

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
July 3, 2016
Spiritual Ponderings
Faith & Film: The Peanuts Movie



There was a part of me that was really excited when I heard that there was going to be a big screen movie about Charlie Brown and his loyal dog Snoopy. *Peanuts* was always one of my favorite comic strips and I always loved watching the television specials that came on around each holiday. My personal favorite was the Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown and the Christmas Special. There was also a part of me that was afraid to go because I was afraid that the director may have decided to add a lot of dirty jokes and foul language under the excuse of trying to appeal to a modern day audience. I am very glad that the director chose to remain very faithful to the classic comic strip and the television specials that I had remembered watching growing up.

The plot of the movie was very simple. Charlie Brown, the young boy who cannot seem to do anything right, becomes infatuated with the new kid in the neighborhood. Charlie Brown does his best to impress the “little red-haired girl” but it seems that everything he does blows up in his face and makes him look like a fool in front of her. At the end of the movie, Charlie Brown discovered that the “little red-haired girl” has looked past all his mistakes and sees his kind and generous heart when she agrees to become Charlie Brown’s summer pen pal.

A small side story within the larger movie is Snoopy learning to write a book on an old typewriter that he discovered in the trash. He writes a novel in which he as the main character must rescue the love of his life by defeating the dreaded World War I German flying Ace the Red Barron.

The first spiritual insight I discovered in the movie is that you do not have to be crude, obscene, or disgusting in order to be entertaining. It saddens me with how much of television, movies, songs, and comedic routines feel the necessary to use foul language or talk about subjects that should be taboo. I really appreciate how clean and violent free the movie was. I am glad that “good grief” was as close to a cussword that we got. As Christians we are called to clean up our language and humor because they could lead others and ourselves into sin.

The second spiritual insight, I discovered watching Charlie Brown was what it truly meant to have the virtue of perseverance. No matter how many times in the past he had failed, or how scared he was he persisted in doing his best. In this way the Charlie Brown was as heroic as any DC or Marvel comic book super hero.

I also appreciated Charlie Brown’s optimism. Many of us when we find things going against us would become depress and start making negative self-fulfilling prophecies. Charlie Brown always believed that things were going to get better. We Catholics would do well to follow his example.

Another spiritual insight that I found in the Peanuts Movie was that Charlie Brown in many ways is an example of the Gospel Passage: The second spiritual insight is that Charlie Brown could really be an example of the “greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:11-12).

Charlie Brown’s servant heart is manifested over and over again throughout the movie. Charlie Brown humbles himself by giving up of his time at the talent show to assist his baby sister Sally when her talent show act goes bad. He also tries his best to make sure that the book report that he can when he and the “little red-hair girl” are assigned to work together and she has to leave for a week to go and visit a sick relative is the best that it can be.

He also demonstrates the virtues of courage and trustworthiness when he discovers that his test was mixed up with Peppermint Patty’s test and the perfect score that everyone thought he had earned by admitting that the test was not his own. In all these ways he humbled himself only to have the “little red-haired girl” lift him up by pointing out the different virtues that she saw him. These are the things that make him great in the eyes of the “little red-hair girl.” These are the things that elevated him more than any trophy or perfect score on a test ever could.

The last spiritual insight, I discovered when I stopped and realize that in a way the “little red-hair girl” was also a role model. She did not pay attention to the labels that others had put on Charlie Brown or that Charlie Brown put on himself. She at the same time is willing to take a moment and affirm the person that everyone else looks down upon. The more and more I reflect on the movie the more and more I want to be like the “little red-haired girl” because I want to see the good in others instead of focusing on the negative.

Finally watching this movie made me thankful for my loyal friends who help make me who I am.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

July 10, 2016

Spiritual Ponderings

Faith & Film: Star Wars VII – The Force Awakens

Doctors Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham begin their book: *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search of Meaning* focused on the power contained within stories to speak more deeply than mere words alone. Here is one of my favorite quotes from their book: “Listen! Listen to stories! For spirituality itself is conveyed by stories, which uses words in ways that go beyond words to speak the language of the heart. Especially in a spirituality of imperfection, a spirituality of not having all the answers, stories convey the mystery and the miracle—the adventure—of being alive.”

Having just finished watching Stars VII: The Force Awakens, I understand better what they were talking about. There are so many spiritual themes hidden throughout The Force Awakens that it will be impossible for me to share all of them with you. Here are is a small plot summary and a few spiritual insights.

