

Ask Mason & Teo



Non-Catholic friend is upset that we have a pope

Dear Mason & Teo,

A bunch of friends who went to World Youth Day in Sydney, Australia, were excitedly talking about their experiences seeing Pope Benedict XVI. One of our friends, who is not a Catholic, was bothered by how we Catholics seem to "follow the pope around the world when he is only a man." It seems to her that we Catholics seem to think the pope is holier than everyone else. I didn't know what to say. What would you say about who the pope is and why we honor him? (Papal high)

Dear Papal high,

We congratulate you on being privileged to experience a papal Mass and ceremony at World Youth Day in Sydney. You will be forever changed by the experience and truly God will continue to bless you because of it. Please continue to share your experience with others, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, for your "eyes have seen (God's) salvation, which (God) prepared in sight of all the peoples." (Luke 2:30)

Some who are not Catholic object to the institution of the papacy because they simply do not understand it. Even Catholics misunderstand this ancient institution and thus, find it difficult to explain.

The church is a community of disciples, a spiritual family. In the New Testament, Christians often referred to each other as brothers and sisters. In that respect, the word pope is derived from a child's affectionate word for "papa" or "father" in Latin. From the third to the fifth century, words like "papa" or "father" were used to describe a bishop's role as a spiritual father. By the third century the term "pope" began to be used solely for the bishop of Rome.

What is a pope? He is not a CEO of a multinational corporation, or a king or a president. He is a pastor. Christ clearly intended to provide for an orderly succession of pastors to lead his church. We call it "apostolic succession" — the unbroken chain, from Christ to the apostles to their successors through the centuries, down to the present-day bishops of the Catholic Church.

Jesus had many disciples, including Mary Magdalene and Lazarus. But from the many he chose 12 to whom he entrusted special responsibilities. He gave them the authority to teach what they received from him (Matthew 28:20), the power to sanctify through the sacraments which they were to administer (Luke 22:19, John 20:21, etc.), and the power to govern the life of the church (Matthew 18:18).

From the 12, Jesus picked one whose name he changed from Simon to Peter, meaning "Rock" (Matthew 16:18), indicating that he has a unique role planned for Peter, as shepherd of the church. Every book of the New Testament notes the

special leadership role of Peter.

Peter was not necessarily better or stronger than the others. He had his obvious weaknesses and imperfections — he even denied knowing Jesus. He couldn't live up to his name by his own power. It was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) that allowed him the ability to fulfill his role to care for all of the church. And if we take Luke 22:31-32 seriously, he is called to be the shepherd of all the shepherds, which is a huge responsibility considering the immense size of the Catholic Church today.

Christ made sure that the church is to be indefectible; that's what he meant when he said that the Holy Spirit would teach the Apostles all truth and dwell with the church forever (John 14:16, 16:13). It means that the church will keep the deposit of Christ's revelation intact, with nothing added and nothing taken away, until the end of time.

The church has the authority to tell us what Christ said and what he means when it teaches faith and morals. This authority is centered in Peter's successor, the pope. Jesus built his church on the rock of St. Peter, declaring that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. (Matt 16:17-19) This authority has no power to change the Bible or Tradition, but to serve the Word of God by teaching it, interpreting it, and preserving it from distortion, so that it can guide our lives.

It is an insurmountable task which a pope cannot fulfill on his own power. That is why we pray for him at every Catholic Eucharist for the grace of the Holy Spirit to help him fulfill his role as the Servant of the Servants of God. Let us continue to pray with gratitude and compassion for those who shepherd us.

So what about the Catholic doctrine that the pope is infallible? Does it mean that the Pope can never be wrong about anything? We'll save that answer for our next column. Stay tuned.

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'Sister Hollywood'

Nun works for former student as technical adviser on film 'Doubt'

By Mark Pattison

Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON

For Sister Margaret McEntee, her roles in religious life have ranged from being a teacher to a campus minister to a fan of a former student's work to working for that former student when he directed a film adaptation of his own Pulitzer Prize-winning play.

And now the "job" for the Sister of Charity, or "Sister Peggy" as she commonly refers to herself, is giving interviews about that student, John Patrick Shanley, and his new movie, "Doubt." She's been interviewed by CBS News and USA Today, among others.

