

THE JOHN CARROLL SOCIETY  
*Archdiocese of Washington*

FOR OVER 65 YEARS: LAY CATHOLICS ENRICHING THEIR FAITH & SERVING THE ARCHBISHOP OF WASHINGTON

John Carroll Society  
Margaret Mary Missar  
High School Essay Competition

2023

1st Place

Essay

## The Modern Fiat: Young People's "Yes" to a Life of Faith and Service

In an age of consumerism and social media, faith has slipped from the lives of many Americans. This lack of faith, whether it be a devotion to God or an appreciation for the spirituality of life, has marred our modern-day society and detached us from what is truly important. Of course, defining exactly what "truly important" means differs for each individual; at the same time, however, basic respect for human dignity and service to those in need can be universally agreed upon as basic virtues for those from all walks of life. By examining the raw, pure faith of Christian figures like Mary, we can strengthen our connection to our inherently spiritual nature and develop a sense of purpose that aligns with God's will.

The story of Mary's fiat on the surface is of obedience to a higher power—Mary recognizing God's ultimate supremacy and submitting herself to Him—but upon further analysis, it is also found to be a story of faith and trust that changed the course of human history. The word fiat translates to "let it be done" in Latin, signifying that Mary's submission to God is one of not only humility but also of acceptance of her role in God's plan, signifying her faith in Him and expressing her desire to submit herself to God's will. Through her trust in God, Mary's "yes" changed the course of human history by bringing Jesus, the Christian Messiah, to Earth to spread the word of God and to lead to the development of the Christian faith. Her "yes" can be seen as an inspiration to young people because of how quickly she accepted the role God wanted her to play without hesitation. By also saying "yes" to the opportunities that arise from which we can change the world for the better, we too can develop a sense of purpose and become who God wants us to be.

In our modern world, where technology both connects us to and isolates us from each other more than ever before, it can be difficult to muster the courage, confidence, and humility necessary to serve those in need. However, Mary's "yes" can teach us how we can respond to the needs of the world by putting trust in God and serving others. Despite lacking the knowledge as to what being the mother of Jesus would entail, Mary had the courage to say "yes" anyway in order to serve her Lord and bring our Savior to the world. We, too, can serve our world with courage by metaphorically putting ourselves in the shoes of others, even when it is difficult and we do not agree with each other. Another virtue that Mary possesses, confidence, can also be utilized by young people to serve those in need by putting faith in God and the power compassion has to heal and repair divides. Perhaps most difficult of all, we can also use humility to respond to the needs of the world by recognizing our faults and striving to be the best versions of ourselves. As it is stated in James 4:10, "humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you" (*USCCB Bible*, James 4.10). Only by being truly humble can we build meaningful connections with the communities we choose to serve, and like Mary, can we strengthen our relationship with God and the Christian faith.

Developing these virtues, however, is no easy task. Our modern world of social media and consumerism can make it challenging to put ourselves in a position both mentally and spiritually to be prepared enough to adequately serve others. According to Pope Francis, the internet "is an opportunity to promote encounter[s] with others, but it can also increase our self-isolation, like a web that can entrap us" (O'Kane). With the growing prevalence of addictive social media platforms in young people's lives, the pressures to keep up with the trends and compare one's self to others can distract us from what truly matters, and direct our energy into punishing ourselves for our own shortcomings rather than uplifting others and improving our

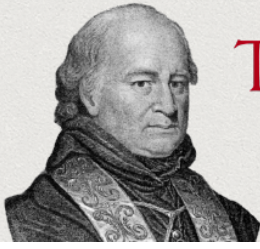
world. With a layer of consumerism added to this, in which we focus more on the acquisition of physical objects than spiritual growth, young people today regardless of their religion have grown to become under-developed spiritually and lack the empathetic impulses to connect with those in need. With all this being said, it may seem impossible to instill virtues of courage, confidence, and humility in young people today. However, by promoting a universal life of faith, younger generations can be united under the banner of love and truth and be better prepared to serve one another, as well as the world as a whole.

