

12th January 2023

Easy

"The dying is easy; it's the living that's hard."

John Patrick and James Kennaway, *The Shoes of the Fisherman* (screenplay)

The 1963 novel, *The Shoes of the Fisherman*, by the Australian writer, Morris West, was made into a movie in 1968. Starring Anthony Quinn, it unfolds the story of Ukrainian Archbishop, Kiril Lakota, who has been set free after twenty years as a political prisoner in a Siberian *gulag*.

Brought to Rome by a young priest, he is given an audience with the Pope, who elevates him to Cardinal Priest. The world is on the brink of war due to a Chinese-Soviet feud worsened by a famine caused by US trade restrictions brought against China. When the Pontiff suddenly dies, Lakota's character and unique life experience move the College of Cardinals to elect him as the new Pope.

But Pope Kiril I has to deal with his own self-doubt. In one scene, he takes to the back streets of Rome to find out what the ordinary people have to live with and finds himself in the home of a dying man, being cared for by a young doctor whom Kiril knows. Immediately, the priest begins to recite the "Last Rites". The doctor points to a Star of David on the wall. Seamlessly Kiril begins the Mourner's *Kaddish*, the prayer chanted as part of Jewish mourning rituals and funerals.

Before he leaves the house, Kiril has a conversation with the doctor, who, in thanking him for his comfort, gives him the words quoted above: "The dying is easy, Father; it's the living that's hard."

I'm sometimes accused of making things easy for people in what I write, making faith too simple. Someone suggested I was "letting people off the hook". But these aren't easy issues I deal with; the wrestling with them isn't easy for me; the reflections aren't designed to be facile or easy to accept. Like Kiril Lakota, I try to recognise that we're all dealing with hard questions, to help folk realise they're not alone in wrestling with their issues, and give people, as a troubled priest did with his *Kaddish*, something appropriate to work with.

Making it easy for people? Not so, not when "the living is hard". For, after all, if the living was *easy*, there would be no point in reflecting on anything anyway, would there?

A prayer for today

Lord, when the living is hard, make loving easier to understand. Amen