

St. Mary's Academy
2022 Summer Reading
11th Grade

The following books are assigned for summer reading. You will be assessed on the assigned book the first two weeks of school. You will also be expected to bring your knowledge of the book into classroom discussions during the appropriate period.

Honors English 11: *Death Comes for the Archbishop* by Willa Cather

About the Author:

Willa Cather was born in 1873 in Nebraska, and though trained in the East, wrote fiction that depicted and celebrated the American West. *Death Comes to the Archbishop* (1927) was inspired by the lives and careers of the real-life nineteenth century French priests Archbishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy and Father Joseph Machebeuf who came to New Mexico.

Summary of the Work:

In 1850, French Catholic priests **Bishop Jean Marie Latour** and his childhood friend, **Father Joseph Vaillant**, are sent from their diocese on the Great Lakes to their new home, a huge area of which has recently become part of the United States (and is now the state of New Mexico). When they arrive in Santa Fe, this is the first of many long and arduous journeys the priests endure, coming to respect and love the land and the people. Latour and Vaillant studied the priesthood together in southern France and left to become missionaries in the diocese of St Louis, Missouri. Latour is distinguished and scholarly, while Vaillant is homely and fierce. Their next twenty years are spent in various adventures around the region, visiting Indian pueblos and Mexican ranches alike to baptize and sanctify marriages in geographically remote locations. They meet **Kit Carson**, an American scout, soldier, and interpreter, who becomes their friend; equally, Latour is befriended by Eusabio, a Navajo clansman. They clash with native priests and a schismatic church in Taos and Arroyo Hondo. Eventually, a French Catholic community arises in Santa Fe, where it is Latour's life's work to build a Romanesque Cathedral, which he accomplishes. Latour and Vaillant are separated when Vaillant follows his calling to the lawless miners' camps that spring up around Pike's Peak in Colorado. During his last days, Latour recalls his friendship with Vaillant and dies in the shadow of the cathedral that he built. To give one of the most recognized quotations from the book, "*Where there is great love, there will always be miracles.*" (Study.com)

Assignments: There are a total of three parts to your summer reading assignment, two of which you must complete and have **typed, printed, and ready to submit at the beginning of class on the first day of the semester. Late assignments will not be accepted.** You may also share with Google docs or Microsoft Word docs.

Part I: Pre-reading

In order to understand a novel, it is sometimes optimal to understand the context of the text. Prior to reading *Death Comes for the Archbishop* you need to develop a paragraph or two that explains the setting of the novel: mid-19th century New Mexico. How are the landscape and the people important to this

fictional narrative? In a separate paragraph or two, explain who Kit Carson and Padre Martinez were and why Cather might have chosen to inject these real-life individuals into her work. (Remember that a paragraph should be a minimum of 5-8 well-developed sentences.)

Part II: Discussion Questions

This novel deserves to be read *reflectively*. The questions are not designed to test you but to help you to locate and to understand characters, plot, settings, issues, and themes in the text. They do not normally have simple answers, nor is there always one answer.

1. The cardinals live in relative luxury. Give some examples. Why do you think the author stresses this point?
2. What are the various reasons that lead the Mexican priests to refuse to recognize the authority of Bishop Latour?
3. As he approaches the water, the Bishop sees “a boy driving a flock of white goats toward the stream.” What religious significance might this vision have?
4. We have not yet encountered Father Vaillant, but clues are given to his character. Explain the different way in which he and Bishop Latour would explain the same miracle such as how the latter came to find water.
5. Describe Bishop Latour’s relationship with his brother.
6. How does the Bishop justify his determination to help the Mexicans become good American citizens?
7. Why do the two men react so differently to the sound of “rifle-shots and blood-curdling yells without”?
8. Explain why Vaillant values the bell. Why does Latour value it?
9. What qualities does Señor Lujon admire in Father Gallegos? What qualities does he come to admire in Father Vaillant?
10. Latour insists on sleeping not in the sacristy (which has “a damp, earthy smell”) but “on the rock dunes, under the junipers.” What does this indicate about him?
11. In the cloister garden Latour finds “two thin, half-dead peach trees.” What do you think that these signify?
12. The narrator concludes, “So did they rid their rock of their tyrant, whom on the whole they had liked very well.” Explain this rather paradoxical judgment.
13. Comment on the footnote that Cather adds in this chapter to explain the historical “dying pueblo of Pecos.” What is the effect of the information it gives? Why do you think that she uses a footnote here and not in any of the other places where she adapts history to the needs of her story?
14. In what ways does Zeb Orchard’s experience suggest the unbridgeable gap between the whites and the Native Americans?
15. Give details from the text of features of the relationship between Indians and their environment that Latour finds admirable.
16. Explain the significance of the Virgin Mary to the Mexican and Indian peoples, and to Father Latour.
17. There is a large gap in chronology between Books Eight and Nine. Why do you think that the author chose to deal with this period so briefly and in retrospect? Is this an effective choice in your opinion?

*****Part III: There will be a Socratic Seminar the first week of class and an in-class essay for a test grade the following Monday. You will not be successful with either of these if you have not read the book. Simply reading SparkNotes/CliffNotes or Googling the answers to the questions will not prepare you for these assignments.***