



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace 127

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Our Lady's message of March, 25 1996:

Dear children, I invite you to decide anew to love God above all else. In this time, where the spirit of consumerism has made people forget what it means to love and to appreciate real values, I am again inviting you my children to give God first place in your lives. Let not Satan attract you through material things, but my children, decide for God Who is freedom and love. Choose life and not death of the soul. My dear children, in this time when you meditate on the passion and death of Jesus, I invite you to decide for life which reblossomed with the Resurrection; and may your life today be renewed through the conversion which will lead you to the eternal life. Thank you for responding to my call.

Decide for God and everything you will find

Meditating on the Lord's Passion and death stirs up in our hearts repentance and conversion. Mary spoke of this in Her last message. This month Our Lady says: decide anew to love God above all else. In fact, Jesus' Passion and death is the utmost manifestation of God's love: He gave us His Only Son so that in Him we would have life. Thus, the paschal mysteries speak to us of life's essential value which is recognizing God's infinite love so that we too become an offering to God and a gift of love for our brothers and sisters.

If Mary is calling us to decide for God's love it means we are not sincere, i.e., certain Christian habits survive in us thanks to feasts like Easter where these are more heavily emphasized, but at the same time we satisfy all our worldly desires in order to keep up with the world. We are, instead, called to found our life not on the logic of have and enjoy, but on the pages of God's Providence. Right from the beginning Mary invited us to do this: Do not worry about your food or clothes... observe the birds in the sky, the lilies in the field... Seek first God's Kingdom; His justice and the rest will be given you. St. Catherine would say: "It is the lack of reason that makes us live in an abyss of madness." The desire to accumulate, to enjoy, as if life depended on us, is the cause of our perennial conflict with God, as though He were a threat to our well-being, and we forget who we are and that others need us. This is the sin of the wealthy

peoples which cries out to God for vengeance, because it destroys the equilibrium of creation and provokes the anger of the needy, making them rebel. This will be the real catastrophe of the future, we don't need to fantasize on heavenly chastisements described in some so-called secrets.

Does all this regard us too? The general level of Christians who are not continuously nourished by the Word and the Bread is easily conditioned by the current pagan mentality. Those who accept a compromise do not celebrate Easter: No one can serve two masters (Mt 6:24). Jesus taught us to love God and give our life for our brothers. When we let ourselves be caught by the consumer-istic spirit we do just the opposite. That is, we no longer build on love, like dry scrub in the wastelands, if good comes, we cannot see it (Jer 17).

Do not spend uselessly: be content with the essential (1Tim 6:8), give alms for what you have (Lk 11:41). Appreciate real values. We were created for freedom, yet we are slaves to everything: do not believe in the false freedom preached from the pulpits. Unless it is Jesus Who makes us free, we are slaves to sin, thus, we are no longer children in the Father's house, but prisoners to things, events and finally, to death (cf Jn 8:31-36).

Decide for God Who is freedom and love. God gives Himself to us, making us able to live in communion. This is love, which is spread in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who lives in us when we accept Him. He frees us gradually from slavery, so we are not conditioned by sin and the world, but are able to possess the real values which are fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22). It seems that these values have disappeared from among men: there is not one good man left, not a single one (Ps 13), but Our Lady desires that they blossom again in Her children and in the world through the Resurrection.

Decide for God... decide for life which has reblossomed with the Resurrection. Life is in God and also love for life (see how easily we end life without Him). Away from Him even the most beautiful things are dead right from the beginning. Only God survives; without Him all is ended and man is without hope. I am the Resurrection and the Life... He who believes in me shall never die (Jn 11). And Our Lady wants precisely this: that we live a life which befits those who have risen.

Fr. Angelo

Message of 25 April 1996:

Dear children, Today I invite you again to place prayer first in your families. My children, if God comes first, then in all that you do you will seek God's will, and this will make your daily conversion easier. My little ones, with humility look for what is not in order in your hearts and you will understand what you need to do. Conversion, then, will become for you a daily task which you will carry out joyfully. I am with you my children, I bless you all and I invite you to become my witnesses through prayer and personal conversion. Thank you for responding to my call.

Seek God's Will in Prayer for daily Conversion

In the previous message Mary exhorts us to give God first place in our lives; now She urges us to place prayer first in our families (to encourage the practice of the family Rosary for the month of May?). Either way, it means making God central, and once again Our Lady speaks of prayer: the foundation for family life. Without it is like wanting the fruit without the tree. (Where it is not possible to pray together, those who have understood will pray for the others).

However, which prayer? Above all, the morning and evening prayers which place us in front of God to adore, listen to and thank Him and entrust to Him all our deeds of the day, and to ask forgiveness. There is a great difference between praying out of habit or to fulfil one's duty and placing ourselves before God with open and sincere hearts! In the latter case, we perceive God's will and we will try to live by it: in all that you do you will seek God's will.

Praying and doing God's will is one and the same thing. Being constant in this filial and sincere confrontation with God allows for a daily conversion, making it easier to recognize one's falls and correct oneself. The practice of examining one's conscience is indeed useful. Through it we look back on our day to see if our behaviour was always correct. This is the best antidote to egoism, to divisions and to conflicts which destroy peace and cause people to go their own ways; be it in the family or out of it.

Yes - my little ones - says our Mother with love, concern and trust: with humility look for what is not in order in your hearts and you will understand what you need to do. A continuous conversion requires continuous repentance. It would be a wonderful thing if we for first are able to ask forgiveness when we offend someone: it would purify us and allow Love to grow in us, and each time would be an occasion to take another step forward.

Then, conversion will be for us a daily task to carry out joyfully, for we would see its necessity and be more vigilant. Unless our days are lived in view of our conversion, we remain on the same plane as the old man weighed down by worldly passions. It is like building on sand instead of on Jesus Who is the living rock. Our Lady wants our spiritual growth so that we become Her witnesses, and through us, men will come to know of Her motherly love which has the power to move them from a senseless life into the kingdom of love. It is indeed a great task that She asks of us, however Mary adds that She will be with us and will bless us.

Mary's spiritual direction is simple; easy for everyone to follow, and the message, both wise and practical, is worthy of an incomparable teacher.

Fr. A.

Neither age nor feebleness stop the Pope

John Paul II is surprisingly energetic. When fatigue and age-related ailments would otherwise make him collapse this non-human energy keeps him going. It supports him when he is disheartened by the daily tensions created both in and outside the Church. "Youths shall faint and grow weary, young men shall fall exhausted, but those who hope in the Lord renew their strength, they put on wings like eagles" (Is 40:30).

Siena: social solidarity more important than pursuit of profit.

In St Catherine's city the Pope offered an evangelical and practical solution to present social tensions:

"With the Jubilee, a new opportunity is offered to businessmen, politicians, trade unions and workers to examine themselves about their own responsibilities, to eliminate injustices and, to make new relationships distinguished by brotherhood, justice and solidarity... Be reconciled to God, to make conditions of the individuals and of the peoples more human."

"The first cause of these serious injustices is certainly a blurring of the moral conscience, which is also the result of excluding God from the scope of the human heart and of society. If we are inspired by a purely materialistic and hedonistic vision of life, it is highly unlikely that the logic of private interests will be replaced by that of the common good or that we will pay attention to the need to respect, serve and advance the whole man in every man, especially in the weakest and most defenceless." ...

