TRIUMPH of the HEART

Interview With The Director - Anthony D'Ambrosio

How did it happen that a young American director made a film about a Polish saint?

I didn't set out to make a film about a Polish saint. But the Polish nation's story really haunted me. Poland has suffered tremendously under constant oppression, and the Polish artistic tradition really shows a unique understanding of hope in the face of inevitable suffering. Polish culture has this amazing gravitas and a quality of dark, gritty hopefulness that I think has always attracted me- but especially when I was going through my own dark night of the soul, I found myself drawn to Polish history.

As an American, I came to Kolbe from the outside. I think that afforded me a unique vantage point on how vital and universal it is. You often are so close to your own story that it's difficult to see its uniqueness. Right now, in a time when we are more isolated, more internally locked up in mental cells, starving for hope, St. Kolbe's story shines like a brilliant lamp to light the pathway to heaven and to peace.

I first heard about St. Kolbe when I was young, but it was when I realized that he had survived and been executed *WITH* other cellmates that I realized that there was a story here that was untold and unplumbed. I didn't come to it opportunistically. At the time I was suffering with chronic illness that caused life threatening insomnia. During the long, almost unending nights, I had dialogues with St. Kolbe and found him to become a companion in my suffering. His story led me back to life.

We know that the film was made with the participation of donors. What did you say, how did you convince people in the United States to create a film with you about events from many years ago and history from the other side of the world?

We didn't pitch this as a religious film to a studio. There aren't studios to pitch with this sort of thing. We made a short film and wrote the feature-length script, and then simply shared them with everyday Catholics. We framed it as a rescue mission for a culture that has lost its way. I think all of us were being forged into a movement of people who knew that this wasn't just a movie. It was a chance to remind the world what love really looks like.

And to be honest, people were hungry for it and we were absolutely astonished by how fast, how generous, and how passionate the gifts came. We're living in a culture that's tired of noise and division. Kolbe's story is real. It's raw. It doesn't flinch from evil. It stares evil right in the face and then offers songs, prayers, and beauty. We raised the funding from thousands of ordinary people—moms, dads, teachers, priests, college students, all of whom wanted to see it told with beauty and integrity.

Where did the idea for the title of the film "Triumph of the Heart" come from?

The title is a kind of answer.

The Nazis had their propaganda machine—they gave us *Triumph of the Will*, a film meant to glorify power and domination. But Auschwitz wasn't the end of the story. Kolbe's love cut through that darkness like a blade. He showed that the real triumph wasn't in the tanks or the uniforms or the lies. It was a barefoot man kneeling down to take someone else's place in a starvation bunker. The Catholic story is often a story of the inversion of power. God as a child, a king on a cross. That paradox is renewed in all of our saints- and I saw that dramatized in a profound way in the contrast between Kolbe's weakness and the Nietzschean Nazi power.

That was how the name the *Triumph of the Heart* was born.

It's almost sentimental until you understand the cost of that triumph, and see how unflinchingly the story is told. We thought it would be a great promise to our audience that watching this costly, painful love would be worth it, that there is a Triumph in the end. Love that endures, even when everything else falls apart.

Is "Triumph of the Heart" a story with a happy ending?

That depends on what you mean by happy, and what you believe about where happiness comes from. The material world is obviously passing. It's not a happy ending in the Hollywood sense, or what we've come to expect from normal faith-based films that have Hallmark endings where everything gets tied up with a nice bow. But everyone who has seen this has been stunned by the joy they feel at the end… because Kolbe was driven by a different orientation towards something deeper than earthly success or victory. It's the kind of ending that says: no matter how dark it gets, love still wins. That hope is still possible. That the heart can still triumph.

And in today's world, I don't think there's anything more hopeful than that.