

Traveling Companion: What Did I do to Deserve This?

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Recently, I have been puzzled about a question I keep hearing myself and others ask: "What did I do to deserve this?"

The first thing I notice about the question is that we usually ask it misfortune or tragedy, comes into our lives. Maybe we ask it when our job is terminated; when our job demands that we move away from our familiar environment to another state; when we are afflicted with some sickness or disease. Usually, negative happenings make us ask such questions. Sometimes, we ask the same question by asking, "That's not fair!" "How come, it had to happen to me?" "Why did it have to happen now?"

The second thing I notice is that we never ask the question, "What did I do to deserve this?" when something good happens. Why? Why don't I ask the same question when I get a promotion at work; when I get a raise in salary; when my child gets a full, all expense paid, scholarship to a prestigious college; when I meet the most loving, kind, gentle, patient, compatible partner and we enjoy a lifetime of marital bliss and love; when I receive the gift I've always wanted but couldn't afford it; when I win the Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes?

I'm a bit puzzled as to why we ask the question, "What do I do to deserve this?" only at times of misfortune and not at times of good fortune. As I muse over it, I have come to some insights that might help me sort out the confusion and contradiction.

When I say, "What did I do to deserve this?" when misfortune happens, what am I really saying? Does it have something to do with my pride being hurt? Control being taken away from me? Being humiliated? Not being in charge? A reminder of how little I know? Is it my way of saying that I like things the way they are, that I'm comfortable with them and that I don't want anyone messing with them, messing up my routine, comfortableness? It's like when your kids have presented you with an empty nest and you are enjoying your own space and have control over your privacy; then, one of your grown kids calls and wants to move back home again. It's difficult sharing that space again.

"What did I do to deserve this?" If you could have told me twenty-five years ago, when I became a priest, that I'd be doing the things I'm doing today, would go through the experiences I've gone through; being involved in the various ministries I've been involved in; I'd say you were crazy. Then again, what about yourself. If you had known back then the things you were destined to go through, how would you have reacted? Would you say that whoever told you of such things were crazy?

"What did I do to deserve this?" Many people in the scriptures asked this same question. Prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah asked it. Jeremiah was too young to be a prophet. He was a teenager. Isaiah had a speech impediment. He had an excuse. Paul had his own excuse. He had persecuted the Christians and now he was being asked to preach that same Christian message to the Gentiles. Peter asked the Lord to depart from him because he was so unworthy of his company, gifts and miracles.

"What did I do to deserve this?" Why does God keep inviting us to launch out into the deep of our lives when we would prefer to just splash around, while holding onto our flotation device? Maybe God wants to test our faith; maybe He knows our true potential and gifts. Maybe He has more faith in us than we have in ourselves.

"What did I do to deserve this?" It all depends on how you look at it. "What did I do to deserve this?" Nothing and everything!