

Traveling Companion: I want to see him!

Fr. Michael Tracey

Randy arrived at my office on Monday afternoon, we had met for the first time following one of our Sunday morning Masses.

He arrived with a copy of my Katrina book for me to sign. That was his first order of business. He prefaced his requests and remarks by saying that he was a man of brevity. Finally, twenty minutes later, we shook hands and he left.

Once he had taken care of the business he came to deal with, he began to fill me in on some of the details of his life – a brief introduction.

He told me the story of how, as a young army officer in the 1950's, he was assigned to New York City. He had a burning desire to meet the then famous, Bishop Fulton Sheen. The day after Randy arrived in New York, he went to Bishop Sheen's office to see him. He encountered a secretary who guarded Bishop Sheen. She wanted to know the nature of Randy's business and why he wanted to see Bishop Sheen. Randy didn't volunteer any information. Instead, he asked about the secretary's supervisor and wanted to talk to her. The secretary stonewalled him. He finally walked ahead and spoke to the supervisor. She, too, protected Bishop Sheen. Momentarily derailed in his efforts, Randy informed the secretary, that he would come back every day and sit in her office until he got to see Bishop Sheen. She simply said, "Go ahead. Be my guest." He followed through with his threat for several days to no avail. Finally, he talked to one of his army superiors so see if he could move mountains for him. His army supervisor said that he had a Jewish friend who was a good friend of Bishop Sheen and that he would contact him. The next day, Randy was informed that Bishop Sheen would see him the next afternoon. Randy showed up for his appointment and had a very cordial chat with Bishop Sheen.

I had to admire the persistence and dedication of Randy to see Bishop Sheen. It reminded me of several calls we have been receiving from A.T. & T. about phone plans. Even though, we have told them consistently we are happy with our plan and are not interested in changing, they still persist in calling.

Wednesday evening, I was in the office late when the phone rang. Instinctively, I knew it was A.T. & T. "May I speak to Michael Tracey," a gentleman asked. "I lied. And said that he was not here. "When do you expect him in?" he continued. "I simply said, "I am not sure." He followed up with, "When is the best time to catch him?" "I simply said, "Before 5 a.m. in the morning." "Oh! Our office is not open at that time," he commented. "Well," said I, "Then, we seem to have a problem." Not to be undone, he came back with, "When is the latest I can contact him?" "Definitely after midnight is your best bet." Stunned by my non-cooperative attitude, he was speechless for a moment. Then, he hung up. The next morning, he called again at 8 a.m. "May I speak to Michael Tracey. This is a courtesy call from A.T. & T." I went through my usual – "He is not in" routine. I was met with, "When is the best time to call him?" "Before 5 a.m. in the morning," I replied. He broke out into a smile, thanked me and hung up.

Earlier that same day, a young man, who indicated he was Catholic but was getting married on the beach, wanted to rent our Community Center for the wedding reception. We informed him about the diocesan guidelines that we could not rent out Center to him because, as a Catholic, he was not getting married in the Church or did not have permission to get married in another church. He indicated that he was a member of the church. Our research indicated otherwise. He tried several ways to get around the guidelines, querying about timelines for preparation. Finally, in a desperate attempt, he said, "If we get married on the beach, could you come and do a quickie blessing on it."

In the three encounters, persistence and perseverance become a hallmark. Still, I often wonder if we are more persistent when it is to our advantage, short-term than do it for the long haul.