

## **Traveling Companion: A Most Inquisitive Word**

### **Fr. Michael Tracey**

Some time ago, I celebrated a school Mass with the students of Our Lady Academy in Bay St. Louis. I began my homily by asking: “What is the most inquisitive word in the English language?” Straight away, a student shouted out the answer – “Why?”

The first reading revolved around the trials and tribulations of Job; his questioning of God as to why so many disasters came his way; his plea for some answers in the midst of the chaos and crises in his life.

Life is filled with “whys?” We arrive in a world asking many whys. When we discover the gift of speech, we discover the insatiable need to ask why. Our innate curiosity catapults us into the rough and tumble of life as we seek out answers, understanding and direction.

Often we arrive at the premature and uncertain conclusion that life isn’t fair; that it isn’t fair because it doesn’t walk to our gait, dance to our tunes, answer our pleas.

As young people, our premature conviction that life isn’t fair is fortified by our parents’ attitude to our requests for enlightenment. How often do children and young people ask the proverbial question “why” of their parents? Questions such as: “Why do I have to do that?” “Why can’t I?” “Why do I have to do them (dishes, chores, etc) again?” “Why me?” are as plentiful as the sand on the seashore.

Responses from parents are equally predictable. Many times, the response is a one word “because...” When pressed, parents default to statements like “because I said so.” And the discussion is supposed to end then but disgruntled inquisitors continue to press their “why” requests.

The “whys” in our lives are pleas to unravel the chaos in our lives, to put it into some manageable shape or form; pleas to a God who brings order out of the chaos of creation and hopefully will bring order out of the chaos of our lives.

But, then again, on a much deeper level, chaos is a science of pattern, not of predictability. In order to discover that pattern, we must be suspicious; we must question, listen, and dare to dream.

First of all, we must be suspicious. One of our greatest burdens today is the burden of an impoverished imagination and a critical outlook on life. We have been robbed of our God-given right to be creative and proactive.

Secondly, we must continue to ask questions and not be satisfied with a simplistic or predictable answer. In the words of the poet Rilke, we must “live the question now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.” Questioning raises strong fears, surfaces tendencies to absolutise and provokes efforts at domination.

Thirdly, we must dare to listen, to listen to the deeper realities that prompts the questions in the first place. Because of our alienation from self, world, others and God, we resist listening because of the challenge it evokes in us. We must be willing to probe what is beneath the cacophonous noises that bombard us and discover that we really do walk on holy ground that both reveals and enriches if we allow it.

Finally, we must dare to dream, to go beyond our urge to merely observe, measure and verify. We must be willing to probe the deepest aspirations of the human heart, to go beyond our propensity to specialize instead of seeing the big picture, which is both enriching and liberating.

So, is all this confusing? Is it chaotic? Is it senseless? Is it provocative? Is it unpredictable? So, why do you think I would write this article?