

MERCY COUNTRY

MERCY COUNTRY (Synopsis)

A sinful priest proclaims that God is merciful and, when sinners start flocking to his parish, antagonizes his church's leaders who regard themselves as holy.

Father Manulito "Itos" Romero proclaims that God is an Ocean of Mercy. First, he invites soldiers to serve at Mass. Then, he associates himself with gays, prostitutes and the handicapped. He even cultivates friendship with a mass murderer. With this invasion of sinners, the "holy" church leaders find themselves sidelined. They, then, ask Father Itos to celebrate two Sunday Masses: one for them (the holy) and one for the others (the sinners).

When Father Itos refuses, Sr. Sandra and friends hire a bus to force people to hear Mass in another parish. When the mass murderer gets assassinated in church while about to receive Holy Communion, Sr. Sandra and friends report to the Bishop that Father Itos has desecrated the church. Alarmed by the report, the Bishop decides to suspend Father Itos.

When the People hear of the impending suspension of Father Itos, they rally to Father Itos's defense. They tell the Town Mayor and Sister Sandra that, because of the sinners who come to hear Father Itos, the town has become economically progressive. Hence, Father Itos gets to remain in San Jose.

Sister Sandra eventually brings Adelina, a laundry woman, who gave birth to two sons of Father Itos, before the congregation in the hope of humiliating him before everyone – and forcing Father Itos to leave. The confrontation ends badly for Sister Sandra – she even gets slapped by Father Itos.

Hearing that Father Itos slapped Sr. Sandra, the Bishop decides to suspend Father Itos. Hearing of Father Itos's suspension, Sr. Remy, Sr. Sandra's companion, consoles Father Itos and embraces him. As they are locked in each other's arms, Sr. Sandra comes in and, later, accuses Sr. Remy of being another laundry woman. Sr. Sandra pushes Sr. Remy away. Sr. Remy slips, hits her head against a table and dies. Shocked, Sr. Sandra appeals to Father Itos with "God is an Ocean of Mercy, is he not?"

Father Itos says nothing about the death of Sr. Remy except that it was all an "accident." In the end, however, Sr. Sandra tells the Bishop that Father Itos caused the death of Sr. Remy. That she found them embracing each other and, in his surprise of having been caught, Fr. Itos pushed Sr. Remy who then lost her balance and her life.

Enraged by Sr. Sandra's untruthful narrative, the Bishop travels to San Jose to personally expel Father Itos. At his homily at Mass when he announces the expulsion of Father Itos, the Sacristan plays before the congregation the CCTV footage of the accident. That as the Bishop talks about how Father Itos caused Sr. Remy's death, on screen can be seen Sr. Sandra pushing Sr. Remy.

In his disbelief over the lie that Sr. Sandra fed him, the Bishop could not help but open his mouth -- so great was his disbelief that the people in the congregation even saw his tonsils.

CHARACTERS

FR. MANULITO "ITOS" ROMERO	Late 60s, Parish Priest
SR. SANDRA, 72	Early 70s, Conservative Religious
SR. REMY	Mid-40s, Docile Religious
CARLA	Late 30s, Hair-and-Make-Up Stylist
TOTONG	Late 30s, Hunchback
COL. ZAGADO	Late 50s, Military "Rebel" Murderer
RODEL	Early 20s, Sacristan
BP. VERACRUZ	74 years old, Bishop
MRS. PILAR	Late 50s, Wife of Mayor
MRS. IGNACIO	Late 50s, Businesswoman
MAJOR SABANDO	Mid-30s, 10 IB Commanding Officer
"YOUNG" MAJOR SABANDO	16 years old
MOTHER SABANDO	40 years old
PRIVATE DORO	Mid-20s
PRIVATE TOLENTINO	Mid-20s
MRS. MANANQUIL	Mid-40s, Parishioner
MRS. PAREDES	Mid-40s, Parishioner
GRANDMA BOYANG	Late 70s, Parishioner
FLORIDA	Late 30s, Vendor
REGIE	Late 30s, Vendor
ELMIRA	Late 30s, Vendor

HECTOR	Late 30s, Municipal Aide
MAYOR PILAR	Late 50s, Mayor of San Jose
GEORGIA	Early 30s, Hair-and-Make-Up Stylist
BILLY JEAN	Early 30s, Hair-and-Make-Up Stylist
NICOLE	Early 30s, Hair-and-Make-Up Stylist
MICHELLE	Early 30s, Hair-and-Make-Up Stylist
FR. MADRIGAL	Mid-30s, Parish Priest of San Vicente
DR. CAFÉ	Late 50s, Municipal Doctor
ADELINA	Early 50's, Laundry Woman
MUNICIPAL HEALTH WORKERS	
VENDORS	

SETTING A parish / municipality in rural Southern Philippines

TIME Present Day

Notes on the Stage / Scenes

1. A wide, rectangular “wall screen” may need to be posted at Upper Stage to flash moving or still images relevant to the scene, like in the Opening Scene, Act I, Scene 1, where Sr. Sandra, Sr. Remy watch, with Fr. Itos, the people of San Jose enjoying the festive atmosphere of the “River of Love, Giver of Life” activity in the middle of the Binuangan River.
2. Some scenes are happening simultaneously. To help the Audience follow the action, lights positioned to direct the Audience’s attention need to be set up.
3. There is a lot of action and, consequently, a lot of fast-paced scene changes. A bare stage, with some rectangular boxes of varied heights that may be joined together – or separated – when needed in order to accommodate characters, is, therefore, recommended.

ACT I

Scene 1

The Binuangan River.

When the lights are turned on, SR. SANDRA, SR. REMY, with FR. ITOS and RODEL, watch, with great delight, the river awash with light.

Floating on the river and flowing with its slow current are horizontally-cut pieces of banana trees topped with flowers at the center of which are a candle and alighted joss stick, like the ones Thai people use in their Loy Krathong Festival..

A few meters from the bank of the river is a makeshift stage on top of which is an altar decked with altar linen, candles and other paraphernalia for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

Sr. Sandra gets ecstatic over what she sees. A little later, she closes her eyes and clasps her hands in prayer. Sr. Remy, with mouth wide open because of what she sees, makes the Sign of the Cross.

Then, after a while, Sr. Sandra, Sr. Remy, help Fr. Itos put on his Mass vestments while Rodel spreads the Sacramentary and Book of Prayers on the altar.

Scene 2

Still at the Binuangan River.

But, this time, Fr. Itos preaches before the Crowd.

FR. ITOS This, my dear Friends, is what a river is – “A River of Love, A Giver of Life.

Before birth, we were in the waters of our mothers’ womb. Then, through the waters of Baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit, we became God’s own as Christians. And through the water that nourishes the trees and quenches the thirst of both animals and humans, the gift of water sustains us with life. But, again, have we ever thanked God for the gift of water? For this irreplaceable gift of the Sibuguey River?

No, we have not. That is why we are here tonight. On this moonless midnight, to thank the Lord for the gift of water – in particular, for the gifts of love and life that the Sibuguey River has generously given to us through these years. The Sibuguey River has made our ricefields fruitful. The Sibuguey River has enriched our lives in more ways than we can ever imagine.

Water cleanses us of our dirt, of our sins. Our feet have been dirtied by the dust of the land, by the sins of the world. That is why

our Lord Jesus had to wash – with water – the feet of his disciples and our own feet, too. Water quenches our thirst, refreshes us, and replenishes our sagging energies.

Let us value water. And let us value one another for, in some sense, at different moments in our lives, we drink from each others' well of experiences.

The Crowd claps CARLA and TOTONG are in tears. Sr. Sandra and Sr. Remy hold each others' hands.

FR. ITOS I am rather new here, my friends, and so I would like to thank, in particular, the two kind and zealous sisters who have supported me in this endeavor, Sr. Sandra and Sr. Remy of the Sisters of Social Reform. Without them, I do not think that my ideas would come to fruition with something like this. Without their unwavering support, I do not think that we could have a successful and memorable activity such as this. Let us all give a big hand to Sisters Sandra and Remy.

The Crowd turns to Sr. Sandra and Sr. Remy and gives them a resounding round of applause.

Scene 3

Sisters Convent.

Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio talk with Sr. Sandra about Fr. Itos.

MRS. PILAR Is Father Itos for real, Sister?

SR. SANDRA His recognition of my work and my worth last night proves that he is for real, Sister. He is really a person who looks out for the happiness of others.

MRS. IGNACIO And he has such enlightening words, Sisters.

SR. SANDRA I have never felt so honored as last night, Sister. More honored, in fact, than when I received a recognition from the Bishop for my Golden Jubilee. What did I receive from the Bishop on that occasion? A piece of bond paper – with no money to even buy me a new habit. But last night was different. I felt I was walking on clouds.

MRS. PILAR Is that so, Sister?

SR. SANDRA And I even thought that Father Itos would be a threat to my existence when Bishop VeraCruz informed us of his coming to San Jose.

MRS. IGNACIO Is that so, Sister?

Scene 4

Parish Convent Dining Room.

Father Itos is enjoying his cup of coffee when Sr. Sandra and Sr. Remy arrive.

Sr. Remy is carrying a basket filled with plastic containers.

SR. SANDRA Father, good morning.

SR. REMY Good morning, Father.

FR. ITOS Good morning, too, Sisters.

SR. SANDRA *(takes out plastic containers from the basket Sr. Remy is holding and opens them)* We heard that you like Spam and Pork and Beans, Father, so I asked Sr. Remy to prepare them for your breakfast today.

FR. ITOS Oh, you shouldn't have bothered, Sister. But since you already have the food here, you might as well join me for breakfast.

SR. SANDRA Thank you, Father.

SR. REMY Thank you, Father.

FR. ITOS Rodel, bring more plates and utensils and let us have breakfast together with the Sisters.

RODEL Yes, Father.

As they eat, Father Itos, Sisters Sandra and Remy, together with Rodel, share their other dreams for the parish.

SR. SANDRA How I wish we can immediately come up with another activity, Father. Again, along our advocacy for the environment. This way, we can further imbue the Faithful here in San Jose with great love for Mother Nature.

FR. ITOS I am actually thinking of pushing through with Field of Dreams, Sister.

SR. REMY Field of Dreams?

FR. ITOS Yes – Mass in the middle of the ricefields. An opportunity to be one with our father in their rhythm of life. The Lord is with us always, especially in our efforts to improve our lives in this world. He is with us in our planting, in our taking care of our plants and in our harvests.

SR. SANDRA What a brilliant idea, Father.

FR. ITOS God, in the end, is the one who realizes our dreams. Otherwise, it will just be field, not field of dreams. Thus, after planting what need to be planted, we need to pray together that no pest nor storm shall come so that we can, indeed, realize our dreams. Especially our dreams for our children and loved ones.

SR. REMY But, Father, your soutane will get soiled with mud should you say Mass in the middle of the ricefield?

FR. ITOS The dirt in the soutane can easily be washed away by a powerful detergent or by a good laundrywoman with strong hands. but the feeling that the Lord is with us, especially when we plant deep into the soil each stalk of rice, that feeling can never be washed away. It will remain with us forever. And we shall forever be thankful to the Lord for his many gifts. We shall become a more grateful people.

SR. SANDRA Amen, Father. This very moment, I can already imagine the great number of people standing over our muddy ricefields and listening to your homily.

FR. ITOS And, again, Sisters, I would like to ask for your help.

SR. SANDRA Certainly, Father.

SR.REMY Just tell us what to do, Father.

And they all clap their hands.

SR. SANDRA *(recalling)* What happened at River of Love, Give of Life was really beyond my expectation, Father. It was so colorful, so touching, so interactive.

SR. REMY It felt like Christmas, New Year and Easter Sunday combined, Father.

