

Traveling Companion: I Can't put my finger on it!

Fr. Michael Tracey

The email from Marcy awaited me on my return from vacation. She wrote: "Father, I have been having problems attending church lately. I know that you have probably noticed. I've always been a regular churchgoer, and I just can't seem to put my finger on what could be going wrong. I don't feel that my faith is lagging-if anything it has gotten stronger. I start out each Saturday determined to attend Mass the next day, but my determination slips by the end of the day. This began after a few unpleasant remarks were made to me by Fr. X, but I don't blame him. God wants me in church; I can feel it. Can you offer me any suggestions that might help me with this."

I emailed Marcy, giving her the opportunity to come and talk with me about her struggle and her feelings when she was ready.

Someone once said that we live lives of quiet desperation. So often we live, surrounded by the squalor and stench that such desperation imposes on us.

Sometimes that quiet desperation is a certain aridity that surfaces in our faith journey. Many times, things are moving along smoothly in our lives. There is no cross or worry, no doubt or fear, no obstacle or problem. It is as if we are cruising down the highway of life on a sunny afternoon without a care in the world. Then something happens that changes the complexion of things. A simple diversion, not of our own making; a crossroads that we didn't anticipate; a problem that we didn't foresee; a situation that caught us off guard raises its ugly duckling head to thwart our serenity and peace of mind.

I'm not sure what it was in Marcy's case that causes her problems in attending Mass. Maybe, the initial stepping stone was the "unpleasant remarks" made to her by Fr. X. But, it seems that, as she reflects on it some more, that is not the real cause even though it may be a contributing factor.

Maybe, Marcy is going through some growing pains in her own faith journey. Such growing pains may seem negative, difficult, imposing and threatening. Still they can be the raw material for new growth, new potential, new possibilities, new enrichment in her faith journey.

Sometimes, we think that faith is an inanimate object, static in nature, unchangeable in design and experience. We fail to realize that faith is a process; a maturing relationship with the Divine that goes through its own growing pains.

Someone once said that there are two kinds of people who please God: those who serve God with all their heart because they know God and those who seek God with all their heart because they do not know God. Christians of all kinds are both finders and seekers. We are finders of God in that we are drawn into a sense of wonder and awe before the living Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being and we are all seekers who need to confess our foibles and failures, people who hunger for a deeper intimacy with Mystery, people who wrestle with all kinds of questions and doubts.

Faith is caught, fought and bought. It is caught from familiar sacred surroundings and people. It is fought when we want to move from a childhood caught faith. Like a teenager, we rebel against the childhood faith that no longer satisfies the inquiring mind of the teenager or adult in the making. And finally, we arrive at a faith we buy, we own; a faith we integrate into our life that it becomes not just a part of our life but life itself.

Maybe, the fact that Marcy cannot put a finger on what is happening in her faith journey is an indication that something powerful is happening; that her questioning finger is pointing to Reality itself.