

'The Exorcist'

Question: The classic horror film and novel "The Exorcist" are certainly terrifying and not without their criticisms. However, I personally find them both to be deeply religious, spiritual and incredibly faith-affirming. As Catholics, is it wrong to embrace such controversial entertainment?

– **Kevin Fellman**, Northridge, California

Answer: Like many Hollywood productions, it is a mixed bag. It does present the face of personal evil, something which many modern secular people deny but which Scripture consistently affirms. Furthermore, it demonstrates the power of prayer, the ultimate effectiveness of exorcisms and the faith of the Church.

However the film errs in many details. Though it purports to be rooted in an actual exorcism, almost every detail is altered. The original case took place in the 1940s and featured a teenage, Lutheran boy who lived in Maryland. The case was handled poorly by the local clergy (who were untrained in exorcism) and given over to the Jesuits. They moved the boy to St. Louis, where the case was concluded only after many months of exorcism prayers. It was his conversion to Catholicism that seemed to win the day along with the exorcism rites.

The movie, however, features a teenage girl who lives in Georgetown and is exorcised largely by a single priest who breaks many of the norms of exorcism. A priest should never engage in the rite of major exorcism without an assisting priest and a team of lay faithful, especially in a case involving a young woman.

Further, while there are many strange things that happen in exorcisms, some of the scenes in the movie are extreme. Heads do not rotate 360 degrees, and so forth. Further there is no

record of a priest being killed in an exorcism.

Ultimately, demons do not have unlimited powers, and most of their rages and strange antics have more the quality of cheap parlor tricks meant to instill fear in the team or distract the exorcist from reading the rite. It is true that demons can and do rage in possessions, but the more usual case in exorcisms is that demons whine a lot and behave in rather narcissistic and juvenile ways. Truth be told, according to most exorcists, demons are very tedious and a real bore.

Overall, some of the excesses in the movie says more about cinematography than actual exorcisms.

What is peace?

Question: What is peace in the Gospels? Jesus tells the disciples to say “peace” when they come into a house, and then if a peaceful person lives there peace will rest upon him, but if not it will return to them. So peace seems to be something more than a sentiment.

– **Marc**, via email

Answer: In the Scriptures, the Greek word translated “peace” is *eirenē*, from *eirō*, meaning “to join or tie together into a whole.” So, peace is the experience of wholeness that occurs when all essential parts of something are present. Relationally, peace is the presence in the relationship of everything that should be there.

Hence, you are right, peace is more than a sentiment. It points to an objective reality and experience of integrity and interpersonal justice. It is something that can be offered and received. As an offered blessing, one must be open to receiving and reciprocating peace. Otherwise the offered peace will return to the one who offers it.

Msgr. Charles Pope is the pastor of Holy Comforter-St. Cyprian

in Washington, D.C., and writes for the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., blog at blog.adw.org. He is also the recent author of "[Catholic and Curious: Your Questions Answered](#)" (OSV, \$18.95). Send questions to msgrpope@osv.com.