



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.

Destiny

Mary's Perspective:

"You're a Mommy first." A priest friend reminded me of that recently, when I was struggling with a conflicting list of to-do's at work and at home. That got me to thinking about our destinies. When I was in school, I didn't know what I wanted to be, other than I was convinced I would be a mother. I chose to get a degree in a field that came easily to me: psychology. Since graduation, I have served as a technical writer, graphic designer, business owner, accounting assistant, liturgical musician, and parent – you'll notice psychology didn't come up there. And I really followed those paths thinking it was what I was doing while I was figuring out what I was going to do. (Funny, huh? 38 years as a liturgical musician and I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up!)

The thing about destiny is, God has a plan for each of us, but we do have some say in how that plan plays out. We choose to ignore a call, or to reach higher, or to change direction. Though I was quite sure I was supposed to be a mom, that journey was certainly filled with unexpected twists and turns. I was willing to participate in the plan, but needed resilience for some of the struggles.

I played two funerals a week ago that reflected how we have a hand in our own destiny, and perhaps offers a new perspective of how to see our destiny. One funeral was for an older gentleman, who had a long and successful career as a mail carrier. After retirement, he had another long and successful career working at the local grocery store. Apparently, his destiny was to serve others. The other funeral was for a dear friend, who started working for the fire department, and completed nursing school when he was significantly older than his fellow students. His destiny was to care for others – through extraordinary compassion, wisdom of his years, and setting an amazing example.



Bob sometimes says blessings appear when we look for them – and maybe we’re not so aware of the blessings in life when we’re not paying attention. In much the same way, the heights and depths of our destiny may reflect God’s plan, IF we are willing participants.

This month of November calls to mind gratitude. I find that, when I am aware and seeking the good in life, I have very much for which to be grateful. When I am inwardly focused and in a dumpy mood, it’s a little more challenging to be grateful. This job (is it my destiny?) has many moments of grief and sadness, but also times of great joy and blessing. I was recently reflecting on how those times can often occur simultaneously...

The weekend after my friend (the firefighter and nurse) died, his widow was at Mass. I observed another parishioner – one who typically sits in the back row on the other side of the church – move from her usual spot to sit next to the grieving wife. Quietly, as the Universal Prayer started, the parishioner stepped a bit closer. When the petition for the recently deceased was read, she gently put her arm around the widow in a beautiful sign of support.

I have a daughter with a chronic medical condition. When she was very little and we were on a family vacation, my daughter experienced a medical crisis. While some of my family took my other children back to the hotel, my husband and I stayed with our youngest at the hospital. Feeling helpless and scared, I remember a lady from the hospital’s chaplain team came into the room and sat down next to me. She had no words that could bring comfort; she simply held my hand. Many years later, I remember the warmth and strength of this lady’s hand – a complete stranger who took the time to make a horrible situation a little more bearable.

These two women who showed such tender compassion serve as an example and a reminder to me. I can’t tell you what they do for a living; I can simply appreciate who they are. Perhaps my destiny is to be a liturgical musician. Perhaps I am meant to write great words or to help my children grow into awesome adults (I am so proud that they have, often in spite of me, not because of me!). Maybe my destiny isn’t so much what I do, but rather who I am.

So what’s your destiny?

Bob’s Perspective:

When I retired from full-time parish ministry, I thought that, other than playing music for an occasional Mass, I was pretty much done. I had no idea that God had something else in mind for



me. It is now almost eleven months since I “retired” (using that term rather loosely.) The number of doors that have opened to me have been nothing short of astounding – and the more I give, the more I seem to receive. But I know that the more I receive, the more I’m expected to produce. When God gives us a gift (or gifts,) it’s expected that we use them. Many times, in using what we’ve been so generously given, we happen upon other gifts that we don’t even realize we possess. Again, when we discover them, we’re expected to put them to use in some way, shape, or form.

