

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

July 1, 2018

Spiritual Ponderings

Faith & Film

The month of July is once again upon us and so it is time again for me to turn my attention to spiritual themes found in movies.



Star Wars VII: The Last Jedi

Synopsis: The Resistance Forces, led by Princes Leia, had no time to celebrate the destruction of the Star Killer base and weapon. They know that they must flee their base before the evil First Order with its powerful space fleet arrives and wipes them out. After a quick skirmish the Resistance fleet and the First Order begin a game of cat and mouse in space with the Resistance ships being just able to stay out of the range of the First Order's weapons. At the same time Rey has found Luke Skywalker on a remote planet living as an odd hermit. Instead of embracing Rey and welcoming her, he decides to wallow in his own grief because he feels responsible for Ben Solo becoming Kylo Ren, one of the leaders of the First Order.

First Spiritual Insight: Pride and Reality

The Seven Deadly Sins are considered "deadly" because they distort our reality. For example pride makes us believe that we are the center of the universe instead of God. Envy makes us view others as competition for God's love instead of brothers and sisters in Christ. The more we allow our reality to be distorted the more sins we are willing to commit.

One of my favorite scenes in the movie takes place when Kylo Ren is presenting Rey to Supreme Leader Snoke as his prisoner. At this point Supreme Leader Snoke began to express his pride by talking about how powerful he was and how much control he had over his young apprentice Kylo Ren. He does not sense or see that Kylo using his force powers to manipulate a nearby light saber. Kylo using the force powers activates the light saber and slices Master Snoke in half. Snoke's pride blinded him to the threat that his young apprentice had become.

Second Spiritual Insight: Self-Hate is a Form Of Pride

Luke Skywalker the hero of Star Wars IV, V, and VI has exiled himself to a remote planet where he focuses on hating himself for one mistake that he committed while training Kylo. This self-hate leads him to miss out on the opportunity to make a positive difference in the future by training Rey. There are many people out there who feel that they have committed a horrible sin that God cannot forgive and thus more evil happens in the world because they refuse to accept God's forgiveness and move on. St. Peter would be the opposite of Luke in the sense that St. Peter uses his failures to teach others. God's mercy is greater than any sin we have.

Third Spiritual Insight: Differences of Opinion

Ace fighter pilot Poe Dameron and Vice Admiral Holdo each have a deep love for the Resistance and believe in what they are fighting for. They are also both willing to die for what they believe. Sadly instead of being supportive of each other in this time of crisis, they find themselves at each other's throats. Eventually Poe discovers that Holdo has more information about the escape plan than he does and his actions have been putting the Resistance at risk but before he can reconcile with Holdo, she takes the largest resistance ship and rams it into the largest First Order ship in order to allow Resistance fighters to escape.

There are many times in life where we come across people who have the same goal as we do but we don't always agree on what is the best way to accomplish this goal. We need to avoid the mistakes that Poe and Holdo made by making sure that we have all the information and that we have not stereotyped others (Holdo assumes that Poe is just a hot shot spacey jockey). We all need to spend more time talking with people we disagree with and work together to find the truth or best way to do something and we need to make sure that we keep our ego out of the way.

Forth Spiritual Insight: Anybody can become a somebody

There were many articles before the release of the movie speculating a lot about Rey in particular there was a lot of speculation about who her parents were. Many people assumed that she was the daughter of Obi Wan Kenobi or even Luke Skywalker. It is revealed in the movie that Rey's parents were nobodies. Sometime we can feel like we are nobodies and that we does not matter but the Catholic Church teaches that everybody is a somebody no matter who their parents are. We are all children of God.

I think sometimes we want to think that because if I am a nobody than what I do does not matter. I think the following quote from Marianne Williamson is more inline with reality.

Our Greatest Fear —Marianne Williamson
it is our light not our darkness that most frightens us
Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous,
talented and fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.
Your playing small does not serve the world.
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other
people won't feel insecure around you.

We were born to make manifest the glory of
God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.
And as we let our own light shine,
we unconsciously give other people
permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear,
Our presence automatically liberates others.

—Marianne Williamson

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July 8, 2018
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Guardians of the Galaxy

Guardian of the Galaxy



Synopsis: A young earthling named Peter Quill is abducted by a group of space pirates called Ravagers. The leader of the Ravagers, Yondu, raises Quill as his own son. Years later, Quill attempts to steal a magical orb which leads Quill to become the target of Yondu, who sees Quill as a traitor. He is also a target of a fanatical alien named Ronan who is a Kree and he desires all non-Kree should die. In the midst of his adventure, Quill becomes friends with Gamora (an assassin), Drax (a warrior whose wife and daughter were killed by Ronan), Rocket (a genetically experimented on racoon turned bounty hunter) and Groot (a tree like humanoid).