This installment of the Star Wars saga begins thirty years after the death of Darth Vader and the Emperor. In the meantime Luke Skywalker tried to create a new order of Jedi Knights but is stopped when one of his disciples turns to the dark side and kills all the students. Luke escapes and goes off into a self-imposed exile. A new enemy emerges from the remnants of the Empire calling itself the First Order. They aim to impose a totalitarian regime upon the universe. Both the rebels/resistance and the First Order claim it is important to find Luke Skywalker.

During a Battle where the Storm Troopers massacre a village one of the Storm Troopers begins to have second thoughts about being a storm trooper despite having been brainwashed as a child to obey the First Order commands without question. In his attempt to flee the First Order he runs into Rey who is trying to get a small robot BB-8 back to its owner Poe. Poe is trying to get it back to the Resistance. They then make an attempt to destroy the new massive weapon of the First Order called the Star-Killer base. During all of this Rey discovers that she has been given the gift of the Force and we learn that Kylo Ren was the son of Princess Leia and Han Solo.

The first spiritual insight for me was the realization that this movie was part of a larger story helped me understand the importance of praying and studying the whole Bible. Knowing the larger context of a Scripture passage helps me appreciate the current story all the more. For example knowing that the mask Kylo Ren was talking to was that of Darth Vader means more to me because I knew how evil Darth Vader was. If we want to get even more out the Scripture Readings on Sunday take time to study the Scripture readings outside of Mass to understand them better.

The second spiritual insight that I thought was obvious was that the First Order had turned a planet into a weapon of mass-destruction. We have an obligation to use the things of creation for good and not evil. While none of us have the power to blow up a planet we can destroy another person’s world with our tongue. We can tear people down, ruin others reputation, and make other people feel worthless in less time than it took the Star Killer Base weapon to charge.

I found Finn to be an interesting character. His character is a character that can be used as an example of what theologians mean when they use the word “metanoia.” The Greek word “metanoia” most often translate “repent” in our English versions of the Bible literally means “to stop thinking one way and to think in a totally new way.” Finn stops thinking in line with the First Order and starts thinking in a totally different way. He is no longer worried about taking orders but now is worried about helping others. In some ways this metanoia is small, at first he only cares about himself, then about Poe, then about Rey, and then finally about everyone. We are called by Christ to have a metanoia in much the same way. Instead of thinking about ourselves first we are called to start thinking about the needs of others first. “Reject sin and believe in the Gospel” = Metanoia.

The climax of the movie in my opinion was the confrontation between Han Solo and Kylo Ren. Kylo Ren’s real name is Ben Solo and He is Han Solo’s son. Han professes that he is willing to do anything to help his son escape the power of the dark side and in return for his love Kylo/Ben kills him. This for me is a great example of the power of sin.



Each and every time we sin, we in a way reenact this part of the movie because it is our sins that nail our loving God to the cross. The next time you think about stealing, lying, cheating, etc. realize that this is what we do to God. Realizing this though helps understand the great love and mercy our God has for us because after we have killed Him, He comes back to life and offers us peace instead of revenge.

I know that there is much more that I could share with you about the different spiritual insights in the Force Awakens. Some of them good insights and some of them faulty distorted ideas but I am out of space. I want to conclude with the following quote from St. Francis of Assisi: "All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle."

May the Lord be with you.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

July 17, 2016

Spiritual Ponderings

Faith & Film: Minion Movie

One of the great Catholic writers of our time was G.K. Chesterton. He was a contemporary and friends with C.S. Lewis who wrote the Chronicles of Narnia. I am particularly fond of this quote from G.K. Chesterton regarding the power that stories (and thus movies) have on our lives. "Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed."



For the third of our five movies, I want to reflect on the Minion Movie. Most of my family and some of my friends know that I am a fan of the little yellow minions. There is something about them that makes me laugh. (I have a minion piggy bank, fleece blanket, tooth brush holder, and much more).

In an effort to be completely honest, I did not find the Minion Movie to be all that great. There was too much cheap/crude humor in the movie that really missed its mark. There were times when I wondered if I would have been able to understand any of the movie if I was a kid in the second grade. With that being said I of course was able to walk away with some spiritual insights from the movie.

