

Traveling Companion: Tools of the Trade

Fr. Michael Tracey

Some months ago, I wrote about some of the unusual gifts I have received as a result of Hurricane Katrina. People send me gifts with a view to the more practical nature of what might be needed.

On returning from vacation, I noticed a 6 inches high X 6 inches wide by 14 inches long box awaiting me with my name written on it with a wide felt tipped pen. I checked the postage and it cost almost \$20 to mail. The box was covered in layers of brown paper, bound together with a plentiful supply of strong binding tape. I checked its weight and it probably weighed over twenty pounds.

I tried to decide what might be contained in the deep recesses of its belly. I had no alternative but to begin the laborious task of cutting through the fortified tape and discover what surprise may lay in store for me.

After much tugging, cutting and pulling, I was able to open the package. To my surprise, I discovered another practical gift from an unknown person. What did I find inside? I found 25 screwdrivers of various sizes; 9 pairs of pliers of various sizes; 5 pairs of measuring tapes of varying colors; 4 sturdy hammers; 3 wrenches for various tasks; 3 spatulas for mudding sheetrock and one sturdy nail puller. All showed signs of a lifetime of dedicated service in the building, repairing and rebuilding of someone's prized possessions.

Going through my stacked mail, I found a letter which would unravel the mystery of the toolbox I just received.

The letter was from a gentleman in Monument, Colorado. A group from his parish had come to volunteer with us some months earlier. The letter began, "During our parish's recent trip to yours, I was unable to join Father Bob and the group due to some previous commitments. (I was busy with the fire department of which I am a Lieutenant and two boy scout troops where I serve as one of the Assistant Scoutmasters.)

I would like to assist the parish as best I can – even though being unable to come to Mississippi. I talked with Fr. Bob about what our group did while they were there and about the building repair that was going on. I have therefore packed a box for the church and sent it (by separate carrier). Inside, hopefully you will find some tools that I had that I figured you might find helpful in repairs or building. Should there be anything else that I can help you with; please let me know. I hope that all goes well in the coming days and months so that you all can get back to a somewhat regular (pre-Katrina) routine."

I wrote back and thanked him for his generous and practical gift. I assured him that our volunteers would appreciate such tools as they continue to help rebuild people's homes.

This past summer, I wrote an article titled, "My Bridal Store." In it, I shared how a family in Illinois sent me their daughter's wedding dress. They offered it to any young bride who was planning on getting married and whose family lost everything in Hurricane Katrina. I mentioned it at our Masses but received no offer of acceptance. I offered it to a wider audience through my column in Gulf Pine Catholic but received no offers.

Today, I received a surprising phone call, wondering if I still had the bride's dress. I indicated I had. Their daughter was getting married in the near future and wanted to know if she could come and model the dress to see if "something borrowed" could make her day special.

Now, we await the rest of the story as we continue to apply the tools of our trade to new and surprising encounters.