

## REFLECTION ON MATER

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Usually on the Feast of Mater, we are treated to a fantastic explanation of the symbolism of the most beautiful fresco painted by Pauline Perdrau in 1844, how it was deemed unsightly and garish by Pauline's mother superior and covered and hidden away, and how it was rediscovered in its mature muted beauty by Pius IX on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1846 and declared "Mater Admirabilis!" – Mother most admirable...

But today, I'd like to focus on the subject of the fresco – Mary, the Blessed Mother.

This seems appropriate for today's liturgy, which is a celebration of Mater's feast day and of the Holy Spirit. There has never been a fuller fusion of human freedom with the grace of the Holy Spirit as was evidenced in the choices and actions of Mary.

Most of the time, Mary's chief epithet is "Virgin." While the metaphysical miracle of the Virgin conception of Jesus is astounding and awe-inspiring I would like to focus more closely on Mary's other characteristics – namely her youth and her gender.

Mary is a particularly potent example for young women. When posed with the news of her impending pregnancy, Mary, most likely as young as our juniors and as scared as our seniors approaching college, chose to say yes to God. Her response, was simple, "I am the Lord's handmaiden."

In a world that didn't value women very much, nor immaturity or youth, Mary transcended the perceived inadequacy of her femininity and her tender years to accomplish the greatest task of all –bringing God into the world. And let us remember that Mary was not a surrogate, discarded after her son's birth. She reared and raised him, taught him, and shepherded him to adulthood and to his eventual ministry. I do not envy Mary's task; I can imagine Jesus was a rather precocious lad, what with being the Son of God and all. But the point remains that bringing God into the world for others is not an isolated event; we must shepherd it, mold it, nourish it, and help it to grow to maturity. We must also be willing to sometimes endure unpleasantness or discomfort to accomplish this most noble of endeavors.

Mary is the epitome of using wisdom in decision-making. She is the height of how a human should cooperate with the Spirit in her own life. She perfectly embodies goal 5. To use a phrase my seniors will recognize she is the Form of wise-freedom that we all strive to imitate. I encourage each of you young women here in the chapel today to say yes to God when he asks you to help him be present in the world. Choose wisely to be God's handmaiden.

In a time honored 91<sup>st</sup> Street tradition, we would like to use this time to give each of member of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade class a mater medal to signify how they are imitating Mary in a very particular way by bringing God into the service organizations at which they are volunteering.