



Mary and Bob often find themselves sharing common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry. When approaching ministerial concerns from different angles, He Said - She Said is a venue to share differing perspectives.

Reflecting on the Spiritual Journey

Mary's Perspective:

As a Church, we are in the midst of celebrating the Easter season. Having survived yet another marathon Holy Week, I have been intentional about unpacking the experience. Because of the Covid pandemic, this Triduum was very different from the past couple of years. After two years of restriction from exercising their ministry, my choir sang for the first time together on Palm Sunday. That was a transformational experience – one etched into my mind as filled with gratitude and joy.

Looking back on the week, celebration by celebration, it feels more like a roller-coaster. I suppose that may be somewhat similar to the experience of Jesus and his disciples. The triumph of Palm Sunday, the tenderness of the last supper, the agony in the garden, the brutal crucifixion, the utter sadness and fear, followed by the confusion of the empty tomb and the glory of the resurrection – it's a lot to process. I find myself getting mired in the details. Why didn't more people get their feet washed during the Mandatum? (At my parish, all in attendance are invited to be washed, and then to wash, in a very public yet intimate ritual.) Why are so many drawn to our celebration of Stations of the Cross on Good Friday? Was the song used during the sprinkling rite at the Great Vigil the best choice? Did I tend to the details sufficiently so folks could have a fruitful worship experience? Oh, and make a note that the candles by the ambo on Easter were a tad too close, and the cantor smacked one when he was cuing the assembly on the Responsorial Psalm.

At first blush, it's easy to stop the conversation there. Figure out what worked, what did not, then make notes for next year. Certainly, I have done that. But there's a reason the season lasts 7 weeks – and no, Bob, it's not because Jesus came out of the tomb and saw his shadow! The Easter season is an extended period of joy and reflection, of mystagogia and alleluias, to give us time to absorb the vastness of what has occurred. We really are called to dig beyond the mechanics of whether the Easter ham was big enough for the crowd at dinner.

Beyond the logistical notes, there were three really poignant moments that stick out for me. First, I have pondered the whole foot washing ritual. People are weird about feet. Ladies feel they need to have the perfect pedicure. If you have a fungus or a gnarly bruise, feet can be embarrassing. Back in Jesus' time, feet were dirty and stinky, and washing them was a lowly task befitting a servant. But that's what makes this ritual so beautiful – we are called to serve each other, to raise each other up and embrace each other, fungus, gnarly bruises, and all. I've been feeling like maybe more people would participate in the



ritual if they understood the depth behind it (which leads to an upcoming retreat/mission that Bob and I will be developing...)

The second very meaningful moment etched in my mind occurred during the Exsultet. In our parish, I have adapted Dan Schutte's *Most Holy Night* to include verses accurate to the current Roman Missal translation. As the assembly sings the refrain, they hold up their lit tapers in the dark church, and the room is literally ablaze with glory. As we sing of "the power of this night," that power is truly palpable. The first time I accompanied *Most Holy Night* at this parish was over 20 years ago, and I remember having a lump in my throat and emotion so strong that I could barely sing. So many years later, that same wave of emotion, of power, of Spirit, was every bit as palpable. For that, I will always be grateful.

The third moment occurred during the last Mass on Easter Sunday. By that point, exhaustion has set in, and we musicians risk going through the motions in a somewhat disconnected fashion. After Communion, we sang a song of praise that is the parish's favorite song. It's a simple refrain called *We Worship and Adore Thee*, and we hum it once, sing it softly once, and then sing it robustly. Of all the restrictions of Covid, perhaps the hardest for our parish was not being allowed to sing what the assembly fondly refers to as "the hum song." After two years of pandemic restrictions, they could finally allow their heart-felt "hallelujahs" to burst forth. I looked across the assembly and saw one very faithful friend, openly sobbing. In the two year draught, she had faced cancer, isolation, tribulation, and still remained a beacon of light. She lives her faith in her very being, and the tears that streamed forth conveyed such anguish, joy, gratitude, and the multitude of emotions pent up over two years, that the wave of music was at once cathartic, communicative, and filled with praise. Moments like that carry me through the darkest times and make me most appreciate the blessings of my vocation.

At one point, Bob and I talked about why Jesus' crucifixion had to happen the way it did. Why so much suffering? Bob referred to a favorite Klingon saying: the bloodier the battle, the more glorious the victory. (Yes, Bob uses Klingon in conversation. And, by the way, he occasionally uses an English-to-Klingon translator. Now who's the real nerd?) If Jesus had lived to 100 and then died from old age, and then rose, his resurrection would not have had the impact of being struck down in the prime of his life in a very public and humiliating way.

We as Catholics use the phrases "carrying our cross" and "offering up our suffering" – as if our daily challenges can begin to compare to the road that our Lord walked. If we really take the time to immerse ourselves in the experiences of holy week, and allow the Spirit to penetrate our very beings, we may discover our smallness in all of this. Not to minimize the struggles we all face, but sometimes it behooves us to step out of our own shoes, even for a moment, and recognize the bigger picture.



