

## Ask Mason &amp; Teo



## Is heaven a 'Catholics-only' kind of place?

Dear Mason & Teo,

Do non-Catholics get to go to heaven? How about those from New Hope Chapel? Other Christians with faith don't have to fast, confess, worry about marrying a divorced person, attend Mass every Sunday, abstain from meat on Fridays in Lent, follow the requirements for Catholic funeral services, etc. Jews don't even recognize Jesus Christ as our savior. Buddhists believe in Buddha. (Strictly Catholic)

Dear Strictly Catholic, In God's eyes, there are no denominations, whether Catholic, non-Catholic, Jew, Buddhist, etc. God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to be flesh for the world. He came for all men and women, for all time, not for just an elite group of people.

The Pharisees asked Jesus a similar question. The Pharisees considered themselves redeemed by their meticulous adherence to religious rules and tradition. When they questioned Jesus about his fellowship with sinners, foreigners and those they considered "unclean," he responded, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous but sinners." (Matthew 9:12-13)

Heaven is, therefore, a gift freely given to everyone because "all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ" (2Cor 5:18). All people are called to God himself and bound to seek the truth. Different religions reflect different parts of the truth. We must treat those who do not know our faith with love, respect, patience and prudence.

There's an old saying: "It is better to be kind than to be right." Many people, Catholics and others, are so focused on being obedient to rules and commandments that they miss the main reason for the rules and commandments. It is about relationships — a loving relationship with God and loving relationships with one another.

It is not enough to fast on Fridays and go to Mass on Sundays if it does not move one to be a compassionate, loving person, in right relationship with God and with others. We see only the external action. God sees the desire, the intention and the heart.

As Catholics, we believe that our relationship to Christ depends on our relationship to the church. We do not idolize the church because the church is not a substitute for Christ. Rather the church itself is a Sacrament of Christ. A sacrament, the Baltimore Catechism used to say, is an "outward sign, instituted by Christ to give grace." The church is a sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among all.

The Catholic Church's sacramental perspective is one in which we discover God in and through the things of this world. Catholics recognize God's saving

presence mediated through the ordinary, the material, and the human — water, oil, bread, wine, a word, a gesture.

Jesus Christ chose to communicate his salvation through the sacraments. The sacraments do not depend upon the strength, intelligence or holiness of the person administering it because it is Christ who acts in every sacrament, even through its unworthy ministers. It is Christ who baptizes; it is Christ who absolves sin in confession.

Every sacrament produces its effects by the power of Christ alone and not by our own works or that of our ministers. However, the effect of the sacraments depends upon how well we are disposed to receive them. Christ always gives grace, but we must have the motives and conditions for receiving grace.

Although our Catholic Tradition holds that faith in the Gospel and membership in the church are central ways of God's grace working in history overall, God's presence and grace does exist outside of Christianity because Christ died for all men and women.

As Catholics, we believe in a God who revealed the fullness of his divinity through Jesus Christ. Even though life is filled with sinfulness, we believe God created all things good and holy and, through God's grace in our human experience, we are able to see God up close and personal in the ordinary.

And while the church is not the exclusive place where God's grace is revealed, it is still a privileged place to see God. The word "catholic" means universal. To be Catholic means to be open to all truth, universal and all-embracing. It does not mean that all religions are the same. But ultimately, every person, every nation, every culture, every race is included in the church because each has something to gain and something to give to the church.

Yes! There is diversity in the church but there is also unity. "For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another" (Romans 12:4-5).

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](mailto:yaadvice@yahoo.com).



A woman joins others to practice yoga in New York's Times Square June 21.

CNS photo/Mike Segar, Reuters

## Christian yoga?

## Classes incorporate prayer, spiritual music into eastern exercise

By Gretchen R. Crowe  
Catholic News Service

TRIANGLE, Va.

Some might call Christian yoga an oxymoron, and, indeed, a quick Google search of the two words presents a clear divide between believers and nonbelievers of blending prayer with the exercises of Indian origin.

But Donna Kocian, a parishioner of St. Francis of Assisi Church in Triangle, is all for it. In fact, she said, yoga has done nothing but strengthen her Catholic faith.

