

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.

So What?

Bob's Perspective:

Life is busy...too busy sometimes. We get so caught up in the rut of doing things that we sometimes forget about why they're being done. We are so proud of ourselves when we actually take a moment or two to "be" with someone (actually spending time with them) – when in fact, being together is what we're supposed to do, and all else should be supporting that goal.

I recently underwent an elective surgery, which was supposed to be outpatient, taking only a few hours. I'm especially grateful to a good friend who took me the hospital that day (at an ungodly hour), and waited around for an extraordinarily long time in order to know that I was in good hands. Because of a complication due to the anesthesia, I wound up being in the hospital for a few days. From the time of surgery through my release, the health team did an outstanding job. The thing that impressed me most was the amount of personal interactivity that took place. They actually took the time to express their concerns and support – a touch on the hand or shoulder, a smile, a conversation.

Over the course of my recovery, I've received a number of emails, text messages and the like, wishing me well and offering thoughts, prayers and concern. I count myself to be very blessed for the many wonderful people in my life. There have even been a few people that have stopped over to my house to look in on me from time to time.

This experience has reminded me of a few values that I probably need to re-examine. While all of the communications have been greatly appreciated, the personal interactions have really made a difference. Though getting tasks accomplished is sometimes essential to quality ministry, the most important thing is people. So many times, we have people in our families, assemblies, music ministries, et cetera, that would appreciate even a few moments of personal interaction. How many times have we talked to someone who has indicated that they were doing well, when in all actuality we could see by their facial expression, tonal quality or body language that it probably wasn't the case? I had a time not long ago, where I would have misconstrued what someone had texted if I hadn't called them and actually heard their voice.

Don't get me wrong. I'm all for convenience and efficiency, but sometimes it's more important to do the inconvenient or inefficient thing for the greater good. That's why we go to Mass on Sunday, not only for personal interaction with each other, but personal interaction in a family setting with Our Lord. Otherwise,



maybe we should propose a new form of liturgy for Sunday worship. We could call it “ut laudent et confiterentur illud,” or in English, “Text of Praise and Thanksgiving.” The great thing about this is that we wouldn’t have to leave the house (or for that matter our comfortable bed) on Sunday morning – or deal with anyone else’s problems, concerns and son on. All we would need to do is pick up our cellphone and type:

“Hi God, doing well...thanks for everything...talk 2 U soon...luv ya! ♥”

Mary's Perspective:

I recently had dinner with a group of friends, who are all connected with music ministry. (Yes, I have friends!) There were several reasons for this gathering. One member of the group has been battling a string of illnesses that have taken him away from his usual participation in ministry. We wanted to share a meal with him, get all of us caught up on the local gossip, and strengthen bonds that have felt frayed by cancer and dialysis treatments. As a bonus, that night turned out to be a wedding anniversary celebration!

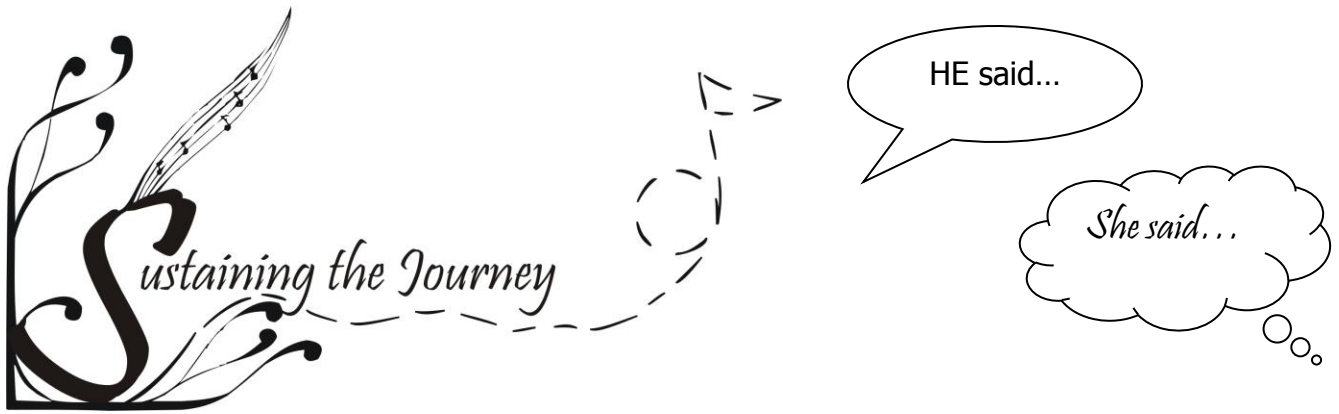
It is challenging to put into words the feelings evoked from that evening. There were nine of us sitting around a beautiful, intimate living room. Conversation flowed easily. While we all come from different backgrounds and locales, we shared much in common. As colleagues, we face similar challenges. As parents, or children of aging parents, stories elicited knowing nods and understanding compassion. I mused on the way home that we are all broken people but shared common ground.

The sense of community from that night was palpable. It felt good to be part of something beyond myself. All of these folks walk a similar journey, in ministry and in life. I felt supported and not alone. And I am convinced the anniversary couple were content that we were there. They are a delightful example of marriage – through good, bad, sickness, health, wealth, lean times, teens with blue hair, grandchildren who take them to radiation treatments – they have an enduring love and unstoppable faith.

Driving home, my thoughts drifted to my own children. Many of us at dinner commiserated how we can raise our children with certain values but ultimately they make their own decisions – which may not be the paths we might choose. One of my children has found that participating in his girlfriend's weekly "family dinner" fills a need he didn't even realize he had. Certainly those dinners have their share of raised voices and unsolicited opinions, but they also leave him feeling part of a community.

I think back to earlier days of ministry, when we played Saturday night Masses and hung out as a group on Sunday, throwing a football and cooking burgers in the park. Again, a bunch of broken people with common ground. Isn't that essentially what the apostles were? They were a motley crew, from different backgrounds and broken in their own ways – yet they shared a common strand. They followed Jesus.

Back to Bob's "text of praise and thanksgiving" aka dialing it in when it comes to Mass... In the big scheme of things, I think my dinner... my son's family dinner... the apostles... the "guitar group" days... and even Bob's experience of the value of personal touch are a microcosm of our faith experience. Liturgy is a group of broken people who share common ground, coming together around the table to take time to be with each other.



So what?

Maybe this is just a gentle reminder that showing up does make a difference. It's like taking a vitamin... you don't always recognize the good it's doing, and you may not always feel like taking it. But gathering for that meal – be it Eucharist or family dinner, or being with aging friends – is about quality time together. About being part of a bigger picture. About being community. About being broken around each other, and accepting healing. About finding common ground. And about giving thanks to God, who offers abundant mercy, grace, healing, and acceptance of all who are broken but gathered for the meal.

That's what.