



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.

Courage

Mary's Perspective:

Catholic liturgy is cyclical, and we have recently turned the proverbial page. As we celebrated the First Sunday of Advent this past weekend, we began a new liturgical year. The liturgical readings near the end of fall Ordinary Time, approaching Advent, speak of the end time. And the readings at the beginning of the new year point toward the coming of the Savior. Far from sweet little images of a baby and a star and fluffy snow-covered trees and sparkly wrapped gifts, we hear that we will face terrible times first – wars and natural disasters and temptation – and the admonition to stay awake and be ready. We are told that, in the face of all the challenge, we must remain faithful, persevere, endure, and give witness.

Turn on the news and you may wonder if political tensions and violence and ideological disparities have escalated such that perhaps the end of the world as we know it is coming sooner than we may think. I recently read a reflection that said if we are so worried about what we will lose when the end time comes, what does that say about the depth of our faith? If we truly believe God is with us, and that we are of His Kingdom, then we will find within us the courage and confidence to face any challenge that stands in the way of bringing about that kingdom here and now.

The reflection went on to emphasize that we need to stay focused on what really matters, and to put less weight on the superficial. The only way we find God and become who we are meant to be is by resisting temptation, recognizing the values we as Christians proclaim, and showing others the path of unconditional love. And that takes courage.

That idea of courage has come up over and over for me recently. Although definitions range, researchers tend to agree that it features three primary components: a risk, an intention, and a goal that may benefit others. In "church" terms, we may risk rejection, temptation, or others challenging our beliefs. Our intent is to stay firm to our faith, take what may be the unpopular stand, and to stay true to Catholic teaching. The goal is to live a life so compelling that others recognize Christ through our actions, and experience transformation so



that they, too, want to live that way. The benefit to others is, if those transformations become widespread enough, we end up with a kinder, gentler world. Okay, that may be a bit too simplistic, but you get the gist.

However, I am a much more “hands on” kind of person. Courage seems like a big, broad thing. What does courage look like in my little world? Well, for one thing, courage doesn’t necessarily mean broad strokes and dramatic events. Courage in the dramatic stems from courage in the decidedly undramatic parts of life. Courage may mean taking the time to vote. Courage may be comforting a grieving friend, even when your own heart is heavy. Courage may be facing that person you know will talk your ear off (instead of crossing the street and walking the other way) or taking the time to buy a sandwich for a person in need (and actually looking them in the eyes and seeing their innate value.)

With the holidays looming, we may find ourselves invited to spend time with a wide range of folks. There are definitely people in life who, after I spend time with them, I feel energized. There are also people who leave me feeling drained. Courage may just be choosing to accept the invitations to attend to the life-giving relationships, and minimizing the time spent with the energy-suckers of life.

As Bob and I have pondered our ministry, we recognize that the past couple of years have left us feeling like we are bailing water from a leaky boat. With weekly inspirations and blogs, our writing has attempted to look back and heal the wounds that resulted from the isolation of the Covid-19 pandemic. We focused on topics to inspire self-care, mindfulness, and striving toward being happy, healthy, and whole. We have a stronger sense now that we, as a community, need to move forward. Rather than looking back and licking our wounds, we need to take active steps to become who we are meant to be. We need to persevere in the face of fear (and flu season), set aside our self-doubt, and take bold steps with courage. Whatever you call it – “the new normal” – can either be defined for us by our lack of decisions, or we can take active steps to become who we are meant to be.

Where do those steps lead?

I guess that’s the cliff-hanger ending for right now – but it is worth pondering. New seasons, a new year, and scriptures that insist on perseverance beckon us to introspection and resolution. How will you courageously respond?



Bob's Perspective:

When I think about courage, the first thing that comes to mind is the Cowardly Lion from *The Wizard of Oz*. The whole point of his quest was to gain something that he already possessed – he just didn't know that he had it in him. As a matter of fact, the same was true for Dorothy, the Scarecrow and the Tin Man as well. Their gifts were already within themselves. They just needed to be discovered.

Earworm (Okay, tell me you didn't see this one coming):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlb-lXypMyI>

While this blog isn't intended to be a lesson in etymology, I think it's interesting to point out that the Latin word for *courage* is *animo* (from where we get the English word *animate* – “to give life to...”). In the same vein, the etymology of *courage* comes from the Latin word *cor* (literal translation – “heart”). Another English word that comes from *cor* is *core* (“essential”).

The flaw in the Lion's train of thought was that he confused being tough (or being a bully) with being courageous. Courage isn't something that comes to us from outside influence. Rather, courage comes from within. As with the Cowardly Lion, sometimes we confuse being afraid with being a coward. The sense of fear means that we are wary or cautious – or at least have a healthy understanding of a particular situation/event – especially if it presents impending danger. Courage is what animates us from our core to deal with what's going on (afraid or otherwise).

I can't even begin to image the intensity of fear which gripped the first responders on that fateful September day in 2001. Yet, their core animated them into extraordinary acts of heroism.

As we approach the celebration of the Nativity of Our Lord, we can take a lesson about courage from St. Joseph (a grossly unsung hero, in my opinion). If anyone had reason to be afraid at that time, it was he. Think about this: he had to take a 70-mile hike from Nazareth to Bethlehem through some fairly treacherous weather and terrain while leading a donkey carrying his pregnant wife. Once getting to Bethlehem, having no idea as to where they were going to find lodging, he persevered and adapted. And then to top things off, after Jesus was born, St. Joseph had to pull up stakes and cart his family off to Egypt (another 429 + miles on foot) in order to escape Herod's persecution. As they travelled, I'm sure things like setting up shop, finding shelter, and making a living had to be eating away in the back of his mind. No reason to be anxious or fearful there! (Facetiously spoken.)



St. Joseph was animated by his core – his faith in God and love for his family – to act with extraordinary courage in order to provide for their needs and wellbeing.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was afraid. “He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.” (Luke 22:44) The fact that he was afraid in no way made him a coward. On the contrary, his fear made him wary through the understanding of his situation. It was his inner core (faith and love for us all) that animated him to do all that the Father required of him: **an extraordinary act of courage that literally changed the course of the world!**

As Christians, we derive courage from our core beliefs – our faith. Every week as we worship, we recite either the Nicene Creed or the Apostles’ Creed – each written for a different purpose, but both covering much of the same ground (a blog for another day). Through our prayers, we take courage in knowing that there is more to life than what we experience in this world. “I believe I shall see the LORD’s goodness in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD, take courage; be stouthearted, wait for the LORD!” (Psalm 27:13-14)

“Take courage and be stouthearted” tells us to dig deep into our core – let it animate the actions of our daily life. In everyone’s life, there is a situation that makes us afraid or anxious. Maybe it’s dealing with an illness, a relationship, a job, not knowing what the future will bring, or any number of things. All of those are natural – external in one way or another. However, our core is internal (supernatural – given to us through God’s love) and animates us to move forward, to not be paralyzed, to be extraordinary (each in our own way,) and to know that even when times look their worst, God always walks with us.

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