"Work, businesses and solidarity must go together... reconsider the business firm, regard it not only as a place of conflicting interests, but as a working community, aiming to achieve the common good for all its members ... involving the harmonization of production needs with the protection of the land. ...It is necessary to make the principle of solidarity the constant, determining criterion for economic policy decisions.

Many wrongly believe today that the broadest market freedom is automatically translated into wealth for all. ...There must be a suitable balance between the demands of economic freedom and that of the 'culture of rules' which protects the rights of labour, the first of which is the right to work for all.

It is now time for a new policy of social solidarity, which has nothing to do with a comfortable welfarism that the long run is harmful to those assisted, but rather is based on interventions aimed at encouraging a sense of responsibility and industry on the part of the weakest groups, providing them with the practical possibility of expressing their own talent..."

The Pope quoted St Catherine: "You desire to reform your city; but I tell you that this desire will never be fulfilled if you do not strive to overcome the hatred and resentment that prevail among you because of self-love, i.e., if you do not make the effort to seek the overall good of the whole city and not merely your own private advantage. Those in a position of authority ... do not wield authority for their own good, but for the common good of the whole city" (from the Dialogue of Divine Providence).

Politicians: do not forget the family! - "It is particularly serious that motherhood can sometimes become a reason for fear to young mothers, who reach the point of contesting or even denying this vocation, for fear of losing their job or of being unable to find one." And in a pressing appeal to politicians he said: "the family is the fundamental cell of society and as such should always be defended and sustained." ... "Equitable laws are required to safeguard the weakest, but even more necessary are people who are open and motivated by an authentic spirit of love."

"Young people: be prophets of life and prophets of joy."

"I ask you to become prophets of life, by your words and deeds, rebelling against the civilization of selfishness that often considers the human person a means rather than an end. Do so by concretely helping those who need you and who perhaps, without your help, would be tempted to resign themselves to despair. I also ask you to be prophets of joy: the world must recognize us by our ability to communicate to our peers the sign of a great hope which has already been fulfilled in Jesus, who for our sake died and rose again. Do not forget that the future of mankind is in the hands of those who are capable of providing the generations to come with reasons for life and optimism. ...

God said to Joseph: 'Do not fear to take Mary as your wife.' I repeat to you: do not fear to take Mary as your mother on the journey of life! Do not be afraid of confiding in Her, of entrusting to Her maternal hands your every problem, anxiety, expectation and project. Above all, trust Her with the project that concerns your whole life: your vocation, in the sincere gift of what you are, for your own

self-fulfilment."

Pope speaks on fasting, from TV too, and echoes Queen of Peace

During Lent, the Pope dedicated his Sunday "Angelus" messages to lenten penance. It was noticed by all that he used the word "fasting": further proof of how he and the Queen of Peace are tuned in to the same frequency. "Penance seems a subject from another era, and yet this is a vital theme for every person and for society itself. In its deepest sense, penance means repentance for sins and the purpose of amendment - is there anyone who does not need to do this?"

It is more appropriate than ever to rediscover the wise directives of Paul VI's Apostolic Constitution Paenitemini, which was not always correctly interpreted, some thinking it meant a relaxation in penitential practices. External acts of penance are never an end in themselves, but an aid to interior repentance, which consists in freeing our heart from the grip of sin with the help of grace, and redirecting it to the love of God." ...

"Penance should be practised first of all in faithfulness to one's duties, in the acceptance of the difficulties arising from one's work, and from human co-existence, in a patient bearing of the trials of earthly life. Some voluntary penances, such as those the Church suggests, support these attitudes. With them we are invited to share in the Cross of Christ, and the human will, under the influence of grace, is strengthened to be ready to obey God's law promptly and totally." (3 March)

"Fasting means moderation in food consumption, and should be rediscovered especially in those parts of the world where not only is food plentiful, but overeating is the cause of illnesses. How can we calmly have a feast when countless human beings are suffering and dying of hunger? Fasting also implies this: giving something up in order to share it with those in need..." (17 March)

"Penitential fasting is obviously something very different from a therapeutic diet, but in its own way it can be considered therapy for the soul. In fact, practised as a sign of conversion, it helps one in the interior effort of listening to God: Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Today, especially in the affluent society ... consumerism, instead of satisfying needs, constantly creates new ones. Everything seems necessary and urgent: you end up having no time to be alone with yourself. Enter again into yourself, St. Augustine warns, to find yourself. Not only is our spiritual life at stake, but our personal, family and social equilibrium.

One of the meanings of penitential fasting is to help us recover an interior life. Using moderation also extends to other things: it is a great help to the spiritual life. Moderation, recollection and prayer go hand in hand. This principle can be appropriately applied to the mass media. Their usefulness is indisputable, but they must not become the 'masters' of our life. In many families television seems to replace personal conversation rather than favour it!" (10 March)

For the 50th anniversary of his priestly ordination, the Pope sent a letter to priests on Holy Thursday, asking them to consider the sense and responsibility of their vocation, and to give thanks with him for the gift of priesthood. During a visit to seminarians in Rome the Pope told them: "Even if a priest is a Bishop or a Pope, the most important thing is that every day he is able to celebrate the Eucharist and can confess."

Orthodox Church: crisis may help unity

It is a tradition of the Orthodox Church that the national Churches who desire autonomy can obtain it by forwarding a formal request to the Mother Church of Constantinople. In Estonia, the Orthodox Church was swallowed up by Moscow with the Russian occupation of 1943, however, the Bishop, the clergy and thousands of faithful took refuge in Sweden. In 1991 Estonia got back its independence and the Estonian government asked the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, to restore autonomy to the Estonian Church.

The Patriarch, aware of his role as *primus inter pares* and guarantor of the Orthodox faith, accepted the request in February 1996. It is a positive affirmation of his spiritual primacy, despite the 'political' authority which the Patriarch of Moscow holds over all the Churches in the former Communist territory - and which are now asking for autonomy.

Alexei II of Moscow thus opposed the decision and accused Constantinople of invading his 'canonical' territory. This has resulted in a break between the two Churches, almost a schism. Bartholomew, who is gaining a lot of moral authority, did not fear to write to Alexei: "The great stock of Russians received the light of Christ and the baptism of salvation from the ecumenical throne. A mother never stops loving her children, even when they deny her - and even if you, beloved brother Alexei, >>systematically refuse to recognize the historical significance of the Church of Constantinople, and continue to call her merely a big sister."

Could not all this be part of a Providential plan to see the oriental churches spiritually united? May they all be one!

Who will save the Church?

Present-day Marian apparitions definitely have a great influence in the life of the Church and the world. It is not just a question of how much fruit they bear, for this is easily seen in the millions of believers and non-believers who are moved by the messages, and in the many pilgrimages and prayer groups. The phenomenon of conversions obtained by the Blessed Virgin with Her visits to the earth when these weren't numerous, should open everyone's eyes on the authenticity of the apparitions. More than quantity, Mary's presence in an atmosphere of modernistic bewilderment is a gift of quality without comparison in the two million years of Church history.

