

“The Mission” starring Robert de Niro, Jeremy Irons, Aidan Quinn, Liam Neeson, 1986, PG, 125 minutes

Please do not judge the Catholic church as a result of this movie. We need to examine our own hearts and see where we have treated others unjustly, where we have hated, where we have not fully forgiven.

Major themes:

- Salvation
- Missions
- Love
- Forgiveness
- Martyrdom
- Pacifism vs. self-defense
- Authority – government, church

Scriptures:

John 1:5 (ESV) – *“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”*

Acts 3:19 (NASB) – *“Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord”*

Matthew 28:19 – 20 (NLT) – *“. . . go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

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Acts 1:8 (NLT) – *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere--in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Psalms 11:3 – 7 (NLT) – *“The foundations of law and order have collapsed. What can the righteous do?’ But the LORD is in his holy Temple; the LORD still rules from heaven. He watches everyone closely, examining every person on earth. The LORD examines both the righteous and the wicked. He hates those who love violence. He will rain down blazing coals and burning sulfur on the wicked, punishing them with scorching winds. For the righteous LORD loves justice. The virtuous will see his face.”*

Matthew 16:24 – 26 (NLT) – *“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?”*

Matthew 5:10 (NIV) – *“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

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Background info:

This movie is based on actual events surrounding the Treaty of Madrid in 1750, in which Spain ceded part of Jesuit Paraguay to Portugal. The film's narrator, Altamirano, speaking in hindsight in 1758, was sent by Jesuit Superior General Ignacio Visconti to Paraguay in 1752 to transfer territory from Spain to Portugal. He oversaw the transfer of seven missions south and east of the Río Uruguay, that had been settled by Guaranis and Jesuits in the 17th century. As compensation, Spain promised each mission 4,000 pesos, or fewer than 1 peso for each of the circa 30,000 Guaranis of the seven missions, while the cultivated lands, livestock, and buildings were estimated to be worth 7-16 million pesos. The film's climax is the Guarani War of 1754-1756, during which historical Guaranis defended their homes against Spanish-Portuguese forces implementing the Treaty of Madrid. For the film, a re-creation was made of one of the seven missions, São Miguel das Missões. The film is set around the borders of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil.



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The Mission won the Palme d'Or (first prize at the Cannes Film Festival) and the Academy Award for Best Cinematography. Many of the people who played the natives were actual native South Americans who spoke little English. They were given free reign to say whatever lines they wanted. The majority of the crew became ill with amoebic dysentery. Robert De Niro was one of the few who did not catch the illness. The elderly priest sometimes seen traveling in the background is actually Daniel Berrigan, S.J. (Society of Jesus). He is a well known Jesuit priest and professor who, along with his brother, is known for his work in human rights and social justice. He has one line in the film: "no". At the film's very end, after the final credits, Altamirano gives the audience an ambiguous, almost accusing look, as if he were asking it, "*Would you or would you not have done this?*"

Tomorrow, November 13th, 2011, is the International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church around the world - <http://www.idop.org/>

Major characters:

- Father Gabriel
- Rodrigo Mendoza
- Fielding
- Cardinal Altamirano
- The Guarani community

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Discussion points:

1. What moved you the most about this story? What disturbed you?
2. What political and historical factors conspired to create the situation in which the Jesuits found themselves?
3. Did you identify more with Father Gabriel, who preferred to resist the invaders peacefully and lead the people in prayer, or Rodrigo Mendoza, who chose to use weapons in order to defend the people and resist the attack? Is one way better than the other?
4. Where does the Scriptural basis for church authority lie, considering the excess of authority in the Church portrayed in this movie and the absence of authority that we often see in churches today? Are we members of a democracy, an order, or something else?
5. Altamirano wrote in his report to the Pope, *“A surgeon to save the body must often hack off a limb. But in truth nothing could prepare me for the beauty and the power of the limb that I had come here to sever.”* What would you have done if you were in his shoes?
6. How can we respond to David’s question in Psalm 11:3 – *“The foundations of law and order have collapsed. What can the righteous do?”*
7. Discuss Mendoza’s conversion. What did you notice? What convinced you that it was genuine?
8. How did Mendoza and the other Jesuit priests live out 1 Corinthians 13?
9. Why do you think God allowed such a tragedy to occur?