

Our Lady's message of 25 November 1994:

**Dear children, Today I invite you to [decide for] prayer. I am with you and I love you all. I am your mother and I desire that your hearts be similar to my heart.**

**My dear little children, without prayer you cannot live, nor can you say you are mine. Prayer is joy, prayer is what the human heart desires. So, my children, draw close to my Immaculate Heart and you will discover God. Thank you for having responded to my call.**

### **Draw close to my Heart through prayer and you will discover God!**

Mary uses all her gentleness to open the door of our hearts. Her words are sweet, sincere, clear and essential, for where they come from there is only light and truth. It is a place where *night does not exist, where there is no need for the light of the sun or of lamps, for the glory of God gives it light* (Rev 21). Thus her words do not change - they are *antique, yet they are always new*. So even if the words are the same, they bear a new sense of imperativeness which shakes the heart from its state of torpidity to place it before unthought-of requests. Which requests? **I love**

**you all**, I watch over each of you (**I am with you**). But do you love one another? Do you take care of one another? Or is it that you ignore and resent one another, that you are divided? Know that in my heart you are as **one**. This is how you must be with each other. *Love one another as I have loved you*, it seems Jesus is saying to us (Jn 13).

So draw close to me; but not me "apparitions," not for obtaining the graces you desire. I want you to **draw close to my Immaculate Heart**. Let yourselves be transformed by my motherly love so your hearts may become **similar to mine**. Her heart is Immaculate, it belongs entirely to God. It is without a shadow of sin and it burns with pure love, thus God made it His dwelling place. God also wishes to dwell in our hearts: *When one loves me... we will come to him and make our dwelling with him* (Jn 14:23).

**Without prayer**, however, **you cannot live** - because we do not breathe the life that comes from God. We are drowning in life that is not life. *We have the reputation of being alive, but we are dead* (Rev 3:1), therefore, you cannot say you are mine and

I do not mean anything to you. You have nothing of the life that I live and teach to live, even if you come to me for your earthly needs and say you are devoted to me.

For those who do live, **prayer is joy, prayer is the heart's desire**. This makes us ask: why is prayer not joy for me? Because you do not love, because you are full of yourself, because your heart is caught up in the research of carnal joys and satisfactions. You are a slave to idols that impede you from loving and looking at God: *It is the Spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail* (Jn 6:63).

Why does my heart not desire prayer? Without realizing it, you are like a dead man who cannot desire life, like those whose *God is their stomach, their glory is in the shame. Their minds are occupied with earthly things*

#### Happy is the family where Mary dwells with Jesus

and so can desire nothing else. *But our citizenship is in heaven* (Ph 3:19). Thus: *awake, o sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light* (Eph 5:14). *Come to me, all you that yearn for me, and be filled with my fruits* (Sir 24:18).

Let us draw close to Our Lady's Heart and everything will change. God sent her to us on purpose so we could be regenerated through her pure heart which burns with love. It possesses complete joy and could desire nothing else for her children who are so easily led on.

Our Advent will be commitment to enter her Heart and thereby remain; and our Christmas will be commitment to become the dwelling place of God. *Fr. Angelo*

#### **Preparing for Christmas**

*Dear children,*  
*In these days of Advent I am calling you to family prayer... You know that the time of joy is drawing close (Christmas), but without love you will attain nothing. Therefore, first of all start loving your family and everyone in the parish... I invite you to do something tangible for Jesus. On the day of joy I wish that every family place a flower next to the Nativity scene so that Jesus may come and see your surrender to Him. (Advent '84)*

### **Towards new millennium: Church must seek unity & ask forgiveness for past**

The **apostolic letter** *Tertio millennio adveniente*, in preparation for the jubilee of the year 2000, was not unexpected. Card. Etchegaray, president of the Central Committee of the Jubilee, said "A Pope has never prepared for a Jubilee Year so much in advance, and never in the past has a similar mobilization been launched to involve all the faithful. We see John Paul II tending towards the year 2000 as an athlete does for a race, planted solidly in the pauline vision of Jesus Christ: *the same yesterday, today and always* - and it is such since the beginning of his Pontificate when Card. Wysnizinski told him: 'If the Lord has called you then you must introduce the Church into the third millennium.'

The **Jubilee**, which comes from an antique Jewish tradition, repropose the central event of salvation to the Christian community so that it may find new vigour for its journey. **The Pope's letter**, in fact, begins and ends with Christ. Other religions always portray man searching for God. In Christianity God Himself came to the people to show them how to go back to Him. God searches for man to defeat evil: this is redemption. The Word made flesh is thus the accomplishment also of the yearning which is present in all the religions, which is something to consider when dialoguing with them. In what condition is the world after 2000 years? This is the question behind the letter which first explains the meaning of jubilee.

**Jubilee is returning to God and treating all men equally.** The jubilee year (yobel) is the horn used to proclaim the year of jubilee) fell every 50 years. *This fiftieth year you shall make sacred... when every one of you shall return to his own property, to his own family* (Lev 25:10). Thus it was a year of grace, dedicated in particular to God during which all the children of Israel were to treat each other equally. It was a year when land was given back to its previous owner, when slaves were freed, when the oppressed received justice. The wealth of creation was considered a good thing coming from God to be shared by all. Those who had goods were only administrators of those goods.

**Scandal of division among Christians.** For the Church, the Jubilee year is especially *a year of remission of sins and penalty for sinners*. In this sense, the year 2000 invites Christians to an examination of conscience for the past 1000 years of history. Since this is the millenium of division of Christians, the Pope made the following entreaty on behalf of men: *among the most fervent petitions which the Church makes to the*

Lord during this important time is that **unity among all Christians** of the various confessions will increase until they reach full communion (16).

Hence it is appropriate that, as the Second Millennium of Christianity draws to a close, the Church should become more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children, recalling all those times in history when they departed from the spirit of Christ and His Gospel and instead of offering to the world the witness of life inspired by the values of faith, indulged in ways of thinking and acting which were truly forms of counter-witness and scandal... Acknowledging the weaknesses of the past is an act of honesty and courage which helps us to strengthen our faith, which alerts us to face today's temptations and challenges and prepares us to meet them (33).

The Pope then denounces the acquiescence given, especially in certain centuries, to intolerance and even the use of violence in the service of truth ... which cultural conditioning can explain but not justify. From these painful moments of the past a lesson can be drawn for the future (35). The present is not without its errors either with: religious indifference, ethical secularism and relativism, disoriented faith and erring theological shifts.

The Pope's harshest words regard the **lack of social Christian doctrine**: ...with respect to the Church of our time, how can we not lament the lack of discernment shown by many Christians concerning the violation of fundamental human rights by totalitarian regimes? Should we not also regret the responsibility shared by so many Christians for grave forms of injustice and exclusion? (36)

The letter then gives indications for **ways of preparing** for the year 2000. Christians are invited not to forget the martyrs of these final years of the second millennium - the "unknown soldiers" of God's great cause (37); to rediscover the theological virtues of hope, and to learn to better appreciate and understand the signs of hope (46); to rediscover the Church's preferential option for **the poor** and the outcast. In a tangible sense, Christians should raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world, to propose the Jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought to reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations (51).

The Jubilee is an occasion for **dialogue** with the great religions... The crisis of civilization must be countered by the civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty, which find their full attainment in Christ (52).

