

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.

Empty Your Cup

Mary's Perspective:

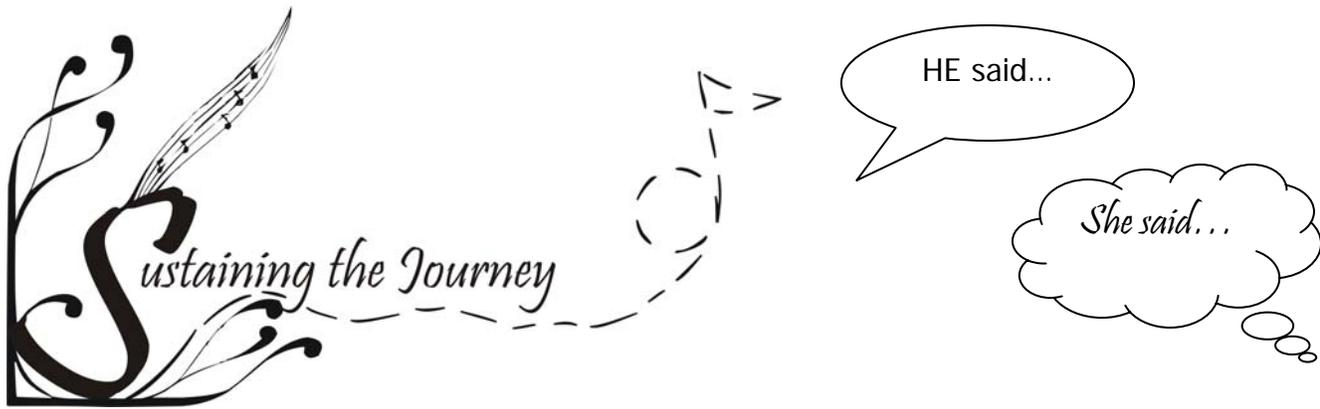
On occasion, I have opportunity to help Bob by accompanying the school mass at his parish. Before we begin, Bob or I always warm up the students, to help them focus and prepare for the celebration. One of the techniques we use is a guided imagery experience involving a full cup. We instruct all to close their eyes and imagine a cup. Focus on the details. Is it cold? Warm? Textured? Colorful? It is full to the brim, so that the lightest bump will cause some of the contents to spill. What is in it? Clear water? Prune juice? Murky, muddy mess that comes out of the lawn mower after a lot of rain? You get the picture. Ultimately, we empty the cup so that there is room for it to be filled.

We approach liturgy - heck, even life! - the same way. If you come to your work or to Mass or to a relationship already filled, there's not much room for growth. If I am filled with expectation or preconceived notions, there is no room to experience the Spirit, to grow in faith, to be nourished in the Eucharist, to be enlightened by the Scriptures, or to be FILLED with God's abundant love.

Emptying and refilling the cup is a constant process. Creation is continuously destroyed and rebuilt. The forest burns down so it can come back even thicker. Our bodies empty and refill to sustain life. Muscles are torn down in order to grow bigger. In order for Jesus to rise, he needed to die, and he couldn't die if he wasn't born. If the cup stays full too long, it gets gross (think of stagnant water). Once emptied, it gets refilled with new life.

Sometimes it's hard to empty the cup - especially if it's full of M&M's! I'm not sure I want to let go; I'm afraid to move from what is known to the unknown. Letting go of "how we've always done it" makes room for a new path, but sometimes this means evolving your thinking and trusting that God will lay out the path for you.

We are at the start of another summer. School activities are winding down, our daily routines often change this time of year, and longer days with warm evenings offer a great opportunity to reflect. As a church minister, I find I need this time to empty myself of all the tension, work, and "stuff"



that builds up in my busier times, and allow myself to be renewed. We need to empty ourselves in order to be refilled at the Table. Water - in the form of a cool drink or a plunge in the pool - can refresh and restore, if we let it. But we need to make room for it.

Summer is also the time for conferences, retreats, workshops, and other forms of continuing education and formation. What will you do differently this year to be renewed? Perhaps emptying your cup means taking a week away for retreat. Perhaps it means leaving the office early - or working from home - so that you can be restored by family time. Maybe emptying your cup involves a week at the camper, or a vacation on the beach, or simply a commitment to a regular evening walk around the neighborhood with your spouse.

