

LUST

7 Deadly Sins Vol. 1



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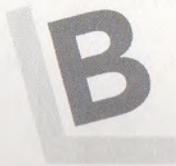
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Bless Me Father

Robert Iulo

“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It’s been one month since my last confession.”

But what a month. I had just started in an all-boys Catholic high school, and it was my first time going to confession there. I had learned about a whole new category of sins. In elementary school, having been taught by Sisters of Charity, I didn’t consider myself much of a sinner. Starting at about age seven or eight, we were encouraged to go to confession every week. I often had trouble coming up with any sins to confess. An easy one was cursing. What we kids considered cursing wasn’t quite the same as what the Church thought of it. It usually went something like this:

Father, I cursed.

What did you say?

I called my friend an asshole, and I said fuck five times.

Did you use the Lord’s name in vain?

No, Father.

What you said is profanity. It’s not good but not as bad as using the Lord’s name in vain. Don’t do that. For your penance say three Hail Marys.

As long as the nuns taught us about sinning, it wasn’t too bad. But in high school, instead of Sisters of Charity, we were taught by Christian Brothers. All of the sins the nuns were too modest to mention weren’t a problem for these guys.

At our first religion class, we were given a book called *Nothing Below the Belt*. It began with a picture of two fighters in a ring with the caption, "The best rule is the boxer's rule; nothing below the belt." Our religion teacher, Brother Patrick, went through it in excruciating detail. It dealt specifically with the Sixth Commandment and adultery. I knew about adultery, and there was no way, at thirteen, that I had committed it. According to Brother Patrick, it wasn't so simple. He had a whole book to explain there was a lot more to it. Moses might have gotten that Commandment in five little words, "Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery," but in the millennia since, the Church interpreted them to mean much more, summed up in just one word – lust.

He started with "impure thoughts," a mortal sin, with its obligatory eternal hellfire. And for what? For an adolescent boy enjoying thinking about sex. How were we supposed to steer clear of those very natural thoughts? By praying, of course. That was the best Brother Patrick could come up with. It didn't work.

After he felt he had solved that problem for us, he went on to "nocturnal emissions." I at first thought it had something to do with car engine exhaust but what he meant were wet dreams. We were in our early teens, and all of us had and looked forward to having these pleasant emissions. Did he expect us to suddenly stop them? "This isn't something you can consciously avoid," he said, "but if you wake up during one of these dreams, say a decade of the Rosary." That's ten Hail Marys.

So with wet dreams out of the way, masturbation came next. The solution – just don't do it. You got an erection? – Pray. It's as easy as that. Studying hard and playing lots of sports helps too.

After a few more classes, he finally arrived at actual, physical girls (not only thoughts about them). He started with “prolonged kissing.” That’s something more than the kiss you give to grandma. He didn’t indicate a time limit and never mentioned tongues. What he said was, “Prolonged kissing can lead to much, much worse things,” and he ended the subject there. Some of the kids in the class still hadn’t engaged in prolonged kissing, but I had, always hoping it would lead to much, much worse things.

He said we might be more familiar with his next subject, “improper touching,” as “necking” or “petting.” These were 1950s terms he assumed were still in use. We called it “making out.” He used countless words to tell us what body parts would be improper to touch, but he never said exactly what they were, leaving us guessing.

After a few weeks in Brother Patrick’s class, I found the bottom line was that anything to do with sex was a mortal sin if procreation within marriage wasn’t the end result. And I wondered how, with such strict regulations, Catholics could manage to procreate at all.

I was now ready for my first confession in high school, with all of these new sins committed before I knew they were sins. I decided to simply face it, tell the priest everything and get it over with as quickly as possible. It began with my usual venial sins. You didn’t go to Hell for all eternity for those. Instead, you did a stretch in Purgatory. The priest’s response to this part was, “Try to be good and don’t do that again.” Then I started with my “below the belt” mortal sins. He questioned me in excruciating detail about each one. He grilled me for what seemed like hours. I couldn’t wait to get out of that dark little box. At the end, he gave me the biggest penance I’d ever gotten. So big that the rest of the class had to wait for me to get

back to school. And what was the result of all this Catholic education? Did it put me off sex? No, it put me off religion.