"Our world is so frenetic and crazy," Kocian said in an interview with the Arlington Catholic Herald, diocesan newspaper. "We always seem to be moving in fast-forward motion. I like to give people the opportunity to pause and really start to find themselves again, to pray within themselves, to pause in their lives, to reflect, to give thanks and to heal. It really takes on a different facet for each person who comes."

Kocian's class incorporates an opening prayer, Gospel readings and the sharing of prayer intentions. She reads passages from Daily Word, an inspirational publication, and she brings her class holy water from her many trips as an international travel agent to Rome. In the background during class, Kocian plays Christian music, varying between chant or contemporary depending on the class. The students "feel like they've been to church and yoga in the same session," Kocian said. "It's a very spiritual format."

Kocian became intrigued by the idea of Christian yoga after her brother was killed in a car acci-

dent in 2005. In a dark place, angry and depressed, Kocian lost herself in her grief. Yoga helped bring her back to life.

"I could feel my heart finally open and some semblance of myself starting to come through again," she said.

Certified to teach, she began incorporating prayer into her classes. After participating in a grief program at St. Francis, she invited her group to attend her class. The positive effects on herself and her students were immediate, she said.

"The comments I got after that class were amazing," she said. "I realized it's doing the same thing for them that it's doing for me."

"I can see when people walk into class at the beginning of a six- to eight-week session, I see them evolve, I see them soften," she added. "I see their hearts begin to open up."

Yoga is defined by Merriam-Webster as "a system of exercises for attaining bodily or mental control and well-being." Because of its foundation in Hinduism, yoga can be a controversial topic in Catholic circles.

In an article published in Ignatius Press' "The Catholic Faith," Jesuit Father John Hardon called yoga "incompatible" with Catholicism because of its pantheistic origins.

Kocian is familiar with these opinions and, in her travels, she has met numerous priests — some who say yoga is a perfectly acceptable practice for Catholics and others who say it's not.

"More than anything, I think it's education and figuring out

what yoga really is," Kocian said. "We can use our bodies as an element of prayer. If you can pray the rosary while you're walking, why can you not practice yoga and have the intention of prayer at the same time?"

Helen Sherman, a St. Francis parishioner, finds a healing, accepting space in Kocian's class.

"'Spiritual' sums it up for me," she said. "It helps you physically, it helps you spiritually, it helps you mentally. You have permission to relax and be in your own little world. It makes your life a better life to live."

"It wasn't just peaceful, but it was a prayerful, spiritual, peaceful," said Laura Yagelski, a first-time attendee at a recent session. "It wasn't just that you stretched and felt good when you left; you felt fulfilled when you left. It just didn't give me a workout, it gave me a sense of being there in God's company."

Rita Evans, a parishioner of St. William of York Parish in Stafford, has attended four sessions with Kocian, driving 45 minutes to attend each class. Like her classmates, Evans has found peace in Christian yoga.

In healing, too, Evans can relate to Kocian. Practicing yoga helped Evans heal after she became a widow in her early 20s.

"So often in life when you have very difficult circumstances to face, I think what you need to do is let go and let God handle that for you," Evans said. "Yoga gives that to you, because you're focused on the moves and the meditation."

When her mind is quieted, Evans said, it's easier to focus on God.

Growing deeper in faith "is something that I strive for all the time," she said. "Yoga assists me in that."

Movie reviews



CNS photo/Warner Bros.

**Photo above:** *Inception* (Warner Bros.): Ingenious sci-fi brainteaser in which, at the behest of a powerful CEO (Ken Watanabe), a corporate spy (Leonardo DiCaprio) who uses shared dreaming to extract secrets from the minds of sleeping executives leads a team of skilled collaborators (Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Ellen Page, Tom Hardy and Dileep Rao) on a raid into the subconscious of the heir (Cillian Murphy) to a rival business. Writer-director Christopher Nolan achieves a tour de force of spectacle and suspense that eventually involves four adventures unfolding simultaneously at different levels of consciousness, though his crafty action tale is rife with explosions and gunplay and engages the imagination more than the heart. Much violence, some of it bloody, several uses of profanity, a few crude and crass terms. A-III (PG-13)

