

Traveling Companion: Hurry up and wait

Fr. Michael Tracey

Life is filled with times of waiting. We wait for nine months for a child to be born. We wait for years for them to walk, talk and be potty trained. We wait for them to start school so we might have a few peaceful moments in our day. We wait for them to graduate from school and are helped by the many mini-milestones that help along the way. We wait for them to start college so we can be able to use the phone again. We wait for them to graduate from college so we can begin to save some money but we wait for them to get married so that we can spend more than we saved. We wait for them to have our grandchildren so that we can have someone to dote over in our twilight years and we wait for them to come and get them when our nerves are shattered and our home looks like a tornado blew through it. We wait for to be debt-free; for good news from the doctor; for test results; for God to be merciful to a dying family member from a deadly disease.

I find one major problem with all this waiting. The event or occasion we wait for becomes the goal and the waiting for that occasion or event becomes an obstacle that hinders us from reaching the pinnacle of achievement. The waiting becomes a waste of time that hinders the sought after gratification from happening sooner.

The word “wait” seems to be a limbo word. It is a short word that stands in the way of urgency, immediacy and achievement. The word itself is so full of resignation and sorrow for most people.

I am ready to check out at Walmart. I check the lines and I notice that there is a line with only one person waiting. My excitement builds as I stand there in anticipation of a quick exit. Then it happens, the cashier calls for a price check for the person in front or they need a supervisor to ok a personal check. I glance around. Should I stay in the line or venture into another one? If I don’t make a quick decision, I may be stuck; my patience tried and my hopes of a quick exit dashed.

Growing up on a farm teaches one that there is no such thing as waiting. One plants a crop. Then one goes on to other tasks until the crop is ready to be harvested. No one hangs around to wait for things to happen. There is always a sense of “being” along with a sense of “doing” and they go hand in hand. “Being” does not tolerate any waiting.

Sometimes, I watch the “waiters” in airports, in grocery stores, in banks, at traffic lights, in doctor’s offices. The “waiters” wait passively, checking watches, being agitated because what they “wait” for is not happening within their time frame. Blood pressure elevates. Stress levels soars. Patience plummets. Aggravation multiplies.

The saddest part of waiting is the “waiting for retirement.” Then they will paint that room; repair the house; write that book; travel to that place they’ve always wanted to see. By the time, they have “waited for retirement,” they are either too old or too tired to do anything but continue to wait. They might as well organize a headstone that says, “Dead at Sixty-five; Buried at Eighty-five.”

I could wait for the perfect day to quit smoking; to begin an exercise program; to take a trip; to visit some long lost friends; to attend a class reunion; to go back to school again; to volunteer; to start another career. Then again, I realize there is no perfect day for me to reinvent myself; to quit something harmful or to start something new. The now is all that matters, the wait is an ephemera.

Waiting is an opportunity, a divine chance to think new thoughts, explore new options, cross new frontiers while one indulges in the “here and now” which never repeats its uniqueness.