

Traveling Companion: I want to see Jesus

Fr. Michael Tracey

I arrived in the sacristy, fifteen minutes before I was to celebrate the 11 a.m. Mass. Having checked the books, etc on the altar, I prepared to go to the back of the church to meet the people and to vest for Mass.

As I finished checking the altar, I noticed an elderly lady standing outside the sanctuary with two elementary school children. One, a boy, was probably in the sixth grade; his sister was probably in the fourth. Their grandmother sat in the third pew all alone.

Some people had arrived at the church early to spend a few minutes in prayer. The brother and sister had arrived early also, both dressed in black. They had walked up on to the sanctuary and explored the altar and other furnishings. I realized that those who had come to church early were not enthusiastic about having two young people in the sanctuary, exploring it. The elderly lady had come in and noticed the two young people in the sanctuary. She beckoned them to come to her outside the sanctuary. She stood there with the children on either side. They looked up at her gray hair and her walking stick, cradled in her arm. Their eyes danced as they glanced around the sanctuary, drinking in the sights and sounds. They continued to ask her questions. Finally, as Mass was about to begin, they sat down by their grandmother. The elderly lady went and sat down by her daughter-in-law.

I watched the two children during Mass. They kept watching their neighbors in the pews around them. They looked around to see what page the readings were being read from. They watched when people stood, sat or knelt and likewise did the same.

Soon, Mass was over, and they disappeared with the rest of the Mass goers. I wondered about their experience. I wondered about their curiosity. I discovered this was the first time they had entered any church and they were awestruck by the surroundings and experience.

The elderly lady told me later that she took the two children out to lunch that Sunday afternoon and the conversation continued. She also told me that the young boy told her that, one day, he would like to be a Catholic.

A few days later, at daily Mass, I read the gospel reading from Luke which shared the story of Zaccheus who climbed the tree to see Jesus as Jesus passed by. All Zaccheus wanted was just to see Jesus. Obviously, his curiosity brought him a bonanza that included a dinner engagement with Jesus and the realization that his sins were forgiven.

I began to realize that the journey to God often begins with a curiosity. Such curiosity becomes full-blown and life-changing. I realize that if we leave the door ajar slightly, the Lord will see it as an invitation to just step into our heart. The slightest crack in our defense armor will be exploited by God to render us defenseless to his love.

It seems that God is the greatest salesperson that ever lived and he is selling a product that doesn't twist our arm in order to purchase it. He is content to wait, to wait for the opening, no matter how small, to embrace the opportunity to give; to nurture the hurt that needs healing.

When I think about the two children in church that Sunday, I realize that, even before they came, the seeds were planted by the Lord. All He needed was for someone to recognize such.

Often, I reflect on the fact that Jesus said, "the harvest is ready. Pray the Lord send laborers to gather the harvest." I realize that one doesn't have to sow the seed in the springtime of someone's life. The Lord has already taken care of such. All one has to do is to recognize the opportunity to recognize the harvest in full bloom in someone's life and have the courage to gather it. In the meantime, I will continue to watch out for the two children that God sent our way.