

Traveling Companion: I'm not Raymond!

Fr. Michael Tracey

I pick up the Sunday morning paper and begin to read it. I finally get to the social section where I find write-ups on engagements and weddings. I check out to see if I know anyone who tied the knot recently or how many of the weddings took place in a Catholic Church.

On a few occasions recently, I have noticed an interesting trend. This happens in the write-ups of weddings I have personally witnessed. There it is! The wedding was performed by "Fr. Raymond Michael Tracey." That sure got my attention.

In fact, several persons have approached me with the statement, "I didn't know your first name was 'Raymond'"

I know there is a TV show called "I Love Raymond." I am not a fan of it. In fact, I have never watched the program.

I really am in a quandary as to why, all of a sudden, my name has become "Raymond." The rumor seems to have a life of its own.

I checked my birth certificate as well as my baptismal certificate and found that there was no mention of "Raymond" in any of these documents. I even checked copies of the wedding programs from the weddings I had performed recently and found that they did not mention "Raymond" as my first name. In fact, if this persists, I may have an identity crisis.

The Raymonds in my life and name reminded me of how easily rumors start and spin a life of their own. Conversations that begin with "Did you hear about...." often continue to embellish in detail and falsehood, in volume and analysis, in trafficking and character assassination.

Perhaps the old saying that "the best defense is offense" is really true. If we can cast the spotlight on someone else and detract from their contribution, their commitment and their involvement, then, maybe it will provide us with an excuse not to get involved.

How often do people, in the Sacrament of Confession, confess that they talked about someone? When they do, then notice how they qualify their statement. How often do they follow their self-accusation with statements like, "but I didn't mean any harm?"

Often fear becomes the basis for rumors. For example, following the September 11 terrorist attack and the anthrax scare, one of the rumors that circulated was that if you ironed your mail, it would kill any deadly anthrax spores lurking inside.

Someone once said that "The best way to avoid rumors is to put the facts on the table promptly, available to everyone. Don't sweep anything under the rug unless you have valid, compelling reasons for doing so. And think twice about those reasons."

Often, governments and corporations use a sanitized version of a rumor to test the waters in order to try and gauge people's possible acceptance or rejection of a position or product they may be entertaining or releasing. Judging people's acceptance or rejection often will become the criteria for embarking on the next step. "Spin doctors" can take the sanitized morsel of a rumor and generate enough copy that will become a research mechanism for the rumor initiators.

Of course, the magazines that bring us the latest "secrets" of the rich and famous, while we wait at the check out counter; pushes the envelope as far as rumors are concerned.

Rumors perk our curious ears as they propose to give us the latest and greatest, the inside track, the newest scoop, the hot-off-the-wires Gnostic appetizer to titillate over for a fleeting moment.

For the moment, I have enough trouble with my own identity without complicating it with another Raymond.