Not the Council will save the Church, but the Virgin will save the Council and the post-council. Not the ecclesial movements will save the Church, but the Virgin will save the ecclesial movements. Not the theologians and biblists will save the faith, but the Virgin will save the theologians and biblists from their mental bewilderment. Modernism advances, undermining the Catholic faith in a very subtle way, dissolving obedience to the ecclesial magisterium, but the Virgin is intervening to consolidate the union of believers with the Vicar of Christ.

A shrewdly subtle satanic strategy aims at destroying the Eucharistic cult: tabernacles given always less

importance; the Eucharistic Sacrifice seen as a fun social event rather than the saving sacrifice of the eternal Priest; Communion trivialized and tolerated in mortal sin which reduces the sense of the divine transcendence; the Real Presence ignored and adoration suppressed... With Her apparitions, Mary intervenes and checks the attempts to corrode the faith and the Christian cult and morality. This alone is enough to see how great is this heavenly gift. And Christian spirituality? To light up holiness again in the widespread climate of listlessness (partly due to the mediocrity of pastors compromised by the spirit of evil) Heaven intervenes and multiplies mystical gifts and spreads over the Church seeds of very high personal holiness. Just think how fruitful giants like Padre Pio are for the Mystical Body of Christ, though they are habitually hidden by strict reserve. Such gifts are guaranteed by Mary's motherly assistance.

The power given by God to His Holy Mother is without a doubt enormous. When God intervenes through His Mother, He acts as the mighty King with generosity worthy only of a King. We cannot yet measure the final bearing of the apparitions in this era of terrible bewilderment, nor of the numerous unordinary charismas or the mystical gifts outpoured by the Holy Spirit through Mary's intercession. It must be said, though, that without the heavenly intervention of Christ and His Mother with apocalyptic signs, the Church would have been ravaged by an inevitable disaster.

God sees and thus provides accordingly!

(Medjugorje, Spirito e Verità #105)

What Medjugorje means for the Church

"URGENT CALL to accept and live the Word of God to face the times"

In Hotel Alga of Tucepi, which had housed most of the 4,000 Croatian refugees during the war, the Third Seminar on Prayer and Information was held from 17 - 21 March for leaders of peace centres, pilgrimages and groups. Together with the priests who work in Medjugorje and the visionaries Mirjana, Vicka and Jakov, about 100 people from 17 different countries took part. The conclusion serves as a guide for the future. It is divided into 6 main points:

1. God waits on our contribution in view of the third millennium... To make the future a more Christian and a safer one, Our Lady is calling all of us through the words of Her Son to total conversion.
2. Read the Holy Scripture, live it and pray to understand the signs of the times. The Medjugorje messages for us are an urgent call to live the Gospel of Her Son.
3. It is Our Lady's wish that prayer groups be organized in the world, so that through these hearts are opened to the work of the Spirit and are able to recognize the Word of God in the Bible for our times and discover in prayer the ways to realize it.
4. Prayer groups should be the heart and soul of the parish community, a fount of trust, of love and of peace.
5. The scope of the MIR Information Centre is to serve the pilgrims, the peace centres and the groups,

through its archive, library, information office, press bulletin and its robofax, internet, BBS and radio services.

6. Collaboration and exchange of information among groups of same nation and with that of Medjugorje is recommended.

The Seminar concluded with a pilgrimage to Medjugorje where the representatives of the linguistic groups held a press conference. The seven volumes by Fr. Slavko Barbaric were also presented. Entitled "Pray with the Heart," they are the result of his long and fruitful work with the pilgrims: they have been translated into 20 languages.

The group then went to the hill of apparitions and to Sr. Elvira's Upper Room Community (Comunità Cenacolo) where they heard moving testimonies by three of the ex-drug addicts.

Better organizations, Spiritual Assistance and Ecumenical Centre needed for pilgrims

In his conclusive speech, Alberto Bonifacio spoke on behalf of the groups from Italy, Brazil, Spain and Bolivia: "We have accompanied many pilgrims over the years and brought a lot of aid during the war (which we still do - as far as Sarajevo, Tuzla and Gracanica in the north), because we love Our Lady, we love Medj. and we have seen the importance and the urgency of Her message. We are grateful to Our Lady, but also to the parish, to its monks, the visionaries and the families for all that we have received." Alberto expressed the hope that Medj. may once again overflow with pilgrims, so that many others receive the same opportunity of conversion, and then said: "We are all enormously responsible; we must become humble and pure servants of Mary and of Her messages, i.e., of the Gospel. This responsibility belongs to us who guide pilgrimages and prayer groups, just as it belongs to the parish which accepts the pilgrims.

Therefore, it is hoped: 1. That the witnesses of these events (visionaries and monks) may continue to offer to the pilgrims, especially new ones, their important testimony in suitable ways, places and times through an efficient information office able to supply all necessary indications.

2. That pilgrims travelling alone and without a suitable guide be helped by local guides and appropriate pamphlets regarding the Shrine. Furthermore, care must be taken to impede that fanatic views or messages different to the truth reach the pilgrims.

3. That the parish will ensure the stable presence of a priest for each major linguistic group for a constant presence for confessions, spiritual guidance and liturgical functions.

4. That there be an improvement to the town's facilities: roads, parks (especially for buses), footpaths, a path from the church to Podbrdo and one to Krizevac, a medical centre, toilet facilities, telephones, etc.

5. To conclude, our ardent hope and dream is that Medjugorje become a great ecumenical centre, like and more than Assisi, in the spirit of St Francis. May it become a great centre of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of love and of peace and promote ecumenical meetings for the various Christian faiths and religions. May Medjugorje become a great centre of charity for all those who because of the Bosnian war are in need, whether they be Catholic, Orthodox or Muslim: the economic resources brought by the many pilgrims could be used partially for this purpose.

And may the Queen of Peace, Mother to us all, through Her presence and love, continue to illumine and convert us.

Towards the 15th anniversary of the apparitions

Next 25 June, at the Shrine of the Queen of Peace, anniversary celebrations will be held for the 15th year of the apparitions. Fifteen years ago Our Lady said: I have chosen this parish ... and through His Mother, God began speaking to the world, calling it to live in peace and be reconciled. This state of being chosen calls us to look back and see just how many have been here and were profoundly moved, and we are all invited to be renewed and to become aware of Mary's message. This is the chance for a profound spiritual revival of the parish, to give force to all that is good and to eliminate all that does not correspond to the divine will.

For this purpose a mission was organized for the parish from 29 February to 3 March. The preacher was Fra Vitomar Slugic, a professor at the Franciscan School of Theology in Sarajevo, who lived in Fojnica and Sarajevo all during the war. The usual evening programme of prayer was maintained. On Fridays great crowds of faithful took part in the Way of the Cross which was led by Fra Vlado Kozina on Krizevac. The mission concluded with the Rosary for peace and consecration of the parish on the hill of apparitions.

News from the blessed land

Our Lady to Mirjana: "God's love is great, make a home for Him in you!"

On Monday the 18th March, beneath the large tent behind the church, a great crowd gathered in prayer well before 1 pm, for Mirjana desired that as many as possible be present for her annual apparition. The visionary arrived before 2 pm and began reciting the Rosary, a decade of which was led by her 5 year-old daughter Marija. At 2 pm precisely she stopped for the apparition which lasted 6 minutes. The message was: "Dear children, I desire that you reflect lengthily on this message which I give you today through my servant. My dear children, God's love is great. Do not shut your eyes, do not close your ears as I repeat to you: His love is great! Heed my call and my petition which is addressed to you. Consecrate your hearts and make in them an abode for God, that He may live in you for ever.

