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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.

## What Do I Want?

*Mary's Perspective:*

I've been spending a lot of time lately walking and listening to inspirational podcasts. It's almost like I'm not certain where I'm going, or what I'm supposed to be doing, but I believe that making my muscles work and feeding my brain good stuff *has* to have some long-term positive effects. It's kind of like taking a multi-vitamin. You don't necessarily feel it doing good things for you, but somehow it must help, right?

Anyway, one of the things that I have become very aware of is that I really don't know what I want. I often joke that I don't know what I want to be when I grow up! As Bob's retirement date looms, we've been spending some time pondering the next steps. Here's what I do know...

We are regularly surrounded by a cacophony of noise. Talking heads, reality TV, radio personalities, politicians, whatever things we have surfed on social media or the internet, even our friends and coworkers vie for our attention by sounding louder and louder.

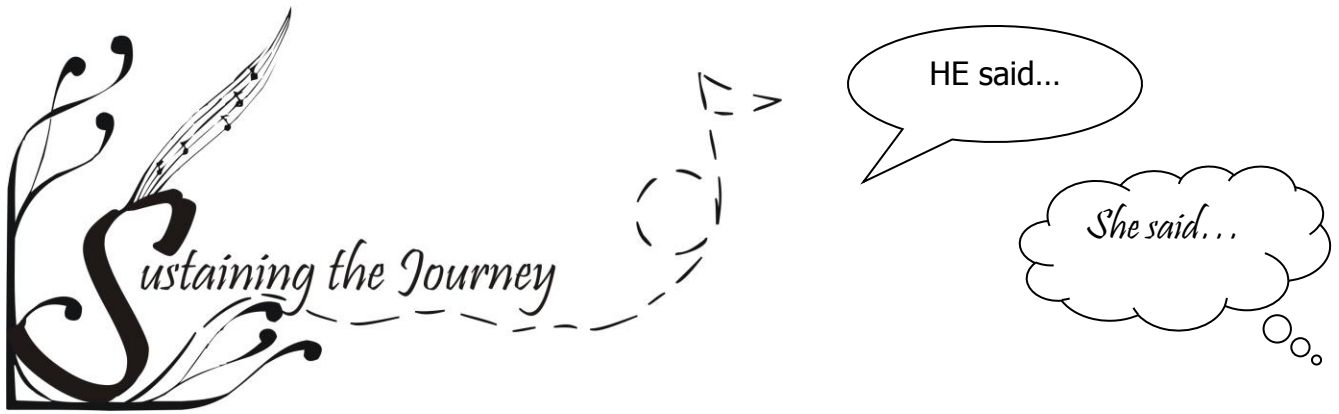
**Cacophony** [ *kuh-kof-uh-nee* ]

*A cacophony* is a mishmash of unpleasant sounds, often at loud volume.

In Music, a cacophony is described as *frequent use of discords of a harshness and relationship difficult to understand*. I find that definition very pertinent, as I don't always understand the relationship of the noises that can be suffocating around us. That's part of why I walk – it gives me a chance to really disconnect, to experience nature and breathe the air and clear my head. Yes, I often listen to podcasts (more noise,) but I also make it a point to spend at least part of each walk being aware of my own heartbeat, my breath, and whatever thoughts are swirling in my head. Even at that, I find it challenging to really determine what I want.

I know a number of people that I would describe as restless. You know the type: always looking for the next big job, or planning that great trip, or generally just perpetually discontent. Some sense of restlessness can be good, in moderation, because it can propel us forward. If we are not content with the status quo, it can motivate positive change. However, that restlessness taken to more of an extreme can lead one to miss the everyday miracles, or the beauty of today. If we're always looking to the next great thing, we risk missing out on the here-and-now.

If I'm restless without knowing what I want, then I risk spinning my wheels ineffectively. I may feel like I'm always busy, always moving ahead, but how will I know when I get there? I believe we need to quiet ourselves to really give our inner voice time to be heard. Perhaps that quiet time is spent in meditation, or in a church, or in that blissful time between



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sleep and wake, when only the birds provide the background soundtrack. If we can't quiet ourselves, how will the Spirit ever get a word in edgewise?

