

Traveling Companion: Why can't they accept me?

Fr. Michael Tracey

The doorbell rang on Easter Sunday afternoon. I opened the door and recognized her immediately. Jan had outgrown her teenager spurts. Now, in her late thirties, I remembered her from twenty years earlier. She had participated in one of the SEARCH retreat weekends I led years ago. Now, she stood at the rectory door, bridging a gap of twenty years.

She burst into tears without saying a word. The tears ran down her cheeks in torrents, fogging up her wire-rimmed glasses. Finally, forcing a lull in the tears, she asked, "Can I talk to you?" Before I could answer, the torrents of tears exploded once again.

Finally, we talked. She tried to talk amid her outbursts of tears, resembling a stuttering car, not getting enough gasoline.

Jan was now married and living in the area. Gradually, her story unfolded. She married someone who had an alcohol problem. She spent her married life so far trying to cure his disease. She was proud of her achievement.

She had taken a man with a poor self-image, the product of an alcoholic family, the possessor of a crutch to get himself through life. She tried to affirm his goodness; weaned him from his addiction; set him on a path of sobriety; reinforce his gifts and skills. It all seemed to be working. So, why the tears on a day of resurrection, a day of joy and hope? I soon found out.

She attended Mass that Easter Sunday morning. She listened to the homily that spoke of hope even in the darkest moments of life, affirming that hope and of resurrection for us from our deepest sufferings, pains, struggles, fears and deaths; are possible.

Why, all of a sudden, was she now feeling pain and hurt? Why were her tears flowing so generously?

She was struggling with her parents. Her parents reminded her constantly that she should never have married this man. They kept reminding her that she was "too good for him;" that she "deserved better;" that she was "wasting her life."

She hoped, in vain, for her parents support and only found isolation. She hoped that they would understand and accept her decision but got rejection instead.

Now, on Easter Sunday, she stood alone, carrying her bucket of tears to anyone who might listen. She couldn't go to her parents. They wouldn't understand. She couldn't go to her husband. He was out of town, working. Instead, she came, looking for hope, for some reassurance, for someone to accept her in her decisions and commitments.

She continued to talk amid the sudden outbursts of tears. I continued to listen to a young woman, crucified by the expectations of her parents; feeling all alone, as she carried her cross of pain in an uphill battle; hoping for some kind of Easter miracle.

As I listened to Jan, my mind wandered back to earlier that morning. I remembered the overflowing church, filled with regular and seasonal churchgoers, celebrating new beginnings, new dawns, new hope. I realized that, in the middle of that mass of humanity, stood Jan. I'm sure someone turned around and offered her peace and Easter greetings. I wondered if, even then, she fought back the tears, as she felt so alone and burdened that Easter morning. I wondered if her parents stood at the same Mass as she did. I wondered if they noticed her soul-wrenching agony or did they continue to be disappointed.

I began to realize that it is possible for tears of sorrow and struggle to burst forth from people's graves on Easter mornings as well as new, risen life. I just continue to hope and pray that somehow, Jan's Good Fridays will be followed by some Easter Sundays in the near future.