

Traveling Companion: On the High Seas

Fr. Michael Tracey

I got my first email from Bonnie about nine months ago. Bonnie, a student at a university in Scotland, emailed me. I still do not know how she discovered my email and my web site but it became providential.

Since then, we have both emailed each other. Usually, Bonnie emails me with a question about her faith journey. I respond. She thinks about my response and then emails me back with further questions.

Bonnie had left the familiar surroundings of her home environment, her friends and her comfort zone to attend college in Scotland. As she ventured out on her own for the first time, she began to reflect more deeply on her life, its direction and more especially the impact or non impact of her faith on her life.

She began to attend Mass in her new surroundings, often feeling awkward and out of place there. She didn't know anyone, felt alone and dared not to venture to receive Communion..

As I reflect on the many emails from Bonnie during the past few months, I have sensed an attitudinal change brought about by her willing to risk and find answers to her searching questions of faith. I noticed a more positive attitude; a more comfortable stance in her faith, brought about through her own growing pains.

Recently, she finished her first year at college and returned home for a few weeks before embarking on a new adventure in her life. She wrote to me about her anticipation and trepidation. Her email is as follows: Hi! Just a quick question that I would appreciate your opinion and advice:

I'm flying off to Los Angeles on Friday to meet my ship. I will be on-board for approximately 3 1/2 months on a route calling at west coast USA ports before crossing the Pacific to Japan, China, Taiwan and South Korea. Obviously I am really looking forward to this new challenge and I'm very excited about it but as you know I have been spending the last few months trying to get myself back 'on track'. I 've been regularly going to Mass and feel that I have begun to develop a better relationship with Jesus because of this. As I will be at sea for so long I will not be able to go to Mass and I fear that I will slip back to where I was before, and my faith will be demoted to somewhere in the back of my mind. Have you any suggestions that may help me? I would be grateful for any! Thanks for you help.”

I emailed Bonnie. First of all, I reminded her of the progress she had made in her faith and her relationship with God during the past year; how her questioning and desire to have a deeper relationship with God led her to that deeper relationship. I reminded her that she now appreciated where it led her in her faith and the struggle to arrive there, even though confusing at times, was really worth it. I also told her that the growth she had experienced in her faith would become foundational. I informed her that, my asking the questions she was now asking and the subsequent fear of falling backwards in her faith journey, let her know that she was aware of and willing to face the obstacles that lay ahead of her while she was at sea. I gave her some other pointers to help her with the transitions.

She emailed me back and let me know that I had given her lots of food for thought.

By now, graduates are heading off to college or into the workplace. Many transitions are ahead for them also. They may be leaving the comfort and security of home and the gentle reminders of their parents to put their faith into action. Now, they face the transition without that support structure. Many of the graduates come from predominantly Catholic schools or a small town environment. They now face a wider and more diverse atmosphere.

Will they have the resources and courage to face their own journeys on the high seas of life? We hope so.