

Ask Mason & Teo



I want a tattoo. Is that bad?

Dear Mason and Teo, Howzit. Many of my friends are getting tattoos. I'd like to get one too. I go to church every Sunday and I'm Catholic. Is it bad? What about body piercing? Is it okay? (Body Art Partiality)

Dear Body Art Partiality, "Body art" — getting tattooed or your body pierced — has become prevalent in the past decade or so. These methods of body decoration were brought over into Western culture primarily during the World War campaigns in the Pacific from the pagan Orient. The only reference to tattoos in Scripture is found in Leviticus 19:28: "Do not lacerate your bodies for the dead and do not tattoo yourselves. I am the Lord."

We could not find references to this verse in the important magisterial documents of the church or in the writings of the Church Fathers. According to many Bible commentaries, this prohibition isn't part of the unchanging moral law, but of "ritual law" specific to the Old Testament. Many Scripture commentators believe this prohibition was intended to separate God's chosen people, Israel, from their pagan Canaanite neighbors who may have used cuttings in the flesh and tattoo marks in pagan idol worship.

The church does not teach that Scripture forbids tattooing and body piercing. However, she does offer principles by which to discern whether it is sinful to be tattooed or have one's body pierced.

The Fifth Commandment — "You shall not kill" — requires that we respect human life. That includes respecting the dignity of persons, their souls, their health and their bodies and to safeguard peace (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2258-2330).

"Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good." (CCC 2288) "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1Corinthians 6:19)

Your body is sacred and must be respected. A particular act of tattooing or body piercing could be more or less sinful depending upon the risk to health and harm to the body. If tattooing or piercing involves mutilation — cutting or maiming a part of the body — then the act is immoral (CCC 2297).

Catholics must also consider the common good. In some cultures, tattooing is a rite of passage to adulthood. The common good practically demands that a person be tattooed. In some Polynesian cultures, for example, it was once a widespread custom to tattoo the eldest son or daughter of the local ruling family.

Tattoos whose words and images are diabolical or demonic harm the souls of others and would be considered immoral. Be aware that some body piercing sends implicit messages, for example, consent for a homosexual lifestyle or other unchaste acts. Such body art would indicate approval of sin and would thereby scandalize others.

Tattoos or body piercing can also lead into the sin of vanity if used to draw excessive attention to yourself.

Before getting a tattoo or piercing your body consider reflecting on the following questions: Why do I want to get a tattoo or have my body pierced? Does it involve any risk to my health? Would this act mutilate me — that is, would it inhibit the proper functioning of my skin or another organ of my body?

Is the full message of my tattoo compatible with love of God and neighbor? Does it convey an unchaste message? If I am under the authority of my parents, would this act be an act of disobedience that would violate the Fourth Commandment?

Would this act needlessly offend my family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and thus hinder my ability to lead others to Christ and his church? Can the expense involved be justified in light of the needs of my family, the church, and the poor?

Being made in the "image and likeness" of God, we are meant to be treated with care and with great dignity, not disfigured or maltreated. The beauty of the human body must be kept and cultivated and continue to be an expression of the deeper beauty of the soul which houses the Holy Spirit.

You are God's masterpiece. May you come to a prayerful and prudent decision with regard to tattooing or piercing your body. The choice is yours.

Mason and Teo Matsuda are parishioners of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Ewa Beach and have served in youth and young adult ministries for years. Write to them at yaadvice@yahoo.com.

Got politics?

College-age voters expected to continue their involvement



CNS photo/Jason Reed, Reuters

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON

President-elect Barack Obama's call for unity during his Nov. 4 acceptance speech before a huge crowd at Chicago's Grant Park resonated with students at St. John's University in the New York borough of Queens, N.Y.

"That unity is precisely what I saw on campus just minutes after the election concluded," wrote Gregory Leporati in a Nov. 5 editorial in the university's newspaper, *The Torch*. Hundreds of students of various races, ages and political affiliations watched Obama's acceptance speech on two big television screens in a campus hall of the Vincentian-run university.

Brian Browne, the university's assistant vice president for government relations, said it was not a coincidence that these students were together as the presidential campaign came to a close. They had been working together for months.

Students from the university's College Democrats and College Republicans groups approached faculty members over the summer to organize campus events such as voter registration drives and candidate forums.

Browne told Catholic News Service Nov. 6 that he had never seen this kind of election enthusiasm on campus. He also was impressed with how well the students from different political parties worked together.

When asked if he thought this momentum would continue, he said students were already asking about conducting forums for next year's New York City mayoral race, so he was pretty sure the political fervor was not about to fade.

He attributed the nationwide draw of students to the presidential

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race in large part to the appeal of President-elect Obama. "Obama really did a good job of tapping into" the country's young people, he said, noting his strengths in communicating to them especially through the Internet.

Once Obama got word to them, these students also got on board with making phone calls and canvassing votes to spread the candidate's campaign message. And on Election Day they voted in record numbers.

