

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.

A Disturbing Trend

Bob's Perspective:

A disturbing trend has crept into the belief system of many Catholics throughout the world. While all Catholics hold that the Eucharist as a sacrament is a sign of unity and a source of strength, there is a significant number of Catholics who don't understand – or question – the “real presence” of Christ in Eucharist.

If one were to peruse through all the liturgical and theological documents of the Church, the theology of the presence of Christ might seem a bit complicated. So let me try to put the Church's teaching into a nutshell.

In the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (the primary liturgical document that emerged from the Second Vatican Council) it is stated, “Christ is always present in his Church, especially in its liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of his minister...but especially under the Eucharistic elements ... He is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church. He is present lastly, when the Church prays and sings...” What this basically tells us is that Christ is present in: (1) the Priest who acts [*in persona Christi Capitis*] in place of the person of Christ himself by virtue of his ordination, (2) in a special way in the consecrated [transubstantiated] bread and wine, (3) in the proclamation of Scripture [the readings], and (4) in the gathering of the Assembly [the people] – “where two or three are gathered in my name..” Mt. 18:20].

Note that the Church specifically states that Christ is present in the Eucharistic elements, the bread and wine. The Council of Trent summarized the Church's theology and belief about the real presence as follows: “...by the consecration of the bread and wine, there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.”

The Church reiterates this teaching in its official catechism (par. 1413): “...Under the consecrated species of bread and wine Christ himself, living and glorious, is present in a true, real, and substantial manner: his Body and his Blood, with his soul and his divinity.”

So while Eucharist is a *symbol* of unity both with Christ and with each other (especially the poor), as well as a source of grace and strength – it is imperative to remind ourselves that Eucharist is also the *real presence* of Christ in our midst.



Mary's Perspective:

We have a priest friend who, when he preaches, first articulates the Scripture or the theology lesson of the day, and then says “so what does that mean for us?” What Bob has articulated is true, well-substantiated, and a tenet of our faith. So what does that mean for us?

I think, as Catholics, this one is non-negotiable.

If you are like me, you struggle with many of the teachings of the Church. I’ve heard the term “cafeteria Catholics” – as in, you pick and choose which parts to support. Different people have different “hot button” topics, whether it has to do with church politics or birth control or same-sex marriage or ordination of women. Some choose to support *this*, but look the other way when it comes to *that*.

Often times, I think I don’t belong ministering in the Church because of this struggle (some days more than others!). We preach to our music ministers that you have to “sing it like you believe it”. We tell our cantors that the only way to be effective proclaiming a responsorial psalm is if you have prayed it so well this week that it is imbued in you. We can only communicate the Scriptures through song if we actually believe what we sing. Sometimes, that’s hard.

A while ago, I created an entire bulletin board of positive messages and inspirations. They covered the wall and spilled over into my office. One of them is still on my door, several years later. It is a quote by Arthur Ashe:

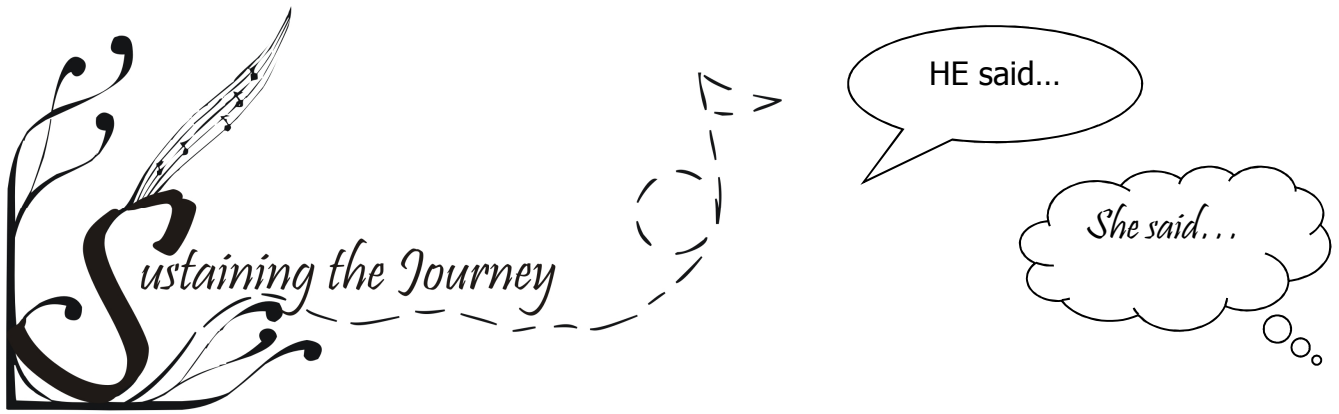
*Start where you are.
Use what you have.
Do what you can.*

Am I a perfect disciple? Absolutely not! Do I struggle with our faith, question things I’ve been taught, and even have difficulty connecting with the Almighty sometimes? Definitely. Then I think back to some of the stories we read. Think about Epiphany – the word itself means “manifestation” or “revelation”. Wise men following a star to see Christ revealed. Jump ahead to Emmaeus. Those knuckleheads spent all this time with Jesus in intimate connection, yet didn’t even recognize him when he appeared on the journey. Our brokenness is innate to our humanity, and is revealed throughout time.

I think we’re still broken. We all struggle. We’re not holy enough or good enough or *whatever* enough, so why bother? Yet our faith challenges us to start here, with what we’ve got. Try to be attuned to the Spirit. Open our hearts and ask God to use what we have, that we might do what we can to proclaim the gospel of Christ. Is it hard sometimes? Absolutely. Do we struggle, or pick and choose sometimes? Yep. But are there some things that we just need to accept? I think there are.

For example, I believe this isn’t it – that there’s more to come. Call it heaven or afterlife or purgatory, but I think we need to accept that death in this life is not final for our souls.

Another example... we sin. We try our best, but we fail. And Jesus became human – fully alive, yet fully divine – that we



might be forgiven. Our sins get washed away. Sacramentally and theologically. I don't always get it, but I believe.

And so, too, Eucharist. Both symbol and real presence. Non-negotiable. Maybe somewhere down the road I will understand better or become more insightful, but for now I think I need to start where I am, use what I have, and do what I can to keep on keeping on.