

The Passion of the Christ

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Recently I had the privilege of attending a pre-release preview of Mel Gibson's new movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. I know that many of you are probably planning on seeing this movie when it's released on Ash Wednesday, but don't worry, I'm not planning on telling you all about it. The intent of this article is just to share with you a bit of how it affected me and my perspective of Christ's Passion.

At the time of writing, it has been 3 days since I viewed the movie, so I've had a bit of time to reflect and meditate on what I saw. When I left the theatre on Saturday night I couldn't really say how I felt about the movie and when people have asked me what I could tell them about it, my response has mainly been that 'it's a very Catholic movie, it's not entertainment, it's very graphic and brutal in parts, it makes you think, and I think that it would be a good thing to see for Lent'.

It's really taken me until today to realize the effect it's *starting* to have on me. I say 'starting' because I think that this is only one step in this journey I'm on as a Catholic, as a Christian. But this journey started long before I saw the movie. My journey has been guided and influenced by a number of things I've read and experienced and some of these things have affected me more than others. What the movie has done for me, though, is given me a bit more of an understanding of the reality of what Christ suffered for me because of my sins.

Although the images depicted in the movie were very brutal at times, I think they provide a much clearer picture of the reality of the Passion than the sanitized pictures of Christ that we are usually presented with in our modern religious culture. The message so often depicted today in Christian art and writing is that 'God is Love' and 'Jesus Loves You', which certainly is true, but in doing so we've lost some of the magnificent imagery that tells us *just how much that love cost Him*. As Catholics, we are at least fortunate that the six weeks of Lent draws our attention, both as a Church and as individuals, back to this essential truth of our Faith.

Today is Tuesday, the day to pray the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary. Watching *The Passion of the Christ* has certainly given me a much deeper understanding of each of those mysteries. One of the prayer booklets I sometimes use while praying the rosary attaches virtues to be prayed for while meditating on each mystery and I have a much greater realization of the value of each of those virtues for my own life. I also belong to the Cursillo movement and we always pray the Stations of the Cross on the first evening of each Cursillo weekend. On the Women's Cursillo weekends, we often use a book called *Mary's Way of the Cross*, which offers very powerful and moving meditations on what Mary may have been thinking as she watched her son on His way to die on Calvary. Watching the movie put me right into the middle of that Way of the Cross and I'm sure that every time I pray it in the future, I will remember those vivid images I saw portrayed.

Watching *The Passion of the Christ* is, without a doubt, a thought provoking experience. If you're looking for something to do during Lent to give more depth to your preparations for Easter, this movie may be just what you need!