It can be difficult to determine how exactly this “universal life of faith” should look, especially in regards to an increasingly divisive population in the United States when it comes to religious and political beliefs. No matter what shape this will eventually take, it is imperative that this faith is able to be extendable to all young people regardless of their affiliations in order to effectively unite young people into a cohesive, service-oriented generation. In 2013, the Pope encouraged religious leaders of various faiths to fight our modern society’s “one-dimensional vision of a human person, according to which man is reduced to what he produces and what he consumes," which he described as "one of the most dangerous snares of our times" (VOA News). Despite the lures of consumerism, it is possible to create a sense of community and civic duty among young people. Teenagers and young adults are in a unique position in the respect that they are highly tapped into their emotions, allowing them to channel their energy into either closing themselves off and judging others or opening up their hearts and forming deep, meaningful connections with each other. By instilling virtues within youth like empathy and serving others, young people can help the needs of the world by filling up where the world is lacking and being a beacon of warm, real light in an era of blue-tinted screens and ever-persistent darkness.

In short, while Mary's fiat is an untainted example of an unwavering "yes" to God, there are numerous challenges that young people face today when pursuing a life of faith in the digital age. In order to combat these challenges, it is necessary to instill virtues of courage, confidence, and humility into the youth of today in order to unite the younger generations into a community of faith and service. The difficulty of the modern fiat is a testament to our reluctance to say "yes" to opportunities that are presented to us; in an age of cancel-culture and perfectionism, the fear of failure far too often overshadows our need to step outside of our comfort zone in order to grow as children of God. Only through accepting our flawed humanity and by following the example of holy men and women like Mary can we shape our world into a more just, equitable society for all.

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Essay

Mary's Devotion to God and its Impact on the Youth's Divine Purpose in Life

At the beginning of many heroic tales, the protagonist is visited by a powerful being, whether wealthy or supernatural, and is given a mission to combat a threat to humanity. Even if this task was willingly accepted or not, the future hero embarks on a life-changing journey. Throughout the story, we see our main character develop the skills and knowledge to become the savior the society wants, and at times, we see them completely change for either the best or the worst. A main theme of these heroic ballads is for your people to forge their own path and to choose who they want to be. While these stories may seem to be filled with wisdom, they are dull compared to the miraculous true story of a humble, poor young lady who became the Mother of God. Mary's life was full of humility and sacrifice that the heroes young people idolized would not be able to endure. The Virgin Mary began her story when she said "yes" to become the mother of the world's savior. Overjoyed, Mary arose and went with haste to tell her cousin the good news (Luke 1:39). By taking on the mantle of God's Mother, Mary became a warrior against the ultimate destroyer of humanity, sin; thus, the perfect example for young people today.

At the moment Mary arose to meet Elizabeth, our Mother did not just physically rise from her place, Mary rose above the physical limitations and restrictions of society and she does this repeatedly through her holy life. At her Annunciation, the angel reminded Mary that nothing is impossible with God, and this was reflected in her being able to carry a child as a virgin. Comforted by the angel's promise, Mary carried Jesus in the midst of a Jewish society that could have stoned her for not carrying a child of Joseph, her husband. Even after giving birth and raising Jesus, Mary continued to trust in God. While following her Son, she chose to suffer beside Him as others persecuted Him. No mother wants to see her child suffer, but Our Mother had faith that God knew how to save humanity, even if it meant watching her son get nailed to a



cross. Contrary to following God's will, today's society preaches to young people that they should take control of their lives and assign themselves their own purpose. Instead of taking this path, young people can take the alternative path Mary offers. It is difficult for young people to let go of the control they want in their lives, but doing so allows God to seep in their lives and to direct them to a more purposeful life. Through an act of humility to say "yes" to God's will, young people will be able to surpass their mortal capabilities and society's shallow expectations.

