

Traveling Companion: I'm Fine, but some people think I'm Not!

Fr. Michael Tracey

I checked my emails on Monday morning. One, in particular caught my eye. It said, that they heard a rumor that I was relieved of my parish duties for health reasons. Later that afternoon, I received a phone call from the editor of Gulf Pine Catholic who asked the secretary if I was okay, if there was anything wrong; if I was feeling okay. The secretary assured her. Obviously, the editor was concerned because she hadn't gotten my article for the newspaper. She was worried because I seem so prompt with past articles. The article she worried about got lost in an email jungle days earlier.

I emailed a response to the person, who indicated that "I was relieved of my parish duties for health reasons," and told them that I was very much alive and well and still carrying out my parish duties. The only doctors I had seen in the past two years were friends or parishioners and that was in a non-professional setting.

In a way, I felt honored that I was the subject of a rumor of such magnitude. At least, I realized someone was thinking about me, maybe even concerned about my well-being. Of course, I would hope that such a person would be just as concerned about me in my wellness as in a possible illness.

I had read a useless piece of information recently that fascinated me. It said that "if a rumor was started at midnight and repeated within two seconds by everyone who knew about it to two people, and those two people told two people and those two people told another two people – everyone on earth would know about it by 6:30 in the morning."

Now, I am not a math whiz kid and am not sure about such a useless piece of information but I know that we can never underestimate the power of a rumor.

I wonder what fascinated us and traps us into perpetuating rumors. I sometimes wonder if it is a desire for power. Phrases like, "did you hear the latest...?" or "You know what happened to...!" or a simple phrase like, "Guess what!" They all seem like pleas for attention, for respect, for notoriety, for a captive audience. They are reminders to the listener that someone has some secrets to tell, some special knowledge to impart, some classified information to impart, some latest, but as yet unpublished inside-track scoop to share.

Maybe, that's why we have gossip columnists in newspapers, checkout counter scandal sheets ready to be devoured by waiting eyes. Maybe it is all a power ploy.

I notice that even the church does not escape untarnished in this field of special knowledge and revelations. I often encounter churchgoers who are caught up and fascinated with and have to have knowledge of and maybe even participation in the latest visions and revelations that supposedly take place in many parts of the world. It is so easy to become carriers of the latest visions and revelations instead of participators in the miracle of the Eucharist. Maybe, then again, we are fed more with visions and revelations that supposedly give us power rather than the nourishing Bread of Life that satisfies our deepest hungers and desires.

Maybe, rumors are really not a hunger for information but instead a hunger for power. Maybe, the latest may not be the greatest or most accurate. Maybe the special knowledge may be as porous as Swiss cheese. Maybe the inside track information is played in the wrong ball field.

As for myself and the rumors about me, well, I feel honored that someone is thinking about me but I also feel saddened that my pain may be more important than my well-being.

I just wish to assure my readers that rumors of my imminent eradication have been greatly overstated. Instead I am alive and well, still writing articles, especially about people who think I'm not fine when, in fact, I am.