

Rocky

Fr. Leonard Andrie

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Making of Rocky

- There are a number of reasons why I would like to reflect with you on *Christ in the Movies*.
 1. I love a *good* movie! The original *Rocky* movie (1976) is one of my *favorite* movies. I find that Rocky is a very *inspiring* movie!
 2. Seeing Christ in the Movies is an example of a *sacramental vision*, i.e., a worldview or way of looking at the world as an outward sign of God's invisible, inward grace. In plain language, seeing the "fingerprints" or "hand of God" in creation. Everything – nature, objects, experiences, and movies can reflect God's presence and action.

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Making of Rocky



- The production of *Rocky* (1976) is a real-life underdog story that mirrored the film's plot.
- The production of *Rocky* was characterized by a low budget, a grueling shoot, and a screenwriter (Sylvester Stallone) who refused to sell his script unless he could star in it.
- "Yo Adrian, making this movie is killing me. It's not easy, ya know."



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Making of Rocky



- Sylvester Stallone was struggling to make ends meet. He was barely scraping by with \$100 to his name.
- He tuned in to a fight between Muhammad Ali and Chuck Wepner ("The Bayonne Bleeder") in 1975. Chuck received 328 stitches during his career and had his nose broken nine times.
- The match with Ali was promoted by Don King as "Give the White Guy a Chance."

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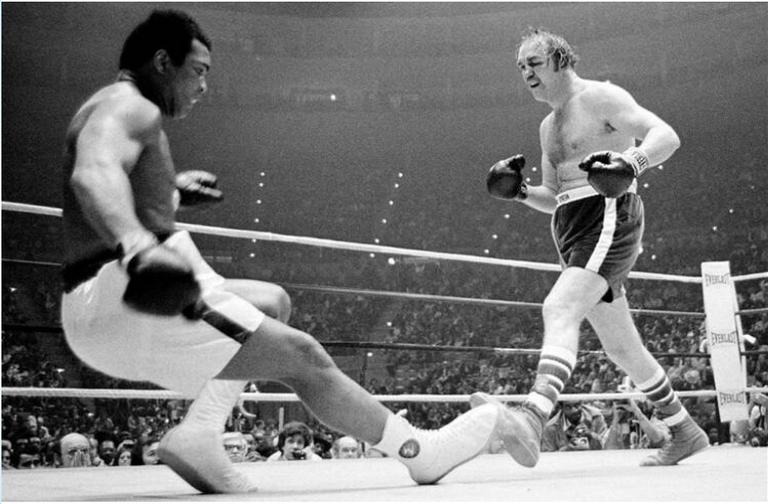
Making of Rocky

- The fight seemed like a foregone conclusion. Against all odds, however, Wepner knocked Ali down in the ninth round before losing by a TKO.
- Stallone found the story that would craft his life.
- He wrote the first draft of *Rocky* in three and a half days. However, only 10% of that first draft survived in the movie. Nine major rewrites and drastic changes were made to the characters and the plot.

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Making of Rocky



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Making of Rocky



- In 1975, studios offered Stallone as much as \$350,000 for the script alone (a life-changing sum in 1975).
- Stallone refused to sell the script unless he was cast as the lead actor, Rocky Balboa.
- Producers eventually agreed, but the studio (United Artists) slashed the budget to just \$1 million – an extremely low amount even for the 1970s.

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Making of Rocky



- The entire movie was filmed in just 28 days.
- *Rocky* was the third film to use the Steadicam, a new invention by Garrett Brown in 1975.
- The Steadicam allowed for smooth, fluid, and shake-free handheld filming, even while the operator was moving rapidly over uneven ground.
- This led to smooth cinematic shots of Rocky running through Philadelphia and up the Art Museum steps.

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Making of Rocky

- Due to the low budget, many scenes in *Rocky* were shot in “guerrilla style” without permits.
- For example, the vendor who threw Rocky an orange while running through the Italian Market was a real vendor who didn’t know a movie was being filmed!
- Additionally, some roles in the film were filled by Stallone’s family to save money. His brother Frank played a street singer, and his father played the ringside bell ringer.

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Making of Rocky



- The famous first date on Thanksgiving at the ice rink was originally written to have hundreds of extras.
- However, because they couldn’t afford them, the scene was rewritten to take place after hours in an empty rink.
- Rocky’s oversized boxing robe and the mismatched colors on the fight poster were actual department errors that production couldn’t afford to fix, so Stallone re-wrote the dialogue to address them in the film.

