

Traveling Companion: Bags of Wind

Fr. Michael Tracey

I am an avid reader of books. I read books reviews whenever I find them. I watch C-Span's Book notes. And of course, I frequent the local bookstores on a regular basis to see what new wares they have. I even have several "preferred customer" cards that offer varied percentage off the cover prices.

I suppose I picked up my appetite for reading from my parents. They were always reading something. When the local, weekly newspaper arrived, they fought over who might get to read it first. Usually they ended up pulling it apart and each of them reading a section. Then they would exchange their sections. The kids waited their turn to devour the latest news.

Of late, I have been purchasing my books from Amazon. com. Like millions of others around the world, I click on "my favorites" and then Amazon comes to the rescue. Before I click, I have a list of the books I want to order, beside my computer. When on line, I read the reviews; walk through the process of ordering; submit my order and, within a short time, I have confirmation of my order. A future email will remind me when the books have been shipped and provides a tracking number for my convenience.

I noticed something different about recent shipments I received from Amazon.com. Gone were the white, fluffy, popcorn like packing material and, in its place, a new invention.

They are called "flo-pak Cell-O" air cushions; small, rectangular pouches, filled with air. I missed the old sheets, filled with small air bubble cushions. In my dull moments, I could just keep puncturing the little air bubbles and listen to their sounds, while others got aggravated. I also noticed that kids loved such an invention.

But, now, I am in a quandary. What am I supposed to do with the "flo-packs? I could squash them and make a big bang but I am not ready to.

They really got me thinking. In fact, these flo-packs, remind me of some people. They have a lot of air – hot or cold. They are light-headed. They just bobble around in the winds of change. They are not anchored to anything in life. They are like balloons. If you untie them, they just float off aimlessly on some upper air current. Their mood is dictated by the prevailing winds, as they hop and skip from issue to issue; from person to person; without every contributing anything of substance. In the hackneyed phrase, they talk the talk but they cannot walk the walk.

As I embrace the new year, the ending or the beginning of a millennium – depending on your perspective, I realize I need to be grounded in my being; connected in my spirit to the One who awaits and anchors me to the lifeline he offers me. If I am to experience his presence, then I need to be tethered to life, imbued with his promise and challenged by his message.

Oh! Yes! I did receive another present from Amazon.com. It was a bookmark that contained a quote from Christopher Morley that said, "When you sell a man a book, you don't sell him twelve ounces of paper and ink and glue – you sell him a whole new life."

Now that you have read this, maybe you realize that there is a message, even in a bag of wind that simply takes up space. I must close and submit my latest order and await another collection of wisdom literature, cushioned by its own bag of wind.