

Gigot (1962)

Not Rated. Running time: 1 hours 42 min.

Our content advisories (1-10): Violence 2; Language 0;
Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (1-5): 5

*For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering^[a] and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces^[b]
he was despised, and we held him of no account.*

Isaiah 53:2-3

*Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of
God as a little child will never enter it."*

Mark 10:15

*For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's
weakness is stronger than human strength.*

1 Corinthians 1:25

Jackie Gleason wrote the original story and worked with John Patrick on the screenplay of this whimsical tale about a mute janitor in Paris. He even wrote the music and asked his friend Orson Welles to direct his film, but the studio heads nixed the idea because of Welles' notorious reputation for overspending a budget. Thus Gleason asked another friend, Gene Kelly, who was more acceptable to the studio.

Gigot (Gleason) is an unkempt shabbily dressed man who earns his meager wages as janitor for Madame Brigitte's (Gabrielle Dorziat) house in the Montmartre section of the city. Living alone, he has no real friends other than the neighborhood cat and a small mouse. As soon as the milk wagon passes by early in the morning, the cat runs down the street, enters his apartment through a pet door, and licks and nudges him awake for its dish of milk. The tiny mouse lives in a hole in the wall and as we will see, has been taught to emerge and accept food from him

One morning two agents from the Department of Complaints talk with a neighbor who accuses Gigot of stealing her milk and sweeping leaves onto her property. She believes he ought to be put in an institute for the feeble minded. They also interrogate Madame Brigitte, who tells them that he is as sane as anyone, his main peculiarity being his passion for joining up with funeral processions. (We see him doing this a couple of times.) These two officious characters will provide both comic relief and a touch of menace to our hero throughout the film.

The patrons at the local bistro, led by the cruel Jean (Jacques Marin) enjoy making Gigot the butt of practical jokes. Indeed, I wonder if "Gigot" is a nickname imposed on him by such folk, for in French it means "leg of mutton." Gigot is so simple minded and trusting that he never seems to catch on that their gestures of friendship always lead to some laughter-inducing humiliation, such as the time when they ply him with free drinks so they can see him stumble about in a drunken state.

Hours later, after he awakens from his stupor outside in the rain, Gigot comes across the prostitute Colette (Katherine Kath) and her little daughter Nicole (Diane Gardner) huddled together for shelter under an archway. He takes them into his basement hovel, dries them out, and gives them a little food and a place to sleep. The next morning the cat licks Nicole's

face, giving her quite a start. Collette wants to leave, but accepts Gigot's offer of bread for breakfast. Afterward her bout of coughing from being out in the rain sends her back to her bed.

Gigot tries to draw out Nicole by performing a few magic tricks, but the shy child remains as mute as her host. However, when he gives her a piece of cheese, takes her into another room, drapes a napkin over his arm as if he is a waiter, and sets a table, he motions to her to place the cheese on it. A mouse crawls out of a hole next to the table and nibbles on the cheese. Nicole bursts into laughter, so delighted that she gives Gigot a kiss.

A series of adventures follows, with Gigot and Nicole drawing ever closer together, but her haughty mother becoming increasingly embarrassed to be with such a "dummy." Gigot wants to keep the three of them together so much that he gives in to Collette's demand for money by stealing a bag of money from the local baker and his wife. For a while they exist as a family, but Collette is never satisfied. All of this climaxes in a mad chase sequence that pays tribute to the man Gleason admired so much, Charlie Chaplin. There is even a funny funeral scene that will remind you of *Tom Sawyer*, the film ending chaotically and ambiguously.

The film includes scenes of pathos and hilarity, with a church sequence especially meaningful for people of faith. Gigot sees that Nicole has entered a church. It's a place that the little girl has never ventured into before apparently, because she playfully splashes the holy water in the font by the door. Gigot stops her, shaking his head "No" and showing her how to make the sign of the cross. He reverently takes off his cap, and when she removes hers, he shows her that females do not have to. To her "What is this place?" he pantomimes praying by folding his hands, and then pointing upwards. She looks around and asks, "What is that?" He takes her hand and leads her down the aisle.

A neat camera shot from behind the large cross shows them approaching the chancel, with Gigot kneeling, and the little girl imitating him. Looking up at the large, standing crucifix, she asks, "Who is that man?" Gigot again points upward and then holds his hands together in prayer, indicating the divinity of the man on the cross. It is obvious she does not understand, so after a moment he walks over to the Mother and Child statue, pointing from it to the crucifix. He cradles and rocks his own arms, again pointing toward the crucifix. He walks up to her, but by her frown she indicates she still does not understand. He walks to the other side to the statue of Joseph and again points from it to the crucifix. Seeing that she is still unaware of his meaning, he walks over to her. The music has changed from serene to a pounding, ominous intensity. His face shows his frustration with his inability to communicate.

He turns and faces the man on the cross and stamps his feet on the stone floor. His brow is covered with sweat from his exertion. In his anger he smashes his fist against his nose, while continuing to stamp his feet. "GIGOT!" The girl's loud command stops him. The camera stays close up on his face for a long time, and then he slowly turns his head to look at her. The camera switches to the girl's concerned face and back to his now serene face, the music also now quieter. The camera holds on Nicole's face, and slowly a smile of recognition spreads across it. She turns and blows a kiss to the man on the cross. Cut to his now calm face as he turns toward the cross. Cut to a long shot of the two walking hand in hand toward the entrance.

Another tender scene that people of faith will appreciate is the one which could be used as an example of God's pursuit of Israel and of humankind as a form of wooing (see the prophet Hosea). Nicole is at first afraid to trust her host when he brings her and her mother out of the rain. Gigot tries magic tricks, but this does not bring her out of her shell. He does

not give up, taking her into the room where the little mouse has its nest, and as described above, elaborately sets the scene as if they were in a restaurant, enticing the mouse out with a piece of cheese, thus eliciting the fear-destroying laughter from the little girl. It is not long before his wooing her has won her trust.

The film is a wonderful addition to the holy fool tradition, one dating back hundreds of years in Europe, especially in Russia. Those familiar with Isaac Bashevis Singer say that it is similar to his short story 1953 short story "Gimpel the Fool," which makes me want to find and read it. If you enjoyed Robin Williams' holy fool Perry in *The Fisher King* (one of my all time favorite films), you will enjoy Gleason's work. When the film opened in 1962 several sophisticated critics, such as Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times*, turned up their noses at it, deeming it too mawkish and sentimental. However, others who thrill at the evangel that God "has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly," will rejoice that the hard to find film is available on [YouTube](#). *At first it was posted in five to eleven parts, but recently a dear soul posted it in its uninterrupted form. If you have retained anything of your childhood wonder years, which I think is part of Jesus' meaning in Mark's gospel, you will love this tale.

(The film is not currently available on Netflix, but check your local library's movie department. A DVD version of the film [also is available on Amazon](#).) The full review with a set of 8 questions will be available in the April issue of Visual Parables—see it in The Store after April 4.

**Added on May 24, 2020: the above link is no longer valid, the video having been taken down. However, it is available still in 11 parts at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rkGRl-cq2I&list=PL6XxsxUhhKni5Y6V9QzpPqSYxL614Y5b-&index=1>. The parts flow seamlessly into one another so that you will see the entire movie.*