

## **Traveling Companion: The silver lining**

### **Fr. Michael Tracey**

I jumped on my bike just after 4 a.m. and headed off for my morning ride. Initially, I dodged the roadside sprinkler systems as they sprayed the still dewed grass. The waves gently embraced the seawall. Obviously, tropical storm, Matthew, had dumped his own fury on a seawall, tired of being beaten down during the past few months.

I glided through the parking area onto the bike trail under the watchful eyes of three local police patrols that parked nearby as they anticipated the end of their night shift. As I rode along, the sea saluted me as I peddled on with its own cacophony of choruses. I knew Matthew had left his calling card as I pressed forward.

I skidded through the mounds of sands he had deposited on the trail, careful to negotiate through any clear path I could find.

Along the way, I noticed the contents of Matthew's vomit as he spewed out sand and sea grass, decaying wood, washed up plastic containers and even dead fish. I listened to the crunching of my wheels as I motored on, weaving to and fro through a gigantic maze of entrails for the sea.

Cars became a rarity as the diminutive moon gave its last salute to a curtain-calling day. The street lights tried to banish the shadows in preparation for a new day. The sound of a cock in the distance called people to embrace a new day.

As I rode along, I felt at home in my own thoughts which took me deeper within. As I reflected on the scenery and Mathew's reminder that another more sinister "Kilroy was here."

I realized that, amid the dimming darkness, a cleansing had taken place. Obviously, later on, when the sun would pontificate, others would see the aftermath.

I reminded myself that, often we find ourselves experiencing our own "dark night of the soul," where, we find ourselves caught up in a wave of desolation, darkness and despair and we have no choice but to navigate slowly and cautiously through its bowels of potential. We may wrestle with some problem, encounter some disappointment, face some rejection, question some loyalty, doubt one's existence, lose one's compass. We never know what the Matthewlike tropical encounters may throw our way; yet, somehow, it allows us an opportunity to purify our intentions, reset our compasses, redirect our thoughts, reshape our focus and eventually reenergize us for the future.

Suddenly, some miles later, my thoughts are disturbed by a parked white pickup truck. As I pass by, I notice two pairs of sneakers by the side of the truck. Moments later, I hear human voices being carried my way. Two young shadowy figures emerge on the water's edge as they ramble along. Life begins to take on a different focus for me. Now, a human dimension has been added to the journey.

On my return journey, I can see the young couple now as they stand with arms around each other's shoulders and facing the ocean.

I begin to wonder why they ventured out so early in the morning to walk barefooted on the beach. Yes, somehow, I realized that there was something beautiful and innocent about their presence. Obviously in love with each other, they had ventured into a debris-infested beach to walk barefooted into each others hearts. To me, they became the rainbow to a Noah world; the dove that returned to signal hope; a reminder that life and love is stronger than death and despair..

I returned home, not through a sand and debris infested walking trail but on a much cleaner roadway, guided alone by the saluting street lights.

Tomorrow, I will journey the same route, hoping that some sweeping machine will have opened up a much smoother path ahead. Still, I will be grateful to have seen an ocean's spring cleaning and a young couple who danced through the whispers of their love. Yes, I have learned that inner house cleaning is a necessary chore but also a gift toward discovering serenity with its own silver lining.