

Bless the Bears

by Katarzyna Müller

Ripped Festival 2026
American Blues Theater

Inspired by:

“Pope Leo Greets Mayor Brandon Johnson
During a Historic Audience at the Vatican”

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Synopsis

Mayor Johnson tries to sell his soul to Pope Leo to keep the Bears in Chicago.

Characters

POPE LEO

MAYOR JOHNSON

Place and time

The Vatican. May 2026.

Casting

Please welcome any path to gender identification.

SFX: regal church music introduces us to the setting.

MAYOR JOHNSON

Do I call you Leo? Robert? Bob? Your Highness? Your Excellency? Da Pope?

POPE LEO

Don't, do NOT, under ANY circumstances, call me Da Pope.

MAYOR JOHNSON

(Clearly disappointed:) Oh. Oh. OK. Sorry.

POPE LEO

Kidding! I'm kidding! What's the point of being the first pope from Chicago, if you can't call me Da Pope? Amirite?

MAYOR JOHNSON

Ha! Yeah. You're right. You're right. So. I got you something.

POPE LEO

Aurelio's?

MAYOR JOHNSON

No.

POPE LEO

Giordano's?

MAYOR JOHNSON

Uh, no.

POPE LEO

Malnati's? Connie's? Home Run Inn?

MAYOR JOHNSON

(Proudly:) A key to the city!

POPE LEO

Why do I need a - Chicago's still a sanctuary city, isn't it?

MAYOR JOHNSON

Absolutely. Yes sir. Everybody's welcome.

POPE LEO

Then what's the point of a key?

MAYOR JOHNSON

It's a symbol. It's symbolic. Just like ... like ... oh I don't know ... the Chicago White Sox?

POPE LEO

Go Sox!!

MAYOR JOHNSON

Because it's a Chicago team. In Chicago. They're *in* Chicago. Like, if you took a red marker and drew the city limits on a map, the *Chicago* White Sox would be *in* Chicago.

POPE LEO

Of course. It wouldn't make sense otherwise.

MAYOR JOHNSON

Exactly. It wouldn't make sense. You wouldn't put them in ... oh I don't know ... Indiana?

POPE LEO

The Indiana White Sox?!

MAYOR JOHNSON

No, no, you'd still call 'em the *Chicago* White Sox, but they would be in *Indiana*.

POPE LEO

Son, are you feeling all right?

MAYOR JOHNSON

No I'm not feeling all right!! I'm dying here, Leo!! Why does Mamdani in New York Frickin' City get all the shiny fun things?! He's got free child care for 2-year-olds! He's already filled 100,000 pot holes! And me? I still got a big hole shaped like a frickin' squirrel!

POPE LEO

It's a rat.

MAYOR JOHNSON

And the Knicks -THE KNICKS! - just won the Eastern Conference!!

*POPE LEO throws up two V's ...
for peace, victory, and Villanova.*

POPE LEO

Go Wildcats!!

MAYOR JOHNSON

See?? That's what I'm talking about! You blessed the three Villanova players, didn't you? Didn't you?!

POPE LEO shrugs.

POPE LEO

God works in mysterious ways.

MAYOR JOHNSON

The Knicks better not win the championship next month.

POPE LEO looks like a cat that swallowed a mouse.

No. Nooooooo. Are you serious?? Are you really serious?? After fifty-three years?!?! Mamdani's gonna get a ticker tape parade and extra votes and what will I get? An E-Z pass for the fuckin' Skyway!!

POPE LEO

Son, adversity is a call to strength.

MAYOR JOHNSON

This isn't adversity. This is a complete betrayal! Chicago has supported all of its teams through decades of mediocrity. We bought jerseys and hats and t-shirts while the whole country laughed at us. And now they're gonna be laughing at *me*. Me! Your second favorite socialist mayor!

POPE LEO

I understand the challenges of leading a flock whose beliefs depend on occasional ... miracles.

MAYOR JOHNSON

Yes. Yes! Thank you! That's exactly what I need. A miracle. I am asking you, Pope Leo, for just this one miracle. Please, please, please keep the Bears in Chicago.

POPE LEO

Hmmm.

MAYOR JOHNSON

I'll get you a signed jersey. An Italian beef sandwich. Double dipped! How about a lifetime supply of Rainbow Cones? I'll convert to Catholicism!! Anything!! You name it!!

POPE LEO

I want you to ... hug J.B. Pritzker.

Beat.

MAYOR JOHNSON

Penny Pritzker?

POPE LEO

J.B.

MAYOR JOHNSON

Nicholas Pritzker?

POPE LEO

J.B.

MAYOR JOHNSON

Thomas, Karen, Gigi, Anthony, John, Daniel, Linda, Matthew, or Jennifer Pritzker?

POPE LEO

J.B.

Beat.

*MAYOR JOHNSON dons a Bears cap, with the word **Indiana** taped over the word Chicago.*

*SFX: Curb Your Enthusiasm theme aka the Italian circus song.**

THE END



**"Frolic," by Luciano Michelini
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