

## Rome, Open City, Part XII

Director: Roberto Rossellini (1945)

Manfredi is in the other room being tortured by the SS men, and Major Bergmann now sends for Don Pietro. The soldier arrives at the cell; we see his looming shadow on the wall.

As he leaves the cell, Don Pietro lays a hand on the Austrian's head to comfort him. "Be calm, my son," he says. "Try to pray."

Crouching on the floor, terrified, the Austrian notices something across the room. He rises slowly to his feet, gazing at some pipes overhead.

Bergmann tells Don Pietro, "We found these materials in your room." He indicates a box he holds. Don Pietro looks at it briefly. "Right."

"Your clear aim is to harm the Reich and its armed forces!"

Don Pietro shakes his head, with a quiet smile. "This isn't exactly my aim."

The Major bangs his hand on the table and stands. He demands angrily, "What do you call a man who not only provides forged documents and refuge to Italians plotting attacks on our soldiers, but even shelters German deserters?!"

With a piercing look, the priest replies, "A man who humbly seeks to practice charity."

"He's a traitor who must be punished!"

"It will be what God wants."

"Then listen to me carefully. Your friend is at the head of a military organization of which you too have detailed knowledge. If you talk or persuade your friend to do the same, you'll have done nothing less than your duty as a priest and a citizen. I'll tell you why. These men plotting attacks and acts of sabotage against German armed forces are violating the rights of an occupying power guaranteed by international treaties. They are therefore guerilla fighters and they should be brought to justice. Clear?"

"But there's a problem," Don Pietro responds. "Personally, I have nothing to tell. Because I know nothing. What little I know, I learned in the confessional, and those secrets must die with me. It's our vow."

"I'm not interested in your vow!"

"But someone else is, someone higher than you... and me."

"Then persuade your friend to talk."

"I don't think he knows anything about what you suspect."

"You'd have me believe that you don't know what he does, who he really is?"

"I only know he's a man in need of my modest help."

"Really? Then I'll tell you who he is. He's a subversive, an atheist! Your enemy!"

The camera zooms in on Don Pietro's face. "I'm a Catholic priest. I believe that anyone fighting for justice and liberty walks in the paths of the Lord."

“I have no time to waste. Have you decided not to talk?” Don Pietro looks down and says nothing. “And you don’t even want to try to persuade your companion? It’s about saving him from sufferings that you can’t even imagine.”

“I think it’s pointless. And if he is who you say, he wouldn’t be easily persuaded, doesn’t it seem to you?”

“Don’t worry. He’ll talk.”

“I don’t think so. He won’t talk.”

Major Bergmann opens the door to the room being set up to torture Manfredi, who is tied to a chair. We see a burning blow torch and a man with a whip.

Bergmann stares at Don Pietro, daring him to watch. He does watch, as well as he can without his broken glasses.

“This will take a while,” says Bergmann to Krammer. “Come and get me as soon as there’s news.” Just then, there’s a knock at the door.

A soldier enters and announces, “The deserter hanged himself, sir.”

“Idiot!” exclaims Bergmann with a sneer.

Don Pietro looks unbearably sad. He begins to pray quietly. But he’s interrupted by screams of agony from Manfredi.

While he’s waiting, Bergman goes into the officers’ sitting room. Through the open door, the priest briefly hears the sound of a piano playing music that one would hear in a bourgeois salon.

Bergmann pours himself a drink. He nods at Ingrid, who sits with her arm around Marina.

By the piano, an officer (Joop van Hulzen) sits in an ornate chair. “Strenuous evening?” he asks Bergman.

“I have a fellow who must talk before morning and an Italian priest who claims the fellow won’t talk.”

“And if he doesn’t talk?”

“Ridiculous,” answers Bergmann, walking away.

“If he won’t talk anyway?”

“That would mean an Italian is as good as a German, that there’s no difference between the blood of a slave race and that of a master race. What would be the sense of our struggle?”

The officer replies, “Twenty-five years ago, I led execution squads in France. I too believed that we Germans were a master race. But the French patriots chose to die rather than talk.” Bergmann sneers and turns away. But the officer goes on. “We Germans refuse to realize that people want to be free.” Bergmann spins around. “Hartmann, you’re drunk!”

“Yes, I am,” he nods. “I drink every night to forget. But it only makes me see more clearly.”

By now, everyone in the room is listening – except perhaps Marina, who seems to be in a stupor.

“All we’re really good at is killing, killing, killing! We’ve strewn all of Europe with corpses. And from their graves rises up an unquenchable hatred. That hatred will devour us. There is no hope.”

“Enough!” Bergman is infuriated. “I forbid you to continue! You forget that you are a German officer!” He’s interrupted by Krammer.

“Did he talk?” asks the Major.

“No, sir.”

Bergmann throws his cigarette on the floor and leaves the room in a huff.

Striding past Don Pietro, who has tears in his eyes, Bergmann addresses one of the torturers. “Well?” he demands.

“It’s impossible, sir. We have to let him regain some strength.”

“Impossible! It’s too late for that.”

Inside the room, Manfredi is collapsed in a chair, covered with abrasions from his beating. The soldier pulls up his head, to show that he is unconscious. We see the instruments of torture.

An injection revives him. “As I said before,” the Major tells him, “I admire you greatly. And, I do appreciate, believe me, this proof of your courage and spirit of sacrifice, but you must understand: this can’t go on! You’re a Communist. Your party has formed a pact with reactionary forces. You’re all working together against us now. But tomorrow, when Rome is occupied – or ‘liberated,’ as you call it – will these high-ranking monarchist officers still be your allies?”\*

*\*During the German occupation, a broad range of Italian political groups– from Communists to Social Democrats – was united in the Resistance. The Royal government was not represented, but it did recognize the National Liberation Committee as the umbrella organization of the Resistance.*

Don Pietro listens from the other room. “I offer you a solution to this problem. Give me the names of the generals. Help me arrest them and I guarantee your release and immunity for the men in your party. Well?”

In response, Manfredi spits in his face.

Enraged, Bergmann grabs the whips, lashes at Manfredi. When he is finished, one of the torturers exclaims, “Keep going until the end!”

Bergmann paces in his office, considering his next step, while Krammer nonchalantly sharpens a pencil.

Ingrid steps into the office, drink in hand. “How’s it going?” she asks with a smile, as Manfredi screams in agony. “I told you it wouldn’t be so easy,” she says standing in the doorway of the torture room, watching with a slight smile.

Bergmann has an idea. He orders the SS men to bring the priest into the room with Manfredi. “Look, Priest, look! Are you satisfied? This is your Christian charity! This is your love for your brother in Christ! Did you prefer to see him like this rather than talk?”

While the Germans watch, Don Pietro approaches Manfredi, tears in his eyes.

Bergmann concludes, “But don’t hope, you hypocritical priest, to save yourself! Or to save your accomplices. We’ll destroy you all! To the last man!”

But for these two brave men, it is as though the Germans are not there at all. With a tender smile, the priest says, “You didn’t talk,” allowing Manfredi to die in a kind of peace.

Don Pietro cradles Manfredi’s face in his hand and then blesses him.

“It’s finished!” he tells Bergman, defiant, tears running down his face, and the German takes a step back. “You tried to destroy his soul, but you only destroyed his body. Curse you all!” Don Pietro says, shaking his fist. “Curse you all!”

Startled, the SS soldiers and Ingrid back off. “You’ll be trampled in the dust like worms! Curse you all!” Then he realizes... “My God, what have I said?”

He sinks to his knees in front of Manfredi’s lifeless body. “Forgive me, Lord. Forgive me.”