

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

July 5, 2015

Spiritual Ponderings

Faith & Film: Captain America: The Winter Soldier

Since the beginning of my Spiritual Pondering columns, I have dedicated the month of July to looking at spiritual insights into movies. The first movie I would like to spiritual analyze is *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. This is the second Captain America movie and takes place within the larger Marvel cinematic universe with other movies like Thor, Iron Man, Hulk, and Avengers. In this movie Captain America has been working for S.H.I.E.L.D. since the events of the last Avengers movie took place. He is working hard trying to make the world a better place not knowing that hidden in S.H.I.E.L.D. are members a neo-Nazis group called HYDRA. HYDRA believes that they have developed a computer program and weapon system that will allow them to target any threat (present or future) and destroy it before the threat becomes a real threat. It is up to Captain America, "Black Widow" Natasha Romanoff, and Nick Fury to stop HYDRA from activating their ultimate weapon.

The first spiritual insight about the movie comes from the questions that the movie raises about what freedom is. HYDRA is justifying its actions with the belief that freedom comes from limiting people's choices. If people cannot choose what is bad then they cannot do the bad. In their plans for the world people would not be able to do what is wrong because their tendency to commit a crime would be detected by their ultimate weapon computer and the person would then be eliminated before they could do the wrong. Captain America and the other good guys realize that the flaw in this logic is the questions that is raised "Who gets decide what is right or wrong?" and "how far do you go, do you kill people only if they have the potential to commit murder or do you go so far as to kill people for littering?" HYDRA does not ask these questions because they assume that they are going to be the ones making those decisions. Scripturally speaking the people of HYDRA have a lot in common with King Herod who willingly had John the Baptist killed despite knowing it was morally wrong because it threatened his power as king since he had made an oath to his niece. Captain America and others are more Christlike because they are determine to do what is right no matter what repercussions their actions may have on them (like martyrdom).

The second insight that I thought was woven into the movie was true good leadership requires willingness for self-sacrifice. HYDRA has no problem with sacrificing others if it gets them what they want. Captain America, Black Widow, Nick Fury, and Hawk on the other hand are willing to sacrifice themselves for what they believe in. In our culture today there are many who declare that we need to sacrifice others euthanasia (because we don't want to serve those who are suffering), abortion (because children will change our lifestyle), and capital punishment (because we are afraid to love, forgive; reform those who commit violent acts). True love requires a sacrifice of self and not a sacrifice of the other.

A third spiritual insight that is closely related to the second one is the evils of human experimentations even if done for self-proclaimed noble reasons. While Captain America turned out to be a good result of human experimentation, we discover that Bucky Barnes (the Winter Soldier) was taken advantage of for human experimentation. Human life needs to be seen as sacred and no one should experiment on a human person period. Some exceptions can be made for attempts for medical cures but no healthy person should be experimented on. This is why the Church is against embryonic stem-cell research. Human being can too easily turn other human beings into objects and when that happens eugenic mentality (a person is only as good as they are valuable to me) are not far behind.

The fourth insight from the movie that I would like to share with you is how the seven deadly sins are like HYDRA. Pride, Envy, Wrath, Avarice, Sloth, Glutton, and Lust can hide inside us mixed with our virtues if we are not careful in the same way HYDRA hid within S.H.I.E.L.D. It takes a daily examination of conscience, frequent confession and a lot of grace to rid our lives of sin. It is a job that is never complete on this side of the grave.



The final insight in the movie shows that power of turning the other cheek. After all the bad guys are defeated Captain America refuses to kill his old friend Buck Barnes (the Winter Soldier) and basically says “Do your worst but I will always be your friend!” At first Bucky does his worst but when he realizes that Captain America is serious he ends up saving his life. No matter how much force or pressure Captain America could have placed on Bucky, he would not have converted Bucky as he did with gift of friendship.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
July 12, 2015
Spiritual Ponderings
Faith & Film: The Lego Movie

One of the images that I use when talking about the existence of God starts off with a bucket of Lego pieces. I then ask the congregation/audience what they think will happen if I would dump them on the floor. The answer I always get is “a pile of Lego pieces on the ground. I normally follow that up with the question: “Why won’t I get the picture that is on the outside of the bucket (normally a spaceship or a house, etc.)?” The normal response to that question basically comes down to the fact that Lego bricks need someone with an intelligence to put them together in order form them to form something. In much the same way I believe the universe with all its atoms, protons, etc, needed an intelligent creature to create it and put it together. The world is intricate for there not to be a grand designer.



I can almost use the Lego Movie as a similar example. The movie in my opinion is an amazing piece of writing and storytelling that one cannot fall in love with it and see the many spiritual insights coming forth from it.

