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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.

## Church and the Media

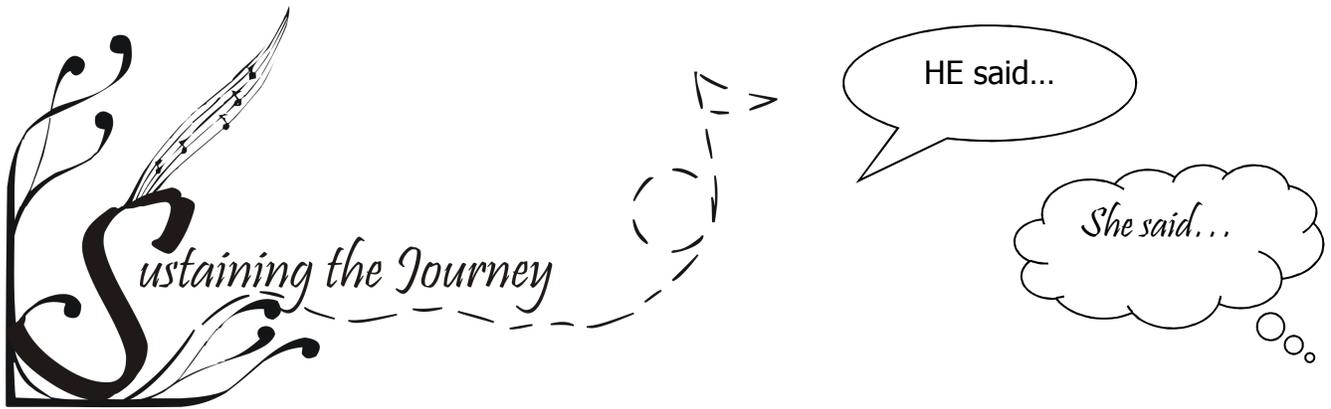
*Bob's Perspective:*

In these days where religion, especially Christianity, is constantly under attack (by both the government and the media) it might behoove us to start paying attention. Does it concern you as to how much negativity we hear from the media regarding the Catholic Church, but how rarely the positive aspects are covered? Did you ever notice that it seems to happen in cycles? First you hear about it for a while, then it seems to go away - and a few months later it's back. If you pay close attention, you'll notice this happens about once every 13 weeks.

In an earlier time of my life, I worked as the advertising manager of a local radio station. An important thing to keep in mind is that the media doesn't exist for the benefit of accurate reporting. It exists to make money for its owners and stockholders by selling advertising. Advertising rates are determined by how many people listen to your station, read your paper or watch your broadcasts. The larger your audience, the more expensive your advertising rates - ergo the higher your profits.

Usually, the highest rated segments are news broadcasts. And the best way to keep your audience numbers up during these segments is to employ a tactic called sensationalism - that is, over-emphasizing an aspect of a news story in order to insight a strong (usually negative) response - or better yet (I'm being sarcastic here), a tragedy (if it bleeds, it leads). This happens especially during sweeps week which generally takes place in November, February, May and July with additional smaller sweeps in the off months (about every 13 weeks - where have we heard that number before?) - a time when rating companies such as Nielsen do their polls to determine the size and demographics of an audience at a given time, thereby determining ad rates.

Why go for a negative response? People in this society are most likely to invest themselves in watching and reacting to something negative rather than positive. Given the choice between "Little House on the Prairie" and "Attack of the Killer Zombies from Mars," where do you suppose most Americans would tune in? Think about it for a moment - whose eyes weren't glued to the TV on November 22, 1963 when President Kennedy was assassinated or on September 11, 2001 from morning to night? On the other hand, on a huge day for the Church, how many eyes were glued from morning to night on the election of Pope Francis (unless of course you watch



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EWTN)? Or did you catch the overwhelming media coverage (another bit of sarcasm) of the many Fortnight for Freedom events promoted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops?

While most news stories have some base in fact, many more times than not they are blown well out of proportion - and are usually barely accurate. Again, members of the news media are not as interested in being accurate as they are in getting you to listen and respond so they can make money.

