

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.

Simplicity

Bob's Perspective:

Over the centuries, philosophers have searched for truth and the meaning of life – the results of which have ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous. However, as many philosophical notions have (or should have) fallen by the wayside, there are those which have endured the test of time. One of the quotes that comes to mind was made famous by the 14th century philosopher, William of Ockham. Although this bit of philosophy predates him (even sounds a bit Aristotelian to me), Ockham stated the following principle so often and sharply that (in popular terms) it became known as “Ockham’s Razor”:

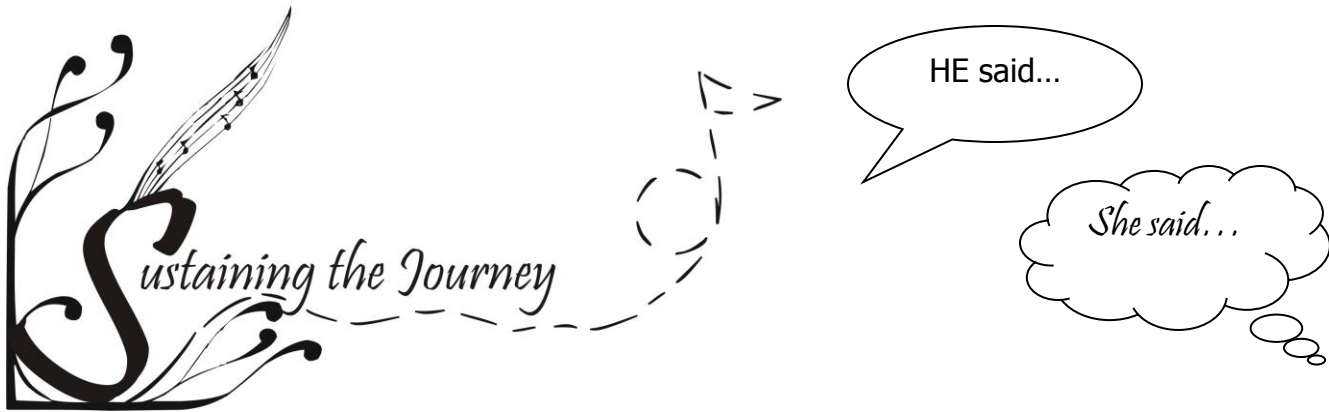
“Pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate.”
“Plurality should not be posited without necessity.”

In modern day terms, it is said, *“All things being equal, the simplest explanation is most likely the correct one.”*

During my high school days (the early 1970’s,) I was fortunate to be the student of a very prominent organist. One of his many roles was serving as the accompanist of a premier choir. During (and in preparation for) a number of their bigger concert events (Christmas in particular,) he would invite me on board to be his page turner. Even though I was enthralled with learning the intricacies of mastering the organ (at this particular church it was a four manual Holtcamp with all the bells and whistles – “phenomenal” to a kid my age,) I found that I was even more attracted to the art of directing. I observed the Choir Director intently, committing to memory his many techniques in overcoming difficult passages, his attention to diction and interpretation – drawing the best out of his choristers.

Taking notice of my enthusiasm, he would on occasion entertain questions and comments from me after the end of rehearsal. More important, however, were the bits of wisdom he shared with me. One evening, during a particularly difficult session, he almost literally took a passage apart note by note and “hand fed” it to his singers. Given the caliber of this group, I was somewhat surprised. Afterward, I asked him about it. His answer still rings in my mind: “At the end of the day, simple done well always wins the race.”

Fast forward a number of years to the mid 1980’s. After losing their new Choir Director to a sudden and unexpected death (it was actually a heart attack after a particularly bad Christmas rehearsal – he literally dropped dead in the parking lot), a parish asked me to step in and take over the group. Being young, ambitious, and maybe a bit naive, I accepted. I located some of the director’s intended scores – an impressive array to say the least. However, when I began our first rehearsal and did the warm-up, it became quickly obvious that the selected music was way out of the reach of



their current abilities. There was no wonder in my mind as to why the last director engaged in such an abrupt departure. They were good people, generous and willing to work – but nowhere near experienced enough to tackle the technical difficulties that were laid before them. I didn't want to discourage them, so I created the illusion (putting it on myself rather than them) that I wasn't familiar with much of their plan, and, given that we only have three weeks until Christmas, let's make some alterations.

With that, I began by teaching them a simple Christmas round that I learned in school choir. They did it – it sounded great and they felt good about it! We did a couple more pieces with simple harmony – and met with a high grade of success, and so on. In the end, their Christmas came off very nicely. The Pastor and parishioners seemed happy with the results. Simple done well won the race!

Being a liturgist, I relish the depth of exploration and thought that goes into the richness of our Church and her rituals, the salvific ramifications of her teachings and actions, et cetera. But I must admit that at times I begin to wonder if, in all of the effort to draw out deep inner meaning, are we tending to overlook the obvious?

As I observe our society today (in particular the dismay and disrespect between family members and friends), I often think of the words ascribed to our Lord in the Gospel of John, *"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* (Jn 13:34–35)

So how did our Lord show us his love, and how is his love shown to us today? The short answer is with authenticity and simplicity. He never negotiated or abdicated his position (or his intent), but he showed compassion, understanding of the human condition, and willingness to forgive – a simple concept. While many turned their backs to him, he never turned his back on them. He even associated with those who didn't agree with his philosophy. He didn't back away from his convictions, but he never stopped showing his love and concern for them. He loved them not just in words, but in his actions – and in doing so he transformed the world.

"At the end of the day, simple done well always wins the race."

Mary's Perspective:

I initially wrote a well-organized, mathematically-minded response to this blog to illustrate how to break down the complex into the simple, and how to, out of clutter, find simplicity. It's a bit oxymoronic that it took me a decidedly un-simple amount of writing to illustrate that point. So, I'll boil it down to this...

Read the story of Bartimaeus ([Mark 10:46-52](#)). The one who could not see with his eyes clearly saw with his heart. All he needed was faith. Simple as that.