

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.

Living a Vital and Resilient Faith

Mary's Perspective:

We were recently asked to be keynote speakers at an awesome retreat in the Akron area that focused on keeping faith alive amidst the busyness of daily life, and (in a variation of that theme) we've also been invited to present a morning in Meadville, PA on avoiding burnout. The preparation for these events has come at a timely point – because this is the time of year when I am most susceptible to feeling overwhelmed, burned out, and less than vital! As a liturgical minister, the last few weeks of Lent often feel like exhaustion is an animated monster, looming and ready to pounce. So how do I avoid that trap?

One of the messages I have learned over the years is to surround myself with people, activities, and things that I find life-giving or energizing. For example, whenever I walk briskly in the park, the fresh air and endorphins leave me clear-headed and glad I made the effort. There are friends who I know that, whenever we get some time together, we will laugh and have fun. Sitting at the piano, or coloring, or crocheting provide great opportunities to decompress. On the flip side, we all have folks in our lives who can be high-maintenance and leave us feeling drained. Carefully choosing the timing of when to be with those folks can have an impact on our sense of vitality.

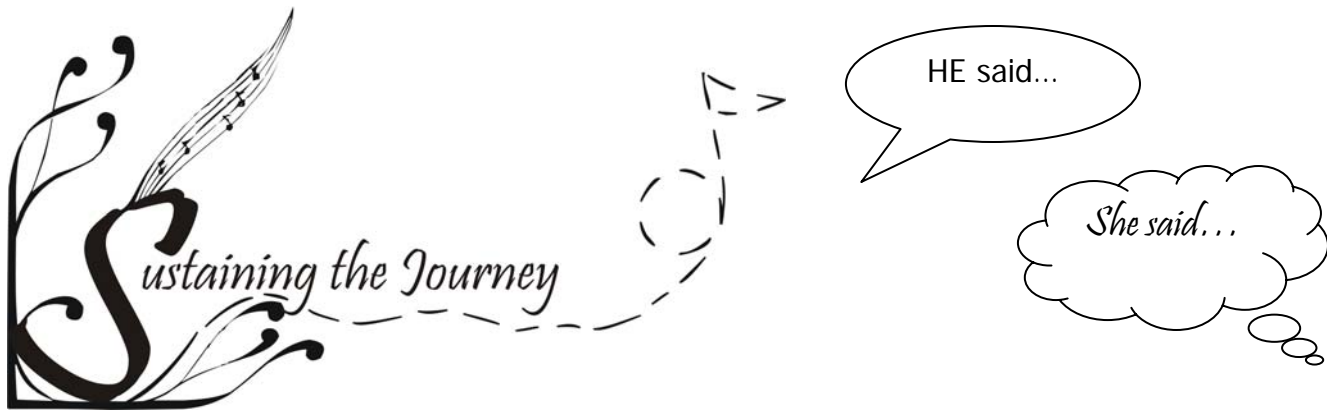
The short end of my reflection is two-fold. To have a vital and faith-filled life (or any other specific quality), try to surround yourself with lively, faith-filled (or fill in specific quality) people. Then emulate those qualities, and be the example so others learn from you. Be the change you want to see.

Bob's Perspective

The secret to resiliency in our faith life is to embrace ritual and integrate it into our daily agenda. So many times we find ourselves doing things automatically, without thought (habitually) rather than with mindful intent (ritually). In order for faith life to be resilient, it has to be well integrated into our being. Merely going through the motions once a week shortchanges the potential richness of our interaction with God and each other.

If Eucharist is truly the source and summit of our lives as Catholic Christians, then we need to view the ritual action of the Mass in a way that carries through our day when we're not in Church. Our day in day out rituals must lead to and flow from Eucharist if we are to succeed.

Let's consider the reception of Holy Communion. Do we mindfully reflect on our action as we move through the line, receive the Sacrament with thoughtfulness and go back to our place offering thanksgiving? How often



do we take time to recognize and reflect on the moral obligations and consequences of our action, and of being sent forth in peace “to glorify the Lord” with our lives? Or is the reception of Eucharist a mere habit? We receive, say “Hi” to a few folks and meander out the door on our way to the next event.

That may seem a little harsh, but it’s actually easier to repair than one might imagine. So what are some of the ways that we can make the Eucharistic experience deeper and more meaningful?

One way is to recognize how God works in our daily lives through the rituals that we establish outside of liturgy. The more we embrace rituals, the more meaningful they become. The more meaningful they become, the deeper we allow ourselves to enter into the mystery. I look at ritual as a habit done mindfully with purpose or meaning;

1. Saying a brief prayer of thanksgiving every morning and/or every evening is a great way to start. It doesn’t necessarily have to be formal prayer. A very simple, heartfelt, mindfully focused “thank you Lord” could work well.
2. Making the Sign of the Cross before and after a prayer with deliberation, conviction and thought (not like a badly done baseball signal) will transform that prayer from a few words to a meaningful action.
3. Saying grace before a meal helps to increase our sense of awe and respect for the God who provides for us so well, and offers a beautiful witness of our faith to those in our presence.
4. Taking just a few seconds each day to pray for those who have gone before us in faith helps connect our minds and hearts to the eternal happiness that we all strive to achieve.

Just a few simple ritual actions such as these move our faith from the dull and theoretical to vibrant reality.

We could go on and on with this, but I think most people will perceive the direction in which we’re moving. The purpose of Sunday Worship is to give thanks and praise to our Lord for all that we receive, and to bring petition for God’s help and strength to continue onward. Simple daily rituals help to build and nurture these attitudes throughout our day, making the celebration of Eucharist even more dynamic and impactful to ourselves and those around us.