

Forgiveness (Father Paul's POV)

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Summary: Father Paul Thistle receives the surprise of a lifetime when Superman seeks him out to try and sort through his conflicted feelings about the death of Lex Luthor.

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Author's Note: For the purposes of this story, I have made Clark (and therefore, Superman) Catholic, since it's the religion I am most familiar with. If you dislike religious themes in your stories, then this probably isn't the story for you.

This story is a companion piece to the author's "[Forgiveness \(Clark's POV\)](#)."

Slow day, Father Paul thought as he stretched in his ancient wooden chair. He couldn't tell if the seat or his joints made more sounds of protest. The pain in his hip made him fairly certain that a storm would soon be on the way. It almost never failed as an early warning system. *Not that I expected any differently. People just don't come out to confession anymore...all these newfangled ideas of theirs telling them that they don't need to.*

He sighed. The church community just wasn't what it had once been. Although, he had to admit, based on recent trends, today had been blessedly busy with the ten people who'd come by to confess their sins and receive forgiveness in return, comparatively speaking, that was. He often saw less than that, being in such a small town. Still, the aging priest had another full hour left where he had to be available. Then he could finally retire back to his room in the church rectory and take a long, hot, soaking bath to ease the aches and pains in his body.

First things first, he reminded himself. He still needed to call his younger sister for her birthday, and check in with his even younger brother. *And don't forget you still need to write up Sunday's homily*, he warned himself, adding to the mental list he had going. He sighed to himself. It was going to be a long night, especially considering that he was on kitchen cleanup duty that night at the rectory.

He shifted again, the wooden chair creaking. He was about to try to pass some time in inner reflection, perhaps to start mentally drafting the homily he needed to write, when he was jarred from his thoughts by a soft knocking on the open door to the confessional room where he sat waiting.

"Come in," he said, in as welcoming and inviting a tone as he could.

It was always so good to have someone else come and talk for a while, even if the circumstances were quite a bit different from a normal conversation. In fact, he looked forward to speaking with whoever had come into the room. There was nothing that Father Paul liked better than to help lighten the

spiritual load of a person and verbally extending the Lord's forgiveness to those who'd sinned.

A section of wall jutted out nearly halfway into the room, screening his visitor from view. Father Paul waited patiently to see if whoever it was would choose to sit behind the wall and speak through the small, black screened window that had been cut into it, or if whoever it was would choose to sit in the chair opposite his own and speak to him face to face. The door closed with a soft *snick!* as the penitent seemed to debate his or her choice.

"Forgive me, Father," the visitor began, his voice pitched just above a whisper, "for I have sinned. It's been..." He faltered for a moment, sounding unsure of himself. "I'm not even sure how long since my last confession. Years, certainly."

"That's okay," Father Paul reassured him. If he had a nickel for every time someone confessed a long absence from confession, he would be a rich man indeed!

"To be honest, I'm not even really sure what to do here," the man admitted softly.

Something about his voice sounded familiar, and the priest's mind spun. He was sure he'd heard it before, even if he wasn't supposed to act like he knew any penitent who came to confess.

"Come, son, take a seat," the priest offered, hoping to put the young man at ease. And he knew for sure, from the sound of the voice, that it was a young man who'd come to see him.

For another long moment, the mysterious person behind the outcropping of wall didn't move. Then, slowly, he heard the floor creak slightly as the man made his choice. Father Paul couldn't help the look of shock that passed over his features as Superman stepped into view. He made no comment, however, and fought to regain an air of friendly neutrality. Superman might be a celebrity to the world but inside the confessional room, he was no different from any other man.

"Thank you," Superman said as he sat, carefully maneuvering his cape as he did so, almost as if he didn't want to crease the neatly ironed fabric.

Father Paul nodded. "May I admit that I'm surprised to see you here?" he asked, fighting down a blush.

Superman smiled in return. It wasn't a warm, friendly smile — in fact, it was rather reserved and even a little self-conscious. "I'm surprised to be here too," he said with a sigh, his eyes sweeping the room.

Father Paul saw the Man of Steel take a particular interest in the stained glass window in the room. Truth be told, it had always been one of his own favorites. He loved the idea of the lion laying down with the lamb in peace and harmony. The idea had always seemed so far-fetched, however, that two natural enemies could coexist in peace. But, ever since the arrival of Superman, the aging priest had seen some promising, if not fleeting, glimpses of hope for a brighter tomorrow. Maybe they would never reach a state of utopia before the Second Coming of Christ, but the presence of Superman in the world was making a positive impact nonetheless. And that was what was really important, wasn't it? The fact that at least some small pockets of the population were trying to better the planet? Even small groups could have a giant ripple effect, given enough time.

