



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.

## Discipleship

### *Mary's Perspective:*

As we write this blog, summer is winding down, and our thoughts turn to the next season. For some, that season may be an academic year. For others, it's the start of a ministry season. To some, it's time to think about winterizing the home, stocking up on comfort foods, or planning the annual "snowbird" trip. As often happens when we start discussing topics of our writing, we find there is a line of thought that has consistently popped up in our conversations, experiences, and tasks. In our preparations for the next season, our thoughts keep turning to discipleship. Let me set the scene a bit.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is about to release an updated translation of the principal document guiding Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA). In this next season, both Bob and I will be talking a lot about OCIA in our respective ministries, and so it seemed prudent to attend some formation for ourselves. Thus, we went on a road trip! We returned energized, renewed, and grateful for the time away together – a blessing in itself.

The conference we attended took a deep dive into the entire process of OCIA, or how folks journey from being inquirers to Elect (called by name) to disciples. We looked at this process from different angles, but some very clear and simple statements came to light:

1. We all want to be noticed, named, and known.
2. God stirs the questions in the hearts of inquirers. Our lives (all the baptized) witness the answers to the questions. Sometimes we need to also use words. In word and action, the most powerful tool we have is our witness.
3. The Church doesn't have a mission so much as the mission has a Church. If we allow our hearts to be changed, we can be the catalysts of change in the world.
4. If we are going to effectively change the world, we must begin with the end in mind. If the change we'd like to effect is that more people know and love Jesus, then we need to embrace our call to evangelization – beyond the sacristy or sanctuary, in society/work/family, among the world's conflicting values.



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Simple statements, but daunting task, right? Here's the thing. Evangelization is the mission of all the baptized, not just the appointed ministers. And it all comes down to relationship. One person at a time, we need to be open to noticing those who may not feel embraced, get to know them, and invite them to see what brings us joy.

Who? Me? I'm not holy enough. I don't have the right words. I don't know all the rites and rituals and rules. I hear you – and often, I feel the same way. But what I have discovered is that we don't need to be expert theologians to make a difference. Quite the contrary: people are drawn to us in the simple parts of life. Whether it's sharing a meal or laughing at a joke, relationships grow because they are nurtured by spending time together. So how do we jump from coffee with a new friend to these seemingly giant concepts of "evangelization" and "discipleship"?

Small steps. There are two concrete things we can do to make us better witnesses to our faith. First, pray each day. Try to consecrate 15 minutes each day to spend in quiet with the Lord. That time can be formal, like praying a rosary or listening to *My Daily Prayers*, or less formal, like strolling in a beautiful park or sitting quietly by the tabernacle. Perhaps your 15 minutes looks different each day. The point is to make time for your own relationship with the Almighty. Be open to the whisper of the Spirit. Make room in your heart, and your heart will be transformed.

Second, think about times when you have really felt God present in your life. Perhaps that time was something monumental like the birth of a child or death of a parent. Maybe it was a little more subtle, like that day at Mass when the choir sang something so stirring it gave you goosebumps. Perhaps you felt the Lord's presence when you smelled that beautiful rose bush, or heard the laughter of the neighborhood children, or when you read a lovely poem or Scripture passage that struck you in a new way.

Now that you have called that image to mind, share it! Using God language can be awkward and challenging, so start with someone very comfortable, like your spouse or your best friend. It doesn't have to be a whole long-winded story. Simply reflect on how you had this encounter, and you really felt like God was there. Force yourself to notice these "Godincidences" and mention them. It's like a muscle; the more you use it, the easier it gets.

That's your challenge. Recognize God present in your life, and tell someone about it. That, my friends, is evangelization in a nutshell.

Want to take it a step further? (We all have overachievers in our lives.) The next step is, once you are comfortable with using God language around those closest to you, stretch that to a wider circle. Perhaps co-workers or neighbors, folks that you know but with whom you aren't super close. The more you are



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able to tell your story, the easier it gets to tell others. In sales, they call this the elevator pitch – like, how would you describe yourself or what you represent in the time it takes to ride the elevator up to your destination? We don't need to sell Christianity, and we don't need to get so windy about our stories that people actively cross the street to the other side when they see us coming, but we can be better prepared to share with others how God has been present in our lives.

I'm really conscious when writing these blogs to make sure I'm not just talking about Church stuff, but rather things that apply to life in general. Perhaps that line is a little blurred today, because discipleship is a Church matter, but it really does apply to all of us. Sometimes we just need to recognize that call and respond a step at a time.

One final thought – this one from 1 Peter 3:15:

*Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.*

*Bob's Perspective:*

Take notice of the people who are hungry – and then feed them. A good way to manifest discipleship is to feed the hungry. I don't necessarily mean hunger in a physical sense, but hunger in an intellectual or spiritual sense. Although it's not always obvious, the truth is that everyone is hungry for something.

Sometimes people show the nature of their hunger by throwing out little tidbits in the course of a conversation, hoping that you'll pick up on their subtlety and break it open with them. There are times when someone will intentionally say something controversial in order to get your response. There are those who will ask a question point blank. Then we come to the ones whom I find most interesting. We all know someone who will sit with the group, never ask a question, never give an opinion – they just listen. As you look at them, you can see the wheels of thought turning in their heads as they process.

Every one of these can be ripe pickings for evangelization. Awareness on our part is the key, and not being afraid to utilize God language on occasion is a powerful tool. Another important aspect of the evangelization process comes from the song "The Gambler," by Kenny Rogers: "You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em..." Acting self-righteous, superior, high and mighty, or whatever you wish to call it, will in most cases just scare them away. Just because you're right doesn't mean that everyone sees it that way. Water is good for a plant, but if you over-water, it will die.



Use Jesus as the model: Jesus always kept (and still keeps) the door open. He never negotiates his position, and never forces or bullies anyone into following. Gathering blind followers isn't the goal. Rather, the goal is to build relationships that will grow and flourish. Blind followers will be here for a little bit but will eventually stray away. Solid relations will continue onward exponentially.

Jesus was (and still is) a teacher. Many people referred to him as "Rabbi," and the Apostles were his apprentices. Take note that they didn't all come onboard in the same way. Some were naturally enthusiastic followers, some tagged along out of curiosity, some had to be convinced that they were worthy. All of them were invited.

And Jesus taught them. His methods varied throughout his earthly ministry. There were times he used life situations as a tool, as in [Luke 21:1-4](#) when a widow was giving her offering. Sometimes he told parables like the Sower and the seed [Matthew 13:1-23](#). And then there were times he taught by doing ([John 11:38-43](#)). His apprentices (the Apostles) watched and took note. Occasionally, he sent them out, along with others, to see how they were coming along, like [Luke 10:1-23](#).

What is an apprentice? According to the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services, "*Apprentices are provided on-the-job training by a skilled mentor...*" In other words, it's using the job to teach about the job. This definition is of course referring to actual employment. But when you think of "apprentice" in the context of evangelization, it becomes the act using life to teach about life, of using faith to teach about faith. And this is in order to help the apprentice to grow in knowledge and skill, to develop that loving relationship with God in their life, and in turn eventually reach out to mentor others to do the same.

So, the question to all of us is "Who are your apprentices?"