While young people feel assurance in planning their future based on their human abilities, young people are not considering the intangible gifts God has given them to achieve their purpose. God looks beyond the labels society gives people. Society saw Mary as a poor Jew. God saw her as the perfect mother for the savior of humanity. If young people were to listen to what God asks of them in a humble manner, their earthly labels will no longer restrict their potential in fulfilling their divine mission from God. Through God, no longer will their SAT score, intelligence quotient, or socioeconomic status dictate their purpose in life. No longer will their sex, race, or physical limitations prevent them from carrying out their God-given mission. Like Mary, young people will be able to love unconditionally and embrace suffering, things that society would consider illogical or impossible. Mary's journey is an inspiration to young people because she began her journey as a young person. While young people are encouraged to let adults make their life-changing decisions, God's calling for each one of us does not depend on our personal schedules. Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary unannounced and on a typical day. Up until the angel's arrival, Mary had her future planned out: Mary would marry Joseph then live a devout Jewish life. As much as young people would like to treat the moment God reveals to them their calling as an exam date or a job interview, the best young people should do is to have an open heart like Mary and to remember that through God, anything is possible.

Sometimes, it takes heroes a while to figure out their purpose and it usually results in heroes coming up with their own purpose in life. When young people try assigning their own purpose in life, their so-called “purpose” is usually so often self-serving and temporary. When Mary accepted her purpose from God, what took hold of her was a missionary spirit that was unselfish and obedient to God. If young people were to be overflowed with this missionary spirit, they would no longer see themselves as the center of the world, but see that they are connected to the entirety of humanity. The missionary spirit instills the zeal for people to put the needs of others before theirs because this spirit enables people to see themselves as part of a unified Church, and not a separate piece. Mary’s missionary spirit enabled her to become humanity’s Mother, which gave her courage to help her Son carry the cross of sin for the sake of saving us, her children.

When young people are ignited by this passion from accepting God’s will, obstacles in life seem less daunting and our human nature more loving. Through prayer and charitable actions, young people can keep this zeal burning within themselves. However, society teaches young people to be charitable, but at a distance. To give to the needy and poor money, but to not build an intimate relationship with them. Instead, young people need to give and be with the needy and poor, to build a relationship that is eternal and does not end with a simple donation of money. Even though Mary was poor, she gave her love to those around her and continued to care for the poor and suffer with them. The youth do not need to be afraid to put themselves in the midst of suffering people because in doing so, cultivates a sacrificial love that strengthens the bonds within humanity. By physically and spiritually reaching out to the poor, the presence of young people aiding poor communities, which could be lacking in nutrition for the body or soul,

will bring hope that the future generations will not forget the people unhelped or abandoned by society.

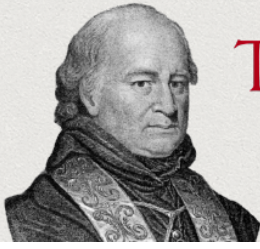
An impactful way to direct the missionary spirit to one the needs of the world would be the need to spread God's love to the impoverished. Even as Queen of Heaven, Mary chose to appear to the poor: to an illiterate girl in Lourdes, to peasant children in Fatima, and other people society had looked down upon. Modern culture has often influenced the youth to be judgmental toward people who are uneducated, homeless, or even look different. Mary looks upon everyone as part of her universal family and so, by adopting Mary's outlook on humanity, young people will see that it is all of our mission to love others regardless of their differences. All of our divine missions can be unique, but they all require trust in God regardless of the circumstances. In return for our trust in God, the youth will develop virtues that can be utilized to aid the impoverished who are lacking faith, hope, and love. The virtues, such as patience, temperance, and diligence, will aid the youth in expressing their missionary spirit that will last longer than a lifetime and leave a legacy of faith in God for future generations. Even after their earthly life, the saints are still fervent in their missionary spirit to pray for the living. This missionary spirit is not extinguished at death and it gives the young people an incentive to focus less on the temporary, destructive ego that society tries to nurture in the youth.

As I go through this journey in life, I know that Mary is with me every step of the way. As a young person who does not know what her calling is, I can look toward Mary as an example of who I can strive to be. To be like Mary does not imply to be a mother, but to be a servant of God. Both young men and women can emulate Mary by practicing humility, courage, and mercy. No matter how many times we fall from the burden of our sins, Mary will pray and intercede for

us, so that she can arise with us into a holier person. When we are in a moment of despair, Mary will come to us in haste, ready to listen to our woes with an open heart.

