

Traveling Companion: I Blew It! Maybe!

Fr. Michael Tracey

I was being very creative, working on another article for "Gulf Pine Catholic," when the phone rang. I answered it. For a few second, nothing happened. I waited. Finally, I heard a mechanical voice. It said, "This is D.J., Jim Rayles from KXYZ.." I put down the phone immediately and didn't listen to any more from a D.J. I never heard of or from a radio station I never listen to.

I continued with my article. Then I got this sinking feeling. My mind began to play out various "What if.." scenarios. What if D.J. Jim was calling me about something very important. Maybe destiny had blessed me and his electronic wizardly called my phone number to inform me of how lucky I was. Maybe I won the grand prize the radio station was offering. Maybe it was a trip for two to Hawaii. If that was the case, what would I do, after all, I was only one! Maybe I was the lucky winner of an automobile; but I didn't need an automobile because I bought one two years ago. Maybe, it was a shopping spree I had won but what good would a shopping spree be to me, seeing that I didn't have a family to make it worthwhile. Maybe the D.J. was going to ask me the answer to some question he asked on the air and, if I got the right answer, I would win a fabulous prize.

If I had Caller ID, I could have called back and got another chance. I blew it! And I knew it!

Then I realized that we fill our lives with "what if's." We browbeat ourselves into the quicksand of inertia, thereby paralyzing our potential and resigning ourselves to the fact that we blew it. We dwell on missed opportunities, rather than learn from the lessons, provided by the classrooms of life.

I chuckle when I hear renowned and well-meaning interviewers ask that final interview question to well-known personalities: "If you had your life to live over again, what would you do differently?" The interviewer is hoping for some very profound answer on which to end the interview. On the surface, the question seems intelligent and thought provoking but, deep down, it is a naive question.

First of all, one cannot live one's life over again, at least on the human level. Maybe if one believes in reincarnation, the probability may be greater. Secondly, there is a presumption in the question that one would live one's life differently. There is another presumption built into that presumption, namely that, based on what you know now, what you have learned through the years of living, would one live life differently. Of course, one would live life differently. Finally, there is one reality that is obvious but not always recognized in such a scenario. Practically speaking, one lives the different moments of one's life, based on the wisdom, insight and experience at each particular moment one is living.

I am always fascinated when troubled people approach me, looking for some direction and advice. Inevitably, they may use such phrases as; "I was very naive back then." "I can't imagine how stupid I was back then to have done such a stupid thing." "I was really dumb back then when I did this." I end up telling them: If you knew then what you know now, you may not have done such a stupid or dumb thing, but you didn't know back then what you know now. Back then, you did what you could with what you knew at the time."

Sure! There are lots of things I blew in life but what really matters is what I have learned from such blown opportunities so that I will not blow similar one's in the future.