**Despicable Me** (Universal): This enchanting 3-D animated comedy about a slightly wicked but ultimately softhearted rogue (voice of Steve Carell) follows his rivalry with a nerdy newcomer (voice of Jason Segel) for the title of

world's most terrible villain — during which they compete to steal the moon, no less — and charts the life-altering effect a trio of orphans (voices of Miranda Cosgrove, Dana Gaier and Elsie Fisher) have on him after he takes them under his wing, initially for his own nefarious purposes. Co-directors Chris Renaud and Pierre Coffin — who also provide voice work for the main miscreant's army of comically mumbling under-sized minions — serve up a delightfully humorous conversion tale spun around themes of loyalty and the transformative power of family love with only a few effects that might scare the most timid and a touch of mild bathroom humor to raise concern among some parents. A-I (PG)

**Predators** (Fox): Dreary sci-fi sequel in which a random collection of human warriors and criminals (most prominently Adrien Brody, Alice Braga and Topher Grace) find themselves unwillingly and mysteriously parachuted into a jungle by the invisibility-cloaked aliens of the title who then hunt them for sport. Despite a half-hearted last-reel lesson about the need to maintain civilized values, director

Nimrod Antal's addition to the thriller franchise that began with 1987's *Predator* is mostly a survey of nasty ways to die, while Alex Litvak's script is chockablock with obscenities. Frequent graphic violence, some of it gruesome, a few uses of profanity, pervasive rough and crude language. O (R)

**The Sorcerer's Apprentice** (Disney): Generally inoffensive but routine fantasy adventure about an ordinary New York City college student (Jay Baruchel) who discovers he is the long-prophesied heir to legendary magician Merlin's wonderworking skills, powers he struggles to master under the supervision of a good wizard (Nicolas Cage) so he can aid in the fight against an evil sorcerer (Alfred Molina), though his pursuit of the gal (Teresa Palmer) he has loved since childhood proves a constant distraction. As directed by Jon Turteltaub, the special effects-driven proceedings — which include unbloody battle scenes too intense for tots — fall well short of movie magic. Extensive stylized violence, brief scatological humor. A-II (PG)

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.

- The A-Team* .....A-II (PG-13)
- Despicable Me*.....A-I (PG)
- Grown Ups* .....A-II (PG)
- Inception*.....A-III (PG-13)
- The Karate Kid*.....A-II (PG)
- Knight and Day* .....A-III (PG-13)
- The Last Airbender* .....A-II (PG)
- Predators* .....O (R)
- The Sorcerer's Apprentice* ....A-II (PG)
- Toy Story 3*.....A-I (G)
- The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* ....A-II (PG)

Twenty something



Christina Capecchi | Off the grid, out of the grind

**"A**re you tweeting from Palestine?" It was a harmless question popping up in my inbox, and I had already begun typing my Twitter handle, eager to pick up a few more followers, when I paused to consider the offer I was about to make. Did I really want to chronicle my Holy Land trip via Twitter? Did the fact that I could access an iPhone mean I should? Did I actually see myself tweeting "at Church of the Holy Sepulchre, reflecting on Jesus' crucifixion"?

I stopped mid-sentence. Something about tweeting on a pilgrimage feels wrong, contrary to the purpose. To tune in I must log off. To open my eyes I must still my fingers. I'll have ample opportunity to relay the experience when I return. I might as well give myself the 15-hour flight home as a buffer between seeing and sharing. Social networks like Twitter and Facebook are challenging our notion of public and private. Their default setting is public; you have to take action to make it private. The assumption is yes, green light, go. Saying no requires a deliberate stance. But it's a healthy one. You must say no to some things in order to say yes to others. A tweet may be just 140 characters, but it's long enough to interrupt a thought or a prayer. And those are the little moments that allow for the big ones that bring us to our knees.