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Making of Rocky

- Stallone was so broke while trying to sell the script and retain his rights to the lead role that he had to sell his dog, who appeared as Butkus in the film.
- Stallone eventually accepted an upfront payment of around \$35,000 to secure playing the lead role in the film.
- Despite its tiny budget, the film grossed over \$225 million worldwide and became the highest-grossing film of 1976. Stallone received roughly \$2.5 million as he had negotiated a percentage of the film's profits.

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Making of Rocky



Butkus



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Making of Rocky

- *Rocky* received 10 Academy Award nominations and won three Oscars, including Best Picture, Best Director (John G. Avildsen), and Best Film Editing.
- Ironically, the production *mirrors* the movie's core message of **determination, grit, resilience, and going the distance**.
- The film's limited budget gave the film its real, often gritty feel. In short, the film's underdog theme that so many love about the film was shaped by Stallone's determination to make the film.

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Movie Characters



- **Rocky Balboa:** Represents the underdog whose story is one of faith, integrity, and victory.
- He is portrayed as good-hearted, resilient, and one who ultimately turns to God for strength.



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Movie Characters



- **Adrian:** A shy, introverted, Philadelphia pet-store clerk who becomes Rocky Balboa's girlfriend and the emotional core for Rocky.
- She is frequently abused by her brother, Paulie, who is an alcoholic.
- Rocky: These are the exotic animals I was tellin' you about, my friends: Cuff and Link.
- Adrian: I sold them to you.



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Movie Characters



- **Paulie:** Characterized by his alcoholism, frequent jealousy, and short temper, Paulie is Rocky's best friend and Adrian's brother.
- A butcher in a meat packing plant, Paulie introduces Rocky to Adrian.
- Paulie is portrayed as a man struggling with his own inadequacy compared to Rocky's achievements. He often projects his own self-loathing onto others, especially targeting Adrian by calling her a "loser" (deflection).
- "Porcupine" – mean and crude on the outside to keep people away, despite needing affection and validation.



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Movie Characters



- **Mickey:** Rocky Balboa's gruff trainer and father figure who pushes Rocky beyond his limits, helping him to go the distance with tough love and emotional support.
- **Quote:** You're gonna eat lightenin' and you're gonna crap thunder!



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Movie Characters



- **Apollo Creed:** His name is a nod to the Apostle's Creed.
- Apollo is charismatic, egotistical, and supremely confident, often in contrast to Rocky's humility.
- Like the evil one, Apollo overplays his hand out of pride, vanity, and excessive zeal in his own abilities.



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The Movie's Beginning

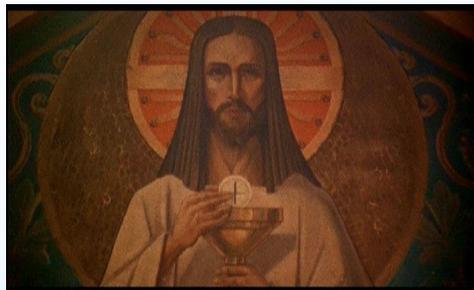


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The Movie's Beginning



- The opening frame of *Rocky* is a mural of **Jesus Christ** overlooking a dingy boxing ring, linking Rocky's struggle to a spiritual journey.
- This is a story of redemption, sacrifice, and divine purpose, not just a boxing story. Rocky's story is framed within a spiritual struggle – he's an underdog destined for a higher purpose (chosen for greatness).



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The Movie's Beginning

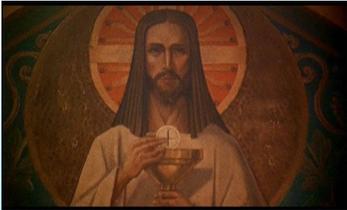
- Our Catholic faith teaches that original sin has wounded human nature, leaving a broken condition that makes life a “hard battle” against the powers of evil.
- While baptism erases original sin and restores grace, the inclination to sin (concupiscence) persists, requiring a constant spiritual struggle.
- *Rocky* begins with Christ, the High Priest, overlooking a *boxing match* - a battle - symbolic of spiritual battle with sin, ourselves, and the evil one.

