

Traveling Companion: Highway to home

Fr. Michael Tracey

At 3:45 a.m., on Wednesday morning, the north wind tried to blow me off the bike path on my isolated morning ride. Using riding gloves, the tips of my fingers became numb as I tried to slap some life back into them.

As I rode along in the semi-darkness, I saw a car approaching in the distance. I realized that someone else, who might be just as crazy, is also out at this ungodly hour when we should be enjoying the creature comfort of a warm bed, dreaming sweet dreams.

The driver, who was approaching from the direction of the Silver Slipper Casino, must be either someone returning home from a few hours of gambling or a casino worker on their way home, following the completion of their work shift.

The car approached in the darkness and seemed to slow down as it got close to me. At that time, some fearful thoughts entered my mind. Soon, the car stopped beside me. Then, I heard a female voice call out, "How do I get to the Interstate from here?"

Relieved, I began to give the female direction. But, how can you give someone direction without any landmarks to guide them, especially in the darkness? How can you tell them what street to turn on when there is no street sign, or, if there is, it is just a crudely painted one? I knew the street she needed to turn on in order to get to the Interstate.

When I passed that particular street the day before, I had noticed certain markers that may help. I noticed some heavy equipment parked nearby as well as a large pile of rubble. But, would the heavy equipment and rubble be still there?

I told her to turn around and head in the opposite direction; go about a half-mile. Then she would see the street she should turn on. It would have a wide entry with concrete sides.

She turned around and headed for home, hopefully. In the meantime, I got on my bike and watched her. As she got closer to the street she needed to turn onto, I notice a brief touch of the brakes. Then my heart sank as she continued on until she disappeared.

Thoughts of a lost soul trying to find their way home flooded my mind. I envisioned her panic as she continued to look for that particular street. I wondered about her state of mind as she could not stop and ask anyone else directions. I hoped that she would eventually turn around and come back. Maybe, then I could give her better directions. She never came. I did hope that, by some miracle or accident, she eventually found her way to the Interstate and safely home.

The woman's predicament reminded me of our human journey. In the Old Testament times, the chosen people kept getting lost, both physically and spiritually. In their darkest hours, God sent them directions on how to get back on His Interstate. At times, they didn't understand the directions or thought they knew better. Other times, they found themselves in unfamiliar territories. Yet, God did not give up on them. He helps them along, encouraging them, guiding them back home.

Eventually, God realized his people were too stubborn and not really listening so he did something dramatic. He came himself to tell his people the way home. Even when he did, some did not believe his directions and decided to seek out their own way. Even then, he had to go a step further. He had to take them there. After all, this was his great Easter breakthrough.

Maybe, if I had not so much given directions to the lost woman, but, instead, asked her to turn around and follow as I cranked up the pace; then maybe, she would be home on the Interstate sooner. Then, again, if I and the woman hadn't had that frustrating and even redemptive experience, we might still be waiting for the dawning of a new day.