

## Celebrating the Feast of Mater

October 20, 2012

“Pay attention, listen to me and your soul shall live.” These words of the prophet Isaiah, reminding the Israelites to listen, touch the core of Mater’s message. Our western world is unaccustomed to listening, both to audible sounds and perhaps even more to the voice of silence.

A much publicized experiment executed by the violinist prodigy Joshua Bell reminds us of the impoverishment resulting from habitual rush and preoccupation in our culture. He decided to dress as a tramp, seat himself in a corner of a Washington subway, and play Bach sonatas on a 3.5 million dollar violin as crowds rushed to catch their trains. Cultured and uncultured persons passed by. Most ignored the exquisite music shared by one of the contemporary world’s most sought-after artists. Finally, a child stood immobile, mesmerized by the beauty of the violinist’s performance. Neither Joshua Bell’s unkempt appearance in an ignoble place, nor the frantic pace of the crowds prevented the child from total attention to the music, an encounter of beauty, mystery and silent communication. The child heard the music, stopped, listened deeply and was filled with delight.



Is not this sense of delight and awareness of mystery similar to the invitation of Mater whose stillness and silence open the path to untold riches?

Consider the painting of Mater for a moment. Mary is seated in the temple with spindle, books and a basket of work at her sides. She communicates a sense of interior silence and composure. Her composure reminds us that only with stillness and silence can the fruits of our work, study, thoughts, even reading the Word of God become integrated into our being.

In 1853, twelve years before her death, St. Madeleine Sophie wrote, “But at least we must unite solitude to the work we do, and counter this whirlwind with a deep cavern where the soul can take refuge as often as possible. For this cavern in the rock is the Heart of Jesus.” It is significant that both Mater and St. Madeleine Sophie are situating interior silence next to labors and study. Neither is calling for the abandonment of an active body or mind. Rather, they urge us to develop a mode of being capable of touching the depths of reality. For it is in the depths of life that we encounter our God whose face is often one of surprise and is unrecognized without the attentiveness of the child who could hear the music of Joshua Bell. All who passed Joshua Bell were in the same subway tunnel while he played beautiful music, but only the child was free enough to receive the gift.

Another dimension of listening is related to memory and imagination, for these faculties require that we enter our interior selves, the cave of our hearts, the secret gardens of our hearts, our hearts as temples.

*“Approach me, you who desire me, and take your fill of my fruits, for memories of me are sweeter than honey, inheriting me is sweeter than the honeycomb.”* (Ecclesiastes 24:26ff)

These words from Mater's liturgy call to mind the fact that memory of love speaks of delight, of healing, of inner transformation, of the very gift of God himself.

The power of love's memory is exemplified in Victor Frankl's accounts of being in a Nazi concentration camp. The memory of the mutual love he shared with his wife was the source of his hope, perseverance, strength. Frankl did not know whether his wife was alive or dead, but the mere recollection of her face and the lasting depth of her love gave him a reason to live. Though physically imprisoned, Frankl was not spiritually imprisoned, for memory gave him hope, which entered into the undying nature of love.

For Christians, graced memory and imagination are rooted in a faith that Resurrection love and life triumph, so we might exclaim with St. Peter: "You did not see him, yet you love him; and still without seeing him, you are already filled with a joy so glorious that it cannot be described, because you believe; and you are sure of the end to which your faith looks forward..." (1 Peter 1:8)

Let us ask Mater, our Mother of the essential and the invisible, to deepen our conviction that we too are offered "a joy so glorious that it cannot be described, because we believe." No matter the circumstances, may we be filled with the joy of the Resurrection.

In the words of St. Rose Philippine, let us remember that, "You are called to live and love with joy! What is this joy? It is the certainty that God IS the center of your life. It is the sureness that you are not alone, for Jesus's call is to love with him; that whatever may come in the future, nothing can separate you from God's love. This joy is the confidence of knowing that God goes ahead of you, That Jesus awaits you in the Galilees of your province, among the peoples to whom you will be sent, where with him you will say to others, 'Come and see; you too will see greater things!'"

As we celebrate the Feast of Mater Admirabilis, may we have listening hearts which lead us to the heartbeat of God.

~ Muriel Cameron, RSCJ

