

Please, Pope!

by Con Chapman

As the curtain rises or lights come up, a man—Kenny Havern—is revealed on one side of the stage dressed in casual clothes that are not dressy—blue jeans, sneakers, a sweatshirt and a jacket bearing the logo of sports team, preferably youth or professional hockey but any sport will do. He should carry a newspaper, preferably one in tabloid format. (If the play is performed in Massachusetts, the Boston Herald should be used.)

The man shuffles forward towards center stage slowly and in starts, as if waiting in a line that is moving gradually. When he reaches center stage, he turns, faces the audience, folds newspaper under arm and extends a hand as if to shake another's in greeting, and speaks.



Havern:

Hi there, uh . . . Pope.

(Looks slightly off center stage, as if speaking to someone.)

Oh—he don't shake hands. Then what does he do? Kiss the ring, huh.

(Bends at the waist and extends a hand as if to take another's hand in order to kiss it.)

You're sure about this? Okay.

(Makes kissing action with mouth, then stands up straight and looks out center stage again)

I'm Kenny Havern, Arborway Youth Hockey League. Boston. Mass. USA. Yeah, I know—very Catholic town. That's sorta what I'm here for, if you got a minute.

(he removes the newspaper from under his arm before speaking)

Mr. Pope—uh, your Holiness: The Board of Directors of Arborway Youth Hockey has sent me here to ask you about this story in the paper here. This one. “Pope plays hardball with Sunday sports fans—urges flock to pray not play.” My question to you is—are you serious? *(beat, looks off center)* Is that a yes? You are? Have you considered—even for a second—what this is gonna do to youth hockey in Massachusetts? No? I didn't think so.



I'm gonna try to keep this professional, but believe you me—this has got a lot of people steamed up. Even more than the birth control thing.

Let me just lay it out for you. We got four mites teams, three squirts, two pee wees and two bantams in the league. I got games starting at six in the morning running to eight o'clock Sunday night. I got ice time bought and paid for from now till next April. And you're telling me "Pray don't play"?

With all due respect Pope—yer outta yer mind. (*Looks higher, as if at a hat*) I mean—have you got mice in yer mitre there Padre?

Do you realize how much the parents pay for their kids to play hockey? No? Go on—take a guess. Take two—the first one's free. (*beat*) I don't know what that is in dollars. (*Looks off center.*) How much is that? Sorry—not even close. Fer each kid it's six hundred a season, plus tournaments, plus some of them play on two teams, y'know, a town team and a travel team—full sheet practices, second set of uniforms, the works. It adds up, Pope, believe me.

Do you have any idea—any idea at all—what this is gonna do to our program? Well let me tell you. We came within one goal in regulation—one lousy goal!—of beating Winchester for the state championship in the Pee Wee Division last year. Thirty seconds left on the clock, ref calls a penalty on us, kids get confused, forget to touch up the puck—boom—game's tied. We go into overtime, Winchester get a breakaway off the faceoff—it's over. You shoulda seen those kids—they were bawlin' their eyes out. It was sad, let me tell you. I nearly went over the boards I was so mad at that ref. I sez to him I sez "If I was you I couldn't sleep tonight after what you done to them kids!" Guy just skates off. It's a lousy thirty-five bucks to him—those kids will never get another chance to be Pee Wee champs of the whole state. Frankly, I think that's worth missing a Mass over, don't you?

Aw c'mon! You know, I thought you guys were on the right track there for a while when you came up with that Saturday Mass thing. Now that was a good idea! Swing by St. Bernard's or wherever Saturday afternoon at 4:30—forty-five minutes later, bingo, you're outta there and done for the weekend. No muss, no fuss. Whatever happened to that? Is that all shot to hell with your new rules?

Oh yes they are new rules. If you had an old rule—Mass on Sundays—then you change the rule—Mass on Saturday's okay—then you change the rule again, it's not like you've gone back to the old rule. Unh-uh, no way. From that point on it's a new rule.

Anyway, we got the kids jackets. They say “State Finalists”—not as good as “State Champions” but they're still pretty nice. Got two little flags—U.S. and Canadian—right hear over the heart. What's that? Why Canada? You know, Pope—that's a damned good question. We're from Boston—we haven't got any Canadian kids on the team. We got plenty of Irish, couple Italians. No Canadians. I guess it's just traditional.

Actually, y'know something—our kids got booed when they went up to a tournament in Canada last year. It was pretty lousy, let me tell you. Really frosted my ass! So now that you mention it, I think we oughta rip those little Canadian flags right offa them jackets! Good idea, Pope!

