

Traveling Companion: At a Loss for Words

Fr. Michael Tracey

Judith Voirst, a columnist and writer, wrote a book, called *Necessary Loss*. In it, she writes, "Throughout our life, we grow by giving up. We give up some of our deepest attachments to others. We give up certain cherished parts of ourselves. We must confront, in the dreams we dream, as well as in our intimate relationships, all that we never will have and never will be. Passionate investments leave us vulnerable to loss. And sometimes, no matter how clever we are, we must lose. I would like to propose that the people we are, and the lives that we lead are determined, for better or worse, by our loss experience."

Of late, I have had to officiate at a large number of funerals in the parish. Funerals are a particular form of loss, a loss that is not only personal but also final. At such times, people search for the right words to say to the family, words that might build a bridge of hope across the chasm of their grief.

Loss is part of the fabric of our lives. It demolishes our yearning for permanence. It detonates our efforts to control. It explodes our certainty and it leaves us, not only speechless but also vulnerable.

It is estimated that the average person has sixty thousand separate thoughts each and every day. It is no wonder we lose our mind trying to keep tabs on them. Yet, we are not supposed to keep tabs on them as such. We are to challenge, articulate, and examine them so we can separate the chaff from the wheat. In the process, we lose and we gain.

Many in our church pine for the return of "the good old days," in our church. They exhibit a nostalgic hankering for "days" in our church that were not necessarily "good old days."

We live at a time when more people are spiritual than religious. Spirituality predates religion. Spirituality is concerned with the deeper, inner hunger for meaning and connectedness. Religion, on the other hand, thrives on the idea of exile. We are exiled not so much from something but because of our obsession with and concern for order and predictability in our lives.

In order to learn from loss in our lives, first of all, we must be willing to question everything. Secondly, we must be prepared to listen to the meaning and direction such questions generate. Thirdly, that listening challenges us to probe the depth of our being by broadening our horizons, dialoguing in silence and prayer with its discoveries, thereby finding new ways to relate to self, others, God and life.

We need to move from the obsession with order and predictability to rediscover the spiritual that reminds us of our need for connectedness, after we have unloaded our crippling baggage. Then we are ready to be converted and begin to explore both the external and internal in a new light.

I suppose, by now, I have lost you in all this rambling. Maybe you are saying to yourself, "what is he talking about?" Maybe, you've given up reading this a long time ago. Maybe I have "lost" you in the process. Maybe you are at a "loss for words" to understand. Maybe, I was at a "loss" of words when I started this article, and still am. Maybe, I am a better person because of my "loss" experience.