The overarching insight into the movie is that we are all special in our own way and we do ourselves harm when all we do is try to fit in. St. Irenaeus of Lyon proudly proclaimed that “The glory of God was a human person fully alive.” Emmet (the main character) discovers this important truth because the more he believes that he is special the more special he becomes. A Church celebrates this type of diversity. All one has to do look at the wide variety of people who make up the Communion of Saints. St. Francis of Assisi and St. Thomas Aquinas probably had very little in common except of their Catholic faith (and even that they expressed in amazingly different ways) but yet the Church holds both of them up for role models.

In many way the villain, Lord Business, is like the Pharisees and Scribes in the Scriptures because they try to keep order by trying to make everything the same. All their many rules and regulations are not meant to glorify God but to keep order in their lives.

As the movie progresses we see that all that is going on in Lego land is actually taken place in a young boy’s imagination. The young boy has been playing with his father (the man upstairs) Lego displays. His father first looks at the boy’s imagination as bringing chaos to his pristine Lego lands. Eventually though he begins to realize that his son’s imagination is a real gift that needs to be nurtured and supported and torn down.

I have read in many books the importance of taking the time to recognize a child’s emotions. For example little Johnny becomes mad at his little sister for taking his toy. He therefore walks over to her grabs the toy and hits her. His sister goes running to mom or dad and Johnny ends up being grounded. Psychologists and family counselors suggest sitting down with Johnny for a few moments and helping him understand that becoming angry with his sister was not the problem but rather the problem was that he handled the situation wrong by hitting his sister. Experts say that if you do not take the time to validate a child’s emotion they can grow up not trusting their emotions and this can lead to many

other emotional and psychological problems. The dad bonds with his son in a way that he could never have imagined by taking the time to understand his son's emotions.

The writers of the movie also hit upon an important fact when the "Master Builders" and Emmet realize the one thing they are not good at is acting like a team. While we are all special we are still called by our God to be a part of his team (Church). As Catholics we are never saved alone. We are saved only as a part of a community.

Here are a few more insights that I gained from this movie. I also liked how the "Master Builders" were so different from one another – kind of like the saints. As Emmet and WyldStyle wanted to be "the special" we should want to be saints. Finally the next time we are upset with chaos in our world, let us realize that it beats the alternative of being frozen in place because God does not create sin or chaos but we do and God could remove sin and chaos from the world but He chooses to respect our free will knowing that it could result in bad things.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

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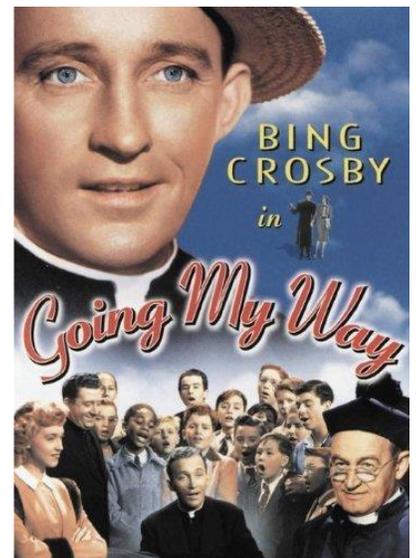
Spiritual Ponderings

Faith & Film: Going My Way

For the next movie, I will be traveling back to the year 1944. *Going My Way* is an American musical comedy/drama directed by Leo McCarey and stars Bing Crosby as Father Charles "Chuck" O'Malley and Barry Fitzgerald as the older and more set in his ways Father Fitzgibbons.

Fr. O'Malley has been given the difficult task of being in unofficially in charge of St. Dominic parish while allowing Fr. Fitzgibbon to believe that he is still in charge. This task was given to O'Malley by the bishop himself and so it is one that he tries to do the best of his ability.

Immediately Fr. O'Malley's more unconventional style clashes with that of Fr. Fitzgibbon who we learn had dedicated his entire life to St. Dominic. Fr. Fitzgibbons eventually goes to meet with the bishop and he is able to deduce the true reason behind Fr. O'Malley's assignment and thus he resigns from being pastor asking that Fr. O'Malley be made pastor in his place.



Fr. O'Malley sees the hurt in the old priest's eyes and tries to cheer him up by having the parish raise money to send him back to Ireland so that he can see his mother who he has not seen since he left Ireland to become a priest and now she is over 90 years old. Before Fr. Fitzgibbons can take the trip, the Church catches on fire and the money is needed to repair the Church. Fr. Fitzgibbons therefore donates the money back to the Church to help it begin to rebuild. I do not want to spoil the end of the movie for you so I will stop there with my summary. It is a movie that I think every Catholic should watch.

The first spiritual insight in the movie that I would like to point out is that I believe the movie gives a good description of how much priest sacrifice for their parish especially in the 1950's and 1960's. Many of us do poor our hearts out and give all that we have. It can therefore be very devastating to us when after we give all that we have we discover that it is not enough or that our efforts go unappreciated. I think though that the movie also shows how rewarding the life of a priest is. The joy that we are able to bring to others is immense. Sometimes though we need to be affirmed by others in our ministry, the housekeeper and Fr. O'Malley affirm Fr. Fitzgibbons in good times and in bad and Fr. O'Malley found support from Fr. O'Dowd and Jenny Tuffel.

