

Traveling Companion: The Airport of Life

Fr. Michael Tracey

Recently, I had a four hours layover at Atlanta airport. Once I had walked up and down a few times and browsed some of the airport shops, there was not much more to do but to sit and wait for the next leg of my flight.

I picked a seat where I could observe the mass of traveling humanity pass through the corridors of my watching eyes.

People constantly passed by. Some ran through the corridor, tugging along a carryon bag with wheels. Obviously, they were hoping they were not late for their connecting flight. Others walked purposefully. They had an air of determination about them. They were in charge. They knew where they were going. They were focused on the prize ahead as they strode deliberately to their flight's gate. Some others carried on conversations on cell phones as they rushed down the corridor. They were connected to the outside world but were immune to the mass of the traveling public they passed along the way. One conversation echoed through the corridor. "I tried to call Bulgaria, all three numbers and no one answered." There was an air of desperation in their voice as they passed on the information to someone else.

Some people walked as if dazed, rambling down the corridor, searching for an answer, a familiar place or face that might lead them to the light. They seemed like foreigners in a familiar land.

Flight attendants for various airlines walked sternly to their next assignment, dragging along their traveling wardrobe on wheels. I noticed some carried a pack of Popeye's Fried Chicken. Obviously, they had purchased it in one of the concession stands nearby. I wondered about their in-flight meals. Probably such meals were non-existent. Surely Fried Chicken was much better than a small pack of pretzels and a soft drink on their short-haul flight. Airline pilots passed, pulling their standard issued flight cases. Some cradled a cup of Starbucks Coffee in their free hand. I hope the coffee was not a wake up call or a soother from a hangover.

I noticed the United Nations plethora of languages, cultures and dress pass. It reminded me of being part of a global village.

The public address system barked out its own messages, addressed in French, Spanish and English. The voices, free of any distinguishable accent, almost sounded as mechanical as the voice when one calls technical support for help.

As I sat there in the black vinyl seat, I was aware of the small microcosm of life that appeared before me. I was conscious of the diversity of life that paraded before me; each one was hoping to fly the friendly skies to some familiar place.

Not only did I witness a microcosm of life, but it reminded me of life in church on a Sunday morning.

People gather from all walks of life, all professions, all age groups, all ethnic backgrounds, all socio-economic situations to focus on some goal and find a vehicle that transport them there. While they gather, like at the airport, their mind, their focus may be elsewhere at any particular moment. Secretly, some may be hoping that their flight to church that Sunday morning may be as painless as possible; providing the least inconvenience at a bargain price. Their cell phone conversations may receive distracting static from the unfinished business in their lives as they try to get in touch with their God. They hope for sustenance, better than a box of Popeye's Fried Chicken to go or a miniature pack of peanuts, to be washed down by a soft drink. All in all, they hope for a brief reprieve from the daily deadlines and, even for a brief time, embrace the Timeless One.