



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace

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Our Lady's message for Advent, 25 Nov. '96

Dear Children, Today I invite you once again to pray so that with your prayer, fasts and small sacrifices, you can prepare yourselves for the coming of Jesus.

My children, may this time be for you a time of grace. Take advantage of every moment, doing good, for only in this way will you experience Jesus' birth in your hearts. If with your lives you give example and become a sign of God's love then joy will prevail in the hearts of men. Thank you for responding to my call.

"Keep watch and pray" if you want to receive Jesus

Christmas is a gift from heaven, an occasion of grace which God in His infinite mercy offers us. This feast is not only the commemoration of an event, but the "memorial" of a mystery which is repeated, and which is full of the same grace of 2,000 years ago. God continues to knock at our door, that we may receive the divine life: His Son become man. If we take advantage of this great gift, it will be a time of grace for us and we will become a sign of God's love. Others will notice this joy in us and will be able to accept it: Peace to the men whom He loves. This is the essence of the message.

1. Right from the first messages Our Lady has spoken to us about preparing ourselves for Christmas and today She reminds us how: above all, I invite you again to pray. We must give our time and heart to God so that He can communicate to us His love and ardent thirst for us to live in a primitive communion of love, to hear us call Him "Father" together with His Son, and to give us all that truly makes us happy. We must, however, create the conditions to be able to pray and thus receive and accept His love. The Holy Family is our example: with prayer, fasts and little sacrifices you can prepare yourselves for the coming of Jesus. In fact, Jesus is born in us through prayer, which is possible and effective when our prayer is prepared with fasting. This is what Peter means when he tells us: Keep sane and sober for your prayers (1Pt 4:7).

2. A basic need for our prayer is fasting on silence, since every day we are bombarded by things and people. We need to cut back on all that is unnecessary so that our hearts can become grotto of poverty and silence where Jesus can find a home. God finds no room in a mind which is already filled with vanities, useless talk and literature, fantasies and passions which occupy the heart. (A reminder us to fast

from the television.)

Neither can Jesus find room when we are occupied by material things and worries about never-ending requirements and when we continually look to please our flesh. The devil uses all these things to make us sleep and to allay our attention in God to the point where we completely lose the sense of sin.

One's soul needs tranquillity to be able to pray and to be attentive to God's and not one's own needs and to His divine works. Love can do this; love enables us to renounce many little things, that is, to make little sacrifices, thus providing "oil for our lamps."

3. So this may be a time of grace for us, we must take advantage of each moment and use our time well: not to satisfy our own whims, but to search continually for God's will in the many occasions He offers us to do good (works of mercy in particular, according to His will).

Such a great gift can only be corresponded by total commitment on our part: keeping the goal ever present in our hearts and being always on the alert, like one in a race who cannot afford to look to the left or the right, or like a mother who keeps constant watch over her children. A great love demands the heart's total attention. We cannot let our souls be distracted from its attention in God's gift.

The witnesses of the first Christmas were so taken by the event that they went with haste to the Child, they made known what they had heard, and they returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them (cfr. Lk 2:16). And some came from afar at the cost of great sacrifices and risks and offered all they had (cfr. Mt 2). Why should it be different today for our Christmas?

It is our great responsibility not to let the Lord's coming pass in vain. If we accept Mary's invitation and Jesus makes His home in us, we will spread the joy and peace of Christmas and thereby help to make it prevail in the hearts of men, despite all else.

Fr. Angelo

Mary's Christmas message, 25 Dec. 1996:

Dear children, I am with you in a special way today as I hold the Infant Jesus in my arms, and I invite you, little children, to open yourselves up to His call; Jesus calls you to joy.

My children, live joyously the Gospel messages which I have been repeating since I first came here with you. I am your mother, my children, and I desire to reveal to you the God of Love and the God of Peace. I do not want your life to be one of sadness, but that it find fulfilment in joy, for eternity, according to the Gospel. This only will give meaning to your life. Thank you for responding to my call.

Jesus is God of joy, not of sadness

In this Christmas message Our Lady is Jesus' monstrance. She is the tent for the Sun which comes forth like a Bridegroom leaving his chamber (cfr. Ps 19). It is Christmas and Mary is radiant with the Holy Infant in Her arms. She presents Him to us as the light of the world and of our life: In him was life, and the life was the light of men (Jn 1:4). This fullness of life is our communion with God: shattered by sin, it was donated to us again by Jesus. In fact, He is the Gospel: the good news of God's Love and Peace. God is once again with us: the Emmanuel.