My eyes and my heart shall be here, even if I will appear no longer. Do all that I ask of you and in the way with which I lead you to God. Do not reject God's name so that you are not rejected. Accept the messages so that you may be accepted. Decide, my children, for this is the time of decision. May your hearts be upright and innocent so I can lead you to your Father, for I am here because of His great love. Thank you for being here!"

After the apparition Marijana said Our Lady was full of joy; She became sad, then joyful again. "We prayed two Our Father's and two Glory Be's for those present and for those who still do not know God's

love. We also spoke about other things, but I cannot tell you about this. However, we did not speak of the secrets. Our Lady blessed those present and their objects. I, Mirjana, saw and heard Our Lady's love. I invite you to meditate on and live this message."

Pilgrims return in pre-war numbers.

Great numbers of pilgrims visited Medjugorje over Easter. Numerous were the groups from Austria, Germany, Italy, North America, France, Argentina, Spain, Poland and the Czech Republic. Since the church was unable to hold everyone for the evening functions, these were celebrated separately in 9 different languages. 20 odd priests were always available for confessions, 200 pilgrims took part in the 5 spiritual retreats of fast and prayer in the Domus Pacis house during Lent. On the 25th April there were numerous groups of pilgrims from Australia, Korea, Lithuania, Slovakia and Ireland.

Evening programme during daylight saving:

6 pm: Rosary; 7 pm: Holy Mass, the blessings and the third Rosary. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on Thursdays after Holy Mass and on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10-11 pm. Each Sunday at 3 pm: Rosary of Peace on Podbrdo and each Friday at 3 pm: Way of the Cross on Krizevac. Information on the programmes and meetings at the Information Office from 10 am-2 pm next to the presbytery, or phone: 387-88-650400; fax: 387-88-642339; or write: MIR Info Centre, BiH-88266 Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, via Croatia.

*** Youth Festival. The seventh this year. From 31 July - 6 August. Theme: "From the Darkness to the Light."**

Wed. 31 July: all together at evening Mass; 1 Aug.: The darkness in and around us; 2 Aug.: The light presents itself, procession with Blessed Sacrament in the evening; 3 Aug.: Encounter with the Light, confessions, theatrical performance by the youth from Sr. Elvira's community: "From the Darkness to the Light"; 4 Aug.: May there be light in the world, festival of Marian songs; 5 Aug.: Mary Mother of Light; 6 Aug. at dawn on Krizevac: The sun is born into the world through me. Testimonies by: Sr. Elvira, Jean Plivar, Fr. Cosimo, Fra Jozo Zovko, Sr. Briege McKenna, the visionaries, Gen. Philip Morillon, and others. Participants are asked to bring head/earphones and an FM radio for simultaneous translations, and a Bible. Anyone wishing to participate with classical musical instruments, contact Agostino: fax 387-88-642339; these will be housed in the Domus Pacis house.

International Festival of Music: "Medjugorje 96"

For this occasion, a concert has been organized for the 21st June. It is entitled: "Message of Peace from Medjugorje to the World." The orchestra will perform for the first time "Missa de tempore in aevum" by Italian composer Flavio Colusso. Participants include the tenor Josè Carreras, the soprano Cecilia Gasdia, 12 choirs from 12 different countries of the 5 continents, 4 actors for the Gospel readings and the symphony orchestra of the Croatian Radio and TV. The concert will be conducted by Maestro Vjekoslav Sutei, one of the best young conductors alive today. This cultural event of great interest will be transmitted by the Croatian Radio and TV, and a good number of foreign television stations too.

New Stations of the Cross have been placed in the church of Medj.

The stations were blessed by Fr. Luka Susac who had been parish priest of Medj. for many years. The walnut stations were created by the famous Italian sculptor Pino Sacchi who has worked for many churches and cathedrals. He is now 85 years old and desired doing these Stations as the last job of his artistic career. The work of art, of great moral and material value, was donated to the church by the Heger family from Switzerland who have been friends of Medjugorje for many years.

* **Five new bells** were blessed by Fr. Tomislav Pervan, the Provincial Father of the Franciscans in Herzegovina, on the feast day of the Annunciation. One of the bells is dedicated to the 15 years of apparitions, one to St James the patron saint and a third to the 50th anniversary of the 64 Franciscan martyrs of Herzegovina.

The Rectors of the Croatian universities met in Mostar in the beginning of March and then visited the Shrine of Medjugorje where they met Provincial Father, Fra Tomislav Pervan and the monks of Medj. The President of the Parliament of the Croatian Republic, Katica Ivanisevic, who headed the body of rectors, said after the visit: "Medjugorje is a great thing for Croatia, not only because it has renewed and given new strength to the Catholic faith, but because the face of Croatia is made known to the entire world through it." (From the Press Bulletin, Medjugorje)

Friday of Sorrow - Ivan returned from the US with his wife Laureen and daughter Kristina. On the evening of Good Friday, on the hill of apparitions (Podbrdo), Our Lady of Sorrows appeared to Ivan and blessed all those present. She said: Dear children, I thank you because I know that you are united to me in sorrow. My dear children, when you return home this evening, pray the sorrowful mysteries before the cross. Go in the Lord's peace, my little ones. During the apparition, Ivan saw Jesus in His passion.

Easter: climb Calvary and be freed of the cross!

Medjugorje, Easter Sunday evening. Anna, a young French woman, is running, dancing, jumping and circling around as she leads the French pilgrims in the farandole. It is difficult to tell whether she is laughing or crying for joy.

That morning, Anna was expecting her usual dose of pain, opium-based pills and humiliations. She was born with a handicap: congenital muscular hypotonia which had deformed her feet. She had already undergone 3 operations and knew that she would be confined to a wheelchair in a matter of time. That morning, however, she decided to do something crazy: with the help of friends, reach the first station of the Way of the Cross on Krizevac, to ask that her parents be healed (her father suffers from myopathy, her mother from hemiplegia). She knew she'd have to pay dearly for such an act and had brought with her an extra dose of sedatives.

She reached the first station with great difficulty. She felt the urge to continue the climb despite the pain. Anna said that it was as though she were communicating with Jesus, as if He had shown her a tiny part of His sufferings and asked her to suffer and offer it for and with Him. Incredibly, step after step Anna reached the top with the others, and on the way down she realized that the pain had gone, though she did not take any sedatives. In her room Anna continued to jump, turn and walk on her heels: something she had never been able to do! That evening Anna led the dance, and the day after she climbed the hill of apparitions to give thanks. Padre Jozo told her to gather up all the medical documentation that was available to verify the healing.

The best gift of this Easter for Anna, though, was her encounter with the Blessed Virgin. Since the time she was an adolescent, Anna had held a grudge against Our Lady and was convinced she could find her

way to Jesus without Our Lady's help. Anna, though, did not have peace. In Medjugorje she made peace with Mary and consecrated her life to the Immaculate Heart, ready to do whatever God may ask of her, with the help of Our Lady; and Anna found peace.

