

Hands down

Fr. Michael Tracey

Many of my columns are born during my 3:30 a.m. ten mile bike ride. It is a wonderful time to slowly open the mind and heart in prayer to a new day and a new experienced of God at work in the beauty and people around us. During the ride, I seldom encounter any traffic and never encounter any other strange human being out pounding the pavement at that ungodly hour.

The other morning, as I rode, a thought began to germinate in my mind. My banana bike saddle wasn't taking too kindly to my non-padded posterior that I had to keep shifting my weight to get some relief. My hands, in spite of biking gloves, grew numb at times and I had to shake them periodically to keep the blood flowing. My mind rambled on to distract me from the inconveniences I was experiencing. Somehow, the word that kept coming to mind was "hands." What followed was a meditation on hands.

During vacations, I work on the farm doing lots of manual work. My hands testify to the results. When I return from vacation, people ask, what I did during my vacation. When I tell them that I dug ditches, built walls, brought home the peat for the winter, did some landscaping and carpentry, they simply ask, "Show me your hands?" When I do, they can see the calluses as proof that I am telling the truth.

While distributing Communion, I notice many things, but two in particular stand out. I notice eyes and hands.

Children's hands are obvious, especially those who come up for a blessing. Often parents have to rearrange their hands. Then I notice their big eyes staring up at some guy dressed in some unusual attire. Many of them think it is Jesus they are looking at. Their hands are small, playful, innocent and capable of hugging and entertaining anyone who needs it. Their hands are new, fresh, unblemished, still growing and I wonder about the many things the same hands will carry or accomplish during a lifetime.

I notice hands with nails that are perfectly manicured. Some have added false ones to enhance the manus. The same hands have been treated with a lot of tender loving care.

Then I notice the hands of the elderly. Many are knotted, bent and gnarled by the demands of time. Their life and love lines running through their palms tell their own stories. I wonder what would happen if these hands could talk and tell their life's story.

I notice the hands of the person who is suffering from arthritis. Fingers are twisted and the hand cannot open fully. Usually, the person will come with thumb and forefinger ready to receive the Host. It is the only way they can offer a safe haven of stability for the Host.

Of course, I notice the older person who opens their hand to receive and I see the gentle tremble in the hand, usually an indication of the beginnings of Parkinson's disease. Gently they receive and consume.

I notice the calluses of the laborers hands that are hard from life's pounding and demanding tasks. These are usually the hands of construction workers, farmers, carpenters, plumbers and other heavy handed occupations.

Of course, there are the hands of the teenagers. Many times, they are presented with some words or scripts or numbers on the palm. I conclude that they just had a test in school or are anticipating one.

I still wonder why the passage from Psalm 22 kept coming to mind as I rambled on with my bike ride. "They have pierced my hands and my side.." Then I noticed that the same passage was included among Catholic prayers "Before the Crucifix."

The crucifix speaks volumes so do the hands which cradle the crucified, risen, glorified Christ who constantly gives himself into our hands at Communion.