

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.

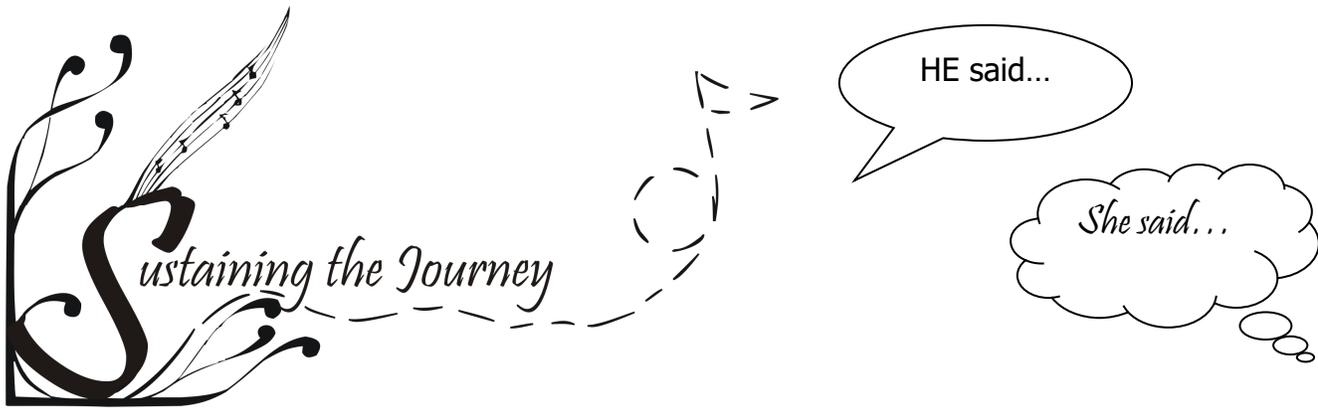
Hope

Mary's Perspective

Our pastor recently posed the question, “Is your hope healthy?” He went on to explain that hope needs to be nourished and exercised. We nourish hope by reading sacred Scripture, celebrating worship, and feeding our minds with those who live out our faith – pay attention to them! We exercise hope by stepping out of our comfort zone and trusting that God will provide the skills we need. Sometimes we make sacrifices to go deeper in faith and try new things, and we see that God protects us and helps us endure the discomforts of that path.

On Friday night, I played the wedding of a young couple who are just starting out. Then on Saturday, I played a Mass that included the celebration of a 40th wedding anniversary. At the anniversary party, I knew many of the folks there, and found myself looking around the room from a new perspective. There were friends from all walks of life, who had journeyed over the years with the anniversary couple. Each had their own story of triumphs and sadness, challenge and accomplishment, blessing and heartache. I began to think that, as a group, we were considerably more beat up by life than the tables of younger guests at the wedding celebration. Certainly, many of the couples at both celebrations had that spark in their eyes – call it hope, or mirth, or adventure – but perhaps the group at the anniversary party also had the wrinkles of worry, the creaky joints that ache upon standing, and the wisdom that comes with life experiences. I suspect that, 40 years ago, this same group of friends may have appeared more hopeful. It was an interesting dichotomy.

Bob and I have talked many times about the concept of hope. When we first met, I would argue that my glass was half full, that I could find the potential good in nearly any situation, and that I was a hopeful person. He would argue that hope is for fools, and that if we truly believe that which we preach, we would more accurately say we are a people of trust. I've even looked in the dictionary for a definition that would show Bob he's just being a grumpy old man stuck on semantics...



HOPE

noun

1. the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best

TRUST

noun

1. confident expectation of something; hope

I'm not at all sure that resolves our discussion.

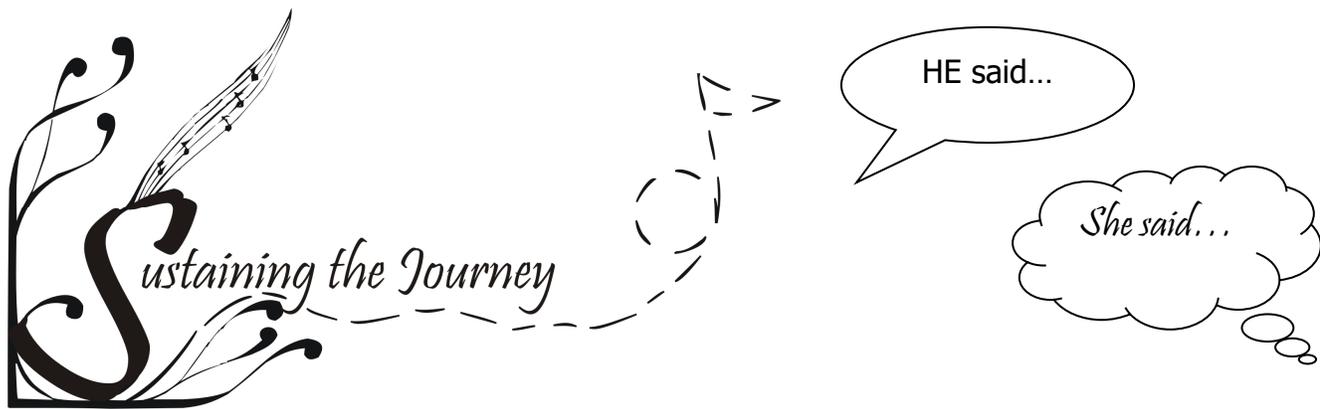
With November right around the corner, I think about feasts of All Saints and All Souls, of shorter days and longer darkness, and of how many lives have changed over the past year. Whether it's from the loss of a loved one, or the diagnosis of illness, or just the wear and tear of daily living, has our hope taken a beating? Do we spend so much time remembering the good old days that we miss out on the good happening in our lives today? Have we nurtured our hope? When we say "life is changed, not ended" – do we really trust that? As we age and morph from the wedding party-goers to the anniversary celebration crew, are we exercising hope and trusting God to lead the way, even if it's not always comfortable?