First Spiritual Insight: "A Hospital for Sinners Not a Hotel for Saints"

One of the commercial promoting the movie focused on a scene in which the Guardians of the Galaxy were being processed in a supermax prison as criminals. The movie makes it clear that these are not only criminals but each of them has some major issues. It is these criminals that are end up saving the galaxy. The Catholic Church is made up of sinners and we are called to save the world by encouraging people to believe in Jesus Christ. The more I think about

this and realize that no super hero team group or team up has had perfect people in it, I wonder why so many people expect only to find perfect people in the Church. What united the Guardians of the Galaxy was a desire to save the universe. Catholics are united by so much more. We are children of God, we desire to bring about an end of war, violence, etc. If the Guardians of the Galaxy can come to grips with each other's faults, we Catholics should be able to do so also.

Secondary Spiritual Insight: Sacrifice is a Part of Being a Hero.

The item that everyone is looking for is called an Infinity Stone. In the middle of the movie it is discovered that this stone if it touches the ground will destroy every all life. Quill saves the day grabbing hold of the Infinity Stone and sacrificing himself. I think St. John Paul II explained this simple spiritual insight when he stated that love is about wanting what is best for another person even if it requires a sacrifice on your part. We celebrate Quill as the hero because he sacrifices himself for others. We know Ronan is the bad guy because he wants to use others as objects and in this case, he desires to destroy the objects in order to complete his plan of genocide. We are called to be heroes.

Third Spiritual Insight: Sharing the Burden

While Quill is holding the Infinity Stone, it becomes apparent that the stone's power is too much for him. In order to save Quill, the other Guardians of the Galaxy grab a hold of Quill and the energy of the stone is dispensed to all the members of the Guardians of the Galaxy. Watching this scene for spiritual insights, I was reminded of a saying that a youth minister, I knew repeated over and over again: "The Catholic faith was never meant to be lived alone. It was to be lived together in community."

Fourth Spiritual Insight: The Power of Music

Quill carries with him a cassette player throughout the movie and on the cassette, tape is a bunch of music from the 1980's. The heroes seem to be pick up their game all the more when the music is playing. It is as if the music helps them take their skill level to a higher level. While music is not required at Mass, it is something that should help us take our worship game to the next level. One of St. Augustine's most famous quotes is: "He who sings, prays twice."

Fifth Spiritual Insight: Religion taken too far is fanaticism

Ronan, a Kree, believes that all non-Krees should die and he will stop at nothing to accomplish this goal. Describing Ronan, the director Gunn said, "He is the primary villain, and he is a really twisted guy, he has a really religious bent in this film. He has a very sick and twisted view of what morality is; strength is virtue and weakness is sin and that is what he lives by, and I think he is very scary because of his beliefs, which are real to him." Catholics should always know that religion should never be used as an excuse to do violence especially when we are taught to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

July 15, 2018

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Ferdinand

Ferdinand

Synopsis: Somewhere in Spain, a ranch owner trains bulls for bullfighting. The bulls are taught that if they win their bullfight that they will be set free. On this particular farm is a little bull calf named Ferdinand. Ferdinand is a strange bull because he is not interested in fighting. One day Ferdinand escaped from the ranch and finds a home with a man and his daughter where he lives many years in peace. One day Ferdinand causes chaos in the town after he was stung by a bee and he is taken back to the ranch. Back at the ranch he realizes that he has to escape from farm or be forced to fight the egotistical bullfighter named El Primero. In the midst of their escape Ferdinand sacrifices himself in order to allow his friends escape. Eventually he finds



himself face-to-face with El Primero and while trying to avoid hurting El Primero he embarrasses the matador and wins over the crowd. At the end of their match the bullfighter comes to kill Ferdinand but the people proclaim that they want the bullfighter to spare Ferdinand.

First Spiritual Insight: Ferdinand preaches Metanoia.

Jesus's preached a message of repentance. Our English word "repentance" though is lacking. The Greek word "Metanoia" (that we translate repentance in English) goes beyond the simple message of stop doing evil and start doing good. Metanoia, literally means, change the way you are thinking. Human beings experience a Metanoia when we discovered that the Sun was the center of the solar system and the earth. Ferdinand's message of Metanoia is stop thinking that you have to fight and that fighting will ultimately bring you freedom. Ferdinand comes to the harsh realization that "no one ever beats the bullfighter," and thus no one ever gets his freedom. Jesus' message of Metanoia is stop thinking of God as a super human tyrant like Zeus or Hades. God is instead a loving Father who cares deeply for each of us. In other words Jesus wants us to learn that we do not have to earn God's love but rather we simply have to remain in it by loving others as God loves us. Like Jesus, Ferdinand's message of change is not accepted by others especially those closest to him. Ferdinand, like Jesus, though does not give up and insists on trying to rescue everyone.

