

Barricades for a reason

Fr. Michael Tracey

On a refreshing Saturday morning recently, I decided to check out the ongoing construction of Beach Blvd. in Bay St. Louis. Supposed to be closed for sixty days, now in their seventieth day, I wanted to see the progress. As I walked along the dirt road, I peered across the seawall and noticed a large object on its side. As I got closer, I noticed it was a Land Rover that had careened off the dirt road, off the seawall and onto the sandy beach.

Like a good citizen, I alerted the authorities. Soon, I heard sirens approach. Two fire trucks, two police cars and a wrecker arrived. One of the police officers examined the scene, checked the vehicle for any occupants and then began to laugh once he saw the car tag and began to call it in to have it checked. It seemed that the driver was known to police and that, the night before, he was trying to escape getting a DUI. The driver decided to crash through a construction barrier, raced down the dirt road, hit a newly constructed culvert, went airborne and ended up on the beach.

Soon a wrecker arrived and towed the crippled vehicle away. As they did, I realized that the driver's last ride in the vehicle must have been an Evil Knieval type of ride that ended in a less-than-perfect landing.

Later that afternoon, I officiated at a wedding. The young couple celebrated their commitment vow in the context of a Mass. They were excited about their future. They enjoying their new beginnings with family and friends

As the couple walked down the aisle together at the end, the main doors of the church opened and a breath-taking view of the Gulf of Mexico greeted them and their new day. I thought it rather ironic that the same Gulf of Mexico greeted a fleeing driver late the night before as he embraced a not too breath-taking ride into the same waters.

The two experiences might seem unrelated but there is a certain irony in both. Both experienced a beginning. One was beginning an evening of partying and entertainment. The other was beginning a new adventure in relationship. Both beginnings had both consequences and opportunities. One celebrating in the late evening needed to be aware of consequences of excess. The other, fuelled with euphoria, needed to be aware of the day to day consequences of their vows.

We all experience opportunities and barricades in life whether we are seasoned or neophytes. Often, we find out the hard way that we are not invincible; that there are severe consequences to our actions or lack of them.

We realize that along the way, we will encounter obstacles, detours that remind us to slow down or take another route. Crashing through the barricades of life may often seem like a ride in faith, but often it is a detour into disaster. An indiscretion may be appealing and thrilling initially but it can lead, not only to a bumpy ride, but also to places one did not wish to go alone.

Often we run from an obligation or responsibility rather than face it. A cat may have nine lives but our commitments when broken, may shatter one's hopes, life and relationships.

Many times, one's reputation is sacred and nothing to be flaunted. Listening to the police officers and wrecker crews, I discovered a tainted reputation of the driver. The newly weds, in contrast, vowed and begin to build their reputation. Their script will continue to be written.

As I watch the Land Rover being winched across the seawall, I glance at the punctured tires, the broken windshield, the broken driveshaft and smashed lights. I look back at the tire marks that led to its graveyard in the sand. I realize that along life's journey there are warning signs that are there to protect us; barricaded that remind us not to test our stupidity; consequences that we didn't anticipate. Now, we all know that barricades that say, "Road Closed" are there for our protection, not our challenge.