

April 15, 2004

The PASSION: guidelines for discussing the movie, The Passion of the Christ

by Fr. Michael Guinan, OFM.

Mike Guinan has proposed four guidelines for discussing the movie The Passion:

1) It is The Passion according to Mel...this is not a criticism but a simple statement of fact; it is NOT the passion according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, though there is some clear dependence; and is NOT "the passion as it really was..." Almost every scene has elements with no basis in the gospels. It is his re-imagining of what he thinks it was like...and so no different from any other movie, painting, musical piece, etc. thereon.

2) It is (only) a movie...it is not a criterion of orthodoxy, reverence, or piety. You can not go and see it, or go— in which case, you can love it or hate it, or anything in between...any and all of the above can be based on religious and spiritual grounds...to pretend it is anything other than a movie is either arrogance or (more likely) idolatry.

3) It is possible to have too much devotion to The Passion...we were not saved by the passion, but by Jesus' incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension (check the creed, for example)...to isolate the passion from what precedes and follows it can lead to a very distorted, even sadomasochistic spirituality...also, too exclusive a focus on the passion is NOT traditional Christianity; it is a development within Western Christianity with roots in the late middle ages and a blossoming after the reformation.

4) If you were moved religiously by it, what does that mean? It should mean that you try to embody Christ and his gospel more and more in your life.