FR. ITOS Then, let us make Field of Dreams even better.

After Rodel and Sr. Remy have cleared the table of plates and glasses, Sr.

Sandra pushes a brown folder before Father Itos.

FR. ITOS What is this, Sister?

SR. SANDRA That is a petition to have the 55th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army stationed in Barangay Kahayagan, San Jose evicted. All it lacks is your signature, Father.

FR. ITOS And why would our people here in San Jose want them evicted from the town? Please enlighten me.

SR. SANDRA These military men only create trouble in our place, Father. The other night, two drunken soldiers beat one of the

barangay tanods who reprimanded them for vomiting along the street.

FR. ITOS Is that so? But why should it be the whole company station here which should be evicted? Why not demand that those two drunken soldiers face the consequences of their actions?

SR. SANDRA *(gets defensive)* Because that has always been our way, Father. Every time the military creates trouble here in San Jose, we petition that they be removed from our place and transferred to another. And we have not failed in doing so, Father.

FR. ITOS Whose way, Sister? I am sorry but I do not quite get the drift.

SR. SANDRA The Church's way, Father.

Sr. Sandra becomes apprehensive and tries to control her breathing – she is breathing deeply now, a portent of a coming explosion if she could not restrain herself. She is getting riled up now – her sense-of-self, she feels, is getting violated by this priest she thought was her ally a while ago and a fan of hers, she thought, a night ago.

Father Itos notices the quivering of Sr. Sandra's hands, as if trying to control something – maybe her anger?— he thought.

FR. ITOS Understanding is the Church's way, Sister. Then, from understanding, reconciliation. That was what I learned from my formation.

SR. SANDRA *(yells at Father Itos)* But these soldiers, Father, are abusive.

FR. ITOS *(calmly)* But what is your data? Your basis for saying so?

SR. SANDRA *(stammers)* My data, Father, my data . . . is my word. That the other night, two drunken soldiers beat one of the barangay tanods who reprimanded them for vomiting along the street.

FR. ITOS Misunderstand me, if you wish, Sister. But I thought that is rather adversarial of us – of the Church, as you say – if we were to ask a whole contingent to leave San Jose just because of the misdemeanors of a few soldiers.

SR. SANDRA Father, you are the first person to have ever asked me to explain one of my initiatives.

FR. ITOS I am only seeking some clarification, Sister.

SR. SANDRA Clarification or whatever, you are demanding that I defend what I have started.

FR. ITOS Because, I think, Sister, that such a move will, in the long run, not benefit the Church. We petition for their eviction now. Then, another company will come in and, then, we petition for their eviction again.

SR. SANDRA That has always been the case, Father. Under my watch, no army contingent ever stayed here for over a year. And I have really done that year after year after year.

FR. ITOS Sister, the pullout of an army contingent just because they bring trouble to the town is not a wise response. This contingent will only to be replaced by another contingent and make our people keep on adjusting to the soldiers. And that is not healthy for both the contingent and for the people of San Jose. We might as well file a complaint against individual soldiers, rather than involve everyone in the contingent. The longer a contingent stays in the town, the more time we will get to know its demons – and better to deal with demons we know rather than acquaint ourselves with a Few demon with every new contingent with our yearly petition.

Sr. Sandra glares at Father Itos.

FR. ITOS Fights are to be expected at bars when men become drunk, Sister. The better option for us, Sister, is, again, to demand that the two soldiers apologize to the barangay tanod and to pray whatever damages they have cost to the bar or to anybody.

Sr. Sandra continues to glare at Father Itos.

FR. ITOS Let the contingent stay in San Jose for one more year, Sister, and we shall see. Well, maybe, instead of driving them away from this town, we can invite them to sponsor our Mass this Sunday. That is, we shall ask them to do the first and second readings at Mass, to assist in the offering of gifts and to assist the extraordinary ministers of the Holy Eucharist in distributing communion.

Sr. Sandra gasps with disbelief at the words of Father Itos.

SR. SANDRA You will be making a mockery of the whole liturgical celebration, Father. You can't ask thugs to serve at Mass.

FR. ITOS By making them assist at Mass, Sister, they will look good before the eyes of the people. And perhaps, with soldiers as Mass servers and lectors, our people may begin to view these soldiers differently.

SR. SANDRA I do not trust these soldiers, Father.

FR. ITOS Whether we trust them or not, Sister, is not what is important at this point. What is important, for me, is making the soldiers feel that they are an integral part of this community. That they're family; they're not strangers.

SR. SANDRA They are strangers, Father.

FR. ITOS By driving them away with your petition initiative, Sister, they shall forever be strangers. But by making them assist in our

Sunday Mass, they shall be our brothers and our sisters.

Can't you see that, Sister?

Sr. Sandra smirks at Father Itos.

SR. SANDRA So many people have already signed the petition, Father.

You cannot stop us from filing the petition.

FR. ITOS File it, if you wish, Sister. But I have no plans of driving away people without making them feel that I care – that the church cares – for them.

SR. SANDRA Father . . . we are the Church. We are the People of God.

FR. ITOS Well said, Sister. But are you a caring people of God? We need to impress on the soldiers the joy of the Gospel, not the hatred for the mauling they have done in the past. Let us always be kind and charitable towards others. Who knows we may be able to touch their hearts, hardened perhaps by their own experience of violence in their lives as soldiers? Tenderness is the key to soften violence.

SR. SANDRA They have no hearts, Father.

FR. ITOS It may be helpful if we allow the 10th IB to sponsor our 3rd Sunday Mass this coming Sunday, Sister.

SR. SANDRA Father, do not do that. By doing that, you shall be declaring war on my petition drive.

FR. ITOS Life is war, Sister, whether for good or for bad. For light or for darkness. For love or for hatred. Evil can only be defeated

by the good, not by a bigger evil. Nor by making others feel that they are not welcome to this community by the petition that you are asking everybody to sign.

SR. SANDRA It looks like you are saying that I should give way to you, Father. That I now need to step aside. I built this community, as you have acknowledged.

FR. ITOS What I am telling you, Sister, is to bring people together, not to create division; to bring about understanding, not to foment distrust.

SR. SANDRA You are the one creating division, Father, by not signing this petition. You are the one finding a way to destroy what I have started.

FR. ITOS We are both old, Sister. We only have a few years more before we get to see the face of God, Sister. Let us both forget ourselves, Sister, in our desire to serve his people.

Stumped, Sr. Sandra can only breathe more deeply.

FR. ITOS Sister, I'm sorry. I cannot sign this petition.

SR. SANDRA Whether you sign it or not, Father, I will forward this petition to the higher authorities.

FR. ITOS Fine, Sister, if that is what you want. But if you do so, I will publicly announce, too, that I do not endorse the petition.

SR. SANDRA Good morning, then, Father. *(to Sr. Remy)* Sister Remy, let's go. We have been deceived.

FR. ITOS Rodel, prepare the motorcycle. Let us go to the camp
and invite the 10th IB to sponsor our parish Mass this
3rd Sunday.

RODEL Yes, Father.

Scene 5

Sisters' Convent.

*Sr. Sandra seethes and explodes with anger as she and Sr. Remy enter their
convent.*

SR. SANDRA I have been deceived. Deceived big time. How could this
happen all over again?

Sister Sandra cries.

Scene 6

Sr. Sandra's Childhood Home. *60 years ago.*

*A glass of avocado shake in hand, LITTLE SANDRA, 10, runs to the room of her
father when she sees the door to his Father's room a bit ajar.*

She peeps and sees her father, MIGUEL, 32, kissing their helper, ESTELA, 22.

*She gets shocked at what she sees and drops the glass of avocado shake. The
shake spills all over the floor.*

Miguel sees Sandra, withdraws from kissing Estela and runs after Sandra.

MIGUEL Sandra!

Miguel runs after Sandra and catches up with her in a corner.

LITTLE SANDRA Father, how can you deceive Mother? Is that why she died?

Scene 7

Back to the Sisters Convent. Present Day.

Sr. Sandra continues to cries in her room.

SR. SANDRA I have been deceived.

Scene 8

10th IB Military Camp.

Father Itos and Rodel get off the motorcycle and walk towards the SOLDIER manning the gate of the camp.

FR. ITOS I am Father Itos of the parish church here. I wish to see
Major Sabando if he is around.

Soldier manning the gate leads Fr. Itos and Rodel to a man cleaning his baby Uzi in front of a makeshift hut, MAJOR DAVID SABANDO.

MAJ. SABANDO *(points to a bench)* Have a seat, Father.

Father Itos and Rodel sit on the bench right across Major Sabando's table.

FR. ITOS Thank you, Major.

MAJ. SABANDO Sorry for this baby uzi right in front of us, Father. I do not like
to keep people waiting so I had no time to hide it from you.

Major Sabando laughs and Father Itos laughs with him.

FR. ITOS It's alright, Major.

MAJ. SABANDO What can I do for you, Father?

FR. ITOS I am wondering, Major, whether you are open to sponsoring our Mass this Sunday at the parish church.

MAJ. SABANDO Sponsor your Mass? But I thought you want us banished from the town, Father.

FR. ITOS You mean the petition being passed around?

MAJ. SABANDO Yes, Father.

FR. ITOS Sorry to disappoint you, Major, but I am not a party to it.

MAJ. SABANDO Is that so, Father? *(sighs with relief)* But I thought it was a church initiative, Father. As it has always been behind the eviction of past companies that have been assigned here in San Jose.

FR. ITOS Not in my term as parish priest, Major. That is why I am here to ask you to sponsor our Mass this Sunday so that the people would see you in a different light.

MAJ. SABANDO Is that so, Father? Well, I would be happy then, Father, to have our company here sponsor this Sunday's Mass at the parish church. I am sure, my men will be surprised by your invitation. But, I think, this will augur well for us.

FR. ITOS We all have a good side to us, Major. We may have our bad or dark side when night comes or when nobody is looking but, I thought, that is rather unfair for the Church, as you

have said, to just drive you away from the town without giving you a chance to redeem yourselves, as it were.

MAJ. SABANDO My everlasting gratitude, then, to you, Father.

FR. ITOS Well, I'm happy, too, that you are rather friendly to the church.

MAJ. SABANDO You know, Father, when I was young, I wanted to become a priest. But my family was rather poor. We did not know somebody who could pay for my tuition in the seminary, so I opted to become a soldier. Thank God, I was able to enter the Philippine Military Academy and blessings came one after the other.

FR. ITOS Is that so? In that case, why don't you become one of our lay ministers here in San Jose? That is, help distribute Holy Communion when we have an eucharistic service here in your camp.

MAJ. SABANDO I would be glad to become one, Father. But, really, Father, you brought us good news, Father. Thank you. I will immediately tell my men about your invitation and I am sure that they will be happy, too. My men have been feeling down lately because of that petition being passed around.

FR. ITOS Well, see you, then, Major. I have to return to the parish.

MAJ. SABANDO I will send somebody later, Father, to coordinate with the parish what we need to do at Mass. That way, we would know what to do this Sunday.

FR. ITOS That would be great, Major.

Major Sabando sees off Father Itos and Rodel to the door of his hut. He then returns to his seat, stares at the baby uzi right in front of him and finds a reflection of his face on one of its sides.

Scene 9

Major David Sabando's Childhood Home.

MOTHER SABANDO is wiping away the tears on the face of her young son,

YOUNG DAVID SABANDO.

MOM SABANDO Dave, don't enter the seminary just yet. Become a soldier priest so that you can send your brothers and sisters to school.

YOUNG DAVE Yes, Mama.

Mother Sabando embraces Young David Sabando.

Scene 10

10th IB Military Camp.

Major Sabando wipes away his tears.

Scene 11

Frontage of San Jose Parish Church.

