

Traveling Companion: Sometimes even God is silent

Fr. Michael Tracey

I received the phone call to go to the Labor and Delivery at the hospital on Monday morning. Sensing the phone call was “bad news”, I set out. The nurse ushered me to the room. Family members, including the patient’s husband and parents as well as a friend, gathered around the young woman who lay in bed hooked up to a drip and a morphine pump.

Janet had just had a miscarriage. She lay there in the bed numb, not from the results of induced labor, but from the gnawing feelings and questions that flooded her mind. Her mind wrestled with her own numbness from the emotional pain of a miscarriage.

As I stood there, holding her hand, I learned more about her pain. This was the third miscarriage for this young couple. They desperately wanted to have a child. Each time, they found out she was pregnant, their hopes soared, only to be crushed some time later. When she got pregnant a second time, their hopes soared again, knowing and hoping that if she get past the wall of the first experience, this time, they might be lucky. But, all was in vain. She got pregnant a third time and they waited and hoped that this time too, they might pass that awful marker. They did and their hopes soared again. This time, they felt truly blessed. Nothing could go wrong now. They had turned the corner. They had crossed the abyss of past walls.

Janet went to the doctor for her usual check up. Obviously, she expected good news. The doctor couldn’t find the baby’s heartbeat and sent her directly to the hospital where they induced labor.

The baby was dead. Another hope dashed, another devastating blow to a young couple’s hopes and dreams of beginning a family.

We all stood there, mostly in silence; realizing that we had more questions than answers. None of us could wave a magical wand to change the situation. None of us could offer or accept that it might be “God’s will” because it was not.

Later, we prayed with the mother. I went, with the father, to see their baby. The nurse obliged but first asked the father, “Do you really want to see it.” He did and so she ushered us into a little room off the nursery. The baby lay on a blue linen cloth that covered a stainless steel tray. Its tiny body could fit in the palm of my hand. We prayed as the husband’s tears flowed readily.

Later in the afternoon, I rode my bike along the beach on a beautiful cloudless blue sky and a gentle breezing caressing my body as a peddled along. People lay out on the beach drinking in the sun’s rays and trying to claim the year’s first suntan. Young children and babies frolicked in the water; others attempted sandcastles.

As I rode along, my mind carried the vivid picture of that dead baby as I contrasted it with the families enjoying themselves along the beach. Somehow, it all didn’t seem fair. I wondered where was God in all this.

I realized that sometimes, even God is silent. I realized that the God we desperately hunger for and believe in is also a silent God. We cannot escape from that raw fact. We can only hope. I realized we cannot make God speak. We cannot get the answers we often demand.

I also realize that, in a mysterious kind of way, silence is also a presence and so, it will teach me volumes if I allow it; if I allow hope to be its foundation.

I know that this experience is also a Good Friday experience. Jesus, on the cross, cried out to the Father, “My God! My God, why have you forsaken me?” I’m sure the couple in the hospital could emit the same cry. Moments later, Jesus was able to say, “Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit.” Obviously, the silence, peppered by hope, yielded an answer.

My hope for the couple is that, somehow, the silence of God will speak to their hearts even when God seems to be silent.