

## **You must be...**

It was time to renew my car insurance. I sat in the Insurance office, waiting for the next available clerk to entertain my request. One other gentleman sat a few paces away. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed him shooting periodic glances my way. As he did, I could guess what he might be thinking. "That guy sitting over there looks familiar. I know I must have met him somewhere before. But I don't know where I met him and I have a feeling I might know his name."

Finally, his curiosity exploded. He couldn't wait any longer. He began, "I think I might know you. Since you came in and I saw you, I have been wondering who you are. I must have met you somewhere before.." Then, he blurted out, "Your last name might be 'Tracey,' by any chance. Would you be a 'Father Tracey'?" I nodded in agreement. Then he said, "You must be Tom's brother?"

One of the joys of being away from the surrounding area for decades, is that it becomes easy to blend in, to go around incognito. Nobody really knows you and when you go out shopping, you are not recognized and don't have to entertain casual meetings or asked questions.

The incident at the Insurance office has become a common feature of my encounters of late with people. If I celebrate Mass in any nearby parish, invariably, I meet folks who, when they recognize my last name, usually ask, "Are you Tom's brother?"

Once someone has asked that question, they follow it up with another question, "How is Tom?" The question is never prefaced by, "It is nice to meet you," or "How are you doing?" still, my ego remains untarnished by such, seemingly, lack of concern for my personal wellbeing.

I have resigned myself to the idea of being Tom's shadow. As for people asking the second question – "How is Tom?" I fully appreciate the question and concern. You see, my brother, Tom, worked in the local hospital system for decades. There, he had contact and access to legions of people who came in and out through its doors. Obviously, friendships were formed there. Some might have been fleeting while, others, were more lasting.

Tom developed Parkinson's following his retirement and news of his diagnosis spread among his friends and acquaintances. And so, it is natural that folks ask, "How is Tom?"

It seems, as we go through life, we are often carried through it, on someone else's coattails. All of us, at sometime or other, have been ushered through life by someone who shapes, forms, guides, inspires us along the way. It might be a parent, grandparent, neighbor, teacher or a friend. Such persons might have been the magic carpet that carried us through life's bumps and bruises. As kids, we might have said, "When I grow up, I want to be like..."

While there are such persons in our lives whose coattails we hitch a ride; we, also, have such persons on whose coattails, we can ride on our journey of faith.

In the past, children were often given the first name of a saint whose feast day might be closest to the child's birthday. When a young person is preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation, they are asked to choose a saint's name for their Confirmation name. and they are asked to research the history of that saint's name to inspire them on their own journey of faith. Also, it was a good idea to know that saint's background just in case the confirming bishop might ask one to explain why one choose that saint as well as its background.

Our church calendar is filled with the names of such saints. We also know of certain saints that are not only patron saints, but saints that are associated with various ministries and causes. Of course, we are quick to call on St. Anthony, not because we have 'lost' something, but that we have 'misplaced it and we want him, with his Xray eyes to find it for us. In more pressing situations, we might call on St. Jude because we might feel that we are in a hopeless situation and need his help as a last resort.

As we approach All Saints Day and the Month of the Holy Souls, we might again, revisit the names of the people, known and unknown, as well as the saints who interceded for us and who allowed us to hitch a ride on their coattails.

So, the next time, someone approaches me and says, “You must be...” I will gladly say, “Yes.” So, in case you are wondering who wrote this column, just know it was written by “Tom’s brother.”