



Roots & Wings

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Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Within our contemporary understandings of meekness, we usually associate it with being weak, soft, or cowardly. In contrast, the Judeo-Christian tradition considers meekness to be our submissiveness to God. Building on the first beatitude regarding poverty of spirit, being meek is the recognition of our vulnerability and powerlessness without God in our lives. When we

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Matthew 5:5

are meek, we are humble before God, and we receive the patience and strength not to sin against God and our neighbors.

According to St. Augustine, the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of piety that helps us to be open to God's will and commandments in the face of our trials and problems.

This beatitude counters the sin of wrath. Anger can become a sin when we decide and will to be angry or when our anger becomes irrational. Meekness can steer us away from destructive and hateful anger that can destroy our relationship with God and others (Kreeft 1992).

Meekness therefore is a type of patience and selflessness that avoids harming others.

In terms of our relationships with others, to be meek requires

strength and courage to fight our inclinations to anger, violence, hatred or envy. In addition, meekness makes us sensitive to the sufferings of others, enables us to be forgiving, and leads to a world that is calmer and more peaceful. It even helps us to love those around us and see Christ in them, even those who bother us.

When Christ says that the meek will inherit the earth, it is counter-intuitive. While our culture thinks of inheritance in the terms of material possessions and wealth, our Christian faith sees an inheritance based on our faith, love and obedience to God. Because the meek have God as the center of their lives, they will not make the pursuit of material possessions, power or influence their focus. Therefore, as disciples of Christ we will inherit the earth and all that God has promised to us (Forest 1999).

Beatitude Fridays

IJP teacher, Mrs. Finnegan, is developing a curriculum based on the Beatitudes. She continues to work with several Junior High reading groups during Beatitude Fridays. The students are currently exploring the theme of Blessed are the Poor in Spirit. The students are talking about Mother Teresa and learning that Poor in Spirit doesn't mean she works with the poor but that internally she follows the Beatitude, Blessed are the Poor in Spirit for they shall see God. They are following a similar theme in their study of St. Frances.

December Prayer

Doing Your Will

Teach us to be generous, good Lord;
Teach us to serve you as You deserve;
To give and not to count the cost;
To fight and not to heed the wounds,
To toil and not to seek for rest,
To labor and not to ask for any reward;
Save that of knowing we do Your will
Amen.

St. Ignatius Loyola

What Should We Do With *The Golden Compass*

The release of the movie *The Golden Compass* has caused a deluge of discussion in the media about the author, an atheist, and whether his books are an attempt to promote atheism, especially among children.

The *Golden Compass* is the first in a trilogy entitled "His Dark Materials". It's a fantasy series involving a young girl as the hero who demonstrates courage as she battles to save children who are captured by an evil organization. The human characters in the book are constantly accompanied by animal daemons (pronounced "demons"). All the sources we examined, and there are many, agree that the books become progressively darker. The sources also agree that the film, based on the first book is a watered-down version of the book.

So should you allow your child to read the book and see the movie?

Based on our own reading of the book and a conversation with a reading specialist, we feel the book is not appropriate for most children under a junior high level because of its complexity and its dark, scary and violent themes. Whether it's acceptable based on the religious controversy, is a more difficult question and ultimately lies with the parent. Parents should know that the book makes explicit references to religious themes such as Original Sin and the authority (negatively portrayed) of a Magesterium. A troubling theme is that children are controlled by a Magesterium which bears a resemblance to the church. The series also references the killing of God. Certainly, if a child is going to read the book or see the movie, parents must be involved and engaged in conversation.

One of our IJP 8th graders who is reading the book and knows about the controversy, doesn't see any religious persuasion in the book. He certainly didn't feel the book was trying to advance atheism. Matt Lamb said the book is a fantasy, just like the *Harry Potter* series. Mrs. Gehm and one of her daughters saw the movie. Mrs. Gehm felt that you could interpret the movie in a different way depending on your age, background or knowledge of the controversy.

Our discussion of this book, which was published

more than 10 years ago, made us question how often we know the background of an author of fiction and whether knowing that background hurts or enhances our reading enjoyment. It also helped us realize that we welcome these types of conversations. We agree with the opinion of Scott Paeth, an assistant Professor Of Religious Studies at DePaul University who wrote in Sunday's (December 9 issue) *Southtown Star*: *A robust and self-confident faith has nothing to fear from 'The Golden Compass'*.

If any junior high students or parents are interested in holding a book discussion of *The Golden Compass*, please contact Mrs. Gehm.

Contributors to this article: Mrs. Gehm, Mrs. Finnegan, Jessica Gehm, and Matt Lamb.



The Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great.

"There are two lasting bequests we can hope
to give our children.

One is roots, the other wings."

Hodding Carter II