

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.

Family Matters

Bob's perspective:

I recently celebrated the 21st anniversary of employment at my parish. As many of you may know, I originally planned on being there for the interim – until a new music director could be hired. Within a short period of time, I found the parish to be very endearing. It was (and still is) the atmosphere of community and family, of gratitude and hospitality, of prayer and support – not just toward me – but toward each other that makes me proud to say, “I’m part of this wonderful family!”

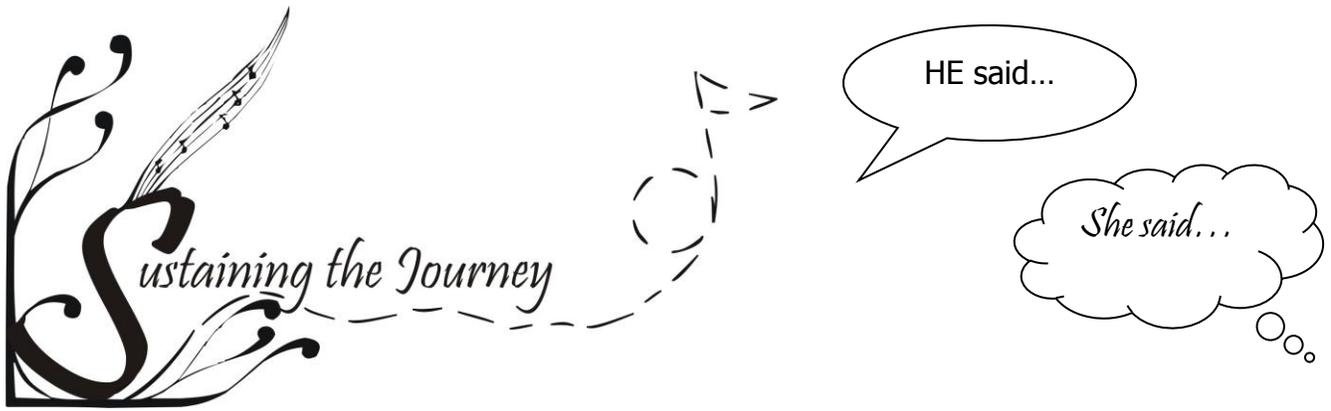
In this “Year of the Mask (2020)” we have faced many challenges, not the least of which is being able to spend time with family, friends and loved ones. Because of this, it is more important than ever that the time we share is quality time. As we have recently celebrated the Feast of the Holy Family, we honor Jesus, Mary and Joseph as the true model of family life. More than just a remembrance, this feast calls us to reexamine the interactions and relationships that exist in our own families – to give thanks for what is truly good, and make a concerted effort to fix what is less than acceptable.

One way of enhancing the quality of time which we spend with our families and loved ones might be to take a few moments every day to pray together. It doesn’t have to be very formal or extravagant. Maybe it could just be a short prayer in the morning, asking for God’s guidance and protection, or simply saying grace before a meal, or even offering a short a prayer in the evening just to thank God for the gifts and blessings of the day.

“The family that prays together stays together” is an old adage, but it contains a great deal of truth. May all of our families find peace, joy and comfort during this Christmas Season.

Mary's Perspective:

When Bob and I first talked about the content of this blog, I was in the midst of a 4-mile walk at the time. He was talking about spending quality time with our families, disconnecting from electronic devices so that we can be more present to each other. (See the humor – I was trying to be present to him on the phone while my feet kept plodding along!) At the time, we were not sure if we would be able to celebrate public worship for Christmas. The ominous news reports of growing cases of COVID-19 surrounded us, other faith traditions had already announced they had once again suspended public worship, and we knew of several parishes in our



diocese that either were not going to have public Mass on Christmas, or were only offering a live-stream version of it.

One of the things I said in that conversation was that, if there was another shut-down, I had pretty specific plans of projects I intend to complete. As we talked more, it got me to pondering why I needed a halt in regular life to motivate me to finish projects – if the tasks are worth doing, aren't they worth completing, regardless of the rest of life's circumstances? Perhaps that's a blog for another day. Meanwhile, my to-do list didn't seem to have much connection to enhancing quality family time. We set the blog aside for a bit, planning to return to it when our minds were clearer.

Fast-forward to the weekend after Christmas, as we celebrated the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. One of the verses from the second reading really stuck with me:

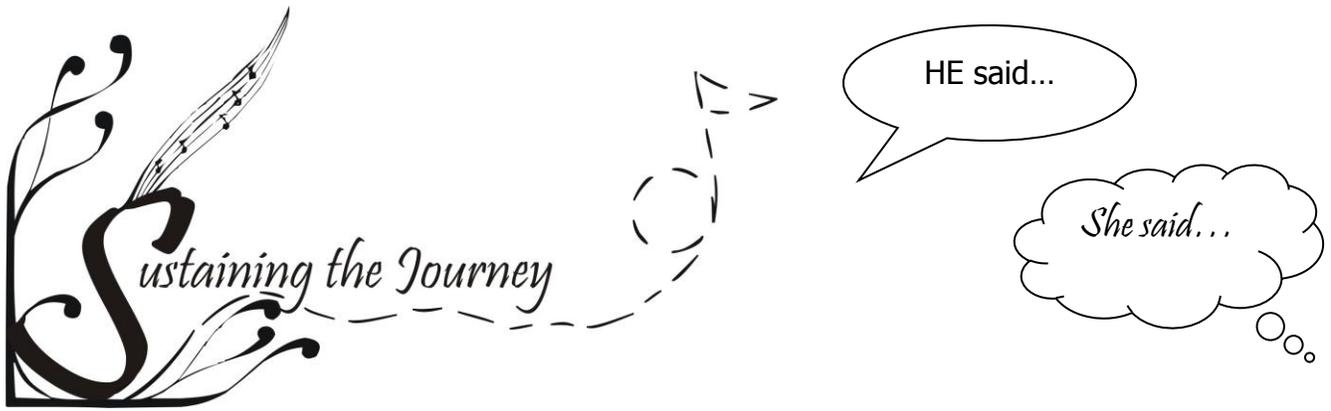
Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16

The whole concept of teaching, admonishing, celebrating, and being grateful certainly describes family life. However, at least for me, it also depicts parish life. I got to thinking about parishioners and friends who have made an impression on me, especially in this past year. I suspect you can also call to mind "family" that may not be related by blood. Their lives – their actions, choices, and friendship – have taught me by example. Here are just a few things that have become clearer:

Perseverance. In prayer, kind notes, medical treatments, sanitizing the church, feeding the hungry, watering the plants – in things large and seemingly small, I have observed the value of consistently doing what needs to be done. Their faithful example shines forth as a beacon to others who might otherwise feel despair or question why consistency is important.

Gentleness. Sometimes life is hard. Yet, the difficult days are much easier when someone offers a listening ear, warm pair of socks, a sweet treat or a cup of coffee, or a couch on which to crash. Caring for others doesn't have to cost a lot, other than your time. When you offer your time, it is like extending a part of your heart.

Joy. One of my dearest friends says, "Sometimes, life comes at you fast." In those times, it would be easy to be grumpy, frustrated, and second-guess decisions. With them, and from them, I have learned that there is still joy. We may have been flustered, perhaps cried a little or uttered words that weren't the best choices, but



ultimately we have shared a lot of laughs over the years. I am so grateful for the joy that our community has brought to my heart.

The take-away from this reflection? You may never know when you are “family” to someone else. If this past year has taught us anything, it’s that we have no idea what is yet to come. As we navigate uncharted waters, may we always be attentive to the example we leave with our lives. May we persevere with gentleness and joy.

Happy New Year!