

A Short Story – Terror of the Night
by Deacon Gerry Palermo

You shall not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day. (PS 91:5)

The Start

My day began at 2:00 AM, eastern. I was taking an Uber to the airport and I didn't want to delay the process. The day would end at 6:00 PM (local time, central) so not a particularly long day but an intense day. From FLL to MEX then onward by car to Puebla, a 126km drive.

I took a late day walk through the Basilica (**Basilica Catedral Metropolitana de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción**). I then ventured to the city square adjacent to great food! So the day was complete. A success by most measures. Travelling during COVID-19 outbreak, the multi-nation protocols for sanitation, immunization, and distancing all played a part in the complexity of the day. Winding down:

- Phone calls to family and friends (voice was restored by then).
- Entries into the journal.
- Evening prayers.
- Yes, I brushed my teeth.
- Then off to sleep.

The Terror

The **terror of the night** hit suddenly and violently.

noun. Psychiatry. a sudden feeling of extreme fear that awakens a sleeping person, usually during slow-wave sleep, and is not associated with a dream or nightmare (1).

If you ever had an anxiety attack and I have on occasion, you know how overwhelming they can be! A night terror has a special quality to it as it happens at night, subconsciously, and brings one to a fully awake state, terrified.

I was fortunate in two ways. The day's events brought clarity as to the cause of the terror. The prayer plan for the pilgrimage was coincidentally perfect for the night terror event.

Enterprise Car Rental

The good people at Enterprise gave me a strange warning. The motorcycle police assigned to the vicinity of the airport are known to perform shake-downs of foreign drivers. I was warned I would be stopped, interrogated, and threatened with summonses and fines. Moreover, they have the authority to detain anyone who they suspect would not appear in court in 10 days. They could impound the car, imprison my person and, well, you can make a list of problems that flow from that.

So I was somewhat prepared for the event that was to come. Except I wasn't.

AT&T

I signed up for a program at AT&T that extends my voice and data plans to Mexico (really 27 different nations). Once the first cell tower signal hit, the plan is in effect and remains in effect until the cell towers are US based again. Except it didn't.

Careful Preparation

So all the careful preparation of making pre-queried Google Maps of the three phases of the trip were now useless as I could not get WiFi, Voice, Data to use these plans. I did have printed copied. I did have folding road maps for assistance. So my navigation to Calz. Ignacio Zaragoza (150D) was way more of an adventure that it should have been.

Motorcycle Police

So they did. The threats. And the offer to instead of all this messiness of tickets and courts and fines, I could simply give them \$300 USD to offset the \$6,000 MDX in fines I am facing. Negotiations ensued and I got out of there with paying them cash \$200 USD and \$1,000 MXN. A bargain.

Good Samaritan

So after the shake-down I was still struggling to get to 150D (Autopista Mexico - Puebla). Thankfully a random man on the street was willing to help. In very short order a three-way conversation occurred where his brother (an English speaker), the Good Samaritan and I (using a hot spot) got the *mappa* completed and on my way. A complication in the dialog is there is a neighborhood near the airport named Puebla. But once I clarified I wanted the Basilica in Puebla, all fell into place.

Day's Event and Conclusions

- The night terror was an assessment of the day's event. After all, if the first 123/km portion would be so treacherous how much more so the remaining 2,100/km?
- The financial transaction issue:
 - Credit cards are useless outside of downtown Mexico City.
 - Currency Exchange is harder and harder to find the farther from Mexico City you get.
- The resource issue:
 - Losing \$250 USD in the very first day effect the travel plan and cost of the trip?
- The technical issues:
 - The WiFi, the data, the voice problems for the necessity of telecommunications.
- The capacity issues:
 - A 64 year old man driving solo. Not in the best of health. Language challenged.

Prayer

The good news is I knew my issues. The axiom '**Name Your Fear**' is really super accurate.

I also reminded myself that we (the Lord and I) have all night to decide the outcome tomorrow. Do I turn back? Do I press forward? But in the meanwhile, there is rest and sleep needed. And trust. Trust in the Divine that I was brought here for a purpose.

My prayer plan for the trip included the contemplation of the *Misterios Gozosos, the Joyful mysteries*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wB1VGIR9DYk>

The Joyful Mysteries

The Annunciation – I made the analogy that my mission and pilgrimage is a worthy event and endeavor. A type of ‘Yes’ to the Lord.

The Visitation – I felt the presence of the Heavenly Hosts, especially, the Blessed Mother and Our Lord. Moreover, I recalled I brought with me the funeral Mass cards for Mom and Beloved Uncle Ed. Both among the Triumphant Church. I also brought Mass cards of the parents of friends and patients with me to remind me of the unity of life and death and persons (Parish, Hospice and Interfaith). ***Each with his sword at his side against the terrors of the night (Songs 3:8b).***

The Nativity – I made the analogy that right at that moment in time I am as naked and vulnerable as the Blessed Child Jesus. But he was not alone, the Angels, Shepherds, Magi, Mother, and Father all supported him and cared for him. This care he gives to us all.). ***Each with his sword at his side against the terrors of the night (Songs 3:8b).***

The Presentation – Lying on that bed (by the way a very comfortable bed (2), I realized I am presenting myself before the Lord. Vulnerable, but not incompetent. Willing but with gaps in knowledge, faith and skill. But that is how I presented myself. Naked. Alone. But, being made in the image and called to the likeness of God, boldly.

The Finding Of Jesus – A pilgrimage in a real sense is a journey to find Jesus in a particular way. The Basilica was reassuring. The first and most historical of all Basilicas in Mexico. And, coincidentally, dedicated to the Immaculate Mary who’s Joyful Mysteries I am praying. I knew I would find Jesus in many along the road. The Good Samaritan of Mexico City was the first of many to come.

Morning Sun

When you lie down, you will not be afraid, when you rest, your sleep will be sweet (Pv 3:24).

By morning, the outcome was uplift and mission. Borrowing WiFi from the hotel to start my offline maps for the immediate navigational aid. Remembering, the more I drive the more I learn how to drive (so to speak) in this beautiful place.

Manage my cash more carefully. Skip a few stops along the way as optional stops for the way back (shift the order of events and their importance).

Trust. Trust, like the Joyful Mysteries. There are exceptional encounters with the Divine that occur in the midst of difficulty.

Peace be with you.

Deacon Gerry

Disclaimer – Names, times and places MAY BE fictional or obscured to protect the privacy of others without distorting the essential truth of the encounter.

References:

1. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/night-terror>
2. Real Santander Hotel, Puebla, Mexico.