

Traveling Companion: Sit with me in the darkness

Fr. Michael Tracey

Today, I noticed the two vehicles in the parking lot of the public pier. Both white, one was a city truck and the other a van. I have been noticing them every morning as I ride my bike past the area at 5:30 a.m. The vehicles were parked so that the drivers could talk to each other through their respective windows.

Of late, I have noticed a different set up. A small folding table stood at the side of the truck, flanked by two folding chairs. They were positioned under one of the parking lot lights. I began to wonder about this new set up. Why two chairs and a table in the middle of a parking lot on a cold winter's morning? What did they signify?

My mind began to play different scenarios. I concluded that the occupants of the two vehicles who were in reality night watchpersons, whiled away the night sitting at the table. They probably sat there, sipping hot coffee, sharing stories and possibly playing cards. I thought, how interesting!

Maybe, the graveyard shift for the two persons was more enlightening than morbid, more entertaining than filled with prolonged yawns; more bonding than bewildering.

I thought of the spiritual significance of the two persons, the table and two chairs sitting in an empty parking lot waiting for the sunrise and the dawning of a new day.

So often in life, we detest the chaos and darkness that sometimes envelops us. We take flight through busyness or escape. We refuse to sit in the ashes of its discontent. We panic at our lack of control in the situation. We want to "get over it" rather than walk through it. We ask questions like, "How am I going to get through it?" or "When will this end?" or "Why is this happening to me now?" "Is this what they call 'the dark night of the soul?'" "I don't like where I'm at!"

Of course, we like to be in control; to be in charge; to let people know we've 'got it together.' We like to set our life on cruise control and speed through the highways of life without care or worry, bump or bruise.

I learned a valuable lesson from the table, flanked by the two chairs. I learned that when it is dark and my life seems like a cacophony of barrenness and brokenness, of chaos and calamities, of dead-ends and distain, I have to allow the darkness to speak to me. I learned that when I have more questions than answers, that I need to sit back and sample the coffee of life. I learned that when other person's expectation of me cannot be met, humanly speaking, then I can sit in my chair and listen to the dawning of new horizons. I learned that when I enlist the help of a soul mate to accompany me on life's journey, then I can face and embrace the rising sun. I learned that as I sit in the ashes of my own discontent, I will find the embers that will light the rest of the path, if I am patient enough. I learned that the stillness of the dark nights in my life can speak volumes in whispers to me. I learned that the God who sits across the table from me in the night can still become the turning point of my life.

It is amazing what one can learn from a folding table, flanked by two folding chairs. I know that as I peddle my bike tomorrow morning along that pier, I will look for the table and folding chairs and remember the simple but profound lessons they taught me about life.