

ITALY

FILM: LA GRAZIA



OVERVIEW:

TITLE OF FILM: La Grazia

RELEASE DATE: January 15, 2026

DIRECTOR: Paolo Sorrentino

COUNTRY: Italy

ACTORS: Toni Servillo, Anna Ferzetti, Massimo Venturiello.

RUNNING TIME: 133 minutes

MAJOR AWARDS:

Venice International Film Festival: Volpi Cup for Best Actor

David di Donatello Award: Best Film; Best Director;

Best Actor; Best Actress; Best Screenplay

San Sebastian International Film Festival: Nomination
for Audience Award

SUMMARY:

“La Grazia’s” central character is the president of Italy, Mariano De Santis, a fictional character who acts so well that he seems real. His dilemma is that he has six months left to serve in office, and a lot to achieve. He’s in the winter of his life where he is haunted by his personal past as well as his presidential legacy. Throughout the film, he’s obsessed by three major problems he wishes to solve:

- . To decide whether or not to sign a bill allowing access to euthanasia and assisted suicide, a sticky political and religious issue in a Catholic country, Italy, where the Pope opposes him;
- . To pardon two convicted murderers whose crimes are more complicated than the courts and the public would accept – which parallels his quandary about euthanasia.
- . To identify who his wife’s lover was 40 years ago.

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ESSENTIALS:**. PRESIDENT OF ITALY’S ROLE:**

- . The film’s voice over begins with a long and heavy list of responsibilities the President of Italy has. It’s overwhelming, especially for an older president, and one with six months left to achieve his goals. Professionally, he’s a jurist, and he needs *facts* as he reviews his imminent duties to fulfill. He’s aware of his inability to decide on key issues and delegates his daughter, Dorotea, as his surrogate and organizer of his life. Several times, he defines himself as falling asleep while he’s praying,

which indicates to us that he doesn't seem to take seriously his duties or adhere to his faith religiously. He's afraid he's getting old. He rather daydream or dream than be objective and active. But pressing him are two major responsibilities and dilemmas that he does not want his successor to decide: pardons and euthanasia.

EUTHANASIA:

. President De Santis' emotional, psychological, and moral arcs are steeped in death and legacy, both internally and externally. And all revolve around the end of life: pardons, euthanasia, his wife's death. As he deliberates about signing into law the bill to allow euthanasia, he seeks the Pope's advice. But the discussion quickly turns to his confession as he opens himself to discuss his moral and spiritual doubts. Rather than giving him an answer to assuage his questions, the Pope answers, "*that is Grazia*" and he walks away, leaving the President alone to try to understand his response. The first step towards *grazia* is doubt. Doubt without facts for the president – but he is not God – and the president has doubts, not facts. He is perplexed as if he has heard a *sphinxlike* question, and we, too, the viewer, will have to wait to learn more about *grazia*.

. STRUCTURE:

. LOVE

. The plot and themes of the film are constructed on love. The president had lost his wife eight years prior and has not recovered from the emptiness and loneliness. As the film progresses, we learn more about his wife, Aurora, with details he consciously and unconsciously conjures up. He becomes haunted, obsessed, plagued with remembering and wondering who was the person she had as a lover while married to him? And yet, we feel it's an existential question for him more than a point of ego or jealousy. He's always the jurist and searches for the facts as he judges and analyses who could have been the person who caused the deceit? He is searching for the truth.

. Love for his wife is not the only element of love that builds the infrastructure of the film's architect. There is also: love he has for his daughter, Dorotea; love for God; love for his horse; for

music; love for his country that he has the power to embellish; and love the two criminals have for their spouses who they had murdered.

SYMBOLS:

. Nickname:

. The president is the last person to learn his nickname: *Reinforced Concrete*. The people see their president as hard, stern, rigid, inflexible, impenetrable, morally severe, unwavering in his decisions, cement-like in his actions and lifestyle.

. He symbolizes the old patriarchal state of Italy, the authority 's limits that is trapped in outdated laws.

. And yet, as his character changes in the film, his moral and spiritual journey comes to an end, and we see an element of flexibility that enters. He goes to the prison to interview those he considers pardoning; he waits in the prison's common room with other visitors until they are ready for him; he discusses his problem with different people to get other opinions; he learns, understand, doubts, and comes to the truth. The Italian phrase, "*chi cerca, trova*" - who seeks, finds – and this is President De Santis as he journeys into the realm of lightness and understanding. He leaves behind his concrete heaviness and gains freedom when he is no longer president. He gains freedom to make his own decisions and can walk alone through the streets of Rome. He's able to pass the law for euthanasia which represents the future for his beloved country.

. Horse:

. The president loves his horse and names him *Elvis*, reinforcing his love for modern music. But when Elvis is dying, the president refuses to allow his officers to shoot him to terminate the horse's agony. This parallels and reinforces his position at the time in the film of not believing in euthanasia. A natural death is part of God's wish and man can not intervene.

