

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.

Reflecting on Pope Francis

Bob's perspective:

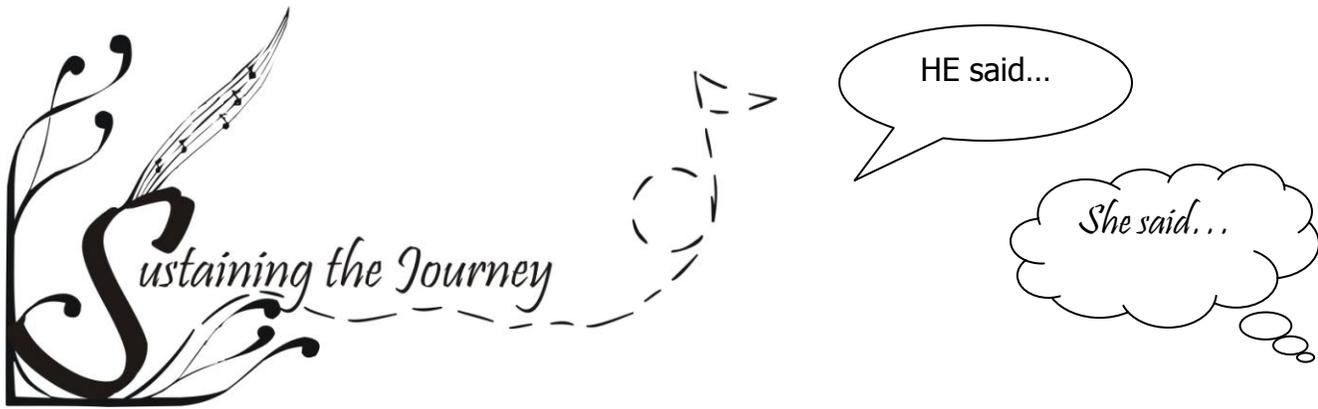
Recent months have seen Pope Francis embroiled in controversy over his Apostolic Exhortation, '[Amoris Laetitia](#)', or 'The Joy of Love'. In response, critics issued a '[Correctio filialis](#)'. While this critical response stops short of directly accusing the Pope of being a heretic, it lists seven alleged heresies - some explicit and others implied. In order to grasp the full understanding of this situation, it's important to read both documents in their entirety. Clicking on the links above will take you to the full texts.

It's at times like this that many of us recall the interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees. Just in the Gospel of Matthew alone, Jesus is accused on a number of counts. Again, for the sake of brevity in this blog, I would suggest that the following citations be read and considered: Matt 9: 2-3, 11; Matt 12:2, 10; Matt 12:24; Matt 15:1-2; Matt 26:60-61, 63-65. In these cases, I think that the old adage, "familiarity breeds contempt," may come into play:

Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then *did* this man *get* all these things?" And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his *own* household." (Matt 13:55-57)

In hindsight, it's easy for us to think badly of the Pharisees for their doubtfulness. Understand that I'm not here to defend them (plotting to kill or sacrifice anyone for any reason is by no means noble), but if we were to walk a mile in their shoes – given their life circumstances and the political climate of the day, I'm not sure that many of us would have reacted much differently. Even Nicodemus (Pharisee) and Joseph of Arimathea (Sadducee) were mostly passive supporters of Jesus at best.

In this day and age, we live in a world of soundbites and tweets – all very short and with little or no supporting detail – which makes it even easier to become judgmental and opinionated without knowing most of the facts.



While it's true that the Church is run by men, we need to always remember that she's guided by the Holy Spirit – and somehow things will eventually work out for the best. Jesus rattles cages and makes us face the realities of who we are and whose we are – not at all an easy path to follow. The growth and development of the Church has not been without great discomfort and pain – remember the aftermath of the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council? Or, in even more modern times, the unrest and consternation of many while implementing the Third Typical Edition of the Roman Missal?

