

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.

Qualified... or Chosen?

Mary's Perspective:

"God doesn't choose people because they're qualified... God qualifies the chosen."

If you do a web search for this quote, an interpretation of I Corinthians 1:27-29, you'll find lots of images, crafts, and reflections intended to inspire. I find now is a very appropriate time to focus on it.

This is typically the time of year when music directors are preparing to resume choir season, selecting what new repertoire will be added, and scheduling rehearsals. Many of our colleagues in music ministry feel lost, floundering, uncertain of the right ways to proceed with our music – and rightly so. There are conflicting messages everywhere. We face the anxiety of the virus, worries of perpetuating it, directives intended to stop its spread, perhaps loved ones who have become sick with it, or even died from it. Government and diocesan leaders have required masks or face coverings in public. The scientific studies suggest, at minimum, adding significantly more space between singers. On the other hand, as liturgists we know that worship is intended to be a dialog. Liturgy is meant to be sung, and the people have their role in that sung dialog. It is not appropriate for a "performer" to take their place in that dialog – that would be like telling yourself a knock-knock joke, punch line and all. We recognize that our choirs feed the community and enhance worship with their ministry, but also are fed by their participation. And even members of the hierarchy are not on the same page when it comes to preventive measures and singing at church. You could attend a church where masks are optional, another where communal singing is welcome, and yet another where all music is instrumental – within a four square mile radius.

In a larger view, other industries face similar conundrums. Educators continue to debate the merits of students learning in person versus the risks associated with that approach. Child care centers offer a vital service to families who might otherwise rely on grandparents, putting a vulnerable population at increased risk of exposure. Financial institutions, grocery stores, restaurants and others are trying to forge forward yet feel like they are making choices without having all the facts. It is a daunting time.

I know that, for my own self, when anxiety weighs heavily, it's easier to doubt my decisions. This pandemic has brought about increases in depression, mental illness, and suicide ideations. And so we can either choose to curl in a ball and not participate in life, or we can seek inspiration.

Go back and read that quote. There's your inspiration for today.



We need to do our homework, to research and educate ourselves with scientific facts as best we can. We can't let emotion or fear drive our decisions. Certainly, we need to be careful. But we also need to trust the fact that God gives us what we need. Whatever your position of leadership may be – as parent, worker, “boss”, minister – God called you to that. If you feel unworthy or unqualified, do what you can to be the best leader you can be. Keep learning. Seek the guidance of a mentor. Play by the rules. Pray. But also trust that God has a plan in all of this, and has put you on this path for a reason. You have been chosen for this role. Chosen.

Just as fire refines or removes impurities, navigating these unprecedented times is forming us, making us stronger – and qualifying us for the next step. Make the best decisions you can based on the information, insight, and inspiration that you have been given. Don't be afraid to forge a new path. Trust that you are qualified, because you have been chosen.

Bob's Perspective:

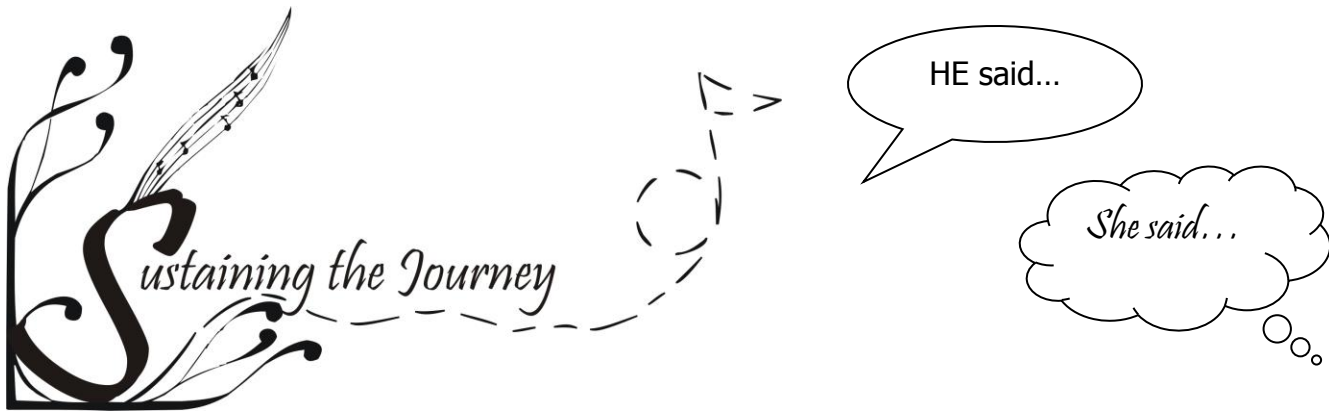
Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit; and therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of the necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work. (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy #14)

The Assembly to whom I minister has always participated well in the liturgy. They respond well, they sing well and they pray together well. However, it wasn't until the events of the pandemic that I realized that “fully conscious and active participation” was not as present as it seemed among them.

One example of this is the “Glory to God.” When it comes to singing, our Assembly knows at least five Mass settings that they can sing off the top of their heads, with no music or text in front of them. However, when the same Assembly was no longer able to sing (due to COVID-19 concerns) and there were no worship aids to follow, they stumbled dreadfully through the recitation of the text. They could easily sing the Gloria, but they had very little idea of how to say it – which to me would indicate that the prayer had not been well internalized. *Their singing, while beautiful and active, lacked full consciousness.* Throughout the course of the “Year of the Mask,” the Assembly has learned and taken to heart the words of this beautiful song of praise – by *saying* the words with no worship aid to guide them.

It has not been the tradition of our parish to sing the Nicene Creed, but until the “Year of the Mask” they had always had a worship aid in front of them to guide them along in recitation. Again, once they no longer had aid



on which to depend, their first recitations of the Creed were considerably weak (at times disastrous). After weeks of nothing but their memories and hearts to guide them, their recitation has become a thing of beauty.

As to other parts of the Mass, rather than having someone sing the acclamations for them (the Sanctus and so on), they now say the words themselves with strength and conviction. I think this is what we know as conscious participation.

“God doesn’t choose people because they’re qualified... God qualifies the chosen.”

I’m sure that many of my colleagues feel as called to ministry as do I. Most of us probably feel that we need to rise to the occasion, using all of our professional expertise to “save the day” for our Assemblies – and give them everything they can’t give themselves. I have certainly found myself feeling that way. Then I call to mind an old story:

A young apprentice and his master were walking along when they happened upon a cocoon. As they observed, a butterfly was struggling to emerge. The young apprentice, with the best of intentions, helped to separate the cocoon so that the butterfly could easily escape. The little wet, frail insect tried to open its wings, but being too weak fell to the ground – where a bird swept down and ate him. The young apprentice felt sad. The master told him that the butterfly emerged weak because the apprentice didn’t allow him to struggle from the cocoon, which would have allowed him time for his wings to dry and his strength to develop. In essence, it was the young apprentice’s good intention that ultimately caused the butterfly’s demise.

One can hear a love song on the radio and be romantically inspired, but in a truly functional relationship one has to say the words, “I love you,” from their heart and not just let someone else sing it for them. While I’m the first to admit that our liturgy is meant to be sung, right now our Assembly (for health considerations) is not able to sing. For the Assembly, listening to music may be somewhat inspiring, but it certainly isn’t worship. Worship comes from the activity of verbalizing the words from their hearts. If they can’t sing the words, they should at least be given the ability to say them.

Are we allowing our butterflies to grow through struggle, or are we killing them with our good intentions?