* Thanks to the growing communion between the various communities in Medjugorje: Oasis of Peace, Sr. Elvira's Upper Room Community, Kraljice Mira, Beatitudes, Precious Blood, we can now ensure the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel of adoration between 1 pm and 4.30 pm. Adoration will conclude with Hymns to the Blessed Sacrament and the Eucharistic blessing. The initiative responds to the message of 25 September and gladdens the hearts of the pilgrims.

* Our Lady on singing - No doubt the concert will attract great crowds. Let us pray that the Blessed Virgin will make use of this love for music so that love for Her Son Jesus may also grow in the hearts of Her children.

Our Lady inspires composers and singers to worthily express praise of God and so hearts may turn to Him. Here in Medjugorje She has already transformed pagan singers into Christian singers - after having pulled out the weed of drug from their lives - and Mary Herself gave singing lessons to the members of Ivan's prayer group in the early years: No, my children, you do not know how to sing with your heart, and She sang with the visionaries, who were then joined by the others. None of the visionaries have fantastic voices, however, they do know how to sing with the heart.

Our Lady has not composed songs, but She has expressed Her preference for some of the old traditional Croatian hymns which exalt the Passion, Resurrection and Glory of Jesus. These are still sung on the hill of apparitions and they really are very moving.

(From Sr. Emmanuel's diary)

Fr. Jozo's Italian Mission Many Bishops present

In February and March large crowds turned up to pray with Fr. Jozo at the various prayer meetings in Italy.

Naples: Fr. Jozo met Cardinal emeritus Corrado Ursi, a great friend of Medjugorje, in the New Church of Jesus. The Bishop of Ischia, also present, embraced Fr. Jozo and said: "Welcome, father. Thank you for what you are doing for us and for the entire Church. We are praying for your mission."

Massa: Eucharistic concelebration with Bishop Eugenio Binini who thanked Fr. Jozo for his presence and mission.

Florence: Card. Piovanelli welcomed Fr. Jozo with an embrace and spoke with him for half an hour. In the end he blessed him. The meeting, held in the church of St. Salvatore, ended with a candlelight procession in honour of Our Lady. Mary's medicine - Pontassieve: Fr. Jozo communicated the Cardinal's blessing, adding: "He was very good to me and stressed the importance of prayer meetings to help bring about the conversion of the world and of each of us." Fr. Jozo urged the faithful to accept Our Lady's messages and put them into practice: "Jesus must be placed in the families and among the peoples

through forgiveness and acceptance of the cross which is the way of conversion." He gave the following example: "Just a few days ago I took a young Croatian boy to the hospital in Parma who had been shot. The doctor was taken aback by the boy's serenity and said: "How can you be so tranquil after what you went through? You're lucky to be alive!" The young boy said as he held up his rosary beads: "These are my medicine and my serenity."

Fiesole: Msgr. Luciano Giovannetti thanked Fr. Jozo for his presence, and Fr. Jozo asked him to help Our Lady at the next Episcopal Conference so that other Bishops may learn of Medjugorje.

Rovigo: Bishop Gomiero encouraged Fr. Jozo in his mission, adding that it was Msgr. Grillo's testimony that convinced him to welcome Fr. Jozo into his diocese. (Msgr. Grillo is the Bishop of Civitavecchia in Rome where a statue of Our Lady of Medjugorje recently cried tears of blood.)

Combat witchcraft and miracle chasers

Alessandria: Msgr. Charrier asked Fr. Jozo to help him combat faith founded on miracles and witchcraft in a city infested by sorcerers and to correct the idea of a religion based only on the extraordinary. Msgr. Charrier said: "Here there are people who put the Sunday Mass on the same plane as going to a sorcerer or fortune-teller. Our Christians confuse the divine Revelation with private messages. They don't understand that our faith can't be founded on private messages. Help me; they will listen to you. Make them understand that our faith is founded on Christ the Lord and that Mary takes us by the hand to lead us to Him."

Fr. Jozo consoled the Bishop by saying how his prayer meetings respond completely to his request: "I always talk against sorcerers and fortune-tellers, etc. I suffer greatly when I see a Christian, who was baptized and married in the church, depend on a fortune-teller. The meeting here in Alessandria today is an important one for this precise reason."

For the orphanage being constructed in Siroki Brijeg send donations to: Matteo Rossi, Via delle Grazie, I-54100 Massa, Italy; or: Medjugorje Appeal, Unit J Lambs Bus. Park, Tilburstow Hill Road, South Godstone, Surrey RH9 8JZ, England. Indicate: For the Siroki Brijeg orphanage.

Fr. Slavko in Africa

Fr. Slavko Barbaric visited the islands of Réunion and Mauritius at the end of January. Like little edens for their tropical climate and natural beauty, these remote and scarcely inhabited lands emerge from the Indian Ocean about 700 km south of Madagascar. 90% of the population is Catholic and they have known the messages of the Queen of Peace for some time because many from these islands go on pilgrimage to Medjugorje. These have formed prayer groups and peace centres.

In Réunion, Fr. Slavko, together with the visionary Mirjana and her family, went to prayer meetings in ten different churches which were unable to contain the large crowds. In the church of St Francis of Sales Cardinal Jean Margeot who had been to Medjugorje (see Echo 121) and who believes in the messages, celebrated the Eucharist with 20 other priests. On this occasion, the choir sang in Croatian. Bishop Gilbert Auby also warmly greeted the visitors and told them that he knows and follows the events of

Medj. because they bear good fruits and that he is thus open to the message of peace.

Also in Mauritius the local Bishop, Msgr. Maurice Piat, took part in the great prayer meeting with 20 other priests to confirm the importance of the messages. It is a great joy for all those who are impeded by poverty and distance to receive a direct testimony of the events by the protagonists of Medjugorje. Fr. Slavko then went to Uganda where Cardinal Wamala, who has also been to Medjugorje, was waiting for him. (Press Bulletin)

"Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs." St. John Chrysostom [CCC 2446]

The Live Church

From 18 to 21 April, Fr. Tomislav Vlasic held the second meeting for 'total-offering souls' in Ancona. The theme was 'The Live Church' and was the arrival point of a programme which began last year with the theme, 'Living the Sacraments.' Fr. Tomislav told the participants: "Just as I had invited you to live the sacraments I am now calling you to become the Church who lives her mystery. We must become alive in Christ Risen and develop all that is in us. The Church is God's greatest gift to men; all the gifts are present in the Church. It is a sacrament which contains all the sacraments. In fact, the Church replaces God on the earth because the Holy Trinity lives in the Church and through her He completes His works." With these words Fr. Tomislav welcomed the 600 participants.

Taking the cue from events which had touched Fr. Tomislav personally only days before the meeting (the death of his mother and of a dear priest-friend), he explained how we can feel their live presence in us: "The Saints and the Angels are alive among us. This is not a theory but a dimension which the soul is able to perceive. I feel my mother's presence much more fully now than one week ago. The souls of Purgatory are alive among us and wish to help us. When we are open to this reality we are able to participate in the Communion of Saints, in the Universal Church."

