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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.

## How Connected Am I? What Am I Connected to?

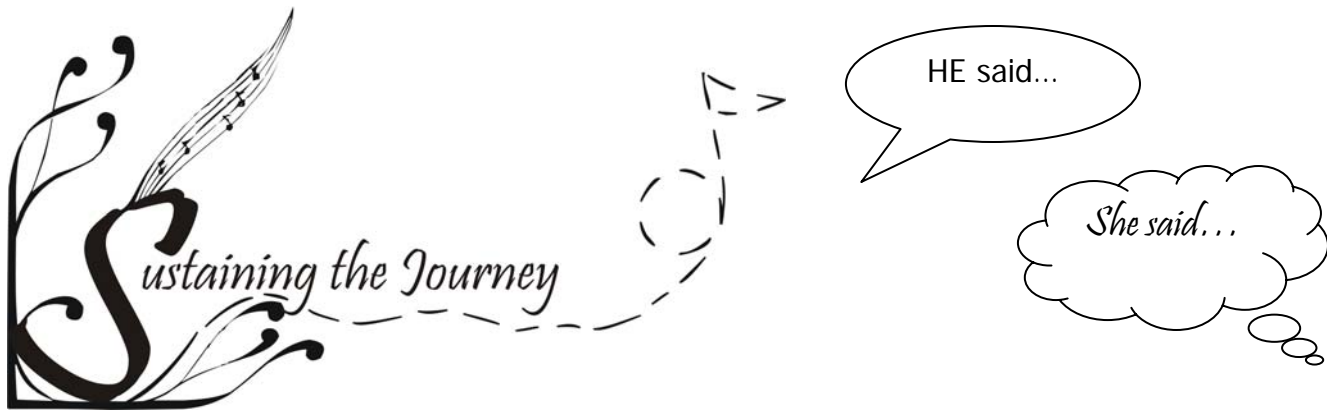
### *Bob's Prospective:*

Sometimes, as I prepare to participate in a liturgical event I ask myself, "Do I worship God, or do I worship the Liturgy? Do I truly give myself over to God in praise and thanksgiving, or do I just go for a 'feel good' experience?" For example, do I truly pay attention to what we're praying at Mass, or because the prayers have become so familiar - do I merely go through the motions? When was the last time that I really thought about the Creed or the Lord's Prayer...what they say, what they mean, what I'm really committing of myself? I've said them so many times over the years, I can say them without even thinking about it...and that's the point. Am I worshipping God (that is, being mindful of what I'm saying) or am I worshipping the Liturgy (mindlessly going through the motions just to feel good or to check it off from my weekly list of activities)? How about the reception of Holy Communion? Do I mindfully "receive" our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and let it become a life-changing event - or do I merely "take communion" and go about my business?

Relating this to the changes of the English translation of the Roman Missal - whether I like all of the changes or not, it has called me once again to think about what I'm saying (or singing). While I'm the first to admit that there are some parts of the new translation that I really like, there are those parts with which I still struggle. But isn't that what our faith journey is all about? We struggle with ourselves all the time - our weaknesses and shortcomings - and by working to improve and coming to terms we grow as people in faith and grace.

So here's the thing: Ritual is supposed to be an expression (an imitation if you will) of what we do in our day-to-day lives. Life is about struggle and joy, failures and improvements, and ultimately growth that moves us toward perfection. And so it is, for a time, I may struggle with the prayers and the music, with mindfulness and connectedness, but I know that I also find joy and satisfaction in overcoming personal obstacles and lifting my soul to God each week in the Liturgy.

So, are you connected? What are you connected to?



*Mary's Perspective:*

When Bob and I first talked about this topic, I thought about some of my recent parish experiences. A couple of weeks ago, we had our monthly cantor practice. I had decided to use some of the time as a refresher workshop. As I was reflecting on our ministers, it struck me that every one of them in that room has been serving as cantor since before I started at the parish nearly 18 years ago. What commitment – what connection! While I respect and admire that, the flip side is the possibility of becoming mired in the routine, and perhaps a bit sloppy with the details. Small things like showing up just a few minutes before mass (instead of ½ hour) or perhaps not spending much time preparing the psalm because it is a familiar setting, can creep into our routine when we become comfortable. The result is noticeable in our ministry. As we discussed this at the cantor practice, I reminded all that it is good to take a step back and reflect on why we do what we do. Sometimes, our participation in various groups or ministries can become habit, rather than a conscious choice. I encouraged them to think about where and how they spend their time, and what is fruitful. Sometimes, the expectations of a ministry like cantor can exceed our ability to truly commit to it – and that's fine. It's growth or evolution of life. Sometimes other ministries are a better fit, or perhaps cutting back a bit. Sometimes a dispassionate look at where we commit our time can solidify our resolve to do our best. No matter the result, the act of reviewing our priorities helps us clarify them.

One other thought... we recently celebrated the Memorial of All Souls. Bob and I had the unique opportunity to minister together at two different parishes. While the feast is the same, and many of the features of the evening were the same, they were also quite different. The characteristics of the worship space, the art and environment, choice of music, and even the supporting ministers gave us dramatically different experiences. However, I observed one common thread. At both celebrations, there were members in the assembly who had perhaps been away from the church, or were not regular attenders, but who felt drawn to the church that night. They recognized the power of our faith; they were seeking reassurance that life is changed, not ended. We will likely never know if our ministry may have had an impact on their future connection to the church. But we believe the Spirit is working in the midst of ministry and grief, and we are charged with an awesome responsibility – to do our best, mindfully, to bring about the kingdom of Heaven here on earth.

Perhaps our challenge to you today is to take some time to reflect... where are your priorities? How do you spend your time? Where are you connected? How can you use the gifts and skills with which you have been abundantly blessed to help others on their faith journey?