**Pope's plans: interreligious dialogue on Mount Sinai for the year 2000**

The events of the recent decades (the Council, the Marian year in 1989, the Synods and the Pope's many pilgrimages) are seen as preparatory events provided by God to create this possibility of interreligious dialogues.... Attention is being given to finding ways of arranging historic meetings in places of exceptional symbolic importance like Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Mount Sinai as a means of furthering dialogue with Jews and the followers of Islam (53) ... and a much desired **meeting of all Christians** in the year 2000 - all being entrusted to the maternal intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer and Mother of the Fairest Love. \* \*

## Our Lady's tears ...

In his homily during the Dedication ceremony of the Shrine in Syracuse on the 6th November, the Pope said: "... The Gospel stories never mention the tears of Our Lady. We do not hear of her groaning either on the night of Bethlehem when she gave birth to Jesus, or on Golgotha, when she stood at the foot of the cross. Neither do they tell us about her tears of joy when Christ rose. The Church, however, as bride of the Lamb, perceives her weeping through the intuition of faith and rejoices with her at Christmas and suffers with her on Good Friday.

Mary's tears are seen in her apparitions with which, from time to time, she accompanies the Church in her earthly journey. Mary wept in La Salette last century in a time when Christianity in France was facing growing hostility. Mary wept again here in Syracuse at the end of WWII ... for the enormous loss caused by the conflict, for the extermination of the sons and daughters of Israel, for the threat that came from the East and for the openly declared atheism of Communism. The picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Lublin also wept during that period. The event of Syracuse, however, is more widely known and attracts great crowds. Cardinal Wyszynski came here as a pilgrim immediately following his release from prison, and I also came here on pilgrimage as a young bishop during the Council.

Our Lady's tears belong to the order of signs: they testify to the Mother's presence in the Church and in the world. A mother cries when she sees her children threatened by evil, be it spiritual or physical. Mary weeps when sharing in Christ's tears over Jerusalem, at the tomb of Lazarus, on the way of the cross.

Shrine of Our Lady of Tears, you were erected to remind the Church of Our Lady's tears. It also recalls the tears of Peter, to whom Christ entrusted the keys of the kingdom of heaven for the good of all the faithful. May these keys serve to bind and loosen, for the redemption of every human misery.

May all those who are oppressed by the awareness of their sins, come here within these welcoming walls and experience the richness of God's mercy and forgiveness! May the tears of their Mother guide them here. They are tears of sorrow for those who refuse God's love, for broken-up or troubled families, for the young people undermined by consumerist civilization and so often disoriented, for the violence that still spills so much blood and for the feelings of incomprehension and hate that create enormous gaps that divide people and nations.

They are tears of prayer, of the prayer of the Mother that gives strength to all other prayers, that implores also for those who do not pray because they are too distracted by a thousand other interests or because they are obstinately closed to God's call. They are tears of hope that melt the hardness of hearts and open them to the encounter with Christ the Redeemer who is fount of light and peace for individuals and families and for all society.

Oh Lady of Tears, look with motherly goodness upon the sorrow of the world! Dry the tears of the suffering, of the forgotten, of the desperate and of the victims of all forms of violence. Obtain for all tears of repentance and new life which will open their hearts to the regenerating gift of God's love." \* \*

## The Pope on his devotion to Mary

**Totus Tuus**: there is much more to this formula than just an expression of faith. I was drawn to this type of devotion during WWII when I was working in a factory.

Prior to this, however, I thought I had to put aside that Marian devotion that was typical of my infancy in favour of Christocentrism. Thanks to St Louis G. de Montfort I came to understand that real devotion to the Mother of God is precisely Christocentric and more still, it is profoundly rooted in the trinitarian Mystery of God and in the mysteries of Incarnation and Redemption. Thus, with a new awareness, I rediscovered the Marian piety, and this mature form of devotion to the Mother of God has accompanied me over the years. The fruits of this devotion are *Redemptoris Mater* and *Mulieris dignitatem*.

With regards to Marian devotion, it should be clear to us all that it is not a question of sentimental inclination, for it corresponds to the objective truth concerning the Mother of God. Mary is the new Eve, placed by God before the new Adam/Christ beginning from the Annunciation, on the night of the birth in Bethlehem, at the wedding feast in Cana, at the cross on Golgotha and in the Upper Room at Pentecost - the Mother of Christ the Redeemer is the Mother of the Church.

The *Second Vatican Council* is a giant step in doctrine and in Marian devotion. In chapter VIII of *Lumen gentium* I found all the things I experienced during my adolescence, including the special bond that unites me to the Mother of God in ways that are always new:

The first of these ways - the oldest - has to do with the stops before the picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in the parish church of Wadowice during my infancy. It also has to do with the tradition of the Carmelite scapular, particularly eloquent and symbolic, which I first came to know about when I was very young and began visiting the Carmel "on the hill" in the town where I was born.

It has to do also with a tradition of pilgrimages to the shrine of Kalwaria: one of those places that attracts a great many pilgrims. This Marian shrine is also profoundly Christocentric. The first thing that the pilgrims do when they go there is the Way of the Cross, where man finds his own place next to Christ through the intercession of Mary.

The solemn Marian procession held prior to the feast of the Assumption is the expression of faith of the Christian people in the special participation that the Mother of God has in the Resurrection and the glory of her Son. My devotion to Mary has been strictly connected to the Christological dimension since my early years precisely because of this shrine of Kalwaria.

*Jasna Góra* with its icon of the Black Madonna is another chapter... This is a place of special evangelization...

I think that what I have said explains the Marian devotion of the present Pope well enough - above all, it explains his attitude of total surrender to Mary, that *Totus Tuus*.

(From the book: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, chapter 32)

\* **Radio Maria in Spain** - For the first time in Spain a radio station is able to transmit a religious programme that includes the Rosary, Holy Mass, prayers, news from the Vatican radio, explanations from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and various other themes of topical interest.

## With Our Lady set aside: clergy is in crisis and hearts have turned cold

After a pilgrimage to Our Lady of La Salette with 150 young priests, Cardinal Martini felt inspired to write a book on Mary's role in the Church - entitled: *From that moment he took her into his home.*

It is, he speaks of how the Church suffers because of a diminishing familiarity with the Blessed Virgin particularly by the "elite" of the Church (priests, religious, etc.). Martini goes on to relate this to affective crises or emotional disorders that torment them, consequently causing a diminishing Marian spirit within the Church.

Since the Second Vatican Council the clergy suffer from what we could call a type of aphasia which impedes them from forming an affective relationship with Mary, believing such a relationship to be suitable for the man of the street. They even excuse the Pope's ardent and intense devotion to Mary by telling themselves that his behaviour is probably typical of the Poles.

We have to admit that the Ecumenical Movement first, then the Council, threw light on the need for greater adherence to a well elaborated liturgy and to a critical interpretation of Scripture, including that regarding the Marian mystery. All this recovery is precious. Nonetheless, it is still not easy to match this critical spirit to the ardent heart typical of Marian devotion.

The consequence is that the ardour of hearts has burnt out. This has caused feelings of contrast, for example between pre-Council and post-Council priests. The elderly priests say the young priests do not love Our Lady and do not pray, which I deny each time I hear it, even though something similar can be sensed. The damage caused by this situation is more obvious in separatist movements and in traditionalists worried about the diminishing Marian devotion.