Mary desires us to be open to Jesus' call which is a call to joy. To each of us He says: Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away... it is time to sing... let me see your face, let me hear your voice (cfr. Song 2:10-14). So much does He care about us that He wants to give us His divine joy. After His forgiveness, He asks us: abide in my love, just as I abide in my Father's love. These things I have told you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full (Jn 15:9-11).

Today Mary is asking us to joyously live the Gospel messages, which She has been repeating to us for 15 years and 6 months. She confirms that they are the same as in the Gospel and that with them She came to reveal to us the God of Love and of Peace.. I do not want - She says - that your life be one of sadness, but that it find fulfilment in joy: in an eternal joy - otherwise life would have no meaning.

Why then are we so often sad? We must examine our consciences to discover why. Sadness is the absence of God and is caused by sin which separates us from Him. It is also caused by the crosses and burdens of life which we try to face without Him Who came to carry them for us (cfr. Mt 8:17), or by frustrated passions, or excessively desiring a position in life, material goods or pleasures, which in the end leave us bitter and destroyed. It is useless to go after the things which give immediate joy and satisfaction. It is only through following Jesus' will and by picking up one's cross that we have the real joy that no one can remove from us... making even our sorrow turn into joy, like the pain of a woman giving birth (cfr. Jn 16:20-21).

Sadness is seeing frowning, complaining, vengeful and disappointed Christians, when it should be quite the opposite. The Acts tells of a Christian community which gathered together joyfully, whose hearts were generous and glad and which had favour with all the people, even amid sadness and persecution (Act 2:42-47; 5:41; 9:21).

Jesus brought to the earth the glory of God and the peace of men, and He invited them to take upon them the easy yoke and the light burden of the Gospel message. If we cannot accept this, we will be forever weary and oppressed (cfr. Mt 11:28-30) [please God not desperate]. Let us then open our hearts to Christmas and its message of love and we will announce the joy and peace which it brings to all.

Fr. A.

TU ES PETRUS!

50 years a priest among priests.

Priests do not age, he says

Never has the state of "Priest in eternity" been exalted like in the celebrations for the Holy Father's 50th anniversary. Never has there been such a family feeling around such a solemn event! There were 700 priests from the diocese of Rome who celebrated with him on the 1st November and about 1700 priests, bishops and cardinals from around the world (also celebrating their 50th anniversary) who celebrated with him during the vespers of Friday 7th November and the solemn Mass on Sunday the 10th in St. Peter's. This was followed by a public manifestation in the esplanade, and lunch for the Pope's fellow jubilarians in the Vatican.

A priest does not become old, he seemed to want to tell them: "If after 50 years of first pronouncing 'Hear I am' on the day of ordination our physical strength has declined, our inner strength on the other hand has not.

We are ministers of Christ and of his Bride and as long as Christ so wishes, a formidable task still awaits us. May we never be discouraged by problems or trials, nor succumb to the temptation to repeat Jeremiad's complaint: Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am old!... Day by day we

make our lips and hands available to Christ for the administration of the various sacraments. Can there be a greater or more sublime vocation than this? ... The advancing years cannot be considered an impediment to this great vocation." (7/12)

"Beloved priests! We are gathered today in St. Peter's Basilica to remember that solemn moment of 50 years ago when with trepidation we took the cup of salvation into our hands for the first time. We inherited it from Christ himself. We took that cup into our hands, reliving the atmosphere charged with the mystery of the Last Supper..." (10 Nov.)

Witness and recommendations by jubilant priests who suffered in their flesh because of their faith, such as one from Birmania and one from China who spoke of their persecuted Church and another from Albania who spent 17 years in prison and many others at hard labour. At the end of the testimonies the priests gave voice to the hopes that burn in their heart and which we should make our own: a) strictness in the preparation of sacraments and in priestly formation; b) celibacy is first guarantee that a priest belongs to all - he who abandons the promises becomes more unfaithful than those who don't believe and makes a show of his immaturity; c) all the Churches, even the youngest ones, must feel responsible for the whole world; (they also expressed their nostalgia for the Latin and Gregorian rites).