In fact, more young people voted in the 2008 presidential election than in any other presidential election. An estimated 24 million Americans ages 18 to 29 voted this year, an increase of at least 2.2 million from the last presidential election, according to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University in Medford, Mass.

The 2008 youth vote was 18 percent of the entire electorate and 66 percent of young voters cast their ballot for Obama.

Peter Levine, director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, told reporters Nov. 5 the high percentage of young voters raises interesting questions for policymakers to consider how to continue to tap into this enthusiasm and keep these voters involved in politics or community service in the future.

Elizabeth Carr, Catholic religious

adviser at Amherst College in Amherst, Mass., and Smith College in Northampton, said she met with several students from both colleges after the election. Above all, she said, the students were inspired by the election.

Many of them told her that Obama had engaged them unlike other candidates and he also encouraged them to take an active role in the political process.

These students, Carr said in an e-mail, "have come of age during a period marked by war and economic downturn. They are concerned about their futures, jobs after graduation (and) about the economy." She also noted that many of them see the economy as a moral issue.

She said today's students tend to have a "holistic ethical approach" in their worldview and they "see the connection between poverty and the abortion rate, for example, and are concerned about the environment and peace as moral concerns."

When asked if this politically-involved youth movement would continue, Smith student Colleen O'Toole told Carr it depended on how well the politicians delivered what they promised. If they failed, O'Toole said, "young people may lose faith in the political system and become resigned to cynicism and doubt."

Another Smith student told Carr she was sure that students who voted this year would stay involved.

"People vote because they care," the student said. "What happens in government affects them. We realize, 'Yes, we can make a difference.' We do have the power to change the world. Once (we are) started in the political process, we will continue."

Contributing to this story was Eileen Casey.

Movie reviews



Changeling (Universal): Gripping true-life drama set in 1928 Los Angeles recounting how the young son of a single telephone operator (a fine Angelina Jolie) goes missing, and how the corrupt Los Angeles police department tries to silence her when she protests that the child they subsequently return to her is not her son, while a crusading Presbyterian minister (John Malkovich) takes up her cause. Clint Eastwood directs with trademark austerity. Though the subject matter is often grim, with some necessarily unpleasant scenes, the story has historical significance as the case led to reform. There's also inspiration in the mother's stubborn determination to continue the search for the boy against all odds. Strong if nongraphic scenes of violence, murder, nonsexual child abuse, patient abuse in a mental institution, an execution, some rough language and profanity. A-III (R)

Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa (DreamWorks/Paramount): Four animal friends (voices of Ben Stiller, Chris Rock, David Schwimmer and Jada Pinkett Smith), stranded on the titular island, try to fly home to their New York City zoo, but land instead on an African savanna where they must continue to adapt to life in the wild. Though occasionally marred by slightly crass humor, this generally amiable animated comedy, co-written and directed by Eric Darnell and Tom McGrath, is visually lush and offers lessons about the need for self-confidence and the true nature of love. Also shown in Imax.

Mild innuendo, a few slightly crude gags and some thematic elements that might frighten very young children. A-II (PG)

Rachel Getting Married (Sony Classics): Tumultuous drama about a young woman (a fine Anne Hathaway) who is released from a drug rehabilitation center for a weekend to attend her sister's (Rosemarie DeWitt) interracial wedding, resulting in a volatile reunion with friends and relatives, including her divorced parents (Bill Irwin and Debra Winger), and the groom's (Tunde Adebimpe) African-American family. Directed by Jonathan Demme in almost docu-

mentary style with lengthy set pieces, the film — from a screenplay by Jenny Lumet (daughter of director Sidney Lumet) — ultimately presents a strong affirmation of marriage and family despite some bitter conflicts and long-festering resentments that rise to the surface, and there are excellent performances from the ensemble cast. Much conversational rough and crude language and some profanity, a fleeting but graphic nonmarital sexual encounter, a brief scene of strong domestic violence, drug references, pregnancy out of wedlock and divorced characters. L (R)

Ratings

Conference of Catholic Bishops Office for Film & Broadcasting classifications: A-I — general patronage; A-II — adults and adolescents; A-III — adults; L — limited adult audience, films whose problematic content many adults would find troubling; O — morally offensive.

Motion Picture Association of America ratings: G — general audiences, all ages admitted; PG — parental guidance suggested, some material may not be suitable for children; PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13; R — restricted, under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian; NC-17 — no one 17 or under admitted; NR — no rating.