Another feeling of contrast can be detected amid the clergy. The priests live a type of double spirituality. Their own is more sober, colder and more scientific. The other is that of the people amid whom the priests carry out their pastoral work. I believe the time has come to take this situation into consideration, to place order into the affective and emotional lives of the clergy and of the Christian people. The present disorder is burning out the ardour in people's hearts.

**The Virgin not a hobby** - Vittorio Messori, who collaborated with the drafting of the Pope's book, adds: "I totally agree with the Cardinal. I find that his pastoral sensitivity has brought to the surface one of the most urgent problems in the Catholic world. A certain *clerical intelligentia* seems to have taken a dangerous turn, according to which Mary is a hobby for sentimentalists, or a type of optional for the traditionalists.

The Blessed Virgin, however, is the very heart of our faith. Her womb is the carnal root that assures us the truth of incarnation. If you remove the Mother, then the Son becomes nothing more than a simple "teacher" of ethics, a wise man, an illuminate. If you remove Mariology, Christology also falls.

Yes, in the past marian devotion had taken on an excessively sweet form, but this aside, marian devotion remains a duty for all Catholics." (Avvenire 11.11.94)

## LETTER FOR ADVENT Offer your life for peace

Peace to you sister! Peace to you brother!

Politicians analyze the breeding grounds of war. People discuss it constantly. Volunteers help the unfortunate. Others organize peace marches. And we unite ourselves to all men of good will. At the same time we follow our specific call by offering our life to give God's life to the world. We have decided that from now till May 13, 1995 we shall offer ourselves in a common intention for peace in the former Yugoslavia and in the world. On the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, we shall offer ourselves together to the Queen of Peace in the Eucharistic Celebration.

Till then, every evening, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I will offer to God the sacrifice of us all. Do not see this as a call to become nervously active. It is an impetus for you to enter into a **profound bond** with Christ's Priesthood and thereby include yourself in the co-redemption. St Peter invites you: *Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ* (1Pt 2:5).

Open yourself to a similar relationship with Jesus. In whatever circumstance, in whatever place, in whichever relationship or situation, no matter what your cross is, offer yourself in a way that is pleasing to God. Turn your heart into an altar on which you offer every sacrifice for mankind. In so doing, every sacrifice is exploited and consecrated by you!

With your love, attract the sick and suffering, that they may offer to God their every trial. In His hands their sufferings turn into pearls and irreplaceable instruments for the salvation of the entire world (cf. Apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris* by John Paul II). Let us journey together through the following reflections which will prepare us for Christmas, for the birth of the divine life in us. Reflect on God's words in this letter and on the whole context of it, till they become part of you.

**1. Possess peace within you** - Jesus left us with His promise: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid* (Jn 14:27). Peace within us is a reality, though it may only be the size of a mustard seed for Jesus gave it to us. The Almighty develops it in us as He did for Mary. It bears much fruit when it becomes life. Do not look for peace outside of yourself. Develop it within yourself, so that you may give it, as life, to another. If you are open to accepting this truth, you will purify yourself and overcome the fight that often throws you into failure, despair and nervousness.

**2. Open yourself to God's life, not to worldly life** - Peace is not fulfilled by thinking about creating order in world situations, nor by finding solutions to the needs of mankind. Peace is born from a vital bond with God. *I am going away and I will come back to you. If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father... and that I do just as the Father has commanded me* (Jn 14:28-31). He doesn't give satisfaction to anyone, not even Himself. He doesn't give human replies to human questions. His reply is to the question on true life. As a man He enters into union with the Father - fulfillment of life is found in Him.

Developing peace within ourselves means entering into a vital union with God. **Peace and joy result when we are able to overcome the limits that block our journey**

to the Father. Peace is not the aim of our research, it is life in God. The Father alone will give us all we need! (cf. Mt 6:24-34) Then peace will be born in us. So, open yourself to the divine life!

**3. Be sincere and humble** - Jesus is magnanimous and demanding at the same time. *If your brother sins, rebuke him; if he repents, forgive him. If he wrongs you seven times in one day and returns to you seven times saying: 'I am sorry,' you should forgive him* (Lk 17:3-4). The world replies: impossible! This impossibility of forgiving is in all of us. Man is unable to forgive. Forgiveness is an act of God. **Humble yourself before God and recognize your inability and His omnipotence!** Go down on your knees before His omnipotence. Enter into union with God so you may desire wanting His will and Jesus will say in you: *All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...* (Mt 28:18). If you enter into His life, you will have His strength and His authority.

**4. Make yourself free for Jesus' coming, for His power** - When will Jesus come in His glory and power? As soon as you are ready! How? The same way God revealed Himself throughout history. It's not complicated or unclear. In Noah's time all was as it is today till the flood came and *killed them*. Also in Sodom and Gomorrah, all was as usual till the fire descended on them and *killed them*. It will be the same on the day that the Son of man will reveal Himself (cf. Lk 17:26-30).

You can protect nothing, not even your own life, for everything passes except the divine life in you. Offer it to God so your heart may be free for the revelation of His glory. Jesus too offered all on the cross and God's power was manifested in Him by defeating death. **In this sense, the law of death will have no destructive power over you. In you and through you the power of God will be revealed to give life to the world.** How lovely to wait for Jesus' manifestation and His glory. It is so close to you!

**5. Being able to forgive is being able to sacrifice one's ego** - Many say: 'I can forgive, but I cannot forget.' This is superficial forgiveness. God's forgiveness transfigures man: he who forgives passes from a tragic memory to a victorious memory. This is the passage from death to resurrection! When we say: 'I cannot forgive or forget,' we are hiding a big **I DON'T WANT TO**. The person who causes war creates motivated justifications for himself (either consciously or unconsciously) which are preferred to the divine life in him.

Behind our every refusal lie interests that nourish our feelings of anger, revenge, sorrow, depression, sickness, not wanting to forget one's tragic experiences... **and these important motivations' feed our state of death and we transmit death to the others.** When we are ready to sacrifice all our interests and place the divine life in us before these interests, the power of God's forgiveness is born in us. So, enter the process of sacrificing your ego and all your selfish interests, raise yourself to the pure level of divine life. You will be God's forgiveness for the world.

**6. Do not react to evil, just offer your life** - Reacting to evil or a stupid action is falling into a dirty war. If we reply to evil with evil, to injustice with human justice, to violence with violence, we dirty and lower ourselves. This is the start of war. Jesus teaches us to reply to evil with the strength of God's salvation: *You have heard that it was said: 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a*

tooth.' But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil... love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Mt 5:38-48). When we are able to overcome the negativeness of the world and are able to offer a positive reply to human evil, we nourish the world with this divine life in us. This way we never lose God's peace.

His peace grows in us and returns to us even when men refuse us (cf. Lk 10:5-6). **God's love, which is active in us and overcomes the limits of all evil, is the only defence we have for the divine life in us.** The mortal poison of war, on whatever level (in our thoughts, feelings, words, works, curses...), cannot find a way into us. The law of death loses its strength and life wins. I invite you to enter into this state of life. Read St Paul (Rm 12:14-21) for your meditations and live these words.

**7. In God's love, unite the world to you** - Man divided in himself is at war with himself and with God, and he transmits his division to others. By closing himself within 'his community, his party, his land' he creates division. God loves all men and He offers His life to each of them. Therefore, allow God's love in you to be free for all. Let it be above all else. **When a boundless union with God's love is in you there is no room for division,** and in the Triune God you will carry all the peoples, nations and the divided groups. In the Trinity war is impossible! If you live this in you you will experience God's power with which to heal the divisions, and the real, live face of the Church will be manifested in you.

