

Fr. Tom Pastorius

July 5, 2020

Spiritual Ponderings

Faith & Film

Star Wars IX: The Rise o Skywaliker

Synopsis: The movie begins informing us that the evil Emperor Palpatine has somehow survived the explosion of the second Death Star. Kylo Ren strikes a deal with the Emperor. The Emperor will give Kylo Ren an incredible armada of Star Destroyer ships and in return Kylo Ren must kill the heroine of the saga Rey. Rey and her rebel friends must find a Sith wayfinder and use it to find the planet of Exegol. Exegol is the place where the fleet of Star Destroyers are docked and where the Emperor is. After finding the wayfinder Rey confronts the Emperor with the help of a newly converted Kylo Ren. Spoiler alert, the good guys win when, Rey uses the emperor's own Force Energy back on him killing him. The other heroes are able to destroy the enemy fleet and save the universe.

1st Spiritual Insight

The major plot twist in the movie reveals that Rey, the heroine, was actually the granddaughter of the evil emperor. Upon discovering this, Rey feels that she is destined to turn evil and harm all of her friends. As I watched the movie and saw Rey come to understand that her family of origin did not control her future, I began to think about how many problems in life extend from the fact that we all come from imperfect families. It also made me think of how proud I am of my brothers and sisters. We grew up in a house where my dad was known for losing his temper but I have never heard my brothers and sisters raise their voice to their kids. They are not allowing how they grew up shape who they are now. For most of us there are good qualities that we received from our family of origin and we should do everything we can to nurture them and pass them onto the next generation. For me, I think of how loving, caring, and forgiving my mother is and I desire to imitate her in those things. We can not choose our families but we can choose how they shape us. I think the turning point for Rey was when she discovered that Leia was willing to train her to be a Jedi despite knowing who Rey's grandfather was.

2nd Spiritual Insight:

Kylo Ren did the unthinkable in *Star Wars XVI: The Force Awakens* when he killed his father Han Solo. In this moving, he turns away from the dark side and embraces the side of good. This spiritual story is all about exploring the idea of how far must one go to be unredeemable. We believe that God is always willing to forgive us if we have to be willing to ask. Catholics stand firmly opposed to the idea of predestination. Predestination is the idea that God upon creating you destined you to go to heaven or hell. We just live out the drama. As Catholics we believe that we have a choice in this life by choosing to live the virtues of the kingdom of heaven now. Our actions and beliefs do have eternal weight. The more sins we commit the more we will end up in hell. In the last chapter of Mathew's Gospel, we see how the sheep and goats ae separated by what they did or not do in this life.

3rd Spiritual Insight:

During a pivotal moment of the movie, Poe Dameron the leader of the Resistance inspires his rebels by declaring: "First Order wins by making people think they are alone. We are not alone." When I heard this quote I remember what an older priest, whom I respected greatly told me. He said "the Devil only has two lies. The first is that you are alone and the second is that you are not good enough." He went onto explain that they are lies because Jesus is Emmanuel "God with us" and with God all things are possible. I do think Poe's insight is correct in that evil tries to convince us that we are the only ones who are striving to do the good or the task that God wants us to do is just not humanly possible. God though will not abandon us and has already defeated our greatest enemy – sin and death. I believe this also speaks to why Catholic believe that Church is so important and why the Mass is an obligation for us. We remind ourselves that we are apart of God's family at Mass and that He has conquered our greatest enemies.

4th Spiritual Insight:

One insight into the movie that I would not have known, if I had not read an article on hidden "Easter eggs" in the movie. The author pointed out at the end of the movie that Rey was the first character to watch a sunrise in the movie and that symbolize the new beginning she now has. In watching the Son rise, the Apostles and Disciples had a new start also. This same new start is offered to us every time we acknowledge the Son rise. Even more striking is that there are two suns on the planet Tatoonie and the Son of God rises twice at Mass. Once when the priest elevates the host and then when he elevates the Precious blood.

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Captain Marvel

Synopsis: The movie begins in 1995 on alien planet named Hala. It is the capital of the Kree Space Empire. We are introduced to a Kree warrior named Vers and her mentor named Yon-Rogg. She is confessing to him that she has nightmares involving an unidentified older woman. During a battle with another group of aliens called Skrulls, she is captured. The Skrulls try to use a machine to extract memories from Vers but she is able to escape and uses one of their ships to crash land in a Blockbuster. While on earth Vers befriends SHIELD agent Nick Fury who helps her learn that she is not really Kree but rather is a human with extra special powers because she was involved in a plane crash with alien engine in it. Vers also learns that her real name is Carol Danvers and that the Kree are actually the bad guys in an intergalactic war. Now knowing the truth, Carol travels to a cloaked Kree ship in order to rescue Skrulls and take out her former Kree teammates.

