

Two First-class tickets

The phone call came in during lunchtime on Monday. Usually, we allow the phone system to record a message if the person calling wishes to do so. The phone rang in quick succession several times. Finally, out of curiosity, Jo, our secretary, decided to check on the number when the phone rang again and she answered it. John Braxton “from the parish,” wishes to speak to me.

I took the phone as he introduced himself. “You probably have a better memory than me,” he began. “I met you several months ago at the parish. I went up to talk to you after Mass and some women came up and distracted you and took you away. So, I didn’t really get a chance to talk to you. You may remember, I was wearing an (airline name) jacket.”

I allowed him to continue. “My problem is this. My mother, who is 85, came to live with me and my wife some years ago. She didn’t get along with my wife. I love my wife dearly for over 40 years and I wouldn’t want to divorce her. I asked my mother what she wanted to do. She said that she wanted to move back to New York to be with her friends again.”

He continued, “I called several apartment complexes in the New York area to see if I could find an apartment for my mother. I finally found one and talked to the Superintendent. He told me that I needed to pay a down payment of \$1,600. Then would be another \$1,600 for another month’s rent that I needed to come up with. I went to the ATM machine and got both payments. I packed up all my mother’s furniture and rented a U-Haul truck and brought it here to New York.”

“When we got here, the two owners of the apartment complex told me that I needed another \$1,600 dollars. I tried to argue with them that that was not what the Superintendent of the complex told me on the phone. “

“I went to the ATM machine here and tried to take out the other \$1,600 dollars but it would only allow me to take out \$700 dollars because I had used the ATM machine over the weekend.”

I sensed what was coming next. So, I asked him where he was calling from. “I am sitting here in the U-Haul truck in New York.

Obviously, the other shoe was about to drop as he asked, “You are the only one I could ask to help me out because I am from the parish.” I asked him why he didn’t go to some place else in the New York area to get help. He again reiterated that he felt called to ask me, as his pastor, to help him.

“If you help me, I will show up at your church and have the money you lent me to you by 7:30 p.m. this evening.” Of course, it didn’t seem logical as I smelt another rotten scam. “How could you show up at the church this evening with the money if you were still in New York?” Obviously, I didn’t let him in on my question.

As a further effort to tug at my heart strings, he made another sweet and appealing offer which I was not about to bite into.

As we talked about the incident with the office staff, Jo, told of an incident that happened at a Grocery chain store in Slidell recently. A gentleman came in to avail of its Western Union services. The clerk who waited on him, became a little suspicious of what he was about to do so she queried him. He indicated that he had received an email with some promises. The only proviso was that he Western Union over \$3,000 to a said account. The clerk advised him to rethink his plan and suggested that he not do it. He decided to leave without sending the money. Some days later, he returned to the store and asked for the same clerk and gave her \$100 to thank her for her willingness to protect him from a scam.

Oh! You may be wondering about that “sweet and appealing offer” John offered me in return for helping him out of his financial crisis. I missed out on two first class tickets: one to Hawaii and the other to Paris, courtesy of John and his airline. I will have to find another way of getting to Hawaii or Paris sans John’s offer which I had to pass up graciously and with delight.