I'm saying yes to silence, to emptiness, to the absence of it all — a mode that doesn't come naturally to wired young adults. I'm going to the Holy Land to see the bigger picture and the higher ground. I'm hoping to capture sights and smells that linger, lending new meaning throughout the year to old readings. I'm planning to turn off my phone so I can experience the spiritual joy St. Therese of Lisieux once described. "For me prayer is a surge of the heart," she said. "It is a simple look towards heaven. It is a cry of recognition and of love." I'm proud to take a break from a habit that shortens, if not eliminates, the line between perceiving and publishing. I'm pleased to give a little less to a force that keeps demanding more. This spring Twitter unveiled a tracking tool that pins an exact location to each tweet. When I was invited to activate it, I didn't have to think twice. Thanks but no thanks.

Many others, evidently, feel differently. Location-based applications like Foursquare are growing in popularity. Personally, I'd rather go off the grid, as they say. I'm not keen on that kind of accessibility. There's value in traveling lightly — no footsteps or footnotes. I'm seeking the kind of discovery that comes with disappearing. After all, Jesus needed 40 days (in a desert I'll soon see!). So I'm packing my suitcase and preparing an out-of-office message. Do you know how good that feels? Do you know how rarely I use that feature? I'm inspired by my uncle Mike, who went off the grid for two weeks last fall to serve as the keeper of a historic lighthouse. He watched birds soar across sunsets, playing his flugelhorn into the glassy water. Sans electricity and Internet, he attuned his body to nature's rhythms. Uncle Mike is going back again this fall, and he's planning to pack even lighter. He knows how to keep the light burning. *Christina Capecchi is a freelance writer from St. Paul, Minnesota. She can be reached at www.ReadChristina.com.*

Maryland beach parishes welcome foreign students on summer jobs

By Elissa Serrao  
Catholic News Service

OCEAN CITY, Md. A home-cooked meal was just what Monika Burzynska needed after her first two weeks in the United States. "I've been working since I got here," said Burzynska, 22, who arrived in Ocean City June 15 from Poland, where she just finished her second year of college. "I have to pay for where I'm staying first and then comes food. "So I eat a lot of frozen (food). It's the first time in my life I have to manage food, accommodations. For the first time, it's just me," she said.

Burzynska was one of about 500 students who came to Holy Savior Church on a recent summer evening for a free dinner provided by the International Student Outreach Program, an ecumenical ministry that began at Holy Savior in 2002 and has since spread to include other churches.

Church volunteers work throughout the summer to help the thousands of international students who travel to Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore each summer to work at restaurants, boardwalk shops, hotels, recreation facilities and elsewhere.

Before the dinner, Anne Marie Conestabile, who heads the program, joined international student volunteers and more than 20 parishioners from 12 participating churches to put the finishing touches on the hall's decorations.

Flags representing China, Lithuania, Italy, Spain, Poland, Ireland and other countries adorned the walls, and balloons and smaller flags served as centerpieces.

Conestabile said hundreds of pounds of food had been prepared for the first of 25 dinners scheduled at different churches throughout the summer.

"It's a blessing to meet so many people," she added.

The program has helped more than 75,000 students since it began, she said.

It started at Holy Savior in 2002 when Conestabile and Father John Klevenec, then the pastor, responded to seven students from Poland who came to the parish looking for help.

Wilmington's bishop at the time, the late Bishop Michael A. Saltarelli, wanted to meet these students, said Conestabile, 60, then the parish's youth minister.

After the bishop invited them to dinner and heard their stories, "he encouraged me to continue the ministry," she said. "And so the ball started rolling from there."

In addition to dinner, the ministry had donated items to give the students, including shampoo and other toiletries, books, clothes, shoes and kitchen items.

"Most students are earning minimum wage (\$7.25) to \$9 an hour, so we try to help in every way possible," Conestabile told *The Dialog*, newspaper of the Wilmington Diocese, which includes several Maryland counties.

Among those enjoying their first visits to the United States was Egle Marcinkeviciute, 21, who came to the dinner straight from her job at a takeout grill on the boardwalk.

Marcinkeviciute, a Catholic from Lithuania who came to Ocean City with several friends three weeks earlier, said she wouldn't miss the dinner.