So the first step in figuring out what I want is to take time to listen to my heart. I'm a methodical person, so I find myself wanting to categorize different parts of life, to break down the question into digestible segments. What do I want in my work/career/job/vocation? What do I want in my family relationships? What do I want for my home? (Careful, that one can lead to making very long lists of daunting tasks that can be overwhelming!) What do I want in my friendships? What do I want in my leisure time? Travel? Hobbies? Volunteer for a good cause? What do I want to leave as my legacy? Written words? A pile of money? Offspring who share valuable qualities?

How do I silence the cacophony, listen to my inner voice, and figure out some of these answers?

We've written about this before – being mindful, perhaps turning off the radio in the car, and scheduling regular time for meditation are all reasonable approaches. Perhaps journaling will help identify some of the values that point to what we want. If we keep doing the same thing each day – succumb to the noise and go through the motions of work (or whatever your days look like) – we will never produce a different outcome. And if we don't take the time to figure out what we want, we may well be wasting valuable opportunities to create a better tomorrow.

So here's your challenge for today... spend some time determining the answer to the question:

What do I want?

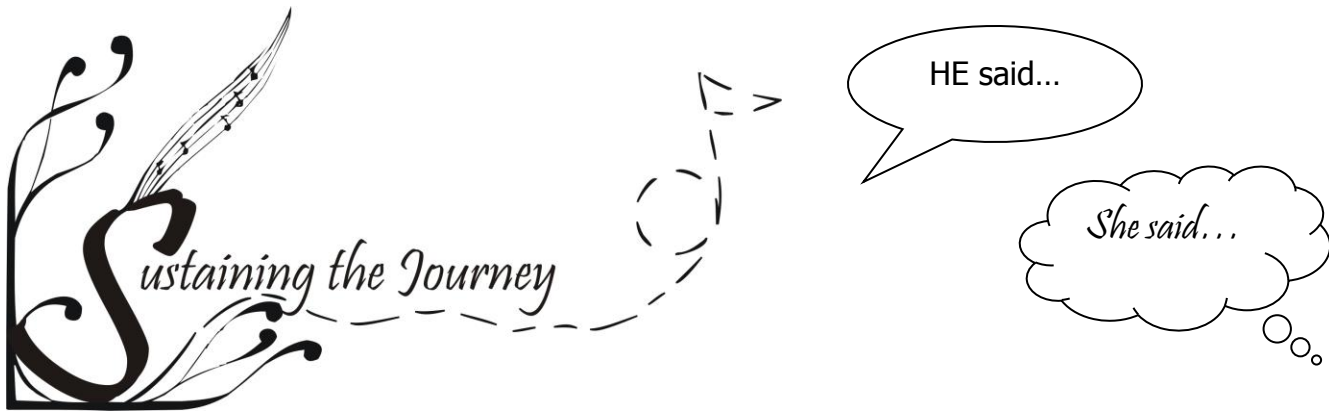
*Bob's Perspective:*

What do I want?

At this stage of my life, Mary poses an interesting question. As many of you may know, at the end of January (2022) I will be retiring from full time ministry at my parish (at which I've served for 22 years).

I've served at other parishes as well for a grand total of about 45 years. Over the last several months, many friends and acquaintances have asked, "So are you counting down the days?" I suppose I am, but in a bittersweet sort of way.

Truth be told, I find the prospect of retirement to be exciting. I have some fairly basic plans for activity and I am looking forward to new adventures. I want to drive a tour bus, I want to sub at other parishes from time to time, I want to expand my website service – and yes, I will still be very active with *Sustaining the Journey*. On the other hand, I'm also a bit saddened by the prospect of leaving behind what has become my home-away-from-home for nearly a quarter century, as well as all of the friends that I've made along this leg of the journey. I'll truly miss them.



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While I'm by no means being forced to retire, it has become apparent in my personal life situation that it's time to move onward – and that's that.

As I first read Mary's perspective, I was going to say something about the fact that in retirement I look forward to enjoying some good strong cacophony every morning along with a couple of glazed donuts and an order of bacon, but I'll leave that alone for now.

