

Traveling Companion: Keep your but out of it!

Fr. Michael Tracey

I sat in my window seat on a Continental flight from Newark to New Orleans recently. I wondered who might grace the two other seats beside me. I soon found out. Two young people, probably in their late twenties arrived, complete with lots of carryon luggage. A young man sat in the middle seat. The young woman sat on the aisle seat. Later, I concluded that they were dating each other. Almost immediately, the young man took out his cell phone and began to give someone an update on where he was, when the flight was to depart and any possible delays due to snow and de-icing of the plane. He also briefed someone on the impact of a meeting he had earlier in Boston.

As he waited for the plane to taxi and take-off, he browsed through the various magazines in the seat pocket. He finally took out a copy of "Business Week" and began to read it.

As soon as we had taken off and were given permission to use electronic devices, he took out an IBM laptop from an attaché case and began to compose a document. He worked feverishly on the document, occasionally glancing over at his fiancé. On one occasion, he turned his head and kissed her on the lips for a brief moment, before returning to his typing.

The flight attendant arrived to offer a snack of either a miniature roast-beef or chicken sandwich, a bag of baby carrots and an almond chocolate. He declined the offer and continued to type. His fiancé took out a fruit salad from one of her bags and began to eat. On one occasion, he reached over and grabbed a grape or a piece of fruit, while he continued typing.

Two hours later, he decided to end his typing and put away his laptop. As I tried to doze off after a long ten hour flight, I became distracted by what happened during the final half hour of our flight to New Orleans.

The two young people began to talk to each other, finally. He began to tell her that he had a big project to work on and that he would have to work all weekend on it. She indicated to him that he was working too much for the company and that the company was taking advantage of his generosity. He retorted by indicating that he was a valuable asset to the company, that the company needed his expertise and that it was important for him to give everything to the company to insure that his future with the company could be guaranteed and that it would lead to lots of promotions along the way because of his dedication to the company.

His fiancé tried to tell him that he needed to set aside some time for her. It seemed that he worked late each evening and she told him that it was pointless trying to talk to him at eleven o'clock at night when he got home; that he was too tired to talk then.

She tried to advise that he should begin to take more time off, beginning with a half-hour each day and building up to working less overtime.

She began to ask him, "What about us? What about me? You don't have any time left for me or for us to be together."

He came back with a proverbial "but..." He continued to make excuses for his work, continued to tell her that the company needed him, that he was a great asset to the company and that it was important for him to sacrifice himself so that, in the end, there would be a pay-off, in the form of promotions.

I thought, how sad! He was not listening! His fiancé was whistling in the wind of his marriage to his job and profession. She was trying to tell him that she needed and wanted him, not his "but..." excuses.

The next morning, I read the gospel for that particular day. It was from Mark 6:30ff. It began by the apostles coming back to Jesus telling him the wonderful things that they accomplished. He simply told them to come aside and rest in him. As I read it, I thought about that young couple and wondered if they had a future together.

Finally, I realized that, at times, we need to keep our "but..." out of it and just come aside and rest in each other and in God.