There is a vastness to the world around us. There is an incomprehensible expanse to God's providence and mercy. If I get so wrapped up in what I want, or in my wounds – even when my wants are noble causes, and my woundedness is real – I lose track of the fact that I don't exist in a vacuum. We are all on this journey together. We each are a tiny part of a big picture, much like trees in a forest.

As I write this blog, I have been reading an interesting book that addresses the natural decline that occurs as we get older. (Spoiler alert: I anticipate more reflection on this book in upcoming blogs!) One of the insights of the book is that, while our raw smarts or drive or innovativeness do eventually decline as we age, our ability to synthesize various facts and apply wisdom increases as we age. Taken in the context of our Easter mystagogia, perhaps as I get older, I recognize more how the events of holy week are interwoven into my personal life and spiritual journey.

When we started this blog more than five years ago, our intent was to offer insight and challenge the reader to think. Whether it is your experience of holy week, or of your career path, or of your health habits, we really encourage you to take stock of what's going on. How does what you are experiencing impact who you want to become? Did your Lenten practices make any difference in your Easter alleluias? If you just keep going to work every day like a hamster on a wheel, is it accomplishing a higher purpose? What choices are you making right now that will improve the outcome, reach the goal, or somehow make life better for others? In the vastness and beauty of this life, though we may be a small part of a big picture, what steps can we take that will make a positive impact?

Bob's Perspective:

Before I go on with my perspective, I'd like to address Mary regarding her attitude toward those who quote Klingon by saying: "NUQJATLH?"

Translation: "Oh Yeah?"

Moving on...

Since my retirement from full-time parish ministry, I've been able to explore and indulge in a number of experiences. As a retirement gift, my choir chipped in and presented me with a Smart TV. While I'm not an avid television spectator, I have discovered a few interesting channels. I have found stations that show reruns of the *Beverly Hillbillies*, the *Addams Family*, educational history lectures and TWO channels of professional championship wrestling – all of them around the clock. If I was a couch potato, I'd be happier than a pig in slop! (Sigh!) However, the one channel that gets my attention the most is the Bob Ross Channel.



For those who are unfamiliar, Bob Ross (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Ross) was an artist who, among other things, had a very popular show back in the 80's and early 90's on PBS television entitled *The Joy of Painting*. The series ran nearly 23 seasons. Although he passed away in 1995, through the magic of television, the Bob Ross Channel now runs episodes of the series 24/7. Despite the fact that I'm color blind, Bob Ross has always been an absolute favorite of mine. In the span of a half hour, he would produce a beautifully scenic painting – all the while speaking in a serene voice, encouraging his TV audience students by demonstrating easy-to-master painting techniques, and talking about nature (“the happy little trees” and his pet squirrels.) Truth be told, I have been rarely able to view an episode from start to finish. The serenity and peacefulness of the program usually lulls me into a bit of a nap.

So what does this have to do with anything? One of the painting techniques that Bob Ross frequently talked about was the contrast between light and darkness. Many times he said that you can't truly express or experience the brilliance of light if your painting is void of all darkness. In other words, it's the dark qualities of the painting that make the light qualities show even brighter. It's the stark contrast that creates intensity and beauty.

This Triduum was the first time in nearly 40 years that I wasn't the director or in charge. Rather, I participated as a keyboard player at my home parish (of which Mary is the Director of Liturgy and Music.) Not having to invest myself in of all the directorial responsibilities allowed me to be keenly aware of many details and nuances taking place – things that, up until now, I rarely (if ever) had the opportunity to enjoy or deeply appreciate.

On Holy Thursday, I was able to see the expressions on the faces of those who were washing feet or having their feet washed – the intimate connection and humility between those serving and those being served. I noticed the look of wonder and awe in the Presider's eyes, as he intently gazed upon the newly consecrated bread that he held in elevation. Good Friday allowed me to witness the love and devotion expressed by the assembly as they processed forward (in some cases, the strong helping the frail) to venerate the Cross. At the Easter Vigil, not having to be concerned about the fire being ready or turning lights on and off allowed me to more fully experience peacefulness and joyful anticipation. I was able to go outside and watch the blessing of the fire and the Paschal Candle. Once inside the Church, I was moved as I stood by and watched the



worship space evolve from darkness into light produced by the Paschal Candle and the tapers of the assembly.

Ritual in its best sense imitates life, and at the same time transforms those who participate. Ritual in its best sense inspires and encourages one to go forward and be to better than before. How can one witness the tender humility of service and not be moved to go forth and serve? How can one be in the presence of the miracle that takes place at each and every Mass and not be caught up in wonder and awe? How can one witness love and devotion and not carry that forward in attitude and action? How can one witness the beauty and evolution of light from darkness and not strive to move from the mire of personal darkness in order to be a light to those around them?

Just askin'.