

Traveling Companion: Why are the priests hiding?

Fr. Michael Tracey

I checked my email after one of the Sunday morning Masses. One email caught my curiosity. The subject line read, "Why are the Priest hiding?" The body of the email read. "Dear Father: Why are the local Priest not wearing the collars in public? Are you afraid to let people know that you are priest? I do not understand. When the Priesthood is under attack it looks like even Priest are running just like the Apostles did when the Soldiers came for Jesus in the Garden. I am very disappointed. Please help me understand what is going on!! Love and prayers...."

Immediately, I knew what she was referring to in her email. Our annual parish Crab Fest was in full swing. Temperatures were in the nineties and the humidity was also in the ninety per cent range. It was hot, humid and suitable for lots of libations.

During the weekend, I had a funeral and a baptism which necessitated official garb while performing some of my sacramental duties. Once they were over, I decided to lay aside my clerical black and don some shorts, a loose fitting shirt and a pair of sneakers. I joined the Crab Fest patrons and enjoyed meeting the workers and participants. Some commented that it was the first time they had seen me without my official clerical black. I assured them that I was off duty and could now relax and enjoy meeting the people at the Fest.

Our Parochial Vicar spent much of the weekend at the Fest in his non-clerical garb of shorts, T-shirt and sneakers. He joined the group of men boiling the crabs and shrimp amid the sizzling heat of the day and the particular heat that emanated from the large boilers. Some of the workers informed me that they did not need to shave their legs because the heat and hot water singed them.

I am going to suggest to our Parochial Vicar that, for next year's Crab Fest, he should wear a black cassock and white surplice over his regular black pants and black clerical shirt. I will also suggest that, instead of him wearing a regular peaked white cap, he wear a biretta. This would also assure that he was clad appropriately while, at the same time, assuring that the hair on his pretty legs did not get singed.

As for myself, I will probably have to invest in a black cassock and white surplice as well as a biretta. Then I will be dressed officially and appropriately, ready for any emergency that may arise on a fund-raising and fun-filled weekend. I will also be protecting my sensitive skin and making sure that I am on duty at all times.

I know that I will have to make some serious adjustments when I go out for my early morning bike rides. Instead of wearing my black biking shorts, a shirt, white socks and sneakers; I will have to wear my cassock and white surplice as I ride along, blowing in the wind. My white surplice will be an added protection, helping the early morning, sporadic motorists to see a biker more easily in the early morning dusk. I know I will also have to find a white cincture to make sure that my cassock is appropriately tucked in so that it doesn't interfere with my mobility and not get caught in my bicycle wheel, hurdling me onto the sand or into the Gulf.

I am grateful for one thing. I'm glad I don't go jogging, otherwise I would have a hard time jogging down the road in my cassock and surplice.

Then again, maybe, one of my friends might get me a T-shirt for next year's Crab Fest that simply says, "In case of emergency, call me! I am a priest!"