**8. A solemn and demanding call** - Each of us go to war, to fight the evil in us and around us. When you desire taking upon yourself this journey you will come across a lot of opposition, both in and around you. Satan will present you with endless motivations, ideas and selfish habits to make you change your mind. **Defeating these, opposing these with the divine life means stopping the wars in the world** - because it is in man's heart that war begins.

This is what St Paul means when he says: *Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. Put on the armour of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil...* (cf. Eph 6:10-20). May you be just as decisive. With the following prayer we shall be united in God. First pray it for yourself, then for all others who, like you, offer their lives for the peace. Then pray it for the whole world. May this prayer become your life and may your life become this prayer. May the peace of God become life that blossoms in you!

*For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant me in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith; that I, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that I may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen* (cf. Eph 3:14-21).

## HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

May the Lord bless you and keep you. Amen. May the Lord let his face shine on you and be gracious to you. Amen. May the Lord uncover his face to you and bring you peace. Amen. And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit descend on you and remain with you always. Amen.

*Fr. Tomislav Vlasic - 13 Nov. 1994*

## News from the Blessed Land

\* According to **Vicka**, Our Lady of late appears sad because of *wars in people's hearts*. We must accept God's peace in our hearts to defuse the subtle bombs of rejection and bitterness towards others which Satan places in them at the first chance.

\* More than with knives and granades, Medj. and the entire region is being threatened by the **demon of money**. In fact, the continual flow of humanitarian aid is cause of great temptation. Lately, two Croatians in Ljubuski lost their lives over a petty fight for the aid.

\* We have learnt that Marie-Claire, **the visionary of Kibeho** whom Our Lady asked to spread the Rosary of Her Sorrows, was killed together with her husband last summer. The other 5 visionaries are alive. This means that the privileges received from heaven do not assure any special temporal protection. The same goes for Medj., where only prayer and fasts can stop destruction. "The blood bath in Rwanda and Burundi could have been avoided," it is reported Our Lady said to Ivanka, who says Our Lady showed her the terrible massacre during the Anniversary apparition of 25 June '94.

\* **A young woman**, who was not devoted to Our Lady came to Medj. anyway. When the bus arrived after 2 days of travelling, Mass was just beginning and the group guide invited them to go first to Mass before making their way to their guest house. The young woman in question entered the church unwillingly. All she desired was a shower, a meal and a bed.

She tells: "After stepping into the church, I could feel Our Lady's mantle around me and I was aware of Her tender love for me. It was as though I was encountering my Mother for the first time. It was fantastic! Now She never leaves me and this has changed my whole life." (*from Sr. Emmanuel's diary*)

## How Mary prepares for death

On the 13th anniversary **Sergio Lepin** from Switzerland, went to Medj. with a group of French pilgrims from Lyon. He climbed Krizevac with the others on the morning of the 25th. On his way back down in the afternoon, at the 3rd station, he realized his wallet containing his passport, money and return ticket wasn't on him (in reality he had left them in his room). The shock of losing them was great. He sat down, but unlike Jesus who got up again, Sergio did not.

To those who asked how he was, he replied he needed a rest and would catch up to them later. After some minutes, though, he could not talk anymore, so they took him to the clinic in Citluk. From there, in a coma, he was sent to the hospital of Mostar. At 7.15 p.m. he died "of cerebral embolism following emotional shock," according to the doctors. Was it just a mere accident with tragic consequences?

During the trip Sergio had told the others: "I am going to Medj. for spiritual and physical

healing, and for the grace of being able to die a Christian death." Some fellow pilgrims asked what he meant and he replied: "It's not that I think a lot about death, but I am prepared and what could be a better than dying in a place chosen by Our Lady?" This reply surprised them even more. Concerning his physical healing, Sergio had decided to give up drinking and, at least during those five days in Medj., had succeeded. With regards to his soul, he had been purified, so Mary made arrangements to take him with her, practically warning him to give him time for the final preparations. (From an article in *Stella Maris*, Oct. '94)

## Why does Echo talk about events not yet verified?

Plus other things people aren't happy about

There are some **recurring questions** that we receive through the mail. For example:

1. *It concerns us that Echo talks of the apparitions as though they had already been certified...*

2. *Why is there so much talk about the visionaries? This star worshipping impedes the development of true Marian devotion... it causes doubts to arise in people's hearts.*

*We thank our readers for having entrusted their queries to us.*

1. What Echo spreads is the message of conversion which for 13 years has shaken so many souls and communities all over the world. This conforms to a line of clearly **ecclesial spiritual formation**, the aim of which is to help the man of the street to persevere and not to deviate. It is true that this is being done while the Church has still not given a positive opinion on the supernaturalness of the apparitions, but it is also true that this will not be given while they are still taking place.

No one now dares to disapprove the people who spread the message of Lourdes and Fatima prior to ecclesial consent being given (respectively, 4 and 13 years later). In the same sense, there is a renewed interest in the world for the things of God because of Medj. and no one can impede us from taking advantage of this so that the spirit of evangelical fervour is nourished.

2. The inconsistencies, controversies and superficiality also disturb us, but it is all part of man's limits and weaknesses. The fact that this takes place in a religious environment, however, makes people notice and talk more. On our part, we have never failed to signal these incorrect situations and to correct them.

3. The fact that a **lot of money** circulates in Medjugorje, making it a business, is not so surprising. Did not the same happen in Lourdes and Fatima and many other shrines? Let us remember that the pilgrims took their affluence and fast living to Medj., thereby distracting the families from their simple living and profound spirituality.

If Medj. was a business, how would it be after three years of war!? Let us remember that the pilgrims' money was needed for works of absolute necessity to maintain the thousands of people who took refuge there and who have been depending on the parish for some years.

4. With regards to the problem of **protagonism**, we say this is difficult to avoid in phenomena of such renown. On our part, we have been careful not to favour it in any way and we have always used moderation and a critical spirit towards certain manifestations.

Furthermore, we have insisted on the need of the visionaries having a spiritual guide (see Echo 103, page 6). We think our readers can attest to this; there are even some who are displeased by it. On the other hand, we cannot question the fact that the fathers and the visionaries have a mission in the world. The same thing did not happen in other apparitions, but the world of today is very different to the world of Bernadette and that of the three shepherd children. People are far more easily conditioned; the influence of worldliness is without limits and it is so easy to be infected.

From the Gospel we read: *scandals are necessary*. We must admit that not only the locals and the Parish, but all of us have contributed to the lack of response to Mary's gift. We have spoken of this responsibility on various occasions (Echo 100, 109 for instance).

The one and only reply is: **Mary is always there when man goes beyond his limits. Those without sin throw the first stone.** It's easy to imagine how the devil was annoyed by such a rich crop with all that famine. Do we really wonder then that he sowed weed amid the crop?

Let's be frank. Which supernatural manifestation has not been accompanied by defection and scandals, whether real or not - starting from the Gospel? Fixing our gaze on this is **similar to judging the work of God based on man's response**. If despite the war and other negative facts, pilgrims continue going to Medjugorje to receive grace upon grace and return home changed, then this signals the presence of a force which is greater than man's limits.