It is still 5:30 morning but the St. Joseph Parish Church already teem with people for the 6:30 AM Mass. At the main entrance of the church stand eight fatigue-dressed SOLDIERS, four on either side, greeting “Good morning” or “Welcome” to the people as they enter.

SGT. DORO Good morning.

SGT. HALASAN Welcome to our church.

In pairs of two’s, other soldiers distribute white envelopes marked “Love Offering” to people as they approach the parish church.

PVT. TOLENTINO For your love offering, please.

PVT. ALBEZA Envelop for your love offering.

Many PARISHIONERS, in the beginning, are hesitant to get near to the church, thinking that, with soldiers wherever they looked, the church is under attack. Among them is Colonel Zagado.

But when they hear the soldiers say, “Good morning. Have a blessed Sunday!” while giving them envelopes for the offertory procession, they smile, wave at the starched men and women in uniform and proceed towards the church.

Two parishioners, MRS. MANANQUIL and MRS. PAREDES, talk to each other as they walk into the church.

MRS. MANANQUIL Is something going on?

MRS. PAREDES The soldiers of 10th IB are the sponsors of today’s Mass.

MRS. MANANQUIL Really? Thank God. I thought there was an ambush here earlier – that was why there are so many soldiers.

MRS. PAREDES I heard that Father Itos wants us to see the soldiers as our brothers, sisters and friends, not as our enemies.

MRS. MANANQUIL But I wonder whether this will do any good for our parish.

MRS. PAREDES That we shall see.

Mrs. Mananquil and Mrs. Paredes enter the Church. Among those in the Crowd entering the Church are COLONEL ZAGADO, CARLA and TOTONG.

Scene 12

Interior of San Jose Parish Church.

Father Itos kisses the Book of Gospels and preaches.

FR. ITOS “I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” These, my friends, are some of the memorable lines from the Gospel text we have just read. Today, I beg you, then, welcome one another. If the Lord Jesus were welcoming of tax collectors and sinners, shared time, food and laughter with them, why can’t we? If he sat with them and exchanged stories with them, why can’t we?

Indeed, before the table of the Lord, everyone is welcome – sinner, saint; male, female, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender; poor, or rich, soldier or civilian. Everybody has

a place before the Lord's Eucharistic table – church people oozing with divinity; criminals neck-deep with their unspeakable transgressions.

In prayer, before God, there is no landowner nor tenant; no cardinal nor macho dancer; no contemplative nun nor prostitute; and no heterosexual nor homosexual. All are children of the One Loving and Merciful Father. All are individuals in need of His mercy.

God, my dear Brothers and Sisters, is an unfathomable ocean of mercy. Let us drown in his love, as it were, and, in the process, realize, how we are one family, one community, one people. Let us not drive each other away by our petty interests and our narrow-mindedness.

The People smile and nod at the Soldiers in church.

Major Sabando tries not to cry but fails. Touched by the love of the Congregation, the Soldiers lift their eyes to the ceiling of the church but, after a while, cannot help themselves from crying.

A loving, sweet silence in the whole church ensues.

On the faces of Sr. Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio, however, are unimaginable contortions.

Scene 13

Frontage of San Jose Parish Church.

The Congregation, including Sr. Remy, greet the soldiers one by one. Sr. Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio, however, do not join the people in greeting the soldiers and remain standing in one church corner.

Father Itos emerges from the Church and approaches Major Sabando and his soldiers.

FR. ITOS Thank you for coming, Major. Thank you for sponsoring our Mass.

MAJ. SABANDO We should be the ones to thank you, Father. What happened today mean so much for us.

FR. ITOS It means so much for all of us, too, Major.

The Soldiers nod. Fr. Itos shakes hands with all the soldiers around. Sr. Remy and other parishioners do the same.

Scene 14

San Jose Parish Church Office.

Father Itos is reading a book when Rodel approaches and whispers something to him. Father looks up and sees Sr. Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio standing at the door of the parish convent.

FR. ITOS Come in, Sister. Come in, Mrs. Pilar, Mrs. Ignacio.

SR. SANDRA Thank you, Father.

FR. ITOS What can I do for you? With your heavy faces, you seem to be carrying the whole world.

SR. SANDRA We are, Father. Your homily this morning burdened our souls.

FR. ITOS Oh, I'm sorry.

SR. SANDRA Father, may I say something?

FR. ITOS Yes, please, Sister. You have been in San Jose earlier than me. You, of course, has a right to say anything.

SR. SANDRA In that case, Father, let me tell you that you are fooling the people, Father. Fooling them that by saying "Lord, remember me," and, ergo, they will be saved.

FR. ITOS Those were not my own words, Sister. Those were the words of the Lord Jesus to the Thief who asked that he be remembered when Jesus gets to his kingdom as recorded in the Gospel of St. Luke.

SR. SANDRA So what is the use of my becoming a religious sister, Father, if salvation is that easy to attain?

FR. ITOS Only you can answer your question, Sister. Indeed, why did you become a religious sister?

MRS. PILAR So what is the use of our sacrifices, Father, if in an instant, God will pardon the sins of sinners?

FR. ITOS Everything is grace, Mrs. Pilar. You may want to count your merits, as many do, but everything is grace. You can't bribe the Lord with your so-called sacrifices and, in exchange, demand salvation.

SR. SANDRA It hurts me to think, Father, that, with what you are preaching, I am just like an ordinary faggot or prostitute you see in the streets. But I have lived my whole vowed life in the convent. I deserve better.

FR. ITOS As children of God, all of us are the same. As for way of life, then, that is where we are different from others.

SR. SANDRA These faggots, prostitutes, hunchbacks, murderers, Father, are not worthy to approach the Lord without sacrifice, the way I have sacrificed my life for God.

FR. ITOS "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you but only say the word and I shall be healed." This is what we say before Communion, Sister.

MRS. IGNACIO I did not realize, Father, how God's mercy can be something scandalous.

FR. ITOS Throw away all your instruments of measurement in calculating who is worthy or not before the Lord. With God as an Ocean of Mercy, all are beneficiaries of his mercy.

SR. SANDRA *(gets hurt but remains headstrong)* This is so unfair.

Uneasy silence. After some time, Mrs. Pilar speaks.

MRS. PILAR If you cannot help but welcome more and more sinners to the Church, Father, can we have two Masses in the parish church every Sunday?

FR. ITOS Two Masses?

MRS. IGNACIO Yes, Father. One for us and one for sinners.

FR. ITOS Are we not all sinners?

MRS. IGNACIO We are only small-time sinners, Father. We only gossip. We are not big-time ones, like gays who have sex with other men. Or like the prostitutes who have come to our church lately.

FR. ITOS Gossip is terrorism, according to Pope Francis, Mrs. Ignacio.

SR. SANDRA *(to Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio)* It's useless. Let us go.

(to Father Itos) If you do not stop preaching about God as an Ocean of Mercy, Father, then we have no choice but to hear Mass in the next parish. And to bring the people with us.

FR. ITOS *(shrugs)* Your choice, Sister. You're powerful here – there's nothing I can do to stop you.

Scene 15

Frontage of San Jose Parish Church.

Megaphone in hand, Mrs. Pilar instructs the people coming to Mass to board the two Merry May buses parked outside the parish church. Sr. Sandra and Mrs. Ignacio, meanwhile, stop the people from proceeding to the church and get on the bus instead.

MRS. PILAR Brothers, Sisters, this Sunday, let us hear Mass in the next parish. So please board the bus now. Those of you who, like us, cannot bear the feeling of being seated next to gays and prostitutes – and sinners of all kinds – please board the bus, too. The next parish has assured us of feel-good homilies. Rather than homilies that disturb our consciences.

Please board the bus now. We shall be leaving soon, so please board the bus. There is also bread and coffee prepared for you in the bus. So please do not worry about what you may eat or drink. Let us board the bus now.

Carla and Totong walk towards the church. Sr. Sandra and Mrs. Ignacio smirk at them.

Colonel Zagado gets approached by Sr. Sandra but he politely waves her off.

Very SINFUL-LOOKING PARISHIONERS, however, are not even stopped by Sr. Sandra nor by Mrs. Ignacio.

Father Itos emerges from inside the church and stands at the church entrance. He does not, however, stop Mrs. Pilar, Mrs. Ignacio and Sr. Sandra in preventing the people to come to church.

CARLA *(approaches Father Itos)* Father, what happened?

FR. ITOS They find my homilies disturbing, I guess, and would not want to hear more of God's mercy.

CARLA *(laughs)* Really, Father? That's funny.

COL. ZAGADO But I wonder why you did not stop them, Father?

FR. ITOS The Loving Father in the Gospel of Luke did not stop his Prodigal Son from leaving him, Colonel.

TOTONG Nor did Jesus stop Judas from leaving the table during the Last Supper, Colonel.

All laugh.

FR. ITOS Come, let's start our Mass.

They proceed to the inside of the church when Sr. Remy appears, panting.

SR. REMY I hope I am not late for Mass.

CARLA You're just right on time, Sister.

Scene 16

Frontage of San Vicente Ferrer Parish Church

Sr. Sandra and Companions emerge from the San Vicente Parish Church *after hearing Sunday Mass. With them is FR. ANTONIO MADRIGAL, 36, the parish priest. They walk leisurely towards the bus already filled with those from San Jose.*

SR. SANDRA Thank you very much, Father, for welcoming us to your parish. You're young and I think you have a bright future ahead of you.

FR. MADRIGAL You are always welcome to hear Mass here in San Vicente, Sister.

MRS. PILAR *(hands over to Fr. Madrigal an envelop filled with money)*
Thank you, too, Father, for a very reassuring homily.

MRS. IGNACIO Your words on sacrifice, Father, were very consoling. I am certain that God will look kindly on the sacrifices Sister Sandra has done for San Jose.

FR. MADRIGAL Thank you, Mrs. Pilar, Mrs. Ignacio. God can never be outdone in generosity and I know that he will be favorable to you in the days to come. Father Itos, forgive his old age, does not seem to know the treasures he possesses in San Jose.

Scene 17

Frontage of San Jose Parish Church.

Father Itos, Carla, Totong, and Col. Santiago emerge from the parish church after the Sunday Mass.

CARLA Father, Totong and I will go to Pagadian City and invite our friends to celebrate the Eucharist with us this coming Sunday.

TOTONG You have touched us, Father, so I am sure, you will also touch their lives.

FR. ITOS That will help, Carl, Totong.

COL. ZAGADO *(takes out his wallet and gives some paper bills to Carla)*
Here, Carl. Use this for your trip.

CARLA No, thanks, Colonel. Totong and I have money.

COL. ZAGADO I have no family to worry, Carl, Tong, Father. So please allow me to help you financially.

All nod.

Carla accepts the money from Col. Zagado.

CARLA *(accepts the money)* Thank you, Colonel. Now, I do not see why I should not serve you breakfast. Why don't we all proceed to my parlor?

FR. ITOS That's a very good idea, Carl.

CARLA Sister, you better go with us, otherwise, I will drug you and dye your hair blonde.

All laugh.

Sister Remy hesitates but eventually goes with them.

Scene 18

Frontage of San Vicente Parish Church

Father Madrigal walks Sr. Sandra and Companions up to the two Merry May buses.

SR. SANDRA So, Father, tell me frankly. Is my request for 2 Sunday masses unreasonable? One for us? And one for the sinners that Father Itos wants to save?

FR. MADRIGAL The Eucharist should be an occasion of grace, not an occasion of distress. Hence, I think, your request was very reasonable, Sister, since you said that, for you, Mass, with these gays and prostitutes has made you uncomfortable and unclean.

SR. SANDRA So what do I do, Father? Since Father Itos does not look favorably on this request of mine.