Triumph and Sacrifice. Days of consolation were these which the Holy Father rightly deserved. However, Jesus' brief triumph in the feast of the palms was followed by his passion, and after the paschal supper came the cross. The Pope knows that the same is awaiting him who is Christ's true disciple, or better, vicar. Not enemies from without, but enemies from within the Church plot against him (see Bishop Hnilica's appeal in Echo 130). But he, like a gentle lamb (Jer. 11:19) does not say a word against the enemies who surround him; he does not complain; he only has words of peace for all. It astounds us. Through and in him, Jesus once again is handing himself over for our sake. Let us pray all together, as the Church of Jerusalem did for Peter who was in prison: May the Lord keep him and strengthen him ... and not hand him over to the enemies.

The preparation for the Great Jubilee began with the first Vespers of Advent on 30 Nov. 1996. The Pope's gaze is constantly on this goal; as we hope it is for the recipients of this immense gift. "The whole programme of preparation for the third millennium must help us discover the glory of God revealed in Christ in the Gospel, and lead us to the threshold of the Holy Door, which will be opened, please God, on the night of Christmas 1999" - the Holy Door being a door of grace and divine mercy.

The tragedy of the 800 million people in the world who still suffer from malnutrition, and the hundreds of thousands of Rwandan and Burundian refugees still dispersed in Zaire - left helpless as they wander in the forests in total destitution - have provoked numerous heart-rending appeals by the Pope: "No uncertainty, no pretext, no calculation can possibly justify further delay in humanitarian aid to these brothers. This tragic scandal in the region of the Great Lakes must be stopped - but the world stands back and watches." The Holy Father does not fear to ask "all members of the Church who have marked themselves with blame during the genocide in Rwanda (1 million victims) to find the courage to bear the consequences of what they committed against God and against their fellow men. They will answer to God for any wrong committed." An honourable return, in dignified and safe surroundings, must be prepared for the refugees.

Offer forgiveness, receive peace is the theme for the World Day of Peace (1 Jan. 1997). From the Holy Father's message: "Peace, which has an irresistible force, is built on forgiveness to be given and received. Forgiveness neither eliminates nor lessens the need for the reparation which justice requires... Individuals

and peoples need a sort of 'healing of memories' .. so as to re-examine them with a new attitude and learn precisely from the experience of suffering that only love can build up, whereas hatred produces devastation and ruin.

**Before the Immaculate in Piazza di Spagna (Rome),
after having praised the beauty of Mary, the Pope prayed:**

We give you thanks O Immaculate One for being among us in this image of yours set on high, which recalls the miracle of grace the Lord wrought in you, and inspires our constant commitment to overcome every form of evil.

We thank you, O Holy Virgin, for having called us here to contemplate your Immaculate Conception and to renew our personal commitment to take part in the city mission which intends to make the face of your Son shine forth in every corner of the city. We thank, O Mother, for the gift of this annual meeting with the mystery of your beauty, which amazes us every time, because it is unique and spotless.

Tota pulchra es Maria!

Secret behind Pope's strength

John Paul II: 76 years old and 50 years a priest. Sicknesses, attempts and the difficult battles to defend the truth have made him greatly suffer, but rather than weakening him they have made him stronger. Mons. Vincenza Thu (Vietnamese) worked alongside Mons. Dziwisz (Polish) as the Pope's secretary for 8 years (till Feb. '96). He was asked:

What is the secret behind his strength? Holy Mass is certainly the most important part of his day. Even when he is ill an altar is prepared close to his bed and he concelebrates. Also when he travels (72 visits abroad and 120 to Italian dioceses) he always wants Mass to be the central moment of the meetings. The Pope begins his day with prayer at 5.30 am followed by Mass, creating in him a sense of communion which lasts all day long: this is the force behind his strength which allows him to remain serene.

(Another assistant told of when the Pope goes to pray alone in his private chapel, he throws himself down in front of the tabernacle with his arms out in the form of a cross, remaining there late into the night, in the company of Christ of Whom he is vicar, and that at times, if he doesn't get up to go to bed, they have to practically drag him out of the chapel.)

How does the Pope pray? To be close to the Pope and observe him pray is a unique experience. He prays passionately with his eyes closed and with frequent invocations, such as: 'Oh Lord! Oh my God!' To the priests he has confided: "I take note of all the intentions given to me by people from all over the world and I keep them in my chapel on my prie-dieu. This way they are present every moment, even when they cannot be expressly repeated every day. They are there, and the Lord knows them.."

He closes his eyes and is immersed in prayer. He prays so intensely that at times, when he opens his eyes again, he cannot remember where he is up to in the Missal. His sense of surrender in prayer is so total that he almost enters into a state of ecstasy. I have often noticed how concelebrating cardinals and bishops are impressed when observing him. One Cardinal said that during a conclave, whenever he would go to the Sistine Chapel at night, the Pope would be there in a corner on his knees in prayer. He prays the Way of the Cross each week, he observes fasting and he recites the 15 mysteries of the Rosary daily. His devotion to Mary is inspired by St. Louis Montfort, from whom he also took his motto: Totus Tuus; he has read St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Bernard...