The narrator in the beginning of the movie explains that the Minions evolved into being with one purpose in mind. They wanted to serve the most evil being around and so they first serve a T-Rex, and then Dracula, and then Napoleon. All the people that they serve meet disastrous ends because of the minions ineptitude. After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo the minions hide in a deserted cave where they build a civilization that provides them with everything they could ever want but in the end they are not happy because they have no boss to serve. The first spiritual insight from the movie is simply is that life would not be worth living without a purpose and meeting are physical needs is not that purpose. We are called to become greater than we are through service to master. In our case our master is God and this is Good News because our creator wants what is best for us unlike any of the masters the minions served before Gru.

One minion named Kevin decides that he is going to leave the cave and search for a new master for the minions to serve. He is joined by Stuart (who was accidently volunteered because he was not paying attention) and Bob (who was at first rejected because he was too small and only accepted because no one else volunteered. Watching the three minions traveled, I kept hearing our multi-parish youth minister saying over and over again "The Catholic life was never meant to be lived alone." I am grateful each time she reminds me and the teens of this fact.

The next spiritual insight comes from the fact that they discover that there is literally a bad guy convention taking place in Orlando, Florida while they are in New York City. The three minions begin to ask for directions to Orlando, FL. The problem is that they ask all the wrong people. They ask a baby who cannot talk, a dog that can only bark and a few other inanimate objects. Sadly there are people in life who keep looking for a direction to travel but they always seem to ask the wrong person. Without good directions, finding our way can be very hard. This is why the Church is so important. She can point us always in the right directions in regards to faith and morals.

The three brave minions eventually hook up with Scarlet Overkill and she tests their loyalty by having them steal the Royal Crown off of Queen Elizabeth's head – pretty big test. Through a strange series of events though Kevin, Bob, and Stuart do not only get the crown but also Bob becomes King of England. Pretty much all of this happens by accident but Scarlet sees it as a betrayal despite the fact that the minions try to give her the crown when they see her again. Sadly, most of the time people hurt us they do so accidentally or out of neglect and not out of malice. Scarlet cannot see this and therefore she holds a grudge which ultimately leads to her demise. Scarlet learns the hard way that holding a grudge is like drinking a poison yourself and hoping the other person dies.

In the end, I am not sure what to make out of the Minion movie. I definitely liked Despicable Me and Despicable ME II better.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

July 24, 2016

Spiritual Ponderings

Faith & Film: Transformers IV: Age of Extinction

"Art, like morality, consists of drawing the line somewhere." — G.K. Chesterton. Perhaps that is why television shows and movies are so powerful. Let us take a look now at some spiritual insights from the last Transformers movie.

This Transformer movie takes place five years after the Battle of Chicago (the end of the third movie where the Decepticons and Autobots fought it out in the middle of Chicago killing many and pretty much destroying the whole city). The remaining Decepticons have gone into hiding not knowing what to do without Megatron their leader. The Autobots have also gone into hiding despite having been given amnesty as a reward for saving the earth. Unfortunately a secret CIA group called "Cemetery Winds" and a transformer bounty hunter named Lockdown have begun hunting down the Autobots especially Optimus Prime. Eventually it is discovered that a group of scientists have been able to create their own transformers and unfortunately these new transformers fall under the control of Galvatron (an updated version of Megatron).



The first major spiritual insight is the simple warning that just because we can do something scientifically does not mean that it is good or moral for us to do so. Science is great, but not everything we can do should be done for example splitting the atom, cloning, embryonic stem-cell research, etc. Sometimes our ambition and pride as a race can get us into trouble. In the Terminator movies, we create a robot named Sky-net that tries to wipe out humanity. Here in this episode of the Transformers, we create an army of robots that fall under the command of an evil enemy. On a more personal level just because I can bully someone does not mean I should or just because I can eat as much as I want does not mean that I should. We need to use our gift of reason to help create moderation and prudence in our lives.

The following piece of dialogue demonstrates the next spiritual insight:

Cade Yeager: When you said you were done fighting for humans, you didn't mean that, did you?

Optimus Prime: How many more of my kind must be sacrificed, to atone for YOUR mistakes?

Cade Yeager: What do you think being human means? That's what we do. We make mistakes. Sometimes, out of those mistakes come the most amazing things... When I fixed you, it was for a reward. That was it. That was why. The money. And it was me making a mistake. Without it, you wouldn't be here. So even if you got no faith in us, I'm asking you to do what I do. I'm asking you to look at all the junk and see the treasure. You gotta have faith, Prime, in who we can be.