(looks down at notes) I had a point here—oh yeah. Listen, Pope—we gotta play on Sundays—there's no other way. Otherwise we're goin' till about ten on weeknights, which is too late for the mites. Some of 'em got homework. I got to at least pretend that school's more important than hockey. There's always one mother on the team giving me grief about homework. *(Imitates a woman's voice in a sarcastic manner)* “Bobby got a C last semester—how's he gonna get into college if he's always practicin' when he should be

studyin'?" I'll tell you how, lady. If he sticks with me I'll get him a scholarship. He can go to any college in the country—as long as it has a hockey program.

If we don't play Sundays, those kids will have nothing to look forward to on weekends. Is that what you want? You want to go down in history as the Pope who took kids' fun away from 'em? What exactly is it they're supposed to do on Sundays if they ain't playin' hockey? Say the rosary? (*Laughs, then turns abashed*) Oh—I was kidding. (*beat, then incredulous*) You'd really make a kid say rosaries on Sunday? But Pope—it don't take a whole day to say a rosary. You can knock one out in about a half hour if I remember correctly from the days of my yout. Trying to save the world from Communism by sayin' the rosary every Friday in October.

Why can't we do it that way? Pick one day a week, say—Tuesday—that the kids could substitute for Sunday. Then they could pray but they'd still get to play—get it? (*Off center*) He don't get it. (*Begins to move to the opposite side of the stage from which he entered, as if being pushed*)

Watch it there buster. I ain't through. (*Returns to center stage, and speaks again to Pope*) Who's the guy with the conquistador hat? The Swiss Guard? What's that? Your own private army? Cool. Is he part of the Swiss Army? Cause I got my son one of those knives.

Damn kid lost it the first day he had it. *(laughs, trying to generate some sympathy)* Ain't that like kids?



Anyway—Pope—listen. If you let us play Sundays, I promise you—let's see, what can I promise—I know. If we can keep playin' on Sunday, I will never drink—anything but light beer again. Seriously. How's that?

Well think about it, would ya? I'd appreciate it. Oh—one more thing. What does it take to become a saint? No, not for me. We were thinkin' a Bobby Orr. *(beat, then incredulously)* Who's Bobby Orr? *(Rolls eyes)* Only the greatest hockey player that ever lived. Except maybe Wayne Gretzky. We were thinkin' a somethin' like *(spreads hands as if to suggest he is contemplating a banner)* "Bobby Orr—Patron Saint of Mass. Youth Hockey." How do you like that? See, I didn't think there was a patron saint for that yet. So what does it take—you know, to get sainthood. Miracles? How many? Minimum of two maximum of four—who decides? Oh—you do, huh. What is it, a judgment call, sort of like icing? Okay. Well, that shouldn't be too hard.

As a matter of fact, it's a piece a' cake! What were his four miracles? Well, you got three Hart trophies for MVP, that's one, cause no other defenseman ever got as many. Then you got eight Norris trophies for best defenseman—that's another record, for two. He was the only defenseman in NHL history evah to win two scoring titles, so that's three.

And then there was 1970. (*Beat, as he becomes sentimental, his voice distant.*) Boston Bruins versus St. Louis Blues in the Stanley Cup Finals. Boston hasn't won the Cup in thirty years. Game four—sudden death overtime. Orr's flying through the slot, he gets tripped, and he still gets the shot off. He scores! Bruins win the Stanley Cup! Got to be the greatest goal in the history of hockey. You can't go into a bar in Boston thirty years later without seein' a picture of it. So there's your four miracles.



What? What was the score in games? Three nothin', Boston. Right, they swept St. Louis in four games. *(beat, then a bit defensively)* Well, granted, up three games to none, they probably woulda won it eventually, but still—

Fine, if you wanna be a nitpicker, consider this: It was the fourth goal, in the fourth period—overtime—in the fourth game. Orr was number four—and so was the guy who tripped him! So if that ain't a “fourth” miracle, I don't know what is.

(After building to this climax, he calms down a bit.)

Anyway, that's my humble opinion. So how do we apply? You want me to write this all down and send it to you? Okay—if that's how you get the ball rollin', sure. What's your mailing address.

(beat, as he takes out pencil and piece of paper)

Da Pope—Da Vatican—Europe. Huh—so you, like, got your own country, huh? Good for you. Zip code? Zero—zero—one—two—zero. Okay. I'll get that in the mail sometime next week, soon as I recover from the trip home.

He turns and begins to walk offstage as if he is being escorted somewhat roughly.

Well, nice talkin' to ya, Pope. Oh—one more thing.

(backpedaling, now, as if being pushed)

Where can I go for good Italian food around here?

Curtain

*Included in The Hockey Plays: A Hat Trick of Shorts About
Hockey and Life (JAC Publishing)*