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The Movie's Beginning



- In the mural, our Lord holds the Eucharist, the representation (or making-present) of His death and Resurrection. Like Christ, Rocky will give his all until there is nothing left.
- In the battle of our spiritual life for Christ, we strive to unite ourselves to Christ's Paschal Mystery as we “die to ourselves” and pick up our crosses. In doing so, Christ's life is poured out for us, re-creating us in His love.
- With Rocky, we see sacrifice, determination, and love.



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The Training Gym

- The gym where Rocky trains is called “the Resurrection Athletic Center.”
- It is a dirty boxing facility that Stallone noted was intentional to symbolize a man being **reborn** through discipline and suffering. A “bum” club fighter will struggle for a “new life.”



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Good Natured

- In the beginning of the movie, Rocky is good-natured, compassionate, and down-on-his luck living in Philadelphia.
- Even though life has not been kind to him, he has a gentle demeanor and is soft-spoken with a quiet desire to be respected.
- Although he has little money, he shows kindness to neighborhood children and people who are worse off than him, maintaining his humanity in a gritty, blue-color environment.

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Good Natured

- For example, Rocky helps a rebellious teenager, Marie, by steering her away from a bad crowd.
- Walking her home, Rocky tells her about the dangers of hanging out with the wrong people and encourages her to stop smoking to avoid "going down the wrong path."



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Good Natured

- Rocky also has a love for animals, caring for his fish and turtles. When he stops to see Adrian at the pet store, he is fascinated by the birds. Eventually, Rocky will be overjoyed when Adrian buys Butkus for him.
 - **Note:** The director placed Adrian behind birdcage bars to symbolize her confined life, which she breaks from as her relationship with Rocky develops.
- In short, while Rocky is rough around the edges, he is a good person trying to find his place in the world.

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God Chooses Us

- As the movie unfolds, we will see that by Divine Providence, Apollo Creed will need an opponent to fight when the scheduled one falls through.
- Key: Before God's grace and choosing us in Christ (in baptism), like Rocky, we struggle through life, which can be gritty and tough.
- In baptism, God "chooses" us in Christ, uniting us to His death and Resurrection, so that we can train (strive to grow in virtue) and go the distance against the evil one.

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God Chooses Us



- Apollo chooses Rocky Balboa, seeking a publicity stunt as he likes the sound of the "Italian Stallion" and America is a "land of opportunity."
- "Who discovered America? An Italian, right? What better way to celebrate [America's] 200th birthday than to get it on with one of his descendants."
- Apollo is warned that Rocky is a dangerous southpaw, which Apollo brushes off.

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God Chooses Us



- In choosing us, our Lord gives us “all the opportunity” we could ever imagine.
- It is the opportunity to wrestle with Him, as the Israelites have done for thousands of years, and the opportunity to be with Him if we are willing to get back up and keep fighting until the bell rings (our death).
- Additionally, God is “not worried” that we are southpaws, i.e., weak, frail, limited, and prone to sin. He *loves* meeting us in our brokenness and weakness.

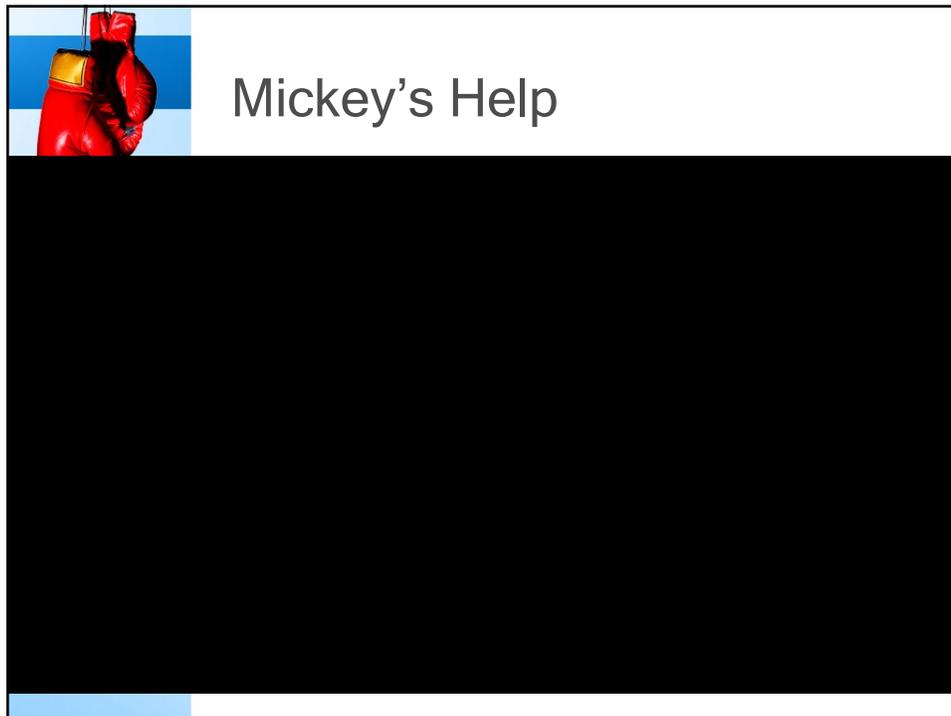
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Mickey's Help