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Essays

## Journeying With God

“All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle.” This is a quote from Saint Francis Assisi that beautifully represents Mary and her life story. Mary endures many struggles throughout her life, and is surrounded by much darkness. She gave birth to her son in a stable, surrounded by farm animals and hay (Luke 2). She was forced to flee to Egypt so that her newborn child was not killed by King Herod’s men (Matthew 2). She and her husband struggled to provide for their son because they had very little money and possessions (Luke 2:24). Many years later, she was forced to watch that very son die, crucified and ridiculed (Matthew 27). Yet, after all of her suffering, after all of the darkness Mary faced throughout her life, the light of her faith and love still shone bright within her, and she continued to walk beside God. Mary made this choice, though a difficult one, because she trusted in the Lord, and trusted in what the angel Gabriel told her: “Nothing is impossible with God.” (Luke 1:37).

This idea that Gabriel puts into our minds that God is always with us, and that through him we can accomplish anything, is a truly beautiful thing. The world today is so full of struggle and pain that it is important to be able to recognize that those struggles and those pains don’t completely define us. While these hardships do play a part in who we become, it is God who helps us become better because of them and not worse. Gabriel reminds Mary, just as he is reminding us, that if we continue to turn to God and continue to love him, that we can push through those hardships with Him at our side, and become better versions of us because of it.

Mary is not the only saint with which we can find this example of overcoming struggles with the help of the Lord. In fact, you could look to almost any saint and you would find a great example of walking with God in times of struggle. One very well known example of this is Saint

Augustine. Saint Augustine struggled with depression throughout his life, and he searched for meaning in many of the wrong places. His search led him down a path of sin and self destruction, and he grew farther and farther away from God in the process. Despite all of Augustine's sin, God still wanted to be in a relationship with him, and through the people in his life, like his mother and Bishop Ambrose, God was able to bring Augustine back into the faith. Saint Augustine found peace and hope in God, which he thought was an impossible thing. Augustine became a priest and lived the rest of his life spreading and sharing the impossibly perfect and unending love of God (Aleteia). Augustine learned through his struggles that if he turned to God, anything was possible. Augustine's example can apply to all of us, not just those who are called to be members of the clergy. Any one of us, so long as we are willing, can turn to God, and through Him, anything will be possible.

This idea that nothing is impossible with God can provide hope in a person's life where they may not have had any hope before. Those who live in poverty, those in abusive relationships, or even the less extreme cases of those who simply feel a little lonely, can find hope in the knowledge that better times will come so long as they choose to live with the Lord. Oftentimes, people view God as someone who does not intervene in any human or worldly affairs. This can become easy to believe, especially because in recent years our world has become so filled with violence and chaos. People back this belief with the idea that if God was truly involved in the lives and well being of all, then there wouldn't be such terrible things as murder and poverty. In reality, this idea that God exists separately from us could not be farther from the truth.

I know firsthand what it's like to endure hardships and suffering. When I was younger, my mother and I were involved in a severe car accident. We both sustained severe injuries, and



were unable to do many of the normal, everyday things people hardly think about doing. Walking, talking, even doing something so simple as brushing our teeth became very difficult, and sometimes even painful, processes, and for a while it seemed as though things would not get better. Any person would hear this story and think it a sad one, but it is actually a very happy and joyous one. This is because during these struggles, I learned that there is joy and thanksgiving in doing even the simplest of things. I learned not only to appreciate the small gifts of everyday that were given to me by the Lord, but I also learned to walk more with God, and I became closer to Him than I ever had before. As I started to grow closer to God, I started realizing the progress I was making in my recovery. After almost six months of praying and putting my trust in the Lord, I was completely cleared to go back to my normal self. In choosing to walk with Him, just as Mary did, the impossible became possible. This experience shows just how present God truly is in our everyday lives, so long as we ask Him to be there.

Mary is a wonderful example to young generations of how, if we turn to God, he can help us through our difficult times. She herself was young when she decided to say yes to the Lord and to walk with Him, especially in her times of struggle. Her story gives the world a glimpse of just how much grace, love, and peace God can provide to the world if we give Him the chance. By knowing her story, and the stories of the many saints like her, we can turn to God and say yes to Him ourselves, and help to bring that hope in a loving God, through whom all things are made possible, to the many people who need it in their lives today.

