

Traveling Companion: I'm still wondering...

Fr. Michael Tracey

The other day, I shopped at a grocery store that also had a mini-restaurant and wine department. When I finished shopping, I decided to use the restroom. There, in the men's restroom, I discovered something amazing and amusing. As I washed my hands and began to blow dry them, I noticed a rather large black sign and etched in white letters was the following message: "Alcohol consumption can cause physical and mental problems if one is pregnant."

Obviously, I chuckled. I knew it stated a medical fact but I was also amused that such a notice was posted in the men's restroom. Then I wondered if the message might be posted for a would be Arnold Swartznaggar by his doctor, Danny DiVito, because of the movie, "Twins." Why else would such a warning be posted in a men's restroom? Was it there to impress upon men to warn their wives about the consumption of alcohol during their pregnancy?

Life is filled with surprises and when I think I have it all together, it gets juxtapositioned. When I think I have my day organized and under control, I lose control and things become chaotic. When I think I have figured out someone, then they do something to surprise me and I have to start all over again. When I think I have the right answer, all of a sudden, the question has changed. When I think I know what I am doing, I end up totally confused. When I buy something and think I am getting a bargain, I find out a few days later that it has just gone on sale. When I think I have figured out God, he comes along and changes the script so I have to keep on guessing. Then I remember that if I want God to laugh, all I have to do is tell him my plans.

One of the things I love about parish life is its unpredictability. I may get up in the morning and have my day planned or nothing planned and then it surprises me with its interruptions. Then I realize that such interruptions were part of the day that God scripted for me.

I may have some appointments and meetings scattered throughout the day. Then a phone call from the hospital to go and anoint someone; then someone drops in to see me; then someone calls for an urgent appointment; then someone wants me to go to lunch with them; then the funeral home calls to arrange a funeral; then someone from the school calls and wants to know if I would come and take some pictures for them; then it is time to check emails and listen to and try and answer some pressing problems. Then it is three o' clock and school is getting out. Now it is time out for me; time for a break and an afternoon cup of tea and some goodies. The doorbell rings. Tessa, a smiling kindergartener rushes in, climbs on my lap and wants to tell me about her day.

Then I ponder the correlation between chaos and creativity. I think about the *butterfly effect*, how the beating of a butterfly's wings can alter a tornado on the other side of the world. I begin to grasp how we bury the negative by denial and projection; how we run away from pain and discomfort; how we feel compelled to control and manipulate. I begin to understand that problems are not obstacles for which I must find a solution but rather they will open up new ways for me to perceive and understand reality.

Then I realize in the words of St. John of the Cross that "all created things are but crumbs that fall from the table of God." What I like about such crumbs is that I can eat as much as I like and I'll never gain any weight. Now, that's something to keep me wondering!