Here's my point: when questions arise regarding the Church, don't depend solely on the media (or rumors) in forming your opinions. For things that truly matter, go right to the sources. Do your research - ask your questions.

#### *Mary's Perspective*

I must admit, I never thought about the timing of news in industry terms. I will say that I have become somewhat counter-cultural, in that I rarely watch news reports on TV (no matter the source) and I really do not participate in social media. I have friends who have the "talking heads" on either radio or television from morning to night - and, in some cases, even during the night. Some friends and family members are extremely knowledgeable of current events because they actively seek multiple news sources across different media. Others believe only what they hear on their favorite station.

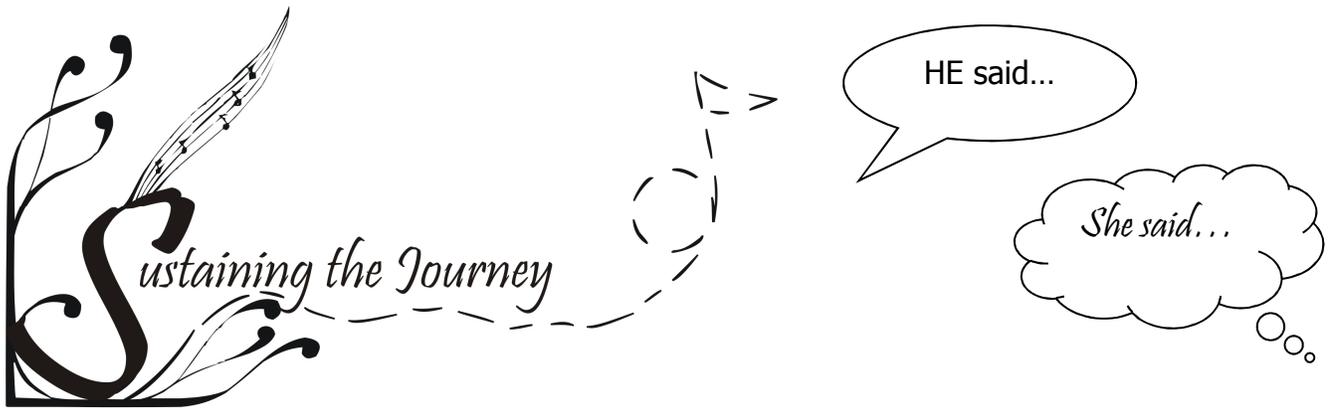
For me, ignorance is bliss.

Okay, maybe not bliss - and I'm not completely ignorant - but a healthy dose of skepticism and restraint are important tools to me. I choose carefully how much I listen to "news" stories. I have found that, no matter the topic, sensationalism sells and so listening to a news broadcast can leave one feeling depleted. It's a mental weight to hear about tragedies over and over. It's a spiritual burden to be bombarded by only the negative, and to feel like there is no possible way one person - little old me - can effect change.

Mother Theresa said, "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples."

I recently shared a reflection at a retreat where I talked about the power of small steps. I sang the song "Dream Small" by Josh Wilson - sidebar note...powerful lyrics! I observed that there are only seven colors in the rainbow, yet look what Michelangelo did with them. There are only 7 notes - yet listen to the beauty of music that can be created with those seven notes.

Aristotle basically said if you want to be a great-souled person, surround yourself with great-souled people. If I want to be positive, to make the world a better place, to be a true disciple, then I should be hanging out with, and listening to, great disciples. If I allow my soul to be weighed down by negative sensationalized stories, I'll become a weighed-down person. And I'm heavy enough, thank you very much!



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So I choose to limit my exposure to “news”. I don’t participate in social media. I try to focus on the positive and do what I can to change the negative. To stay abreast of current events, I try to seek multiple sources, and listen with a critical ear. Mostly, I try to take small steps to leave my little piece of the world better than how I found it. Not very newsworthy, but (I hope) worth the effort!