- Prior to Apollo Creed's giving Rocky a once-in-a-lifetime shot at the title, Mickey was angry with Rocky. Mickey believed that Rocky was wasting his potential.
- Mickey: “You had the chance to be a good fighter. But you sold out to a loan shark, a lousy loan shark.”
- Rocky: “It's a living.”
- Mickey: “It's a waste of a life.”
- **Key:** We see the great danger in spiritual complacency - “It's a living.” (sloth)

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A slide titled "Mickey's Help" with a red boxing glove icon on the right. The slide contains a bulleted list of four points.

- Mickey, upon learning about Rocky's opportunity to fight Apollo Creed, visits Rocky's apartment to offer his services.
- Mickey wants to help Rocky "cash in" on his once-in-a-lifetime chance of hitting the lottery.
- He argues that Rocky needs a trainer, highlighting his credentials – suffering numerous injuries in his own boxing career – to show he has what it takes to get a fighter ready.
- Once Rocky finally accepts, Mickey transitions from a harsh critic to a dedicated mentor and father figure. He will help Rocky with his "grit."

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Mickey's Help

- Mickey plays a critical role in *Rocky* as he symbolizes the tough-love, old-school mentor, who acts as a surrogate father figure for Rocky.
- Mickey transforms Rocky from a “bum” wasting his potential - moving him from just being a “good fighter” to a “great fighter.”
- Mickey represents a tougher generation of boxing that focuses on raw grit over flashiness. He provides security and direction for Rocky.

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Mickey's Help

- Mickey's character symbolizes that God calls us to give our absolute best - to work “heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” (Col. 3:23-24).
- The parable of the talents (Matthew 25) reminds us that God expects us to use our unique gifts and resources diligently rather than hiding them.
- The widow's mite helps us see that it is not about giving what is extra but rather giving from *our poverty* (our substance), all we have, our whole livelihood (Mk 12:41-44) that is pleasing to God.

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Fight Training



Training Techniques	Explanation
Endurance Training	Long-distance running through Philadelphia, gradually building intensity.
Strength and Conditioning	High-volume calisthenics, notably one-arm pushups, pull-ups, and intense abdominal work.
Boxing Technique	Working the speed bag for hand-eye coordination and the heavy bag for punching power.
Improvised Methods	Punching frozen carcasses in a meatpacking plant to harden knuckles and build power.

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Fight Training



Training Techniques	Explanation
Prayer	Increase daily prayer, such as reading Sacred Scripture, attending daily Mass, praying the Rosary, or Stations of the Cross.
Fasting & Abstinence	Catholics aged 18 - 59 must fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (one full meal, two smaller meals). Abstinence on Ash Wednesday and all Fridays of Lent for those 14 and older.
Almsgiving	Giving to the poor, sacrificial donating, or volunteering time and talent.

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Rocky and Adrian

- Over the course of the movie, Rocky and Adrian develop a shy, hesitant courtship into a deeply trusting, supportive bond.
- A tough, lonely boxer and a quiet, socially anxious shop-keeper bond over their shared insecurities.
- When Paulie asks about Rocky's attraction to Adrian, he says, "I dunno.... She's got gaps, I got gaps, together we fill gaps."
- **Key:** The filling of their gaps helps them form a stronger bond.

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Rocky and Adrian

- The two go out on a first date on Thanksgiving where they go to an ice-skating rink (which was closed but opened for them).
- At the rink, they share their vulnerabilities, insecurities, and personal struggles - Adrian's lack of confidence and Rocky's being considered a "bum."
- Rocky's persistence and kindness empower Adrian to find her voice and stand up to her overbearing brother, Paulie.
- In return, Adrian becomes Rocky's "emotional anchor" giving him a reason to strive for more than his "bum" status.

