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The First Sunday of Advent (A)

As we begin the Advent watch awaiting the coming of Christ our King in glory, the Savior tells us to be prudent and vigilant as we await his return.

A new movie will be released next weekend in the nation's theatres: *The Golden Compass*. It is a movie based on Philip Pullman's book of the same name, the first of the *His Dark Materials* Trilogy. Many in the news media have been comparing this trilogy to C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Lewis wrote his *Chronicles of Narnia* as an allegory for the Christian faith. It was his attempt to tell the Gospel in another form, and he has proved rather successful at it. While Tolkien himself did not like Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* and wrote his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy in response to it, Tolkien's characters provide a strong example of both Christian virtue and the Catholic worldview. Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, on the other hand, stands in stark contradiction to Christianity and to the beliefs and virtues that both Lewis and Tolkien sought to instill in their readers.

It is an odd comparison to make, that of Pullman to Lewis and Tolkien, especially considering that Pullman has said, "I hate the Narnia books, and I hate them with a deep and bitter passion;" he also has called Tolkien's books "infantile."¹ "New Line Cinema may not realize it, but Tolkien and Pullman are not peas in a pod. In fact, they aren't even Jacob and Esau. They are more like Gandalf and Sauron, more like Aslan and Jadis."²

In 2001, Pullman told the *Washington Post*, "I am trying to undermine the basis of Christian beliefs." He has also said, "The Christian religion is a very powerful and convincing mistake, that's all." Pullman knows the power of books and the influence they have on unguarded minds.

J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series has taken much criticism from Christians over the years. Pullman himself admits, "Harry Potter's been taking all the flak. Meanwhile I've been flying under the radar, saying things that are far more subversive than anything poor old Harry has said."³ This brings me to the point in talking about *The Golden Compass*.

While the movie based upon the book of the same name does not quite follow the book chapter by chapter - leaving out much of the book's anti-Catholicism, it still poses a danger. The

¹ In Sandra Miesel, "Misleading 'Compass,'" *Our Sunday Visitor*, (96:31) 2 December 2007, 13.

² Thomas Peters, "U.S. Bishops give *Golden Compass* a pass and why we shouldn't". <http://www.americanpapist.com/2007/11/us-bishops-give-golden-compass-pass.html>. Accessed 1 December 2007.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

danger lies in that the movie will inevitably lead many children to read the books, which their parents will not likely have read beforehand and cannot help guide them through the books.

If parents were to read these books they would find continual reference to the Catholic Church and her priests, bishops, nuns and Magisterium. All the religious people and figures portrayed in the books are murderers, assassins, liars and more. The Church is never referred to in a kind light; rather, it is all but demonized and vilified. What is more, God - who is called "the Authority" and stands against human freedom - is always portrayed negatively and is killed in the third book.

This is the danger of these books: by putting utterly false information and ideas into the minds of young children, Pullman hopes to turn out an entire generation of atheists, and is already on his way.

To read these books then without proper formation and education in the faith poses a great danger to the faith of children and even of adults, as we have seen with books like Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. To read books such as these, to watch movies such as these, without proper formation and education - without remaining alert, awake and vigilant - is to allow the thief to break into our house and to steal away what

is most valuable: our faith and hope in Christ (see Matthew 24:43).

Knowing that it would be counterproductive to urge you to boycott the movie and the books, I will not do so. I also know that not everyone who sees this movie and reads these books will lose their faith. Nonetheless, parents have a sacred duty to raise their children in the faith of Jesus Christ and to guard them against anything that might hinder that faith. I urge you, therefore, to be wise about what you let your children watch and read - about what you watch and read - knowing that what is seen and read does indeed help shape our thoughts, beliefs and worldview. To say otherwise is to deny reality.

Even so, we are not without hope, "for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed" (Romans 13:11). Advent is the season of waiting and watching because it is also the great season of hope.

The hope of Christians is not the same hope as that of everyday life. It is something far more profound, far more beautiful. It is something Philip Pullman and company fail to see because they fail to acknowledge the fact that there is life after death, that this life is not all there is.

It sometimes happens that we, too, live as though there were no Judgment or that God does not care how we act. On the day of the Lord's return we will learn otherwise. On that day

"He shall judge between the nations, and impose terms on many peoples" (Isaiah 2:4).

Saint Paul admonishes us: "Let us then throw off the works of the darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day" (Romans 13:12-13) because when Christ comes again, if we are found worthy of him and the house of our soul has been kept secure, we will "walk in the light of the Lord," in whose presence there can be no darkness (Isaiah 2:5).

Knowing full well that "the night is advanced, [that] the day is at hand," Holy Mother Church gives the Advent season to us as a time to cast off the works of darkness, to secure our home, and to await with eager expectation him who is the fulfillment of our hope.

"Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob" (Isaiah 2:3). Let us "stay awake" and "be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come" (Matthew 24:44).