

Traveling Companion: Vatican in the Driver's seat

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Recently, the Vatican issued the "Drivers' Ten Commandments." These were efforts to encourage drivers to be careful, courteous, competent, supportive and charitable in their driving habits. The Commandments received lots of press coverage both in print and on TV. Many commentators found it interesting, if not unusual, that the Vatican would issue such commandments. They saw such commandments as a stark departure from many of its traditional pronouncements and roles.

Yesterday, I decided to put some of the Ten Commandments to the test at the unusual time of 4:00 a.m. Why that time? Well, There would be less traffic, less congestion and obviously, less stress.

My first test didn't take long to administer. I biked on the bike path along the beach. I tried to negotiate the sand-strewn path with its mounds of sand, debris and broken glass, wondering when the group in charge would get around to clearing it off. I wondered if they were too preoccupied with the next election campaign that they had forgotten some of the responsibilities of their present job.

As I picked my way through the debris-strewn path, I heard a car approaching from behind on the beach road. Most mornings, traffic is a rarity. When the car was parallel with me, the driver laid on his horn and kept tooting it. I glanced sideways and saw a limousine gradually pass by. I wondered about the horrendous salute. Was the driver on the way to pick up some clients at the local casino? Was he letting me know that he saw me and wanted to acknowledge such? Was he wondering what this crazy guy was doing out biking at such an ungodly hour?

Some time later, and two miles further along the path, I noticed vehicle lights approaching from the opposite direction. When we were side by side, the pick-up truck slowed down and a teenager stuck his head out the window. He let out a prolonged and mighty scream which resembled a howl from the wilds. It reminded me of some sort of caveman's pronounced effort at communication. My mind coiled in disgust. Obviously, the teenager thought it was very funny.

On my way home, I turned onto the street that would lead me home. The sporadic street lights helped guide me down the street. With the aid of my bicycle light, I felt secure. In the distance, a car approached from the opposite direction. Its lights were full beam. I waited, hoped and prayed that dim reality might set in, but it didn't, even as he passed me. Obviously, he had seen me with the streets lights and my bike lights but choose to dazzle me with his presence.

My morning experience gave me an opportunity to reflect on the Vatican's "Drivers' Ten Commandments." They are an examination of conscience for everyone, especially in an age of road rage, elevated levels of stress, drinking and driving, and invincible drivers.

In case, you have not seen these Commandments or forgotten them like yesterdays stale news story, they are as follows:

1. You shall not kill.
2. The road shall be for you a means of communion between people and not of mortal harm.
3. Courtesy, uprightness and prudence will help you deal with unforeseen events.
4. Be charitable and help your neighbor in need, especially victims of accidents.
5. Cars shall not be for you an expression of power and domination, and an occasion of sin.
6. Charitably convince the young and not so young not to drive when they are not in a fitting condition to do so.
7. Support the families of accident victims.
8. Bring guilty motorists and their victims together, at the appropriate time, so that they can undergo the liberating experience of forgiveness.
9. On the road, protect the more vulnerable party.
10. Feel responsible toward others.