

DISCERNMENT AT THE MOVIES

*Spider-Man 2*¹

Kids like Henry need a hero.

Courageous, self-sacrificing people, setting examples for all of us...

I believe there's a hero in all of us, that keeps us honest,
gives us strength, makes us noble, and finally allows us to die with pride,
even though sometimes we have to be steady,
and give up the thing we want the most. Even our dreams.

-- Aunt May, from the script of *Spider-Man 2*

Discernment Key to Watching the Film

In *Spider-Man 2*, Peter Parker struggles with his calling--whether or not to be Spider-Man. Throughout the second act of the film, Peter goes through the steps of discernment. Even though there is no overt reference to God in the film, each of us can identify with Peter's struggle to find the core of his identity and mission/purpose in life.

As you watch the film, pay attention to the theme of discernment: how Peter discerns whether or not he is meant (called) to be Spider-Man.

DON'T READ ANY FURTHER UNTIL AFTER you've seen the film.

Questions contain spoilers.

After Watching the Film

Here are some topics and questions that you may wish to think about, talk about with others, and even bring to prayer.

Key scenes to think about further and discuss:

- After MJ's engagement announcement, Peter's dream with Uncle Ben: "You always have a choice."
- Peter's relief at letting go of being Spider-Man.
- Peter's struggle to let Spider-Man's responsibilities go. Finally in the fire, he saves the child but not the other person.
- Aunt May's speech.
- Coffee shop conversation with MJ.
- On the web with MJ after he rescues her—his final affirmation, "I'll always be Spider-Man."

¹ *Spider-Man 2* (2004), directed by Sam Raimi, starring Tobey Maguire. Screenplay by Alvin Sargent. Screen story by Alfred Gough & Miles Millar and Michael Chabon. Based on comic book by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko.

To think about/share:

1. What was your favorite moment of the film? How did it connect with Peter's discernment journey? How does it connect with your discernment?
2. As Aunt May says, all of us are called to be heroes.
 - What are your gifts, your passions, your dreams?
 - How might God be calling you to live most fully?
3. The most important part of any discernment is to seek to do what God wants, and the process of discernment can help us to purify our motivations. No matter what we choose, there will be sacrifice involved. All vocations are vocations to love, and love always involves giving one's self away.

To think about/share:

- What moment in Peter Parker's struggle to discern rang most true for you? What about it resonated in you?
4. At one point in the film, Peter says to his Uncle Ben: "I can't live your dreams any more. I want a life of my own." Every life choice requires sacrifices. Sometimes we mistakenly think that God wants whatever requires the most sacrifice from us. But really, what God wants for us is what will ultimately make us happiest. At the end of the film, Peter finally understands that the loneliness he envisions as part of Spider-Man's life isn't an essential part of his call, but a self-imposed limitation. He will have to make sacrifices as Spider-Man, but being alone all the time isn't one of them.

To think about/share:

- Do you feel that you need to give up what you want in order to follow your true vocation?
 - What are you struggling with the most in your discernment right now?
 - Are there steps you can take to resolve this struggle: ask advice, try out a particular aspect of this life, etc.?
5. What discernment steps did Peter take in the film?
 - Take time to reflect on the circumstances of one's own life
 - Listen to the desires of one's heart
 - Listen to the needs of the world and one's own specific circumstances
 - Test out a preliminary decision
 - Reflect on what gives true peace of heart
 - Seek wise advice of a mentor or spiritual director
 6. How did Peter come to his final decision in the film? What was the most important step Peter took in his discernment?

To think about/share:

- How can you listen more attentively to God's call in your life?
- What is the next step that you can take to live in a greater spirit of discernment?

Conclude by praying the *Our Father*.