One morning he was late for the audiences; I went to look for him and found him with his arms crossed,

looking up at [a statue] of Our Lady with such intensity that he had the appearance of a child before his mother. One other time on a cold winter's day we went looking for him and found him on the terrace on his knees before a small alter dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima. I called him, but he continued to pray for a while before getting up... On each page [of his writings] he adds an invocation to Our Lady... Is he a Pope who listens and reads a lot? He dedicates about one hour to personal reading each evening from 10 - 11 PM He also dedicates time to listening by calling once weekly 5 or 6 experts in various matters to discuss important themes regarding theological and political questions or new discoveries in physics, nuclear weapons, etc.

* **Mary's sceptre in Pope's hands** - Card. Wyszynski told of a "strange" fact that happened during a Marian procession in Cracow which he was guiding. Bishop Wojtyla was close to the statue of Our Lady when the pole bearers made an abrupt movement and the sceptre She was carrying fell, and Bishop Wojtyla ably caught it so it wouldn't fall to the ground. Card. Wyszynski commented: "Our Lady ceded Her sceptre to Wojtyla."

UT UNUM SINT!

Pope to Chinese Catholics: Do not give in; be men of communion. Government must not fear you.

The Pope's vision goes far beyond our horizons, reaching as far as China: that immense field waiting to be harvested (1,200,000,000 people). It is a land where freedom is still suffocated but which out of physical necessity, must open its gates to the world. The Pope was speaking to the Catholic minority (about 12 million), half of which are faithful to the Church of Rome and live as clandestine. The other half belong to the "patriotic" Church. It seems, however, that these do not feel so separated from the first, if they pray for the Pope and the Church of Rome during their Masses, and if the Holy See itself does not consider it to be schismatic.

The 13th December, feast day of St. Francis Saverio, patron of the missions, was the 70th anniversary of the first episcopal ordinations and the 50th of the institution of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in China. For the first time, John Paul II sent a historical message to the population of China over the Vatican Radio, via satellite, which permitted Radio Veritas (the Catholic radio which covers all Asia and transmits programmes in local languages) to relaunch the message to all corners of China.

Last century, the faith in China became an instrument of dominion for the victorious European powers which guaranteed liberty for the missionaries who went there to preach the Gospel. At the beginning of this century, however, thanks to the work of untiring pioneers such as Cardinal Costantini, the Christian communities were made more "Chinese" to the point of ordaining Chinese Bishops in 1926 and instituting a regular hierarchy in 1946 with 20 archbishops and 79 dioceses. Thus, the Church of China was able to prepare herself for the great challenge of the Communist regime. The 16 million Catholics left to themselves once the foreign missionaries were sent out of the country gave ample proof of their maturity with martyrdom and evangelization still today.

The Holy Father recalled the many martyrs when he asked the Bishops and the Catholic people to remain faithful to Christ's one Church without compromise: "do not give in to the idea of a Church which corresponds neither to the Lord's will, nor to the Catholic faith, nor to the feelings and convictions of the

majority of the Catholics of China. "A weakening of the faith would end up in division which would generate only confusion to the detriment of both the faith and the contribution that the faithful could offer to their country as authors of peace and social progress."

The Pope also invited them to be "men of communion". The Pope also addressed the Chinese authorities: "..do not fear neither Christ nor His Church ... feel assured, because a disciple of Christ can live his faith in any political system as long as there is respect for his right to behave according to his own conscience and faith... Furthermore, I ask the believers to contribute with their energies and talents with ever more enthusiasm and dedication to the development of this nation which has such an important role to play in the community of nations."

At the conclusion of this extraordinary message the Holy Father added: "It is my desire to personally meet the Catholics of China at a time pleasing to the Father, so we can express our gratitude to Him with the same faith and the same love." Yes, this Pontiff's horizons continue to widen.

"Happy are the persecuted." For now, religious freedom is still constrained because any religious act must be done within the authorised organisation. The regime recently condemned to lengthy terms five Catholics found guilty of having organised the Legio Mariae in Zejiang; church buildings have been razed because built without authorization by the "patriotic" Church, and 80 faithful were arrested in Nov. in Jiangxi (Catholic population of 20,000) to impede the celebration of a great open Mass for Christmas. Religion must serve the political powers in China, as it did last century when the colonial powers preached support of the religious for their own interests. Yet, the "Word of life cannot be tied down" and in the end the Cross will be victorious.

