

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.

Sweetness

Mary's Perspective

As any music minister will tell you, our “job” very often goes beyond simply picking five songs and playing them. I’ve often commented that the majority of my ministry happens in the times when someone says, “Have you got a minute?” A recent Sunday was no exception, other than there were several someones who each needed more than a few moments. In the course of one day, I experienced three different encounters with folks who each felt disgruntled, frustrated, and even beat up not just by life...but by fellow church-goers.

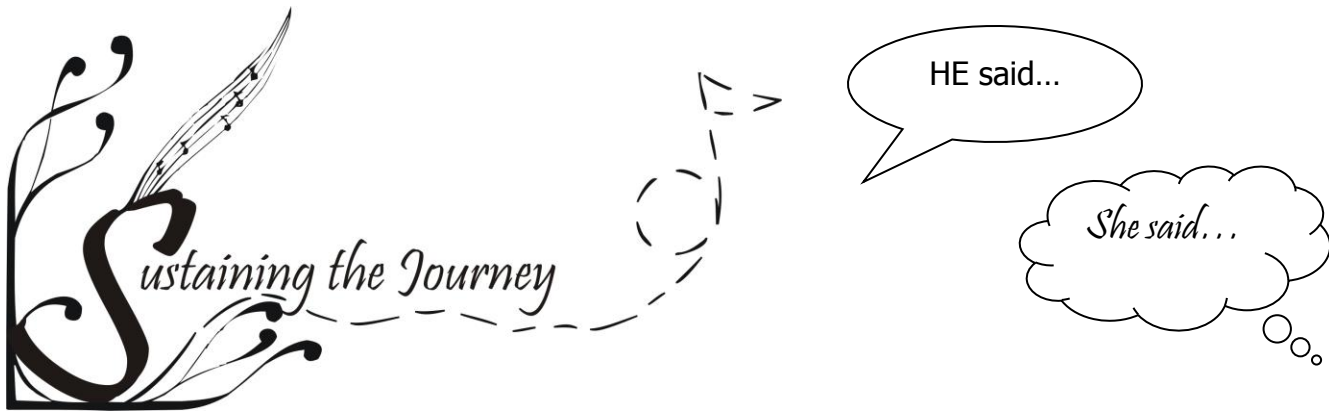
Whatever the issue, it is disheartening when the humanity threatens to overshadow the divinity, especially in the place where you’ve come to worship. In all three instances, those who were involved truly intended no harm. Perhaps it was a tone of voice, or the stress of the week, or simply expressing one’s opinion that came out harsh. Feelings get bruised. In an effort to protect ourselves, instinct says to lash out at the person or to project hurtful intent.

A few weeks ago, I offered an evening of reflection and refresher training for our Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. One of the messages of the reflection was that your choice of words matters. Very often, we attend the same Mass each week with the same people, and you become an extended family. We open our hearts and let down our guard. Unfortunately, sometimes the people closest to you can inflict the most pain, simply by choosing poor words or expressing an air of superiority. I shared a story...

My daughter is part of a wonderful music group through her high school. I know many of the parents of the students in this group, as our children have grown up together. This particular music group travels for competitions on the weekends. The majority of their events – shows, social gatherings, and fundraisers – occur on Saturdays and Sundays, when I’m working. One Saturday not long ago, the group had an evening cabaret night at which my daughter was both directing and performing. It was a typical Saturday, where I had left the house early to play a wedding at one church, grabbed lunch on the run, then worked and played Mass at another church, before rushing home to quickly regroup and get to the high school. Meanwhile, my husband managed the grocery shopping, laundry, transporting offspring, and also had to deal with getting a flat tire in the midst of the errands. When we got to the high school, one of the moms (whom we have known for years) saw us and said, “Oh, you’re here for a change! How nice...”

In that moment, I felt a mixture of rage and inadequacy and aggravation and a myriad of other thoughts – none positive. I am quite certain she did not intend it as a hurtful comment, but all I heard was judgment. The words you use matter.

Fast forward a couple of weeks... I was playing the funeral of a beloved parishioner. Near the end of the Mass, his daughter offered a few words of remembrance. She brought with her a large 3-ring binder. On the cover of the binder was a big M&M’s wrapper. She explained that the binder was her dad’s medical records, meticulously kept over the past 25 years. Whenever he had an appointment, he would be able to produce the latest detail of lab results, prescriptions,



diagnoses, etc. She described him as the doctor's dream, because of the great records he maintained. Inevitably, a nurse would ask about the M&M's wrapper – at which point he would immediately give her a pack of M&M's.

Word spread (are you surprised?), and soon many medical personnel asked him about the binder cover. All would receive packs of M&M's. He became known as “the M&M's guy”. The moral of her story was to encourage all to spread sweetness in life. Kind words, gentle actions, and even small packs of colorful chocolate candies can make someone's day better. Every time I eat M&M's, I will remember fondly this friend.

My point in all of this is simple. The choices we make have impact. Allowing harsh words or strong opinions or negativity to creep in runs the risk of it seeping to others around us. If you've been wounded by a friend and it threatens your desire to stay in your place of worship or in that relationship, recognize that ultimately divinity wins – try not to let our humanness overshadow that. And finally, spread sweetness.