Rather, I would like to turn our attention to St. Augustine of Hippo – and in particular his book, "Confessions." Many people are familiar with the quote in the opening paragraph, "...for You made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in You." Bernadette Farrell wrote a beautiful song based on this quote, entitled, "Restless is the Heart." If you're not familiar with this piece, it would be well worth your time to check it out.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuJTODCUfk>

Now back to St. Augustine.

In his book, St. Augustine lays out an autobiographical account of his tumultuous youth. Throughout the story, he echoes his restlessness in life, in his relationship with God and others, and with himself. His journey is one of seeking relief and rest from the anxiety that was the hallmark of his early life.

Restlessness can be caused by a number of issues. When examined closely, the issues have one common root: the lack of balance. This balance can be mental, spiritual or physical (or any combination thereof). In St. Augustine's case it was all three – but most prevalently it was spiritual. As his life went on, St. Augustine struggled to understand his restlessness and finally came to grips with his understanding. In Chapter 8 of his book he offers a Zen-like image:

*"Oil poured below water, is raised above the water; water poured upon oil, sinks below the oil. They are urged by their own weights to seek their own places. When out of their order, they are restless; restored to order, they are at rest."*

A well-known Vietnamese philosopher, Thich Nhat Hahn, draws the correlation between restlessness and balance in this way:

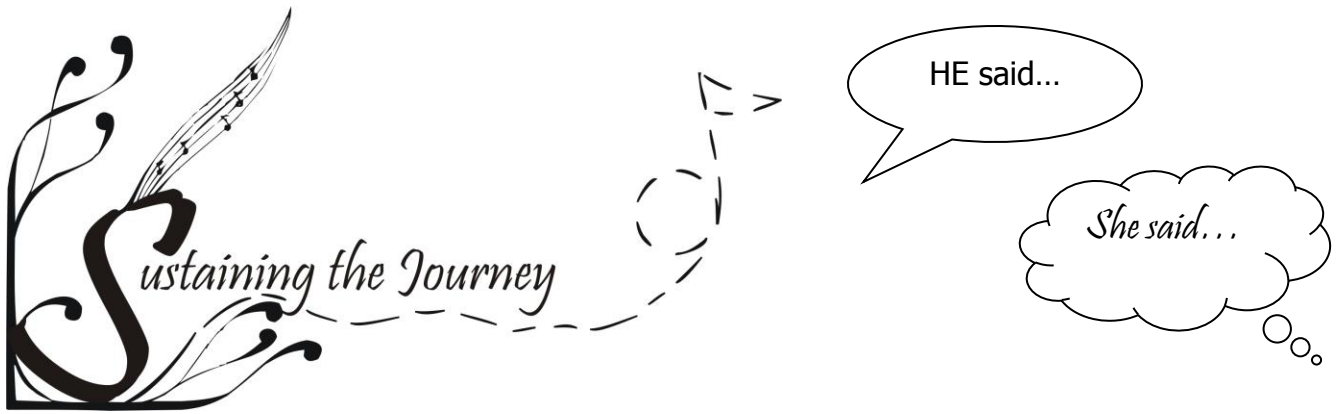
*"If you're feeling restless, the energy of mindful breathing will encounter your energy of restlessness, and in no time at all you'll see a change as the energy of restlessness steadily ebbs away and transforms."*

Mary and I have talked a lot about mindfulness over the years. It stands to reason that once I'm mindful (and own the fact) that I'm restless, then developing strategies to combat it becomes less difficult to accomplish.

So what does all this have to do with "What do I want?"

Not a damn thing!

Just kidding.



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While I'm very much at peace with my decision to retire, there is still a part of me that is restless. I'm restless about finishing up all that needs to be done for the parish before I leave. I'm restless about coordinating a smooth transition between myself and my successor. I'm restless about some of the new adventures that are in store for me. I'm restless about keeping abreast of the latest in the world of Church music and Liturgy. I'm restless about knowing what I want.

What do I want? Hmmmmmmm.