



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.

Doing the Don'ts?

Bob's Perspective:

I'm writing this blog on the 21st Anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on our country. Today is Sunday, September 11, 2022. I attended 7:30am Mass this morning at my neighborhood parish because I didn't have a music ministry assignment this weekend. With the exception of a petition during the General Intercessions, there was no mention or reference to the day (not a criticism, just an observation). After going through the drive-thru at my favorite donut and coffee place, I went home, kicked back in my recliner, and watched a very captivating documentary about the events of today's anniversary.

We all know the story, or do we? Those who celebrate their 21st birthday today were newborns on that day. Anyone younger than 21 wasn't here yet. We didn't have smart phones or iPads. Social media websites were experimental and not yet used by the general public. As I watched the documentary, a prominent news anchor from that period of time was being interviewed. I was struck by something she said regarding the aforementioned technology: "Thank God we didn't have all of that stuff then." I replayed that portion of the interview to be sure I had heard her correctly. Yep.... that's what she said.

She continued to say that it was difficult enough to ascertain information as the events unfolded that day without having to contend with all of the misinformation and biased opinions that infiltrate these technologies today. The documentary then went on to other aspects of the event, which included film footage and eyewitness interviews, most of which we've seen at one time or another.

At the end of the documentary, another news anchor from that period was interviewed. I found his comment to be very thought provoking. He opined that the most significant danger we face today isn't from radical terrorism. Rather, it's from the breakdown of the spirit of community and the rise of an individualistic society. That is, a society in which the values (or lack thereof) and opinions of individuals are held in higher regard, while those of the greater community are all but cast aside.



I'm not saying that technology is a bad thing. I utilize my smart phone, iPad, and social media on a daily basis. Many who read this blog on our webpage regularly receive notifications from us via Constant Contact or Facebook. These are all good things in and of themselves. It's when they become a hiding place from personal interaction that the danger sets in. That is, when others become to us faceless entities rather than warm-blooded human beings with their own core values, feelings, and emotions (an artificial universe). It's when we care more (or only) about ourselves at the expense of others that our path becomes crooked and darkened – and that's easy to do when we can remain isolated and anonymous rather than converse civilly face to face and in person.

As I said in a previous blog, God created us to be social beings. That's why he gave us the Ten Commandments – rules for living in a peaceful, healthy, and wholesome society – not an artificial universe.

It seems to me that God has pretty good feel for the human condition. He understands our needs and shortcomings. First of all, we need him in our lives. The first three Commandments deal with our relationship with God – the easy part:

- Putting God before anything or anyone else
- Reverence of his name; not swearing a false oath
- Worship, thanksgiving and taking rest in him.

The next part is much more complicated because human beings are much more complicated by nature. In his great wisdom, God gave us seven more Commandments to deal with our relationship with others. Take notice that only one of those are a "do," (honor our parents) while the rest are "don'ts." When you cut to the chase, here's what you get:

- Don't kill people.
- Don't cheat people or steal from them.
- Don't destroy the reputations of others.
- Don't lie or deceive.
- Don't be envious.

Whether one believes in a Judeo-Christian religion or not, it seems to me that following these principles (even on a secular basis) would make for a pretty healthy society.



In the days that shortly followed 9/11/01 people of all denominations, races, and political views came together to mourn, pray, comfort, and rebuild. My question is: Where did all that all go?

Mary's Perspective:

My daughter was one of the speakers at her high school graduation. Unfortunately, hers was the class of 2020, so the speech was pre-recorded in front of an empty auditorium and broadcast as part of an online graduation service watched from our family room. In that speech, she reflected on the fact that hers was the class of students who were born – or just about to be born – amidst the largest calculated act of terrorism on US soil. She described being exposed to strength and resilience from her very first breath, as a world in chaos put itself back together again. She further reflected on fifth grade, in 2014, when national strength and resilience were at the forefront once again as our nation recovered from the Sandy Hook school shooting. Fast forward to 2020, when it was my daughter and her class that showed strength and resilience, “creating the example that we grew up following.” I know I am biased, but I found those to be pretty profound words from my teenage daughter.

Her speech caused me to reflect then, and on every September 11, on how things really have changed. None of my children know going through an airport without needing to take their shoes off and walk through an x-ray machine. None of them remember a time when you could go to an amusement park without having to first have your bag inspected. September 11, 2001 has become a piece of history that they study in school. In some ways, I’m grateful they don’t have the intensity of memories that many do from that fateful day and the weeks that followed.

As they have gotten older, they have asked questions. This poses a challenge for any parent, to answer honestly about very scary things, to encourage safety and vigilance, but to keep a positive outlook. Whenever the conversation of 9/11 comes up in our household, I have always maintained that, while it was undeniably a terrible tragedy, it was also a time of unity and belonging. We were no longer Republican and Democrat, or Ohioan and Texan, or this and that. We were Americans. As Jess said so accurately, it was a time of strength and resilience, when we recognized each other in community, and relied on that support system.

Another thought... there was a penny on the floor in my office yesterday. I don’t know about you, but I don’t think much of pennies – when a simple trip to the store involves spending \$100 (and bringing home items that fit in two measly bags), a penny doesn’t make much difference in the overall bill. But a penny can serve as a good example. Grab a handful of change and you’ll see some pennies are shiny and new, while others are dingy, stepped on, perhaps worn. However,



whether it's brand new or it has seen a lot of life, a penny is still worth one cent. The value conferred by the maker doesn't change. In the same way, we know people who get through life pretty unscathed, while others weather some hard knocks along the way. Yet they all have value, conferred by the Maker, no matter their condition. I could use this argument to defend why my needs, wants, and desires are important – but that also goes for others. Whether poor or wealthy, on the margins or in the limelight, neighbor or stranger, each person has innate value. We must respect that and reflect it in how we interact with others.

A number of my fellow church ministers have observed that life has resumed post-pandemic in hectic ways. One of my cantors said she felt like everything was shut down, and then when things re-opened, we jumped back in on the fast lane. I muse that our perceived need for “busyness” is really an expression of our need to fit in, to be less alone, and to feel the balance, support, and strength that comes from being part of a community.

The Catholic Church has embarked on a synodal process – meaning a process of listening to each other and walking the journey together. Sessions have been held in our diocese and across the country, where folks met for dialog, reflection, prayer, and listening to each other. The results of these meetings across the country have been synthesized and submitted to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. I took the time to read through not only our diocesan document, but also the national synthesis. It was interesting to note that one of the common themes, not only expressed in our diocese but also reflected nationally, is that of community and fellowship. The national document articulates it like this:

“Participants expressed much appreciation and gratitude for the support they experience in serving the community and praying together. Parish life and social activities foster a sense of community and strengthen personal relationships among members.”

While I don't always put a lot of stock in the effectiveness of multi-year, multi-country processes, I do appreciate the notion of listening to each other and journeying together. The discussion points that have been raised so far in the synodal process suggest to me that folks really do long to be together. My pastor recently reflected that Jesus' work was active, among the people, not passive.

Back to the commandments...while I appreciate Bob's analysis, I would also suggest that discipleship is not just about omitting the bad actions, but about doing the good stuff. Consider also these words in Matthew's gospel:



“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

He said to him, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment.

The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Matthew 22:36-39

We’ve been reflecting a lot about community – how we fit, how we grow, and how we can actually make a difference. I guess that’s the thought I leave you with again. Does it really take a terrible tragedy or global pandemic to remind us of our strength, resilience, interdependence, and worth? How will you rejoin society and live out the commandments?