

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire---A Review

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.

A reading for February 27, Jude 1: 11-25, includes these words of the apostles to Christ's followers: "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions. It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit."

The world shown in "The Hunger Games: Catching Fire" could be seen as a depiction of the "last time" that the apostles spoke of. The movie is set 300 years in the future, in a bleak country called Panem. As in the first Hunger Games movie, a small ruling class blights the lives of the subjugated underclass. The rulers scoff at notions of kindness and honesty, their passion for cruelly-imposed power is surely ungodly, and they are eager to sow division among the people they rule by forcing them into the deadly competition of the Games.

Two members of the oppressed underclass, Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark, have an especially dire predicament. They have achieved the distinction of winning and surviving the Hunger Games, but they live with the guilt of having killed other contestants. And now they are forced to go on tours around the country as positive propaganda for the ruling Capitol.

Much worse is to come. The despotic President Snow realizes, as he observes Katniss' popularity with the people, that her survival might make her a symbol of defiance for the miserable masses in the twelve districts of Panem. So he decides to get rid of her.

For the upcoming Games, he plans lethal contests with a creepy games master, and declares that the event will have a new feature: the contestants will be victors from the previous Games. This all but insures that Katniss will be among those chosen to compete, because she is the only female from her district to have survived.

The Games winners had been promised that their victory would guarantee that they could live the rest of their lives in safety. So in defiant anger against the broken promise, some of them begin to undermine the fight-to-the-death premise of the Games. They sacrifice themselves for each other in the arena, rather than providing a "good show" by trying to kill each other. They have seen the hollowness of Snow's promises and pageantry, and the crowd in the stands begins to see it too.

Katniss is nearly emotionally undone, and begs Gale, a childhood friend she loves, to run away with her and their families. But in the end she doesn't run away; she sees that the only way to change things is to stay and "cause all kinds of trouble."

This movie has a large share of graphic violence. But it shows self-sacrificing human courage in memorable ways, one example being Katniss' resolve to stay rather than run. Another verse from Jude reminds us of what the Panem's people, or we ourselves, can do when the world seems overwhelmed with evil: "...build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