. Music:

. The president loves modern, electronic music. For him, it's freedom, rhythm, life, and the pleasures that contrast with his rigidity and control. His security guard gives him headphones as a birthday gift so he can enjoy the music even more when

he's alone. And his son is a composer of modern music which he shares with him. The modern music, rap and electronic, symbolizes the president's link to the next generation of youth. He's eager to learn from the young and enjoy their pleasures.

. **Robot dog:**

. The robot dog is seen several times walking alone through city streets. This symbolizes and reiterates the need for the aging generation to give way to modernity. The robot is technology that becomes part of the future.

. **Astronaut:**

. We share with the president his viewing on a flatscreen of the Italian astronaut who has been in space for one year. The astronaut is seen looking at an *iPad*, maybe of those he loves and misses. We see him cry; his tear solidifies on the screen and then we see him laugh. The president reaches out to touch the tear on his flatscreen but can't. It's the grief that exists but floats in outer space without gravity and cannot land. This scene symbolizes the president's desire to escape his own heaviness, transcend his reinforced concreteness, and the memory of his wife's infidelity. Sorrow is visible but untouchable. He wishes to possess a tear of grief, like the astronaut, a being of zero gravity - to become lighter than his grief.

. At the end of the film, we see the president is floating in air as if he, too, is an astronaut. His heaviness and reinforced concrete have become light. He accepts the truth of his wife's secret. Truth of infidelity seems less important compared to his love for her. He can give up control. Forgiveness sets in. De Santis is ready for his *grazia* – *grace for being what he has become*.

. **Aurora:**

. The name of his beloved wife symbolizes morning light, first love, dawn, radiance, beginning, beauty, elegance. This is what she meant to him.

Yet, we don't see Aurora's face or details of her body throughout the film. Sometimes, she's shown in a fog or amidst the forest. She exists in his memory more than as a tangible

figure. The only visual evidence of her is found in her wardrobe when he touches her clothes and tries to smell her essence from a dress.

. Character Foil: His Daughter:

. The father-daughter dynamic between the president and Dorotea is sensitive and real. She becomes his surrogate judge, taking care of his life as well as his presidential duties. We see their characters also have similarities: cerebral, covering up their sensitivity, and trying to act with mind rather than with heart. But as a young person, she opposes him with his hesitation of signing the euthanasia bill, that she endorses. Eventually, they come together as they agree on the need for the country's bill of euthanasia.

. Before she leaves for Montreal to visit her brother, she says goodbye to her father, rather coolly, and then one second later, she returns and hugs him tightly from the back. She also contacts him by Zoom the first evening he's alone at home when no longer the president. She wants to know, "*What are you having for dinner?*" He answers and smiles, "*Pizza.*"

KEY POINTS AND THEMES:

. WHO OWNS OUR DAYS?

. This is a question that Dorotea asks her father. He cannot answer it, but as the storyline advances, we get an answer. *We own our days: carpe diem.* Live each day. Live life. In the film, the conflict between religious doctrine (Catholicism) and secular compassion is answered as religion is refuted. One would say the answer is an *existentialist* response: man is responsible to himself to define his actions and his life choices. Only the individual can do this.

. CHANGE OF CHARACTER:

. We see a character arc of development that is a result of the president's moral and spiritual journey. As he analyzes his quandaries of judicial pardons and passage of euthanasia, he learns, understands, and accepts what he sees as the truth. At the end of the film we see he moves from being rigid to light, from gravity to freedom. Once liberated from his presidential duties and decisions, as well as from and his wife's infidelity, he

does what he wants to do. He's no longer the caretaker of his nation but a free man. He changes from stone to empathy, from heaviness to spiritualism, from judgement to mercy. He pardons his wife. He pardons himself from judging his wife harshly.

. At the last scene, De Santis (his name is symbolic also) owns his days: he walks home through the streets of Rome instead of taking the chauffeured car; he orders pizza for dinner instead of eating quinoa; he smokes a cigarette; and he dines with his good friend, Coco, *who is also his wife's best friend*. He's liberated from doubts; he has voyaged towards the Truth; and he allows himself to finish his voyage of life with a heightened awareness of the importance of forgiving and showing mercy, He has earned his *grazia*.

. WHAT IS GRAZIA?

. In Italian *grazia* has multiple meanings: mercy; clemency; divine grace; the opposite of doubt; truth; acceptance of the truth; forgiveness; and viewing truth as less important compared to living life or loving.

In the film there are several layers of Grazia:

. Literal meaning: Presidential pardon that the head of state can offer. He has the power to forgive when used humanely.

. Religious meaning: In a Catholic theological interpretation, it's the idea of forgiveness and compassion.

. Moral meaning: Can mortals show mercy like God? Who has the right to decide who lives and who dies? This is the dilemma of euthanasia.

. Symbolic meaning: Can a man who grants forgiveness and mercy to others (De Santis to his wife), grant forgiveness and mercy to himself?

. At the last scene with Coco, Mariano De Santis - *once a judge always a judge* - is able to achieve all the above interpretations of forgiveness - that is his *GRAZIA*.