In the case of Medjugorje there is a superabundance of criteria that support its credibility. The whole world can testify to this. Why would so many bishops have gone there - many of whom received encouragement from the Holy Father? Many of whom are now convinced of the authenticity of the apparitions.

To conclude, one must make a distinction between the good branch and the useless ones; between the messages that actualize the Gospel and nourish an infinite number of people and those that do not. *Do as they say, do not do as they do.*

We try to resist the fatigue by looking at the positive side and by not giving in to the diabolic temptation to throw the washing away with the dirty water. So we get on with our work in the certainty that Our Lady assists us. Her blessing is enough for us, together with the favour of our readers from all over the world. *Fr. A.*

### Mary's Oasis blossoms

The young Marian community, **Oasis of Peace**, sees the recent Synod for Religious as an event that crowns the fertile developments of their community in this last year. A new house was opened in the diocese of Quixadá in Brazil and another on October 22 in Ancona, Italy. During this last year, the year of the family, the community received the gift of 4 priestly ordinations.

"Last September we received a visit by Msgr. P. Boyle, the bishop of Mandeville in Jamaica. The prelate made an official invitation to the community to open a house in his diocese which so thirsts for God. Statistics rate the country as the second poorest country in the world."

It was in March 1987 that Msgr. Boyle, a Passionist, gave consent to fellow Passionist father Gianni Sgreva to found a new congregation. The Marian community is made up of men, women and married couples. >>>

## VOICES FROM THE EAST

### Aid to Orthodox priests reconciles

*Help for the Church in Need*, for decades under the guidance of Fr. Werenfried, is one of the better known institutions working for the reconciliation of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The untiring apostle writes: "It all has to do with the **Rosary crusade** that both the Orthodox and the Catholics offered for the conversion of the materialistic western world and the victory of Christ in Russia, and the reconciliation of the two Churches. It is for this reason that we are helping 6,000 Orthodox priests (signalled by the Bishop) with \$1,000 each. In the same way we are helping 58 Catholic priests."

In the many letters sent to their bulletin, *The Echo of Love*, the recurring theme is: 'people go to church, but know so little about God and His Mother and know none or very few prayers. The priests do not have time to take care of the people because they are married and live hard lives. If only they could worry less about earning a living, they'd have more time for us...' People are searching for God but the sects are quick to step in where the Church is not present."

Another problem is that the Russians **do not trust** the Western world a great deal. They think that through the help we give them the Catholic Church wants to buy the Russian clergy and convert them. This Orthodox phobia only makes sense when seen in the light of the fourth crusade (1204) which ended with the sacking of Constantinople. The crusaders had betrayed their scope and began taking over political and economical positions and arriving as far as despising the Latin traditions: sacking churches and other sacred places and driving out the Byzantine clergy to replace them with Catholic clergy.

This crime is still seen by the "greek" people as irrefutable proof of the disloyalty of the western Church which aims at latinizing all Churches. This is why the Pope insists on a courageous recognition of guilt and of the default by Christians, with a proposal to make up for it so the journey towards unity and a new common evangelization is made easier.

**In Moscow with Alexej II** - "On 8 Sept. 1994, after hundreds of meetings with Orthodox Churches and communities to show our wish to pray and help one another, I was able to tell Patriarch Alexej II about the joys and graces of this voyage in a meeting that lasted 1 hour. I think I convinced him of our loyalty, given his friendly smile as he declared his willingness to accept our aid for the Orthodox Church. He said: 'What you are doing will help the two Churches get back together. I believe that it will not remain a unilateral aid...'" (The Echo of Love, Oct. '94)

**From the Church of the Martyrs** - An extermination camp for dissidents was recently discovered close to Omsk in Siberia, in the middle of a silver birch wood. It had been opened by Stalin in 1930. After his death in 1953 it was closed down and all trace of it cancelled. It was discovered by the Orthodox Archbishop after talking to the son of one of

>>> They have 7 houses in Italy and 2 abroad, one of which is in Medj. For information: Oasis of Peace Community, Cas. Postale 10, I-02036 Passo Corese (RI), Italy

the victims, who number 200,000. Many of these were martyred for their faith. The Archbishop wants to construct a small monastery on the site to honour them. In the church which has already been built, but is still unadorned, Catholic and Orthodox priests celebrated a Mass together for the victims.\*

**In Byelorussia** - In 1972 many religious were driven out of their convents. They did not give in, but continued practising their faith in secret, keeping the Eucharist hidden and gathering the faithful to pray. This way they were able to keep the faith of the families alive. For the catechism classes of the young, they hand-copied 15,000 catechisms, with the result of more than a few young people asking to share this life with the religious. It has been noted that these young vocations are the most vigorous. (From the Synod)

### In Fatima to thank Mary for Her Pope

Together with a dozen other priests and a small group of young future priests from the *House of Mary* Community, Polish **Cardinal Msgr. Deskur** went on pilgrimage to that blessed land where in 1917 Mary appeared to three young shepherd children. Cardinal Deskur is the President of the international Association of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. They conduct consecrated people to Fatima to ask forgiveness of sins and new graces for the Church, according to Our Lady's request in Fatima. In particular they ask for the grace of peace and the cessation of persecutions. Card. Deskur is also the president of the Pontifical Academy of the Immaculate.

In Fatima he blessed a new "House of Mary" to be directed by young consecrated people. Last November he blessed one in Lourdes. These communities will offer spiritual guidance for pilgrimages as wanted by the new spirit of evangelization.

At the feet of Our Lady the pilgrims expressed their gratitude for the miraculous protection She offers the Pope, Her beloved son, who carries the Word to the ends of the earth amid threats and danger. The following Pauline text can indeed be attributed to John Paul II: *frequent journeys... dangers among the people and in the city and among false brothers; in toil and hardship... and the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the Churches* (2 Co 11:26-28). Yes, the Pope is the most stimulating Sign of contradiction that Mary places before the eyes of the whole world *so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed* (Lk 2:35).

The bullet that nearly killed the Pope is embedded in the crown of this statue - a living icon of maternal love. Before it the group renewed the consecration of filial love to Mary and prayed for the Pope and the Church. Card. Deskur spoke at length with Sr. Lucia in Coimbra who asked that her cousins, Francisco and Jacinta, be beatified as soon as possible.

\* **More sorcerers than priests in Italy** - according to Card. Piovanelli of Florence. "The number of sorcerers in the official register doubles that of the priests, while the people who go to sorcerers are approximately 12 million. We can see from this how people easily mix up faith and superstition and how easily they fall into the nets of Satan, the author of destruction and death."

## When the group is not Church

When we live God's love,  
the family, the prayer group, the  
Church, the world all blossom

(...) The Church is the greatest gift given to mankind by God through His Son, Jesus Christ. In giving us the Church God gave us all we needed. The Church is our mother, our home, our country. We call the Church "Mother," and tonight I pray that each of you may think of her as being our "Mum," that you may love her as you love your own mother. I deliberately chose to speak to you about the Church, because I feel you cannot realize the meaning of the Virgin's call or feel Her presence within you unless you understand what Church is to a Christian.

Thus, I invite you all to be in communion with each other; those of you who belong to groups and those who do not. In the depths of their hearts people wish being in communion with someone else, be it only with the priest during confession. Being in communion with others is only possible when we are in communion with God.

