

## **Traveling Companion: A Question for you!**

### **Fr. Michael Tracey**

Sue's email arrived on Sunday evening. I recognized her immediately. She became a Catholic some years ago while attending the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. Then she went on to Medical School in Kansas City. Now she was in her final year there and had a question for me.

In her three page email, she flushed out her question as she placed it in context. She explained, "I have been struggling with an issue for several years but this past year has really caused a struggle...I am convinced you have the answer I need to hear. The topic is death."

As a medical student, she encountered several persons who were either experiencing Alzheimer's or were terminally-ill cancer patients. She walked with them through their final days of life on earth. Following one such walk that affected her, an "inquiring colleague" told her that she "would get over being affected by death, and that it would become a routine things that would mean nothing." She responded by saying, "I pray to God above that I am always affected by the death of my clients, and my future patients."

Sue went on to explain that her real soul-searching began when she learned that her best friend in medical school had been killed in an accident. He was 25 years old and "we had such an ideal unconditional friendship, 100% support and help regardless of the hour or need...the pain of losing the best friend, study partner, advisor, handyman, mover, Christmas tree giver still to this day breaks my heart."

From all her encounters with death, she resolved certain things. First of all, that death has become a huge part of her life, with and without her expectation of it, and will continue to occur as such for the rest of her life. Secondly, being a very strong and positive person, she has the "ability to prepare her clients and families for the passing into the next life, and provide optimal care for the process to be peaceful and painless, without medication being the cause of death." Thirdly, "this is my mission in life, according to God. I fought it for several years, because it is such a huge calling, but prayed daily for the doors to be opened if this was His will – and applications arrived that weren't requested and tests ignored and other applications were bypassed for medical school. There is no doubt in my mind that I am on a medical mission for God." Fourthly, death is a process, not the end of existence but rather the beginning of new life. Fifthly, grief is a normal response to death, with identifiable stages. Sixthly, it is God's will to call His children home, with or without warning, and they are happier as a result. "I have faith in God. I know he will always take care of me."

Sue ends up by saying, "I know you have the answer to this dilemma of mine. I know that you have dealt with this more than I have...so the question is: How do I go about viewing death through positive eyes, all the time, and why am I so affected by it despite what I have discovered?"

I sat down at my computer and began to compose a return email. The ideas began to flow and soon I had churned out a three page response to her question. It sent it on its way on Monday morning.

Later that evening, I got a response from Sue. She shared other insights that were profound. She discovered that the tragic accident that took her soul-mate "was a lecture on relying on God for strength and guidance."

She also realizes that she has been blessed with a special gift. After trying to ignore it, she has accepted it and "each day leads to a clearer understanding of the capabilities of my gift –which really scares me."

She ends her email by asking "please say a prayer for me as I continue to grow in faith and service for God. I will say one for you."