

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

July 2, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

Faith & Film: Captain America: Civil War

Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham in their book: *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning* has the following to say about storytelling: "For once upon a time, people told stories. In the midst of sorrow, and in the presence of joy, both mourners and celebrants told stories. But especially in times of trouble, when "a miracle" was needed and the limits of human ability were reached, people turned to storytelling as a way of exploring the fundamental mysteries: Who are we? How are we to live?" In keeping with my tradition and acknowledging the power of a story, I will share with you some spiritual reflection on different movies.



Captain America Civil War

Most superhero movies follow the basic format of one or two heroes going up against the villain of the day and it is normally very easy to know who to root for. This movie is different in that it pits two teams of super heroes against each other. The first team is led by Iron Man (A.K.A Tony Stark) and they believe that the team of super heroes need to have a govern body to hold them accountable. Iron Man strongly feels this way because he feels guilty for all the destruction the Avengers caused when fighting Ultron in their last movie. The second team is led by Captain America (A.K.A. Steve Rodgers) and they feel that no good can come out of having to report to any group. Captain America strongly feels this way because he had been betrayed by S.H.I.E.L.D. (which was infiltrated and taken over by an evil organization named H.Y.D.R.A.). Steve also has a strong desire to rescue his childhood friend who had been turned into an evil assassin by H.Y.D.R.A. and he knows that no oversight committee would permit him. Other superheroes are then forced to choose sides depending upon personal beliefs and loyalties and this leads to a climactic battle at an airport when Captain America's team tries to stop a third evil threat that the other heroes do not know about.

Spiritual Insight #1: Know your full motivation

Both Iron Man and Captain America have good reasons for their beliefs. The movie left me believing though that neither of the two knew their deepest reason for their beliefs. I never see Iron Man full come to grips with the guilt he feels for creating Ultron and the countless death's that he caused. Captain America's loyalty to his childhood friend also seems to motivate Captain America's thinking more than he would care. I wonder if the major conflict could have been avoided if they had done a little more soul searching of their motivation.

Spiritual Insight #2: Vengeance is Never Any Good

T'Challa (the Black Panther) seeks vengeance upon the Winter Soldier because he believed the Winter Soldier had assassinated his father. There are a couple of times in which he almost succeeds but in the end, he is lucky and fails because the Winter Soldier had been framed and instead it was Helmut Zemo who was responsible for killing T'Challa's father. T'Challa shows that he has learned his lesson and stops Helmut Zemo from committing suicide at the end and instead turns him over the authority.

Tony Stark loses all control also when he realizes that the Winter Soldier (while under mind control) was the one who killed his father. Tony ends up taking his anger out on Captain America and almost kills him. Ultimately Iron Man is left alone and without any friends at the end of the movie because his anger has driven everyone away.

Spiritual insight #3: Know Your Enemy

Saint Ignatius of Loyola speaks of three enemies of the spiritual life: our sinful nature, the world, and finally the devil. We sometimes are own worst enemy because we can talk ourselves into doing things our way instead of God's way. The world tries to instill in us values that are not Christian. Finally, the devil desires to see us miserable like he is miserable. If we are not aware of how these enemies are affecting us, we can allow them to manipulate us in ways that lead us

away from the good. The Avengers spend most of the movie not knowing that Helmut Zemo has declared himself their enemy and has manipulated them into their current conflict.

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July 9, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings:

Faith & Film – Rogue One

Let us spend sometime today reflecting on the movie: *Rogue 1: A Star Wars Movie*.

Rogue 1: A Star Wars Movie

There were once two scientists who were best of friends. The first was a man named Galen Erso and the second was a man named Orson Krennic. At some point, Galen Erso discovers or reasons that the scientific breakthroughs that he and his partner are working on can be used for great evil and so he takes his family and goes into hiding. Orson Krennic uses the research in order to advance in rank in the Empire. Krennic eventually tracks down his old friend and forces him to help complete building the Death Star. Erso helps build the weapon but includes a design flaw in it. He hopes he can get word about the defect to his daughter Jyn so that she can help the Rebel Alliance destroy his evil invention.