FR. MADRIGAL You can tell the Bishop, Sister, that Father Itos is dividing the community with his preaching. So divided that you even now come to church in my parish than in your own parish.

SR. SANDRA Thank you, Father. You have just consoled our troubled souls.

MRS. PILAR Thank you, Father.

MRS. IGNACIO See you, Father, next Sunday.

FR. MADRIGAL Have a safe trip.

Scene 19

Interior of Carla's Beauty Parlor.

Father Itos, Sr. Remy, Colonel Zagado, Carla, Totong and Rodel enjoy their breakfast of hotdogs and omelet.

SR. REMY Father, are you not going to do anything with what Sister Sandra has done?

FR. ITOS The people will find their way back to our parish, Sister, whether Sister Sandra will like it or not.

COL. ZAGADO But isn't she inciting rebellion, Father, by herding people for Mass in the next parish?

FR. ITOS God knows what is best for us in every situation, Colonel. This is one lesson I have learned in life. I know Sister Sandra's reasons for doing so. But while I feel bad about what she did this morning, I leave to God and to her conscience the punishment she deserves.

CARLA Don't worry, Father. Totong and I will make sure to fill our church with sinners this coming Sunday. We'll travel to Pagadian very early in the morning. Early birds catch the sinners.

All laugh.

TOTONG Please eat.

Scene 20

Interior of Merry May Bus #1.

Sister Sandra and Companions rejoice as they take their seats in the bus.

MRS. PILAR Father Itos should be very sorry by now, Sister.

MRS. IGNACIO I wonder how much collection he has received from his Mass
today.

SR. SANDRA We built the parish of San Jose, Sisters. He just cannot
ignore us.

MRS. IGNACIO But we need to restrain some of the old women in the other
bus in our next trip. That Grandma Boyang said that she will
only listen to Father Itos and no one else.

SR. SANDRA Don't mind these old women. Just give them coffee, some
bread and, maybe, some tobacco leaves and they will all
keep quiet.

All laugh.

Scene 21

Sisters' Convent.

Sr. Sandra and Sr. Remy have lunch in silence.

SR. SANDRA I thought you were ill but I heard you attended the Mass of
Father Itos and you even had breakfast with that Carla and
Totong.

SR. REMY I got healed, Sister, the moment you left.

SR. SANDRA Am I now becoming the cause of your illness?

Scene 22

Le Rouge Beauty Parlor.

Carla and Totong enter Le Rouge Beauty Parlor and greet their friends

GEORGIA, 32, and BILLY JEAN, 28.

Georgia and Billy Jean scream when they see Carla and Totong. They hug each other.

GEORGIA Carla! Totong!

BILLY JEAN Wow, the beauty queens of San Jose paying respects to
their Highnesses.

CARLA Excuse me.

TOTONG No, we're here to see how our ladies-in-waiting are behaving
themselves.

All laugh.

Georgia and Billy Jean motion Carla and Totong to take their seats.

CARLA Georgia, Billy Jean, please help us.

GEORGIA What is it?

BILLY JEAN Money? Boyfriend?

CARLA Help us bring people to God.

GEORGIA What?

BILLY JEAN Did you just become a nun? Where's your veil?

TOTONG You know, we have this very good priest, Father Itos, in San Jose.

GEORGIA He must be so good to have brought you back to church.

CARLA He's so good that Totong and I have found ourselves attending Mass almost everyday. Now, even prostitutes of all make-up shades come to Sunday Mass.

BILLY JEAN Really?

TOTONG And he accepts us as who we are. He does not condemn nor give us this "sinners, go away!" look.

CARLA Now, even soldiers find their way to Mass.

TOTONG And almost everybody in town are happy.

GEORGIA So, what's the problem?

CARLA Unfortunately, the holy ones in our town are not happy with what is happening.

BILLY JEAN What?

TOTONG There is this Sister who is not happy with sinners – gays, prostitutes, soldiers – invading what she thinks is her church. They find themselves diminished by our presence.

CARLA And so, yesterday, she boycotted Father Itos' Mass and brought many parishioners with her to hear Mass in another parish church.

GEORGIA Wow. Seeing you praying with her must have made her uncomfortable.

BILLY JEAN Now, I would like to hear Mass in that church where he priest would make sinners like us feel at home.

TOTONG Father Itos is that kind of priest.

CARLA So will you help us?

GEORGIA Yes, we will.

BILLY JEAN Come, let us visit other beauty parlors.

Scene 23

La Fea Beauty Parlor.

NICOLE, 29, and MICHELLE, 36, scream when they see Carla and Totong with Georgia and Billy Jean.

NICOLE What brings you here, lovely birds of San Jose?

GEORGIA Nicole, Michelle, let us help Carla bring people to their parish on Sunday.

MICHELLA Is there such a thing as a gay missionary?

TOTONG With Father Itos, yes. Carla and I have just become gay missionaries a week ago.

All laugh.

CARLA Gays we may be but, deep, deep down, you and I know that we wish to lead good lives. That we desire to become holy.

Nicole and Michelle become silent for a moment.

NICOLE So what do we do?

GEORGIA Let us go around Pagadian and invite people to hear Mass in San Jose this coming Sunday.

MICHELLE How will we bring the people to San Jose?

BILLY JEAN Let's think about the logistics later. We have the whole week for that while Carla and Totong only have this day in Pagadian.

CARLA Thank you.

Scene 24

Pagadian City Street.

Montage of Carla and Company meeting different GROUPS of Gays in the streets and in other beauty parlors.

CARLA We may be gay but we remain good people. All of us, I am sure, wish to be closer to God.

TOTONG Our priest, Father Itos, is a very understanding priest. He will surely make you feel that God loves us for who we are.

The Gays they meet smile and, eventually, join them in their campaign to make people come to San Jose for Mass until Carla's Company becomes a very big group – a joyful one.

Carla and Totong continue to speak before the Crowd of Gays and Onlookers.

CARLA Are you gay? Are you a prosti? Are you handicapped? Then, come and join us for Mass in San Jose. We are the Church of the Peripheries. Lowly People yet called to become the Lord's Beloved.

TOTONG Sin is a cause for shame – that's why we often shy away in coming to church. Shame, however, is too small a price to pay for the love of God.

CARLA Let us reclaim our rightful place before the Table of the Lord. Come to San Jose this Sunday and feel the love of God that has been waiting for you all these years.

Georgia and Company clap.

GEORGIA *(to Billy Jean)* This Father Itos must be a very good priest to transform our gay friends into good preachers.

BILLY JEAN I can't wait to meet Father Itos in person.

Some PASSERSBY, however, wonder about Carla's and Totong's preaching.

RAUL Is the world about to end?

EDWIN With Trump? With Duterte? Maybe.

RAUL Huh?

Scene 25

Pagadian City Bus Terminal.

Carla and Totong wave goodbye to Georgia, Billy Jean, Nicole and Michelle from inside the bus.

CARLA Thank you very much, Georgia, Billy Jean, Nicole and Michelle.

TOTONG Hope to see you this Sunday.

GEORGIA We will invite more, Carl. Do not worry.

CARLA I never thought I will be doing this in my life, Georgia. You know me.

GEORGIA I know.

MICHELLE I wonder what other surprises God has in store for all of us, Carla.

TOTONG Come to San Jose and you will know.

All laugh.

Scene 26

Frontage of San Jose Parish Church

Father Itos, Carla, Totong, Colonel Zagado and Rodel watch Sr. Sandra and Companions herd people to two Merry May buses.

MRS. PILAR *(megaphone in hand)* Brothers, Sisters, just like last Sunday, let us hear Mass in the next parish. So please board the bus now. Those of you who, like us, cannot bear the feeling of

being seated next to gays and prostitutes – and sinners of all kinds – please board the bus, too. The next parish has assured us of feel-good homilies. Rather than homilies that disturb our consciences.

Please board the bus now. We shall be leaving soon, so please board the bus. There is also bread and coffee prepared for you in the bus. So please do not worry about what you may eat or drink. Let us board the bus now.

CARLA *(to Father Itos)* Don't worry, Father. Georgia and my other friends have called this morning and told me, an hour ago, that they are on their way to San Jose. They should be here, then, in 30 minutes.

COL. ZAGADO You must have very good friends, Carl. For them to travel this far.

FR. ITOS I worry more for the safety of those onboard those buses. Many of them are old. What if something happens to them on the way?

TOTONG Then we will make Sister Sandra and Company pay for whatever danger may befall on these grandmothers of ours, Father.

Father Itos and the rest wait for the coming of Carla's friends from Pagadian City. Carla gets restless and keeps on looking at her cellphone.

The two Merry May buses leave as Father Itos and Companions wait for Carla's friends.

Scene 27

Interior of Merry May Bus #1.

From the rear section of the bus, Grandma Boyang stands up and tells the BUS DRIVER, 36, that she wishes to get off.

SR. SANDRA Grandma Boyang, return to your seat. You could have gotten off before we left the church.

GRANDMA BOYANG Well, I changed my mind. I would not trade Father Itos' homily for your coffee and bread in this bus.

MRS. IGNACIO We are now 5 kilometers away from the church. What do you intend to do, walk back to the church?

GRANDMA BOYANG I don't care. I can walk back. All I care is to hear the words of Father Itos.

MRS. PILAR Driver, do not listen to this old woman.

GRANDMA BOYANG *(approaches the Bus Driver)* I want to get off.

SR. SANDRA Return to your seat.

GRANDMA BOYANG I will not return to my seat.

Grandma Boyang grabs the steering wheel from the Bus Driver. Bus Driver strikes Grandma Boyang with his right hand and kicks her with his left leg.

Grandma Boyang, however, fights back and eventually gets a hold of the steering wheel.

Scene 28

Frontage of San Jose Parish Church.

Carla looks at Father Itos and Companions.

CARLA Something is wrong, Father. Georgia and Company should
be here by now.

FR. ITOS I hope they did not meet an accident along the way.

RODEL There is no network signal from Buug to here, Carl. So, I am
sure, they also cannot call or send you a text.

FR. ITOS Let us wait for a little while.

Scene 29

Interior of Merry May Bus #1,

Grandma Boyang gets a hold of the steering wheel.

GRANDMA BOYANG Who are you to prevent me from attending Father
Itos's Mass and in forcing me to attend the Mass in the next
parish? *(to the Driver)* Driver, stop the bus. I will get off.

*Sr. Sandra gets up to pull Grandma Boyang and make her return to her seat
when the bus careens off the road.*

Scene 30

Interior of Bachelor Bus.

Georgia and Companions are getting excited as their bus approaches Marao Bridge.

GEORGIA For first timers to San Jose, once we cross Marao Bridge, we will only be 10 minutes away from the parish church.\

ALL Yehey!

Scene 31

Interior of Merry May Bus #1.

The Bus Driver elbows Grandma Boyang to take control of the steering wheel but the bus heads towards the ridge right before the Marao Bridge coming from San Jose.

Scene 32.

Interior of Bachelor Bus.

Georgia and Companions watch, in horror, as the bus in their opposite direction careens and heads towards the ridge right before the other end of the Marao Bridge.

Everybody shouts.

ALL Oh God, no!

Scene 33

Marao Bridge.

Merry May Bus #1 falls off the ridge right before the Marao Bridge. Merry May Bus #2, following Merry May Bus #1 stops and the PASSENGERS get off.

Bachelor Bus stops after crossing the Marao Bridge in the opposite side. Georgia and Companions hurriedly get off.

From the bridge, cries for help from below can be heard.

GEORGIA Billy Jean, Nicole and Michelle, let's go down and help.

MICHELLE We will all help.

The Gays and the Prostitutes get energized for action.

GEORGIA I'll head down and see what I can do.

BILLY JEAN I'll go with you.

