

The Pastor's Column - August 3rd, 2023



Barbie and the Bomb

"What did you think?" asked the woman sitting next to me as the credits rolled at the end of Oppenheimer. "Impressive," I said, "But it's no Barbie." I had no business making that observation as I hadn't seen Barbie yet. So, Fr. Ron Franco and I went to see it this past Monday. We tried to wear the most appropriately pink colored clothing we had without breaking out the Gaudete Sunday vestments. Fr. Ron and I laughed and giggled all the way home recalling all the silliness in the film. As he noted later: "Sometimes it's good to go to the movies just to have fun..."

That's the point of summer movies: to have fun, take a vacation from reality and be transported to another world. This July, droves of people have packed the movie theaters for Barbie and Oppenheimer and not one superhero is involved. There is hope!

So as promised, here's my take on "Barbieheimer." (If you are over this conversation, skip down to the next item!)

The good news is that both movies are worthy of your time and consideration. On the surface they couldn't be more different. One is foreboding and dark, the other effervescent and pink. And yet, they have more in common than you think. Both are engaging, well-acted, visually stunning, and leave you with much to ponder. You can't help but be overwhelmed, entranced, and repulsed by the nuclear bomb blast at Los Alamos. In Barbie, there is a deep and impactful monologue on being a woman that I didn't see coming. Both movies are packed with other details that you can't possibly absorb. Both have endless talking and war scenes, but the time passes quickly in both. At least weapons in Barbie are all plastic. I didn't nap during either movie, which for me is the equal to two thumbs up.

Both movies are a reminder that on this side of heaven, you can't have it both ways. In the first movie, the (almost exclusively male) scientific community, led by J. Robert Oppenheimer (played by Cillian Murphy) seeks to advance the knowledge of quantum physics, and then are crestfallen when their big discovery, that is The Bomb, is put in the hands of those whose moral choices they question. In the other, "Stereotypical Barbie" played by Margot Robbie must choose between her fabulous fantasy world where she and all the other Barbies are in charge leaving Ken and company to beg for their attention and the world the way it really is where women are challenged to find equality with men.

While the title characters grow in self-awareness, they both gain a deeper and sadder realization of the fallen nature of our society. Of all the places encountered: Barbieland, Venice Beach, Century City, Los Alamos, Berkeley, and Washington DC, there is not one appeal to God or any Higher Power. That's not allowed in Hollywood! Worse, humans and Barbie have been deified and embark on paths that are less than satisfying for people of faith, especially with so much at stake! Just as disheartening is the competition for power and control on display in both movies. It cries out for a Savior who can redeem us from our worst selves and transform the flawed constructs of which we humans are so fond.

As you can intuit, Barbie has a happy ending. She overcomes rampant patriarchy, crass corporate greed, a pink existential crisis, and cellulite, while Oppenheimer painfully reminds us we are haunted by the specter of nuclear annihilation. If you have a choice, see Barbie second. You will sleep better, I think....

So, that's all I have to say on this great cultural moment of our summer. Now, I am going to take a brief summer break at the Paulist Summer House in Lake George this coming weekend. See you on the weekend of August 12 & 13.

God Bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Eric". The letters are cursive and fluid.

Rev. Fr. Eric Andrews, CSP
Pastor, Church of St. Paul the Apostle (NYC)

Cautionary Note: *Oppenheimer* is rated R and contains graphic sexuality, nudity and language which is not suitable for those under age 18. *Barbie* is rated PG-13 and has some suggestive references and some questionable language. It also has a lot of glitter and pink.