

Traveling Companion: Romancing in the night

Fr. Michael Tracey

I find my early morning bike ride a wonderful reflective time. Traffic is almost non-existent and the moon shows its many moods and faces as the weeks go by.

It had rained earlier on Tuesday night. The roadside puddles were alive with the croaking of frogs as they called out to their friends nearby. Their friends responded in kind, acknowledging their presence and availability.

I passed darkened houses. The only sounds of life were the sounds of air conditioners cranking out cooler air for sleeping beauties.

The voice of a barking dog would break the silence as he sensed a stranger passing. Then I noticed other dogs in the distance would echo the original barking dog and join in with their contributions. I wondered if the joining in dogs knew why they were barking or who they were saluting with their barking. It was the proverbial: monkey hear, monkey do mentality.

I turned on to the bike trail and headed toward Waveland. The blustering breeze from the Gulf kept trying to push me off course but I resisted. The accompanying street lights guided my way.

Two miles later, I noticed a car and a pick up truck parked across from the beach. They seemed unusual as there was no house in the area. I pressed on with a journey that became uneventful.

The next morning, I headed out again. I came to the place where I noticed the car and pick-up truck parked the night before. This time, I noticed just the pick-up truck. Then I heard some voices coming from the beach area. As I got closer, I noticed a couple seated on the remnants of a pier in an embrace and whispering sweet some things to each other.

As I neared the outward part of my journey, I noticed another car parked in a municipal pier's parking area. Presuming it might be someone engaging in an early morning fishing encounter, I didn't pay any attention. Then, I heard some voices being carried in the wind toward me. Ahead of me, in the sand, I saw a row of palm trees. Under one of the trees, I found my answer. A romancing couple sat, allowing the warm Gulf breeze to enhance their encounters.

On my way home, my mind filled with thoughts of wonderment and questions. I noticed there was no full moon, just a tiny sliver that tried to peek between the dark clouds. My curiosity heightened. Lots of possible scenarios and answers surfaced but I reserved judgment.

As I peddled on, I heard a car come from behind me. When it passed, I heard two quick hoots of the horn as it sped off to its final destination. I raised my hand in acknowledgement and pressed on.

Decades ago, I remember hearing a radio interview with a woman who was dying of cancer. The interviewed asked her several questions but, one in particular, peaked my interest. He asked her what was the best time of the day for her. She answered that it was just before dawn. She would lie in bed watching the gradual transformation from darkness to dawn. She mentioned that it was a very sacred time for her. The world was not quite awake as yet and people had not started to get busy about their day. For her, it was a sacred time – a new day, another day of hope and life for her to treasure, enjoy and appreciate.

People often ask me why I go for a bike ride at 3:30 a.m. in the morning; that it seems illogical and unnatural. Yet, like the woman with cancer, I find that time a special time of quiet prayer, discovery, heightened awareness of life as it wakes to a new day, devoid of all its busyness and distractions.

After all, how many people can say they encountered romantic couples on the boardwalks of life and sheltered under palm trees in a matter of minutes. How many people can say they heard the calls of the frogs and dogs in salute and warning to each other? To ice the cake of experience, I will listen for a short two hoot horn tomorrow morning.