

Stories for lipreading



A SPECIAL WASH by Michael Edwards

[This text is read aloud at the beginning of this video:]

Welcome to Stories for Lipreading. If you haven't used our website before, we suggest you look at our 'How to Use' page before you begin. We hope you enjoy this autobiographical story, 'A Special Wash' by Michael Edwards.

A Special Wash by Michael Edwards

The time was one of political crisis and external threat. The visit of His Holiness the Pope to Britain had very nearly been cancelled – but was going ahead amidst great excitement from the Catholic community. Everybody needed a good excuse for celebration.

These Papal trips are always hectic and arduous, doubtless bringing great joy to the participants, as well as producing a considerable amount of dirty washing. As it happens, the Catholic Church in the United Kingdom was responsible for all the costs and details of the visit as this was a private, rather than a state, occasion. As it also so happens, the convent laundry where my father worked was closely connected to the Church and would launder vestments and more personal items for many of the clergy, and other Catholic institutions in the diocese.

Apocryphal or not, this is how my father told the tale of the holiest laundry he had ever undertaken, and I'm sure he could have dined out on it if he had wished. Special batches of items would sometimes be given individual attention. My father understood the washing cycles better than most, and could be trusted with the outmost discretion, so he was not surprised when the laundry sister, highly excited and flushed of face, rushed into his workroom with a sizeable tissue-wrapped parcel of white shirts and other garments. "I know you will be discreet, but this is an exceptionally special and rather urgent consignment of washing, belonging to a most important visitor. Please personally ensure that it is handled with the greatest respect and care".

Now, the laundry processed not only washing for the clergy and convents, but also from hotels, service flats and other sources, such as night-shelters and hostels for displaced and homeless people; these latter concerns were perhaps not best known for the highest standards of personal hygiene. As it was a Saturday, and not a usual working day for the laundry staff, Dad was about to undertake one of these washes – he sometimes had to process urgent weekend washes in the absence of his team. With, of course, appropriate ceremony and due dignity, he tossed the Pope's smalls into the machine, together with who knows what, belonging to who knows who!

This very special, almost unique and slightly holy consignment, took its course through the system, was duly dried and lovingly ironed, doubtless with greater care than that afforded to it in the washhouse, rewrapped, and then it found its way back to its rightful owner, none the worse for its interesting adventure and brief contact with the down and outs of London. Had he known I am certain that His Holiness would have approved!

Moral of the story: it doesn't matter who you rub up against - it will all come out in the wash!

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