The participants were helped to be immersed in God, through meditation and prayer, so that they could better understand the theme of the retreat through personal experience of the live Church in the hearts of individuals and the entire assembly. "We must enter into live communion with each other. Distance cannot impede souls from being touched. When we become "one" with Christ the Church is renewed." Fr. Tomislav stressed the importance of creating harmony between the divine and the human in individuals, in marriage, in the community and in groups. This is possible, he explained, when the Church promotes the lifestyle of the Gospel teachings as fundamental, both for lay people and the consecrated (eg. being obedient to God's voice in us and in others; being pure of heart and mind; being poor in spirit: it teaches us to be last; and seeing God as our "everything"). "A soul who desires living in full its state of being owned by God must make these values an integral part of him or herself, just the way many petals united make up one beautiful flower."

There hangs over the Church a great danger of pharisaism, that is, knowing all about God without ever having encountered Him. But when we make it so that our every exterior expression manifests God, we make visible the inner communion which we live with the Father. The Church teaches us to manifest the

faith founded on the paschal mystery: "We proclaim your death Lord..." This means: "We do not fear because God does everything for us, to the point of giving His own life!.." So let us proclaim Him with our lives and insert our sufferings and our death into His death so that we become a non-stop paschal proclamation.

"We proclaim your resurrection..." It is not by words, but by dying to our egocentrism, that we favour the birth of a new creature within us - a redeemed creature - so that in us will live also the new Church, the Heavenly Jerusalem."

"Until you come in glory!.." How many questions and discussions there are on the next coming of Christ! Our wait must be planted deep in Mary and the Church, in a trustful and patient wait, which is not fashioned by ones ego nor by a visionary's predictions. The Church is "one" and the interpretation of the divine events must go through her, so that individuals do not end up inventing "their own" Church.

"To wait means to be in the light. Each confraternity of offered souls should be as a lighted lantern. You see, the virgins who wait for the groom are a reality!", Fr. Tomislav pointed out. "The lantern which burns in us is the immolated Lamb, it is Love whom the Father sacrificed. If we are capable of living this love donated by God, Who donates Himself beyond all limits of suffering and death, if we live the sacraments by trying to be lambs who offer themselves for each other in Mary's embrace, then all the gifts present in the Church will blossom. The Church desires living in us! Members of communities and confraternities must embrace one another with this offered love for it gives life to the sacraments. This love protects us and it closes the doors of hell... With this our desire is to put into practice that which the Catholic Church teaches: the Gospel!"

As usual, the conclusion was a start to the mission. The reflections on the "live Church" must now assume visible and concrete features in the souls of the participants who allowed themselves to be gently conducted by the "shepherd." With these proposals and hopes, the total-offering souls move towards the year dedicated by the Pontiff to Jesus Christ (1997) to be a "living announcement of his coming."

Sr. Stefania

Mary guides first prayer group and all groups in the world

1. It is a fact that there are many prayer groups in the world which were started up by Medjugorje pilgrims. This happened, and still is happening, because Our Lady expressly desired that prayer groups should be formed. Today there are thousands of them.

The first prayer group was born on the 4 July 1982: one year after Our Lady's first apparition. Ivan, the visionary, explains that Our Lady said She would be with the group in a special way during the prayer. The Virgin also asked for prayer groups in all the parish communities to help Her fulfil the plans that the Lord had entrusted Her with.

In the beginning the group met 3 times a week: Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. During the prayer Our Lady appears [to the visionary] and gives brief messages. When Ivan cannot be present, he is substituted by Marija and when she is absent by Vicka. At times the meetings are reserved for the 40 odd people who make up the group, at other times they are open to whomever wishes to attend. Lately the

meetings have been held twice a week, on Mondays and Fridays and more recently on Tuesdays and Fridays: During the meetings the members pray the Rosary, sing, read the Scriptures and the message. They are usually held on Podbrdo or Krizevac no matter what the weather is. These prayer meetings are significant for the Lord's projects entrusted to His humble handmaid, but also for the spiritual growth of each of the group's members.

Ivan was asked: "What does it mean for you to participate in the prayer group?" He replied: "It's very important for me, for I learn to pray together. I cannot imagine how my spiritual growth would be without it."

2. A second prayer group grew around Jelena Vasilj starting March 1983. At the time Jelena was a 10 year old who had begun hearing an inner voice (which she still hears). Jelena says that Our Lady speaks to her and teaches her. The group used to meet in the presbytry after the Holy Mass in the evenings and was under the guidance of Fr. Tomislav Vlastic and occasionally of other priests.

During the meetings (prayer and songs) Our Lady gave messages to the group, through Jelena, to teach them how to pray. One of the meetings was for the local Bishop; a third was dedicated to sharing experiences with each other. The group was active till 1987, and those who took part in it had to commit themselves to make no decision which regarded their own lives for 4 years.

When a part of this group went to Italy with Fr. Tomislav Vlastic, the other members continued to meet for a certain period. At the moment a community is being formed in Italy under the guidance of Fr. Tomislav called "Queen of Peace-all yours-for Mary and Jesus." The community includes candidates, postulants, novices and those who have already taken their vows, plus a large group of external helpers, organized confraternities and prayer groups.

In the beginning Jelena transmitted the following message: "Our Lady says: I desire a prayer group to be here. I will guide the group and give it rules of consecration. With these rules all others in the world can make their consecration. For one month contemplate, then transmit, the conditions I give you. These are: first of all you must renounce everything and place yourself entirely into God's hands. Each person must renounce all his fears because when you are surrendered to God there is no room for fear. All the difficulties that you will come across will be for your spiritual growth and for the glory of God. I invite young people, because married couples have commitments of their own. However, all those who wish to participate in this programme may follow it at least partially. I will guide the group."

Besides the meetings during the week, Our Lady asked the group to attend night adoration once a month. The group usually did this on the night of the first Saturday, and concluded with Mass on Sunday morning.

3. After this brief summary of the facts, let us see what a prayer group is. A prayer group is communion of the faithful who gather in prayer one time or more per week or per month. It is a group of friends who pray together the Rosary, read the Holy Scripture, participate in the Mass, meet and exchange spiritual experiences. It has always been recommended that prayer groups have a priest to guide them, and when this is not possible, the prayer meetings should be kept to the essential. The visionaries always stress that the first and most important prayer group is the family; it is only then that one can speak of true spiritual education which continues in the prayer group. The group demands that each of its members be active and contribute spiritually. This way the group is kept alive and is able to grow.

4. Biblical foundations of the prayer group are also found in Christ's word: "If two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them" (Mt 18).

In effect, the first prayer group was born during that first novena after the Lord's Ascension, when Our Lady prayed with the disciples, waiting for the Risen Lord to fulfil His promise and send the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1.5). The first Church did the same: "These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to

the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42) and: "The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common ... everyday they went as one body to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread, sharing their food gladly and generously. They praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved" (Acts 2:44-47).

5. Certainly, there is also a sociological reason to explain the existence of prayer groups. Each person has to take care of his own spiritual growth, and there is nothing like communion for this growth, because of the psycho-physical structure of the human person. It is extremely important these days because it is so easy to get lost in today's confusion. The group helps with one's spiritual growth, correcting it and spurring it on. The experience of a single person enriches and illumines that of the others. Those who remain alone risk an out-of-control growth. All difficulties are more easily overcome in the group, and these can become rich spiritual experiences for all its members. The group helps a person take care of and channel his or her charismas.

