

Traveling Companion: Why are you doing this to me?

Fr. Michael Tracey

It all began on Tuesday, May 30th when I received an email that said, 'I feel kind of strange sending an email to a priest and yet right now it is the only way I can. Ok. So if this is not ok with you I am sorry Father. I just am not much of a writer of letters or even talking to a priest. I noticed you had an email address from the bulletin and I just was hoping this was ok.' Sandra went on to indicate that she had attended Mass the previous Sunday. She said she "only got pieces of what you said. Something you said got to me and I really don't want to talk about this. I didn't stay for the whole mass."

I emailed her and told her I would be glad to send her a copy of my homily as an attachment.

She responded and said, "somehow I didn't think I belong at mass so that is why I left ok. It has been a long time since I went to mass Father." She went on to say that a young married woman went to our church with her kids and she invited Sandra to join them on that particular Sunday. "She let me sit with her Sunday. But by communion time, I left. It means nothing to me and I just keep thinking about something you said."

She went on to say that she did pull up our church site and read some of my articles. "I will say some how they touch me. Odd though, I am not one to let thing touch me like that. When I first attended college on the coast you were writing then too. That was back when this diocese didn't exist. I don't know why I remember such. Some touched me back then. So, I suppose that doesn't matter now...I know you are busy and all. So that is all I need to say. Just thanks for sending the homily ok. I don't think I cried so much in a long time. I know that is crazy but that is what your words did ok. I told you I wasn't good at this with priest."

The emails continued. She let me know that she remembered "the series of articles you wrote about the so called tears in the pews. It was the first time I ever heard a priest even show any sign of caring about anyone hurting in their church. The fact the articles affected whoever you were talking about at least tells me I shouldn't feel so alone here."

She continues to email me, almost daily. She continued to remind me: "You don't understand. I am not a catholic ok." Another email arrived under the heading, "Who are you?" and indicated "I am sorry but I have to ask that question ok! I just never pictured a priest to be like you ok. Do you think maybe that if I just tell you more about myself, we could go through them? I just can't believe I am telling a priest all this and continuing."

Doors began to open. Desperately she tried to close them. She kept reminding me that she hadn't a clue who I was, why I was doing such with someone who claimed not to be Catholic.

The emails got longer and the efforts to close doors got more persistent. She reminded me that if I knew her, I would change my mind about continuing to email her. The hesitations mounted – filled with "but I can't do this;" reminding me, as with all priests, "you dress the part, but..."

The emails continue as she tries to trust, to share some of her pain, her anger, bitterness, especially at the Church and priests in particular. Of late, she asks her favorite question: "Why are you doing this to me?" in my own proverbial way, I respond by asking, "Why is God doing this to you?" Eventually, I will know.