Bob's Perspective

All too often I hear of someone who left the Church because of some change, or something that was said or done by a priest (or other prominent minister) or another parishioner. Words really do matter – hence my recent rants about email and texting versus direct human interaction. On the other hand, human interaction can be tricky at times. We do our best to project a positive attitude, and most times others pick up on it and adjust or react accordingly. But sometimes, people just come at us ‘loaded for bear’ and that's just the way it is.

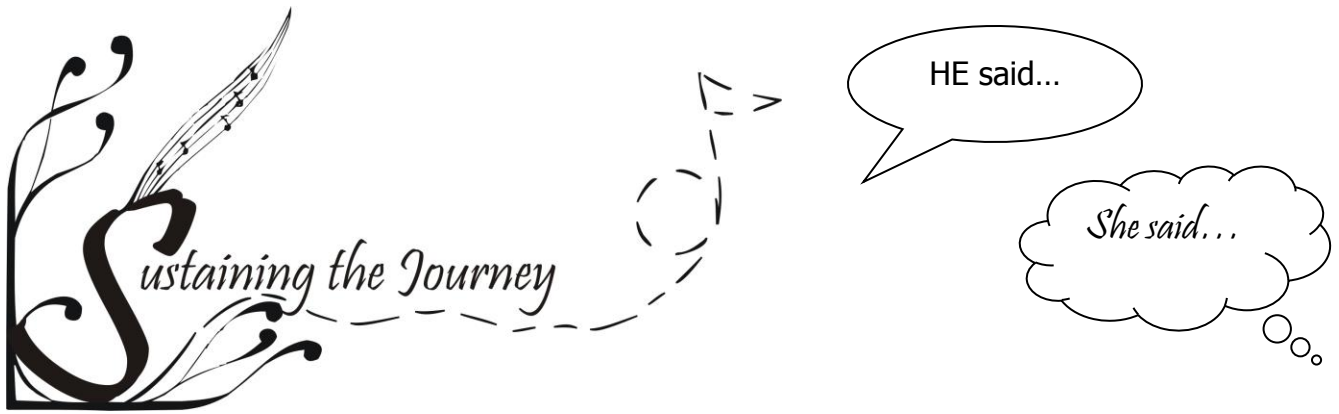
[CLICK HERE](#) for an example.

This takes me back to the earlier part of the 2010's when many of the liturgical texts were about to undergo a transformation. No matter how changes were presented in the course of their introduction (workshops, classes, etc.), one could find at least the undercurrent of discontent among some. At one such gathering, a very wise person addressed those present and posed this question: “Do we worship the Liturgy, or do we worship God?” A pregnant pause ensued. He had a great point!

I don't in any way mean to undercut the severity of the horrible actions or treatment that some have undergone at the hands of those who were supposed to be here to offer comfort and spiritual guidance. In these cases, coming to a resolution (if it's even possible) is complicated and painful. However, in many cases of disgruntled feelings, the resolution is not as complex or difficult. There is a place for separating the humanity of the institution from the divine mission of the Church. God is perfect – human beings have the propensity to fail, and do so on many occasions.

Every now and then someone comes to me upset about something that was said or done by someone in a meeting, or rehearsal, or other ecclesial gathering – and then threatens to leave the parish or the Church. I usually (when appropriate) begin with: “You need to do what you feel is best, but try to understand that the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, but run by human beings.” Most times that calms things down to a place where at least we can entertain a civil conversation.

Be clear that we're not trying to minimize the person's concerns. Hurt on any level is a very real thing and should not be casually cast aside. But many times through the art of refocusing, calmer heads prevail and positive steps toward resolution can soon follow. This refocusing helps us to understand the hierarchy of what's important in our lives. Many times, people don't always stop to think about the possible impact of their words or actions, which aren't meant to be



insulting or hurtful – but end up that way. We always need to consider the source of the pain and determine what (if any) course of action is appropriate, rather than blindly reacting to a stimulus (whether negative or positive).

Over this past summer, our parish sponsored a number of summer evening events at which we had live bands of various genres, but all top names in our area and of very high quality. The response to these events were overwhelmingly positive. We had excellent attendance and although our financial goal was to just break even, we actually made a handsome little profit. The Sunday after one such event, an older gentleman came up to me and said, “Bob, the band you guys had last week was terrible.” Rather than arguing with him, I asked him, “What was terrible about them?” He replied, “I don’t like that kind of music.” (The genre that week was smooth jazz – and advertised as such.) So to clarify his thought I responded, “So you’re saying that you judge the quality of a band’s musicianship based on whether you like the particular style of music they play?” He answered, “No, the band was good, I just didn’t like some of the songs.” (In a few short seconds we went from the band being terrible to the band being good.)

By refocusing the conversation, we were able to get to his true concern, he doesn’t like smooth jazz – and thereby had a peaceful resolution. Although we didn’t agree with each other about musical styles, we walked away with respect and clearer understanding. If we had left it at his initial remark, we would have walked away with bad feelings.

“Spread a little sunshine every day. Ain’t that purddy?”