

Traveling Companion: When will it be rebuilt?

Fr. Michael Tracey

Recently, I spent some time with some of the reporters, technicians and producers for CNN. They were in the process of producing a one-hour program on the recovery and rebuilding of the Bay St. Louis area.

During the various interviews, they asked me various questions about Hurricane Katrina; about my own involvement, the disposition of the people, the seemingly overwhelming task that is ahead for everyone.

One of the final questions, Brian, the Producer of the program asked was: “When do you think Bay St. Louis will be rebuilt?” His question was obvious and necessary but the answer was not so obvious or certain, at least, initially.

I answered his question by indicating that one cannot put a deadline or date as to when the city would be rebuilt. I went on to explain that rebuilding is a process not a deadline. It is an ongoing process, not a finished product.

Later, I began to think more and more about his question as I probed it more deeply.

So often, we try to bring closure to things and events. It is a natural desire but often proves fruitless. Can we ever say we have “made it?” Can we ever indicate that we “know it all?” Can we ever say, we have finished our schooling, finished learning, finished growing? I doubt it!

One of the most distasteful kinds of people are people who know it all, who have all the answers, who have nothing to learn, who are experts in everything. They pride themselves in their knowledge, their expertise, their “know it all” mentality that they exude.

As a society, we thrive on deadlines, tasks accomplished, jobs done, status achieved; portfolios enlarged; people impacted, income increased, financial security; expectations met and ladder climbing achievements.

We have our measuring rods, our goals and projections, our comparisons, and our affirmations at having made the grade. We have our barometers to measure our earning power, our true worth, our productivity, our output and our influence amid the movers and shakers.

We are always striving, always trying to reach higher and farther; climb another rung in the ladder of success; improve our portfolio and credibility. We engage in simple makeovers that are just cosmetic and makeovers that are extreme. We are always remodeling our homes, retooling our skills. We engage in continuing education that becomes lifelong learning. We are always experimenting with life’s “what ifs” as well as second-guessing our decisions.

We are constantly pruning, grafting and recreating our space, whether it be our little garden or our giant castle. We get bored easily with the mundane, the common, the monotonous and the repetitive. We watch Reality Shows because we are bored with the real which we are constantly changing and manipulating to make it over into our image and likeness.

When someone we love dies, we go through a mourning period. It is filled with emotions, memories, thoughts and experience. Some times, people tell us “it is time to move on.” But one cannot put a time limit on “moving on.” People deal with grief in different ways, depending on their own resources and support systems.

The same happens when people begin to rebuild their lives, homes and community after a disaster. One cannot put a time limit on such. Rebuilding is never finished. One is always growing, always improving, always expanding in more ways.

The Book of Ecclesiastes reminds us, “There is a time for everything,” and we discover that time is not always chronological.