

Traveling Companion: I hate to admit it, but....

Fr. Michael Tracey

I hate to admit it but there is one question that I have no choice but to keep asking myself. What is that question!! “What is the hardest thing for me to admit about myself?”

Recently, I asked a gymnasium full of young people the same question in a homily. The occasion for the question was a Mass to celebrate the life of a High School Junior who was killed tragically over the holidays.

The occasion did not allow an opportunity for the young people to answer the question. All I could do was try and anticipate some of the possible answers. How would a young person answer such a question? I’m sure that the answers would be as varied as the lives and experiences of the young people.

All I can do is imagine some of the answers: that I am lazy; that I put off doing things until the last minute; that I haven’t a clue what I want to do with my life; that I have no idea where I want to go to college; I hate school; that I don’t like the way I look; that I take for granted my family and friends; that I am confused all the time; that I’m bored; that I need to lose weight; that I need to dump my boyfriend/girlfriend; that I cannot wait to get married and have children; that I’m not perfect.

So often in life, we feel as if we are invincible; that bad things happen to other people and not to us; that we can do anything we want; that we deserve the best; that people owe us certain things; that all our “ducks” are in order; that our destiny is written in the stars; that we can never fail at anything. Young people in their idealism think they are immune from crises, disasters, disappointments.

When our invincibility is shattered, we are faced with some profound “whys.” We become more aware of our own vulnerability; our own humanness, our own inadequacy.

Reflecting on the story of Adam and Eve, I wonder if their main sin was not only pride but also an effort to be God. They found out that there is only room for one God. They came to realize that they were not that Higher Power; that the exclusive knowledge and power they craved for was not theirs to receive.

Poor Job thought he had everything figured out in his life. His friends had all kinds of answers as to why Job’s life and livelihood was falling apart. Job quickly found out that God was God and he, Job, could not understand the ways of God. He had no choice but to trust.

Jesus was tempted by the devil after he completed his preparation for his public ministry. The temptations involved the offering of power. Jesus rejected the offer as already had the power that really mattered.

During our seminary days, we had many retreats in preparation for ministry. I remember very little of any of them, what was said or who said it. But there is one that stayed with me. It was our final retreat before ordination to the priesthood. I don’t remember who the priest presenter was but I do remember something he said that has stayed with me for over thirty-five years. He said that the greatest gift we can reflect and pray about is the gift of our weakness.

I have pondered on the idea of weakness thousands of times since. I realize that, reflecting on, praying about and embracing one’s weakness, is not an excuse for opting out, inactivity or commitment. Rather, it is an opportunity to accept one’s weakness so that the power of God’s presence can work in and through us.

During this Lent, I hate to admit it, but I am happy to admit that I am not God; that I don’t have to have it all together; that I don’t have to have all the answers; that it is okay to have more questions than answers. On the contrary, I am happy to admit that my greatest gift is my weakness.