

Homily for 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In the last twenty years there has been a plethora of movies about super heroes. Included are Superman, Batman, Thor, the Avengers, Captain America, the Fantastic Four, Iron Man, Green Lantern and, of course, Spiderman. With four films about Spiderman in the last few years, it is obvious that he is the most popular of these Super Heroes. The question is why.

I think that the main ingredient is that he is a hybrid. He is a coming together of the ordinary and the extraordinary. Spiderman is one of us. He is a geek who is bullied at school and struggles to find meaning in his journey through life. But he's also extraordinary. Bitten by a spider, he is able to fly through the air, gracefully climb walls and, with expanded powers, able to achieve feats of great strength.

Jesus is also a hybrid. Jesus is a combination of the human and the divine. In the gift of the Incarnation, Jesus is one of us. He experiences life as we do. He experienced rejection and was made an outcast. At the same time, Jesus is the Son of God whose divinity shines through in His healing the sick, raising the dead, feeding thousands with little. Ultimately, His divinity is found in His death and resurrection.

The question with both Spiderman and Jesus is the question of mission...of vocation. You remember that when Peter Parker finds his new powers, he taunts and belittles the classmate who has bullied him. But it is the wise Uncle Ben who challenges Peter. Uncle Ben asks what is Peter going to do with these powers. Is he going to settle scores, show off, and go on an ego trip? Or can Peter use these gifts in a program of love – a program of helping to protect and aid other people?

Jesus also strives to discover His mission, His vocation, in life. At the very dawn of His ministry, He journeys into the desert to be alone with God. For forty days and forty nights Jesus communes with God, faces temptation and prepares His heart to journey back to our world. Rather than use his power to hurt His enemies Jesus chooses to forgive them and remain focused on His mission...on what He had learned in the desert. Jesus would only bring the Good News of peace, forgiveness and God's unending love. That's what the Gospel today is all about -- Christ filled with compassion for the people who come to Him. Christ who is shepherd of our lives. Christ who teaches us about God's love.

And here's what is most important about this comparison between Spiderman and Jesus. Spiderman is simply a cartoon figure who has been recreated on film. Spiderman is imaginary. Peter Parker is nothing more than a creation in the mind of Stan Lee.

Jesus, on the other hand, is quite real. Truly human and truly divine, Jesus is the Son of God who came to teach us to follow His example and learn to be for others what He Himself has been for us. And it is Jesus who calls us today to Shepherd each other, to care for each other and to teach each other by the way we live what God's love is truly all about.