The Armenian Church (6 million faithful), deemed monophysite (they held that Christ was of only one nature: divine) had not been in communion with the Catholic Church for 15 centuries, but is now united to her in the same faith. Its leader, Catholicos Karekin I and the Pope signed a common declaration on 13th December in which it is written: "Christ is Perfect God as to his divinity, perfect man as to his humanity, his divinity is united to his humanity in the Person of the Only-begotten Son of God," according to the Catholic faith. The only obstacle remaining is the Pope's primacy.

Anglican Primate George Carey (Archbishop of Canterbury) visited the Pope on 5th December. The Common Declaration which they signed affirms the "need for fervent prayer for the grace of reconciliation" in view of the Great Jubilee.

The Pope invited the Anglican Primate to undertake "sincere efforts" to strengthen the bond between the two Churches, but it seems that the Anglican Church doesn't want to overcome the deep gap created by the ordination of women priests if they are also now ordaining women bishops. Many Anglican priests and faithful continue to make requests to be admitted to the Catholic Church.

Satan's trap for consecrated souls Only a "virgin" Church able to see God

Much is said these days about Satan, but mostly about his extraordinary presence made known through cases of misfortune, possession, oppression, infestation, etc. which damage man's physical and psychic state. Yes, Satan is a murderer from the beginning (Jn 8:44) so it can't be denied that he tries to damage

man also in this sense to make him blaspheme against God as though God were the cause of his many ailments. However, we need to watch out for the astute traps which Satan sets for the ruin of souls and the devastation of the Church.

That is why that when he is driven out by Jesus (who is much stronger) in our Baptism, he - an intelligent being - hides and camouflages himself in far more innocent and seducing aspects to deceive man, spying on him in every moment to make his attacks and steal him from God: he lurks in secret like a lion in his covert, that he may seize the poor, drawing him into his net (Ps 10). His greatest ambition is to get at his enemy, the Church (whose task is to defeat him) to take his seat in the temple of God (2Th 2:4).

This is why he so constantly attacks God's ministers and consecrated souls. His action in their regards is more treacherous, more subtle and more astute. Woe betide them if they let their prayer life, their trust in God and their vigilance weaken: they will fall into the net and be defeated, and when God's servants fall they drag behind them also God's people. Satan tries to obscure their faith in God's presence and power, to the point of making them doubt God, His laws and the bonds with His Church. Satan insinuates, as with Eve, that His Word is not really true, and that the laws do not consider man's needs; that: "after all, you're not really doing bad." Satan makes it all seem natural because, "by now everyone is doing it." Thus, if your eye is not sound, your whole body is full of darkness (Mt 6:23). A false conscience and a corrupt heart cannot experience God: Happy are the pure in heart because they (and only they) will see God. The most pure ray of divine communication cannot penetrate a sensual heart, and every attempt by a sensual heart to approach the divine mysteries becomes profanation, sacrilege and corruption of all that is sacred. This is the cause of doctrinal confusion.

"The devil is far too much master of an unpure soul to let the Truth enter it. You could not enter my soul, my God, when the devil of unclean passions was its master," exclaimed Fr. de Foucauld.

This is how Satan works, even if no one says it. The saints say: most of the souls in hell are there because of impure sins (Curi of Ars). Pureness is tied to faith, to hope and to love, which the devil tries to extinguish through brain washing dished out by the mass media and our secularized culture. The effect is the disappearance of the sense of sin, of the revealed mystery and of eternal life. Preaching on the future life, on grace and on pureness has also largely disappeared. The "father of falsehood" closes our eyes to the truth and to capture us more completely he slowly breaks down also our defences (he is a prudent serpent!). Thus, no longer do consecrated souls: have a sense of danger (he who loves danger will die by it); wear a cassock/habit which distinguishes them as men of God; have a sense of reservedness and self-restraint in relationships and contacts with others (shows of affection, choice of words, literature, etc.), or practise mortification, in particular of one's

Sin halts our desire to pray, it halts true love which desires being sacrificed; consecration to God and communion with others becomes a burden. All this makes one's ministry inefficient and one's apostolate sterile despite untiring activity, because only virginity is fertile the 3 Rosaries, story of Medjugorje, prayer (S. Ambrose). For this, many souls, though endowed with charisms, are unable to produce fruits of good. On the other hand, we know how many fruits of good pure souls are able to produce without creating noise around them.

