

Traveling Companion: Bugged by God

Fr. Michael Tracey

I was relaxing on Holy Thursday morning, take some quiet time in anticipation of the Holy Thursday services later that evening.

I thanked God for answering machines that constantly barked out the Holy Week and Easter Sunday schedules.

Around 11:00 a.m., the doorbell rang. In frustration, I journey from my living room to answer it. My mind was filled with unpleasant thoughts as I prepared to give a cool reception to the intruder in my life at that particular moment.

I opened the door, only to be accosted by an angry, middle-aged woman. She introduced herself. I wasn't interested in even her name. Then, she abruptly demanded, "I want to have a Mass said on Easter Sunday. " Holding back my frustration at being disturbed, I told her that it was not possible to have a Mass said for her intention on Easter Sunday as that day had already been taken by another person and their intention. She wasn't too happy with my direct response. "You mean to say that I cannot have a Mass said on Easter Sunday, in my own parish." "Yes," I answered her. "What kind of parish is that anyway that you can't have a Mass said on Easter Sunday?" she continued, sarcastically. I tried to explain to her that Masses are booked at least a few months to a year in advance. She was not impressed but began to realize that she was not winning the battle.

Immediately, she changed the subject. "When do you have confessions here at this church?" I noticed, she was now referring to "her church" as "this church." I told her the times for confessions on Saturday evening. "So, you will be having confessions this Saturday evening?" I said, "no!" "But you just said that you were having confessions this Saturday evening?" I tried to explain that we had our Lenten Penance Service earlier. She was not impressed. "So, you aren't having any confessions?" she blurted out. I indicated that we weren't but I threw her a lifeline. "But if you would like to go to Confession now, you can."

She was mesmerized and didn't know what to do. I opened the door fully and allowed her in. She followed me to my office and decided to go to confession.

Being away from the church for decades, she let loose with her anger at God, at life, at the Church and at priests and anyone else who might have gotten in her way.

When she had finished, the tears began to flow freely down her cheeks. Some time later, she left a much happier and more peaceful woman.

When she had left, I just thanked the Lord that, often, He sends himself as an intruder into our lives to see if we notice, recognize or are willing to offer some healing love.

A few days earlier, I received an email from a gentleman who attended a recent Mass at our parish. He wrote, "I had the privilege of attending a Saturday vigil service at your church a few weekends ago, and it was a very memorable experience. I thank you for enabling me to enjoy Mass more than I have been able to do in years.

About twelve years ago the security I had known all my life from being a Catholic was completely shattered as the result of an unfortunate encounter I had with a priest that I thought I knew well and trusted completely. ..this letter is to convey my gratitude to you for helping me to remember and recapture some of that spiritual security that has been absent from my life during these past few years...the feeling of leaving Mass and having really benefited from it."

As I thought about the two encounters, I became even more conscious how the Lord puts people in our lives, often at the most inopportune times, so that, through such encounters, he may speak, heal and renew them.