(From Fr. Slavko's address at the meeting in Tucepi, 19 March 1996. To be continued.)

Pray for Russia!

In a letter to Marian groups, Bishop Paul Hnilica, S.J., who is always attentive to the developments of the Fatima message, asks for prayers for the forthcoming presidential elections in Russia.

Among other things, he points out: "In 1917, just months before the Bolshevik revolution, a miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary Queen of Russia was found in the summer residence of the Tsars. It depicts the time when the Virgin appeared to a poor peasant-woman, telling her that the time had come for Her, the Mother of God, to take the fate of Russia into Her hands... and at Fatima Mary promised the triumph of Her Immaculate Heart for these same people...

In the numerous places where Mary appears, She repeatedly says how She needs our prayers to help Her win the apocalyptic battle. Mary will triumph through our hearts, if they are sufficiently united to Her, which will constantly make petitions and inter-cessions for our brothers most in need of God's mercy." The Bishop also brings to our attention the fact that more than 2,000 weapon factories have been re-opened to help build up the country's social structure. "Without God's help how could we stop corrupt forces from gaining power..? Russia's (and the Church's) last hope was offered at Fatima: consecration to Mary's Immaculate Heart, the Rosary, the >>>> Eucharist and penance, especially on the first Saturdays. One day to the Holy Father I said that Our Lady in Russia does today for the Church what Abraham did for Sodom and Gomorrah. He asked: "But how many righteous people would be needed today to save the world?" Well, I believe that through Her apparitions, Our Lady is looking precisely for these righteous people." (14 April 1996)

Young Buddhist's call to Krizevac

Philippe Jeanneau of Tonny-Charente made the following testimony public on the 3rd March 1996. A copy was sent to us.

Dear brothers and sisters, allow me to say a few words. Today I turn 25. After 20 years of atheism I became a Buddhist monk in March 1994, but I was in a spiritual desert. I realized something was missing: I didn't have Love, and though I experienced a profound inner call to it, I did not understand where it could come from. Then a small voice told me: "Why do you search so far for something that is so close?" At the same time I deeply desired seeing a film on Jesus that I had seen as a young child which was the only religious instruction I had ever received.

I went to see if a Christian friend had it; he did. I watched it and fell in love with Mary and I was so struck by Jesus that I forgot to eat. On seeing my enthusiasm my friend showed me a videocassette on Medjugorje.

In an instant I knew that the fount was God, but to reach God one had to go through Mary. She would have led me to Jesus, Her Son, and Jesus would have led me to the Father. I said to myself: "If the Virgin is really appearing over there, it would be stupid to die without have seen this place."

A week later I was in Medj. The peace present in that land invaded my entire being. What really struck me was the joy, serenity and beauty that shone on the faces of the Croatian youth. They'd get together at any moment with their guitars and shamelessly sing about God. I envied their faith.

One day on Krizevac I was feeling sad and I had my head on my knees. Was I Christian or was I Buddhist? I just didn't know. Then a little hand reached out to give me something. I looked up and saw a little girl. When she gave it to me I felt invaded by immense love. I understood that it had been given to me with love. It meant so much to me. I wanted to give her something too but before I could find anything she had gone. I looked down at the object and saw it was a medal of the Blessed Virgin (the miraculous medal, I later discovered).

As I looked at it it seemed to tell me: "I am the solution to your problems." On the way back down the hill I told Mary I'd do the 5 things She asks of us: the Rosary every day, fast on bread and water on Wednesdays and Fridays, Mass as often as possible, read the Word of God every day and confess once a month. "Then we'd see," I told Her.

Yes, we'd see... And the sad little Vietnamese boy who had been adopted at the age of 16 months in 1972 can smile again, with an eternal and peaceful smile, and after a long spiritual battle found Love and lets himself be loved... and will become a priest.

Philippe

How to Announce the Eternal Truth today

[Continued from last issue] In the rich and desperate West, the Church needs to become a "place of life", of real life, capable not only of gathering together as no other human institution can, but of offering life and communion that the world has never known.

There are many oriental-inspired communities in our environment which obviously intend to compete, and we envy their sense of solidarity and their "spiritual" vitality so manifest and ostentatious. However, we can and must be far better. The only way to stop these dangerous "fashions" is to show that there is no need to leave our "house" to find true communion and true spiritual life of incomparable intensity.

New announcement of Gospel lies in "novelty of life" (Rom 6:4)

1. The "new" way of Christian living cannot spring from a human or earthly morality, but, like the primitive Church, must be founded on the one and only Word which does not age. Neither can it be removed from a continuous return to the Scriptures where we are constantly reminded of the essential announcement: God so loved the world that He gave His Son ... Christ died for us, He rose, He appeared to many, according to the Scriptures, and we are witnesses... This is the reason and the source of the Christian journey and action. This is the only way whereby we also become announcement of Christ, true salt of the earth and light of the world; and the new evangelization will not be subject to the ambiguity of Christian modernism so alluring and deviant.

2. All the deeds of the believer must depend on and evolve around faith in Christ and total acceptance of Him. The believer will find in his faith strength, justification and inspiration and the source of his very existence. Any work is vain, with respect to its Christian value, if seen and done in a human light or for human reasons, even though done with all one's heart and the best of moral intentions [cf. Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. Rom 14:23].

It must be clear that a specifically Christian intention is the fulfilment of God's will, of Christ's love and is obedience to Him. Thus, all the "human" contents of our deeds are not done in vain: a mother's tender love for her children is not vain, a man's compassion for an ailing brother is not vain, a sense of justice which can make one take grave risks for the love of the truth is not vain. Rather, it constitutes authentic value for a Christian when done, because of his total acceptance of Christ. For a Christian, faith cannot be limited to being implicit, but must permeate his every thought and dominate his every action, being his first and last reference.

3. All Christian activity must have God as centre and be subjected to the Lord's commandments, or rather, to the first of these: love God with all your heart... for you cannot serve two masters. So implicit faith is not enough, just as being part of the "flock" is not enough, to qualify the deeds of a Christian, or to provide the necessary strength to carry out deeds with that integrity, generosity and pureness demanded by God.

At this point we begin to understand the importance of prayer, that is, of the filial relationship with God, which allows us to know and live by His will. Often prayer is ignored or considered a convenient choice or inert mask. It is, instead, the explicit manifestation of God's love; it is the privileged moment where one seeks the loved one, to stay with Him and speak to Him, to praise Him and celebrate Him. Prayer, confirmed by the fulfilment of God's will, does not consist in acts of obedience to rules, done perhaps grudgingly, or the cold fulfilment of one's duty by a lazy mind or out of human respect.

4. Christian activity must have God as its centre; it must be fruit of the paschal mystery. Therefore, reference to Christ cannot be an occasional supposition or declaration. When an intention is only initial

or assumed, a person is more easily pressed by other, more persuasive reasons to act, and more easily roused by temptations of a worldly nature. On the other hand, when Christ is one's reference, one continuously refers back to Him, to remain in Him - like the branches of the vine. This is how we are to understand St Paul's phrase, which is often misunderstood: And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Co. 3:17).