In St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians ([1 Corinthians 12:4-11](#)) he says, “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit...” and he goes on to describe each gift and their purpose. Beyond that, he uses the illustration of a body to show how all the parts (working well) are necessary for optimal functionality. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit that he describes are like seeds that produce much, if we take the time to discern and nurture them. Each gift produces more gifts – but the gifts can also wither and die if left unattended. These gifts are then utilized by us for the good of others. In turn, many more will use what’s been handed on by us – and the beat goes on! It’s not about what we have – rather, it’s about what we give. That’s the real gift.

God has placed each one of us here for an intended purpose. God has also given us the gift of free will. We can choose to either accept or decline our intended destiny. God doesn’t make mistakes – but sometimes we do.

“For I know well the plans I have in mind for you—oracle of the LORD—plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope. When you call me, and come and pray to me, I will listen to you.” (Jeremiah 29:11-12)

As tough as the road may get from time to time, when we pursue our destiny, we ultimately experience a sense of fulfillment and happiness – a true feeling of being blessed – contentment and joy. When we choose to not follow our destiny, we are eventually left feeling empty – with little or no purpose, and no sense of fulfillment – like dust in the wind.

Following our destiny begins with expressing sincere gratitude for the many gifts (both great and small) that we’ve received. Never let a day go by without saying “thank you.” When we show appreciation for what we’ve been given, it deepens our realization of just how much God has blessed us – and opens our eyes to see deeper within ourselves. There is something to be said for counting our blessings and giving thanks. I’m not sure if God sends us more because we give thanks, or if it’s a matter of fact that we discover more inside ourselves (already put there by



God) because we're looking and nurturing. In any case, if we take stock in ourselves and show sincere gratitude, more will surely find its way to the surface.

So, what are the gifts I'm talking about? Well, they can be physical gifts...stuff. I'm thankful that my cars run well, that I have enough to eat and a place to call home – and there are people in my life that I truly love and that truly love me. But there are other gifts that are just as much (if not more) important. While giving thanks, we can pray for things like wisdom, opportunity, courage, patience, strength, comfort, a spirit of charity toward others. Or how about praying to find within ourselves a real hunger and thirst for justice, peace, or whatever we feel is important? In praying for some of these things, we just might discover that we already have them – and in being grateful and nurturing them, we move a few steps closer to our destiny.

What are you grateful for?

A final thought from Mary... who never knows when to shut up...

Early on in my formation, a wise priest friend advised me to quit telling God the answers. (Who? Me? Trying to control destiny?) He subscribed to the "less is more" school of thought when it came to petitioning for our needs. For example, instead of praying, "For xyz, that God respond by doing *a*, *b*, and *c*," we would pray, "For xyz." Period. Short, sweet, and to the point. His rationale was that we don't need to tell God how to respond, especially because God has such beautiful plans for us, of which we can't even conceive, and we wouldn't want to limit that grace!

My prayers tend to be more for concepts, rather than specifics: I pray for insight, inspiration, understanding (of God's will), and opportunity (to do God's will.) I don't typically pray for healing of an illness, but rather comfort and peace in the heart of the person suffering. I try not to pray for a specific result of a task, but rather, insight to know the best next step that I should take. Sometimes, I don't understand the answers, but I recognize that my needs and experiences are part of a bigger picture. I may not get why I had to walk this path, but perhaps my journey triggered some step in another's destiny.

Oh, and I try to remember to mind my manners – say please and thank you!

God, if it is your will, please grant... and if not, help me to be at peace with your will. Thank you for this grace and blessing me this day.



Final, final words from Bob...

Our destiny today is not necessarily what our destiny may be later. As life changes, our purpose may change. We may fulfill part of the plan right now, but there may be more parts of the plan that we are destined to fulfill later. We must be willing to keep our minds open and think out of the box. Being comfortable with being good at something may fulfill a necessary goal now, but many times we are called to step out of that comfort zone in order to grow to a greater level of fulfilling God's plan.

When we place limits on God, we place limits on His plan and our destiny.

Just pray without ceasing – He will show you the way.

So, back to the original questions... Right now, what is your destiny? What are you grateful for?