NICOLE Don't move those who may be heavily injured. Otherwise, it may be difficult to heal those broken ribs or bones.

GEORGIA Those who can move by themselves, we'll ask to come up unassisted.

MICHELLE We'll help them as they climb.

Scene 34

Frontage of San Jose Parish Church

Father Itos approaches Carla and taps him on the shoulder.

FR. ITOS I think we need to start our Mass, Carl.

CARLA Something must have happened in their way to San Jose,
Father.

COL. ZAGADO Let us pray for them, then, Carl, in this Mass. We don't really
know until we hear some news from them.

CARLA Okey, Colonel. Yes, Father, let us now start our Mass
though there are only a handful of us. I'm sorry.

FR. ITOS There is no need to apologize, my friend.

Scene 35

Interior of Merry May Bus #1.

*Cries for help are heard as Georgia and Billy Jean enter the bus. They see
Grandma Boyang right at the front right side door of the bus.*

GEORGIA Grandma Boyang, are you okay?

Grandma Boyang nods.

GEORGIA Can you raise your arms?

Grandma Boyang nods.

GEORGIA Come, let me take you out.

*Georgia and Billy Jean help Grandma Boyang get up. Nicole and Michelle find
Sr. Sandra and try to help her get up.*

SR. SANDRA I'll get off on my own. I do not need your assistance.

Scene 36

Interior of San Jose Parish Church.

Father Itos is about to sing the "Our Father" when a Bachelor Bus and Merry May Bus #2 stop right in front of the church.

FR. ITOS Now, let us call on God our Father in the words our Saviour
 taught us.

They all look in the direction of the church's entrance.

Scene 37

Frontage of San Jose Parish Church.

Georgia emerges from the Bachelor Bus and runs towards the entrance of the parish church.

GEORGIA Help.

Father Itos, Carla and Companions emerge from the parish church and approach Georgia.

CARLA What happened?

GEORGIA One bus fell of the ridge right before Marao Bridge. It was
 just fortunate that we were on the other end of the bridge
 when the accident happened.

FR. ITOS Come, let us help them get off the bus and rest on the pews
 of the church.

TOTONG I hope nobody died.

GEORGIA Thank God, no.

Georgia, Carla and their Friends assist the passengers in getting off the bus.

Scene 38

Interior of San Jose Parish Church

Father Itos approaches Grandma Boyang.

FR. ITOS Grandma Boyang, thank God you are fine!

GRANDMA BOYANG *(hugs Father Itos)* Thank God, Father, that I still get to
see you!

FR. ITOS What happened?

GRANDMA BOYANG Father, they were forcing me to hear Mass in the
other parish. But I told them I only want to hear your words,
not anybody else's. So I grabbed the steering wheel.

FR. ITOS What is important, Grandma, is that you are well.

GRANDMA BOYANG Father, we are sorry. We should not have boarded
that bus and left you.

FR. ITOS It's alright, Grandma. But rest for a moment please. This
way, you will regain your strength.

GRANDMA BOYANG Thanks, Father.

Grandma Boyang falls asleep.

Municipal HEALTH WORKERS arrive and check up on other passengers.

After some time, Grandma Boyang wakes up and shouts.

GRANDMA BOYANG Father Itos! Father Itos!

FR. ITOS *(rushes to Grandma Boyang's side)* Yes, Grandma.

GRANDMA BOYANG *(looks around and is pleased by what she sees)*
Father, where am I? What place is this? Is this the one they
call heaven?

FR. ITOS Heaven?

GRANDMA BOYANG Why is everybody talking? Why is everybody smiling?
This must be heaven.

FR. ITOS Grandma, this is our parish church.

GRANDMA BOYANG *(shocked. Looks around again. Breathes deeply)*
Thank God, I'm still alive. I thought I was already in heaven.

FR. ITOS Well, Grandma, if we love each other here in San Jose, San
Jose will be heaven on earth.

CARLA Father, if you do not mind, can we continue with our Mass?

FR. ITOS Oh, yes, I have forgotten we were in the middle of Mass.
Yes, yes, of course.

CARLA *(to Everyone)* Friends, if you do not mind, we shall continue
with our Mass.

GEORGIA Yes, of course, Carl. That's the reason why we are here. We
also want to hear Father Itos speak.

ALL Yes, please. Let us proceed with the Mass.

Scene 39

Sanctuary Area, Interior of San Jose Parish Church.

Father Itos stands behind the altar.

FR. ITOS Let us now call on God, our Father, in the words our Saviour
 taught us.

Everybody sings the "Our Father."

Scene 40

Frontage of San Jose Parish Church.

*As the Congregation sings the "Our Father", Sr. Sandra picks up a stone and
throws it against the church.*

SR. SANDRA (V.O.) This is not my church. My church is not the Church of
 Gays, Prostitutes and Handicapped. It is the Church of
 Saints and Blesseds. This is not the Church I used to know.

Scene 41

Sanctuary Area, Interior of San Jose Parish Church.

*Father Itos expresses his gratitude to the Pagadian Friends of Carla for coming
to San Jose.*

FR. ITOS My Pagadian Friends, thank you for coming over to San
 Jose. Thank you for finding space in your hearts for Carla's
 and Totong's appeal and, in the process, saved some of our
 parishioners from possible death.

Space was what St. Joseph was looking for on the evening of Christmas – but there was no room in the inn. Hence, the Blessed Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus in the manger amidst cows, sheep and probably pigs.

Space is what I think we are all looking for. Space where can be ourselves and not be condemned, by others' words and by others' looks. Space where, in the deepest recesses of our hearts, we can hear God telling us, "I love you, I care for you."

God is an Ocean of Mercy – and he has space for sinners like us. And, as Pope Francis has said, "If a person is gay and seeks out the Lord and is willing, who am I to judge?"

As Father Itos speaks, Carla and Georgia press each other's hands. The rest of the Gays and the Prostitutes try to keep themselves from crying.

ACT II

Scene 42

Parish Convent Dining Room.

Father Itos and Colonel Zagado talk while they are eating. Rodel listens.

COL. ZAGADO Father, I got worried when I heard about Sister Sandra and companions boycotting your Mass just because they did not like your preaching on God's mercy.

FR. ITOS God knows what is best for each one of us, Colonel. There is no need to worry.

COL. ZAGADO I have also been busy attending to the documents for my properties, Father. That's why I have not been visible lately. And, without your permission, Father, I have made you executor as well as part-heir of my properties in case something unexpected happens to me.

FR. ITOS Are you expecting somebody to kill you?

COL. ZAGADO I have long been in fear of somebody shooting me dead, Father. But that was before I met you. That was before I realize that God still has space for a mass murderer like me. I have killed hundreds, Father, when I was active in the military. I am sure that I am in the hit list of the rebels.

FR. ITOS I know. But I also know that you have repented, sincerely repented, for those sins of yours.

COL. ZAGADO I have, Father.

FR. ITOS And you are no longer living in fear of somebody shooting you dead now?

COL. ZAGADO I still do. But as you have said, Father, God knows what is best for each one of us, Father.

FR. ITOS I did not expect that line of mine to be repeated so soon.
Father Itos and Colonel Zagado laugh.

COL. ZAGADO That's why I also brought you these 4 images of the Divine Mercy, Father.

FR. ITOS Oh, thank you. So many people have also been asking me for Divine Mercy images.

COL. ZAGADO But, these are not just images of the Divine Mercy, Father. They are also CCTVs. With Rodel's help, I shall place these in different locations in the convent and in the church, for your security as well as for the community. We may not be able to prevent the commission of any crime but we will definitely get to know the perpetrators of the crime with these CCTVs.

FR. ITOS Thank you, Colonel. That's very helpful of you.

COL. ZAGADO Let us not, however, inform people, Father, that these images are actually CCTVs. And, with your permission, I will instruct Rodel how to monitor them. I will place one in the convent sala, in your room, in the parish hall and in the altar

area of the church. I think those are the four most crucial spots here, Father.

FR. ITOS I leave to you and Rodel the details of the installation, Colonel.

COL. ZAGADO Thanks, Father. And, one last thing, Father, let us hide the CCTV monitor in your room so that only you and Rodel will get to see and review what has been recorded.

FR. ITOS *(to Rodel)* Rodel, help Colonel Zagado in the installation of the CCTVs and learn how to review what has been recorded. Learning new skills will certainly help you in the future.

RODEL Yes, Father.

Scene 43

Bishop VeraCruz Office.

Bishop VeraCruz stands up when he sees Sister Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio arrive.

SR. SANDRA Bishop!

BP. VERACRUZ Sister Sandra, is everything alright?

SR. SANDRA I have never been so disgusted about our Church in my whole life, Bishop.

MRS. PILAR Bishop, because of Father Itos, San Jose has been invaded by all sorts of sinners.

MRS. IGNACIO We have everyone, Bishop. I thought, Bishop, that we are the Church of the Poor. I did not realize that we have become the Church of Gays, Prostitutes and the Handicapped. And you are forced to hold hands with them at the Our Father.

MRS. PILAR Yes, Bishop. Instead of meeting God, we meet all this assorted rainbow of faggots.

MRS. IGNACIO They're making our pursuit of holiness very difficult, Bishop.

BP. VERACRUZ Is that so?

Scene 44

San Jose Parish Church Office.

Father Itos is making his Evening Prayers when his cellphone rings.

FR. ITOS Yes, Bishop? *(pauses)* Yes, Bishop. I will be there in the morning. Around 9 AM.

Scene 45

Bishop VeraCruz' Office.

Father Itos approaches Bishop Veracruz who remains seated on his chair and kisses the Bishop's ring.

BP. VERACRUZ I have heard reports of how you spurned Sister Sandra and her friends, Father, regarding the celebration of another Sunday Mass for them.

FR. ITOS Have you also heard, Bishop, of my preaching on God's mercy and how some sinners have found their way back to the Lord?

BP. VERACRUZ Father, I assigned you in San Jose to strengthen the mission, not to create division in the community.

FR. ITOS Bishop, I am sorry if I have frustrated you and have placed you in an uncomfortable situation. But I, myself, cannot fathom how God's mercy can be a very polarizing issue.

BP. VERACRUZ *(sighs)* In that case, Father, please refrain from now on in talking about God's mercy. Preach, instead, about Purgatory. About the never-ending fire in hell that await sinners.

FR. ITOS *(nods)* Yes, Bishop.

BP. VERACRUZ Have a wonderful day, then, Father.

Bishop VeraCruz stands up and sees Father Itos not only to the door of his office but to the front door of his residence.

Father Itos, once again, kisses the Bishop's ring.

FR. ITOS Goodbye, Bishop.

Bishop VeraCruz waves at Father Itos as he gets into his motorcycle.

BP. VERACRUZ (V.O.) I am very sorry, Father Itos, that I am hard on you. I am old. I have glaucoma. Glaucoma of the body; glaucoma of the spirit. And I shall be retiring next year. That's why I have to remain friendly with the moneyed, with those in

power. And I would like to retire comfortably. Our vicariate is poor – we do not even have any retirement plan for our priests nor for me.

Scene 46

Interior of San Jose Parish Church.

Carla assures Georgia and Billy Jean that they will just be doing the readings for Sunday Mass.

GEORGIA Carl, my knees are shaking. I do not know whether I can do it.

BILLY JEAN Can you just do the Second Reading for me, Carl?

CARLA Everything is in the Lord's hands now, Georgia, Billy Jean. All you have to do is to cooperate with his grace. Keep calm. You can do it.

Georgia proclaims the Responsorial Psalm.

GEORGIA The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.

PEOPLE The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.

GEORGIA In green pastures he makes me lie down; to still waters he leads me; he restores my soul. He guides me along right paths for the sake of his name.

PEOPLE The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.