Yet she still finds time to fulfill her current ministry — being a religion teacher and campus minister at the all-girl Notre Dame High School in Manhattan — and to enjoy the work she had a bit of a hand in creating.

"The movie's actually better than the play," Sister Peggy told Catholic News Service in a Dec. 11 telephone interview from New York City, "and I've seen the play four times."

One reason for her avid early interest is that one of the drama's characters was named after her. Some 50 years ago, Johnny Shanley was a first grader at St. Anthony School in the Bronx. His teacher was Sister Peggy — known then as Sister James.

"Doubt" concerns suspicions harbored by the principal and a teacher at a New York City Catholic grade school, circa 1964, that a parish priest may be molesting the school's first black student.

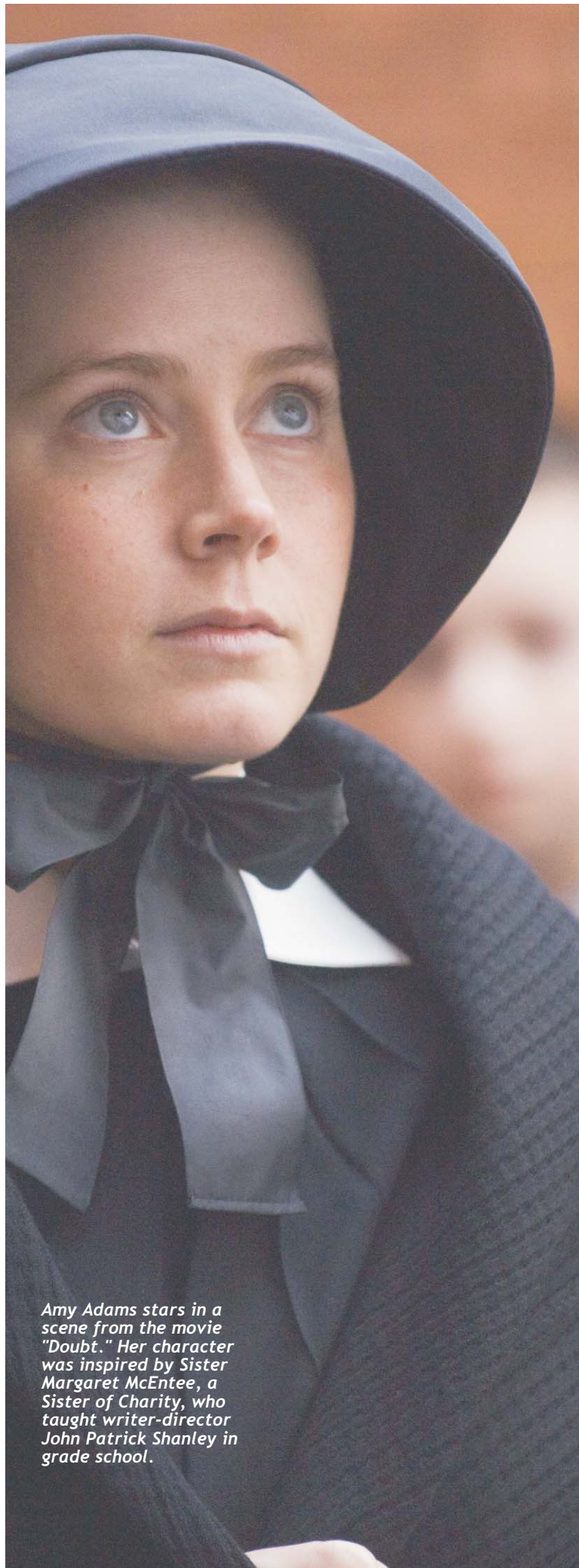
"Shanley has successfully adapted his drama," said Harry Forbes, director of the U.S. bishops' Office for Film & Broadcasting, in a review of the film.

"Though sexual misconduct is at the heart of the story, it is the balance between doubt which, as Shanley has said, 'allows for growth and change' and premature certainty, which only leads to a 'dead end' — that forms the principal thematic subtext. His metaphorical critique is directed not at the church but at those who insist on absolutes in society at large."

"Doubt" was classified by the USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting as A-III — adults, for its "discreetly handled sexual abuse theme."

As technical adviser, Sister Peggy said she, among other things, helped the props crew understand the nature of the Mass before the wave of liturgical reforms — including use of the vernacular — was ushered in starting in Advent 1964. Although, Sister Peggy told CNS, "I don't think we saw them until 1968" in New York.

