

Traveling Companion: Lost in the fog

Fr. Michael Tracey

On Tuesday morning as I passed Coleman Avenue in Waveland on my morning bike ride, I looked at my watch. It was 4:25 a.m. Here I was in the middle of a blanket of fog with only the street lights to guide me. I was all alone as the foggy dew clung to my face. I pushed on - a sole crazy person out meditating and praying while pumping pedals.

Then it happened! In the distance, I noticed the lights of a car picking its way out through the fog. As it got closer to me, it began to slow down. Millions of thoughts flooded my mind. Many of them were scary. There would be no witnesses, I thought to myself.

When the car met me, a heart a driver's side window slide down. My heart froze for a while. Then I heard a woman's voice shout, "How do I get out of here?" My heart returned to its normal pattern as I asked, "Where are you going?" Where is the sign for the Silver Slipper (Casino)?" "You need to turn around and go down the beach until the end of the road and you will see the Silver Slipper there," I volunteered. "No! I don't want to go to the Silver Slipper. I want to follow the signs out of here." "Where do you really want to go?" I pressed her. "Slidell," she responded. I gave her directions on how she could get out onto Highway 90 and back to Slidell." With that, I heard the window roll up as she turned to follow my directions.

While I peddled on, I thought about that woman, all alone, lost in the fog. Where could she stop and ask for directions at that hour of the morning? There were no street signs to mark her exit and, if there were, now they were shrouded in fog. Luckily, she happened upon a crazy cyclist out, riding the streets at an ungodly hour.

I wondered about the thoughts and feelings that entertained that woman as she searched for home. Being lost in a strange place can be scary. Being lost in the fog in a strange place serves only to compound such anxiety and fear.

On the way home, I thought about the concept of being lost, especially in unfamiliar places. Having biked on that same road for years and, especially after the hurricane, I have become an expert on where all the potholes, ravines, bumps and bruises are. Mentally, I have stored them away so they do not creep up on me unawares. As I approach them, instinctively, I know what kind of evasive action I need to take to avoid them.

It seems that life is filled with its share of potholes and pitfalls; with journeys into uncharted territory; with spring times of hope and winters of discontent; with changes that are expected or surprising, yet challenging; with detours into questionable encounters and lost innocents deprived because of cruel fate.

People often say, "Everything happens for a reason." If that is so, then nothing happens by chance. If we experience sickness, injury, moments of serenity or moments of despair; there is a reason. If we encounter roadblocks to our plans and have to regroup; there is a reason. So often that irrational reason is seen only through the eyes of faith.

When I get lost in the fogs of life, I always remember Tomas Merton's reflection: "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone."

In a way, I'm glad I met and could help that woman lost in the fog and that she wasn't left to face her perils alone.