Cassian Andor learns of Galen's message and tracks down Jyn hoping that she will help him. In the process they put together a team that is comprised of Chirrut Imwe (a blind warrior) Baze Malbus (mercenary friend of Chirrut), Bohdi Rook (a former Empire Cargo Ship pilot) and other rebel outcasts. Together they successfully steal the plans to the Death Star and transmit them to the rebels before they are all killed.



Spiritual Insight 1: Beware of Technology

Human beings have demonstrated a great capacity for scientific growth. Unfortunately, I am not sure if our ethical growth as a race has kept up. Just because we can do something does not mean we should do something. A man may be able to physically beat up a child but he in no way should. In the same way, we human beings have advanced far enough that we can create life in petri dishes but we shouldn't because whenever human beings create something we begin to implement quality controls. We have thousands of people literally locked away in refrigerators in small little prisons called petri-dishes. We have created drugs that give us a temporary high feeling to help escape the present moment when we really should be facing these moments and learning, growing, and healing from them. Technology can be responsible for thousands of deaths just like the Death Star in the movies.

Spiritual Insight 2: Ambition and Competition can blind us

Orson Krennic's competition with Governor Tarkin renders him blind to the full implications of the moral implications of his weapon. He is only interested in gaining fame and power under this new regime. Sadly, Ambition and Competition can blind us today to the needs of others. Ambition and Competition also lead to a greater lack of respect for life. Others become either allies to help one advance or obstacles that must be overcome. This is why Krennic is able to kill Galen's wife without a second thought and still consider himself Galen's friend.

Cassian also suffers from a blind ambition in the movie. He is so set on defeating the Empire that he is willing to do anything and in the process he becomes able to kill another without a second thought. As he gets to know Jyn and teams with her, he begins to have a greater respect for life which is demonstrated by the fact that he refuses to kill Galen when he had a chance.

Spiritual Insight 3: Trusting the Future

While Chirrut is not a Jedi he is able to sense the force and it allows him to fight despite being blind. Chirrut often speaks a mantra as he fights – "And I fear nothing. For all is as the Force wills it." Chirrut does not fear death because he trusts that the Force will work things out for good. It would be nice if each of us trusted in the Holy Spirit the way that Chirrut trusts in the Force. Chirrut's saying made me think of this story about St. John Chrysostom found in Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan's book: *The Road of Hope: A Gospel from Prison*.

“You need to fear only one thing: sin.

When he was the patriarch of Constantinople, John Chrysostom incurred the wrath of the Byzantine court for his strong denunciation of sin in the Emperor’s family. Various plans were suggested as means or exacting revenge on the saint.

Plan A: Imprisonment. “But” court officials protested, “there he will have the opportunity to pray and suffer for the Lord as he has always desired.”

Plan B Banishment “But for him, everywhere is the Lord’s country.”

Plan C Death. “But then we will satisfy his desire to be a martyr... None of these plans will cause him to suffer; on the contrary, he will joyfully accept them.

“No, there is only one thing John fears and hates above all else: sin. But it is impossible to force him to commit sin!”

If you fear sin only, no one will be stronger than you.”

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

July 16, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings:

Faith & Film Suicide Squad

As we continue to look at some of the stories that were made movies this past year, let us remember to explore some of the spiritual insights the author may have planted in the movies (knowingly or unknowingly).

Suicide Squad:

The premise behind this comic book movie is an interesting one. A woman, by the name of Amanda Waller, gathers together humanity’s worst criminals. Each of these criminals has one or more special superpower. (I would argue Harley Quinn’s super craziness is her superpower). Amanda implants a small bomb inside each of them that will go off if they do not do as they are told. They are then place under the command of Colonel Rick Flag.



An ancient witch named Enchantress becomes determined to take over Midway City. Amanda Waller sends the Suicide Squad to Midway City with the mission of rescuing a “high value” asset from the city before the witch gets him or her. Throughout the movie, the Joker tries to rescue his girlfriend Harley Quinn. Amanda Waller is eventually captured by the Enchantress and the villains are given a chance to run away. Instead of running away they gather together and defeat the Enchantress and save the world.

Spiritual Insight #1 Doing Bad Things Do Not Make Us Bad

The men and women of the Suicide Squad have embraced the label of being a villain. Each has done so for a different reason for example: Deadshot does it for the money, Harley Quinn does it for love (or lust), El Diablo does it because he uses his gift (superpower) for his own personal gain instead of helping others, and Killer Croc does so as a result of the way that others of treated him.

