

## **Traveling Companion: Should I stay or should I leave?**

### **Fr. Michael Tracey**

Don't let the title fool you. What are you thinking? Do you wonder if I am trying to decide whether to stay in the priesthood or to leave? Well, read on.

The middle aged couple walked into the rectory as we were finishing lunch. "Could we talk with you for a few minutes?" asked the gentleman. I ushered them into my office and closed the door. The couple attended the first R.C.I.A. class but never came back and we wondered what happened to them. I found out why.

The middle aged gentleman informed me that he was educated by the Jesuits and had studied to become a Jesuit for a few years but eventually left. His partner was less talkative and appeared awkward in the surroundings. She was not Catholic and wasn't comfortable with a Catholic priest.

Jack began to break the ice for Kathy. He set the scene that was to become the backdrop of our conversation. Kathy was married for sixteen years. She and her husband belonged to a non-denominational church. Finally, when she did begin to talk, she told me the rest of the story.

She confided in me that her marriage was an abusive one. Her husband was both physically and emotionally abusive to her. She felt trapped in the marriage. She also went on to tell me that, in her religion, she had no rights. She could not file for divorce, no matter what the circumstances. Only her husband could file for divorce. She had no choice but to accept the abusive treatment as part of her marriage covenant with her husband and be a dutiful and obedient wife. Her husband didn't want children, even though she did.

Kathy had an interesting concept of God. Her God was a just God, a God who was dogged in his demands; a God she feared because His attitude and demands were reinforced in her church.

Obviously unhappy in her marriage, she was torn between her church generated fear of God and her seeking some consolation, fulfillment and peace of mind.

Her friend, who came with her, introduced her to our Perpetual Adoration, which was something very foreign to her. She asked him why he went and simply sat there, staring at something on an altar. He explained the practice of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament to her. As time went on, her quiet time in front of the Blessed Sacrament, flooded her with all kinds of questions and emotions and struggles. Now, she was at a crossroads and needed some answers. Should she leave an abusive marriage, even though her church would not allow it, and if she did leave such a situation, how would her just God see her actions? Was her just God demanding that she stay in the relationship, no matter what the dangers or consequences? Could she live with the consequences of her decision?

We tried to help her to discover a more expansive understanding of a God; especially a God who knew people's intimate struggles and who wasn't so demanding as to condemn a person to a relationship that was both abusive and unfulfilling.

Since our encounter, I have noticed that Kathy and her friend have attended Mass faithfully on weekends. I noticed that he guides her through the liturgy and, I am sure, he is also guiding her to a new awareness of God and how he works in people's lives and now, especially, as God works in her life.

Right now, I have no choice but to await the answer to her question: Should I stay or should I leave?