

Traveling Companion: No more Whispering

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We don't have to consult the "Whispers in the Loggia" BlogSpot any more to see who our new bishop might be. The word is out and the rumors were true that it would be Bishop Roger Morin from New Orleans.

As history is made, we pause to reflect, anticipate and hope. Many of our priests have served under at least four bishops so far. Each bishop had their own gifts, approaches, and impact on the church and people of Mississippi.

What gifts, pastoral sense, approach, direction, attitude will Bishop Morin bring? Once the euphoria wears off, and he is among us, we will see. Like the inauguration of a new President, there are hopes and dreams for great things. Soon, the honeymoon will enter a more realistic stage and even the populi will begin to evaluate the first hundred days.

One hopes that, with a new beginning and beginner, he would be open to reflections from the trenches, from those who work and minister at the grassroots on a daily basis. One hopes that their lives, service and gifts will be recognized, and utilized rather than micro-managed.

Any office, by its nature, demands respect because of its position, status and authority. Initially, the person holding such an office has to earn the trust of their co-workers. Trust is earned, not necessarily given *carte blanche*. A listening ear, an openness to dialogue, an openness to suggestions, a recognition of each other's giftedness and contributions all enhance such trust. That listening involves both the foot soldiers and the inner circle of advisors.

In an age of fewer personnel, limited resources and greater expectations; less of a bureaucracy or "funnel down" approach is appreciated and more of a mature trust, transparency and accountability is acknowledged.

A new bishop needs to be aware of the need for healing. After all, his Mentor, the Lord Himself, spent his short life healing. Our diocese was decimated by Hurricane Katrina. It is still broken in many ways. The brokenness is not just physical. On a much deeper level, it is also humanly and personally broken. This is true of both priests and people. Unresolved hurts often lead to discouragement and apathy.

Many decisions were forced upon our parishes and schools as a result of Hurricane Katrina. Some decisions have left deep scars that yearn for healing and hope. After all, as a church, we are in the healing ministry.

Some decisions need to be made about the future direction of our diocese. Such decisions need to be made collaboratively. In making such decisions, input needs to be sought from all involved before the decision is made, not as a token gesture when the decision has been made already.

Pastoral planning becomes imperative, not from a "crisis management" perspective, but from a vision and direction that people have had input in and consequently own the decision, even though it may be painful.

For too long, our diocese has depended on vocations from outside the diocese to serve the diocese. One wonders why we lack more local church vocations. Are we too used to the idea that "someone else will do it," probably someone with an accent?

Many of our priests have labored in the Lord's vineyard for decades. Their wisdom, faith, guidance as well as contributions to the church must be affirmed in word and deed. Some may feel the need to retire at a particular time or age. Others may wish to continue to serve. All need to be respected and accommodated. Retirement should be a humanitarian decision, not based on age, but on the prayerful desire of the priest. So often, our church has adopted a "usefulness" mode for its priests, drawing out of them every ounce of energy it can until they are no longer able to "function." Then, they can be cast aside to let someone else worry about them.

Hopefully, all our "whisperings" may not fall of deaf ears.