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Welcome Address by the Most Reverent Patrick J. McGrath, Auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco

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OFFICIAL WELCOME
THE MOST REVEREND PATRICK J. McGRATH,
D.D., J.C.D.
Auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco

As one of the topics for your discussions these days is Mary, as found in the prayer of the Church, it is fitting that we begin with a prayer taken from the Liturgy of the Hours for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.

Father, you prepared the Virgin Mary to be the worthy mother of your Son. You let her share beforehand in the salvation Christ would bring by his death, and kept her sinless from the first moment of her conception. Help us by her prayers to live in your presence without sin. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome this meeting of the Mariological Society to the Archdiocese of San Francisco. I extend to all the members of the Society the greetings and encouragement of Archbishop John Quinn and offer you my warm personal regards.

Perhaps in our day more than in any recent era, the image of Mary, Mother of God, Herald of Peace, offers a bridge between divided brothers and sisters and a challenge to nations torn by dissension and antagonism. Your deliberations these coming days cannot avoid the emerging hopes for peace, now crackling across the globe like an electrical discharge. Our attention and dreams have focused on the events in China, and our untiring hope latches onto the unfolding drama in Moscow and Washington. Could it be that

the world is finally willing to attempt peace after so many foolish wars? Can once bitter enemies set aside past wounds in search of new understanding?

The world seems pregnant with promises of peace, but a mountainous counterweight of hatred, suspicion, and hurt must be counted in the balance. Perhaps what we most lack, after so many decades of anger and belligerence, is an image of peace. As a nation, as a people, as a world, have we forgotten what peace looks like? Can we glimpse the image of peace after the uneasy balance of terror and fear that we have for so long passed off as peace?

Mary, gentle and trusting, Mary, always hopeful and confident in the vindication of God, is an image of peace both ancient and forever new. Too often we are left confused by the swirl of world events. Mary too was confused when the angel came to her bearing such strange greetings. Her confusion, however, did not allow for despair or rage, but only trust in the promise of God. She knew the suffering and anguish of death, injustice and senseless cruelty. Her wounds, her tears, could not offer fuel for the engines of revenge or the drive for conquest. Suffering rather prompted Mary all the more to love and to hope—to love the God who had called her and to trust in the promise of his peace.

Perhaps it is possible that our world can also learn to trust and to hope. But for our trust to be vindicated and our hope sustained, first we must learn Mary's lesson of patience, gentleness, and humility. Must we always plunge into despair when we are confused? Is it inevitable that our fears must seek redress in toys of conquest and war? When hurt, shall we always cry out for blood? Many, perhaps most, in our world might answer "yes." But is there another answer, another image to set before us? I believe so; indeed, there are probably many images which belie the world's cruel hoax of false strength and sham security, but none stronger than Mary.

Mary, Mother of God, Herald of Peace, offers a course other than angry fear and conquering pride. If the untested waters of peace are to be tried in earnest, our world needs the image of Mary more desperately than ever before.

Your discussions then are more than intellectual calisthenics. Your search for the importance and meaning of Mary in the modern world and the immediate age can and should offer renewed hope and strengthened trust in the promise of God. Peace, like faith, is not won by merely wishing it or any exertion of human endeavor alone. We must trust in the promise of peace, true peace, which comes from God. But to trust, to hope, is something unfamiliar to this world of ours. Give then to the world an example and an image of trust and hope. Make present to a desperate world Mary, the Woman of Faith, the Mother of Hope.