

I don't see a lot of movies, but when I do go to the theater it's often to see a film like the ones Daniel Keating talks about in his book, The Adventure of Discipleship (which we handed out at the beginning of Lent). I see Superhero movies – Captain America, Black Panther, Batman; or, a few years back, all The Lord of the Rings and the Narnia films. And when I'm waiting for those movies to start – most of the trailers are also for such films. Hollywood makes so many of them because they make lots of money. Why are we suckers for Superheroes?

The superhero is usually someone who is human, but also more than human. They are people we can relate to – but also greater than we are – so we often secretly dream about being like them. That sounds a lot like Jesus. He is completely human, but also God. He is weak like us in His human nature. He weeps, and thirsts. But He also performs miracles and defeats the demons.

But there's the catch with that similarity between Jesus and Superman – we can expect God to act like a superhero. In fact, we're drawn to those characters precisely because they seem like the false conception of God Keating says we all too often have. In The Adventure of Discipleship Keating mentions that many of us who claim to be Christian actually believe in a religion best described as Moral Therapeutic Deism, meaning we think God is good and watches over us, but doesn't get involved in our lives unless things are really going badly. That's when we call for help and God helps us, and then backs off until next time. Kind of sounds like a superhero movie's plot, doesn't it?

Think about it: here is how Keating summarizes a typical superhero plot. "An evil villain arises who endangers the wider populace, (usually the whole human race), and normal law enforcement has no chance against the superpowers of the villain. And so the superhero appears on the scene . . . to do battle with the villain and overcome him (or her) . . . And when the superhero has triumphed

. . . equilibrium and peace is restored to the world – and the superhero goes off into seclusion or attempts to carry on “normal life” until a new foe arises.”

Practically speaking, we may live as though Jesus is like Superman, but that isn't what Jesus is all about. He isn't a superhero. Yes, there are certainly similarities, as I mentioned. And on Easter it's good to celebrate the power of the risen Christ. But this Easter I want to stress the differences between the superheroes and Jesus Christ.

It's all about what Jesus promises us. He does not promise us a restoration of the way things were before. Think about the last volume of The Lord of the Rings. It's entitled, The Return of the King. At the end of the long trilogy Aragorn, the ancient heir of the Kings of Men, is restored to the throne after a thousand years of exile by his forefathers. Peace reigns once more – but only for a while. So it is with most superhero movies. With superhero franchises there's always a sequel, because another villain always rises up to threaten Gotham City

or Metropolis. And Batman or Superman always restores the peace and justice: again and again. The point of the superhero is to bring things back to normal.

But that is not what the risen Christ promises. Certainly, there is violence, sin, and injustice in our world – and Jesus battles those. But His goal is not a return to normal. Jesus and His gospel promise a completely new world and a new life beyond this normal life. At the end of the Bible, in the book of Revelation 21:5, Jesus says, “Behold, I make all things new.” That is His goal for us.

How many of us, when things get bad, hope that God will restore things to how they used to be? We want to return to some past age in our country’s history. Or you want to return to an earlier phase of your marriage. Perhaps you want the relationship between you and your children to be what it was like in the past. Or we want our prayer life to return to that time of consolation we remember when we were so close to God. “Come, Jesus,” we pray, “make it like it was.”

But it won't happen, because Easter is not the Return of the King. It's something better. Jesus rising from the dead is the end of the old world and the establishment in our souls of a New Kingdom ruled by Christ the King. When we allow Jesus into our lives, with all the graces He wants to bring us, we are transformed into someone new. Our community, our marriage, our family, our souls, are not merely restored. They become divinized.

Perhaps earlier in life we fantasized about flying like superman or fighting like Batman. But Jesus isn't dealing in fantasies. He wants to make our transformation into Him really happen.

On this Easter let us ask ourselves, "What do we expect from God?" Whatever our answer, it's probably too little. Jesus is greater than any superhero. His point in becoming one of us, and dying for us, and rising from the dead on the first Easter – is for us to share in the life of God Himself. He came to transform us and make us a new creation in which we could remain together with Him forever.