

We hope you enjoy these messages that contain a little information about aspects of American Catholic history that are often little known and unexpected. We've also included links for you to find out more and to subscribe to the podcast, *American Catholic History*, which gives you a bit of history in about 15 minutes a week. Enjoy!

Sir Alfred Hitchcock



You may know **Sir Alfred Hitchcock** from his groundbreaking and enduring movies like *The Birds* and *Psycho*, but he was also a lifelong Catholic whose faith brought him much consolation at the end of his life.

Hitchcock was born in England and met and married his wife, Alma, there in 1926 at the **Brompton Oratory**. But for most of his career and life, Hitchcock would live in the US, where he would make his most famous films. He was quite prolific and innovative in his filmmaking style and soon people were going to the movies to see not just films, but **Hitchcock** films.

His films frequently involved a story of mistaken or assumed identity, with the wrong person being suspected of a crime and then having to run from both the police and the real bad guys. He would also upend conventional Hollywood storytelling by presenting the bad guys in a way that made the audience identify with them, or sympathize at least a little, with their plight.

This approach came at least a bit from **his Catholic upbringing**. He once told the journalist François Truffaut, “I don’t think I can be labeled a Catholic artist, but it may be that one’s early upbringing influences a man’s life and guides his instinct.”

He also told Truffaut that through his Catholic schooling, “A Catholic attitude was indoctrinated into me.... I now have a conscience with lots of trials over belief.” And regarding the Jesuits he said that they gave him “a consciousness of good and evil, that both are always with me.” In short, he had an awareness of the fallen human condition, the complexities of being good and bad, that there really is no one who is all good or all bad.

Fr. Sean Salai, SJ, wrote in America magazine: "Although I have never enjoyed horror movies myself, I enjoy Hitchcock. While horror films depress me, Hitchcock amuses and enlightens and sometimes moves me. He treats unspeakable things with tact, humor and style in a way that is much imitated by modern filmmakers without being fully recaptured."

His only explicitly Catholic film is *I Confess*, the 1953 film which sees a murderer confess his crime to a priest, and then the priest — who during the confession tells the man to go and confess to the police — becomes the chief suspect in the crime due to his past relationship with the victim. The priest cannot tell the police what he knows because he cannot break the seal of Confession.

When discussing *I Confess* with a reporter he said, "We Catholics know that a priest cannot disclose the secret of the confessional, but the Protestants, the atheists and the agnostics all say, 'Ridiculous. No man would stay silent and sacrifice his life for such a thing.'" Hitchcock knew the priest couldn't, and wouldn't, and thus he had the hook for a truly brilliant film.

Throughout his career, Hitchcock made 65 films and although nominated five times, he never won an Oscar as best director. But in 1979 he was awarded the American Film Institute's Lifetime Achievement Award. He would die a year later in 1980.

In the last several years of his life, Hitchcock was frequently visited by two priests, Father Tom Sullivan and Father Mark Henninger, SJ. It seems that he had been away from Church for a time following the Second Vatican Council, but these priests who visited him and his ailing wife, Alma, apparently helped him come back fully into the fold. Fr. Henninger would later write of visiting "Hitch" in his home, hearing his confession, and celebrating Mass for him and Alma there.

Father Henninger reports that after receiving Holy Communion Alfred Hitchcock would remain quiet for a time, with tears streaming silently down his face. So deeply did he understand the reality of what was going on: the wrong man, hunted down and punished for crimes he did not commit, accepting that punishment on behalf of the guilty, out of love.

He died on April 29, 1980, and his beloved wife of 54 years, Alma, died two years later.

For more about Alfred Hitchcock, listen to [American Catholic History, Episode #54](#).

The American Catholic History podcast, hosted by Tom and Noelle Crowe, finds the hidden gems and compelling stories of Catholic Americans who have contributed to their nation by virtue of their faith over the past three centuries. In about 15 minutes, American Catholic History will introduce you to the amazing men and women who came to these American shores and were born here and contributed in ways both great and small, celebrated and unheralded. **Send us your feedback at history@sqpn.com**

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