Spiritual Insight #1

The moment when Vers realizes that she is really Carol Danvers and that the Kree were not her family but rather her enemy was a great example of someone having a metanoia experience. The Greek word "Metanoia" means the change the way one thinks for example when people realized that earth was round and not flat people had a metanoia experience – a new way of looking at something. The word "Metanoia" is translated in most English Bible using the word "repent." So, when Jesus came to earth, He called people to have a metanoia experience to change the way they were thinking. They were to stop thinking of God as a task master and begin to think of God as a loving Father. Knowing what she now new Carol cannot go back to her old way of life and we knowing what we know about Christ should not go back to our old sinful way of living.

Spiritual Insight #2

The second person who has a metanoia experience was Nick Fury. He goes from living in a world where he did not believe in aliens to living in a world where he knew they existed. He demonstrates this metanoia by almost become paranoid. Recognizing that none of his friends ever called him "Nick" but yet his boss just did. He is able to deduce that his boss is a shapeshifting alien. He has a second metanoia experience when he discovers the "cat" is really a dangerous Flerken (alien monster whose mouth opens up to reveal octopus type tentacles. He goes from thinking the cat is cute and harmless to realizing how dangerous it is and thus begins to treat it differently. Maybe a metanoia we can have in our life is to think of our family as a gift from God and not just a pain.

Spiritual Insight #3

Another spiritual insight in the movie is that is great to be a human being. While the Kree look down upon Vers for not being fully Kree and not being able to control her emotions, she later learns that having emotions can be a good thing. When Carol fully embraces her humanity, she lets it be known by saying "I've been fighting with one arm tied behind my back, but what happens when I'm finally set free?" Are we reaching our full potential?

Spiritual Insight #4

At the end of the movie, I was really looking forward to a great battle between Yon-Rogg and Carol Danvers. Yon-Rogg gets out of his spaceship and throws his blaster to the side and demands to face Carol one on one. Carol's response caught me completely off guard when she blasts him (doesn't kill him and says: 'I have nothing to prove to you.' While I missed out on another awesome fight scene, I did like the message that Carol, firm in her identity, did not have to fight. As Catholics we talk about embracing our identity of being the "Beloved" of God then we won't have to fight either. I think we can see this in our personal life. All we have to do is be ourselves and God will take care of the rest.

Spiritual Insights #5.

Good leaders try to bring out the best in others. Yon-Rogg kept telling Vers:" I want to be the best version of yourself." Even though he did not fully mean it, it is still good advice.

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In The Footsteps of Elephants

During our time of Social Distancing, I finally broke down and got Disney Plus. The first movie, I ended up watching on Disney Plus was a documentary about the making of the film *Elephants* called *In the Footsteps of Elephants*. I found both movies to be very interesting. I especially enjoyed the making of documentary.

Synopsis: We are introduced to a herd of Elephants that live in Kalahari area of South Africa. The Herd is led by their great matriarch Gaia. Shani, Gaia's sister, assist Gaia and has also been raising her spirited son Jomo, a very energetic young elephant. As the land they are in dries up, Gaia leads the elephants must migrate north towards Victoria Falls and then back again. On their journey they must face many dangers.

Spiritual Insight #1

When I first watching the documentary about the making of the movie Elephant, I was reminded of something I learned about science that I still find extremely fascinating. Scientists can be divided into two categories. They are either Newtonian scientists or Goethe scientists. The way they approach the subject they are studying are amazingly different. For example, if a Newtonian scientist wanted to study a rose, he would go out and pluck a rose out of the ground and bring it back to his lab. The Newtonian scientist would then begin dividing the rose into pieces. He might start by separating the flower into its parts: blossom, stem, leaves, and root. He then would pick one of those items and divide it into smaller parts until we get all the way down to its atoms. A Goethe scientist wanting to study roses would simply watch a seed become a rose, the rose bloom, and eventually watch the rose die. A good example of a Goethe scientist was Jane Goodall. She learned a lot about apes by living with them and not by taking them back to a lab and dissecting them. I often feel that most of the world tries to divide the Church into parts when it studies the Church and it would be better if they watched the Church as a whole practice its faith. I have learned more about how to be a saint from watching holy people be saints than I have from try to dissect every little thing about them.

