

Traveling Companion: Hunger or Fulfillment

Fr. Michael Tracey

“That was when, for the first time since his birth, it happened again. I felt a familiar tinge rush over and through my body, a slight electrical buzz that made the hair stand up on my nape and arms. I didn’t hear or see anything, but suddenly my mind was filled with a thought that seemed to have come from somewhere both far beyond me and deep within me. I knew – I knew – that there was some infinite power whose relationship with me was being echoed by my relationship with Adam. It seemed to be telling me, without words but with perfect clarity, that my natural state was not hunger but fulfillment. More than that: this power yearned, longed, ached to nourish me, as intensely as I needed to feed my child. The only obstacle, for both Adam and me, was an impaired ability to receive.”

When I read these words from the book, *“Leaving the Saints”* by Martha Beck, they caught my attention.

Martha Beck’s book is the story of “how I lost the Mormons and found my faith.” It reflects her torturous struggle to find healing from the sexual abuse she experienced as a child growing up. The revelation she spoke about earlier came to her as she reflected on the birth of her son, Adam, who was born with Down Syndrome.

Toward the end of her book, Beck says that it “was Adam’s ‘handicap’ that began teaching me how to be happy – or perhaps I should say to stop doing things that made me unhappy. My fear and sadness were so unbearable that eventually I gave up the way of thinking that created them. Over and over, I groped past the shadow scrimms of intellectualism and perfectionism to find something deeper and truer beyond them. Love, I discovered, is the only thing human being do that really matters a damn. Happiness, like beauty, is its own excuse for being.”

She concludes by saying that “we believe without question almost everything we learn as children, stumble into the many potholes and pitfalls that mar any human endeavor, stagger around blindly in pain and outrage, then slowly remember to pay attention, to listen for the Silence, look for the Light, feel the tenderness that brings both vulnerability to wounds and community with the force that heals them. Don’t worry about losing your way, I tell my clients. If you do, pain will remind you to find your path again. Joy will let you know when you are back on it.”

As I reflected on Martha’s journey in search of healing the abuse she suffered at the hands of her father, I realized that her search was not only for healing but also a search to discover if she was still loveable and desirable. Her husband, John’s love for her, became part of the process. Martha discovered that her natural state was not hunger but fulfillment. Maybe, she realized that, like all of us, we desire not because we are empty but because we are full.

We realize that God desires us before we desire God and such desire from God makes us desirable. After all, God first loved us.

Perhaps T.S. Eliot was correct when he wrote in “Little Gidding.”

We shall not cease from exploration
And in the end of all our exploring
Will arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.