Superman dropped his gaze to his lap after what appeared to be a cursory glance around the room, but which Father Paul guessed had been far more appraising and studious than it appeared.

"I'm not sure where to begin," Superman said at length.

The admission was nothing new to Father Paul. He'd heard it from plenty of troubled people before — men and women alike, old and young, parishioners and visitors. He gave Superman an open, friendly smile to encourage him.

"Just tell me what's on your mind."

Over the years, he'd found that the open-ended invitation was

usually one of the best ways to get people to open up to him.

Superman nodded but stayed silent for a minute. Then, finally, he began to speak. “Three days ago, I watched a man die.”

“I’m sure you see death on a regular basis, Superman,” Father Paul said, his voice neither praising nor condemning.

Superman shook his head. “I do, but this was different, Father...?” He let the statement trail off into a question, unsure how to address the man before him. “I’m sorry. I’m not sure how you prefer to be addressed.”

“Father Paul,” he replied.

“Father Paul,” Superman repeated, his voice sounding approving somehow.

“Tell me, Superman. How was this death you spoke of ‘different’ than other times?”

Superman hung his head. “This time, I didn’t do anything to prevent it.”

The words struck Father Paul like a thunderclap. “I’m sure there must have been a reason why,” he said, never losing the friendly, neutral tone to his words.

Inwardly, his mind spun. Of all the things he never thought he’d hear in his life, this had to be the one he’d never even come close to imagining. And yet, he somehow doubted that Superman had idly stood by and watched as someone was either killed or took their own life. From what he knew of the superhero — mostly through newspaper articles and television news segments — it just wasn’t the man’s style. Sometime must have happened that had prevented Superman from making the save.

“I couldn’t,” Superman said, nodding his affirmation to Father Paul’s words. “I literally couldn’t do a thing to try to save him.” His voice was heavily laden with guilt.

“Why not?” Father Paul asked, carefully ensuring that the question remained innocent and completely devoid of judgment. He only wanted to keep Superman talking so that he could better understand the situation, and therefore be better able to offer words of comfort or advice, if it came down to that.

“Because,” the hero said slowly, as if choosing his words carefully, “I was wounded. No, that’s not really correct. I guess... weakened is a better word. The man who died... Lex Luthor... he attempted to kill me, just before he leaped off the top of Lex Tower. He almost succeeded. I barely got out of the trap he’d set for me alive. By the time he jumped, I only had enough strength left in my body to watch. I tried to fly up to catch him, but I barely managed to give even a tiny hop.”

He stopped there as if surprised or maybe even afraid of how much he’d said. He pulled his gaze from his hands and looked at the priest. Father Paul read an entire volume of heartache in those eyes.

“It sounds like the situation was completely out of your control,” Father Paul said sympathetically. His mind was whirring though. Superman was invincible... wasn’t he? How had the billionaire managed to inflict such damage onto the hero? It was a concerning thought, to be sure, but not relevant to why Superman had sought him out, so he let the matter drop.

Superman hesitantly nodded. “I guess. I just feel like I should have done more. Like I should have been smarter and avoided getting caught in his trap.”

“Because you’re Superman?” Father Paul asked. Again, there was no weight behind the question. He just wanted to understand what it was, exactly, that was bothering the Man of Steel.

“Because I knew something didn’t feel right,” Superman admitted, shaking his head, “as soon as I got the message that Luthor wanted to meet with me. I’ve never trusted him, since the moment I first met him. At first, it was just a gut reaction to the man, something I couldn’t justify or put my finger on. But as time went on, my suspicions about the man and his possible criminal activities grew. So, I feel like I should have known

something was amiss when he casually asked to meet with me.”

“And why did you meet with him?” He wanted to keep the superhero talking. The more the man talked, the better chance Father Paul knew he had in getting to the heart of the problem.

“Because he said that he was concerned about a friend of mine.” This time, the Spandex-clad man clammed up immediately, seemingly distrustful of saying anything more.

“I see,” Father Paul said quietly, nodding absently, buying himself a few precious seconds to think. He wasn’t a psychologist, but sometimes he certainly felt like one, he mused to himself. “Superman, it sounds like you are completely blameless in the matter. There is no sin in trying to help a friend. There is no sin in being physically unable to help someone in need.”