Billy Jean reads the epistle.

BILLY JEAN

For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Father Itos kisses the Book of Gospels, sets it aside and then preaches.

FR. ITOS

The face of God, my dear Brothers and Sisters, is mercy. The face of God is the face of the loving child in the manger. The face of Jesus on the Cross The face of God is the face of the outcast: the gays, the hungry . . . I was sick and you visited me; I was homeless and you gave me shelter; I was hungry and you fed me. If anyone of you did this to the least of my brothers, you did it to me.

It is evident then that the face of God is found among the poor, those in the peripheries of society and so, we, in the Church, need to be more accepting of people from the margins, especially those who have long been sidelined because of sin. We should avoid the Older Brother Syndrome in the New Testament, in Luke 15.

What is the Older Brother Syndrome? This is the sickness of those who feel that they are upright and who are not happy when sinners or the sick try to find their way back to the loving embrace of the loving father, as narrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son. In this story, the older brother did not join the banquet that was prepared by the father for the long lost son. The father even had to get out of the house, approach the older brother, explain to him why he held such a banquet and told him to join . . . He was lost and is now found. So let us rejoice . . .

Our gay Brothers and Sisters have joined us in this Eucharist, let us all rejoice.

Many in the Congregation are teary-eyed. But not Sr. Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio.

Colonel Zagado, standing still near the church entrance, nods and smiles.

Father Itos is distributing Holy Communion. Among those in line are Georgia, Billy Jean, Carla, Totong, Colonel Zagado.

FR. ITOS Body of Christ.

GEORGIA Amen.

FR. ITOS Body of Christ.

BILLY JEAN Amen.

FR. ITOS Body of Christ.

CARLA Amen.

FR. ITOS Body of Christ.

TOTONG Amen.

Colonel Zagado is about to take a step towards Father Itos when, suddenly, a MALE ASSASIN appears from one of the pews and shoots Colonel Zagado in the head.

Pandemonium follows.

Father Itos tries to catch the falling Colonel Zagado and, in the process, drops the ciborium filled with consecrated hosts. These sacred hosts get scattered all over the floor.

While everybody scampers for safety, Carla and Totong help Father Itos in securing the body of Colonel Zagado.

Scene 47

Sisters' Convent.

Sr. Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio fan themselves from fright and exhaustion.

SR. SANDRA That's what you get when you have Gays doing the readings
and taking care of the liturgy.

MRS. PILAR How frightening.

MRS. IGNACIO Thank God, I thought of not receiving the Lord today.

Scene 48

Fr. Itos' Room.

*Fr. Itos and Rodel review the recording of the Divine Mercy CCTV placed near
the altar.*

FR. ITOS Do you know this man, Rodel?

RODEL No, Father. But his face looks familiar. I must have seen him
somewhere.

FR. ITOS Well, let us help the police in making a cartographic sketch
of the killer. But let us not tell them that we got his profile
through our CCTV. Nobody must learn about our CCTV.

RODEL Yes, Father.

Scene 49

Bishop VeraCruz' Office.

*Bishop VeraCruz stands up from his chair to meet Sr. Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and
Mrs. Ignacio.*

BP. VERACRUZ So tell me what exactly happened, Sister?

SR. SANDRA Twin disasters, Bishop. First, you have Gays doing the readings. And then, during communion time, a shooting, killing a certain Colonel Zagado. It was a scandal and everything went chaotic from there.

MRS. PILAR Bishop, my God. You should have seen the Body of Christ being trampled by people who did not know where to go after the killing.

BP. VERACRUZ Why? What happened?

MRS. IGNACIO Father Itos dropped the ciborium he was holding, Bishop, and all the consecrated hosts fell on the floor and got trampled upon in the pandemonium.

BP. VERACRUZ Is that so?

MRS. PILAR I really could not imagine Father Itos dropping the Body of Christ, Bishop, to catch the falling body of Colonel Zagado. How can he exchange the Lord for this body of Colonel Zagado who, according to reports, have killed so many rebels when he was active in the military?

SR. SANDRA It was a real desecration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, Bishop.

BP. VERACRUZ My God, what a great scandal.

SR. SANDRA It may be best, Bishop, to make Father Itos leave San Jose for some time. This way, the people of San Jose can have some rest from all the agitation these past months.

MRS. PILAR *(hands over an envelop)* Bishop, please accept our little donation for your many ministries in the vicariate.

BP. VERACRUZ Wow, thank you very much, Mrs. Pilar. I think it is now time for me to rethink about Father Itos in San Jose.

Scene 50

Sisters' Convent.

Sr. Sandra and Sr. Remy eat in silence, though tension is etched on Sr. Remys face. After some time, Sr. Remy speaks.

SR. REMY Have you gone mad, Sister? I didn't know that old age drives religious sisters crazy. How can you distort the story of what happened last Sunday to the Bishop.

SR. SANDRA Mad? Yes, I have gone mad. Crazy? No. My mind is as sharp as a newly-sharpened knife. Father Itos has to pay for continually making me look bad before those stupid faggots.

SR. REMY Father Itos? Or your Father whatever was his name?

SR. SANDRA Sister Remy, don't you dare mention my father.

SR. REMY Your unfaithful father? Your father who you said deceived you?

Sister Sandra's eyes glare with anger and, in her uncontrolled ire, Sr. Sandra approaches Sr. Remy, pulls her hair and her veil. Sr. Remy fights back and does the same to Sr. Sandra. They roll over the floor but, after some time, stop and take deep breaths.

Scene 51

San Jose Public Market.

The Vendors in the public market are agitated because of the rumor that Father Itos will be removed from their parish church.

FLORIDA That can't be.

REGIE They cannot remove Father Itos from San Jose.

ELMIRA Father Itos brought us visitors from other places and have made us, Vendors, earn more.

FLORIDA It must be that Sister Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio. From what I have heard, they are the ones who like spreading fake news about Father Itos.

REGIE If Father Itos is removed from San Jose, what will happen now to our goods, to the food that we cook for the visitors, to our families?

ELMIRA Let's go to the Mayor and tell him to ask the Bishop to keep Father Itos here in San Jose.

FLORIDA Let's go and demand that Father Itos be made to stay.

All the Vendors of the public market leave their stalls and march towards the municipal building.

Scene 52

Interior of San Jose Municipal Building.

MAYOR NESTOR PILAR, 62, is drinking his coffee in his office when HECTOR, a municipal aide, whispers to him that he has guests outside the building.

HECTOR Mayor, the Vendors of the public market would like to see you.

MAYOR PILAR Bring them in.

HECTOR They are too many, Mayor. They will not fit in our office. It's not just one or two vendors. But all the vendors in the market, Mayor.

MAYOR PILAR *(shocked)* What? Why are they here?

Scene 53

Frontage of San Jose Municipal Building.

Mayor Pilar meets the Vendors gathered before the entrance of the municipal building.

MAYOR PILAR What brings you here?

FLORIDA Mayor, we object to your plan of kicking Father Itos out of San Jose.

REGIE Father Itos brought us many customers, brought us more income. Driving him away from San Jose will endanger our livelihood.

MAYOR PILAR Who told you that I planned to have Father Itos removed from San Jose?

ELMIRA Your driver, Mayor. According to him, your wife, with Mrs. Ignacio and Sister Sandra were so happy last night because they made Bishop VeraCruz promise that he will suspend Father Itos.

MAYOR PILAR My wife? I do not know anything about it. Come, let us go to my house and clarify this rumor with my wife.

Mayor Pilar leads the Vendors in marching towards his house.

EXT. MRS. PILAR'S GARDEN – MORNING

Scene 54

Mayor Pilar's Home.

Mrs. Pilar is spraying her dendrobiums when she sees her husband, with a large crowd behind him, walking towards her.

MRS. PILAR *(gets agitated)* Nestor, what brings you back here? And what is this crowd for?

MAYOR PILAR Now, explain to them your plan of having Father Itos expelled from San Jose.

MRS. PILAR It was not my idea. It was Sister Sandra's.

MAYOR PILAR Then, let us go to Sister Sandra. Lead the way.

Mrs. Pilar, followed by Mayor Pilar and by the Crowd of Vendors, march towards the Sisters' Convent.

Scene 55

Sisters' Convent.

Sr. Sandra and Sr. Remy emerge from their convent when they hear Mrs. Pilar shouting.

MRS. PILAR Sister, Sister, please save me.

Sr. Sandra wonders why the Mayor and the Vendors are with Mrs. Pilar.

SR. SANDRA Mayor, what can I do for you and your people?

FLORIDA Keep Father Itos here in San Jose, otherwise, there will be a revolution.

REGIE Drive Father Itos away from San Jose and you will certainly experience hell, Sister.

ELMIRA Father Itos has made our lives a little more comfortable. Why do you not care for little people like us, Sister?

MAYOR PILAR Please listen to the cry of the people, Sister. Otherwise, we may have a violent riot here in San Jose.

The Vendors stare at Sr. Sandra. Sr. Sandra sighs.

Scene 56

Frontage of San Jose Parish Convent.

People carrying candles march in the darkness carrying lighted candles while humming a tune. Then, after a while, they sing.

PEOPLE How beautiful is the morning / As we come and sing to you /
 With hearts so full of gladness / And the fondest hopes for
 you. / On the day that you were born / All the flowers burst in
 bloom / And make you feel the warmth / Of our love as we
 sing along.

Carla, Totong and the People smile when the lights in the room of Father Itos are turned on.

Father Itos emerges from the door of the parish convent.

Carla, Totong, and the People greet Father Itos individually. Some women kiss him on the cheeks.

PEOPLE We wish you happy birthday / Today and the years to come /
 God bless you now and forever / May your dream come true
 dear one.

Scene 57

Sisters' Convent.

Sr. Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio, not wanting to accept defeat, plan their next move.

SR. SANDRA Now is the time to deal Father Itos our last card. We have to bring before the People the laundrywoman he has impregnated, not just with one son but two.

MRS. PILAR As you have suggested, Sister, I have given her P5000 the other day and she promises to cooperate with our plans.

MRS. IGNACIO The poor can really be bought with money. But isn't P5000 too much for a laundrywoman?

SR. SANDRA Well, in this case, this is a very special dirty linen which she has to wash before the people of San Jose.

Scene 58

San Jose Parish Church Office.

Father Itos is reading a book when Sr. Sandra asks to come in.

SR. SANDRA May I come in?

FR. ITOS Yes, please, Sister.

SR. SANDRA Father, let me be direct to the point. Tomorrow, I shall be bringing Adelina before the People and will be asking her to tell us about her relationship with you.

FR. ITOS If that would make you happy, Sister, that would also make me happy.

SR. SANDRA So, it's either this, Father: leave San Jose quietly and there will be no Adelina; stay in San Jose and Adelina will open her mouth. And you will forever be shamed.

FR. ITOS Let us hear everything from Adelina, then, Sister. I am sorry, Sister, but I do not get intimidated by blackmail. Come what may, bring Adelina, if you so wish.

Scene 59

San Jose Parish Hall.

The parish hall is noisy with the People talking to each other and getting excited over what will transpire in the coming minutes of their gathering.

Carla, Totong, Georgia, Billy Jean, Nichol, Michelle and the Vendors all seated in front chairs of the hall.

Sr. Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio enter. Father Itos enters. And, last to come in is ADELINA, 48. Adelina is relatively young but because of her hard work as a laundry woman, looks rather old.

All become silent.

Mrs. Pilar, Mrs. Ignacio, Father Itos and Adelina sit on the chairs facing the People.

SR. SANDRA *(stands up before the people)* I hate to be confrontational but I hate the hypocrisy that has been going on in our parish. Our beloved parish priest has been inviting sinners to our parish. What we do not know – what most of you do not know, however – is that he is one big sinner himself. And so we have here, Ms. Adelina Saligumba, mother of 2 sons sired by no less than our beloved Reverend Father Manulito Romero.