They fail to realize that “villain” is just a label and not who they are at the deepest part of the being. Each of them is a child of God and has the capacity for doing good. They just have to reject the label of villain and start doing good. There is a young French man named Jacques Fesch who is up for canonization. Jacques was a villain, he killed a police officer while robbing a bank. In prison though he took ownership of his evil choices and became a mystic.

Spiritual Insight #2 Good Guys are Bad Guys because they objectify others

Even though Amanda Waller is trying to protect the people of the world from an evil threat and is not labeled a criminal she is a bad guy. What makes Amanda Waller a bad guy is that she objectifies others. Everyone in her life is a means to

an end. She will treat them well while she needs them but the moment that she does not need them they become expendable. This is proven by how she treats Rick Flag, the other intelligence operatives trapped in Midway City with her (she kills them all without a moment of hesitation) and of course how she treats the villains.

John Paul II stated in his teachings that the opposite of love is not hate but rather objectification. When we love someone, we want what is best for them even if it requires a sacrifice on our part. The opposite of them is when we use another person, even if it hurts them, for our own benefit. Amanda Waller is therefore one of the evilest people because she only sees people as an object. We see that most of the villains cared for someone for example Deadshot loves his daughter, Harley loves the Joker and El Diablo loved his family.

Spiritual Insight #3: Image of God

The Enchantress and her brother Incubus, according to the story, were at one time mistaken in history to be a god or goddess. They decided that since people are no longer worshipping them that they would kill all the humans. This is pagan mythology/theology at its best. We must be careful that we do not assume that this is how God really is. Our God is love and therefore He is: "Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." (1 Corinthians 12). Remember that God is not like the Enchantress or Incubus.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

July 23, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

Faith & Film: Jungle Book

Jungle Book:

A young human boy named Mowgli was rescued as a baby from death by a panther named Bagheera. Bagheera entrusts Mowgli to a pack of wolves led by Akela. Akela tries to raise Mowgli as a wolf and therefore looks down upon him when Mowgli uses his human reasoning to invent tools to make his life easier. During a particular dry year, a truce is called in the jungle and everyone gathers around the river. At the river Sheer Khan, a tiger, makes it known that he plans to kill Mowgli when the drought ends. Bagheera decides that the best thing for Mowgli is that he be taken to the man village at the edge of the jungle.



During their travels, Mowgli and Bagheera become separated and Mowgli meets a python named Kaa. Mowgli is rescued from Kaa by Baloo, a giant bear. Baloo and Mowgli quickly becomes friends and are reunited with Bagheera. As they continue their journey to the man village Mowgli is kidnapped by monkeys and taken to their king – a giant monkey named Louie. Louie wants Mowgli to give him the secret to fire (the red flower) which Mowgli does know anything about.

After escaping Louie and the monkeys, Mowgli learns about Sheer Khan has killed Akela and now he desires to avenge Akela's death. Mowgli grabs a torch from the man village and runs back into the jungle to face Sheer Kahn. Mowgli accidentally sets the forest on fire and Sheer Khan falls to his death.

Spiritual Insight #1 – Be oneself

One of the key struggles that Mowgli has in the story is discovering who he is supposed to be. Akela and Bagheera wanted Mowgli to act like a wolf and did not appreciate Mowgli's "human tricks" (making of tools). At the end, Mowgli learns that he has to be himself if he is going to beat Sheer Kahn. Baloo on the other hand appreciates Mowgli's tricks

but does not at first appreciate the fact that Mowgli has his own life to live. Mowgli had to learn to appreciate his tool making ability and to do the things he feels compelled to do despite what other people may think of him.

Spiritual Insight #2 – Friendship

Mowgli learns a lot about friendship throughout the movie as he encounters different animals. The main lesson he learns is that friends want what is best for you. King Louie, Sheer Kahn and Kaa all want something from Mowgli. Bagheera, Akela (and wolves), and Baloo want what is best for Mowgli. Baloo begins his relationship with Mowgli by using him to get honey but he quickly learns that friendship with the man cub is worth more than all the honey he could eat. This is why he is willing to fight the monkeys and Sheer Kahn to save Mowgli.