Second Spiritual Insight: Watch Out for the Culture of Death

Ferdinand and his fellow bulls at the bull ranch are living in a culture of death because they believe that only through violence will they gain freedom. The opposite is really true for it is only when they work together that they are able to gain their freedom. Our faith teaches us that all life is precious and that taking a life for whatever reason never leads to freedom. This is also true on a small scale. Anytime I lash out at another person in anger, I have lost a little bit of my freedom and I become a slave to anger and rage.

Third Spiritual Insight: Ferdinand loves his enemies.

Martin Luther King Jr. stated: "Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into friend." Ferdinand gains the respect of the other bulls who have been bullying him not by fighting back but by loving and caring for them. He earns their trust and respect by deciding not to escape without them. Here are two more quotes about the power of loving your enemies. The first one is from Nelson Mandela: "If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner." The second quote is from Abraham Lincoln: "The best way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend."

Fourth Spiritual Insights: God will not give you anything you cannot handle:

The other bulls arrive, thinking they are too late to save Ferdinand, but instead witness Ferdinand making history as the first bull to ever make it out of a bullfight alive by being himself and in the end, Ferdinand returns home with Nina, Juan, and Paco. They are joined by the other bulls, the hedgehogs, the bunny, and Lupe, who all move into the farm. The film ends with Ferdinand, his bull friends, and Lupe watching the sunset over Ronda from a field of flowers.

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July 22, 2018
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Guardians of the Galaxy II

Guardians of the Galaxy II

Synopsis: Peter Quill, Gamora, Drax, Rocket and Baby Groot are known throughout the galaxy as the Guardians of the Galaxy. They have become a sort of "heroes for hire" mercenary group. At the beginning of the movie an alien race known as the Sovereign Race led by a woman named



Ayesha has hired the Guardians of the Galaxy to protect special “batteries” from an inter-dimensional monster that desires to feast on their energy. After a hard fought battle, the Guardians of the Galaxy were able to defeat the monster. Rocket, having a hard time giving up his old ways, steals a few of the batteries with the plans to sell them. The Sovereign therefore decide to attack the Guardians of the Galaxy and forces them to crash on another planet. They would have finished the Guardians off except a mysterious figure destroys all their drones. The mysterious figure reveals himself to be a super creature called a Celestial and he also reveals himself to be Peter’s father and that his name is Ego.

We find out in the movie that Ego has traveled the universe mating with different life forms in order to create offspring. Ego would then hire the Ravager Yondu to bring his offspring back to him when they reached a certain age. What Ego did not tell Quill and the other Guardians was that he would kill the children who did not help him achieve his master plan. Eventually Quill discovers that his father is not only a murder but also that his father was responsible for his mother’s death and if matters could not get worse, Ego now has a plan to destroy the universe. Eventually the Guardians of the Galaxy are able to save the day when Yondu arrives and sacrifices himself. He allows everyone to escape the planet as Ego blows up.

First Spiritual Insight: Ego is a bad image of God.

When I meet someone who declares him or herself to be an atheist, I am almost certain that I have come across someone with a really poor image of God. They imagine God to be very similar to Ego in the Guardians of the Galaxy. Ego has many godlike powers (he is even able to manipulate matter and create life). Ego though has no conscience. No one would say that “Ego was love.” The universe to him is like a giant sandbox for him to do what he wants. He has no care for any other life form except for himself. Everyone else exists to serve him. If this is who God is, then I would not want to worship him either. Jesus teaches us that the real God is nothing like this. The real God is a God who loves the world into existence and loves His creatures so much that He gave us His only Son. Want to know who God is? Then I encourage you to read the story in Luke again about the Prodigal Son. The Catholic God and Ego of the Guardians of the Galaxy have nothing in common.

Second Spiritual Insight: Family Issues & Fundamental Attribution Error

I found the story of the relationship between Gamora and Nebula to be extremely intriguing and insightful. Both Gamora and Nebula were kidnapped by evil being named Thanos when they were young and he raised them as his children. Thanos, being a sick and demented individual, would often force Gamora and Nebula to fight. Gamora always won and Thanos would punish Nebula for losing by removing a part of her body and replacing it with a robot part. Nebula grew to resent Gamora because she always won and she thought that if Gamora cared about her in the least bit she would have at least lost some of their battles. At the end of the movie Gamora confesses that she never really thought about what Thanos was doing to Nebula because she was too busy being concerned about her own faith.

