

Traveling Companion: The "However" Call

Fr. Michael Tracey

The phone rang while I was in the middle of responding to an email. "May I speak to the person who is responsible for making telephone decisions." I smelled a sales pitch straight away. "I'm Brenda with...." She probably expected me to introduce myself and I was tempted to say, "I'm Jake, the Bouncer, at Mabel's Pool Hall."

"Are you the person who makes the telephone decisions?" "Yes," She began her scripted speech and I interrupted her immediately, "We are happy with our service and I am not interested." She tried to persist and said one more word when I decided to cut her off; the word was, "However." "Look, I told you I am not interested. Goodbye." And hung up, I began to think about that all important back-door word she tried to use, "However." I began to mull over its implications in life. I began to realize that there are "However People" and there are "Never People."

The "Never People" are closed-minded, never open to new ideas, new perspectives, and new approaches to life. They are full of themselves, preoccupied with their own glamour, gifts, egos and agendas. Obviously, they are the "know it all" people who have an opinion on everything and, in their own enhanced self-perception, such an opinion is the only opinion that really matters because it is the right one.

The Scriptures contains a plethora of "Never People," people who had all the answers, people who liked to let everyone know how knowledgeable they were, how important their insights were, how right their opinions were. They were full of themselves, of their own importance, yet closed to new perspective, new insights. Even Jesus had a hard time with such. He couldn't work any miracles in their lives because of their closed-mindedness, their lack of faith, their predisposition to judge without knowing.

The Scriptures, too, has a multiplicity of the "However People," people who were willing to climb trees, go out on a limb, people who were willing to ask for the impossible, knowing it would be possible; people who didn't grandstand on protocol but instead on their unworthiness and their deep-seated need for healing, hope and forgiveness; people who were on the fringes of society; people who weren't bothered by status-seeking or ladder-climbing adventures. They were usually the sinners, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the possessed, the ostracized women; the ones tried without evidence or jury.

It seems Jesus had a special place in his heart for the "However People," people who knew their needs and weren't ashamed to ask for help and healing; people who had the gift of courage and faith rather than the burden of expertise.

I remember hearing a tongue-twister piece of wisdom that still challenges me. It said, "He who knows not and knows not that he knows not is a fool, shun him. He who knows not and knows that he knows not can be taught, teach him."

"However" opens doors. "Never" closes them. "However" offers new insights. "Never" quenches any new fires. "However" expands minds and horizons. "Never" pulls down the shutters on life and its possibilities. "However" invites growth. "Never" stifles creativity. "However" exudes optimism. "Never" seals fate. "However" is an invitation to grace. "Never" seals its fate.

Now that I think about it, I "Never" thought a simple telephone call could lead anywhere, "However..."