

Traveling Companion: What are you doing?

Fr. Michael Tracey

Our second phone line rang at the rectory just before Christmas. Usually, this is the number people use to call us in an emergency. Now, I know, people's definition of "emergency" is rather relative.

When the phone rings like this and I answer it, I usually answer, "Hello!" Well, when it rang just before Christmas, I was amused. When I answered the phone with a "Hello!" A rather mildly excited middle-aged woman asked cheerfully, "What are you doing?" Usually, if I know the person calling, I will flippantly answer, "I'm talking to you!" But this time, I decided to pause for a few seconds without saying anything, other than my "hello!" After a few seconds, the woman on the other end of the phone, realizing that something was amiss, said, "I must have the wrong number" and hung up. Obviously, she thought she reached one of her children or close friends, but didn't.

When she did hang up, I waited there for a while to see if the phone would ring again and she would discover that she had still dialed the wrong number but she didn't. I could only imagine her chastising herself in her embarrassment for having made a fool of herself.

The incident reminded me of the curiosity that surrounded Jesus. People approached him and asked him "What are you doing?" "Where do you live?" "What are you about?" His simple, but profound answer was "Come and see!."

I realized that the invitation Jesus offers each of us is an invitation to "come and see!" He doesn't give us a lecture on the benefits of His company. He doesn't ask us to read tomes of theology books. He doesn't ask us if we have experience. He doesn't ask us if we have a driver's license. He doesn't do a background check on us as a pre-employment requirement. He knows all that already. He doesn't tell us what the signing up bonus might be. He doesn't tell us what our health insurance might include. He doesn't tell us what the retirement policy might be, except to indicate that it is so good, it is out of this world. He doesn't tell us how to climb the corporate ladder. He simply says, "come and see!" He just invites us to hang around with him and we'll see what he is all about and, more especially, what his message is all about.

There is no arm-twisting, no guilt trips. Even if we "come and see," and then decide to go elsewhere, he doesn't put a big guilt trip on us. Sometimes, he may ask, "Will you also go away?" Obviously, he wants to give us something to think about.

He doesn't sugarcoat anything. He reminds us that if we are seeking comfort when we "come and see," we will be disappointed because He does not have anywhere to lay his head. He just doesn't promise us security, just risk; risk losing our life in order to gain it elsewhere.

He also reminds us that if we are looking for quick advancement in His company, we will be disappointed just like the other James and Johns. Instead, he simply asks if we can drink from the "cup" that he is destined to drink from. Obviously, such a "cup" is bittersweet.

He also tells us that there is no "quick-fix," no "fast-track," no upward mobile track that we can hitch our success-hungry wagon to in order to get to the top. Instead, he mentions distasteful and unpleasant words and realities like taking up a "cross," being "last," the need to "deny" oneself, to turn the "other cheek."

I wonder if the woman who called the "wrong" number that night realizes what she started. Maybe, there are times that the Lord plays a little joke on us; has some fun with us at our expense. Maybe, the Lord will have the last laugh when he asks each of us, "What are you doing?"