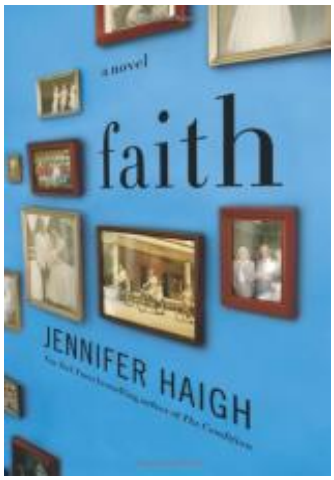
Faith

by Jennifer Haigh



About the Book

The critically acclaimed and bestselling author of **The Condition** returns with a powerful and affecting drama of faith, doubt and redemption as one woman uncovers the truth about her family, her beliefs and herself.

It is the spring of 2002 and a perfect storm has hit Boston. Across the city's archdiocese, trusted priests have been accused of the worst possible betrayal of the souls in their care. In **Faith**, Jennifer Haigh explores the fallout for one devout family, the McGanns.

Estranged for years from her difficult and demanding relatives, Sheila McGann has remained close to her older brother Art, the popular, dynamic pastor of a large suburban parish. When Art finds himself at the center of the maelstrom, Sheila returns to Boston, ready to fight for him and his reputation. What she discovers is more complicated than she imagined. Her strict, lace-curtain-Irish mother is living in a state of angry denial. Sheila's younger brother Mike, to her horror, has already convicted his brother in his heart. But most disturbing of all is Art himself, who persistently dodges Sheila's questions and refuses to defend himself.

As the scandal forces long-buried secrets to surface, **Faith** explores the corrosive consequences of one family's history of silence --- and the resilience its members ultimately find in forgiveness. Throughout, Haigh demonstrates how the truth can shatter our deepest beliefs --- and restore them. A gripping, suspenseful tale of one woman's quest for the truth, Faith is a haunting meditation on loyalty and family, doubt and belief. Elegantly crafted, sharply observed, this is Jennifer Haigh's most ambitious novel to date.

Click here for a special video about **Faith**.

Discussion Guide

1. For the epigraph, Jennifer Haigh uses two quotes, one involving sin, the other about living by the Rule. Explain what each quote refers to. How do these quotes reflect the novel's themes?

2. What role does religion play in each of the family members' lives? How do their religious beliefs --- or lack of them --- define who they are? Is religion a solace for the family or a burden? Are there sins or transgressions that are unforgivable?

3. How do you define faith? What does faith mean to each of the characters, especially the siblings, Art, Sheila, and Mike ? Is this a good title for the novel?

4. Describe the relationships between Sheila and her brothers. How do these siblings compare to each other? What defines their reaction to the scandal and to Art? What were their roles in Art's story, and how did each of their outlooks and actions affect the other? How are each of the family members ultimately transformed by events?

5. Shelia remembers that as a child she saw her priest as "other than human, made of different stuff than the rest of us." Explain what she means. Do you think that view still holds? How have societal views of priests --- and other religious leaders --- been affected by the abuse scandals? What role does the media play in shaping our views? What do the news stories leave out?

6. Many see doubt in negative terms. But can doubt strengthen our beliefs, our "faith"?

7. How would you describe Art? What did you think of him? Why did he become a priest?

8. Was he a good shepherd? Was he a good man? Did Art fail his faith or did faith fail him?

9. "Love to marriage to home and family: connect those dots, and you get the approximate shape of most people's lives. Take them away, and you lose any hope for connection. You give up your place in the world." Explain the meaning of Art's words to Sheila. How does this reflect his own life? How does it reflect hers?

10. In sharing her brother's past, Sheila reflects, "Art's story is, to me, the story of my family, with all its darts and dodges and mysterious omissions." What do the events of Art's life reveal about the McGanns? What do they reveal about our own lives and modern society? What about the Catholic Church?

11. Shelia recalls that at the entrance of each building at the seminary where Art studied for the priesthood was carved the motto: Vigor in Arduis. "Strength Amid Difficulties." Does this describe Art? What about Sheila and Mike? Would you consider those three words to be a good definition of faith?

12. Talk about Art's relationship with Aidan Conlon and his mother, Kath. Why did Aidan affect Art so deeply? What about Kath? What were her feelings toward Art?

13. Talk about Mike's relationship with Kath. How does it affect his impression of his brother? What is your opinion of Mike's wife, Abby? As a non-Catholic what does she think of the McGanns, of their religious faith, and of Art?

14. Faith explores the dark and light of human nature: deception, belief, doubt, love, loyalty, compassion, anger,

forgiveness., loneliness, the need for community, the desire for goodness. Choose one theme and trace it through the experiences of a character or two.

15. Do you think that faith --- the adherence to conviction --- is misunderstood in modern society? If the Church is a community of faith, what happens to the other when one begins to break down?

16. What did you take away from reading **Faith**?

Author Bio

Jennifer Haigh?s first novel, MRS. KIMBLE, won the PEN Hemingway Award for debut fiction. Her previous novel, MERCY STREET, was named a Best Book of 2022 by *The New Yorker* and won the Mark Twain American Voice in Literature Award. Her short stories have been published widely in the *Atlantic*, *Granta*, *The Best American Short Stories* and many other places. Published in 18 languages, her work has been recognized by the Guggenheim Foundation, the Michener Foundation, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She lives in Boston.

Critical Praise

"Ms. Haigh --- through sleight of hand, a compelling array of characters and top-flight writing --- is remarkably successful in making us want to read on. **Faith** is so emotionally rich, and its story so deftly delivered, that we?re absorbed?. Engrossing."

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