If not, what will you do differently today?

Bob's Perspective

First of all, a note to Mary: What do you mean "old?"

Ok, so now let's deal with "Hope." I not sure that we're talking a semantic issue. Rather, I think our disagreement is in terms of definition. "Hope" as understood in colloquial terms is about unfounded optimism – a feeling rather than a confident fact. For example, if I were to buy one Powerball Lottery ticket (the odds of winning are approximately 290 million to 1) and then base all of my life's plans on the "hope" that I'm going to hit the jackpot this time – I would be very foolish. If I "hope" that I never become seriously ill, but do nothing to take care of myself (poor eating habits, no exercise, etc.) – I would be very foolish. If I "hope" to win a Marathon



Race, but never work out or practice running long distances – I would be very foolish. In which case, I stand by my statement that “hope” is for fools.

However, that’s not the “Hope” to which St. Paul or the Church is referring. Let me share three references, and then I’ll give a further explanation.

In the Letter to the Hebrews we hear:

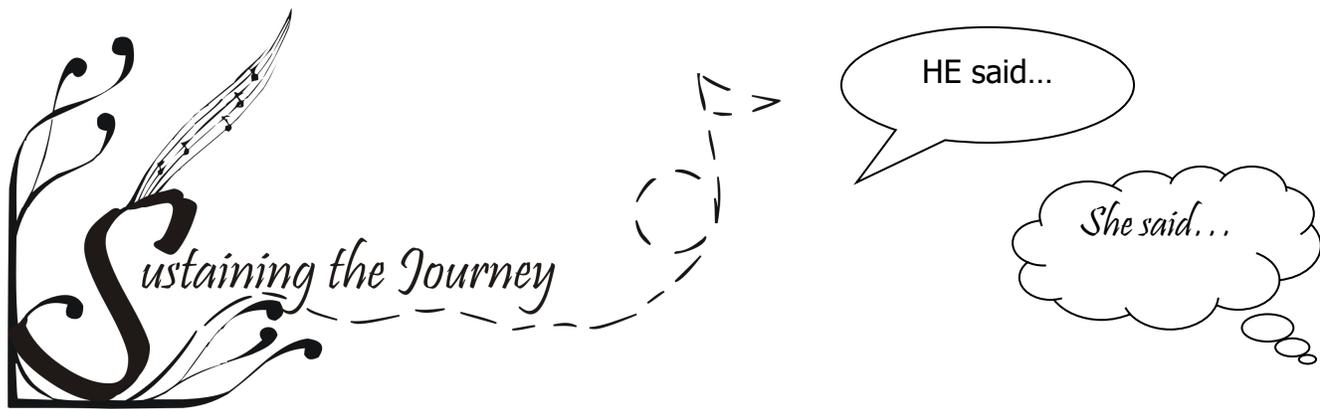
Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. (Heb. 11:1-3)

Paragraph 1817 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church gives us the following definition: *Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." (Heb 10:23) "The Holy Spirit . . . he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:6-7)*

In the introduction to his second encyclical (*Sep salvi*), Pope Benedict XVI wrote:

1... Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey...

2..."Hope", in fact, is a key word in Biblical faith—so much so that in several passages the words "faith" and "hope" seem interchangeable. Thus the Letter to the Hebrews closely links the "fullness of faith" (10:22) to "the confession of our hope without wavering" (10:23). Likewise, when the First Letter of Peter exhorts Christians to be always ready to give an answer concerning the logos—the meaning and the reason—of their hope (cf. 3:15), "hope" is equivalent to "faith"...



In the first quotation from Hebrews, we see the close link between faith and hope. When we have assurance of an outcome – here based in faith – we are actually taken beyond a colloquial hope to something much more solid.

Looking at the second quotation from the Catechism, we see that a significant part of Hope is derived from “...placing our trust in Christ’s promises...” and relying on the grace we receive from the Holy Spirit. Again, we see that this goes well beyond a colloquial understanding of “hope” in that we surpass “the feeling that what is wanted can be had” (the definition of “hope”) and transcend to “a confident expectation of something” (the definition of “trust”) based on fact.

In the last two quotations Pope Benedict XVI explains the interconnectedness of “faith” and “hope” to the point of being interchangeable in this particular context. Once again this takes “hope” outside of the colloquial realm. I would suggest that we can take this one step further. The “Hope” that is being talked about here is really more linked to ‘trust by virtue of our faith’ – and our faith is not unfounded. Our Lord demonstrated to us – not only in his words, but also through his Passion, Death and Resurrection that salvation is not only possible, but actually probable if we live out our faith through the course of our daily lives.

I find great comfort in trusting (not just hoping) that God will be faithful to his promises and keep me in his care if I do my very best to remain faithful to Him – not just in word, but in deeds. This was promised to us by God in both the Old and New Covenants – not a maybe, but a reality. This means that if I truly do my best to live and nurture my faith in God through the teaching of the Church then I have no need to merely (in colloquial terms) “hope,” because I truly trust and know through faith that God loves me unconditionally, will forgive my faults (if I am repentant) and eternally embrace me as one of His own – and that goes for all of us.

Final Comment From Mary

Old: of advanced years, like Yoda.

Old: aged, like fine wine. Or moldy cheese.

Old: having gained wisdom surpassing the understanding, expectation, and HOPE of mere (younger and blonder) mortals.