



Roberta Nobleman shows the tension and anger represented in the rejected wife mask.



Getting into character, Nobleman slips into another mask from her Marian play.



Bonnie Trafelet/Courier-Journal

Nobleman as the false virgin represents an unrealistic 1940s-style view of purity.

Unmasked

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stop people from being whole and complete, Nobleman noted. These masks can then prevent people from having full and satisfying relationships with others and with God, she remarked, and can at the same time trap people in certain roles or ideas about themselves and others.

One of the masks she wore for the workshop, for example, was a white virgin mask which the actress described as representing the 1940s ideal of the pure woman. The mask featured blond hair, a white face, red lips and eyebrows that were plucked down to thin black lines.

This mask helps create the role of unknowing ignorance, of not wanting to know, of not wanting to be involved, of not wanting to see or hear about the unpleasant parts of life, Nobleman remarked. All too often, she added, this is also the mask given to Mary, particularly as she is represented in art.

In contrast, Nobleman then donned a virgin mask she'd worn in the play the previous night. Composed of light and dark earth tones, this mask offers a truer face of virginity and of Mary — a face that reflects awareness of both the light and dark sides of life, she said. "We catch Mary in a moment of seriousness," she explained. "It reflects a moment in her life when she had to make a serious choice."

"What we also see is peace," Nobleman continued — not the easy peace of not experiencing or facing pain, but "the kind of peace that comes through hard choice."

"What I see Mary as is this whole, complete person," she said. "She was so pure in the sense

of being so whole a person that she knew what she was taking on when she agreed to become the Mother of God. I think the rest of us would have been paralyzed with fear. Mary let the fear drop away and she said, 'Yes'."

In making that choice to bear Jesus, Mary allowed God to enter her life more fully than any other human being had done, the actress said. This openness allows the creation of intimacy, which is a central theme of her play, and was an underlying thrust of her Wednesday talk.

"I feel that's what we have to do," she said. "We have to allow the Spirit to enter us. We all have masks that inhibit the Holy Spirit. Wearing any kind of masks, anything that covers up our true selves, is sad."

One of the dangers for church personnel, for example, is that they will put on a "super mother" mask, Nobleman said. The super mother is up in the morning before everyone, in bed after everyone, always working and sacrificing for everyone else. "Priests do it — running around trying to meet everybody's needs but not their own," she noted. Directors of religious education, parish staff, many kinds of caretakers put on this mask as well, she added. All too often, the super mother is trying to force the object of her mothering "to be the way the mother thought he ought to be."

In contrast, Jesus constantly unmasked people, telling them who they were — as he did with the Samaritan woman at the well, Nobleman said. The unmasking experience could be terrifying, but at the same time, liberating, allowing the person to be an individual, not the role created by the mask, she noted. The woman at the well was set free from her past because Jesus knew who she really was. "She left her water jug at the well, free of all that garbage," the actress commented.

When a person recognizes his own masks, he discovers this freedom, Nobleman said. "You begin to look on (the masks) with pity, then you begin to forgive yourself," she said. Understanding one's own masks can help a person to understand other people better, to become more open to them, and to be able to approach the degree of intimacy with God that Mary experienced.

Ultimately, Nobleman said, she spoke at the institute not to teach dramatic techniques participants could take back to their pulpits or

religious-education classrooms, but to help the people present to come to a better understanding of themselves.

"I hope they can put aside their mother's mask for a time," Nobleman said. "The most important thing is that they get a good feeling of themselves and get a new idea of the Holy Spirit. If you can love yourself, then that's a pretty good start."

"Basically," she concluded, "I would like somebody to come to the end of this week and say, 'Hey, I learned something about myself.'"

Youth theatre to present musical comedy

The Festival Youth Theatre at Nazareth Academy, 1001 Lake Ave., Rochester, will present three performances of "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" in August. The musical comedy will be performed in the Nazareth Academy auditorium on Friday, August 19,

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