

Traveling Companion - On the high seas

Fr. Michael Tracey

Over the years, I have developed an email ministry. I am amazed, at times, how people who email me, discover my email address and my web site. I always ask my emailers how they discover my email address. I know that, in the majority of cases, it is not through the GulfPine Catholic. Somehow, I sense the hand of God in it and I notice how he places people in our lives for a reason and a season.

Almost four years ago, I got my first email from Bonnie. Bonnie was a student at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland. She was studying to be part of the merchant marine corps. Part of the email read, "I have recently moved away from home to go to college and since coming to college, I have found myself attending Sunday Mass regularly since I have not been to Mass regularly for many, many years. This was a big step for me but so far I'm glad that I made the effort because I have really been 'enjoying' (if that is the right word,) and getting a lot from the Mass as well having a great feeling of peace and serenity each time I go. This is all good but I really want to progress in my faith now that I have found it again and it seems to me that the next logical step is to go to confession and there lies the problem. I know what my numerous faults and failings are and I am so very sorry for them and I really want to make my peace with God. However, I just cannot get together the confidence to go to confession. I have prayed for it but still I can't manage it and it's really hurting me."

During the next few months, we communicated back and forth through email, encouraging her in her faith journey. She updated me on a regular basis on her growth in her faith. As I reviewed her emails, I discovered she began feeling more comfortable in her faith. She told me about her first trip on the high seas and her fears as she chartered new grounds.

Finally, the emails ended some time prior to Hurricane Katrina. Since then, I often wondered what happened to Bonnie. Her latest email assured me that all was well with her. We were connected again.

Her email began, I hope all is well there. I am not sure if you will remember me, I initially emailed you about 3 1/2 years ago, I was a first year undergraduate student, how had left home to go to university and was beginning to think about and question things.

Well, recently I was thinking of the help you provided me, your emails had a positive and lasting effect and it struck me that I hadn't ever thanked you for taking the time and effort to reply to my emails

In those 3years I have changed a lot as a person - graduated July past and have spent 12 months of the last 4 years at sea and I just about to sit my coastguard exams so I can fully qualify as a navigating officer in the merchant navy.

Your advice and encouragement greatly helped me in my journey to learning and understanding and coming back to my faith, and I am sure that this faith has helped me to get where I am today, and happy person so thankful for getting the chance to live my dream. My faith has come a long way since then -in the main! it is still complicated at times, but sure we all need a challenge! But all that learning and I suppose soul searching and questioning I did back 3yrs ago has helped me a lot-and you provided me with so many answers back then. So thanks again for your help, encouragement, patience and time - they were much appreciated."