



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.

All In

Bob's Perspective:

While channel surfing a few weeks ago, I happened upon a TV station dedicated to Texas Hold'Em Tournaments. I viewed it for a few minutes, all the while anticipating that it would be as interesting as watching paint dry. Much to my surprise, I found the program to be quite fascinating, and have tuned in a number of times.

Texas Hold'Em is a card game in which a table of typically six players compete by betting on the strength of the hand they've been dealt. The hand consists of two cards that each individual holds in secret, as well as five additional cards that are dealt to the middle of the table, face up, in succession. The five cards may be utilized by all the players. It is a game of strategy, psychology, and some luck.

To spare a recitation of all the details and rules, a number of short video tutorials appear on YouTube that can bring one up to speed.

Right now, however, I would like to focus on one particular aspect of the game. It is a betting strategy called "*All-In*." This is where a player bets their whole stack (all of their chips) on one hand. In simple terms, a player can win big or find themselves out of the game in one shot. When a player goes *All-In*, those wishing to stay in the hand have to match the amount of that bet (or, if they have a shorter stack, go *All-In* themselves), otherwise, they can fold and cut their losses. Generally, an *All-In* bet would be placed for one of three of reasons:

1. The player is sure that they have (or can draw) the strongest (winning) hand.
2. The player wants to bluff the others into folding, and therefore win the pot uncontested.
3. The *All-In* bet may be a desperation move because the player is so far behind in the chip count that the only chance to stay in the game is to take the long shot.

When deciding to take someone up on the *All-In* bet, a sharp player will pick up on the "tells" of other players in order to make a good betting decision. A "tell" can be body language or some



other idiosyncrasy that a player displays when they have a particular type of hand, tipping off their opponent(s). A really good player can even fake a “tell” in order to bluff their opponents.

While I’m not all that into playing Texas Hold’Em myself, I think there is a real value to understanding the players’ use of strategy and psychology. Over the last few weeks, I’ve witnessed some interesting scenarios. Obviously there have been a number of times where the strongest hand actually won. However, the most interesting ones have been when a player folds a strong (winning) hand because they believe the other person’s bluff. In other words, because the person with the weaker hand puts up a good front and may have even gone *All-In*, they trick the stronger person into giving up.

Up to now, we’ve been talking about a card game. *All-in* can also apply to the way we live our lives. It’s easy for us to go *All-In* when we’re in a comfortable situation, but what about other times?

To be clear, I’m not espousing that one should be belligerent, lack compassion, or be discourteous when faced with competitive points of view. However, just because an opposing point of view may be more eloquent or strongly presented doesn’t translate into it being the strongest hand. Sometimes we need to go *All-In* on what we believe, and sometimes we need to call the other person’s bluff.

Who would have ever thought that watching the Texas Hold’Em station would have caused me to reflect on my own state of being? What do I believe in so strongly that I’m willing to go *All-In*? When are the times that I can be bluffed into backing away? Do I just put up a good front, or do I really hold the strongest hand? Am I willing to admit that sometimes others may actually hold a stronger hand than I do?

To paraphrase Kenny Rogers’ song, “You’ve got to know when to hold’em, and know when to fold’em.”

Ear worm!!! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hx4gdlfamo>

Mary’s Perspective:

When Bob and I first discussed the concept of *All-In*, my mind honestly did not immediately go to a card game, nor the psychology and strategy of it. I am definitely not a poker player. Those who know me will attest to the fact that I do not have a “poker face” – quite the contrary, I’ve been described as “disarmingly honest.” I don’t bluff; I tell it like it is. In general, one look at my face or body language will



tell you a lot. If it's past lunch time and my eyes are "twinkling" (Bob's description), you probably want to approach with caution (and a snack to share). When I hear good news or am having a happy day, I tend to dance rather than walk down the hall. In the middle of Sunday afternoon, after getting up at 5am and working a full day, a glance will tell you the proverbial elevator isn't getting to the top. That said, the idea of *All-In* has, to me, tentacle-like reaching depth.

For me, being *All-In* means there is no wavering. Being *All-In* means that you believe in something so strongly, you are willing to defend it to the death. Rather than focusing on deception or bluffing – convincing someone you stand for something of which you may or may not be firmly convicted – being *All-In* means being willing to face embarrassment, ridicule, and arguments to the contrary, all while standing firm.

As a parent, being *All-In* means, "what do I feel so strongly about passing on to my children that it is non-negotiable?" Here's an easy example: whether you are the passenger or the driver, you must buckle your seatbelt every time – no questions asked. Being *All-In* means that I will love you, no matter what – even if I don't always like the decisions you make.

There are more challenging examples. Although a more faithful believer would say they espouse everything the Catholic Church teaches, my experience has been that most folks are "Cafeteria Catholics" – those who find the religion resonates with them in general, but they hold some truths more stringently than others. As a Catholic, what do I believe in so strongly that I'm *All-In*? Perhaps the idea that ours is a Triune God: Father, Son, and Spirit. It may be hard to understand or explain, but I will defend that as truth every single time. I believe that life begins at conception, so abortion is wrong. Period. That may be an unpopular stance in some circles, and there will be people who will challenge that belief, but I'm *All-In*. Non-negotiable. When we first discussed this blog, Bob had recently subbed for a fellow musician, and reflected on how he was blown away at the beauty of their choir's ministry. When they sang, they were *All-In* (they sang it like they believed it) – a testament to their faith and to the effective formational work of the fellow musician.

Usually, the examples come to my mind quickly. And I can conjure lots of situations where I'm not *All-In*. Want to dye your hair blue? That wouldn't be my choice, but it's just hair. You do you. Ice cream for breakfast? Not the wisest move, in my opinion, but I acknowledge there may be times when ice cream might be considered the breakfast of champions. I usually think if something is worth doing, it is worth doing well – but I acknowledge there are even times when it's okay to say, "done is better than perfect." So, what is it that you believe so staunchly, of which you are so convicted, that you are *All-In*?



Once you start defining that, you get a better picture of who you really are. This one may take some soul searching, but make a list. Do you like what you see?

One more thought... we just celebrated the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. I read a reflection that said, "The Trinity is not so much a dogma or teaching, as it is a description of the environment of love from which everything came and the environment of love toward which everything should move."

(Paulist Evangelization Ministries, 6/11/22) You might want to read that one again, slowly, to digest it. A priest friend, preaching about the Trinity, lamented that words are not adequate. He said, "knowledge in our mind has to move to an encounter of the heart." *(Fr. Alex Clark, Parochial Vicar of St. John Vianney Church, Mentor OH)*

Perhaps, when we reach that "encounter" stage, we will recognize more clearly where we are *All-In*.