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'40': Jesuits launch Lenten social media series on Ash Wednesday

Sr. Rose Pacatte | Feb. 21, 2012 NCR Today

Using Facebook, Vimeo, YouTube and the "40" website [1], young people and adults will be able to follow the journey of seven people in Los Angeles after an apocalyptic event has thrust them together for survival.

The number 40 haunts them as they try to figure out where God is in the midst of chaos and isolation. Each high-definition webisode is 4 to 7 minutes long and stars actors that most people will recognize from a variety of television series and/or commercials, Peggy Miley [2] in particular. Two new episodes will air each week during Lent. A reflection guide is also available for each webisode on the site for reflection and conversation.

It's always a challenge to judge made-for-web videos because the first thing viewers do is compare webisodes to made-for-television programs and series. We know from the outset that Catholic producers don't have near the budget network or cable producers do.

In the age of YouTube's homemade, on-the-spot videos, "40" moves the bar above amateur to tell faith stories in a way that respects the message and the medium of online social media.

Can we use entertainment to teach? The Jesuits certainly think so. Here the production quality is good, and the story well-plotted. It's a fine line, though, to tell stories that entertain and inspire in a few minutes at a time. I think Loyola and others will get better and better at this form of communication.

The series is good news for all pastoral ministers, and in better news, "40" webisodes can be accessed throughout Lent anywhere pastoral leaders, catechists, parents and kids can access the Internet. These brief episodes are perfect for homilies, and they won't cost anyone anything except the time to prepare. This series is timely and provides new material as more parishes install projectors and professional sound systems. They can be used before Mass begins or during the homily; they are perfect for Lenten retreats and small groups, too.

The series was developed by award-winning Jesuit Br. Michael Breault.

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Links:
[1] http://40theseries.com/

[2] http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0587323/