

Amen: Holy Ghost Power

My appreciation for the work of Robert Duvall took hold early.

I was in the second grade when Boo Radley first haunted little children in “To Kill a Mockingbird,” released on Christmas Day in 1962. From mob lawyer Tom Hagen in “The Godfather” to Texas Ranger/amateur philosopher Augustus McCrae in “Lonesome Dove,” Duvall’s ability to absorb himself in a part is a wonder.

Lately, I’ve gone back to “The Apostle,” a 1997 star turn for Duvall that he also wrote and directed.

Euliss “Sonny” Dewey is as human as we come, a womanizing Pentecostal preacher who, after losing his family and his flock in Texas, assaults his wife’s lover in a drunken, tempestuous rage that leaves the man in a coma that eventually kills him. Dewey flees to find a new identity and, hopefully, grace, as “The Apostle E.F.” in Louisiana, leading a congregation of his creation.

The film has replayed in my mind since last summer. Visiting [Carolyn and Larry Conway](#) in their Parkville home to gather material about St. Ursula School and Parish’s tribute to their two children who were taken at an early age, he said something that stuck:

“My favorite of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit; he’s my sneaky friend. He doesn’t do anything except get other people and put them in your path to do good.”

Other than a solid formation strengthened by ordeal, Larry Conway has no formal theological training, but his description of the third person of the Holy Trinity works for me - as does Duvall’s.

In one scene, his character and a young follower anonymously drop food at the homes of those in need. Having heard Sonny/E.F. say, sing and shout “Holy Ghost Power” so often in the film, I remembered him whispering those words as he knocked on doors and dashed off in glee.

A re-watching of the film proved that recollection faulty. Sonny/E.F. doesn’t voice it at that moment; perhaps my perspective saw - heard? - the Holy Spirit at work in his being a Good Samaritan.

Duvall’s acting evokes the ecstasy we experience when we spread God’s mercy - or

when someone shares it with us.

According to the Catholic News Service stylebook, Holy Spirit is “now preferred over Holy Ghost in most usage,” which recalls another scene from the film. Sonny/E.F. comes upon a Catholic priest blessing a shrimp fleet, smiles and says to himself, “You do it your way. I do it mine. We get it done.”

The January issue of the Catholic Review features a [look inside](#) Holy Family Parish in Davidsonville hosting a movable shelter for the homeless in Anne Arundel County. Other Catholic churches participate in the Arundel House of Hope, but the ecumenical nonprofit is not restricted to them.

From Catholic institutions and secular ones – many receiving federal and state tax dollars – to fraternal organizations such as the Knights of Columbus, right down to the lone individual, what bond, what force, compels us to do good?

Erik Zygmunt’s article and Kevin J. Parks’ photos from Davidsonville launch a new series in the Review. “The Least of These” takes its title from Matthew 25:40-45, which concludes “... what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.”

If one of the features the Review publishes in the coming year moves you or your neighbor to give even more, it will fulfill its purpose.

This month’s Wit and Wisdom column by Father Joe Breighner shares a [modern parable](#) that references the very Gospel passage that inspired “The Least of These.” When Father Joe wrote, he had no idea what the Review had in the works.

Holy Ghost Power, indeed.

Paul McMullen is managing editor of the Catholic Review.

Read more commentary [here](#).