“I know,” Superman said, his voice sounding as meek and small as a child. He sighed, the sound lancing Father Paul’s heart.

“I can see that something else is bothering you,” Father Paul said gently. He leaned slightly forward in his seat, trying to relieve a stab of pain in his lower back, but also knowing that the motion gave a sense of deep listening.

A long moment of silence passed as Superman appeared to fight some internal battle.

“The truth is,” Superman said at length. He pulled his gaze away and Father Paul followed his eyes as they once again trekked to the brilliantly lit, stained glass window. “The truth is,” he started again, maintaining his stare at the window, “when I saw him die... I took no pleasure in it. I’m not that kind of person. If anything, his death has haunted me over the last few days. I see it every time I close my eyes — the arc of his body through the air, the sound of it as it hit the asphalt. But when he died, I couldn’t help it... I felt like a weight was lifted from my shoulders. I felt *relieved* that his life had ended.”

Superman had felt relief over the death of someone? Father Paul momentarily wondered if he’d heard correctly. He’d always known that Superman was human, but he’d also always seemed to be somehow more than human. Someone who wasn’t burdened down by his emotions. But now the Man of Steel’s hunched shoulders and haunted look of desolation belied the once-alloof, neutral personality, leaving permanent cracks in the mask the hero wore when out in the public’s eye. It gave the priest pause as he looked upon the Spandex-clad alien hero. He felt like he was seeing the man for the very first time.

Superman had always seemed removed from laws of human nature — his abilities made him appear almost god-like. He’d appeared to be timeless, ageless, unmovable as the mountains, more powerful than the sea. But now that Superman sat across from him, in obvious emotional and mental torment over his inability to save a life — a life that the world was starting to learn the dark side of — it was easy to forget the invulnerable hero and see the man beneath the cape. And what Father Paul saw surprised him.

Superman was not ageless. In fact, he was a very young man, not much past his mid-twenties. Thirty, at the most, though Father Paul doubted that he was even that old. Superman wasn’t timeless. He had grown from a boy into a man, and was a man who would one day, if the Lord allowed it, become an old man. He wasn’t immovable. He was a man whose emotions ran deep, even if he bravely shoved them aside for the benefit of mankind. And Father Paul had little doubt that the poker face Superman usually wore in public was a way for him to control the situation and keep people at ease. If he appeared calm and collected, it would rub off on everyone else as well. Now Father Paul felt privileged to be given a glimpse into the truly compassionate young man who saved the world on a day-by-day basis.

“Relieved?” Father Paul repeated, letting him know in the tone of his voice, that he wanted the hero to keep talking and to clarify what he’d said.

Superman sighed and it was all Father Paul could do not to wince at the sadness in that sound. “Not for me. Well, at least, not totally for me. I knew I could handle whatever Luthor might have thrown at me next. At least, I believed that I could have. But mostly, I felt relieved for my friend, knowing that she was beyond his reach, beyond the mentally abusive manipulations that he’d been committing against her.”

“Lois Lane,” Father Paul said, thinking about what limited information he knew about Superman. Lois seemed like a good guess. After all, it was no secret that she and the hero shared a special bond. Plus the fact that the entire world knew that Lex Luthor had committed suicide at the unfinished wedding he and the reporter had begun. “I remember reading about her impending nuptials with Mr. Luthor in the paper.” For some reason he couldn’t quite verbalize, he felt as though he needed to explain his guess.

Superman nodded. “Yes.” His posture stiffened by the slightest of degrees, as if he were afraid that he’d spoken too much aloud.

Father Paul didn’t want to press the issue. It made no difference to him who the friend was that Superman had mentioned. He wasn’t there to judge the man and he certainly didn’t want to give the impression that he might be.

“Superman,” he said evenly, still with the same warm, inviting tone. “It’s only human to feel relief when a threat — real or perceived — is removed from our lives. You said yourself that you don’t take any pleasure in seeing a man die. And you’ve said that you couldn’t have made the rescue, that you even tried to, and found yourself unable to.”

“Yes...”

“So, you can’t be blamed for what happened.”

