

Traveling Companion: Will they still be Catholic?

Fr. Michael Tracey

I received an interesting email, following one of my recent columns in Gulf Pine Catholic. It read: "Hello fr. tracey, My name is Cheryl, and I would like to thank u for writin' such a great article every month. I always look forward to them!! I only wish u wrote one every week. U put the trivial things that we go through every day back into perspective. U seem to let us know that the simple things in life are nothing to sweat. Which we seem to forget that we just need to hand it over to the big guy and let him take it and run. There were times in my life where I would question the things going on in my life. Then I would remember never to question what was going on but to let things come and go as he has planned and just deal with it. Eventually all things would work themselves out. Like the time I was struggling with what religion I should raise my children in. I worried about it like crazy. Until one night I just gave it to the old man upstairs, and said to myself, Look u deal with it I can't handle this, because I have no clue what to do. Well, come a few days later; the neighbors daughter came over and invited my daughter to the church and the rest is history. When all was said and done all I could say to myself was of course, that's what I'm supposed to do. Let him tell me what to do and where to go. Because I have no idea half the time. I just let him lead me and go with it. Because I know he is the one that is in control and I'm to do his work as he wants. Oh life has become so much easier, of course I am human and tend to forget. But then I remember!!! Thank u again fr. tracey for ur work and God bless u. I look forward to ur articles so much. U remind me that I am not alone and that I am only human so give it a rest. God bless u and I need to come to one of ur masses. Take care. Cheryl."

As I thought about her email, I began to notice some important ingredients that make up our identity as Catholics. We start with experience and move beyond it. We become conscious that the divine is mediated through a nature that is often damaged but still a courier; that grace is mediated through a series of symbols, events and encounters and, that life is filled with sacramental moments.

Yet, recent surveys seem to indicate a declining sense of Catholic identity among our young people. Authority in all its forms is questioned as young people live in and are infected by a rampant individualism.

Cheryl, in her email, alluded to something that is at the core of Catholic identity. She mentioned how my articles take a human, ordinary encounter or experience and show how grace is at work. Sociologist Andrew Greeley refers to this as the "Catholic Imagination." God is immanent; can be encountered in a graced nature, scripture, persons, community and sacramental signs.

Cheryl wonders about the kind of religion she will pass on to her children. Some time ago, a Notre Dame University study concluded that individuals growing up in a stable family in which both parents are practicing Catholics, they tend to remain Catholics for the rest of their lives, even though they may stray during adolescence and young adulthood. Even the Second Vatican Council called the family the "domestic church."

Has our faith become more heady than hearty; become more abstract than more experiential; become more devoid of symbolism, story, statue, saint and imagination? Maybe, we need to refine our childlike fascination and dull our adult bland expression of faith.

My next article, "Will our children be Catholic?" will reflect on the impact of secularity on the religious experience of our young people.