

Traveling Companion: Behold a Treasure

Fr. Michael Tracey

I watched him on Friday morning through my living room window. In the early morning, while cars sped by, nearby, he was absorbed in his own mission. This middle-aged man, clad in a navy blue pants and light blue shirt, searched. Methodically, he waved his magic wand metal detector over the graveled parking lot, while he listened for the hum of a hidden treasure through his earphones.

He stopped frequently over a spot that might yield a hidden treasure. He brushed aside the gravel with his shoe to get a clearer sound. He stooped down and, with his left hand, would pick up his treasure and momentarily examine it before he put it into his pants pocket. He continued to make a few discoveries as he went along. Later, with an air of satisfaction and accomplishment, he paused, reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. He put one in his mouth, lit it and continued on with his search. Minutes later, he pulled down the earphones from his ears onto his neck, unplugged his metal detector and disappeared. I surmised, he might have found a few coins. Obviously, he was satisfied with his reward and left.

As I thought about what I saw that morning, I realized I was seeing a parable in action. We live in a fast-paced world, filled with noise and fleeting promises. The noise becomes our distracter and detractor. It shields us from our God, our lives and ourselves. We cannot hear the whisper of God that says, "Be still and know that I am. God (Psalm 46:10)" We befriend the noise because we don't want to embrace our own stillness and its gifts. We tune in all kinds of distracting sounds in order not to hear or face our own stillness and its creator. We live with so much noise that we can barely hear our own heartbeat. There always seems to be a radio humming, a TV serenading, a phone ringing in the foregrounds and backgrounds of our lives. We seem to tune in the distractions and tune out the silence that speaks volumes. Maybe we really need to retool and retune our lives.

Like the man with the metal detector, we all seek a treasure but the treasure we seek is not buried in the earth. The treasure lies in what we might consider, the most unlikely field, ourselves. It lies in our inner life and this affects our perception of the world and our resulting actions. We tend to ignore this treasure because it is both mysterious and complex as well as the fact that it can only be discovered in stillness.

Like the man with the metal detector, we need our own tools to detect this hidden treasure. We need experts – doctors, psychologists, religious teachers and specialists from all levels of life to help, but not dominate us. We must be willing to allow the word of God to hover over our busyness, our distractions in order to bring order and stillness out of the chaos within us.

I begin to be drawn to the words of Gerald Manly Hopkins in his poem, "The Wreck of the Deutschland:"

Since, thro' he is under the world's splendor and wonder,
His mystery must be instressed, stressed;
For I greet him the days I meet him, and bless when
I understand.

Of course, as I looked out the window that morning at the man searching for treasures, I could be doing other things but, then again, in the stillness of that moment, I found my own treasure.