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## The Impact of Mary's Journey

The theme "Mary arose and went with haste," from Luke's gospel is an invitation to everyone to be obedient to the will of God and to trust in His plan for our lives. Her journey gives hope in situations that may seem like there is no way out. It reveals that although everything will work out for the good of those who love God, there will be struggles. For instance, Mary had to experience the death and crucifixion of her Son before his wondrous Resurrection, the start of the early Church, and her ascension.

The angel Gabriel had appeared to Mary, unexpectedly, telling her that she had found favor with God and will have His son and name him Jesus. Gabriel said He would rule over the house of Jacob forever and have an everlasting Kingdom. She was confused and wondered how this could happen because she wasn't in a relationship with a man. Gabriel responded to her saying,

"The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God" (Luke 1:35-37).

After hearing this, Mary humbly submitted to becoming the mother of Jesus. She said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

When thinking about Mary's visitation to her cousin Elizabeth, the question may arise: How can this be an inspiration for young people today? I believe her visitation is an inspiration for young people to have unwavering faith and be obedient to whatever it

is that God is calling them to do. Like Mary, we may have to take a leap of faith to get to where He is calling us to go (Steve Harvey). We have to trust God through the uncertainties and unknowns of our lives just as she did (Cardinal Gregory). The song "Joy In The Morning" by Tauren Wells comes to my mind because it states, "Cause it ain't even faith till your plan falls apart But you still choose to follow". I think these lyrics are an admirable representation of what faith is and how Mary took part in it. She didn't have a clue what was going to take place when she said "yes", but she still chose to follow His way.

Mother Teresa is someone who I believe serves as a model for the Christian journey. She vowed to say "yes" in 1942 to everything that God would ask of her. Mother Teresa wrote in her diary, "I made a vow to God, binding under mortal sin, to give to God anything that He may ask, 'Not to refuse Him anything'". She surrendered to God, while she was struggling with her faith. Mother Teresa went through a very difficult time for almost 50 years of not feeling the presence of God. She underwent a long season of doubt and depression in her life, but never let go of her faith through all her hardships. The book *Come Be My Light* about mother Teresa's life expresses her struggles, "...but shows her full complete trust at the same time" (*America's Martin*). Despite her troubles and instead of walking away from the faith, she woke up at 4:30 a.m. and wrote to Jesus saying, "Your happiness is all I want" (Mother Teresa). Teresa also continued to visit her homes for the dying in service to God. I am currently going through doubt in my faith and to know that I'm not alone in this is comforting and gives me hope. Something that I pray will stay with me is a word that was spoken to Mother

Teresa by Rev. Joseph Neuner. He said, "...that feeling Jesus is not the only proof of him being there, and her very craving for God was a "sure sign" of his "hidden presence" in her life; and that the absence was in fact part of the "spiritual side" of her work for Jesus" (Joseph Neuner). Although mother Teresa still struggled after hearing this, it was something that gave her relief, and also gives me relief. She is an example for everyone to keep on pursuing the faith no matter what. Teresa said that, "Faith keeps the person who keeps the faith". Just like Mary, Mother Teresa couldn't see what was ahead of her, but still humbly submitted to the will of God.

The reality is that victory doesn't take away suffering. We have to have experienced low points in our life to appreciate the highs (Bennett Jeppsen). The angel's response to Mary that "nothing is impossible for God" provides a sense of hope during the difficult moments in the journey that God will help and give you the desires of your heart if you trust in him. He is a faithful God and will fulfill his promises just as He has in the past. I just came across a post on social media that is captioned perfectly to support this. It states,

"If GOD could close the mouth of the lions for Daniel, part the red seas for Moses, make the sun stand still for Joshua, open the prison for Peter, put a baby in the arms of Sarah, and raise Lazarus from the dead THEN He can certainly take care of you. NOTHING you are facing today is too hard for HIM to handle" (Candace Susan Lyons).

Mary, Mother Teresa, and the angel Gabriel are inspirations to us all. Through Mary and Mother Teresa's experiences, we can be confident that in "arising and going in haste" to follow God, He will never leave us the whole time, even if it may feel like it at

times, and never lead us astray. In addition to this, they give us hope that we will see his glory and be rewarded for our obedience and perseverance.

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