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Rocky and Adrian

- As Rocky begins training for his championship fight against Apollo Creed, Adrian buys Butkus for Rocky to keep him company during his workouts.
- The film famously ends not with a celebration of boxing results but with Rocky calling out, “Adrian!” repeatedly after the final bell.
- The two embrace in the ring and profess their love for each other, making it clear that their relationship is the true “win” of the story.

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Rocky and Adrian



- Our heavenly Father is aware of our insecurities and is quite comfortable with them.
- In fact, He is *drawn* to our insecurities (our gaps) and uses them as the very means for our sanctification. God “fills gaps” with His grace.
- He gives us a guardian angel, our Blessed Mother, and all the saints to accompany us while we train on earth.
- Our embrace of Christ after the bell of death is the true “win” in God’s great story, which is also our story.

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Pre-Fight Scene



- The night before the championship fight, Rocky wakes Adrian up and says, "I can't beat him."
- He complains, saying, "It ain't so bad, 'cause I was nothin' before." Adrian replies, "Don't say that." Rocky then pours his heart out to Adrian.



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Pre-Fight Scene



- "C'mon, it's true -- But that don't bother me -- I just wanna prove somethin' - I ain't no bum... It don't matter if I lose... Don't matter if he opens my head..."
- The only thing I wanna do is go the distance -- That's all. Nobody's ever gone fifteen rounds with Creed. If I go them fifteen rounds, an' that bell rings an' I'm still standin', I'm gonna know then I weren't just another bum from the neighborhood..."

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Pre-Fight Scene



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Pre-Fight Scene



- While Rocky does not think he can win, by finishing the fight, he proves his self-worth (not just a bum from the neighborhood), and gains self-respect, transforming Rocky from a "nobody" to a "somebody."
- **Key:** Rocky defines his own victory. "Winning" means "going the distance," which requires him to **keep getting back up** when he gets knocked down.
- If he goes the distance, he wins. This is a **critical lesson** for the Christian life!

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Pre-Fight Scene



- Stallone said that the scene with Adrian where Rocky is vulnerable and expresses his desire to be standing when the bell rings is the **most important scene in the movie**.
- When the movie ends and Rocky is still standing (albeit he is a bloody mess), he doesn't even care about the verdict.
- Instead, he immediately calls out for Adrian, having earned the respect of the champion and himself. Rocky may have technically lost the fight by split decision but morally, he has won.

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Pre-Fight Scene



- Before the final fight in the locker room, Rocky kneels down to pray. We get the sense that prayer is something very natural for him, i.e., his reliance upon God who guides him.
- Whereas Rocky enters the ring with humility, Apollo Creed enters the ring with pomp and circumstance on an American float and dressed with American stars and stripes. He shouts, "I want *you*."
- **Key:** The evil one mocks, points, and tries to intimidate us. He brings glitz, but with emptiness and weakness on the inside.

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Final Fight Scene



- The final fight is 15 rounds. Rocky's goal was not necessarily to win, but rather to "go the distance" against the champion Apollo Creed.
- Apollo begins with speed and a lot of show, while Rocky waits for the opening and lands a great punch to knock Apollo down.
- **Key:** The evil one dances and intimidates, while we need to just remain calm and allow our Lord to strike him with an uppercut on the chin with love and grace from on high. In doing so, we *grow in confidence* that Christ wins the battle.

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Final Fight Scene



- The fight is an all-out war. By the 14th round, both fighters are severely injured.
- Rocky's right eye is swollen shut, and he famously demands his trainer Mickey to "cut" his eyelid to restore his vision. He is willing to suffer immense pain and self-mutilation to achieve his personal goal of lasting all 15 rounds with the champion.
- In a pivotal moment, Apollo knocks Rocky down. While Mickey tells Rocky to stay down, Rocky shows incredible **resilience** by rising to his feet, shocking Creed and landing solid body punches and breaking Creed's ribs before the bell.

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Final Fight Scene



- The 14th round represents a core theme of the film – perseverance over raw talent (triumph of spirit).
- **Apollo Creed** must be thinking, “You have got to be kidding me. This guy *never* gives up.”