5. Christian activity must aim at holiness, which is fitting for a new creature who is a member of Christ and who houses the Spirit. Letting His power work in us leads us to fulfilling God's will in a more complete sense and in a new state of freedom. The weakness of the flesh has been defeated. This doesn't mean that we are to feel triumphant, for the battle continues and we will fall because of our fragility, however, peace is ours because God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything (1Jn 3:20) and can fix everything.

7. The Sacraments alone support and qualify a life which is renewed thanks to the baptismal regeneration and is constantly nourished by the Eucharist. A believer lives for the Eucharist and in virtue of the Eucharist. Reference to the Eucharist helps one gauge the pureness and fervour of one's new existence which is enveloped in "God's wonders" and which lives on the Eucharist. The mean perspective of precept and duty must be overcome, totally abandoned, if we want the activities and hopes of today's Christians to return to the truth of the first Christian communities where the bread was broken in gladness everyday (Acts 2:46).

7. Christian life must be shaped by its state of "waiting for the Lord," of when He will reveal true justice for all those in the world who in their torments awaited His return. The times have already been completed in Christ and now we live in total faithfulness which stems from the knowledge that the last times are upon us and that it would be stupidity to cling to those realities which have already been judged fleeting and deceptive. This way of thinking does not at all mean a detachment from historical realities or temporal commitments, but rather, it means greater dedication because when one is freed of worries related to the present, a person can fulfil - with love that multiplies strength - all that is pleasing to God, since: the time is by now close at hand.

Fr. Umberto Neri

(End - adapted and reduced from the original)

* 5th UK YOUTH 2000 Int'l Prayer Festival at Woldingham School, Woldingham, Surrey from 14 - 18 August. Contact YOUTH 2000, P.O. Box 119, London SW 7 5RH (Fax 0171 370 0211) for info about this and other YOUTH 2000 events in UK, Ireland, USA, Germany, Australia, Trinidad, Colombia and Mexico, also for info on how to start YOUTH 2000 in other countries.

**Fr. Amorth's appeal to Priests:
help the people who suffer**

Fr. Gabriel Amorth, the most famed exorcist of Rome and with more requests for help than he can handle, complains that priests and bishops do not accept the requests for help from people who believe they are possessed. "If they come to us for this," he says, "then it is a sign that they are at least going through a crisis, either psychological or faith-related. Therefore, they should be heard and tranquillized, with charity and competence. The Bishop of Isernia told his priests that a person in need who turns to a priest should never be turned away. The trouble is that there aren't enough priests and they are not competent enough."

Q. Not competent?

A. In this specific field. Not many know about seances, thinking they are just games. Instead, many problems and obsessions start there, or through going to necromancers, etc. who often are the only ones willing to listen (upon payment) to people sent away by priests, or through taking part in conventicles of the occult (for satanic worship) where people go in search of a remedy to their solitude.

Do you think that satanic conventicles really exist?

Well, a distinction is to be made. Often these are groups of dirty-minded people who get together for orgies, and at time tortures, with a colouring of satanism... But you've no idea how many pacts of blood I see!

Pacts of blood?

Written requests in blood to ask Satan for things, such as wealth, success, pleasure. It's the same as in the Gospel which describes Jesus' temptation: Satan wants to be adored and in exchange he promises worldly goods.

Wealth, pleasure, success: the same values respected and glorified by today's society.

That's the point: Ours is a society without values that stresses emotions, that calls "experience" what was once called "sin." This society is definitely influenced by an evil type of fascination: it opts for evil and glorifies rebellion...

Which social class is influenced by this fascination?

All of them, without exclusion. You've no idea how many doctors come to us for help... and how many professional people, businessmen and famous sportsmen go to sorcerers... and how many young people too! Oh, how distressing!

Young people?

Young people who do not receive religious instruction are attracted by occult "emotions," such as oriental faiths, spiritualism, satanic rock music. The television is full of bad examples, also the press stirs up their curiosity. An inquiry made by the Bishop of Foggia ascertains that 36% of the senior high school students in the diocese of Foggia have taken part in seances, and my experience tells me that this figure goes for all of Italy. And don't think that certain "experiences" are not accompanied by serious consequences. (MB)

Aid delivery - Our stricken brothers and sisters of Bosnia are in need more than ever. One aid deliverer speaks for all: "In the north of Bosnia, above Tuzla, the situation is hallucinating... the people are suffering from malnutrition... and we haven't yet found the most needy..." (A. Bonifacio)

* To those who wrote to us to complain (politely and non) about the stance we took regarding "prophetic voices" which speak (though not officially) in the "name of Jesus" (Echo 125.8) we say: be no more severe than Jesus Who said: He who is not against us is for us (Mk 9:40). In Medj. Mary teaches us to be kind towards those who do not have our same faith. We can say we have behaved accordingly. Can you

do the same? Remember: the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Co 3:6).

* Cardinal I. Schuster, to be beatified on 12 May, was pastor of Milan. Of the Christian vocation he said: "Being perfect and imitating the beauty of God in us is not an optional, but a duty. Sooner or later on our death bed we will realize that it was the only thing necessary for a Christian, and that nothing else counts."

* "Open your hearts to Mary Queen of Peace" - a book of meditations available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, Italian; also in Russian, Polish, Romanian, Czech, Hungarian, Slovak and Arabic. For a copy write to: Associazione Amici di Medj., Via Nirone 9, I-20123 Milano, Italy.

* Archbishop Msgr. Franic of Split wrote to Echo to say thanks for the copy of Echo in large print: "Now I have no trouble reading it." For those with sight problems an enlarged photocopy might be just the thing.

* It warms our heart to receive your mail, dear readers. Many write to say thank you, to wish us well, or just to say hello. Mrs Hart from Beverley writes on behalf of the local prayer group: "It is compulsory reading and we love it." Kevin from Dunblane prays for all the families: "Our Lady of the Wayside, for the love of the Child, take hold of our hands, for the rest of eternity." Marie from Prague shares her joy with us because the Czech publishers of an important Catholic journal receive copies of Echo and have been to Medj. Together with Marie, let us all offer prayers for the Catholic press worldwide.

Fr. A. Held from Ohio also shares joyful news with us: Ms Willing from Covington wrote to General Walker in Sarajevo (of the Allied Forces) to tell troops about Medj. In his reply General Walker said: "... I have just been down to Medj. where we have a Spanish Brigade based in the area; their officers and soldiers attend the mass there regularly. My own officers from the headquarters here in Sarajevo also attend by taking trips down there. It is surprising that, notwithstanding the reputation that this poor country has for the moment, the masses are always packed out..."

* A thank you to our readers who continue to support Echo with donations, in particular, our readers of the Italian, French, German and English editions. Thanks also to our many distributors, old and new: blessings upon you all.

* Echo will be translated into Swedish thanks to friend Mario Frizzo. His wish is for Mary's message of peace "to reach this people who thirst for the truth. May Her Immaculate Heart triumph in Scandinavia!"

* The Mystery of the Living Love - Anyone who, under Mary's guidance, intends to live in the Church and for the world will be happy to draw from the wealth of this book. Write to: E.M. Mackenzie, 90 Seymour Street, London W2 2JJ, England.

In this month of May which is consecrated to Mary, let us trustfully place our lives in Her hands and discover the power of Her inter-cession and receive the gift She so ardently desires giving us: the love of Jesus. May the blessing of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit descend upon you all.

I wish to call you again to prayer.