

Traveling Companion: Is there anyone out there?

Fr. Michael Tracey

I started writing a newspaper column called "Rambling Rhetoric" for "Mississippi Today," then the Catholic newspaper for the entire state of Mississippi. It is ironic that my first article on September 19, 1976, was titled, "Keeping in Touch."

When the Diocese of Biloxi was established in 1977, I continued to write my bi-monthly column. Later when "Gulf Pine Catholic" became the official newspaper of the Diocese of Biloxi, I continued to write columns under the byline of "Traveling Companion." I have enjoyed both the challenge, the responsibility, the experience as well as the perspectives on life I have gained.

Through these columns, I have met hundreds of people; shared glimpses of people's pains and hopes, joys and sorrows, defeats and accomplishments. I have received countless letters, emails, faxes as well as person-to-person comments from people on how my columns impacted them.

Some comments have been simple and sincere, like, "I really enjoy your articles," "I look forward to your article," "The first thing I look for in the paper is your article and if it is not there, I don't even bother to read the rest."

Of late, some people, knowing that I will be moving to a new assignment after the summer, ask, "Will you continue writing your columns?" I assure them that I will, if the editor still wants me to do so.

We live in an age of focus groups, samplings, polls, and survey. They are efforts to gauge people's response to a particular story, viewpoint, article or issue.

In newspapers, "Letters to the Editor," speaks volumes, both in their absence and presence.

When Mayor Ed. Koch was running for a second term as mayor of New York City, he visited the various boroughs, asking people his favorite question, "How am I doing?" He, too, was trying to gauge his level of popularity.

Obviously, in Jesus' time, there were no opinion polls, no straw votes, no samplings, no exploratory groups, no ratings, no telephone polls, and no marketing strategies. He gathered around him a band of unlikely heroes, reminded them that popularity wasn't to be their goal but rather preaching the good news to anyone who might listen. He asked them one thing, "Can you drink of the cup I am about to drink of?" He didn't offer them an earthly retirement package, a signing bonus, moving expenses, stock in his company, bonuses at the end of each year, paid vacations, travel expenses, hospitalization, paternity leave. He simply offered them the cup of the cross.

In our humanness, we crave respectability; we wish to make a difference, have people think highly of us, remind us that we are indispensable or at least doing a good job; be affirmed in our willingness to contribute.

Parents hope that all their talking to their kids, their example, the love, their dedication, will make a difference in the lives of their children, setting them on a good, moral, loyal, and committed foundation for life.

Priests, brothers, sisters hope that their example, their commitment to their various ministries, their example, will rub off on the people they serve. Being human, they also yearn for some tangible reminders and results that they have done a decent job.

Professional, service oriented people, hope that, through their dedication and self-giving, they have helped to enrich the people they serve.

Every human being cries out, "Is there anyone out there, anyone who loves me, anyone who supports me, anyone who will let me know I have made a difference?" If there is anyone out there, then let the people that need to know, know. E.T. (Ever Thankful) phone home.