

Traveling Companion: Another Lenten Headache

Fr. Michael Tracey

This morning, I went to my computer to email my next article for Gulf Pine Catholic. I have done it so many times over the past decades and I expected it to be the same as usual. But it was not.

I stored my Gulf Pine Catholic articles on a USB external hard drive, hoping the newer drive would give me years of dedicated service. Now, I have my doubts.

My external hard drive began to whine and splutter. Its external light alternated between red and blue. I began to feel the blues. What a way to begin Lent.

I emailed the company in the hopes that there might be a magical solution and I would be able to access my precious data. I waited.

I hooked up the drive to two other computers in the hopes that, by some magical act, it might work with them. But, it was all in vain.

In the meantime, I wasn't too thrilled about having to endure another Lenten headache. After all, I had delineated my own Lenten penances. I felt they were sufficient. So, why should I have to incur some more penances?

So, what do I do? Do I email Gulf Pine Catholic and tell them there will no article from me this issue and maybe for future issues. After all, I always like to be prepared for such deadlines by having extra articles available in case the creative juices don't flow. Now, the extra articles are swallowed up in some stubborn hard drive that locks me out.

It is hard to sit down and write a fresh article when your mind is still filled with unpleasant and hideous thoughts.

We all like to be in control, to have things organized, to plan ahead, to prepare but sometimes, when least expected, the computer bulldog comes and gobbles up one's work and one has to start afresh. This time, telling the teacher or editor that "the dog ate my homework" or article does not hold any authority.

So often, things are thrust upon us, not of our choosing but placed in our lives to test, to reevaluate and to reflect on one's priorities. We would wish and hope for other, more palatable ways, of being surprised or angered, depending on one's frame of mind.

As I think about my hard drive crash, my mind goes into overdrive, trying to play out several possible remedies. Maybe, it is false hope. Maybe, the black cloud might lead to some brain-thrust that might yield a "happy ever after" conclusion. We live in hope but continue to deal in practicalities.

So often, we have figured out our lives and directions and make plans accordingly. A hurricane-like disaster arrives and thwarts our best laid plans. We have a choice. We can bemoan our lost control or we can look a little deeper and see if there is a silver lining in the chaotic clouds that ensue. Years ago, actress Lillian Roth suggested that a planned life was an unfulfilled life. By now, my life must be very fulfilled because of how my many plans have so often been derailed.

What is going to happen now that I have been derailed? I am still waiting for an email response from the hard drive makers. At the same time, I am preparing myself to accept the fact that major surgery will not revive my drooping hard drive. Will there be an article for Gulf Pine in the next issue. I have no choice but to wait and see if the Lord will cure my Lenten headache.