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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.

## Growing in Gratitude

*Mary's Perspective:*

Everybody has stuff.

I was chatting with a parishioner a few days ago about how messy life can sometimes be. Disputes among siblings, divorce, complicated relationships, faith lives that ebb and flow, addictions, medical concerns - it's all stuff. And everybody has stuff.

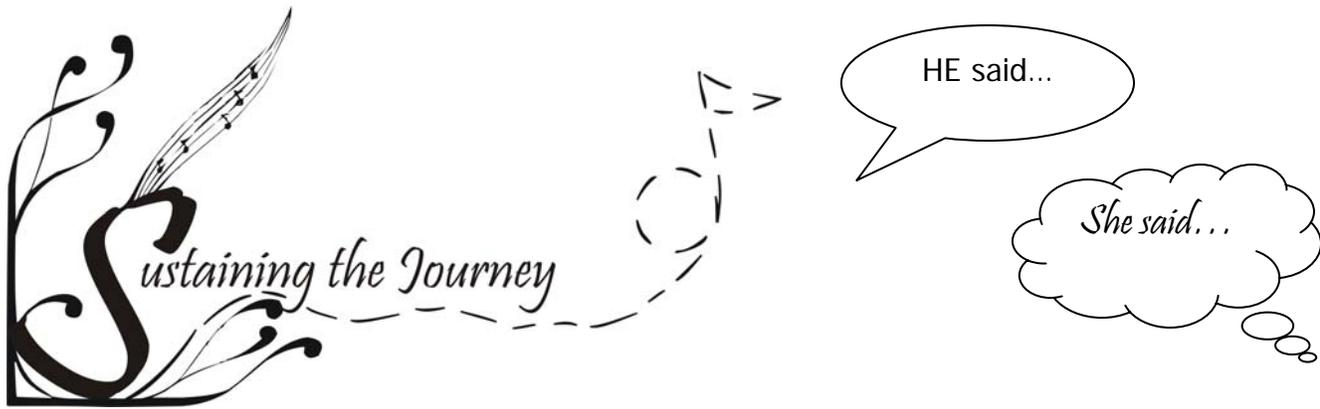
As a church minister, I am blessed to know the stories of many wonderful people. We walk the journey together, celebrating new life, grieving loss, supporting each other, and praying as companions on the same path. And I have discovered that many folks think they are the only ones that have stuff. That little (or large) dark issue that looms overhead, that keeps one awake at night, or perhaps is the focus of intercessory prayer - everybody has stuff.

Bob and I recently were invited to speak at a dinner hosted by the Erie PA chapter of the American Guild of Organists. It was an awesome experience! We toured a beautiful Lutheran church, enjoyed a bounteous dinner (FABULOUS home cooking!), and shared some reflections with a group of clergy and musicians.

This was quite a diverse group. There were men and women, ordained and lay, with varied charisms and coming from a variety of faith traditions. And yet, we all shared much in common. Even though we came from different states (literally!), we all were people of faith, called to lead God's people.

One of the pastors put it eloquently... Jesus ate fish and therefore Jesus farted too.

We reflected on the drive to and from Pennsylvania, that even amidst all the stuff, we are so very grateful for this incredible journey. To meet so many different and faithful people, all committed to following the Lord's command, is a humbling and inspiring experience. It's easy to get mired in the



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day to day list of to-do's, but driving across the country for the purpose of ministry always gives us a great opportunity to step back, reflect, and appreciate.

Yes, we still have stuff. We all do. But it is crucial to be aware of God's abundant blessings, even amidst the stuff. To be grateful for the people, the gifts, the music, the very breath we breathe...and, yes, even the stuff.

If you haven't taken the time recently to empty yourself of expectations and be filled with gratitude, do it today. More on emptying in a future blog, but for today, just be grateful.

Even for the stuff.

*Bob's perspective:*

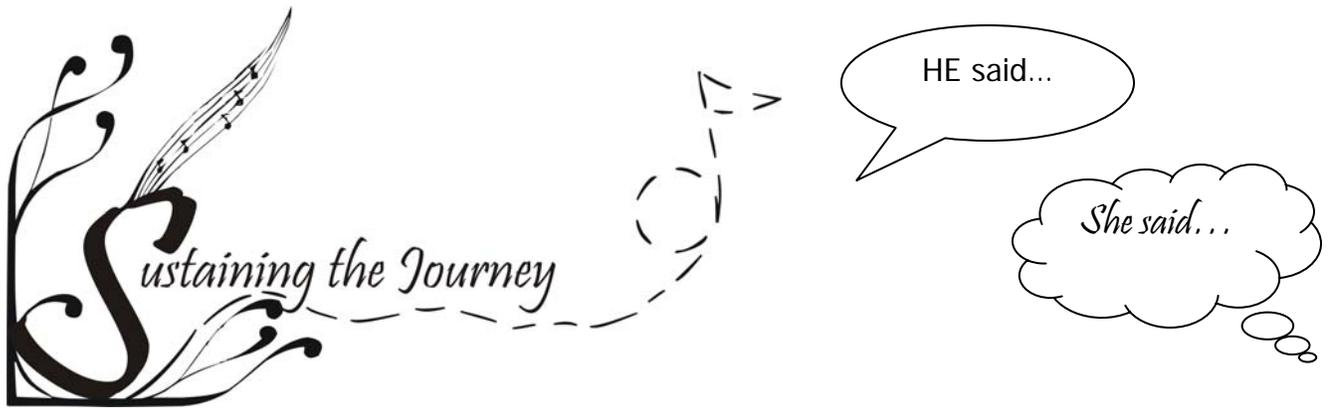
One of my favorite songs is 'Song of Thanksgiving' by the Darryl Ducote:

“Love that’s freely given wants to freely be received.  
All the love You’ve poured on us can hardly be believed.  
And all that we can offer You is thanks.  
All that we can offer You is thanks.”

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When we think about it, the words of that song are very humbling. After all God does in our lives, after all the gifts we're given day in and day out – the only thing we can truly give back is our gratitude. When someone gives us a present at Christmas (or another occasion), many times we not only say “thank you,” but we try in some fashion to reciprocate. We rarely just let the action go by without acknowledgement and a reactive response. But how often do we mindfully thank God for the blessings of the day – which are far greater than anything else?

As Mary said in her perspective, we all have the propensity to get mired in the stuff of life – and in that it's not too difficult to become forgetful or unmindful. The precept we always need to keep in the forefront of our consciousness is that of God's abundant goodness, generosity, and love. Voicing our gratitude to God in prayer and making a concerted effort to publically acknowledge his generosity when the opportunity presents itself should be a primary facet of our daily lives.



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It's fairly easy to give thanks and praise while we attend Mass on Sunday, but how often do we say a heartfelt "Thank You" when we sit down for a meal, especially in a public forum? God's not ashamed to feed us, so why are we ashamed to make the Sign of the Cross in a restaurant? How often do we take a moment to give thanks when we receive our paychecks from work, which covers our mortgages and other vital needs? (With that, we can take a moment to pray for those who are unemployed or underemployed.) How often do we thank God for our skills and talents? Finally, how often do we thank God for the gifts of family and friends?

The attitude of gratefulness comes from being mindful of our station in this vast universe with respect to our relationship others and especially to the One who created all things. And yet in all of that greatness and awesomeness and majesty and power he knows each of us by name, embraces each of us in his mercy and forgiveness, and loves each of us unconditionally.

Thanks Lord!