**Groups experience trouble because they are not true Church** - In recent years many prayer groups have blossomed throughout the world. Their progress depends on two things: whether or not they develop the Church of God among themselves and the others, and on their entering into communion with God. If members are unable to share this communion among themselves then God is not present in that group. Similarly, if there is little or no understanding between groups, then God is not present in them. At this point I need to tell you some important things concerning this journey of: communion in God.

Many well-established groups, even though they believe in Our Lady's apparitions, have still to reach full Christian maturity because they are not in communion with God, with the Church and with their fellow men. Often these groups do not get on well together, to the displeasure of both Our Lady and the Church. Let me tell you a story. A woman who headed a national prayer movement recently came to me for counselling. She spoke about special gifts received from God, but at the same time about troubles in her family: her husband has affairs and her children have rejected God and the Church.

She was asking herself how she could be so unhappy after 16 years in God's service. I told her: "You have placed too many minor, peripheral things in the centre of this movement. You never really went into the depth of your spirit to meet your God, to meet life. What your husband and children saw was a religious mask. Your husband lost his wife and your children their mother because you did not enter into the life of God."

Can something like this happen? Well, we know that Jesus was put to death by priests! Movements and groups can also wear religious masks. When a group or movement fails to transmit life, when one is not united to the entire Church, then human elements are likely to show up. To the contrary, if one goes into true spiritual depth, he enters God's life and then transmits it to the others. The Gospel is the reflection of life. In fact, it means donating not words, charisms or songs, but the "new life" to others. So when our inner selves are open we feel the need to meet our brothers, to take this life to the ends of the earth.

**False religiousness that does not generate**

**love** - What is prayer exactly? What did Jesus say about prayer? Very little! He taught us to live, to create a real relationship with God, with ourselves and with our neighbours. The message, the main law is to love God with all our might and love our neighbours as we love ourselves (cf. Mt 22:37-39).

We can truly love our neighbour only when we are open to God and feel loved by Him and truly abide in Him. Human love does not help. You may shower toys, cars or money on your children and smother them in hugs and kisses, but this is not giving them the fullness of life - the eternal life - which only God can give.

Prayer that comes from the Gospel will change our behaviour. **The primary intention of prayer is wanting to enter God's love to transmit it to others.** What happens when during our prayer we love this way? What happens is that the Church is born. No one can separate us if we are in the Church. This consideration goes for families and married couples as well. If a wife attends a prayer group but has no idea of her husband's needs and he feels her heart has hardened, and even if she prays three rosaries a day and fasts twice a week, but she can't transmit the slightest bit of love to him then her prayer is false and worth nothing.

Genuine prayer should generate God's love within you and fill you so that it spills out onto your family. They will feel it and sooner or later it will blossom (in them). This makes false religiousness fall.

Love changes man and makes him more beautiful. In one of Our Lady's messages in Medj. she said how we become more beautiful when we pray. Do you remember? She said: *we are more beautiful, life is more beautiful!*

Falseness in the lives of people who believe creates division and refusal. Let me tell you another story. I used to give guidance to a young woman who was a member of a prayer group. One day she had a vision. She saw a grain of corn fall from the sky onto a desert. It sprouted and with time the desert flourished with life. Shortly after, the young woman entered a convent. Things began well, but after some time she found herself in the desert and her heart, instead of being like a grain of corn that dies and produces many more grains, turned to stone. I saw her again and asked her: "Why are doing this? The Lord doesn't want it. He wants you to love with His love, then you will see the grains of corn falling onto the desert to produce a fertile land. Withdraw into silence. All you have to do is radiate God's love." She listened to me and soon life began to sprout around her.

Whether we are in the family, in the prayer group or among our friends, our conversion must take this approach, but this isn't easy, for Satan will try to stop you. He detests the fact that love is filling a soul and tries to stop it from happening - and we become defensive, we try to defend what is sick in us, what actually belongs to Satan. This is a type of closure.

**Why so many divisions? Unity based on human relations will fail, sooner or later** - I invite all of you to enter within yourselves and develop this divine love. Divine love bears Life, as it bore Life in the Virgin's womb and in the Upper Room, thus bearing Life into the world. This is a very important task for us because the Church, who is the depositary of the mysteries of God, will accept a movement when she can recognize herself in that movement.

What does Our Lady want for us? She wants the real Church to be born in us; that Church full of divine love, as taught to us by the Gospels. This is important not only for the Church, but also for politics and indeed, the whole world. Why is there so much division in the world? Why do so many marriages break up? Precisely because people unite, but they do not unite in God. Their union is the fruit of a purely human choice and sooner or later it comes to an end. If union is based on mere convenience it will last only as long as mutual interests last. The whole world is in danger because authorities do not lean on God, nations do not act according to God's will. If they were in God, mankind would be a Church which is communion in God.

What does this mean for us? Well, let me tell you: one day a woman came to me. She said she needed advice, but what she really wanted was to complain about Jesus. She had been married three times and had only one son. She had intended marrying again, saying she had found real love in her husband-to-be. She wanted to know why Jesus was against this. I looked at her and said: "Jesus leaves you free to do as you wish, but if you want to accept Him as your friend, He will tell you that you're making another mistake, that you will fall into perdition. Just as you made a mistake with your first husband you are making a mistake with your fourth one. You're taking the wrong step." She looked at me for a moment and then said: "I believe."

What is the world of today looking for? Pleasure, money, material goods, power. All these things open the great door of selfishness in man's heart which draws him into the realm of Satan. This is why the world is so divided. If the live Church is within us it means we have discovered the live God and we are united in Him. This is the new Jerusalem mentioned in the Scriptures. Prophecies talk about new heavens and new earth, and this is where all spiritual movements must move towards.

Living God's love makes it possible to experience God's Kingdom already among yourselves. That goes for you all: married couples, families, religious and prayer groups. Everything that happens in a prayer group should be visible and tangible. When Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God (*It is here among you!*) He was teaching us how it is possible to live already God's Kingdom.

If we help the Church to live out its sacred deposit of faith in everyday life we will have fulfilled the true task of the prayer group, and no one could be happier than the Church, the priests or the bishops when they see that we do form the real Church. We will be happy too, for the person who loves desires love to spread to the whole world. A person without this love is full of fears and insecurity.

When we live the Church in ourselves, in our families, in the prayer group and with other prayer groups **we have realized our mission.**

Let us pray in particular for the Church and the Pontiff who guides the Church and who represents Christ on earth.

Fr. Tomislav Vlasic - 22.9.94

\* **Mary the Mother of Eucharistic Reparation**, by Msgr. George Tutto. A little booklet on our call to participate in the work of salvation. Write to: Marian Spring Centre, Unit J, Lambs Business Park, Tilburstow Hill Road, Sth Godstone, Surrey, RH9 8JZ, England

## St Anthony the great. The call of the desert

The most popular saint of the Mediaeval, whose feast day is on January 17, was born in Egypt on the banks of the river Nile. Up to the age of about 20 he led an innocent life with his parents. When they died he inherited an immense patrimony. One day at Mass he felt Jesus' words were being directed at him: *If you wish to be perfect, sell all you have, give it to the poor and follow me.*

Anthony did not hesitate to sell everything (except a part for his sister) and he *distributed* it among the poor, just as Jesus had said. He withdrew from the rest of the world and dedicated himself to meditation and the psalms. At first he remained on the outskirts of the village, then in a cave in the Libyan Desert, then in an abandoned castle invaded by snakes. When he arrived the snakes left. A friend took him the little food he needed to keep alive.

