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Spirituality Living the Faith

Friday, February 19, 2010

'The Dark Knight' and the first temptations of Christ

 By Rev. Anthony Scannell, OFM Cap.  [text only version](#)

The film "The Dark Knight" during this first week of Lent gives us the chance to look at the temptations of Batman, the Gospel temptations of Jesus, and our own temptations as individuals and as a country. That should help us look forward to Easter.

"The Dark Knight" is a sequel to "Batman Begins," and until recently was the second most popular film ever. But it is a more conflicted Batman than ever: faced with the opposition of the citizens of Gotham who think he is a vigilante, faced with a city so full of corruption that he doesn't know whom to trust, hoping to turn over his crime-busting to the new and trusted District Attorney but not sure. And then on the scene comes the most dangerous villain he has ever faced, the "Joker."



So this film is not about a simple hero like Superman, but about heroes who are sometimes white knights and sometimes dark knights, at the same time. This film is really a far deeper psychological study of Batman than earlier films were, and may bring us closer to the human side of Batman, just as the temptations of Jesus can bring us closer to him, and recognize our own temptations in theirs.

The Joker is to Batman what the devil was to Jesus: constantly tempting him to become or do something he didn't want. In fact, Batman almost gives up: "I have seen what I would have to become to stop men like him.... I cannot endure that."

The Joker appeals to Batman's shadowed side, taunting him to break the rules; he wants to show him as a fraud. The people of Gotham want Batman to quit, too, and consider him a vigilante, an outcast, for causing so many deaths as he cleans up crime.

Will Batman choose to abandon being the White Knight and become the "Dark Knight"? It is only at the end of the film that we find how White Knight and Dark Knight roles can be reversed.

The film challenges us to look at our temptations, and our "rules." Is the Joker correct in saying that the only thing fair in life is chaos? Are most people really selfish and corruptible? What choices do we make when we face evil in our own lives?

The film is almost 2 1/2 hours long; but the real story takes place in the last hour and 20 minutes (which we will show at "Soup and Cinema" with an introduction to clarify the plot). Begin with DVD Chapter 17 if you want the shorter version.

Some questions for discussion and reflection:

1. Who is the "white knight" and who is the "dark knight," in name and in reality?
2. What did the Joker mean when he told Batman, "You complete

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3. What are the temptations Batman must face? Does he ever succumb? Does Harvey Dent?

4. What happens to us when our white knights turn dark and shadowed? Do we still need heroes?

5. What is the meaning of this film for us on this First Sunday of Lent? Does it also have ramifications for our country as we fight "evil"? Was Jesus a "Dark Knight"?



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Capuchin Franciscan Father Anthony Scannell is spiritual director of Catholics in Media Associates (CIMA). "Soup and Cinema" presentations will be held at Holy Family Church, South Pasadena (Feb. 19); St. Francis De Sales Church, Sherman Oaks (Feb. 22); and St. Bede the Venerable Church, La Canada (Feb. 24), beginning at 6 p.m.

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