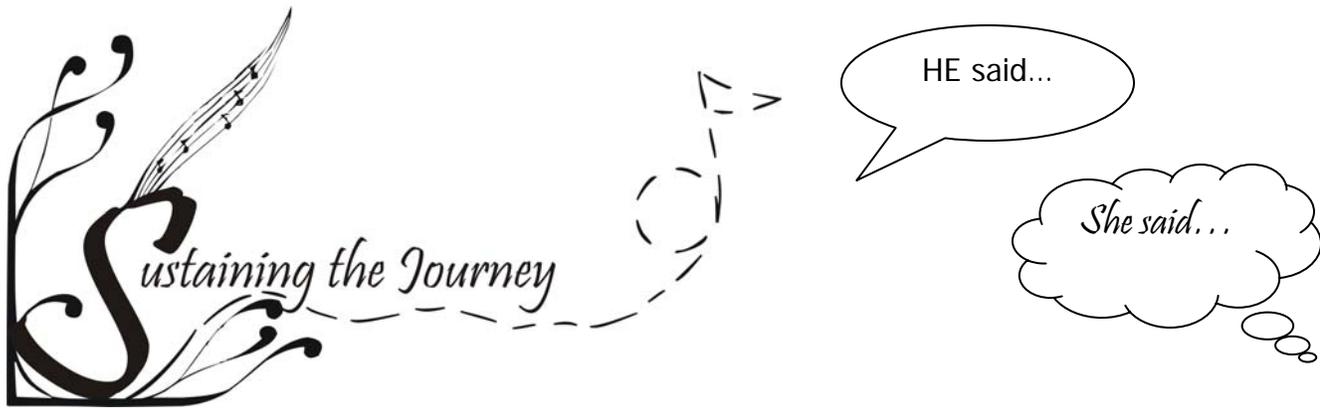
Our last blog talked about gratitude. This summer, we challenge you to empty yourself of whatever holds you back... expectations, pessimism, taking on too much just because you have the skills to complete it, whatever limits your growth. Empty yourself so that you can be filled with inspiration, energy, and gratitude.

How awesome would it be if we all did that together?

Bob's perspective:

Like any lifestyle change, emptying the cup takes resolve, mindfulness, and practice. I think that resolve is the most difficult part. In the lives of most people, we don't make resolutions unless they are of some real importance or value. However, as the old adage goes, "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions." In order to turn resolve into reality, it's a good idea to use a small step approach. The question to ask at first would not be, "What value would emptying the cup have in my life?" That makes it too big and too general. It's better to start off with something like "What value would emptying the cup have in this or that particular situation?"

A great situation to consider would be that of personal prayer time. Many of us fill our prayer time with the Divine Office or the Rosary or other formal prayers. These for sure are terrific and should be done on a regular basis – but mindfully and not just rambled. Ask yourself, in all of these times of prayer how much time do I spend listening? If prayer is truly a dialogue with God, it would be nice to let him get a word in every now and then. The prayers and readings are there to open our minds and hearts to the possibilities of God's message in our daily life. If all I do is ramble, what is the prayer's real value? A few moments after reciting (or chanting) a psalm, or praying a decade of the Rosary is a great time to empty the cup. How?



One can start by spending a few moments closing their eyes and taking a few deep breaths (in through the nose and out through the mouth) and focus on breathing. By this process, the cup is naturally emptied and allows itself to be filled with God's message and grace. Even if at times you don't get through the entire Office or Rosary, you've still increased the value of the time that you've spent in dialogue with your Creator. Now we're no longer just blabbing at God, rather we're truly conversing. Some days the conversation is more abbreviated and some days it's more intense...just like any relationship.

If outside thoughts come to mind (daily schedule, shopping list etc), simply acknowledge the thought, breathe again and continue with prayer time. Fighting outside thoughts "No, no...I can't think about that now....I'm praying!" only makes the thoughts return stronger. Consider an outside thought as if it were a pestering child. If you say to that child, "not now...go away," they will most likely keep at you (maybe even more aggressively). However, if you say, "O.K., I hear you...just give me a few minutes," they will most likely go about their business (at least for a short time) allowing you to continue with your task. So for example, if your daily schedule comes to mind during prayer time, respond by acknowledging that you have a busy day ahead, but it can wait for a few minutes – then close your eyes, breathe and go back to your prayer time. The outside thought (at least temporarily) will dissipate. With a little practice, it really works!

This process can then be applied to many other aspects in life. For example, when one becomes angry or stressed out about something, emptying the cup helps to settle, relax and gain perspective. In times of joy and celebration, emptying the cup helps to deepen awareness and a can add an incredible amount internal emotional depth. If you don't believe me, just give it a try!

Guest perspective:

I needed this.. sometimes I feel empty coming in to church, but I am not.. I feel good that I got up, drove to church, met people at the door.... etc.. Now I can say, that was standard, not empty I need to feel hunger, to empty it out, to receive more.. and have Faith to know it will be filled.. . After my husband died, I said I had to reinvent me.. enjoy my memories, or cry with them, but find new ways. to live.. .. now to add to that, I must open myself more, to see where that leads me. Thanks Bob and Mary.....

- Dottie Heister