



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.

A Hopeful Retreat

Bob's Perspective:

Often times, many of us approach the Season of Lent as, "What do I have to give up this year?" or "What task or prayer or activity do I need to take on?" I would propose that, while neither of these approaches are in themselves a bad idea, there is another way to look at the Season of Lent: in terms of actually becoming a transformative event. If all I do is give something up, or add some activity for Lent, but it all goes away after Holy Week, then what have I really accomplished?

I recently heard Bishop Michael Woost (Auxiliary Bishop of Cleveland) refer to this season as "Our Lenten Retreat." That thought has rumbled around in my mind a lot since I first heard it. What would I do if I wished to enter into retreat mode during this season? Taking whole days or even longer to stop everything I'm doing is highly impractical and, in some ways, irresponsible, especially with regard to commitments and events for which others depend on me. Maybe, instead of looking at this as "all or nothing," what if I break it down into simpler terms? This could be a great instance for applying the "small step approach." A full-blown Lenten Retreat may be impractical, but what if I allow myself to have a "retreat moment" every day? Back in the 8th century, St. Bede defined a moment as a period of 90 seconds. I could do a minute and a half every day – a Lenten moment, so to speak – and if I take just a few committed moments throughout the day... well, there you have it! So, what could a Lenten moment look like?

Here are a few possibilities to consider:

- How about 90 seconds of silence? Each day around the same time, turn the volume down on the computer, turn off the television, close your eyes, breathe deep and just allow yourself to "tune in" on God's presence in your life. I would even be so bold as to suggest that you put this event on your calendar or "to do" list, so you don't forget.
- How about 90 seconds of music? Go on the internet and search for a sacred song in which you find special meaning – [YouTube](#) is chock full of great music. Play the song and really take time to listen to the words and melody. Most of the songs are longer than 90 seconds, but maybe listen to a verse and a refrain. What are the lyrics saying? Why does this song speak to you? What feelings are invoked when you hear it?



- How about 90 seconds to read one of the Psalms? Even if you don't get all the way through it, really try to understand what each verse of the Psalm is saying. What relevance does that verse have in your life, or present situation?

Again, I would strongly suggest that you take your 90 second Lenten Retreat each day around the same time. There are many more 90 second scenarios that, with a little creativity, can help to bring great results. If you stay true to this concept, you'll soon find that you'll begin to experience... I'm not going to tell you. Give it a try and find out for yourself.

Godspeed!

Mary's Perspective:

In November of 2017, we wrote a blog about hope. In true *He Said-She Said* fashion, I contended that my glass is perpetually half full, and I am a hopeful person. Bob argued that hope is for fools, and that if we truly believe what we preach, we would more accurately say we are a people of trust. While I have no intention of poking that bear again, I would like to revisit the concept of hope in a new lens.

In the 6+ years since that blog, our world has changed immensely. A global pandemic, wars, "supply chain issues," working from home or hybrid employment... all have contributed to a jaded, reserved, lonelier mentality. How many people do you know who have retreated (forgive the pun) into a darker, more solitary existence? How many have become content to be mediocre, to clock their 40 hours per week and then spend the evening in quiet solitude with the television or a book? Have you looked around our churches lately? Smaller assemblies make for less vibrant worship. (Churches that seat 800 people with Sunday Mass assemblies of 50 can seem hollow and not very communal.) Ministries are not as robust as they once were, with the few core folks trying to hold it together while members that were perhaps only loosely anchored drifted away during the pandemic, not to return. Forced time away from the Church during the pandemic shutdown fueled in some the reasons they were comfortable staying away, whether it's they disagreed with some rule, had a poor experience of Church growing up, or simply discovered they liked sleeping in and eating pancakes on Sunday. It's easy to feel isolated, challenging to reconnect with others, and not difficult to paint a pretty daunting picture. If you're nodding your head right now, you're likely alone – but in good company.



I'd like to offer a different perspective. Having recently started a "corporate" job as diocesan Director of the Office for Worship, I have the privilege of seeing beyond parish boundaries to the larger diocese as a whole. In particular, on the First Sunday of Lent, I was blessed to participate in not one but two celebrations of the Rite of Election. For those who are unfamiliar, Rite of Election is a formal process where the catechumens and candidates – those unbaptized or baptized but uncatechized in the Catholic faith – take the next formal step toward celebrating initiation at the Easter Vigil. They meet the bishop, and their bishop meets them. The bishop formally declares those catechumens to be the Elect, recognizing that God is present in them and inviting them into a fuller life of the sacraments. He welcomes the candidates and calls them to continuing conversion. It is a time of great witness of the transformative power of Jesus in peoples' lives.

In Cleveland, we celebrated the Rite of Election not once but twice, because our cathedral was not large enough to hold at one liturgy all who wanted to participate. As it was, we had to set up folding chairs to accommodate all in attendance. Imagine that – more than 2,000 people gathered either because they long for what the Church offers, or because someone they care about is on that journey! Nearly 550 of them, coming from about 78 different parishes, are preparing for initiation in our diocese alone. Take a step back and recognize that our diocese includes 185 parishes, which suggests to me that there are even more folks who are in RCIA, but were unable to celebrate Rite of Election at the cathedral that day. Isn't that a different picture than Sunday Mass with 50 attendees?

For those catechumens and candidates, the experience had to be impressive. Seeing that others are on a similar path makes the journey feel more significant. When the bishop called all the candidates and their sponsors to come forward into the sanctuary, the energy was palpable. For family and team members, it was an opportunity to reaffirm the choices these candidates have made, and to recognize the important role they have – we all have – to support the spiritual journey of others. It was, at once, a time of great joy and great mission. That, my friends, is a far cry from isolation. That is a reason for hope.

A number of friends have asked me for my impressions of these first few weeks working downtown. I have to say I've been blown away by the high quality of those who work for the diocese. Literally everyone I have met in this new job has been kind, welcoming, and very smart. These are folks who genuinely care about people, about ministry, about supporting parishes, and about the transformative love of Jesus. These are people who have been



empowered to make a difference, and who are passionate about growing in their own faith and sharing that faith with others. Far from being weighed down by frustration, isolation, and apathy, these new friends embrace their call as missionary disciples. That gives me great hope.

Yes, it's easy to feel isolated or lonely. It's convenient to complain about empty pews and the lack of visible young families at whatever Mass you attend. Humanity comes with its own frailties and sin, and many have legitimate concerns about the future of the Church, especially if the plan is to keep doing what we've always done and expect some different response. I propose that we don't need to be stuck there. Don't be afraid to reach a little higher, to embrace the uncomfortable, to risk standing alone and singing at Mass. Sharing your faith story isn't easy, but it opens you and others to great growth. Get to know Jesus better, especially during this Lenten retreat. Pray for the insight to recognize how you can make a difference, even in small ways. Collectively, those small acts can be powerfully transformative. Dare to hope.