

Traveling Companion: They are supposed to...

Fr. Michael Tracey

Recently, I continue to hear a recurring theme and statement that seems to be more prominent as we engage in the rebuilding process of our communities. The statement always begins with something like, "They are supposed to..." Most often, it seems to conclude with, "They were supposed to..." The statement goes from present tense to past tense in the blinking of an eye.

Personally, I have heard the above statements in my own efforts at rebuilding our parish facilities following Hurricane Katrina. They take the form of "They were supposed to start yesterday...but they didn't." "The supplies were supposed to be here last Thursday...but they weren't." Many daily promises come and go and never seem to be realized.

Parishioners echo the same sentiments. Contractors and builders remind them they will "be ready to start," or "restart" or "continue" their project on a certain day. The day comes and goes but the contractor or builder does not come to either start, restart or continue the rebuilding project.

Others have told me their experience is the same with government agencies, and especially FEMA. FEMA is supposed to come back "tomorrow" and pick up a trailer that is no longer needed or in use. The "tomorrow" becomes elastic, expanding into weeks, months and never to date.

Also, our patience gets tested when someone is "supposed to" meet us at a certain place and at a certain time and they don't show up at that certain time. They keep us waiting and while we wait, our level of impatience and anxiety rises dramatically.

I wonder why I continue to hear the "supposed to..." phrase and why it is so prevalent in our society today. Obviously, it is not a new phrase. It is more noticeable today.

Why is it so prevalent today? Does it say something about our impatience, especially, since Hurricane Katrina. Does it say something about how dependant we have become since Katrina? Does it still say something about how Katrina still holds us hostage?

Maybe Katrina has highlighted our insecurities. Our security has been shattered. The routine, props, rituals and comfort zones we created and surrounded ourselves with have been washed away. In their place, we become like strangers in a foreign land.

We have become so dependant on other people's schedules and promises that we become their hostages. We become paralyzed into inertia and frustration.

As part of the "supposed to..." mentality, many people find the transition back into their "new" or "restored" or "remodeled" homes strange. Many have mentioned that they find it hard to adjust. Even though it is their home; still the makeover it experienced, changes the would-be inhabitants forever. Even if the outside shell of the home has not changed because of the hurricane; somehow, not only has the inside of the house changed but the hearts of those who try to make it a home again have changed dramatically.

I suppose the big question is: how do we actualize all our "supposed to's?" We do it by controlling, at least, part of our environment, by taking charge of something that is "supposed to" happen and making it happen ourselves. Otherwise, we continue to allow the "supposed to's" of life to manipulate and control us.

If each of us took one thing that we were "supposed to" do and did it, it might give those who are controlled by the "supposed to's" of life hope to take some action.

Jesus reminded us that the kingdom of God is not "supposed to" happen some time in the future, but, instead, it is NOW.

During the past few weeks, something has been telling me that I am "supposed to..." write this article. I finally beat it at its own game. I did it.