“Maybe not,” Superman replied, moving his eyes downward to inspect the fresh tan carpeting on the floor. “At least, not for Luthor’s decision to commit suicide. But I *do* blame myself for everything else. My pride, my hatred, my concern for Lois allowed me to blindly walk into a trap when I should have suspected that something was up. Even when he low—sprung the trap, I had this moment of such extreme...ego. I brushed it off, refused to take it seriously. That was my downfall. I lost those precious moments when I should have gotten myself far away from that worsening situation. It’s my own fault that I was too weak, too sick, too injured to save him. So yes, I do blame myself,” he said. His voice was intense and quiet at the same time, in a way that Father Paul had never once heard him speak in all the television news segments he’d ever seen on Superman.

“Superman, you can’t foresee every event. Granted, I don’t know you well at all, but it seems to me that seeing into the future is *not* one of your, albeit, extensive, abilities.”

Superman let out a single, rueful laugh, and Father Paul was thankful that his small joke had been at least somewhat appreciated. “No, though sometimes I wish it was.”

Father Paul wondered for a moment about the far-off, almost wistful look that crept into the superhero’s eyes, but as always, he maintained his silence. It wasn’t his place to know, unless Superman specifically told him what he was thinking about.

“And,” the hero continued after a moment, “I blame myself for my reaction to his death.”

“Your relief over the fact that he couldn’t influence Miss Lane any longer,” Father Paul clarified.

Superman nodded slowly. He finally pulled his eyes from the carpet, moving his gaze upward to meet the priest’s eyes. “Yes. Not just Lois either, but for everyone. Luthor was an evil man. I know, I know, who are we to judge...only God himself should apply the label of good or evil to any given person. But...he was an evil man. The things he’d done...the murders he’d ordered...I felt...still feel...that the world is much better off without the billionaire crime lord in it.”

“It seems to me like that’s really why you’re here.” At last, Father Paul felt like they’d broached the heart of the problem, the real reason for the Man of Steel’s despondent attitude and defeated posture.

Superman sighed heavily before he spoke again. “Yes,” he said, in a rough voice that sounded as though it held back a torrent of mixed emotions. “I guess...I guess I feel like I shouldn’t have those thoughts at all.”

“Because you’re Superman?” Father Paul asked, his voice betraying nothing but a desire to understand the situation a little bit better. At least, he hoped that was how his question came off. He didn’t mean to sound accusatory.

“Because I was raised better than that,” Superman replied in a whisper-soft voice. “Because I was taught to respect human life — because I *do* respect human life. I guess...I feel a little like a hypocrite. How can I claim to be a crusader for life when someone’s suicide — regardless of my ability or not to save him — brings a sense of...I don’t know. Almost a sense of peace, I guess. Not that I’m okay with death at all. But, again, peace knowing that a threat to the world has been extinguished. It’s...I don’t even know if I’m making any sense. It’s something I’m having trouble verbalizing. I apologize for that.”

“There’s never a need to apologize when you’re trying to sort out your feelings,” the priest said kindly. His heart was bleeding for the distraught man before him. “Just say whatever it is that comes to mind.”

“I feel like a horrible person,” Superman admitted after a moment, as he pulled his gaze away again. Father Paul had to wonder how much courage it took for Superman to admit that.

“You aren’t a horrible person, Superman. You’re human.”

“No, I’m not.” The sigh that accompanied the words was heartbreaking.

Father Paul mentally frowned at Superman’s refusal to believe in his own humanity, though he never let it show on his face. How could such a good man consider himself as anything *but* human? If anything, Father Paul felt as though Superman was *more* human than some people who’d been born on Earth.

Born on Earth! Of course! He wasn’t born on this planet. He was born on Krypton! his mind screamed at him in stark realization.

“Maybe you weren’t born on this planet, but believe me, son, you’re just as human as the rest of us.”

He tried to gauge if Superman was buying the truth he was telling him, but the hero remained unreadable. Father Paul shrugged and adopted an even more informal, friendly tone. Something in his back popped as he shifted, bringing a release of some of the pain he’d felt a moment before.

“Sure, you’re a bit stronger and faster, and maybe you’re the only one who can fly, but it’s not your genetics or your abilities that make you human. It’s your *heart*. Your ability to love and be compassionate. It’s having passion and feeling confused, or scared, or lonely, or even being unable to sort out how, exactly, you feel about some matter that isn’t black and white. This is one of those moments — any one of us would feel the same as you. The loss of a life is tragic, that’s true. But when that life ends and puts a stop to the threat of other lives being lost or damaged, any one of us is going to have those slivers of relief mixed into their emotions.”

