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Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles... *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

### **What I Did (and learned) on My Corona Vacation**

*Bob's Perspective:*

I suppose that if I started out by saying, "I've never experienced anything like this in my entire life," most people would roll their eyes and walk away. The truth is, none of us have experienced anything of this magnitude. I'm talking here about the economy and social effects. A disease is a disease – the world has seen this time and time again throughout history – just read your Bible. The closest any of us may have come would be the old folks who lived through the beginning of the Great Depression of 1929.

My brother-in-law just died from complications that were exacerbated by COVID-19. However, his death in itself has not been nearly as difficult to handle as the separation our family has had to experience throughout this mess. None of us have been able to be with his wife and kids because of the "Social Distancing and Stay-at-Home" policies.

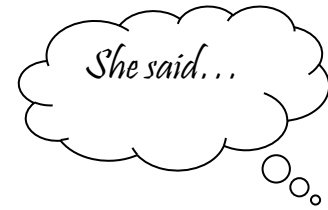
Not unlike many who will read this blog, I've not been able to visit or take Communion to my relatives in nursing homes or assisted living. I've missed all of the people with whom I connect at Sunday Mass or other parish events. I've even had to cancel a popular summer event that our parish holds (and return all of the money to my sponsors for advertising).

Although it may sound like it, I'm really not complaining. This is probably more of a lament. I'll come back to that shortly.

One of the good things that has come from all of this is the opportunity for creativity and growth. Up until now, I've done very little with online meetings and other technology (other than working on websites). I've learned quite a bit and have acquired a number of new skill sets. As a parish staff, we've seen areas for improvement that were not as blatantly obvious before all of this occurred.

On a personal note, the neighborhood in which I reside has really come together in a more tight-knit way. I've lived in this house for nearly 16 years and have had hardly a word with anyone except my next-door neighbor. Now I know at least a dozen other people on my street. Not needing to be at the parish from morning to night every day, I've been able to take some time to walk and exercise more frequently. With all of my favorite weekend haunts being closed, my eating habits have improved. Since the middle of March, I've dropped almost 8 pounds.

So what's with the lament? The lament simply is that I really liked things the way they were – and we will probably never go back. While physical hygiene and good social habits are certainly important, I feel that we are slowly becoming obsessed to a point of being unhealthy. The lack of balanced mental health and self-esteem can cause just as much (if not more) damage than less-than-perfect hygiene and social habits. As a Church and as good people, we need to keep ourselves aware of that fact. We need to be sure that we don't start shunning people out of fear (or disgust). We need to remember that everyone – from the most clean and proper to those who may not be able to achieve those standards



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– are all part of who we are and whose we are. We can't allow ourselves to be taken over by fear and paranoia. I become very concerned when the news media can't wait to give us the "body count" every day. We know that people are sick and that people are dying. However, people get sick and die every day from all sorts of things. Believe it or not, this has been happening for many thousands of years – it didn't just start a few months ago. And guess what? The human race is still here. Should we be concerned by the current pandemic? Of course. Should we take proper precautions to ensure the public good? Without a doubt. However, I heard a great quote from a noted Rabbi and author (Dennis Prager) that I'll leave you with: "I would rather die living than live dying."

*Mary's Perspective:*

During this whole pandemic, collective chaos has been introduced into our lives. Schedules, routines, and much of what we took for granted suddenly drew our attention. Uncertainty and "what if" thinking definitely causes anxiety. But the reality is that life is uncertain. All we have is now. We don't know when our heart will beat its last. So once again, I am challenged to reframe my thinking.

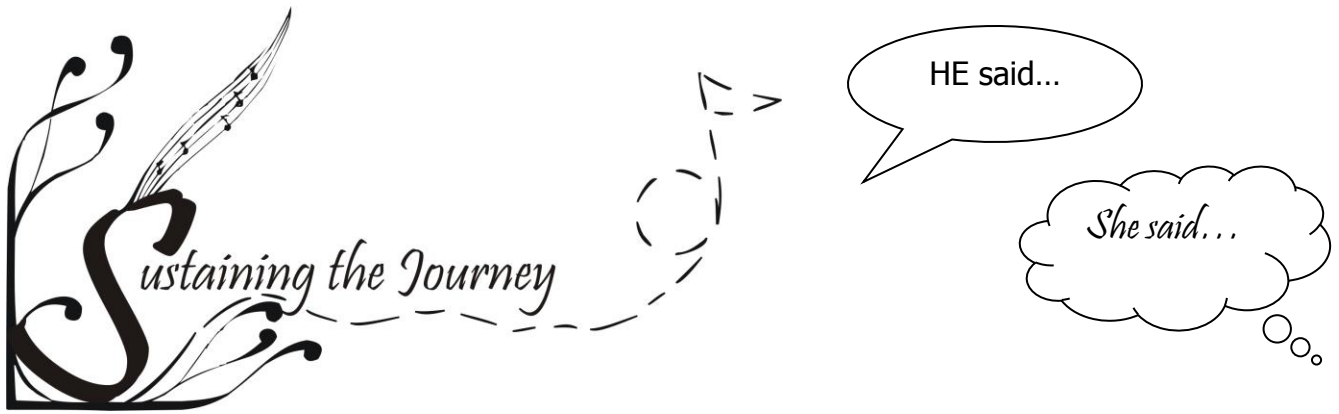
In [our last blog](#), I talked about leveraging what you learned during lockdown and expecting good things to come of it. Remember, positive expectations are self-fulfilling. And I absolutely agree with Dennis Prager's concept of wanting to die living than live dying.

Spiritual development usually happens the most dramatically in troubled times. Think about it – how many folks do you know that fell away from their faith, yet still were drawn to church for the funeral of a loved one? How many times have you heard that an addict had to hit rock bottom before taking that first step toward healing? Do we tend to recognize our dependence and lean on the Almighty when life is happily rolling along – or is it when our hearts are aching the most that we seek comfort, reassurance and relationship?

This time of lockdown has posed an amazing opportunity to press RESET. We've been able to take time, without the chaotic noise of our previous life, to ponder, to pray, and to consider our values. We've had opportunity for physical healing, with more sleep, healthier eating habits, and more regular exercise. (Bob is down a few pounds; I am regularly walking 15-18 miles per week in the park.) We've gotten the chance to know folks better, including our offspring and even some clergy who took to regular online conversations. Perhaps we have discovered podcasts or TED talks, or other inspiring audio resources.

Yes, this time has not been without loss. But I do not want to pander to panic. We make the best decisions with the information we have, whether those decisions have to do with resuming singing in church or shopping at the farm market. We act prudently, again paying attention to things like handwashing and social distance. Uncertainty is a part of life. If we can accept that and live in the "now" our souls will be more peaceful.

For those charged with figuring out how life resumes after this extraordinary time – in whatever setting – perhaps this is a good time to rely on that newly developed spiritual growth. If you believe God has a plan in all of this, then you need to be attentive to His voice. Try to let go of fear and arm yourself with knowledge. Spend time in meditation and trust the Spirit's guidance as you make your decisions and plow forward.



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I don't know about you, but I've learned during this "Corona Vacation" (as Bob puts it) that putting more emphasis on balance and values has made me more peaceful. I've discovered new sources of positivity, from podcasts and webinars to increased time with my (sweet/crazy/wacky/lovable/no one word is enough) teenagers. I found out that the bags under my eyes actually do go away when I am rested! And I've learned about myself... what motivates me and what I value. Perhaps I didn't accomplish all I thought I would – our book is still only half-written, and my closets have not decluttered themselves – but I'm definitely on a better path to die living than to live dying.