



I have seen different movie versions of the story of a small group of men and woman committed to the Independence of Texas making a last stand against the powerful Mexican army in 1836 at the Alamo. According to the movies and the legend, the leader of this band of fighter, Colonel William Travis, took out his saber and told those with him that the time had come to stay and fight or to leave and seek safety. No one would be criticized

if the choice was to leave; he then drew a line in the dusty Texas sand and said whoever staying cross this line, would most likely die in battle. 179 out of 180 people chose to cross the line at the risk of death. Thus, today we hear the expression *he/she drew a line in the stand*.

I have spoken to you before about my favorite playwright Thornton Wilder. In his play *By the Skin of Our Teeth*, he writes this about the marriage vows: *"I didn't marry you because you were perfect. I didn't even marry you because I loved you. I married you because you gave me a promise. That promise made up for your faults. And the promise I gave you made up for mine. Two imperfect people got married and it was the promise that made the marriage. And when our children were growing up, it wasn't a house that protected them; and it wasn't our love that protected them--it was that promise."*

In 1732 seven priests and one brother left Naples for a small Italian village named Scala. Alphonsus Liguori was beginning a new religious order that would come to be known as the Redemptorists. There was a great deal of hardship in those early days at Scala and one by one the men left Alphonsus went home to Naples. Only Alphonsus and Brother Vitus Curtius remained. Alphonsus, because of this experience, added a fourth vow to our order: in addition to the standard ones of poverty, chastity and obedience, a Redemptorist also takes a vow and oath of perseverance.

It is not always easy to honor a promise made for life. The people we make the promise to change, we change, and the world around us becomes very different. Sometimes, a person, very often for very good and healthy reasons, comes to know in faith that a promise he or she made is not what they believe God has is calling them to continue.

I remember my cousin Mikey, a funny Irish guy now home with God, said to my mother on my ordination day: *Aunt Margaret, he is all set for life. Mikey was telling my mother that her son would never have to be worried or concerned about anything.* There has been some truth to that in terms of food, housing, health care, and full employment if I could use such a word for ministry. But the religious world I entered into has changed so very much. Far less people go to church than they did 40 years ago. The horrible abuse of minors by priests has led many to look on all priests with negative eyes. The Church in America is struggling with religious vocations, Catholic schools are closings, celibacy is seen by many as sad way to live one's life, and the media often dismisses and ridicules religion and faith. I know many of you face some of the same issues in your own families as you see your children and grandchildren rarely practice the faith you so cherish. My life here at St. Martin's has brought me great joy and happiness in my life, but I do get discouraged as I look at the larger reality of how secularism is overwhelming faith and traditional values in our society. Some of the changes in society are good, but many leave me scratching my head and discouraged.

Today, Jesus speaks clear words to us about our commitment to him to be his followers. *And to another he said, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." But he answered him, "Let the dead bury their dead. But you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." And another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home."*

To him *Jesus said, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.* Jesus is not against us loving our family and burying our dead, but he seeks to shock his listeners about the importance of staying the course, of not giving up and running away in our love of Christ and in the call to live our faith by loving one another. A friend of mine was complaining

about his life recently and he was told, *Man Up*, or I think of the quote of every sports coach who has ever lived: when the going gets tough, the tough get going.

None of us are perfect followers of Christ. The word *courage* comes from the Latin word *cor*. To be discouraged is to lose heart. But as followers of Jesus we have strength together as a parish community sharing faith with one another. We have Body and Blood of Jesus here at the Eucharist and the promise of Jesus that the Holy Spirit will be with us until the end of time. We walk together by faith. In the face of challenges, we continue to pray, to seek to love one another, to be merciful. Last week on the feast of Corpus Christi, we heard that many disciples walked away from Jesus when he tells them they must eat his body and drink his blood. They are shocked by these words and wondered if Jesus was a madman. So Jesus sees many depart from him, he turns to the apostles. Jesus says to Peter and the apostles and asks, *Shall you too walk away*. I love Peter's answer; it could be mantra for today's Catholic: *Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of everlasting life*.