THE YES MAN

A modern-day comedy about redemption

A few weeks ago Karen & I watched a quite funny romantic movie starring Jim Carrey called the “Yes Man.” The movie opens with him finding many ingenious ways to say “no” to life. You see Jim’s become a spectator in his own life. He’s lost his wife and now he’s about to lose everything else when a friend convinces him to attend a self-help seminar. There he’s browbeat into entering into a covenant, a covenant which requires him to say "yes" to everything for an entire year. While the movie does have some totally unnecessary sexual and profane content, the “Yes Man” is nonetheless a story of redemption.

“Yes” brings life anew

Jim Carrey’s new-found ability to say “yes” eventually leads him into discovering that he’s saying “yes” not because he has to... not because a covenant tells him to... but because he knows in his heart that he wants to. His heart leads him to live and love like he never knew possible. As Pope emeritus Benedict once said, this is the essence of our Lenten journey: "to 'become' Christian 'anew,' through a constant process of inner change and progress in the knowledge and love of Christ."\(^1\)

The Prodigal Son

And so it is that we turn now to our Gospel reading from Luke where we find Jesus telling the story of a father who lets go of a rebellious boy and welcomes home a son.

PG-13 / MA Audiences Suggested

Now you may be surprised to hear that the parable of the Prodigal Son is not an innocent coming of age story. It in fact starts off quite violently with
the younger son demanding his share of the family’s inheritance. This is more than saying “I cannot wait for you to die.” In their culture, the younger son’s demand means “you are dead to me now.”

It’s a parable after all

Yes it’s true the younger son eventually returns home starving to death. But being a parable as it is, we are left wondering… is the boy’s return merely a life-sustaining event or a new life-giving existence?

Rembrandt’s “Return of the Prodigal Son”

A painting called “Return of the Prodigal Son” provides us both insight and beautiful imagery of the son’s return home. Created in the 17th century by the great Dutch artist Rembrandt, the younger son is portrayed kneeling in front of his father with his head resting against his father’s chest. Both are bathed in a mysterious light and surrounded by the older son and onlookers.

The younger son

A close look at the younger son reveals a face with the sunken cheeks of one who has long hungered. He’s dressed only in a torn undergarments, stained yellow-brown perhaps from his time tending to the pigs. A broken sandal partially covers his right foot while scars mark a bare left foot. Clearly the younger son has travelled a long and humiliating journey searching for happiness.

Who among us need help in finding their way home?

The older son

Rembrandt’s portrayal of the older son shows us one who resembles his father in appearance: both have bearded faces and wear red cloaks. But there’s a distance – or is it a tension – between he and his father. The son is standing off to the side, partially hidden in a shadowy darkness. I can’t tell if the darkness is actively consuming him… or if that he’s backing into the darkness. Either way, it seems to me that the older son’s blind to the events at hand and where he’s going. He’s stuck in the world of no, a place
of complaints, anger, rules, and jealousy. I can hear him screaming “All these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders.”

The people in the shadows
Besides the older son, the shadows also hold two women standing behind the father, and a seated man staring into space and looking at no one in particular. These shadowy characters display indifference, curiosity, and daydreaming.

Who among us are still finding ways to stay close but not too close to God’s endless mercy? Who among us are holding on to some control over their journey?

The Father
Moving now to Rembrandt’s portrayal of the father, we see a bent-over old man embracing his kneeling son. The father’s hands are incredibly revealing. His left hand appears strong and muscular. There’s a certain indentation around his thumb that makes it appear as if he’s applying pressure in a firm yet gentle grip. The father’s right hand conversely seems to be caressing, offering consolation and comfort. Altogether I can hear the father affirming: this son of mine “… was dead, and has come to life again. He was lost and has been found.”

We too celebrate
The parable of the Prodigal Son ends with the slaughter of the fatted calf and much rejoicing. We too share in God’s joy of reuniting with all prodigal sons and daughters when celebrate in the memorial feast of Holy Communion.

Christ does not put up roadblocks
You see we don’t come to this table because our Savior reshapes the world by turning away the lost or forsaken or creating barriers to entry into His Church. We come to this table because He freely grants amnesty, I repeat amnesty, to every single one of us sitting here today, just like Peter and Paul, the woman caught in adultery and the tax collector who got rich off
Forgiveness and Healing

So why do we keep thinking that we can protect ourselves from either real or imaginary threats or hurts? Why do we deny ourselves, even in the tiniest of ways, the power of forgiveness and healing that every single one of us possesses and that our God calls us to freely bestow on others?

Come be reconciled to the Lord

It’s never too late to be reconciled to the Lord. Make it a point to come to one of the upcoming Lenten reconciliation services. There, kneel before the Father, put an ear against his chest, and listen – without interruption – to the heartbeat of God. Then with hearts beating as one, say yes! like Christ Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. Accept your Father’s unconditional mercy and forgiveness; reclaim your full dignity; become a new creation.

Tom di Stefano
Permanent Deacon
St. John Neumann Catholic Church
Catholic Diocese of Richmond


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1 Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, February 21, 2007, A Year with Pope Benedict, XVI.

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