Spiritual Insight #3 – Part of a Pack

A youth minister I know is very fond of saying “The Catholic Faith was never meant to be lived alone.” This is somewhat similar to the wolves’ Law of the Jungle: “Now this is the Law of the Jungle—as old and as true as the sky; And the Wolf that shall keep it may prosper, but the Wolf that shall break it must die. As the creeper that girdles the tree trunk, the Law runneth forward and back; For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.”

The Law of the Jungle I think can be compared to St. Paul’s teaching on the Mystical Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians: As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, “Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body,” it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, “Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body,” it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I do not need you.” Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.”- 1 Corinthians 12: 12:26

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

July 30, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

Faith & Film Kung Fu Panda 3

This past month we have explored five different stories from movies. I hoped that reflecting with me on the positive and negative spiritual insights in these movies has helped you grow not only in your faith but also in your ability to pick up different philosophical, and theological ideas that may be hidden within the special effects and stories.

Kung Fu Panda 3:

In the Spirit Realm, Grandmaster Oogway’s (the turtle from the first movie) eternal peace is disturbed when he is attacked by an old enemy named Kai. Kai steals Oogway’s chi (soul) and uses it to enter the realm of the living. Meanwhile Po (the Panda that became the Dragon Warrior) is given the task of teaching his fellow Kung Fu masters. This is a task that he fails miserably at. Before he can understand Shifu’s advice about just being himself, Po meets his biological dad Li. Fast forward a bit and Po must train his fellow pandas the art of Kung Fu in order to defeat Kai who is coming to destroy the Pandas and their village. Po finally



realizes that teaching is not about molding them to fight like him but rather it is about helping them to develop their own abilities. In the end, Po and the Pandas defeat Kai.

Spiritual Insight 1: The Real Art of Teaching

Throughout the story, Po has a hard time teaching because he tries to mold everyone to be like him and the furious five. Toward the climactic battle, he realizes that a good teacher is one who helps others develop their own strengths. He therefore helps the Pandas take things that they are good at and teaches them to turn them into Kung Fu moves. As Catholics, we do not believe that God is trying to make us all the same. If He wanted us all the same He would have made us that way from the beginning. Our God does want us to use the gifts and talents that we have to best of our ability. St. Irenaeus of Lyon stated that “The Glory of God is a person fully alive.”

Spiritual Insight 2: Becoming a Teacher

There is a part in everyone’s journey in which they become a teacher (or should become a teacher) but not necessarily in an academic sense. For example, an alcoholic in recovery reaches a point where he or she becomes a sponsor (a teacher) and thus model the life of sobriety to a person in need of a mentor. In my work with Project Rachel, I can tell that a woman has taken a turn for the better in her relationship with God when they take time to help another woman through the healing journey.

Spiritual insight 3: Adoption

All three Kung Fu Panda movies carry with them a very pro-life message because they are all pro-adoption. At first Po thinks his parents gave him up for adoption because they did not want him but Po discovers that his parents gave him up for adoption because they loved him and wanted him to be safe. Men and women who give up their child for adoptions show a great love for their child. There are some cultural of death myths that state that adoption is cruel because it lets the child wondering who he is or that his or her parents did not love them. This is sadly all smoke screen and lies by the devil to encourage abortion (which ends a life). Children who have been adopted go on to live ordinary lives. In fact, sometimes when they are old enough and situations are right they reunite with their birth family and thus become doubly blest as Po end up being with having two dads in Kung Fu Panda 3. I know many wonderful families who are hoping to adopt children.

I think I will end today’s reflection with a prayer for families trying to adopt. I invite you to pray with me.

“God, you do love adoption. You’ve adopted us into your family, giving us all rights and privileges of family. We are heirs and co-heirs with Jesus of all your treasures. We pray today for those seeking to adopt a child. Many children in the world do not have mothers and fathers. Many men and women do not have children. God, bring them together. Create the perfect match. Provide resources. Provide perfect timing. Give endurance and emotional strength through the grinding details. Give wisdom for them to anticipate ahead how to prepare practically for the coming change. Strengthen their marriage ahead of this coming gift. Heal any past disappointment. Parental love is nature. Adoptive parental love has to be SUPERnatural. Give a miracle of love and bonding. May nothing stand in the way of you accomplishing a completion of this match – child to parent. In Jesus!”