Sister Peggy took actress Meryl Streep, one of five "Doubt"-re-



Amy Adams stars in a scene from the movie "Doubt." Her character was inspired by Sister Margaret McEntee, a Sister of Charity, who taught writer-director John Patrick Shanley in grade school.

Movie reviews

Bedtime Stories (Disney): The fanciful yarns a hotel handyman (Adam Sandler) spins about his own life while baby-sitting his niece and nephew (Laura Ann Kesling and Jonathan Morgan Heit) start to come true, affecting his competition with the hostelry's toadying manager (Guy Pearce) for their boss' (Richard Griffiths) favor, and shifting his romantic interest from his employer's glamorous daughter (Teresa Palmer) to his sister's (Courteney Cox) down-to-earth friend (Keri Russell). Aside from some mildly crude gags, director Adam Shankman's adventure comedy — which affirms perseverance and family unity — is unobjectionable, and the fantasy sequences are entertaining, though the humor is clearly geared to the grade-school set. A-I (PG)

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button (Paramount): Overly long but imaginative expansion of an F. Scott Fitzgerald short story set in New Orleans about a man born old (Brad Pitt) who ages backward from World War I to the present and his bittersweet romance with a dancer (Cate Blanchett). Under David Fincher's direction, the leads give fine performances and outstanding digital effects make the forward and backward aging remarkably believable, and the unusual story — presenting a unique, often profound perspective on the transience of human life and how we deal with the people we meet and the things we experience, including death — is thought-provoking and poignant. Implied nonmarital situations including nongraphic encounters, some rough language and brief profanity, mild innuendo, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, adultery, brief rear nudity and wartime violence. A-III (PG-13)

Doubt (Miramax): Engrossing drama set in 1964 at a Bronx parochial grammar school where the nun (Meryl Streep) who serves as principal suspects a popular priest (Philip Seymour Hoffman) of impropriety with a 12-year-old black



CNS photo/ Fox/Regency

Marley & Me (Fox/Regency): Heartwarming, often rambling, but consistently likable true story about a journalist couple (Owen Wilson and Jennifer Aniston) in West Palm Beach, Fla., who adopt an unruly Labrador whose companionship sees them through the joys and vicissitudes of family life. Director David Frankel's adaptation of John Grogan's best-seller is deceptively plotless, but the leads are most engaging, the affirmation of marriage and parenthood strongly positive, actions always motivated by compassion and decency, and there's a bittersweet ending that will speak powerfully to anyone who's ever had a deep emotional connection to a pet. A few crass words and expressions, brief mild innuendo and sexual references. A-II (PG)

student, and together with a young teacher (Amy Adams), sets out to confront him. Writer-director John Patrick Shanley has successfully adapted his Pulitzer Prize-winning stage hit, deftly recreating the Catholic milieu of the era, with outstanding performances, including that of Viola Davis as the distraught mother of the putative victim. Though sexual abuse is part of the story, it is the balance of doubt and certainty in society at large that forms the principal the-

matic subtext. Discreetly handled sexual abuse theme. A-III (PG-13) **Slumdog Millionaire** (Fox Searchlight/Warner Bros.): Vibrant drama in which a Mumbai, India, slum dweller (Dev Patel), suspected of cheating on a television quiz show, explains to a police inspector (Irrfan Khan) how his life experiences growing up with his brother (Madhur Mittal) and his loving pursuit of a childhood friend (Freida Pinto) enabled him to answer the acerbic program host's (Anil

Kapoor) questions. Director Danny Boyle's sweeping panorama of Third-World life, adapted from Vikas Swarup's novel "Q & A," though harrowing at times, is ultimately hopeful, stressing the dignity of the underprivileged and the primacy of spiritual over material values. Beating and torture, fleeting rear nudity, crime and prostitution themes, underage drinking, brief scatological humor, and occasional rough and crude language. A-III (R)

Doubt

Continued from page 20

lated Golden Globe nominees, to the Sisters of Charity's retirement home in upstate New York to meet Sister Marilda Joseph, "the only living member of our congregation who still wears the old habit" depicted in the movie. There were lots of pictures taken, she added, and Streep stayed for supper.

