

If This Doesn't Motivate You for Christ, Nothing Will

When Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* released on February 25, 2004, I was one of the millions who flocked to the theater to see it on opening night. The film was an instant success as it grossed nearly \$84 million its first weekend.

The pre-release hype was incredible, and many critics panned the film for various reasons, including its brutality, as my friend Lee Grady described in his *Fire in My Bones* column this week. My question to the naysayers is, and was at the time, "what do you think a Roman crucifixion was like for Jesus, an amusement park ride?"

Because of its nature, it's difficult not to remember almost every detail of that film, including the fact that it was done in the Hebrew language with English subtitles. I remember the Jewish community's objection to the film.

I felt it was a bit creepy that a demon would follow Jesus throughout the movie, but I wonder if that's what life was like for Him. And certainly to Gibson the details of Jesus' flogging and crucifixion were as realistic as it was portrayed. I do remember that, throughout most of the movie, my hands were gripped tightly to the theater chair.

For those of you that have yet to see it, believe me, it is that intense. Much more so than some of my other classic favorites like *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, *Jesus of Nazareth* or even *The Jesus Film*. I just finished watching *Jesus of Nazareth*, a six-plus hour mini-series that I saw originally on television when I was 11. That film had a huge impact on me then and still does.

Even the most recent films of the life of Christ, like *Son of*

God, can't match the graphic depiction of Jesus' ordeal in *The Passion*. In 2004, Gibson told that it was his intention to make the film as realistic and human as possible.

"I don't think other films have tapped into the real force of this story," he said. "This film will show the passion of Jesus Christ just the way it happened. ... There is no gratuitous violence in this film. ... I think we have gotten too used to seeing pretty crucifixes on the wall and we forget what really happened. We know that Jesus was scourged, that He carried His cross, that He had nails put through His hands and feet, but we rarely think about what this means."

What it means is that Jesus suffered, and he suffered horribly. I truly believe in my heart that the flogging scene is exactly what took place, if not worse. They didn't just whip Him, they used the cat-o'-nine-tails, a multi-tailed whip designed to lacerate the skin and cause intense pain.

During the flogging scene, the Romans stopped and apparently believed Jesus, played by Jim Caviezel, had suffered enough. But then Jesus stood up as if to say, "more." That's when it became really brutal. Jesus wanted to show that he had to suffer more than that to take the sins of the whole world upon Himself.

I remember my first thought was, "are you kidding me? More?" If that doesn't motivate you for Christ, then nothing will."

Jesus was willing to take all of that on, including the horrible crucifixion itself, just to save me?

Think about that on this Good Friday. And think about it long and hard. Jesus suffered that terrible pain—which, undoubtedly, no other human being could have—so that we didn't have to.

Think about that the next time your flesh prompts you to do

something of which you know Jesus wouldn't approve. Think about that when the Holy Spirit prompts you to serve, but you have other plans. Think about that when you are sad and discouraged, that someone would love you that much.

And as I always like to say, "there is that." {eoa}