

Traveling Companion: On a (Toilet) Roll

Fr. Michael Tracey

I usually wake up around 4 a.m. every morning in anticipation of my morning bike ride. On Monday morning, I woke at the usual time and looked outside to check the weather. A slight mist of rain danced on the blacktopped parking lot. So, I decided to lie back down in bed. Then, a short time later, I heard it. A car raced into the parking lot and parked beside our parish school bus.

Having being burglarized some years ago, I am more conscious of the movement of people around the property. I decided to explore the intruding vehicle. I looked out my bedroom window and saw three young ladies exit from the car and proceed toward the bus. Clad in shorts, the ghostly figures moved like shadows in the artificial light. With rolls of toilet paper, they proceeded to roll the bus in toilet paper.

I quickly donned my pants and went to our lit carport to view the operation. The offending culprits saw me and abandoned their creative touches on the bus. They hastened off between two buildings, hoping not to be caught. I waited for a while to see if they would reappear.

We played cat and mouse for a few minutes. Then I decided to investigate some more. I walked toward the parked car and noted its make and license tag for future reference.

The rain became more persistent as I waited in the carport, having first turned off its light. Finally, three brave young ladies braved the weather and ran to the car. They waited in silence to see who would make the next move. I would not blink. Finally, they started the engine, turned on the lights and with a cheer drove off down the beach in their black Mercedes car.

Later in the morning, I investigate their trademark and decided to continue my detective work. The early morning rain had soaked the toilet paper as it clung to trees, buildings and walkways.

Some weeks earlier, a group of neighborhood boys decided they would leave their mark as a reminder they were “here.” They used a baseball bat to bash in the windshield of our parish bus. Having replaced the windshield, some days later, I found them milling around the bus again with a baseball bat. A week later, they decided to strike again. This time, their weapon of choice was a stone to shatter the windshield again. We decided not to replace the windshield again until school was out for the summer lest the same fate visit us again.

Everyone wants to be noticed. Everyone wants to be recognized for something. Everyone one wants to make a contribution. This is true especially of graduates. Some write their names on desks; some on sidewalks; some on yearbooks; some even on buildings. Others, in a fit of daring exploits, leave their mark with toilet paper, only to end up forgotten in the waste baskets of life. Some use a baseball bat as their “calling card.” Everyone wants to be a “Kilroy” in some way or other. Everyone wants to make a “statement” by their actions. Too often, they, in their efforts to be recognized, make a far more important statement about their own worth, their own respect or, in most cases, their lack of it.

Jesus gave us a model for our “calling card.” He simply said, “by this will all know that you are my disciples, by your love for one another.” After all, love is constructive, not destructive. It is respectful, not disrespectful. It values others possessions, not thrashes them. It accepts the dignity of others, not degrading it.

Perhaps Gilbert K. Chesterton said it best when he said, “Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it.”