Notes from Fr. Nick

My Favorite Films

The city of Berkeley, not too long ago home to eight cinemas, is now down to one: the Rialto. This is a real loss for our city. While watching a movie at home is an enjoyable experience, nothing beats viewing a film in a crowded theatre. I hope one of our movie palaces will reopen before it, too, is converted to “luxury condominiums.”

Film is an interesting art form. Its rise to prominence, golden age, and decline span the twentieth century. Its technology was uniquely mechanical: motion picture film, lenses, cameras, projectors, synchronized sound and animation all required unique machines. Film captures literature, dance, theater, and numerous other art forms with a physical record of the event. Further, it uniquely combines au courant and performance art. Film also speaks to every taste, from high culture to our most lowbrow cravings. Like almost everything else, film is now succumbing to the digital age, but movies continue to engage as at all levels.

The all-time catalogue of film is so vast that choosing my favorite films is almost impossible. I will thus make my selections according to categories:

- **Drama**: *Through a Glass Darkly*, directed by Ingmar Bergman (1961). If not for the last five minutes of this film, it would be one of the most depressing stories of all time, about a family with a strong history of mental illness. Yet the father’s confession of faith at the end makes sitting through an hour-and-a-half of Swedish dialogue worth every minute.

- **Comedy**: *Young Frankenstein*. Mel Brooks’ and Gene Wilder’s riff on the 1931 film directed by James Whale, who in turn made a film from Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel. This film is not only extraordinarily funny, it is a homage to the entire genre. In addition to Wilder, Peter Boyle, Marty Feldman, Cloris Leachman, Teri Garr, Kenneth Mars, and Madeline Kahn deliver outstanding performances.

- **Animated**: *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* directed by Robert Zemeckis (1988). This mixture of live action and animation was a major innovation for its time and holds up well today; the reason is that the story is well written. No amount of special effects will save a poorly told story.

- **Film Noir**: *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, directed by Tay Garnett (1946), based on the novel of the same name by James M. Cain. When Lana Turner’s lipstick case rolls across the floor of a diner, you know the ride will be downhill all the way. Poor John Garfield doesn’t stand a chance!

It was hard to limit myself to these films, so here are some honorable mentions: *Grand Canyon, Tim’s Vermeer, Inside Out, North By Northwest*, and *The Big Lebowski* are more than worthwhile.

With no nearby movie theatres in Berkeley, why don’t we restart Movie Night here at Saint Mary Magdalen? In a similar way to liturgy, films can tell us a lot about who we are and why we’re bonded together.