

## **Traveling companion: Didn't Expect to See You Here!**

### **Fr. Michael Tracey**

Easter Sunday! A Church bursting at the seams with familiar and not so familiar human faces, greeted me. People, straight-jacked by the lack of space, hugged their claimed sacred space, hoping for a new lease on life, a resurrection of spirits, hearts and thoughts.

Following the Mass, I stood in the vestibule, greeting the people as they left. The usual greeting of "Happy Easter," seemed to be on the lips of everyone who shook my hand.

Toward the end of the mass exodus, a woman, shook my hand. She was small-framed and probably in her late 20's. She said, "I didn't expect to see you here!" Immediately the wheels of my mind began to get lubricated as I tried to think if I had ever met this young woman before. Maybe I had met her at some parish I had been stationed at in the past. Maybe she was a student at the University of Southern Mississippi when I was in that area. Maybe! Maybe! Maybe!

She brought my mind back to reality very soon when she continued. "I used to live here some years ago. In fact, I was a student at Our Lady Academy and graduated from there. I knew Father Pete very well. He was a wonderful priest and did great things here."

What she said next really got me thinking. She continued, "You know you have got big shoes to fill." Then she gave me some hope and encouragement by saying, "What I heard you say and saw you do at Mass today, I think you can do it."

She let go of my hand and disappeared into the morning sunlight. Obviously, I didn't let go of her comments and observations.

I suppose it is only natural for us to compare. We compare prices, paychecks, clothes, vacations, and especially people. Comparisons often become a barometer of one's success or failure; one's expectations or accomplishments. How often do I hear parents say to a child, "Why aren't you like your sister/brother." "Why aren't you like Johnny next door or Mary down the street." We all know such statements. We have used them and they have been used to encourage us "to be like..."

Why aren't we like someone else? Why are we expected to fill someone else's shoes? Why do children of famous persons, children of actors and actresses have a hard time adjusting? Why do they often rebel against expectations thrust upon them by others? Why do they often drop out, getting in difficulties with the legal system? Why are they expected to follow in the footsteps of their parents? When they either drop out or get in trouble with the law, are they not making a statement? Are they not answering the expectations of their critics?

Why do you think that one of our most confessed sins is the lack of patience? Have we ever wondered why? Why do we tend to get so impatient with people? Why does it come so naturally to us to project our expectations on others, irrespective of their abilities, interests or gifts? Why do we get so bent out of shape when others do not measure up to our expectations of them? Do we continue to measure our success or failure in life based on how people respond to our expectations? Sure, it is commendable to have expectations of ourselves, but we get in trouble when we expect the same of others, without considering if they have the ability, resources, inclinations or viewpoint necessary to respond to our satisfaction.

After all, our true worth is not measured by comparison but through the uniqueness of our God-given talents and abilities and how successful we are in using them. We don't have to buy acceptance from anyone. It is God-given. In exchange, we have to fill the shoes He has given us, not someone else's.

I really like my size 10 Florsheim slip-on shoes. They have served me well for several years. They are very comfortable and they have taken me to many places, spaces and people's hearts. After all, they are God's footwear.