Shanley wanted to be a stickler for period accuracy. The exterior of St. Anthony School, which he had attended and where Sister Peggy once taught, was filmed as the fictional St. Nicholas School in the movie.

Moreover, Shanley used names of past classmates. "There actually was a Jimmy Hurley. There was a Noreen Horan," Sister Peggy said. "He had to change some names for the sake of legal issues."

One slight change was that of the principal. In "Doubt," it's Sister Aloysius. In real life, it was Sister Aloysia. "He made it masculine," Sister Peggy said. And, yes, the principal was every bit as hard as nails as Streep plays her in the movie.

Sister Peggy had high praise for the cast. "I was just very impressed with the woman's sensitivity," she said of Streep. Philip Seymour Hoffman, who plays the suspected priest, "is a fine man, very engaging and very approachable."

As for Amy Adams, "I just fell in love with her," Sister Peggy said. "She plays Sister James, so I'd better like her!" And Viola Davis, portraying the mother of the boy the nuns are trying to protect, "was just smashing" in the role, she added.

She said that at a preview screening attended by other members of her order, they heard "Tantum Ergo" used as a recessionary hymn. "After the preview with the sisters, we said that's really not appropriate," since its use was for Benedictions, she added. "And they changed it."

Twenty something



Christina Capecchi | Solving a problem with Maria: The power of friendship

Growing up six miles from a cousin who is six weeks your junior provides fertile foundation for friendship. Ours didn't disappoint.

Maria and I attached quickly, and we broadcast that bond with matching attire. Identical shirts. Duplicate necklaces. And twin magenta visors that Grandma decorated with puff paint. Even our names had a similar ring: Maria Louise, Christina Marie.

In spite of those saintly selections, we wanted to be wild. We saved coins to buy candy cigarettes, flicking them in slow, dramatic puffs.

We wanted to be brave, but when we camped out in a backyard tent, a strange sound paralyzed us in fright, and we screamed bloody murder.

Above all, we wanted to be together.

We loved having sleepovers.

Our parents forbid "Grease," but we adored the "Sound of Music," and our viewing habits were in sync: We fast forwarded through "Climb Every Mountain," not relating to the slow-motion scene, and rewound "Sixteen, Going on Seventeen."

Our cousins were all younger, which gave us license to be bossy. Under our expert tutelage, the Capecchi cousins re-enacted "So Long, Farewell" in basements at birthday parties. As co-directors, Maria and I enjoyed the prerogative of casting ourselves in the prime roles, which meant we alternated as Leisel, yearning for champagne.

"Yes?"
"No!"

Over the years, our interests and appetites advanced along a similar arc. We played soccer against each other. We carpooled and contributed to the same teen newspaper. And then, before we knew it, we were both packing up and moving off to college to be noble English majors: Maria north, me south.

We stayed in close touch. Frequent emails. Some letters. And occasional visits, when we whispered in our dorms until someone nodded off. More than ever, it seemed, there was so much to discuss. We were trying to uncover God's will for our lives, untangling it from others' expectations and our doubts.

We were still joyful, but life had become more complicated. It was so helpful to talk it through, knowing, for once, there was no need to mask raw emotion or censor half-formed thoughts. I knew I could solve any problem with Maria.

She began grad school right after college and then got a job. I started with a job, then moved onto grad school. When she sensed my exhaustion there, she validated it. If she had survived to tell her own horror stories, I would too. It gave me new energy to keep climbing my mountain.

And that was the other thing: We were noticing tell-tale signs of getting older, which, experienced together, made them a little less



I'm on the left.

freaky. Like that never-ending nun song — it had become meaningful — inspiring, even.

Maria and I have searched "high and low" for the dreams we are meant to pursue. And today, we are kneeling at their entrance, inhaling deeply and thanking God.

When Maria told me she was engaged to John, we rejoiced. It was, like so many moments before, a Visitation of our own, joy shared so swiftly and fully it causes the Christ within to leap, sparked by an electric current of the Holy Spirit.

"For at the moment the sound

of your greeting reached my ears," Elizabeth told Mary; her heart leapt for joy.

During the Christmas season, when we remember Mary's life-changing news, we celebrate friendship, the bonds that keep us warm when it's cold outside.

I will stand beside Maria, the bride, and smile. We may not be wild, but we're two for three: brave and together.

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