Spiritual insight #2

The second insight, I received was a better understand of the power of water. The video of the dry desert becoming an oasis during the raining season is just truly amazing. Remembering that the Bible was written by people in a desert area of the world makes understand better what water would have meant to the human author of the Bible.

Spiritual Insight #3

Life is both precious and complicated. Watching the elephants travel their journey, how they interact with one another, and how they interacted with the dead bones of other elephants showed me just how amazing elephants are. I do not think it would be too hard to think about all animals being this amazing and thus get a better understanding how awesome all of God's creation is. Then add the truth to it that the God who created this wonderful, awesome, and complex world loves you and me. Our minds should be blown away.

Spiritual Insight #4

Sin is endangering our world. I think it is safe to say that God does not want elephants to go extinct but yet they are an endangered species because of human beings not being good stewards of God's creation. It was also nice to see what some people are doing to protect the elephants.

Spiritual Insight #5

The herd survives because they stay together. In the same way, we Catholics believe that the Church is strongest when all its members feel that they are apart of the Mystical Body of Christ (The Church). The herd is made up of many different generations and so is our Church. The herd is a group that is constantly moving and so is the Church. We are constantly moving towards heaven. We should do our best not to leave anyone behind.

Fr. Tom Pastorius
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Spiritual Ponderings
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Frozen II

Synopsis: Elsa and Anna go on an adventure in order to save the kingdom of Arendelle from magical elemental spirits. As they travel on this adventure, they realize that parts of a story that their father King Agnarr had told them is true. In order to save the day, they must find a way to bring peace between the people of Arendelle, the people of Northuldra, and the elemental spirits.

Spiritual Insight #1

The main insight I gained from the first Frozen movie was that when families keep secrets in order “not to hurt” others, they normally end up causing more harm than good. Again this is what happens when we find Anna and Elsa parents lied to their children and instead of traveling to the South Sea went to the Dark Sea in order to find out more about Elsa’s powers. Elsa ends up blaming herself for their death when she finds out. Anna finally convinces her: “You are not responsible for their choices, Elsa.”

Spiritual Insight #2

“All one can do is the next right thing.” The preceding quote is an ongoing theme in Frozen II. I think this is a very positive notion. I read once that a lantern is not like a flashlight. A lantern can only light the next step or two while a flashlight can shine down a path. Jesus (human side) would not have known what a flashlight was so when He tells us that “Word of God is a lamp for feet.” He is reminding us that it only lights the next step or two at best. It does not matter what is beyond that because we should always do the next right thing.

Spiritual Insight #3

One of my favorite quotes in the movie came from Elsa when she said “Fear can’t be trusted.” This simple statement should be the motto everyone adopts. For most people do the wrong thing when they act from a position of fear. We learn in the movie that fear drives Anna and Elsa’s grandfather into treating the Northuldrands as enemies instead of friends. It also leads him to becoming a murderer. How many of our sins have we committed because we were afraid of something? Afraid of loss of material possessions? Afraid of loss of fame or prestige? Or even out of a fear of a loss for our lives (I am not meaning self defense here). A fear of change? St. John Paul II was fond of pointing out that the most use phrase in the Bible was “Be not Afraid!”.

Spiritual Insight #4

Another quote that is used the movie a lot is “water is memory.” As soon as I heard this, I began to think of the Church’s blessing of Holy Water to be used at Baptism and how many historical/Scriptural references there are in it.

Blessing of the Water

My dear brothers and sisters, God uses the sacrament of water to give his divine life to those who believe in him. Let us turn to him and ask him to pour his gift of life from this font on the children he has chosen. Father, you give us grace through sacramental signs, which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power. In baptism we use your gift of water, which you have made a rich symbol of the grace you give us in this sacrament. At the very dawn of creation your Spirit breathed on the waters, making them the wellspring of all holiness. The waters of the great flood you made a sign of the waters of baptism, that make an end of sin and a new beginning of goodness. Through the waters of the Red Sea you led Israel out of slavery, to be an image of God’s holy people, set free from sin by baptism. In the waters of the Jordan your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Spirit. Your Son willed that water and blood should flow from his side as he hung upon the cross. After his resurrection he told his disciples: “Go out and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Father, look now with love upon your Church, and unseal for her the fountain of baptism. By the power of the Spirit give to the water of this font the grace of your Son.

You created man in your own likeness: cleanse him from sin in a new birth of innocence by water and the Spirit. We ask you, Father, with your Son to send the Holy Spirit upon the water of this font. May all who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism rise also with him to newness of life. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

In this sense water does have memory and with the grace of God behind it, it has power to make us His sons and daughters and wipe away our sins!