Father Paul paused for a moment, letting his words to sink in, he hoped. “God gave us the ability to feel many things at once. There are no right or wrong ways to view a situation that is so firmly rooted in a gray area, such as this one.”

“Maybe, but I still feel like...like I’ve failed some moral test.” Superman swiveled his gaze away again, as though keeping his eyes on the priest’s was too insurmountable a task or one that physically pained him. “I can’t...I can’t forgive myself for viewing a death as anything but something to be mourned. I can’t

forgive myself for feeling the tiniest bit happy that Luthor is dead.”

“And you think God is angry at you, is that it?”

It was a leap, and not one that Father Paul would normally feel comfortable making, but he was willing to risk any assumptions if only he could ease the burden in Superman's heart.

The hero seemed to think it over before responding. “I'm not sure what I think about that, to be honest.” Defeat and weariness resounded in his voice.

“Superman,” Father Paul said, his ancient wooden chair creaking as he shifted his body around while he searched in vain for a more comfortable position. “Superman,” he began again as he finally settled in one spot, knowing it was the best he would be able to get. “God forgives all of us for our very human missteps, our very human emotions. He doesn't judge us on one moment of weakness — physical or moral. And He most certainly does not condemn those who are unable, for whatever reason, to lend their aid to those who need it.” He tried to will Superman to see the truth in his words. He tried to will away the man's obvious distress.

“I just wish I didn't feel like such a failure,” Superman admitted after a moment of contemplative silence. “I wish I didn't feel so...inadequate.”

“Superman?”

“Yes, Father?”

“How many lives have you saved?”

It sounded like a simple enough question, but Superman took a long time in answering, just as Father Paul had thought he might. He knew, in his own mind, that the deceptively simple query could be translated in a multitude of ways. Lives snapped up from the jaws of death. Lives saved by averting crises before they could endanger anyone. Lives protected against the certain extinction the Nightfall asteroid had presented. Unborn lives saved when Superman rescued an expectant mother-to-be or when he delivered squalling infants in emergency situations.

No, it hadn't been a simple question at all. It had been purposefully broad in how to define what the word “saved” really meant.

As expected, Superman didn't respond for several long minutes, appearing to be deep in thought.

“Superman?” Father Paul finally asked, if only to ensure that the hero's mind hadn't wandered too far.

“Honestly, Father, I have no idea,” Superman answered. There was no pride in his voice. Nothing that pointed to even the least bit of ego. If anything, the tone of his voice was humble and soft. “I've never bothered to keep track. And,” he admitted, while an embarrassed blush crept across his features, “saving a life is so broad a term, I wouldn't know where to start anyway.”

His answer pleased Father Paul more than he could verbalize. He smiled widely.

“Exactly, my boy!” the priest said with pride in his voice.

“Exactly what?” Superman asked, his eyes giving evidence to his befuddled state.

“Superman, what you do for the world on a daily basis...it's more than anyone has the right to ask or expect of you. You've impacted the entire world, my son. And I'm not just talking about diverting the Nightfall asteroid several months ago. The little deeds you do...saving a life, talking to a child, making people aware of the charities that your Superman Foundation supports...all of it adds up. All of it sets you apart as a prime example of what we should all strive to be like.”

“But this isn't some scale,” Superman protested, sounding somewhere between angry with himself and despondent. “I know that what I've been able to do probably outweighs what I haven't been able to. I still watched a man die. I still felt relief that he is beyond impacting the world now.”

“Would you be here today, if you hadn't felt that sense of relief?” Father Paul asked, folding his hands in his lap and waiting patiently for the hero to sort out his feelings.

Superman didn't answer right away, and when he did, he sounded unsure of himself. “Maybe. I'm not sure,” he said, with a slight shake of his head. “I hadn't really thought about it.”

Father Paul smiled a little, pleased once more with Superman's answer, and the thoughtful way in which he'd come to that answer. “You have a good heart, Superman. The Lord forgives you for the things you are truly repentant about.” He paused a moment, feeling as though he could say more. “And from what I've heard here today, I believe the sincerity of your confession. What you need to do now is to forgive yourself.”

“How do I do that?” Superman asked in a pleading voice. The hurt that was in his soul ripped at Father Paul's compassionate heart.

He merely shrugged in response, wishing he had a magical fix for what ailed the Man of Steel, some salve he could spread on the man's inner wounds.

