

For Sunday, January 10, 2016

Grace Awakens

The Baptism of the Lord

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/011016.cfm>

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

The latest installment in one of Hollywood's most successful movie franchises, Star Wars: The Force Awakens, became the [fastest to reach one billion dollars in ticket sales](#).

Though it takes place in a galaxy far, far away, its main character, Darth Vader, is a very modern American fictional character, being named by the American Film Institute in 2003 as the [third greatest villain in movie history](#).

In the previous three movies of the series ([commonly referred to as the "prequel trilogy"](#)), we are introduced to Darth Vader as the young Anakin Skywalker, an energetic child with whom "the Force is strong." As events unfold, fear and anger draw him into the dark side of the Force. His ambition to rule the galaxy leads to a violent confrontation with his teacher, Obi-Wan Kenobi, who leaves him for dead at the side of a volcano. When his maimed and burned body are fitted with the black mask and cloak we are all familiar with, his transformation into Darth Vader is complete.

Why seemingly good people become evil is a frequent theme of popular American culture. Often, the answer is that events beyond their control warped them. They may have been bullied as children or may not have received enough attention from their families. Perhaps they were adversely influenced by the high level of crime in their neighborhood. In the past, villains created the conflict that drove the plot and lead the audience to cheer their eventual demise. Nowadays, villains are sympathetic figures, victims of forces beyond their control, whether it be the teacher in the hit television series [Breaking Bad](#), who turns to cooking methamphetamine to pay for his cancer treatment or the wicked witch in the Broadway play [Wicked](#), who turns out to really be a good witch who is demonized by the Wizard of Oz to protect his power.

This outlook on good and evil also plays itself out in our courts and media coverage. A recent example is the teenager who claimed that his upbringing in a wealthy home made him unable to discern right from wrong, which came to be called [the "affluenza" defense](#). When mass shootings occur, [gun control laws come under scrutiny](#), and when terrorist acts occur we ask how young Muslims become "[radicalized](#)." Whether it is failed schools, inadequate laws, or the economy, we want to blame everyone except those who actually commit the crimes. As we see it, people are basically good. If they do bad things, it must be because of circumstances beyond their control.



How different is the Christian doctrine of [original sin](#)! Simply put, we are born guilty and in need of forgiveness. We do not start off good and innocent and then are influenced later to do evil. Rather, we are already inclined to selfishness before we take a breath. We do not “break bad” but are born broken and in need of healing. That healing comes to us through the sacrament of baptism.

This Sunday we bring the Christmas season to a close with the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. The one man born good, Jesus Christ, submits to baptism to make it a source of healing for us who are born bad. Just as he suffered death so that we could have life, he enters the Jordan River to charge the waters of baptism with power to forgive and sanctify.

That sanctifying power is already at work in us through faith. However, we must repent, choosing every day to calibrate our thoughts, words, and actions to the kingdom of God breaking into human history in the person of Jesus Christ. We must take responsibility for our sinful choices and repair the evil we have done, rather than considering ourselves victims entitled to compensation for our suffering. Then we can treat those who choose evil as well as their victims with genuine healing mercy and empathize with them not because we want to excuse their behavior but because we see in our own hearts the wounds of a broken world. When we do so, grace will awaken.

Douglas Sousa, STL

PRAYER

By God's gift, through water and the Holy Spirit,
we are reborn to everlasting life.
In his goodness, may he continue to pour out his blessings
upon these sons and daughters of his.
May he make them always, wherever they may be,
faithful members of his holy people.
May he send his peace upon all who are gathered here,
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Blessing from the Rite of Baptism.

NOTICES

COLLECTION FOR THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA

Many dioceses will take up the collection for the Church in Latin America the weekend of January 23–24. More information and collection resources are available at: <http://usccb.org/catholic-giving/opportunities-for-giving/latin-america/collection/index.cfm>. LPi customers can also find the resources on Art & Media Portal by searching keyword “[Church in Latin America](#)”.

SPECIAL JUBILEE DAY OF THE HOLY YEAR OF MERCY

Share beautiful, vibrant art in your parish with a free bulletin cover from LPi. This special Holy Year of Mercy cover celebrates the World Day of Migrants and Refugees on January 17, 2016. To download visit LPi’s Art & Media Portal at www.portal.4LPi.com. You can also view the Holy Father’s message for the day here: https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20150912_world-migrants-day-2016.html.

SOLIDARITY FUND FOR THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

The Solidarity Fund for the Church in Africa, which has no set national date, gives much needed aid to the Church in Africa while expressing the gratitude of the Church in the United States for the warm and generous assistance of the African priests and sisters in our parishes. The USCCB has resources available for this national collection on its website at <http://www.usccb.org/catholic-giving/opportunities-for-giving/solidarity-fund-for-africa/collection/index.cfm>. LPi customers can also find the resources on Art & Media Portal by searching keyword “[SFCA](#).”

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