

## **Traveling Companion: Different Strokes for different folks**

Fr. Michael Tracey

I lost my thirty-four year collection of books in Hurricane Katrina. They served as a support network. They provided research material for adult education projects I was working on. They also provided spiritual and emotional enrichment opportunities to enhance a thirsting soul. In one sense, they were a bastion of information that could be used in any situation. In another sense, they reminded me of my hunger for learning which I inherited from my parents. Basically, my book collection became a journey of discovery, self-discovery, discovery of insights that might lead to other insights; discovery of ideas that might eventually lead to an article in Gulf Pine Catholic.

Prior to the hurricane, many people who visited my office, browsed through my book collection. They would often ask if I might have a book that would speak to a particular problem or issue that they happened to be dealing with. Some people would ask, "Have you read all these books?" I would nod in affirmation.

Since Hurricane Katrina, I have received several offers from people to help me replenish some of my book collection. Many of the people know the kind of books I usually read and wish to purchase them for me. Others, recognizing the fact that they purchased books I had recommended in the past, offered to give me their copies. I have given their suggestions some thought. Basically, I have declined their offers.

As I look deeper at my rejection of such offers, I realize that I am not interested in starting a collection of books. I am more interested in starting a collection of insights, gained from my experience of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Comedian George Carlin has a routine about "stuff" in our lives. We collect stuff. We build bigger places to accommodate all the stuff we collect. When we tire of too much stuff, we have a "Garage Sale" in order to make more room to accumulate more stuff. Basically, a "Garage Sale" is a collection of items that people thought they needed but found out they didn't and so they dispose of them by selling them to people who have empty spaces in their homes and lives which needs to be filled with more "stuff."

If we have several living situations, we space out our stuff so that we have stuff in all kinds of places in case we need them. If we go from one place to visit our other place, we don't have to take along a whole lot of "stuff" because we will already have stuff available in the place we are going to.

If we go on vacation, we pack lots of stuff, "just in case" we might need it. We pack for all eventualities – for formal and informal occasions, to casual and unpredictable times; to a variety of weather scenarios. We feel safe when we have covered all eventualities and, supposedly, are able to really enjoy our vacation. Inevitable, we return from vacation with "stuff" that we never used because the eventuality we planned for did not happen.

Even Jesus knew how much we were consumed with "stuff." So, he asked his followers to travel light; to leave behind the "stuff" they had become so dependant on and trust the real "stuff" he offers.

If we are prepared for every eventuality; if we are surrounded by "stuff" we deem necessary for our survival; if we are secure in our "stuff" collection; then there is no need for faith. We have become self sufficient.

Following the hurricane, I met an elderly, university professor who mourned the loss of a Greek-Latin dictionary from his 5,000 book collection. It was watermarked. I guess there are different strokes for different folks.