The people gasp. Adelina and Father Itos, however, do not display any emotion.

SR. SANDRA Adelina, is it true that you and Father have a relationship?

ADELINA Yes, it is true.

SR. SANDRA Is it true that you and Father Itos have 2 sons and their names are Dominic and Francis?

ADELINA Yes, it is true.

SR. SANDRA One last question, Adelina. Is it also true that Father Itos has not ceased in seeing you even after he has sired 2 sons with you.

ADELINA Yes, that is very true.

MRS. PILAR So, we know now, my Friends, why Father Itos keeps on talking about a loving and a saving God, a God of mercy, because he, himself, is a big sinner.

CARLA What is wrong with that? Are you not a sinner yourself?

MRS. IGNACIO Can the blind lead the blind? Can the sinner lead other sinners to God? Impossible!

SR. SANDRA Now, my Friends here in San Jose, you be the judge. Are we content in having a great sinner as parish priest? Or shall we seek one, like Father Madrigal of San Vicente Parish, who has not been corrupted by sin yet.

Everyone is silent. Then, after some time, Adelina speaks.

ADELINA May I say something? Please.

SR. SANDRA Yes, please, Adelina.

ADELINA Father Itos is, indeed, a big time sinner. There is no doubt about that. He has not been faithful to his vow of celibacy as a priest. But you know who caused him to become one? You yourselves. You who call yourselves holy but have not been doing the more dangerous work of the Church. Who have not even tried to lighten the burden Father Itos has carried through the years.

I, as Father Itos' laundry woman, saw how much he tried to avoid drinking liquor. But he had to, he was forced to. To face the abusive soldiers during the time of Marcos, he had to drink in order to hide his fear of them. Who does not fear facing guns and possible death? He drank so that he would

feel brave, appear brave, and, in the process, so that he could save your husbands, your sons, your daughters, from being arrested by military men.

And, on several occasions, I saw him crying. Grieving over persons he had not saved from salvaging, from extra-judicial killings. And so I had to console him. Console him in a manner only a woman can. That is my relationship with him.

CARLA How can that relationship be sinful if that is so?

ADELINA That is why you, Sister Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio do not deserve to be served by Father Itos.

SR. SANDRA What are you saying, you, Laundry Woman?

ADELINA Does your veil make a person holy? Does your veil save you, Sister? You, three, are indeed good women who practise all sorts of virtues – except charity. Therefore, my friends, if ever there are people you should throw out of San Jose, these Sister Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio should be first on your list.

Sr. Sandra approaches Adelina and slaps her.

Seeing Adelina slapped by Sr. Sandra, Father Itos approaches Sr. Sandra and slaps her hard, so hard that her veil flies.

Scene 60

San Jose Public Market.

The Vendors talk about the events in the afternoon.

ELMIRA A priest slapping a religious sister? What a big story.

REGIE But that Sister Sandra deserves to be slapped.

FLORIDA First, we had a bus of Massgoers falling off the ridge. Then, we had that killing of Colonel Zagado inside the church. Now, we had a priest slapping a sister? I wonder what will be our next surprise.

ELMIRA I just heard that Fr. Itos will be suspended by the Bishop in his ministry.

Scene 61

San Jose Parish Church Office.

Father Itos is about to leave the parish office when Sr. Remy rushes in and embraces Father Itos.

SR. REMY *(hugs Father Itos tightly)* Father, how can they do this to you?

FR. ITOS *(embraces Sr. Remy)* The Bishop has his reasons, Sister.

SR. REMY But this is unfair, Father. It was Sister Sandra who placed you in such an awkward situation. And now you are the one getting punished.

Sr. Sandra rushes in and finds Father Itos and Sr. Remy embracing each other.

SR. SANDRA *(shocked)* Sister Remy, are you also a laundry woman?

Father Itos and Sr. Remy are shocked to see Sr. Sandra as well. They withdraw from each other's embrace.

SR. REMY You are mistaken in what you are thinking, Sister.

SR. SANDRA But I am not mistaken in what I have just seen.

SR. REMY I do not want Father Itos to leave. He has not done anything to be expelled from this parish.

SR. SANDRA Unfortunately, Sister, my words have greater value in the mind of the Bishop.

Sr. Remy approaches Sr. Sandra and attempts to slap her. Sr. Sandra pushes her away, however. Sr. Remy loses her balance and falls backward, with the back of her head hitting the corner of Father Itos' office table. Short fountains of blood immediately squirt out of her head.

Sr. Sandra freezes. Father Itos freezes but, after some time, recovers and feels the back of Sr. Remy's head. He also checks her pulse.

FR. ITOS She's dead.

Sr. Sandra looks at Father Itos in a pleading manner.

SR. SANDRA Father, God is an Ocean of Mercy, is he not?

Father Itos nods.

In silence, Father Itos and Sr. Sandra lift Sr. Remy's body and places it on top of the office table. After an uneasy wait, DR. GIL CAFÉ arrives, penlights Sr. Remy's eyes and then checks her pulse.

DR. CAFÉ She is officially dead, Father, Sister. God bless her soul.

Sr. Sandra, unknowingly, embraces Father Itos. Father Itos hesitates to embrace her back but eventually does so.

Scene 62

San Jose Public Market.

The Vendors talk about the death of Sr. Remy.

FLORIDA Church events are turning out to be scenes in a horror
movie.

REGIE Who do you think will die next?

ELMIRA But was her death really an accident?

FR. ITOS I think, it is better that we just let the soul of Sister Remy rest, Carl. Rather than speculate more on the details of her death.

CARLA We understand, Father.

TOTONG But what happens now, Father? Are you leaving San Jose once Sister Remy gets buried?

Deep into the night of the wake, Sr. Sandra and Father Itos find themselves talking.

SR. SANDRA Thank you, Father, for hiding the true nature of Sister Remy's death. You have given me a new lease in life. I cannot believe how merciful, indeed, you are, Father.

FR. ITOS Believe more, Sister, that God is far more merciful than we actually think. That is why there is always space for sinners in his heart.

SR. SANDRA I will, Father.

FR. ITOS We are old, Sister. We better spend the rest of our days bringing sinners back to the Loving Father.

SR. SANDRA Yes, Father.

Scene 64

Interior of San Jose Parish Church.

Father Itos is greeting the People as they enter the church for Mass when Carla and Totong approach him.

CARLA Father, is it true that Bishop VeraCruz has withdrawn his order that you be pulled out of San Jose?

FR. ITOS Yes, Carl.

TOTONG Praise the Lord, Father.

As they are talking, Sr. Sandra approaches them and talks to Carla.

SR. SANDRA Carl, if you do not mind, can you do the First Reading? Brother Benedict has not yet arrived and we are about to start. Would that be fine with you?

CARLA *(surprised)* Fine, Sister. Just let me take a look at the readings.

SR. SANDRA *(hands over a booklet)* Here. Thank you, Carl.

Scene 65

Carla's Beauty Parlor.

Carla and Totong have their breakfast and talk about Sr. Sandra approaching them at Mass earlier.

CARLA Something is wrong, Totong. How come this cantankerous Sister suddenly becomes meek after the death of Sister Remy?

TOTONG There you are again. You mean, she simply could not change herself overnight from a growling lion to a meek kitten.

CARLA Exactly.

Scene 66

San Jose Parish Dining Room.

Father Itos, Rodel and Sister Sandra feast on grilled pork.

As they eat, a montage of still and moving shots are played on the wall behind them.

MONTAGE of the different activities of Father Itos, Rodel and Sr. Sandra:

Father Itos, Rodel and Sr. Sandra crossing rivers;

Father Itos, Rodel and Sr. Sandra greeting people they meet;

Father Itos, Rodel and Sr. Sandra entering chapels;

Father Itos, Rodel and Sr. Sandra receiving Mass offerings; and,

Father Itos, Rodel and Sr. Sandra eating with people.

Then, another series of montage is played, this time depicting the passing of different liturgical seasons:

Church altar covered with violet cloth (Advent);

Church altar covered with white cloth with golden embroidery with a

Christmas Manger at one side of the sanctuary (Christmas);

Church altar covered with green cloth (Ordinary Time); and,

Church altar covered with violet cloth (Lent).

Scene 67

Sisters' Convent

Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio visit Sr. Sandra and finds her slumped, dead tired, on an easy chair of the convent.

MRS. PILAR Sister, are you alright?

MRS. IGNACIO Sister, you look dead, dead tired.

SR. SANDRA *(in a weak voice)* I am dead, dead tired. And how I wish I were dead.

MRS. PILAR Sister, you cannot say that.

SR. SANDRA I am dead tired pretending to like Father Itos. Dead tired smiling to people like Carla and Totong. Dead tired from keeping a lie.

MRS. IGNACIO But I thought you like going with Father Itos after Sister Remy died.

SR.SANDRA That's a lie to cover a lie.

MRS. PILAR Is there something we do not know about Sister Remy's death, Sister?

Sr. Sandra motions to Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio to come closer to her so that she can whisper to them.

Mrs. Pilar's and Mrs. Ignacio's eyes become big with shock.

MRS. PILAR In that case, I think we better see the Bishop tomorrow and tell him everything.

Scene 68

San Jose Public Market.

“Justice for Sr. Remy” posters appear in the public market and the Vendors talk about it.

FLORIDA I told you. Our place is becoming like a never-ending horror movie. Just when you think the movie has ended, another surprise comes to life.

REGIE So Sister Remy’s death was not really an accident but something caused by Father Itos?

ELMIRA Who put up the posters must possess something shocking.

Scene 69

Parish Convent Dining Room.

Carla and Totong rush into the convent and finds Father Itos composed and calm while having his breakfast.

CARLA Father, what I have feared seems to have surfaced.

TOTONG *(hands over a poster)* You better take a look at this, Father.
Father Itos takes the poster and looks at it. On it is a picture of the coffin of Sr. Remy during her wake and under this picture are the words, “Justice for Sr. Remy.”

CARLA Father, was Sister Remy’s death really an accident? Or was there something that you tried to hide from us?

FR. ITOS The ones who put these posters, Carl, Tong, would have the answers for you. As for me, the Lord knows what is best for each one of us.

CARLA Father, Sister Sandra, I think, is really bent on getting rid of you from San Jose.

FR. ITOS Let her.

Scene 70

Bishop VeraCruz's Office.

Bishop VeraCruz listens intently to what Sr. Sandra is narrating.

SR. SANDRA The truth, Bishop, is that I saw Father Itos embracing Sister Remy at the parish office. I already suspected that they somehow had an ongoing relationship – that is why Sister Remy had stopping joining me in my different advocacies but had shifted his loyalty to Father Itos. Father Itos and Sister Remy were so shocked to see me see them embracing each other. So tight must have been their embrace that, when shocked to find me there, Father Itos pushed Sister Remy away from him so hard that Sister Remy lost her balance. She slipped and the back of her head hit the edge of his office table. Then blood spurted. There and then, I knew Sister Remy had her last breath.

Sr. Sandra continues her narration while the Bishop listens.

BP. VERACRUZ *(shocked)* My God, what a great scandal! Unbelievable!

SR. SANDRA I'm sorry, Bishop, that I had to hide this truth from you. This was because I really wanted Father Itos to succeed in his ministry in San Jose even when he has humiliated me several times. But I can no longer bear living the life of a lie. I'm sorry.

BP. VERACRUZ *(indignant)* Let's go to San Jose right now. I want to personally expel from the parish this very night. Come.

Scene 71

Frontage of San Jose Parish Convent.

Bishop VeraCruz gets off his Honda CRV and shouts

BP. VERACRUZ Father Itos, get out of the parish right now! Pack your things and leave!