This is why Our Lady at La Salette said: "With their evil life, their irreverence and impiety in the celebration of the holy Mysteries, with their love for money, for honour and pleasures, the priests (ministers of my Son) have become cesspools of impurity... The heads, the captains of God's people, have forgotten prayer and penance and the devil has darkened their minds; they have become those wayward stars which the ancient devil will sweep away with his tail... Many will abandon the faith... The Church will go through a terrible crisis..." I hope these words cannot be said also of us; we have published them as a warning, that we may make remedies in time.

The contents of the secret of La Salette, of which the above is only a part, were fulfilled in our century and were well perceived and transcribed in documents by Leo XIII who personally met Melania, the visionary.

* **A copy of the Immaculate of Tihalijna** (the statue which has become the symbol of Medjugorje) was blessed by the Holy Father on the 8th December together with 200 other statues and 50 icons which will be taken on pilgrimage around France. This particular statue, instead, will tour Herzegovina to bring the message of peace to the people, together with humanitarian aid to the Catholic Croatians, to Muslims and to Orthodox Serbs alike.

* Franciscan father, **Ljudevit Rupcic**, recently celebrated his jubilee Mass. A biblical scholar and theologian, he has worked as a professor, writer and translator, and for many years has been in Medj. He had been imprisoned 3 times under the Communist regime. Let us all pray for him, out of gratitude for his work as witness and advocate of the Queen of Peace.

* **Hospital, guest house for priests** and convent for cloistered nuns will be built in Medjugorje. The land for the 'Padre Pio' hospital has already been bought close to Vionica. It will offer the same services and spiritual assistance as the one built by order of Padre Pio in San Giovanni Rotondo. The association, "Solidarieta' e Aiuto per la Casa Internazionale della Pace," accepts donations. Their address is: Via della Chiesa 38/A, 43015 Noceto (PR), Italy

News from the blessed land

English Bishop's profound analysis of Medjugorje

"Deepest experience is confession and conversion, but there is need of perseverance... Deepen one's prayer to find true peace."

English Bishop, Mons. Augustine Harris, from the diocese of Liverpool was in Medjugorje for two weeks last September. He came as the spiritual guide for two groups of pilgrims and during his stay he confessed and celebrated untiringly.

Before departing he declared: "I was born in 1917, during the war, and it was during another war that I was ordained a priest in 1942. In Medjugorje a lot is said of peace now that the war is over; perhaps too much is said in a superficial manner though, because if we want true peace, we must go far beyond just talking about it. Our Lady does not want us to make the same mistake: i.e., speak of peace without going deep into one's heart where true peace is first made. Here, Mary teaches us about true peace.

I came to learn about Medjugorje from friends and from reading various texts. There is a lot of prayer in Medjugorje; it is up to us to ensure that this prayer enters our hearts and changes them. My friends have been here often and now I am here too, in private. They organised a pilgrimage and asked me to accompany them as spiritual assistant. I accepted.

The need to keep on telling pilgrims about deepening one's prayer by meditating and living [the Gospel message] is clear to me. Nonetheless, the important thing here is confession. People truly are ready to come face to face with themselves; they are ready to repent and make penance. I am sure that this is the deepest experience here; i.e. renewal and conversion. However, there is need to continually repeat that

this is only the beginning and not the end of the conversion process. Pilgrims must depart from here having made a firm decision to continue to pray at home, personally, in the family and the prayer group."

"You cannot say no to the people who come here to change life"

To the question: "Does it worry you that the local Bishop does not accept the apparitions?" Mons. Harris replied: "I do not wish to judge the local Bishop. What I would like to say is this: when a person comes here to pray and wants to confess and change life, you cannot say no. Many live in fear, or are confused and don't know what to do or how to behave. I would say to them that it is good to come here where one's conscience is freed and one finds the essential and where confusion is overcome."

With regards to the apparitions, perhaps they are real, perhaps not. Personally, I have no reason to doubt. I cannot believe that the visionaries (some of whom I met) could keep on lying for so many years. When people will ask me whether or not they can come to Medjugorje I will tell them that they can if they wish to free their consciences.

At the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross I saw more than 50 priests confess. This is wonderful. After I had celebrated Mass on that day in the church of Medjugorje a pilgrim stopped me, asking if she could confess. Could I have said no? Serve the people, teach them to love, be ready to confess. The rest just falls in place."