Watching this story unfold on the big screen, I kept thinking about something I learned in counseling called the “Fundamental Attribution Error.” The fancy term simply refers to our human instinct to assume evil or malice intent to others. Nebula for example thought Gamora would not let her win because she thought Gamora enjoyed seeing Thanos torture her. Nebula did not understand that Gamora was simply trying to survive. Sometimes, we can at least feel that people have done us wrong because the intended to and often the truth of the situation is that they were not even aware that they have hurt us. There have been times in my life where I have felt intentionally snubbed only to find out later that the person who I felt snubbed me did so out of ignorance and not out of malice. When dealing with difficult people, I try to keep the “Fundamental Attribution Error” in mind and thus give the other person the benefit of the doubt.

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July 29, 2018

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Black Panther

Synopsis: A long time ago, five African tribes battled for control of a meteorite because this meteorite contained within a special ore called vibranium. Vibranium is a non-earth metal that has the power to absorb vibrations. During their war for control of the meteorite, one of the warriors discovered a “heart-shaped herb” that when ingested gave him super human strength and agility. This warrior becomes the first “Black Panther” and unites four of the five tribes into a single kingdom. This new kingdom called Wakanda decided to keep their technology and the vibranium a secret and therefore they appear to the world to be nothing more than an ordinary third world country.

In 1992 a black-market arms dealer named Ulysses Klaue stole some vibranium and advanced weaponry from the country of Wakanda. In the midst of his escape he sets off a bomb killing many. King T’Chaka learns the sad truth that his brother N’Jobu had aided Ulysses Klaue in his theft of vibranium. In the midst of the confrontation T’Chaka is forced to kill N’Jobu in order to save the life of another Wakandan named Zuri.

Fast forward to the present, King T’Chaka was killed in the events covered in *The Captain American Civil War* movie. T’Challa has returned home to Wakanda in order to become king. Early in his reign, T’Challa learns that Ulysses Klaue has stolen some vibranium from an English museum and plans to sell it to someone in South Korea.

After failing to capture Klaue, T’Challa returns home a second time and this time he receives a challenge for the throne from someone claiming to be his cousin. It turns out that Erik is T’Challa’s cousin, who was left behind in America when T’Chaka killed N’Jobu. Erik, since being abandoned, has grown up to be a world class mercenary trained by the CIA. In the midst of the ritual battle for king, Erik (a.k.a. Killmonger) knocks T’Challa over a waterfall and everyone assumes that he has died. Killmonger is now king. Killmonger is determined to send Wakandan weapons around the world. T’Challa survives the fall from the waterfall and returns to defeat Killmonger and once again become the true king of Wakanda.



First Spiritual Insight: “Illusions of Division threaten our very existence.”

During the credits at the end of the movie, King T’Challa gives a speech to the United Nations. The following quote is from that speech:

“Wakanda will no longer watch from the shadows. We cannot. We must not. We will work to be an example of how we as brothers and sisters on this earth should treat each other. Now, more than ever, the illusions of division threaten our very existence. We all know the truth: more connects us than divides us. But in times of crisis, the wise build bridges, while the foolish build barriers. We must find a way to look after one another as if we were one single tribe.”

There are so many powerful thoughts in this speech but maybe the most important is that T’Challa realizes that it is not just to be good and take care of oneself. We must also be an example to others of virtue. Jesus put it this way:

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.
– *Mathew 5:14-16*

Second Spiritual Insight: “My son, it is your time.”

“My son, it is your time.” Even superheroes sometimes need some words of encouragement from their moms. Queen Ramonda gives T’Challa the confidence boost he needs with this line. This reminded me of two things. One this is the time in which God has entrusted to us to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ – Today! The second thing is the quote from Blessed Virgin Mary in John’s Gospel: “His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.” (John 2:5)

Third Spiritual insight: “It is hard to be a good king”

“You are a good man, with a good heart. And it’s hard for a good man to be a king.” Building on the old superhero message of great power bringing great responsibility, this sage wisdom from T’Challa’s father King T’Chaka plays out in the tough decisions T’Challa is faced with as Black Panther. I sometimes wonder why people assume following Jesus is somehow going to make their life problem free. We should all realize that it is hard to be “good” in a world that

encourages the opposite. It is therefore important to listen to the piece of advice from T'Chaka as well: "You are going to struggle, so you need to surround yourself with people you trust."

Fourth Spiritual Insight: Be careful of stereotypes.

One of my favorite scenes is when M'Baku is talking Everett Ross. M'Baku threatens Ross by saying: "You can't talk. One more word and I will feed you to my children." He then fills Ross on the joke "I'm kidding. We're vegetarians."

