

Traveling Companion: No Problem!

Fr. Michael Tracey

I found seat 32F on Delta Flight 1816 from Atlanta to New Orleans. It was an aisle seat on the last row of the Boeing 737 plane, next to the toilets and galley.

Across the aisle, a young black man in his early 20's sat in the window seat. Complete with his portable CD player, he tuned out the world and into his own music. A short time later, an elderly couple arrived to occupy the two remaining seats by the young man.

Just having settled into their seats, another young man in his late 20's arrived. With an air of bewilderment, he said to the gentleman occupying the aisle seat, while checking his boarding pass, "There must be a mistake. I have seat C." Both men checked their boarding passes and the young man caught the attention of a nearby flight attendant. He explained his dilemma to her. Her response was two very simple but powerful words, "No Problem."

Within a few moments, the young man with the portable CD player found out he had occupied the wrong seat. The elderly couple moved in and the other young man accepted his legitimate aisle seat – no problem.

While crunching on a bag of peanuts and sipping a Sprite, I munched on the flight attendant's phrase, "No Problem."

Of late, I have noticed the popularity of such a phrase. I noticed that it transcends nations and boundaries. I became curious about its deeper implications.

Our parish secretary, Jo, is a frequent proponent of the phrase. If someone calls on the phone and requests something, even though she might be in the middle of something very important, she invariably responds, "No Problem." If she is in the middle of some project and someone comes in, she puts the project on the back-burner and invariably tells them that their request, phone call or intrusion is "No Problem."

Sometimes, I joke with her and tell her to indicate that it might be a problem but that she will try and take care of it for them when she gets a chance.

So, why is "No Problem" so popular? What does it indicate? Why does it become such a matter of fact habit for us?

I wonder if our references to "No Problem" in spite of the inconveniences it may generate; indicates something deeper. Maybe, deep down, it is a plea for acceptance; a plea to be well-thought of; a plea to be esteemed; noticed, recognized and capable.

Maybe, on the other hand, our references to "No Problem" may indicate a nobleness of character, an unselfish spirit, a true commitment to serve a neighbor without counting the cost.

At the same time, there may be a fear of rejection. We may feel that unless we respond in a timely manner, no matter the inconvenience, people will not love us.

We are so programmed in the comparison mode by society. We are as good as...; as efficient as..., as popular as..., as capable as..., as important as..., as loved as...

Maybe the real culprit of "No Problem" agendas is God. Maybe, God is the real instigator of our "No Problem" mentality. Why? Because he has a history of saying "No Problem," When various people bargained with God in the Old Testament, he gave in and said, "No Problem." When the Chosen People wanted their own kings, just like their neighbors, he gave in and said, "No Problem." Of course, it was God's way of saying that they needed to learn some lessons. When Jesus pleaded with God to take away his chalice of suffering on the cross, God came through and Jesus was able to respond with his "No Problem" to accepting the challenge and commitment to the cross and its implications.

As you can see, I had "No Problem" writing this article.