Yeager reminds Optimus Prime that human beings are not the sum of the mistakes but rather are something more. Another way of looking at it is because Optimus is the stronger that he has a duty to protect the more misguided human beings.

One last quote:

Optimus Prime: After all we've done, humans are hunting us.

Optimus and the other Autobots quickly learn that they do what they do not because of what they get in return but because of who they are. As Catholics we help others out not because we gain anything from it but because we are Catholics. The following Mother Teresa quote summarizes this teaching:

“People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway. If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway. What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway. If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway. The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway. Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway. In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

July 31, 2016

Spiritual Ponderings

Faith & Film: Daredevil (Netflix TV Show)

Since I move to Epiphany, I have discovered that I do not watch nearly as many movies at movie theaters anymore. I think this is because they are somewhat a distance from me and I don't plan far enough ahead to just go to the movie. I also believe that the time for movies to be released on Netflix and other streaming options has increased. Therefore for my last Faith and Film reflection for July I have decided to reflect on the Netflix television show Daredevil which I found fascinating to watch because the main character Matt Murdock is supposedly Catholic with a priest for a confidant. Some of the scenes are very bloody.



Daredevil tells the story of a young boy who was blinded in an accident with toxic chemicals. The chemicals may have taken away young Mathew's ability to see but they also at the same time enhanced his other senses. Mathew is orphaned is also orphaned as a young boy when his father who is a boxer refuses to lose for money and is killed by a group of mobsters. While in the orphanage Mathew meets a blind man named "Stick" and Stick teaches him how to use his enhanced senses to fight.

Mathew eventually leaves Stick's mentorship behind and graduates from law school with a new best friend Foggy Nelson. Together they refuse great opportunities with great law firms in order to open up a law office in Hell's Kitchen, New York to help the poor. Mathew discovers though that he can only do so much good as a lawyer and therefore puts on a mask at night and begins a career as a vigilante.

One aspect of Mathew/Daredevil's Catholicism is extremely apparent is his respect for life. Mathew is absolutely convicted that only God can and should choose when someone dies in the eyes of some this makes him look weak but for Mathew this is what separates him from the bad guys. Recently, I have been doing a lot of reflecting on the phrase from the Gospel of Mathew "turn the other cheek." So often in the past, I considered this to be a very passive, wimpy, statement. The more I reflect on this idea of "turning the other cheek," I see a deeper meaning. For me "turn the other cheek" has come to mean "do you worse to me but you will not change me." I am a loving and caring person and your anger, hate, torture, etc. will not turn me into anything differently. Jesus' death and resurrection could be summarized in this manner. We did our worst to the king who entered into Jerusalem on a donkey (Israelite kings always rode donkeys in time of peace and war horses during times of war) and Jesus still remained the prince of peace as on the night of His resurrection, He appeared to the ten in the upper room and offered them "Peace." Our hate did not turn Jesus into a hater. Mathew/Daredevil is someone who respected life even if no one around him did.

Another aspect of Mathew's Catholicism is his and Foggy's desire to fight injustice. Their disgust at the violence in their city does not create an apathy in them or cause them to move away to a safer place. Instead each in his own way chooses to fight for justice and champion the poor. The following quote from Pope Benedict XVI comes to mind: "The world promises you comfort, but you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness. Mathew and Foggy's desire to help people refuses them to allow them to sit on the sidelines comfortably while others suffer. They hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Daredevil's main nemesis in the first season (and probably beyond) is the "King Pin" Wilson Fisk. The television show goes a long way in trying to help the viewer understand why Fisk has become an evil mastermind. The show explains that Fisk, who with his mother was physically and verbally abused by his father, ended up killing his father. From that moment on, Fisk became a tormented soul as he struggles to come to grips with what he had done and tries to fix Hell's Kitchen. Fisk's plan to fix Hell's Kitchen though is for the most part self-centered and he shows that he thinks the best way to fix the city is to get rid of the poor and criminal element and bring in richer "more civilized people". While one can feel sorry for Wilson Fisk and his upbringing this does not excuse his treatment of others as objects and obstacles. He has no respect for life. If God would have used Wilson Fisk's way about bringing salvation none of us would be here because God would have wiped us out and started a fresh. Thank be to God that God is more loving and caring.

