

On Bible Movies, and the Vine and the Branches

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I very rarely sit down to watch a bible movie. The last one I sat down to watch may very well have been *The Passion of the Christ*, and this film goes back twenty years now. Which is not to say that I don't enjoy bible movies. I love them, and — perhaps because I've read the Book — it's fun to see how the movie-makers portray the various biblical stories leading up to their Hollywood endings. In the days before Easter, I had an opportunity to watch a little bit of many such films.

I have a small TV in the kitchen. I always spend a lot of time there prepping food anyway, and I spent even more time there during Holy Week prepping food for the family members coming my way on the Great Sunday. I was hard-boiling eggs, making cookies, baking bread and lemon meringue pies. And as my good fortune would have it, Channel 32.2 was airing a whole slew of bible movies all along the way.

Let's see... I watched bits and pieces of *The Bible in the Beginning*, *The Ten Commandments*, *The Robe*, *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, *Jesus of Nazareth*, and *The Keys of the Kingdom* (which doesn't really count, but a great film anyway). I may have even watched a few more, because if it was on when I was in the kitchen, I was watching it. Like I said, though, I never really watched any of them. I never curled up on the couch with a bowl of popcorn to totally enjoy them.

Nonetheless, I got enough from all of them to increase my spiritual awareness of — and my appreciation for — everything leading up to the empty tomb that the whole world would be celebrating in just a few days. I saw Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying and looking back. I saw the centurion asking Jesus to cure his servant from far away with just a word. I saw Pilate interrogating Jesus and demanding, "What is the truth?"

But the scene that impacted me most was when Jesus dined with the tax collector, Matthew. Hot-headed Peter is opposed to this, of course. But he hovers in the doorway of Matthew's house anyway with sinners all around, and listens to Jesus tell the parable of the Prodigal Son. Speaking in the person of the father in the parable, Jesus says, "It is right to celebrate. Your brother was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, and is found..." It seems as if Jesus is speaking directly to Matthew and to Peter, but for different reasons, each.

And this scene speaks even more to me now, given today's Gospel. "I am the true vine," Jesus says, "and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit." I think of Matthew, listening to the parable, and coming to an understanding that **he** is the Prodigal Son. I think Peter, listening to the parable, and coming to an understanding that **he** is the disgruntled brother. I think of the pruning that I need every day — that perhaps each of us needs every day — to remain in the Christ. And I think of all those quotidian moments in the kitchen, taking in bits and pieces of the Story, hopeful for Hollywood endings for us all.