

Traveling Companion: May I speak to Mrs. Tracey?

Fr. Michael Tracey

The phone rang at the office trailer the other day. “May I speak to Mrs. Tracey?” the caller asks. “She is not in at the moment,” I reply. I know the type of call this is so I play along. “When do you expect her in?” the caller continues. “I’m not sure,” I respond. “Do you think she may be in later?” “I don’t know,” I reply. “Does she live there?” “No!” “Is there any way I can get in touch with her?” “I don’t know.” “It is important that I speak to her.” “I know,” I assure her. “Do you have a number I can reach her at?” “No.” “It is important that I reach her.” “I know!” “Are you Mr. Tracey?” “Yes!” “Are you still married to Mrs. Tracey?” “No!” “So, she doesn’t live there anymore?” “No!” “Thank you for your help” Then, she hung up.

Some days later, another phone call arrives and asks, “Did Mrs. Tracey receive the gift we sent?” “Yes!” “Did she enjoy it?” “I don’t know. You will have to ask her.” “May I speak to her?” “No! She is not here.” “May I call her back later?” “Yes, you may.” “Is there a good time I may call her back?” the caller asks. “You may call back after midnight. She may be here then.” “Thank you for your help. I will call back.” I know that, if she calls back at midnight, I will not to worry because Mr. or Mrs. Tracey will not be there.

Some times, the secretary has to entertain such calls. Much the same scenario plays out, with a little added twist injected by myself.

The phone call goes as follows: “May I speak to Michael Tracey?” the caller asks. “May I ask who is calling?” ask the secretary. The caller identifies herself and it becomes obvious it is a sales call. “Let me see if he is in at the moment!” suggests our secretary. She puts the phone on hold and asks me, “Are you in?” I know what she means. Then, our strategy kicks in.

One of the blessings of having an office trailer is that we have two entrances. One entrance is up front where the secretary works and the other is in the back where I work. When the secretary asks me, “are you in?” I just ask her to wait a moment while I open the door by my office and step outside. When I have done so, she rescues the phone and says to the caller, “He just stepped out.” She then adds, “May I take a message for him?” Obviously, the answer she receives is “No.”

Once the caller hangs up, I discover that it is safe to reenter my office. Technically, I had stepped out of the office in order to allow my secretary to be consistent in her response to the salesperson.

Everyone seems to have a love/hate relationship and story with salespersons. Now, that many of our parishes are in the rebuilding process following Hurricane Katrina, it seems more and more salespersons want to help us. One wonders if they want us to make a premature judgment, based on emotion or panic, in order to offer them the business.

I love it when a salesperson calls and it becomes obvious that they are reading from a script. Sometimes, it can be difficult to stop them in the middle of their script. Often, I interject, “May I ask you a question?” Obviously, the question I ask has nothing remotely to do with what the salesperson may be calling about. I ask questions such as, “Why am I so lucky and so special to be the recipient of this phone call? For an answer, I am met with hesitation and an effort to continue the script.

So, the next time someone calls, looking for “Mrs. Tracey,” I will be ready to confuse even more with my own ever changing script.