



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.

Control

Mary's Perspective:

A few weeks ago, I had a meeting downtown. It was scheduled for first thing in the morning on a weekday, and I was very concerned about getting there - specifically, the parking situation. Being somewhat claustrophobic, I really don't like parking garages. I know there is a street with parking meters near my meeting location, but I wasn't sure what downtown traffic is like that time of day. In addition, in the state of Ohio, one used to have to pass a parallel parking test in order to receive one's driver's license. However, just a couple of years before I got my license, they changed the requirement to a maneuverability test. (For those who live in OH, I have just pretty effectively aged myself!). It's not that I'm not capable, but parallel parking is not my strongest skill. Needless to say, I worked myself into a full-fledged dither prior to the meeting. I left my house plenty early, felt very focused driving to the meeting (focused on how I was going to approach the parking situation), and got to the street with the parking meters.

If it were a movie, at that point the clouds would have parted, a big ray of sunshine shown down, and the angels sang a harmonic "AHHHHH" - the street blissfully had three unoccupied parking meters. Rather than jostling for space, I conveniently slid into the end spot so I neither had to back in, nor would any car park in front of me, making my departure simple. The sigh of relief was palpable, and I suddenly felt like I could focus on the meeting topic.

We are in the midst of another Advent, with Christmas right on its heels. For those in liturgical ministry, it's a crazy time of extra practices, shopping, trying to find that stupid copy of <fill in Christmas carol> in the right key, and... oh yeah, praying to become a holy person. Every time we come to Mass, we offer gifts - not just bread and wine, but our very selves. And we pray the Lord make us holy. We join ourselves to the bread and wine - our pain, worry, concern, our best joys and deepest desires - to be transformed. We come to the liturgy, offering ourselves, surrendering to the will of God, to have our restless hearts satisfied and to be made holy.

So here's my prayer: God, get me out of the way. Help me to let go of my baggage, emotion, stressors, distractions, and "to-do's", and make me your instrument. When they hear my voice, let them hear you. When they see me, let them know you. Ultimately, that's our ministry - to be an instrument, a vessel, a path. May we be intentional about carving out time to allow the Lord to make us holy. Whether it's participating in a holy hour, or reading something spiritually inspiring, or acknowledging that sometimes "good enough" is enough and there are more important things that deserve our attention, may we use this Advent time to intentionally make our hearts ready.

Back to the parking space? When I shared the story with a friend, he said, "well, I sure hope you learned something!" I was fully anticipating a kind admonishment about needing to keep up my parallel parking skills. He smacked his hand



against his forehead and said, "why stress about things over which you have no control?" Made me suspect God's feeling the same way. <SMACK> Why are we stressing about picking the right Christmas gift, or transposing that song, or how the new recipe will turn out? We are not in control. All we need to do is humbly ask God to make these gifts - bread, wine, music... US - holy. *Then* we shall rejoice with prayerful hearts.

Gaudate!

Bob's Perspective:

"Control....Control....I MUST HAVE CONTROL!!!!" At one point in my life, I was almost convinced that this was the Liturgist's Creed. That was when I was an optimist. Optimists are rarely happy because they're usually disappointed by the outcome of one thing or another. On the other hand, pessimists are a much happier lot because things usually turn out better than they had planned or expected.

Admittedly, I'm being a bit facetious. We have to be careful about not confusing 'control' with 'discipline.' In simple terms, discipline is doing what you have to do, when you have to do it, whether you want to do it or not. 'Control' is more about manipulating an outcome. On an individual basis, the more disciplined we are, the better our chances are of reaching the desired outcome. However, as the saying goes, "no man is an island." If we add anything or anybody into the mix of our disciplined lives, control of any particular outcome loses ground exponentially.

This is never clearer than when we have something planned based on the commitment of someone else, only to have something change at the last minute. For example, we prepare an ambitious piece with our choir, only to have a torrential snow storm just before the event and no one from the Soprano Section shows up. That actually happened to me – Christmas Eve of 1983 – what a nightmare! And it was my **FIRST TIME** out as a music director – ***it was the most absolute, terrible, awful experience...*** (Oops! Sorry, I lost control there for a second) – but, I digress.

As the saying goes, "Let go and let God." (O.K., so how many proverbs can you quote in one article...hmm?) This doesn't mean that we should sit back and do nothing. But after careful and diligent preparation, we have to always remember that God just may decide to use this event as he sees necessary – and the lesson may not always have anything specifically to do with us. In other words, God knows that (in a particular situation) we may be strong enough to endure a less than palatable outcome of an event in order to teach something to someone else. Maybe this is the endurance of an illness or an embarrassing situation, or whatever. I'm sure that just about every one of us has experienced this in some way, shape or form.

Think of a time when you planned something out to the very last detail, only to have it go wrong because of something out of your control. Or, maybe it was an event or situation that occurred in a completely unexpected manner that entirely disrupted the flow of your life. It's in those times (maybe after a little reflection) that we are really fortunate enough to see the hand of God at work in our lives.

Okay...I'm done. **Felix dies Nativitatis!** (Colloquial translation: Merry Christmas!)