

Spiderman 3: Sin is a Monster



The drama of sin and redemption are at the heart of the story in Spiderman 3. There are so many easy parallels. Venom, in this episode of Spiderman, is the great villain. It begins with Peter Parker and Mary Jane in an Eden-like setting, resting in a web as they gaze at the stars, happy and in love. Unknown to them an alien intruder enters the park from outer space. It is a black gooey substance later analyzed and called an aggressive symbiote by Parker's scientist teacher. This thing attaches to Peter as they leave the garden-like park.

VENOMOUS EFFECTS OF SIN

This intrusion of “sin” is only the beginning. Soon Peter discovers it and becomes enamored with the power, exhilaration and good feelings that it gives him. He allows it to form a black Spiderman suit that he chooses to wear. At first he wears it only on occasion, then almost exclusively. He becomes addicted to the black suit. The effects of putting on this alter-ego (his sinful nature), are numerous. His personality becomes dark, brooding and aggressive.

This begins to have a disastrous effect on his relationships especially with MJ his girlfriend. The insidious nature of sin and the web of evil and destruction that it spins along with its life-sucking, parasitical quality are all very clearly and cleverly demonstrated as the plot builds.

As Parker becomes aware of the price he has to pay for wearing the suit the theme of free-will enters in. He seems to become afraid of the black suit. Shame, conscience and denial are all on display. Peter decides to put the suit away and go back to his old self but the temptation proves too strong and he soon comes back to his sinful ways. He later acknowledges that this is a choice, however difficult it may be, "Whatever battle rages within us, I've learned that everyone has a choice about who they become. We always have a choice". This theme of free-will reminds us of Spiderman's motto, "With Great Power comes Great responsibility".

Whoever comes into contact with this parasitical symbiote changes for the worse. There are four ways that a person changes due to sin (the black goo)...There is a loss of innocence, a burst of egoism where one becomes self-centered, a justification for vengeance, and a loss of identity. This last point came to a head when after Peter, who is secretly wearing the suit underneath his civilian clothes, embarrasses MJ. In an act of vengeance he humiliates her and then he gets violent. MJ looks at him and asks one haunting question. This question is echoed by many sinners who find themselves to be lost in depravity, "Who are you?" The full disorienting power of sin clouds Parkers' thinking as he responds, "I don't know".

Finally, Spiderman in his black suit swings across the city to a bell tower. He seems to be in a reflective mode as he looks at and studies the black suit on his hands; it reminds us of an examination of conscience. He enters the church (a

Catholic Church) and the tolling bells begin to have a loosening effect that the suit has over him. The more the sound of the bells reverberates the more the black goo seems to lose its power until finally Parker rids himself of the gooey black suit and it falls away. (This scene unmistakably speaks of the Sacrament of Reconciliation).

RIDDING OURSELVES OF SIN

As the goo falls down the bell tower it consumes another character, Eddie Brock. Eddie has a great predisposition to evil. His moral compass is already broken so when the parasite of sin (the black suit) clings on to him it amplifies what proclivity to sin it finds in its host. Now, the plot has a super villain: Venom. The name is reminiscent of the serpent in the garden and the dangerous, slow creeping, life-draining power of sin in the world.

After the church scene and the grace received (the bell sound) to rid himself of his identity-altering black suit, Peter is shown taking a shower. This signifies the restoration of sanctifying grace and his identity as a child of God and a force for good.

There are some interesting sub-plots in the film that I will leave alone but in the end Spiderman, with some help, is victorious over Venom. The final scene has Spiderman sling his web at Eddie Brock and as he sounds the bells (grace) Eddie is temporarily pulled from his sinful alter-ego, Venom. Eddie however, resists this separation and in a very powerful commentary on the force of addiction breaks away from this effort of Spiderman to save him and he chooses the black goo even at the cost of his own life.

This film sets up a more interesting and imaginative portrayal of sin that helps us to see the relevance of the categories of sin in our own lives... Mortal and Venial, Original and Actual, Omission and Commission. When we think of sin as a creature that wants to devour us and not as a list of rules about exciting and fun things that we shouldn't do, it penetrates much deeper into the imagination and in the psyche. If my students think of Venom when they think of their sins then I have succeeded. This is what I think the first portrayal of sin teaches as well. In the story of Cain and Abel God tells Cain that sin is a predator crouching and waiting to pounce on him. "...sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen 4:7).

Not only is this personification of sin as a monster or super-villain biblical but it highlights the epic battle that Jesus waged through his great act of love on the cross which takes away the sins of the world.

It was only in a church that Peter Parker was able to deal with his sin problem and tap into the grace needed and the grace that Jesus earned for us.