“However way you forgive yourself for any other misstep. Each rescue you can't attend. Each disaster that occurs before you can reach that place in time. You know that you have your physical limits. Know and embrace that you have your emotional limits too...and that it is okay to have those limits. It's what makes you human, what makes you...makes all of us...strive to be better than before.” He purposefully mentioned the man's humanity again, hoping to hammer home how much he truly believed that the alien hero was a human being.

Superman nodded slowly after a slight delay as he appeared to think over what Father Paul had told him.

“Thank you, Father,” he said as something in his expression changed, like the dawning of some inner light. His posture straightened as life seemed to flow through him again. “What you've said...it makes a lot of sense. I appreciate that you took the time to speak with me.”

“Believe me, my son, it was my pleasure. And, if I may be so bold as to offer, know that my door is always open if there are other things you wish to speak about.” He had enjoyed his time speaking with Superman and he almost hoped that the man would come and speak with him again, hopefully in a less distraught manner than he had on this day.

“Thank you. I'll keep that in mind,” Superman said, favoring the man with what felt like the first genuine smile he'd given through the entire conversation. “I really should be going now. I don't want to take you away from your flock for too long.”

Father Paul's heart felt lightened in return. He always felt uplifted when he managed to help ease the burden of another. At least, he *hoped* that he'd managed to ease Clark Kent's burden.

“Take care, Superman,” was all he said.

He wouldn't let on that he'd figured out the young man's secret. And he was, without a doubt, one hundred percent sure that the superhero before him was none other than Clark Kent. He'd known from the first moment when Superman had come into the confessional room. Father Paul had always had a God-given gift to pinpoint voices to exactly who they belonged to. When Superman had first stepped foot in the room, the jutting wall, meant to provide a screen of anonymity for those seeking to confess, had obscured the man's identity. His voice, however, had brought nearly immediate images of the young reporter that Father Paul had known for many long years. He'd been completely shocked when the superhero had stepped into his line of vision.

Still, he'd had his doubts that the two men could really be one. But the thought had stayed, nagging, at the back of his mind. And then Father Paul had started to notice other aspects about Superman. First, there had been the physical characteristics — the eyes, the crooked smile, the mole above his lip. But it was the

way the man had carried himself throughout their talk, and all of the intricate mannerisms, that had truly been what had confirmed the priest's suspicions. All of it, combined, had stripped away the blue and red of Superman's uniform to leave a grief-stricken, confused, and guilt-ridden Clark Kent before Father Paul's sharp and discerning eyes.

The thought had been almost overwhelming, at first, while the two had spoken. Not in the fact that the young man was something other than a person born of the Earth, but because of the simple fact that the reporter was a man Father Paul had known since Clark's childhood — a boy who'd once listened to his sermons on how to live a moral life in keeping with the lessons of Jesus Christ. He was a man who still sometimes accompanied his parents to holiday masses, no different from any other person on the planet.

Father Paul had felt extreme pride in the same moment, knowing that the miracle child of Jonathan and Martha Kent had grown up so well. He was a man whose very powers had the world looking at him as a god in a cape, but who always and unfailingly seemed blissfully unaware of the fact — a man whose humble heart would break over the death of a ruthless, violent sociopath. He was a man who regarded human life as so precious, so worth saving, that he routinely put his own life on the line while trying to save others. Oh, sure, Superman had his powers and his invulnerability, but Father Paul had always believed that there had to be at least one thing out in the vast universe that could present a deadly challenge to the hero. And now he knew, though it made his heart sink, that something had been found. Superman had admitted to being too injured to save the suicidal crime lord.

Clark Kent.

Father Paul shook his head in amusement and wonder. How had he never seen it before, while watching all the news coverage since Superman's explosive debut when he'd saved the space shuttle?

He acts differently when in the suit, he finally concluded. He doesn't let the world see the man who operates the hero. And with good reason. If the public only knew...

He shook his head. Don't worry, Clark. Your secret will remain safe with me. I'll never breathe a word of it. After all, anything learned during a confession is held in the strictest confidence.

Father Paul smiled. Somehow, knowing that Superman was no one more than Clark Kent in a tight suit meant to dazzle the eye and distract people from his true self, comforted him. He could think of no one better than the foundling son of two humble farmers to be the guardian of their fragile planet.

An angel without wings, he mused to himself. Not just to his parents but to us all. A crusader for life, no matter what suit he happens to be wearing at the time.

In the stillness of that confessional room, Father Paul gave silent thanks to God for the man who called himself Clark Kent.

THE END