

Someone rung my bell

The plain box arrived just before Christmas. I hadn't ordered anything off the Internet of late so I wondered what surprise the box may contain. My address was correct. The sender's address peaked my curiosity. It was from some "Lynch" in Tampa, Florida. My initial reaction was; do I know any "Lynch" in Tampa. Obviously, the answer was in the negative. Then I wondered if I had met some visitors from there at one of our parish weekend Masses and they were sending me something for Christmas because I welcomed them as visitors to our parish.

I decided to explore the contents of the small sized plain brown box. Inside, a Floridascape Christmas card greeted me. I opened it and read, "Father Tracey. As a fellow night rider, we both need the enclosed two items. A lonely parishioner...sends me your articles which I find spiritually enlightening and your bicycle escapades interesting. Yours truly..."

Beneath the Christmas card, I discovered the two items he mentioned. The first one said, "Incredible Brass Solo – the Resonate Ring of Solid Brass." Inserted into the cardboard casing was a rounded black and brass bicycle bell about an inch and a half in circumference and an inch high. It had a thumb rest to press and warn people of my approaching danger. Now I had a fitting and practical addition to my biking experience. My only experience with bike bells was as a kid growing up and using a larger and more cumbersome bike bell, not so much to warn people to get out of my way but to remind them to step aside and be amazed at this bike riding genius at work.

Now, it was time to discover the second gift in the box. It looked a bit strange and unusual. In big bold letters, it said, "USB Rechargeable." My first instinct was to conclude that it might be a thumb drive for a computer's USB port. But, on further investigation, I discovered what it really was. The fine print said, "Up to 6.5 hours of burn time; Hi-Beam, Lo-Beam and 2 Flash Modes. Complete Light removes in 1 second. No wire. USB Charging."

I extricated the USB thumbnail like bike light from its plastic enclosure and began to play with my new toy. I checked out the various modes including the flashing mode and they all seemed to work perfectly. The instructions indicated that the beam would cast its light about 45 feet in front of the rider.

Having discovered my new found and practical gifts, I began to wonder that precipitated this gift from a complete stranger. Rolling back my mind through my most recent columns in Gulf Pine Catholic, I finally settled on the culprit column. It was a column titled, "A Scary Feeling." The column related how, during one of my 3 a.m. morning bike rides, I scared a lonely walker by surprising him from behind as I shouted ahead a "Good morning" greeting. I used the incident as a stepping stone to decry some of the negative and scary advertisement used by political candidates in a recent election campaign.

I am always amazed at the impact of word, experience and story association. It is fascinating to discover how one experience leads to a new insight or new discovery; how one story triggers a new direction; how one thought captured on paper can begin to transform a life.

Someone called the office recently and asked, "Did they stop Father's column?" We all knew what she was talking about. I had taken a hiatus from writing columns over the holidays. Also, I wanted to build up a series of columns that would take me through the non-productive writing periods

I feel humbled when people I meet say, "I enjoy your column. It is the first thing I read." Such compliments encourages me to discover fresh fodder in the day to day happenings in my life's circle even if some of them surface at such ungodly hours.

I am often drawn to and encouraged in my writing by a quote from the great Southern writer, William Faulkner when he said that "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat"

At least now, thanks to a generous gift from a "Lynch" in Tampa, Florida, I will go out tomorrow morning at 3 a.m. on my bike and endure the agony and the sweat, knowing that I and others are protected by my state of the art new light and gently but effective warning bell. My only worry is that I may not be able to enjoy using that bell because the chances of someone else being out at the ungodly hour, besides myself, is highly unlikely. No matter what, my bell will be rung.