

Traveling Companion: My Lenten Bicycle Trail

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Over twenty-five years ago, I purchased a ten-speed Schwinn bike and rode it through the streets of Bay St. Louis. Later I rode it through the streets of Biloxi and then Gulfport. Then I put it in mothballs for twelve years. The gears seized and its tires rotted as it pleaded for some exercise.

On moving back to Bay St. Louis, I decided to give my Schwinn a facelift. My bike leaped for joy in the womb of its newfound possibilities.

I decided to do a warm-up for my Lent. I put on my bike helmet and took my bike for a road test one Monday afternoon. It was excited and so was I.

As I peddled down the beach, my face warmed to the gentle breeze from the Gulf of Mexico. The freedom of the wide, open beach road beckoned me to explore more. I did.

The road presented me with its own hazards. Cars passed. The drivers were cushioned from the hard, uneven pavement by their cooperating shock absorbers. I was not so lucky. My banana saddle graciously accepted the pounding pavement and transferred them on to my rear end. I negotiated the bumps and bruises of the road, trying to ease the discomfort. Often it became a useless gesture. It did remind me of Lent, of the bumps and bruises that life throws at us in order to shape and polish our diamond in the rough lives. Lent is a time to face such bumps and bruises to shape us into a resurrection people.

As I peddled along at my own consistent pace, I saw life from a different angle. I noticed houses and people; recently built homes, refurbished piers, newly seeded lawns. Traveling in a car, I would be immune to such observations. It reminded me that Lent challenges us to slow down, to take stock of the things that we take for granted, the simple yet necessary things.

On such a maiden voyage, there is always the question, how far does one want to go? Ordinarily, one starts off slow and builds to a peak, so one is told. But the nagging question remains, how far? The question became more persistent as my rear end cried a little louder and my thigh muscles asked to be noticed. Still, it, too, reminded me of Lent. We start Lent with great hopes and promises but when the discipline becomes too painful, and the cross of our resolutions become too demanding, we get discouraged and give up.

While one is pondering how far, along comes a surprise. I notice other people cycling toward me. As we pass, there is an acknowledgement without words that we are not alone; that there are others out there enjoying the ride in spite of the pain and discomfort. Lent is like that too. When we feel like giving up, along comes someone to remind us of their sacrifices, how their Lent is going and they give us courage to stick to our Lenten script.

At this stage of my maiden voyage, I am beginning to enjoy myself. I muse at the freedom it gives me. I befriend my own thoughts as I push ahead. I feel good. That also reminds me of Lent. Once we survive the initial shock of our chosen discipline, we begin to enjoy the rest of the journey.

As I turn for home, by another route, I begin to feel satisfied that I accomplished something. Still, the simple but important question haunts me: will I continue? Stubbornness and determination hopefully, will help me persevere in my endeavor. I know, at least, I have accomplished two things. I have no trouble sleeping at night. But, more importantly, I wrote this article while on my maiden voyage. So, who knows, my next article may come from another one of my bicycle trails.