Ugandan Bishop "urged" up Krizevac under hail

Mons. John Baptist Odama, freshly ordained Bishop and administrator of the youngest diocese in Uganda said:

"In October I was invited to take part in a pilgrimage by the Cardinal of Kampala, at the expense of pilot Joe Roy who was the first to bring news of Medjugorje to Uganda. The first thing that struck me in Medjugorje was the way I was accepted and welcomed into the family which offered me hospitality. There are no huge hotels here where one might remain anonymous. By living with the families it is possible to meet the people, to pray with them and share a meal with them and thus better understand the true spirit of Medjugorje. People here are very open to listening and are aware of the events. The pilgrims are open to the supernatural. I saw that they are very devoted to the Eucharist.

When we began walking towards Krizevac it started raining, then hailing. My immediate thought was to return to the house, but something urged me on, despite the difficulty. I prayed to have the strength to keep on going and in the end I reached the top of the mountain. I was soaking wet, but I was not tired; in fact I felt as light as a bird. I understood that life is the same when going on seems impossible: if we surrender ourselves to God's will we are able to do whatever is asked of us.

I was greatly impressed by the crowds of people praying the Rosary on the hill of the apparitions. When we all knelt down for the Creed and the seven Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glory Be's, I felt united to Mary in the prayer for the universal Church. Here you see individuals and groups of people reading the Scriptures; it is natural to see people reciting the Rosary, and if you see someone not praying it seems strange.

I am sure that Medjugorje is not opposed to Church teachings, therefore no one should fear to come here. The apparitions are a gift from God. I was present during the apparition in Marija's home; I didn't see anything, however, I did feel Our Lady's presence, and through Her, God's presence, because Mary

reveals God to us. It would be good for every bishop to come here to learn what Mary wants to teach us. I will tell everyone as soon as I return home. Thus, the Lord makes us priests efficient in announcing His Word."

(Press Bulletin)

Sr. Emmanuel meets Pope: he visibly happy about Medjugorje

In November I was able to meet the Pope in private, together with Efraim (founder of the Beatitudes Community) and his wife. We wanted to tell the Pope about our work for Medjugorje and obtain his blessing. After having spoken with Efraim, John Paul II came to me and blessed me silently. I told him that I had lived in Medjugorje for seven years and that my work is to spread the message of Medjugorje through literature, meetings, etc. However, I was unable to finish because he placed his hand on my forehead, his face lit up, he traced a cross on my forehead and said: "I bless you." [Her name was obviously not new to the Pope: it is known that he always reads the Echo to be informed on the situation in Medjugorje.]

There were three Polish priests with us, however, I was the only one to receive such a blessing. I then gave him a copy of my book on Medjugorje and one on the children. He looked at them and was visibly happy to hear that so many children continue to help Mary's Immaculate Heart with novenas. He then gave me a third blessing. In the end I told him that Medjugorje is waiting for him.

It was my wish to share this experience with all those who care about Mary's message and try to spread it, for the Pope's blessing was surely for each of them.

One of the Polish priests who accompanied us said, among other things: "...She desired receiving a certain confirmation from the Pope for her mission. The Pope listened to Sr. Emmanuel with attention when she spoke of her presence and work in Medjugorje, then he traced a cross on her forehead and blessed her work. I was looking at the Pope in that moment and my impression was that this meeting seemed important for him. The nun's work and her projects for the future, tied to Medjugorje, received total agreement on the Pope's part and made him happy." (Fr. Jan Rokosz, MIC).

(From Sr. Emmanuel's diary)

* For children from 6-11 years of age: Sr. Emmanuel's book "Children, Help my Heart to Win," available at Pittsburgh Centre for Peace, 6111 Steubenville, Pike McKees Rocks, PA 15136, USA - fax 7875204.

Fr. Jozo's Canadian Mission - The Indians in Canada, of Mic Mac Nation, Whycocomagh NS, welcomed Fr. Jozo and proclaimed him "Spiritual Chief of all the Indians." The father launched an invitation to all the tribes, that they visit Medjugorje between 2nd and 6th March: "Come to the Queen of Peace who has been waiting for you for 15 years. She is your mother and wishes to help your families and the whole world." His appeal is entitled: "Appeal to the Eagle Nest." This people, which has translated the messages into its own language, is going through a particularly hard time. Let us help them with our prayers.

