

Traveling Companion: God is in

Fr. Michael Tracey

On Sunday morning at 6 a.m., I was watering the front lawn when he drove up in a small red pickup truck. He got out. A man in his mid 40's standing about 5 foot 4 inches of stocky build, approached me. He was wearing a pair of light brown shorts and a T-shirt. I greeted him with "Good Morning." He replied with the same. Then he asked, "What time will God be in?"

Presuming that he was asking what time we were having our morning Masses. I answered him and he seemed satisfied. He got into his truck and left the parking lot. I found his question unusual but I continued watering the lawn as he disappeared out of sight.

Before the 8 a.m. Mass, I stood in the back of church greeting people as they entered for Mass. Then I noticed him come in. He walked up to me with a large brown leather bible in his hand. He was also carrying another book. He asked if he could put it in the collection. I asked him to see it and he gave it to me. The book was a copy of Austin Leslie's "Creole-Soul New Orleans' Cooking with a Soulful Twist."

He marched down the aisle with his bible and moved into the center of a pew in the middle of the church. He sat there and opened his bible. I noticed how he sat in the middle of the pew. Usually, people come in and claim the outside of the pews to stake their claim. Maybe it is habit or a preparation for a quick exit when Mass is over.

As I watched him, I began to page through his soulful cook book. The cover showed a gentleman, supporting a chef's white coat, a sailor's cap; sitting beside a table. On the table a plate of shrimp in a bed of rice, stuffed bell peppers and other ingredients sat in the company of a glass of red wine. Opening the book, I noticed over 200 pages of recipes for sauces, appetizers, salads, soups, gumbos, seafood, beef, pork, poultry, vegetables, breads, dressings and of course desserts. I concluded that I will pass on the cookbook to some soulful parishioners who can use it with the understanding that I don't mind being their guinea pig.

Mass went on without incident. In acknowledging visitors at the end of Mass, the gentleman didn't volunteer that he might be a visitor. As he existed with the rest of the mass of Sunday Massgoers, I forgot about him.

Standing at the back of church again before our 10:30 a.m. Mass, I watched and greeted the people as they entered. Then he surprised he, he came in again and went to the same seat as at the previous Mass. A few minutes later, he got up and went outside again. Later, he arrived in again. This time he was supporting a rolled up towel around his neck.

Obviously the man was a visitor. I have my own system of identifying visitors. First of all, many of our visitors try to come in through our two large main doors which are not opened on weekends. Secondly, visitors usually come in; then pause at the back and get a perspective of the seating in the church before they commit to finding a seat. On the contrary, regular Massgoers come in, don't hesitate but go to their usual pew immediately. Thirdly, a person who comes to the Catholic Church with a bible in hand is usually a non-Catholic visitor.

Since the encounter, I have wondered about the gentleman and his question. The readings that particular Sunday spoke about Job who had lost everything and was seeking an answer from God. The gospel reading reflected the story of the apostles being tossed about in their boat by a sudden storm. Jesus, asleep on a cushion in the boat, is awaked and called upon to calm the storm. He wondered do the apostles have faith as he demands the winds to be still.

Maybe our early morning visitor had his own storms churning inside him and he wanted to know if God was in so that his storms might also be calmed.