

Marvel's "Daredevil" weighs questions of faith and violence

By Cameron Rogers

Editor's Note: Cameron Rogers, a summer intern with the Catholic Review, is a rising senior at Hood College in Frederick and 2013 graduate of Archbishop Spalding High School.

Introspection on one's faith can come from the strangest and unlikeliest of places – in my case, from an action-packed Netflix series called "Daredevil."

Based on the Marvel Comics series of the same name, "Daredevil" follows Matt Murdock, a blind lawyer who uses the legal system to protect his home in the New York neighborhood of Hell's Kitchen by day, and patrols the city as a relentless vigilante by night. Aside from his lack of sight, one of Murdock's defining traits is his inner struggle between his Catholic upbringing and his desire to do harm to the people that are corrupting his city.



This is the cover of the comic book "Daredevil." (CNS photo/Marvel)

Questions about the justification of violence and God's place in tragedies are never easy to answer. Can a person ever truly be in the right when they are hurting other people, even if they are battling against those who have committed far worse transgressions?

After I had binge-watched the series with a friend, I found myself asking about those very topics. We are meant to cheer on Matt as he beats down mobsters and other criminals in well-choreographed and downright brutal fight scenes, but I could not help but be unsettled at the nature of it all. His character walks a fine line between hero and villain, and minor quirks of his during action sequences hint at a darker side within him that he is trying to suppress.

"Daredevil" is far darker than any movie within the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The fight scenes are graphic and bloody, there is frequent cursing and its storylines are more gritty than even the most realistic Marvel movie. I would not recommend it to children or younger teenagers for the explicit content alone. However, I would hardly consider that a negative aspect of "Daredevil." The mature nature of the show gives it room to bring up concepts and ideas that would be otherwise unfit for a Marvel property.

In between the legal cases and moments of vigilante justice, there are discussions about theological matters. Matt and Father Lantom, his priest, talk about the existence and purpose of Satan over cups of coffee, and discuss whether taking a life can be justified when a villain seems unstoppable in his domination of the city.

“Why did He put the devil in me?” Matt asks Father Lantom. “Why do I feel it in my heart and my soul clawing to be let out if that’s not all part of God’s plan?”

As one of the few explicitly Catholic characters on the show, Matt demonstrates a surprising dedication to and openness about his religious beliefs. He goes to confession in the opening scene of the first episode, periodically talks about his inner turmoil with his local priest, and at one point frantically prays when a close friend is gravely injured.

As conflict is the soul of drama, none of the Catholic characters are perfect in their practices. In addition to Matt’s flaws, there is the black-and-white morality of Frank Castle, a former Catholic and vigilante who kills criminals under the media-created name of “The Punisher.” The first four episodes of Season 2 hinge on their battles – both physical and verbal – over the sanctity and value of human life, mirroring current debates about abortion and euthanasia.

While the Catholic belief on protecting every life is given its merits, just as much weight is given to the argument that some people deserve to die for their actions. Neither side is given a definitive edge over the other, but the sympathetic atmosphere around Frank’s killings flies in the face of every lesson the church gives on human life. At the same time, the viewer will not dismiss Frank’s philosophy outright, due to its undeniable effectiveness.

The latter half of Season 2 is dragged down by a convoluted plot line involving ancient secret societies and mysterious living weapons. Thankfully, there are still moments of theological and philosophical analysis, even though they are less frequent than before.

When the dust settles and the brawls end, “Daredevil” offers few hard answers and more introspective questions. I thoroughly enjoyed its journey, however, and look forward to its third season and the spinoff series for “The Punisher.” With any luck, they will continue to raise questions about faith and personal beliefs against a backdrop of inner struggles and vigilante justice.

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