CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

Death Comes for the Archbishop

Willa Cather · *1927 · original English text*

A French priest, Jean Marie Latour, is sent to a vast new diocese in the American Southwest. Cather's 1927 novel is less a single intrigue than a long fidelity: desert journeys, a stubborn vicar, old missions, and a death before the altar of a church the bishop built. The book is now in the U.S. public domain, and this hosted text is complete.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does it mean to spend a life planting a church in a hard country, and how should such a life end?

"the next morning the old Archbishop lay before the high altar in the church he had built."

The close

Latour and his friend Joseph Vaillant ride, build, correct, and endure: Mexican and Indian parishes, a corrupt priest, a desert miracle of hospitality, the slow rise of a cathedral in Santa Fé. The plot is a life, not a single secret. This is Cather's 1927 English (PG #69730), now public domain in the United States. Names include Jean Marie Latour, Father Vaillant, Santa Fé as printed. The last image is exact: the old Archbishop before the high altar in the church he had built. A deeply Catholic book, open to a wide older band.

KEY CHARACTERS

Jean Marie Latour
The French priest who becomes bishop and, at last, the old Archbishop of the title.

Joseph Vaillant
His friend and vicar, more impulsive, equally spent in the work.

the peoples of the diocese
Mexican, Indian, and American lives among whom the church is planted.

the old and failing priests
The local authorities Latour must sometimes correct.

THE CHURCH HE HAD BUILT

> *"the next morning the old Archbishop lay before the high altar in the church he had built."*
>
> The close

Grades 9–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

A Name, and a Mission

THE OPENING

Jean Marie Latour is named and sent. The American Southwest is still a dark distance from the Ohio railhead; the diocese is larger than a European mind easily holds.

- The name is Jean Marie Latour in this text.
- The book's pace is a life of journeys, not a mystery's clock.
- Vaillant, the friend and vicar, is the other half of the work.

02

Desert Roads

THE EARLY MISSIONS

Lost rides, a dangerous house, the kindness of a poor family, and the first sense of a country that will either form the priest or break him.

- Hospitality and danger arrive in the same chapters.
- Cather's Southwest is particular: places and peoples are not a blur.
- A missionary's courage here looks like patience as much as zeal.

03

Old Priests, and a Correction

THE MIDDLE

Latour must deal with entrenched, sometimes corrupt, local authority, and with souls who have kept the faith in their own way. The work is reform as well as founding.

- The book is honest about clerical failure; teach it as a moral problem, not a scandal sheet.
- Indian and Mexican Catholic life is part of the story, not decoration.
- Vaillant's later journeys into Colorado widen the field.

04

A Church in Santa Fé

THE CATHEDRAL YEARS

Stone is gathered; a Romanesque idea rises in a new place. The building is the visible form of a life's work, and it costs years.

- The cathedral is a plot, not only a symbol.
- Latour's taste and his faith are one labor.
- Friends age; the country changes; the work remains.

05

Before the High Altar

THE CLOSE

When the cathedral bell tolls, the people of Santa Fé kneel. The next morning the old Archbishop lies before the high altar in the church he had built.

- The last sentence is exact in this text (line-breaks collapse in quotation).
- The EPUB may append a brief glossary after the close; do not quote the glossary as the novel.
- A Catholic missionary novel of the Southwest, complete in this file, for a wide older band.

> *"the next morning the old Archbishop lay before the high altar in the church he had built."*
>
> The close

A Missionary Life · Friendship · A Hard Country · Building · A Good Death

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The hosted text is Willa Cather's original English of 1927 (Project Gutenberg #69730). The book is in the U.S. public domain (publication 1927). Quote this page. Names: Jean Marie Latour, Father Vaillant; Santa Fé as printed.
2. The close is exact: "the next morning the old Archbishop lay before the high altar in the church he had built." The site EPUB may include a short glossary after the novel; do not quote the glossary as Cather's narrative.
3. This is a Catholic missionary novel of the American Southwest, a life rather than a single intrigue. It is open to a wide older band.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #69730, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/death-comes-for-the-archbishop/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.