- AppaloosaA-III (R)
- Beverly Hills ChihuahuaA-I (PG)
- Body of LiesL (R)
- Burn After ReadingL (R)
- ChangelingA-III (R)
- City of Ember.....A-I (PG)
- The DuchessA-III (PG-13)
- The ExpressA-III (PG-13)
- FireproofA-II (PG)
- Ghost TownA-III (PG-13)
- The Haunting of Molly Hartley.....L (PG-13)
- High School Musical 3: Senior YearA-I (G)
- The House BunnyA-III (PG-13)
- Journey to the Center of the Earth.....A-I (PG)
- Madagascar: Escape 2 AfricaA-II (PG)
- Max Payne.....L (PG-13)
- Rachel Getting Married.....L (R)
- Role ModelsO (R)
- Pride and GloryL (R)
- Saw VO (R)
- Soul MenL (R)
- The Secret Life of Bees .A-III (PG-13)
- Traitor.....A-III (PG-13)
- Tropic Thunder.....O (R)
- WALL-EA-I (G)
- What Just Happened.....L (R)
- W.....A-III (PG-13)
- Zack and Miri Make a Porno ..O (R)

CD REVIEW



Powerful songs, great messages

Review by Bubba Flores
Special to the Herald

Artist: Matt Maher
CD: "Empty and Beautiful" (2008)

I have listened to most of Matt Maher's albums and have loved every one. His latest, "Empty and Beautiful," does not disappoint. From the first line of "Great is your faithfulness, O God" to the last note in "Empty and Beautiful," I found powerful songs with great messages. Written, performed, and produced by the artist, "Empty and Beautiful" celebrates a greater relationship with the Lord.

As a musician myself, I continued to be impressed, song after song, by Maher's melodies and words. His lyrics truly speak to me as a young Catholic. The excellent "For Your Glory" reminded me that everything I am, everything I do, is for the greater glory of God.

Maher turns out upbeat tunes like "Your Grace is Enough" and "Shine Like the Son," and slow prayerful numbers like "Unwavering." Listen on the way to work, or at a youth night, or just alone by yourself praying. You will be enriched.

Maher's music is hard to put into a genre and that's what I like about him. Some songs have a rock-and-roll feel. A few are purely acoustic — just him, a guitar and some strings — very beautiful and prayerful. Maher is versatile and original and I don't think I could compare him to another artist. If I had to label his music, I would say it had a pop-rock sound with a strong Christian message.

An acclaimed musician and singer, Maher has earned many awards and honors including "Best New Artist of the Year" in 2003 from the United Catholic Music and Video Association and, in 2004, the Unity Award for Praise and Worship Song of the Year for "I Love You, Lord."

He performed at World Youth Day in Sydney this past summer, and at previous World Youth Days. Maher does concert touring, performs at retreats and conferences and is still the music minister at St. Timothy Parish in Mesa, Ariz.

Bubba Flores, 22, is a youth and young adult leader and youth minister for InHim Ministries in Honolulu. He plays acoustic and electric guitar and bass.

Saintly quote

"Christ said, 'I am the Truth'; he did not say 'I am the custom.'"

—St. Toribio Alfonso Mogrovejo

Our turn



Therese J. Borchard | Three techniques for overcoming economic anxiety

According to a recent USA Today/Gallup Poll, 64 percent of U.S. adults say they are worried about not having enough money for retirement; 56 percent are worried about not being able to maintain the standard of living they enjoy today; 44 percent are worried about not having enough to pay normal monthly bills; 33 percent are worried about not being able to get a loan for a home, car, tuition or business; and 25 percent are worried about not being able to make the minimum payments on their credit cards.

That's a lot of worrying, especially for a person like me who is hardwired to worry about everything.

My situation resembles that of many young adults. The dream of retirement is 25 years away, but Eric and I are not sure we'll ever see it.

As a writer, the bulk of my paycheck comes from advertising dollars that go bye-bye in an economic recession. As an architect, Eric's paycheck spawns from real estate dollars that have already been slashed because no one builds or renovates in a recession. And then we have bills: school tuitions, babysitters, groceries, gas, etc.

Whenever I start to compute a new formula based on economic recession, the results are ugly and they could single-handedly deliver me into crippling anxiety.

So I'm trying to implement the same techniques I use anytime my brain gets so wrapped around a problem that I can't see a solu-

tion. Here are three of them:

1. Take it a day at a time.

I remember that I don't have to solve the retirement conundrum today. That's 25 years away, remember? Jesus tells me (and other young adults) in the Gospel of Luke (12:22-25) not to worry about our retirement funds:

"I tell you, do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing.

"Notice the ravens: they do not sow or reap; they have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. How much more important are you than birds!"

2. Surrender control.

The most uncomfortable part of a Wall Street crash is the lack of control most of us feel. It's contrary to our human psychology. We want to drive the car or at least be the passenger in the front seat giving directions.

But in an economic downturn,

we're not even in the car. We have no say concerning which rest stations we are stopping at. In fact, much of the time it feels like we are riding in the trailer hitched to the back of the car. With the horses.

Admitting that we're not in control can be somewhat liberating. This is because the stock market is life: You win some, you lose some and you don't have a whole lot of say in the whole matter.

3. Turn it off.

One of the worst things you can do for the fear system in your brain is to keep the TV and radio tuned into the latest news on Wall Street, to keep checking cnn.com to find out what the newest number is. This kind of compulsive behavior is toxic for the obsessive, sensitive folks who are prone to anxiety even without a reporter telling them to run for cover.

Treat your brain well. Turn the news off — except for this piece, of course. And it always helps to distract yourself with just about anything. Especially good are crossword puzzles, Sudoku, gardening, knitting, reading (novels), movies and exercise.