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Sympathy for Delicious: Dark comedy of the spirit

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NCR Today

Dean O'Dwyer (Christopher Thornton) is an aspiring DJ known as "Delicious D" on the Los Angeles underground music scene. A motorcycle accident leaves him in a wheel chair and he ends up sleeping in his car on Skid Row.

Fr. Joe (Mark Ruffalo) ministers to the homeless by organizing and serving meals and finding temporary housing shelter for those who will accept it. The priest notes how depressed the young man is and brings him to a healing service where people are "slain in the spirit." Dean is skeptical but inexplicably he discovers he has the power to heal others. It is very confusing and a lot to take in.

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Meanwhile Dean, now a minor celebrity, joins a rock band and decides to

market his abilities as a healer. This is not out of compassion. It seems an almost passive-aggressive reaction to God's caring for others but not for him. Fr. Joe advises against this, but must confront his own personal faith issues as he tries to guide others. When Dean's healing abilities fail when they are needed most, he is forced to confront his demons and accept the fact that sometimes the healing you get from God is what you need, not what you want.

"Sympathy for Delicious" has a strong cast that also includes Orlando Bloom, Laura Linney, Juliette Lewis and Noah Emmerich. It is Mark Ruffalo's directorial debut. It is writer Christopher Thornton's first film role as well. Thornton's script was 10 years in the making and his friend, Mark Ruffalo, was

determined to bring it to the screen. Ruffalo makes a very believable priest. Because the story is based on Thornton's personal experience (he was partially paralyzed from a hiking accident), his anger and cynicism are convincing.

The cinematography creates an underground environment where the sharp edges of urban hard rock mirror Delicious D's interior struggles. But overall, my impression of the film is that it was like watching a Flannery O'Connor dark comedy of the spirit where the priest-savior cannot find himself and the man-



healer cannot cure himself.

The ending brings it all home. As Delicious D loses what little he has left, he realizes he has been given the strength to keep going in the desert of life, even in a wheelchair. The Bee Gee's song over the closing scene, "I started a joke which started the whole world crying, but I didn't see that the joke was on me" hints that this whole story has been an intimate struggle between two beings who really "got" the other: Dean "Delicious" and God, reunited by grace.

"Sympathy for Delicious" won the Special Jury Prize at Sundance in 2010 and opens on April 29th in New York and Los Angeles.

[Photos: Mark Ruffalo as Fr. Joe and Christopher Thornton as a former DJ on skid row. Credit: Maya Productions]

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