

Traveling Companion: She was no lady

Fr. Michael Tracey

Many words have been used to describe her. Many stories have been told about her. Many curses have been expressed about it. Many tears have been shed over her. Many a heart has been broken because of her. Many a despairing moment has been lived because of her. Many a lonely moment has filled with doubt because of her. Many a weary spirit has been conquered by her. Many a memory has been stolen because of her. Many a friend has been lost because of her. Many a bottle of water has been drunk because of her. Many a question has been asked because of her. Many a family has been torn apart because of her. Many a MRE has been eaten because of her. Many a portable toilet has been visited because of her. Many a dream has been shattered because of her. Many a shoulder has been leaned upon because of her. Many a silence has been created because of her. Many a future has become a past tense.

Her maiden name was “Cleansing.” It was very appropriate. Why did she have to be so thorough? Why did she have to dish out such a deadly blow? Why was she so aggressive? Why was she so indiscriminate? Why was she so controlling? Where was her mercy instead of her fury? Where was her feminine quality? Was she sent to do the Lord’s bidding? Why could she not have been more gentler and kinder? Why do we need such a drastic warning? Why do we have to have such a ‘wake up call’? Why did she have to traumatize so many people? Why did she add to the homeless population? Why did she have to challenge our sincerity? Our values? Our priorities? Our hopes? Why did she have to be in control? Why did she have to bring out the worst and best in people? Why didn’t she choose other less dramatic ways of doing it? Why was she so odiferous? Why did she disturb our tranquility? Why did she devastate our landscapes and the landscapes of our lives? Why did she turn the lives of so many people upside down and inside out? Why do all the questions she forces us to ask ourselves lead to deeper questions that have no easy answers?

Yet, amid all the “whys” there are by-products that otherwise we might have never known. Why are people so genuine and caring now? Why do we stop and talk without thoughts of time or deadlines? Why do people hug each other genuinely? Why do strangers show up on people’s doorsteps and lend a helping hand? Why do people line up in the heat of the day for hours to get a hot meal and still not complain? Why does the “God bless you” seem more genuine now? Why do people say that they will be praying for you and it won’t be an empty gesture? Why do people say “It is good to see you” and really mean it? Why do people not tire listening to each other’s survival story without complaining? Why do even seemingly emotionless and independent reporters shed a tear even in public? Why do people open their hearts and homes to complete strangers? Why are people so open and trusting at such a time? Why do people get up again and again after such a horrific experience? Why do people say over and over again, “Is there anything I can do for you? Why do people ask, “How are you doing?” and genuinely mean it? Why do people stop rushing around at breakneck speed and instead even drive below the posted speed limit? Why do people communicate more face to face now than through the technological gismos? Why are people more humble and accepting now? Why are people more at peace now in their skin even if they have to accept hand-me-downs from someone else?

Yes, there are a lot of “whys” and I think all of us will continue to ask “why” and in the asking discover an answer that, in the past was hidden in the rubble of our lives but now such rubble has been “cleansed” and we can see it more clearly.

Maybe, she wasn’t a lady. But, then again, maybe we needed to meet her and marry her to discover the answer to all our “whys.”