The desert is the devil's realm and it was here that the devil attacked him in every way possible, even bodily fights. He also tempted him under the forms of men and provocative women, and even little animals and chores which, though innocent, could easily distract him from God if he didn't keep watch.

Accepting our weaknesses and passions opens a door for the devil who then enters with ease. Anthony used to say: "A man who lives in the desert in search of peace is freed of three wars: the war of hearing, of speech and of sight. One only is left for him to fight and that is the war of the heart." He clothed himself in the *armour of God so that he could stand firm against the tactics of the devil* (Eph 6:11) and it was this that allowed Anthony to defeat him, but not without effort. Once he said to Jesus after being strongly tempted: "Good Jesus, where were you? Why did you not come to my help straight away?" And Jesus replied: "I was here, waiting to see your battle; and now, after your honest fight, I will make the whole world remember you."

From the writings of St Athanasius, the great bishop of Alexandria and doctor of the Church who paid frequent visits to Anthony in the desert, we read: "After about 20 years some friends of Anthony broke into his refuge. They were totally surprised by his aspect. His body had not suffered despite his lack of physical exercise and despite his fasts and his fight with the devil. Also his spirit was pure, like that of one *just initiated into the divine mysteries*. He was not perturbed by the crowds. He did not rejoice for the many people who greeted him. He was a man of great common sense."

After 20 years, the old man had died and the new man had risen. His example attracted many other men who asked for his prayers or who desired living a monastic life under his guidance. Hermitages sprung up wherever he went. He is known as the Patriarch of monks, because he was the first Abbot to form a stable rule.

Though he lived in the desert, Anthony was not a stranger to his Church. St Athanasius writes that during the "persecution (about the year 308) Anthony served the confessors who had been condemned to the mines and the prisons and at the tribunals he exhorted those who had been called to

uphold the battle, accompanying them to their place of martyrdom.

When the judge noticed the courage of Anthony and his companions, he ordered them to keep away from the tribunal and the city. The day after, though, Anthony placed himself in an elevated position in front of the tribunal so the prefect would notice him. Everyone was astonished to see him there, so fearless, as the prefect and his soldiers walked by. Anthony asked to be martyred, but the Lord had other plans for him."

He was invited a second time to return to the city by Athanasius to make a public intervention against Arianism. Everyone that knew Anthony, including people that held important positions, were drawn to him by a mysterious force. From St Athanasius' writings we also read: "When the emperor Constantine and his children learnt of Anthony's prodigies they began writing to him as one would write to a father. Anthony, however, did not give a great deal of consideration to their letters, nor did he feel pleased at receiving them. When the letters were delivered to him he would call the monks and tell them: 'Do not be surprised if a king writes to us, for he is just a man. Rather, be surprised by the fact that God wrote down the law for men and that He spoke to us through His Son.' "

Anthony died in the year 356. He was 105 years old. Two of his disciples wrapped his body in a sheet and buried him in a secret place - as desired by him, so that no one could bestow honours on him.

Exact with himself, Anthony was aware of man's limits. Once, a hunter was surprised to see how indulgent he was towards some monks. Well, our saint asked him to nock an arrow on his bowstring and to draw his bow and to keep on drawing it. The hunter replied that if he kept on drawing it, it would eventually snap. "That is exactly what will happen to the monks if they are subjected to excessive tension," Anthony replied.

On another occasion a monk from the monastery in Abba Elias had fallen into sin and had been expelled. He went to Anthony and stayed with him for a while. Anthony then sent him back to his monastery, but they turned him out again. Anthony took him in again and sent the following message to the monks: "a ship was wrecked and lost its load. With great difficulty it managed to reach the shore. You, however, want to throw back to sea even that which was saved." The monks understood and took their brother back in.

Some other examples of his sayings:

\* To a monk who asked him what he should do, Anthony replied: do not confide in your judgement, do not worry about the past, dominate your tongue and your stomach.

\* Anthony said: "I could see all the nets of the enemy laid out on the ground, and shaking, I said: 'Who can escape him?' A voice told me: 'Humility.' "

\* One of the friars asked Anthony to pray for him. He replied: I cannot have compassion on you, and nor will God, if you do not first make an effort to plead God yourself.

\* A monk was praised by his brothers. Anthony put him to the test to see if he could withstand being scorned. Seeing that he could not, he told him: "You are like a town that is made pretty on the front, but has been plundered from within." *Fr. A.*

## "Rejoice with me" a recurring message

*"I rejoice" is a phrase that Mary has used frequently in these dramatic times (see the messages of 25 March, June, September and October '94). These words on Her lips echo the prophetic announcement of Isaiah (61:10): I exult for joy in the Lord ... for he has clothed me in the garments of salvation, in the cloak of integrity. Mary brings us the joy of the Gospel. Gospel means good news, thus: news of righteousness and peace and joy brought by the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17) which is rewarding and helps us overcome the sufferings and nightmares of the present time and helps us remain firm in the certainty of God's love.*

*The first piece of good news announced in her messages is without doubt: "I am with you" (see Echo 101, page 4) and this runs parallel with the I am with you of Jesus (the Emmanuel) which Mary experienced in profundity during Her life time. He who accepts the "I am with you" of Jesus and of Mary are capable of receiving the "I rejoice," i.e. the joy and peace that the world cannot destroy (cf. Jn 15:16). This is the object of the second and more important message, a reflection of which follows:*

The Queen of Peace has been appearing in Medjugorje since the 24th June 1981, and for more than ten years She has been giving messages to the world. She continues to appear even in the hearts of Her "dear children" - who joyfully believe in Her presence and love - and She continues to put into effect the plan of salvation that God entrusted Her with for the man of today.

This new way of entering into the lives of Her children makes it possible for them to listen and accept Her voice, giving them the strength to respond to Her call...

One of the many subjects that the Queen of Peace talks about and that perhaps goes unnoticed with respect to other subjects is that of **JOY**. She is a true mother and as such it is Her great desire that we each receive this gift. It is a gift She partakes in and wishes to share with us. Mary makes us understand that joy - fruit of the Holy Spirit - is perceived by one's heart. To perceive it, though, one must be in a state of grace and be in an attitude of constant prayer.

Joy is the gift of God, it is God's own life in us, it is full communion with Him. Therefore, it depends on His presence and on the certainty of His love (for us). It is also joy out of gratitude for all that He gives us. It requires us to be detached from ourselves, from others and from material goods. It is also joy that comes from gradually realizing we are "instruments" in God's hands.

Joy has only one enemy: Satan - sin - separation from God. Joy, like all gifts of the Holy Spirit, is characteristically diffusive: the more you give it to others, the more it grows in you. It is also a faith journey to be discovered in prayer - and bring us to a greater knowledge of the God of joy who is the fount.

Joy should always accompany Christian testimony, which is why the Queen of Peace would like us to be joyful witnesses to the God of joy. In this world so full of indifference and anxiety, joy should be an eloquent and convincing "sign" for those far from God.

Joy is also something to share not only with others, but also with our Mother. She has often invited us to a communion of joy in God, particularly on important feast days.

These teachings by the Queen of Peace contain two very significant and consoling promises; two certainties which are intimately tied to our personal commitment to prayer and good works. One: even the difficulties and the crosses can be transformed into joy by the power of God. Two: we children, with the limits of our humanity, can be reason for joy for the Mother and for the Lord! By living holy lives and our conversion makes this possible.