The second insight from the movie is that sometimes we do not get to see the fruits of our work. Fr. O'Malley planted many seeds in his work at St. Dominic but he is called to serve at another parish before he can see many of them come to fruition. Fr. O'Malley's willingness to leave and go to another parish shows his love for God is greater than his love for

his work or reaping the rewards of success. He quietly slips out in the middle of the night to move to his next assignment.

The third insight from the movie is that faith does not have to be down and dreary but can be uplifting. Fr. O'Malley shows this in the way that he helps people with their problems. He does not judge people but rather he suggests ways in which they can improve their life as a one friend might do to another. He treats all people with equal kindness including the nosy Church woman (who is the same actress as the wicked witch of the west in the Wizard of Oz), the school boys that he forms into a choir, the cohabitating couple, the house keeper, and the grouchy old banker. Fr. O'Malley changes them through his love and kindness and not through lectures.

The final insight from the movie is that God always provides but not always in the ways that we are thinking. In the movie Fr. O'Malley tries to sell a song he wrote called "Going My Way" but the record producers do not buy it. The choir encourages him to sing another song after his failure and the record producers buy that song instead.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
July 26, 2015
Spiritual Ponderings
Faith & Film: Big Hero Six

The last movie I would like to review with you is Disney's *Big Hero 6*. The movie begins with Tadashi trying to keep his younger brother Hiro from making some pretty bad choices. Hiro, who is a fourteen year old computer genius, has been using his talents to hustle money from some pretty bad people in illegal robot fights. In an effort to convince Hiro to stop squandering his talents, Tadashi introduces Hiro to his friends. Each of Tadashi's friends goes by a weird nickname so there is GoGo, Wasabi, Honey Lemon and Fred. I am not sure if Fred is his actual name or his nickname but I think that is part of the joke. Tadashi's friends quickly make Hiro feel a part of the group as they show him each of their science projects. Tadashi demonstrates to Hiro the science project that he has been working on. Tadashi has been building a healthcare companion robot that Tadashi named Baymax. It is Tadashi's hope that his robot will be able to help people live healthy lives and assist them in times of medical crisis. Baymax can scan a person (which is like receiving a MRI, EKG, Blood Pressure Test, etc. all at once. Baymax's hands can also become defibrillators. Even Baymax's marshmallow shape is meant to help people feel comfortable and heal - the most awesome part maybe that he also dispenses lollipops.



Tadashi though is killed when he tries to save his teacher Mr. Callaghan from a fire and this sends Hiro into a deep depression. Hiro spends the next few weeks in his room doing nothing until he accidentally turns Baymax on. Baymax concern for Hiro's mood starts them on a great adventure which eventually includes Tadashi's friends. The crew eventually learns that Tadashi's death was not an accident and in order to stop the "super villain" Hiro makes robotic armor and weapons for each of them.

There are many different spiritual insights sprinkled throughout the movie. The one that surprised me the most was that this movie was extremely pro-life. After Tadashi's death Hiro wants nothing more than to kill the man who was responsible for his brother's death. He goes so far as to reprogram Baymax to be a killing machine instead of a healthcare companion. Hiro though is stopped by the others who refuse to be a part of taking another human life even if the guy is a bad guy. They eventually help Hiro realize that killing the villain will not bring his brother back or make him feel any better. Baymax reinforces this lesson for Hiro as he rescues an unconscious test pilot.

The second insight or theme in the movie that stand out is that our gifts and talents are not meant just for you. At the beginning of the movie Hiro used his gifts for his own selfish pleasure and it is easy to see that he is miserable and unhappy. Hiro begins to find happiness and joy when he begins using his talents to help others. St. Irenaeus of Lyon said "the glory of God is a person fully alive." We can see the more Hiro uses his talents, the more alive he becomes. At the beginning of the movie he is dragging everyone down and at the movie he is lifting up everyone's spirit.

A third insight and challenge from the movie is how to deal with the lost of a love one. The movie demonstrates the importance of not closing in on yourself and to surround you with prayer. It also shows that even though it may be difficult true friends spend time with each other after a lost in order to console and comfort one another.

Finally, when I was growing up, the first cartoon character that I saw die was Optimus Prime in an animated transformer movie. It was quite shocking because before that no one ever died in cartoons. Now it seems that almost every movie has a death of some sort in it for example in *Up* we saw Ellie die, in *Frozen* Elsa and Anna's parents die. Death is definitely a part of life. I think the message that *Big Hero 6* gives young people about death is good. The movie encourages people to examen their love ones' lives and choose the good qualities from their life and make them a part of their own lives. Hiro learns to appreciate his brother's desire to help other people and throughout the movie he begins to imitate his brother's concern for others and thus allows his brother's legacy continue.