Father Itos emerges from the parish convent. Carla, Totong and Rodel follow him.

Sr. Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio get off from their Toyota Pajero.

FR. ITOS Bishop, good evening.

Father Itos approaches Bishop VeraCruz in order to kiss the Bishop's ring.

Bishop VeraCruz, however, withdraws his hand away from Father Itos' reach.

BP. VERACRUZ You do not deserve to be parish priest of San Jose. You do not even deserve to be called a priest. I should not have

believed in your promise to do good in the priestly ministry
this time.

People start to gather because of Bishop VeraCruz's shouting.

SR. SANDRA Bishop, it would be better for you and Father Itos to talk
inside the office.

BP. VERACRUZ I am shouting, Sister, because I want to give vent to my
anger. I have been deceived and I want the people of San
Jose to realize that they, too, have been deceived by Father
Itos. I now know, Father, the real cause of Sister Remy's
death. And I am so ashamed to know about it. I could not
believe how you tried to make it appear that everything was
an accident.

FR. ITOS *(looks at Sr. Sandra)* But, that is not true, Bishop.

BP. VERACRUZ Sister Sandra has told me everything. And I believe every
word she said. You were the one who killed Sr. Remy.

The People around the Bishop and Father Itos gasp with disbelief.

FR. ITOS If that is so, Bishop, then, I shall go. Believe Sister Sandra
up to your last breath.

BP. VERACRUZ You really should go.

FR. ITOS Let me take my leave, then, Bishop, as I have to pack my
things.

Father Itos return to the parish convent. Carla, Totong and Rodel follow him.

After Father Itos has left, Bishop VeraCruz talks to the People.

BP. VERACRUZ I apologize, my dear Faithful, if I have scandalized you this evening. I'm very sorry but I really could not help it. You will know everything tomorrow. Attend our 9 AM Mass and you will know. *(to Sr. Sandra)* Sister, let us proceed to your convent and give Fr. Itos more time to leave this parish in peace.

Sr. Sandra looks at Fr. Itos and smiles.

Scene 72

Fr. Itos' Room.

Father Itos starts to pack his clothes into his travel backpack.

FR. ITOS (V.O.) You must love me so much, Lord, to give me this trial. I cannot fathom this love of yours for me. You must love me immensely for you to call me a priest even in the midst of my sinfulness. Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to having served you. I only thought of bringing more sinners back to you.

Father Itos goes out of his room with his backpack.

Carla, Rodel and Totong meet Father Itos as he emerges from his room.

CARLA Father, please stay in my parlor tonight.

TOTONG Father, it is already dark.

FR. ITOS It's better that I proceed to Pagadian City tonight, Carl, Tong.
Otherwise, I will be tempted to fight back and, I am sure,
some people are bound to get hurt.

RODEL Father, let me carry your backpack.

FR. ITOS Stay here, Rodel. Help the next priest who shall be assigned
here. Take care of his just as you took care of me. Carla and
Totong, I am sure, will also be here to help you in your
needs.

RODEL Yes, Father.

CARLA / TOTONG We will take care of Rodel, Father.

FR. ITOS Thank you, Carl, Tong. *(to Rodel)* I already have everything
important in my backpack, Rodel. So whatever I have left in
my room – clothes, books, everything – are all yours.

RODEL Yes, Father.

*Carla and Totong embrace each other. Rodel tries, unsuccessfully, to keep
himself from crying.*

Many of those in the Crowd also cry.

In silence, People watch Father Itos get into his motorcycle and then speed off.

Scene 73

Fr. Itos' Room.

*Rodel enters Father Itos' room and, as he sees the clothes and things of Father
Itos, he cries uncontrollably.*

Then, after sometime, his eyes light up. He returns to the door to check whether somebody is outside. Finding himself alone, he locks the door behind him and opens the cabinet housing the CCTV monitor.

He turns on the CPU and scans, on the monitor screen, the footages that have been recorded.

Then he sees what he is looking for.

Rodel's eyes widen as he views the footage on the death of Sr. Remy. He makes the Sign of the Cross. He, then, inserts a flash drive into the CPU in order to make a copy of the footage.

Scene 74

Sisters' Convent.

Bishop VeraCruz thanks Sister Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio for the wonderful dinner.

BP. VERACRUZ Thank you, Sister Sandra, and you, too, Mrs. Pilar, Mrs. Ignacio for this wonderful dinner tonight.

SR. SANDRA Welcome, Bishop.

BP. VERACRUZ I really wished I could eat more but, given the situation earlier, I do not think that my stomach could have more.

MRS. PILAR We understand, Bishop.

BP. VERACRUZ But I think I will have a good night's sleep tonight. And, I think you, too, Sister Sandra. Getting rid of Father Itos, somehow, feels like a great relief to me.

SR. SANDRA Nothing is as liberating as Truth, Bishop.

BP. VERACRUZ Indeed, veritas liberabit vos, Sister.

As they talk, Carla and Totong lead the People in praying the Rosary in the streets of San Jose.

CARLA Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb Jesus.

TOTONG Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners. Now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Bishop VeraCruz looks out of the window when he hears the praying of the Rosary.

BP. VERACRUZ What are they doing?

SR. SANDRA I think they are praying for the good of San Jose, Bishop. Now, with Father Itos gone, I think we need to heal so many wounds.

BP. VERACRUZ That sounds inspiring.

MRS. PILAR It was Sister Sandra who introduced the praying of the Rosary around the town, Bishop.

BP. VERACRUZ You really have done a lot for San Jose, Sister.

MRS. IGNACIO Without Sister Sandra, Bishop, there would not be a vibrant church here in San Jose.

BP. VERACRUZ I can see that.

Scene 75

Frontage of San Jose Parish Church.

Two 6x6 military trucks arrive and stop in front of the parish church. Soldiers in uniform get off.

3 Bachelor buses arrive and passengers, many of them Gays, Prostitutes, Handicapped, get off.

Then, Bishop VeraCruz' Honda CRV arrives. Bishop VeraCruz and Sr. Sandra get off.

BP. VERACRUZ I wonder why there are so many people, Sister.

SR. SANDRA Many must be happy to hear Father Itos gone, Bishop.

BP. VERACRUZ I must have made a very good decision, then, in expelling him.

SR. SANDRA I think so, Bishop.

BP. VERACRUZ Now, I cannot wait to tell the People, Sister, the truth about what really happened to Sister Remy. Until now, I really could not fathom why Father Itos had to hide the truth. That rascal!

SR. SANDRA He must have been afraid of being kicked out of San Jose, Bishop.

BP. VERACRUZ *(proceeds to the sacristy)* Come, Sister. I can no longer control my enthusiasm in exposing the great lie Father Itos has crafted.

Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio greet Bishop VeraCruz and Sr. Sandra.

Bishop VeraCruz stretches his right hand for Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio to kiss the Bishop's ring.

Scene 76

Interior of San Jose Parish Church.

Sr. Sandra approaches Rodel sitting close to the sanctuary.

SR. SANDRA Rodel, is everything prepared?

RODEL Yes, Sister.

SR. SANDRA Good.

RODEL Give me a sign, Sister. I will, then, ring the bell and the Choir will then sing the entrance song.

SR. SANDRA Good. By the way, Rodel, why is there a wide, white *(notices the white screen right in front of the Choir)* screen at the Choir area?

RODEL *(smiles at Sr. Sandra)* The Choir thought, Sister, that, with the Bishop here, it may be good to flash the lyrics of our songs while we are singing so that he will be impressed. That way, too, everyone can join.

SR. SANDRA Excellent.

The People rise and sing the entrance hymn. Bp. VeraCruz walks towards the sanctuary, kisses the altar and walks towards his seat.

BP.VERACRUZ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

PEOPLE Amen.

BP. VERACRUZ The grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

PEOPLE Amen.

BP. VERACRUZ My dear People of God, I am very happy to be here with you. With so many of you here present, I have realized how much you love the Lord. I feel sad, however – deeply, deeply sad – that I have to announce to you that I have expelled Father Itos from this parish last night.

People gasp and look at each other. The Soldiers, Gays, Prostitutes, the Handicapped stand up in shock.

Bishop VeraCruz gets rattled by the movement in the congregation but continues to preach.

Carla, seated next to the projector in the Choir area, starts to play the footage Rodel has found.

BP. VERACRUZ I will, therefore, not just expel him from this parish, I will also recommend to the Holy See, to the Holy Father, that he be stripped of his clerical state. He is not worthy to be called a priest. He does not deserve to be called your priest.

As Bishop VeraCruz speaks, the images of the footage of the accident Rodel copied, appear on the white screen.

BP. VERACRUZ I understand that he has been the cause of division in your parish. I also understand, based on what Sister Sandra has

told me, that he made you all believe that Sister Remy died in an accident. Sister Remy died, not because she slipped, but that Father Itos pushed her when Sister Sandra found them embracing one another.

He is a great sinner. A liar – a man who schemes and deceives. He tried to make us believe that God is a loving and saving God – God is. But, I am sorry to say that, with the evil he has done, God may not be loving and saving towards him.

The People start to murmur. Bishop VeraCruz gets distracted.

The People leave their seats and walk towards the screen to get a better view of the images.

CLOSE UP on the images of the recorded footage playing on the white screen.

Flashed on the white screen is the CCTV footage on Sr. Remys death that Rodel found after Fr. Itos has left:

Father Itos is about to enter his office when Sr. Remy rushes in and embraces Father Itos.

SR. REMY *(hugs Father Itos tightly)* Father, how can they do this to you?

FR. ITOS *(embraces Sr. Remy)* The Bishop has his reasons, Sister.

SR. REMY But this is unfair, Father. It was Sister Sandra who placed you in such an awkward situation. And now you are the one getting punished.

Sr. Sandra rushes in and finds Father Itos and Sr. Remy embracing each other.

SR. SANDRA *(shocked)* Sister Remy, are you also a laundry woman?

Father Itos and Sr. Remy are shocked to see Sr. Sandra as well. They withdraw from each other's embrace.

SR. REMY You are mistaken in what you are thinking, Sister.

SR. SANDRA But I am, certainly, not mistaken in what I have just seen.

SR. REMY I do not want Father Itos to leave. He has not done anything to be expelled from this parish.

SR. SANDRA Unfortunately, Sister, my words have greater value in the mind of the Bishop.

Sister Remy approaches Sr. Sandra and attempts to slap her. Sr. Sandra pushes her away, however. Sr. Remy loses her balance and falls backward, with the back of her head hitting the corner of Father Itos' office table. Short fountains of blood immediately squirt out of her head.

Sr. Sandra freezes. Father Itos freezes but, after some time, recovers and feels the back of Sr. Remy's head. He also checks her pulse.

FR. ITOS She's dead.

Sr. Sandra looks at Father Itos in a pleading manner.

SR. SANDRA Father, God is an Ocean of Mercy, is he not?

Father Itos nods.

Bishop VeraCruz continues to speak amidst the growing chaos.

BP. VERACRUZ Father Itos is the one who gets Sister Remy . . . killed.

Close up, slow mo, of Sr. Remy falling, with her head hitting the corner of the office table and blood spurting out of the back of her head.

The People freeze.

Sr. Sandra, Mrs. Pilar and Mrs. Ignacio freeze.

Close up, slow mo, of Sr. Sandra looking at Father Itos and saying,

SR. SANDRA (V.O.) Father, God is a loving and saving God, isn't he?

People stare at Sr. Sandra. Then, they stare at Bishop VeraCruz.

Bishop VeraCruz stares at Sr. Sandra and then at the People. He opens his mouth in disbelief at what he has been saying -- so great was his disbelief that People in the church saw the tonsils in his wide, open mouth.

THE END