Finally, there is another reason for being profoundly joyful which the Blessed Virgin (out of Her immense humility) did not say explicitly, but which cannot be overlooked. It is the joy of having Mary as a Mother, sister, guide, advocate of grace, mediatrix and a living model of every virtue. It is the joy of having Her with us in this time of special grace for all humanity. Queen of Peace, remain with us! Amen, Amen!

#### **Some of the messages of joy**

I wish for each of you to be happy, but with sin no one can be happy. That is why, my dear children, you must pray and in prayer you will recognize the path to happiness. (25.2.87)

I desire that through you the whole world may know the God of joy. I bless you with blessings of joy. (25.5.88)

Rejoice in God the Creator for He has created you so wonderfully. Pray that your life may be full of joy and thanksgiving which flows out from your heart like a river of joy. (25.8.88)

Be on watch, that every encounter in prayer be a joyful meeting with God. (25.11.88)

I am calling you to great joy and peace, which only God can give. (25.3.89)

Let all that you possess be in the hands of God. Only in that way shall you have joy in your hearts... rejoice in everything that you have. (25.4.89)

I am with you and I want to introduce you continuously to the joy of life. I desire that everyone may discover the joy and love that can be found only in God, that only God can give. Pray to be able to discover the greatness and joy of life that God gives you. (25.5.89)

I am here to help you and to lead you to heaven. In heaven is the joy through which you can already live heaven now. (25.5.91)

Today I invite you all again to prayer, to the prayer of joy, so that in these sad days none of you may feel sadness in prayer, but a joyful meeting with God your Creator. (25.7.92)

Do not forget that your life does not belong to you, for it is a gift by which you are to give joy to others and guide them towards the eternal life. (25.12.92)

May your life be a joyful witness of Jesus. (25.2.93)

You will be happy only when Jesus is your friend, and then it won't be difficult for you to pray, or offer sacrifices, or testify to the greatness of Jesus in your lives because He will give you the strength and the joy in this time. (25.11.93)

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**\* "Obedience to God makes us stronger" - St Maximilian Kolbe**, Apostle of the Army of the Immaculate and martyr of Auschwitz:

"Think, my brother, how great is God's mercy and how great is the dignity conferred upon us. With our obedience, we overtake the limits of our own smallness and are conformed to the divine will which guides

us to act righteously with His infinite wisdom and prudence and to produce wonderful effects. It is through accepting this divine will - that no creature can resist - that we become stronger than everyone else."

#### **\* SOS for Rwanda and Burundi**

"These lands have been invaded by terror. It can be read in the eyes of everyone. The orphans are a legion by now: 150 thousand! It's a procession of endless sufferings, of innocent people marching towards the unknown; they are so helpless: nude, hungry, sick, mutilated, homeless. If only you could see the distress of these peoples who are dying of hunger, in silence, on the roadsides! We are asking for help in the name of those who have neither face nor voice. What may be a miserly sum for us is "vital" for them. (Fr. Ernest Tomè)

We now know that only a small part of the thousands of tons of aid that the UN unload every day for the refugees in Zaire arrives at destination. The greater part of it is going to the Hutus and the Zairese army.

#### **\* News about Joan**

Many people write to Echo and to me personally to ask about Joan. Has she been liberated? How is she? Do we still need to pray? Hers is perhaps the worst case of diabolic possession I have ever known. In Joan's case, God has permitted this for obvious apostolic reasons of conversion and reparation.

Considering the actual religious situation, it doesn't surprise us if Our Lady asked Joan and her family to prolong her enormous sufferings. For this we thank and encourage all those who pray for the liberation of Joan, who, by the way, recently lost her mother. The best prayer is the Rosary.

(Fr. Gabriel Amorth)

\* The **MIR Information Centre** has been set up in the parish office of Medj. for the reception of news and eventual transmission of it once certified. Transmission will be twice monthly via fax. Fr. Slavko, Marija Dugandzic, Milona and Sr. Emmanuel are part of the editorial team. Their fax no. is: 0387-88-642702

\* **Medjugorje Online** (24 hour BBS) - Friends in Bolzano (N. Italy) have set up a Medjugorje Information Centre for modem connection. Various documents such as the message and the last three numbers of Echo in the various languages, photos, articles, useful addresses, etc. are available for copying. It is a meeting point open to all. The Echo is already a registered user with its own mailbox. The no. of the BBS is 0471-286011 (14.4 band, Mac+DOS. Fax no. 0471-288185)

\* Pat Ryan from Surrey writes with a suggestion for Pope John Paul's **75th birthday** which will fall on the 18th May 1995. "If Our Lady has asked us to pray for the Pope, would it not be a wonderful idea for readers to have a Mass celebrated for him on that day in their own parish? The whole world could be united, not only in prayer, but also in a visible expression of our love for our Holy Father."

## **A Letter from a Missionary**

\* **Enemies of life in Third World countries** - From the many letters received from missionaries, we have chosen to publish the following. It is from **Huaraz in Peru**. Fr. Stephen began by describing various pastoral initiatives that provide relief for the extremely poor families of his parish of 40,000 people and goes on to describe the strong social pressure exerted by the rich countries on the poor countries to weaken their deciding power on an international level.

"There are 64 organizations, many of which are financed by the UN, that distribute artificial contraceptives. A doctor in a small mountain village told me how the cabinets in his state-run clinic are brimming over with contraceptives that are sent free to him from all over the world - but there is not one phial of penicillin to cure a poor child.

Due to a publicity campaign many people are feeling guilty about having extra children. Yet, Peru, which is three times bigger than Italy and has only 22 million inhabitants, has many riches. They are there, just waiting to be exploited, but no one helps us.

Yuri, a young man from the parish, was asked to recite in a play for a UN-owned company. He would have been paid well and he had planned to buy a bicycle to help out his family. The contract had already been drawn up, but on the first day of rehearsal he realized that the aim of the play was to propagandize the use of contraceptives using false and tendential information. Between easy money and a Christian conscience, Yuri did not hesitate to choose the latter." A small example of heroism. \* \* \*

**ECHO IS FREE** - it lives on your donations. Personal cheques accepted. If you are a group of friends, etc., pool your donations into a single cheque to share the expense, or forward it on to a distributor if there is one near you.

We would be grateful if readers could consider **covering at least the postal expenses**. Nearly all copies sent abroad go by **air mail**, which is very expensive, especially for the parcels. For example, the 1700 copies we send to Australia (in 2 parcels) costs nearly US\$400 and the 1000 copies to California costs us about \$130. A single copy to the US costs 60c. Single copies are sent out by the thousands.

Thank you for all you can do.

As of the 21st November 1994, we are officially: The Echo of Mary Queen of Peace, this being issue number 1.

A **special mention for Roger Gottier** from Ottawa: he produces 2000 copies of the English edition and 1000 of the French edition, at his own expense. Also to **Franco Silvi** who runs the Marian Centre in Rome and distributes 22,000 copies in a network that embraces Rome and the surrounding district. To do this he gave up his job!

We thank everyone for supporting this work that wishes to be ever more **the echo of the Queen of Peace**. Together with my helpers and volunteers, near and far, we ask God, through the intercession of Mary, to grant you all a Christmas of grace and a new year of peace.