

Traveling Companion: Do all these things really happen?

Fr. Michael Tracey

"I really enjoy your articles," she said, as I grabbed a roast beef sandwich following the funeral, I accepted the compliment. Then, she asked, "Do all those things you write about really happen?" I told her, "of course." "Well, she concluded, "you must lead a very interesting life." With that, she was gone and I was left to mull over her final statement.

I remembered reading the conversion story of C.S. Lewis. He had some difficulties making the transitions and some doubts. A friend, J.R.R. Tolkien, author of "Lord of the Rings," said to Lewis, "Your inability to understand stems from a failure of imagination on your part."

I began to wonder what shaped my imagination, my outlook on life, my approach to life, my attitude toward life, toward my faith, my prayer life and my ministry. When I began to study and reflect on Celtic spirituality and the Celtic approach to life, I found my answer. I found what shaped my disposition, my attitude, my outlook and even my writing.

I began to realize how serving in a parish environment appeals to me. It is never dull, never predictable, never choreographed, never on our terms. It is filled with chaos, unpredictability, the spectacular and unspectacular; the common and the mysterious; the ordinary and the extraordinary.

I realize that people fear chaos, meaninglessness and uncertainty; yet, I find in the chaos and uncertainty of each day, moments impregnated by the Holy Spirit. These moments challenge me to gestate it as I mull over it, trying to be open to the birthing process of some new insight, some gem of wisdom, some kernel of truth that may continue to ignite the love and grace of God.

I try to see the hand of God in the events and happenings of the things I write about. I try to see a thread that becomes the fabric of God's tapestry and how it knits together our days and lives into a bond of love and harmony. I realize that God doesn't send us faxes and emails with detailed roadmaps. Instead, he invites us to see the "extra" in the ordinary; the invitation in the problem; the insight in the puzzlement; the hand in the mystery. I realize that what, initially, I might think are "interruptions" in my day, are really graced moments that God sends me to remind me that he is in charge and that I am just an earthen vessel into which he can pour his love and challenge me to invite others to dine with him at my daily dining table. I am always reminded of the old Irish saying that says, "heaven is just a foot and a half above the earth." I just have to look a little deeper and a little longer to find the opportunity in each day to share with others God's handwriting on the walls of their days.

The great, late Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner once said that all of life is an unfinished symphony. All of life is fired in the kiln of restlessness, of incompleteness, of longing, of insufficiency. We yearn for permanence, stability, control, closure but so often God takes away our crutches and replaces them with a desire that can only be satisfied by himself.

Yes, all the things I write about really happen. And yes, I do lead an interesting life as I try to help people see the epiphanies of God in their daily lives because, in the words of Elizabeth Barret Browning:

Earth's crammed with heaven
And every common bush
Aflame with God.
But only those who see
Take off their shoes.
The rest stand around
And pick blackberries.