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Final Fight Scene



- Rocky’s resilience in getting back up is a **critical lesson** in the spiritual battle we all must undergo in life.
- Our Catholic faith emphasizes resilience through faith.
- **Key:** A saint is defined not by never falling, but by a “holy stubbornness” in **getting back up**, relying on God’s mercy, and asking for the Lord’s forgiveness in confession.
- As long as you get back up, stay in the ring and fight, **you will go the distance and win!**

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Final Fight Scene

- Apollo Creed wins the fight by **split decision**. The judges' scores were 8-7 for Creed, 7-8 for Balboa, and 9-6 for Creed.
- Interestingly, Rocky does not show much concern for the decision. He achieved his personal goal of going the distance with Creed, something no other fighter had done before.
- Instead, Rocky calls out for **Adrian**. She runs to Rocky, where the two embrace in the ring, symbolizing that Rocky's true victory was personal and emotional rather than athletic.
- **Key:** Their hug symbolizes that love, human connection, and self-respect are more valuable than winning or fame.

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Final Fight Scene



- The final fight ends as the culmination of a redemptive, Catholic-themed journey, presenting Rocky Balboa as a Christ-like figure undergoing a "resurrection" from a lowly-broken state.
- Rocky endures suffering, mirroring the Passion of Christ, revealing that victory is achieved not through brute strength (might) but by the spirit.
- Adrian, for her part, has a Blessed Mother feel as she is present, offering her emotional support and prayers. She quickly runs to Rocky at the first call of her name.

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Final Fight Scene



I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

~2 Timothy 4:7

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Final Fight Scene



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Final Fight Scene



- Composer Bill Conti, who wrote the triumphant score called "Going the Distance" for the final fight in the final rounds. The musical composition underscored Rocky's refusal to stay down during the final rounds.
- Conti said that he was inspired by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass when composing the musical piece.



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Final Fight Scene



- **Bill Conti:** "The music builds as the guys are getting bloody. Rocky says, "Cut me, Mick."
- I don't care about 'Cut me, Mick.' I care about the nobility of the Sacrifice of the Mass. ...I write music because it feels to me like a death and a rebirth. It seems to me like the renaissance, like the rebirth, like a Mass, like a sacred thing that is going on at that moment."
- **Key:** The Mass is the sacramental re-presentation of the death and Resurrection of Christ, under the appearances of bread and wine.

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Final Fight Scene



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Final Fight Scene



- Adrian loses her red hat after the final bell on the way to the ring, symbolizing the shedding of her extreme shyness, fear, and former "hidden self" to fully commit to Rocky.
- She becomes vulnerable but emotionally available to be with Rocky in his moment of triumph.
- For Rocky and Adrian, unconditional love, personal human connection, and self-respect are more valuable than winning or fame.
- Love and personal growth, rather than just boxing, takes center stage.



- Rocky asks, "Where is your hat? Despite the biggest moment of his life, he focuses solely on Adrian."

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Final Fight Scene



- An envious and intoxicated Paulie destroyed his own apartment and threw his jacket during a violent outburst against Rocky.
- He screams at Rocky, breaks a lamp and a dinner tray, telling Rocky to get out of his house. Paulie is envious that Adrian is moving onto a better life.
- After the final fight, Paulie yells, "Hey, that's my friend. Hey, C'mon, you're **breaking** the jacket." He lifts the ropes for Adrian, symbolizing that this "lovable slob" moves from "breaker" to "helper"; he chooses loyalty over his own bitterness.



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Final Points



- Some final points from this *great* movie!
 1. **Danger of complacency**: Rocky lived a fairly complacent life, a "bum" or an average boxer before being given a "million-to-one-shot" to fight Apollo Creed.
 2. **Importance of a support system**: Mickey drew out the best in Rocky and Adrian provided his emotional stability.
 3. **Resilience over talent**: Rocky was not the most gifted fighter, but his "heart" and ability to take hits allowed him to endure. In a later movie, Rocky will say, "It ain't about how hard you can hit; it's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward."

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Final Points



- Some final points from this *great* movie!
 4. **Always get back up:** Rocky kept getting back up, even when his trainer and friends told him to stay down. As a result, he went the distance demonstrating that true victory comes from perseverance.
 5. **A happy ending:** Going the distance, Rocky calls out for Adrian. Their union at the end is a glimpse of God's will that after all the struggles in our life, He wills to be united with us in an eternal embrace.



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Final Points



- Every champion was once a **contender** who **refused** to **give up**.



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St. Therese



- Final Quotes by St. Therese
 - A saint is not someone who never falls, but one who always gets back up again.
 - It is confidence and nothing but confidence that must lead us to love.
 - I can do nothing on my own, but I believe in the power of God's grace.

