

1. Sister Aloysius was certain.
  - a. She was certain she knew how to run St. Nicholas School, manage her sisters, control her students.
  - b. She was certain she knew her faith, the meaning of her vows and her place in the Church.
  - c. And thus it should come as no surprise that when a new priest with suspicious modern ideas, Father Flynn, singles out a young Negro boy for special attention she was certain she knew what was going on; no matter what this priest said, she knew this type of priest.
  - d. She was certain.
2. Sister James, however was not certain.
  - a. She saw the same things Sister Aloysius saw. She also was suspicious.
  - b. But she listened to Father Flynn's explanations and found them plausible.
  - c. She shared his desire to be more open and loving to the students.
  - d. Sister James had doubts.
3. This tension of course is the driving force behind the play and the movie, *Doubt*.
  - a. I don't know if you have seen either.
  - b. But if you have then you realize
    - i. that *Doubt* is not merely the name of the play
  - c. it is also what the play leaves you with at its end.
    - i. Was Sister Aloysius deluding herself because she hated change?
    - ii. Was Sister James a Polyanna?
    - iii. Was Father Flynn a pedophile? Talk to ten people and you will have ten responses, all of them different. That is what made *Doubt* such a great play . . . but interestingly enough, something of a financial dud as a movie.
4. Because when you get right down to it;
  - a. We want to know that our spouses are faithful,
  - b. are children are obedient,
  - c. our politicians and priests are trustworthy
  - d. our world is good.
5. We hate doubts, and hate the feeling that doubt gives us;
  - a. that fear that the world isn't what we want to believe it is,.
6. That fear can cause us to cling to someone or something who promises to dispel that doubt;
  - a. It caused Sister James to cling
    - i. first to Sister Aloysius certainties
    - ii. and later to Father Flynn's reassurances.
  - b. It causes us to cling to our leaders, be they political or religious.
  - c. It causes us to look for explanations and create theories and to do it all, we believe, in the service of the truth.
  - d. Because when we have the truth, we can be certain. And when we are certain then we know. And when we know, then we are the ones who have control. Just ask Sister Aloysius.

7. OR for that matter the people, that day Jesus came home to Nazareth.
8. Jesus grew up in Nazareth; on that the Gospels agree.
9. Thus the people in Nazareth had known Jesus since he was child. And they said so the moment he opened his mouth.
10. He was the Carpenter; the son of Mary; the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon His sisters still lived there.
11. . They were certain they knew him - certain they knew all about him.
  - a. In this they were not alone; for the Gospels are full of people. Pharisees and disciples, centurions and sinners, all of them certain they knew who Jesus was.
  - b. All of them following him, rejecting him, opposing him and eventually arresting him precisely because they were all certain that he was what they thought he was; a savior a revolutionary, a heretic a king.
  - c. Until that day when according to Mark, Jesus was crucified and all their certainties were shattered.
  - d. That day, which actually began on that day in Nazareth, had to happen; because according to Mark, their certainty about who Jesus was, blinded them to who he truly is.
  - e. OR perhaps better put; their certainty about him, precluded faith in him.
12. Because despite Sister Aloysius and so many others, faith requires something: It requires doubt. IT requires the possibility, the real possibility that what we are so certain about isn't so real isn't so certain.
13. Jesus' "mighty acts" in the Gospels
  - a. Were not parlor tricks meant to wow the people;
  - b. They were actions meant to break open their minds to the new possibilities
  - c. Inherent in Jesus and the message he preached.
14. But since the people of Nazareth were certain they already knew him,
  - a. Since there was no room for doubt;
  - b. There was no room for faith.
    - i. Thus Jesus could perform no "mighty acts" there.
    - ii. Thus Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith.
15. In *Doubt*, Sister Aloysius' certainties eventually win the day.
  - a. She forces Father Flynn to resign.
  - b. But in the final scene, a conversation between Sister James and Aloysius takes place, in which Aloysius reveals that in order to get him to leave, she had to lie.
16. At that moment Sister Aloysius says that some times you have to step away from god to serve God.
17. And we remember that she said that once before,
  - a. at the beginning of the movie; but then with far more certainty.
  - b. For her encounter with Father Flynn had shattered her;
  - c. it had broken her open,
  - d. and in the last moments of the movie she cries, "I have such doubts"!
18. That moment is deeply unsettling for all who believe Flynn guilty;

19. as well as for those who believe him innocent.
20. I know it unsettled me.
  - a. Because it reminded me, reminds us all
  - b. of just how uncertain our certainties can be;
  - c. and how they can reveal themselves to be mere bias against someone or something,
  - d. all so that we do not have to doubt.
    - i. But perhaps it was also something else.
21. Perhaps it was for her what the crucifixion was for all the people who were so certain they knew who Jesus was, starting that day in Nazareth,
  - a. The moment their confidence was shattered their hearts and minds open to doubt; and thus to the possibility of faith.
22. I hope you get to see *Doubt*; but even if you don't, strange as it may seem coming from a priest, I hope you have them.
  - a. Not the caustic, critical doubting that can be as certain Sister Aloysius was
  - b. but the open thoughtful probing doubts of Sister James,
    - i. who listened, and prayed and wrestled with the questions . . . and found her answers,
    - ii. recognizing all along that maybe just maybe she might be wrong.
      1. Sister James had doubts, and because of that, she had faith.
23. And when we face our doubts,
  - a. and allow them to be the beginning of our search and not the end,
  - b. and we allow that search to bring us here day after day, week after week, well then, we have faith too.