

God works in strange ways

The phone call came at 5:50 a.m. on Saturday morning from the hospital. The caller indicated that a patient in I.C.U. wished to see a priest. The caller said that it was not an emergency but that the patient wanted to talk to a priest.

Following morning Mass, I went to the hospital to visit with the patient and possibly give him the Anointing of the Sick. I arrived at the room to see a woman sitting beside the bedside of a patient, surmising that she was the wife of the patient lying in the hospital bed. He was tied to monitors that monitored his heart rate and vital signs.

Following the usual pleasantries and greetings, I began to discover the life's journey of this couple. The couple, living in Covington, Louisiana, had journeyed to the Silver Slipper Casino in Bay St. Louis to celebrate his birthday. On the way into the Casino, Martin felt weak, passed out and had a heart attack. Taken to the local hospital, he was to celebrate his birthday in Intensive Care Unit.

Martin, obviously a bit confused still, tried to explain what happened but his wife sitting nearby continued to clarify the sequence of events for him and for me.

I stood and listened to their story as it unfolded, amazed at the cycle of events that brought them to this point in their lives. Both had previously lived in Birmingham, Alabama and had now settled in Louisiana following cycles of separation and union.

Both Martin and his wife, Mary had gone to the same elementary school in Birmingham, Alabama. Following high school, their journeys took different directions. Both moved to different parts of the country.

Martin felt a calling to the priesthood in the late 1960's, he began to study for the priesthood. Soon, his life would take a dramatic turn. One of his mentor professors in the seminary, left the priesthood and got married. As Martin indicated, at a time of turmoil in the church and priesthood at that time, he decided to leave the seminary. He got a job selling insurance.

Eventually both found someone to love, got married and lived married lives. They lost contact with each other as individual married lives demanded their attention and love.

Soon, tragedy would enter both of their lives as individuals. Martin's wife was killed by a drunk driver going the wrong way on a highway in 2001. Mary's husband was killed in a lone motorcycle accident in 2004.

Mary said that she always had a "crush" on Martin when they were in elementary school in Birmingham, Alabama. She said that she was fascinated then by the way Martin said, "make." He used to say "meke."

Both of them found themselves widow and widower respectively. Minds began to remember the "crush" of the past, and, somehow, miraculously, could it be rekindled? Only time would answer that question, providentially.

Martin found himself in hospital in Birmingham, Alabama. Providentially, one of the nurses who attended to him, was now a much older woman who, years earlier, had a "crush" on him. Now, in the words of commentator, Paul Harvey, we all know "the rest of the story."

I gave Martin the Anointing of the Sick. As he stretched out the palms of his hands, without promptings, to continue the anointing; I reflected on the short but enriching blessing that I had received from the Lord. Once again, I was able to see the hand of God at work in someone's life – in fact in two people's lives. I discovered, once again, how God works to his own design patterns and not to our plans and expectations.

I began to think of Thomas Merton, the famous Trappist monk whose own journey was peppered with God's grace as he led him through many detours on his earthly journey. In his book, "No Man is an Island," he reminded me that "Each one of us has some kind of vocation. We are all called by God to share in His life and in His Kingdom. Each one of us is called to a special place in the Kingdom. If we find that place we will be happy. If we do not find it, we can never be completely happy. For each one of us, there is only one thing necessary: to fulfill our own destiny, according to God's will, to be what God wants us to be."