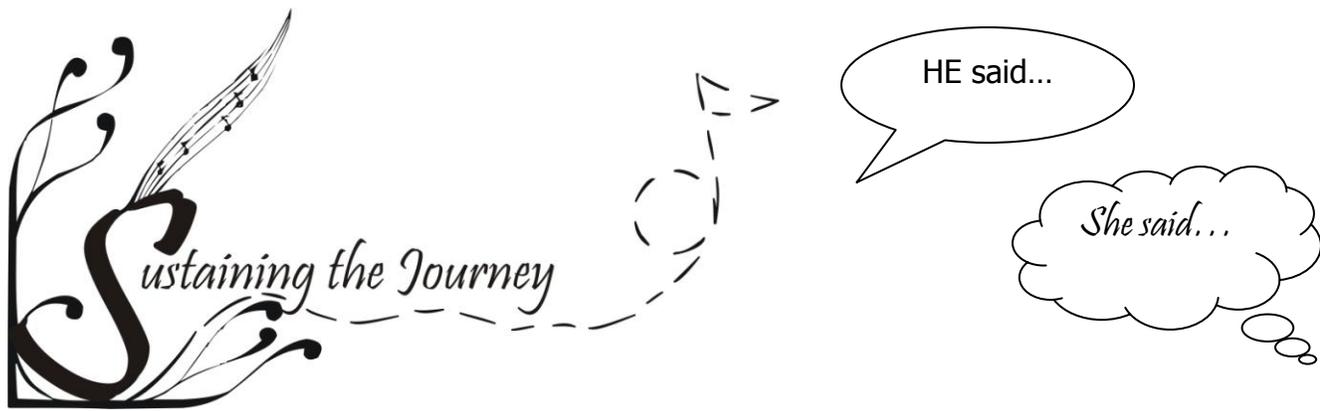
The call of any good leader is to guide those in their charge to grow and move forward. Growth does not happen without some discomfort and pain. Moms going through labor to give birth to their beautiful children will attest to that one. The last few days that Jesus spent prior to his Resurrection could certainly not be construed as a 'leisurely walk in the park.'

Admittedly, I'm a fairly conservative Catholic and am watching and listening carefully. But I do have to admit that the words of Pope Francis have made me think and his actions give me cause to re-evaluate myself and where I stand within the context of the Church and in this world. The truth is, like the Pharisees of old, we don't know the plan that God has in store for us. It's human nature to be uncomfortable or even sometimes fearful of the presentation of different ideas or modifications in philosophy. Many times, Jesus had them (both the Pharisees as well as his disciples) in a tail-spin.

Granted, Pope Francis is not the Messiah. However, he is now the successor of St. Peter, who was the Rock upon which our Lord built his Church. I have to believe that God has a plan for the Church and that somehow, Pope Francis by virtue of his election through the discernment of the College of Cardinals and due process now fills a necessary role in her growth, development and journey. May God bless him and keep him!

Mary's Perspective

Bob writes eloquently, is well-read, and is a truly faithful Catholic. This blog is thoughtful and thought-provoking. In some ways, I am a simpler creature. I have waded through the documents he referenced and we have had many discussions about Pope Francis. (Bob and I each live 30+ miles from work, and often take advantage of Bluetooth technology on the drives to and from our offices. For many years now, we chat on Sunday mornings at 6:30am... discussing everything from



profound reflections, to the number of people in line at Dunkin Donuts, to why the "check tire pressure" light always comes on at the least convenient times.) We both agree that Pope Francis deserves respect, by virtue of apostolic succession and because he is a good and holy man, trying to do his best with all he is given.

It's easy to look back at any situation and "coulda woulda shoulda"... If I had known how much weight I would gain over the years, I might have been better about establishing habits of exercise and eating healthfully when I was a teen (although Dunkin Donuts might not be nearly as successful). If I had known my friend would die at a young age, I might have made it a point to tell her what a positive difference she made in my life. If I had known that being careless about leaving a red sock in the washing machine would turn all the whites pink...well, you get the picture.

It's good to be aware of what the Pope is proclaiming, and also that there are factions that don't agree with all he says. It's important to recognize that our faith supports apostolic succession, and we believe the Holy Spirit guides the work of the leadership. And, as Bob said, a good leader challenges the flock to move forward - sometimes out of the comfort of "how we've always done it". I believe Pope Francis embodies that.

A little closer to home, I have spent some time recently considering the work of Bishop Perez. If you take heed of the Pope's call to "smell like the sheep", Bishop Perez has definitely made a conscious effort to be out and among his flock. While enjoying dinner with some fellow musicians a few nights ago, one of them commented that Bishop Perez is never in his office - suggesting he needs to be there to "get some work done". I would counter with the notion that he is exactly where the "work" of shepherding happens - among the people. Our diocese has undergone many changes the past few years, and while the end result is a stronger structure, that time was not without growing pains. If we are a Church in need of healing, how better to extend compassion and care and wisdom and grace than to actually interact with those in need?

Jesus touched people. Literally. Physically. He ate with sinners. Travelled with a motley crew. Spoke to women. He didn't choose the most educated, nor did he stay in some ornate cathedral preaching to the wise and learned. Rather, he chose the ordinary to do extraordinary things.

God chooses the ordinary to do extraordinary things. Pope Francis. Bishop Perez.

You. Me. Us.