* **Canadian Indians in Medjugorje** - Among the many groups which visited during October, one of great interest was the group of 50 Indians from the Canadian reserves. They remained one week and were accompanied by their chiefs, Roderick Alexis and Ken Wood. The latter has been 6 times and received a profound conversion: he was an alcoholic; now he is witness in his own land for Our Lady's messages of

peace. (Press Bulletin)

Fr. Jozo in Central America

"This mission has been a true blessing for Central America," wrote Mary Fernandez from Miami in Florida. (Her life and that of her husband was completely changed after a pilgrimage to Medjugorje in 1987.) It is calculated that about 100,000 people listened to his message in the 37 meetings in 7 different countries over a 20-day period.

In Porto Rico, where the Medjugorje prayer groups are very fervent, 11,000 turned up at the two different meetings. About the same numbers were also present in Panama (at the two meetings in Costa Rica and S. Josi). In Nicaragua, 12,000 people came to listen to the message brought by Fr. Jozo at the Basilica of Managua, the same Basilica where 14 years ago the Pope was met by protestors. There were great crowds also at Honduras and Salvador.

On 15th November about 7,000 people from the poorest parts of Mexican City gathered to hear him (home for drug addicts, alcoholics and street children). In the Basilica of Guadalupe there were 16,000 faithful, and 7,000 at the meeting prepared by Fr. Tiberio Munari at Merida in Yucatan and 10,000 at the stadium together with the Archbishop of Merida who is very Marian and a great pastor of the Church. (Mary Fernandez)

Hail Mary wins over a tough guy

A Croatian from Sarajevo, Hrvoje, came to Medjugorje as a bus driver. Though a Christian, he did nothing but criticize the pilgrimage, calling it a waste of time. Yet, back home, he realized that he was saying the Hail Mary prayer in his heart. He was surprised by it. For the next seven days he had to face one problem after another, but his intimate prayer continued. In the end his prayer became more intense and the situation in his family began to change: his wife, who had left him, came back; his daughter and her husband, who never spoke to him though they lived in the same house, began confiding things to him, etc. He began to understand the force of the blessing he received in Medjugorje and the grace which comes from prayer. Hrvoje accepted the Virgin's love and today he is another man, and peace has driven away all his bitterness.

* **Barry Welling, a Protestant from England**, never wanted to hear or talk about God. His wife, Pat, had been praying for him for years. One day in 1993 Barry heard on the TV that drivers were needed to take aid to Bosnia. So he went to Medjugorje as a driver.

It was surely for his good heart, that Our Lady let him see Her and thus help him believe: for the feast of All Saints, Barry and Pat took a group of English pilgrims to Medjugorje. On Krizevac at the 14th station Barry saw Our Lady as they were placing Jesus' body in the tomb. She had a greyish-blue dress on, just as the visionaries describe Her, and She was wonderfully beautiful. Again, at the 15th station, Barry saw Her: it was the Resurrection. Our Lady said nothing, but just smiled at him and he burst into tears. He then told the 30 Catholic pilgrims who were with him that he saw the Virgin.

Oh Blessed Virgin, may the day come soon when every man can see how much you love him!

* Franciscan institute in Medjugorje - The Franciscan nuns of the Immaculate from Florence organised a 5-day pilgrimage in Medj. One or two nuns from each convent belonging to the congregation participated. These included convents in Italy and abroad. During the pilgrimage the Institute was entrusted to the Immaculate Virgin. Many were dubious before the departure; on their return, however, all they did was talk about Medjugorje. At a later date, the general superior, Mother Lucia, called all the nuns to Florence for Fr. Jozo's visit.

* Woman from Sardinia healed - The above mentioned pilgrimage was blessed by the healing of Mrs Scanu from Sardinia. She underwent an operation in 1971 in Genoa to have a nodule in the thyroid gland removed. After 15 years the nodule re-appeared and continued to grow despite the treatment received. She had been booked for a new operation in December, however, Mrs Scanu felt she had to go to Medjugorje first. On returning to Italy the nodule disappeared within days. Documentation and medical reports have been supplied for examination.

* Priests coming to Medjugorje are asked to bring their own cassock and stole, plus the "celebret" from their superior. Furthermore, they are asked to celebrate Holy Mass only in the Shrine after having made themselves known at the parish office, and not in private homes, nor on the hill of apparitions or Krizevac.

Fr. Jozo in Sardinia

Accompanied by the Provincial Father of the Franciscans in Herzegovina, this was his first time in Sardinia. He said: "We know Sardinia more for its faith than for its tourism, given the aid which this island has continuously sent to Bosnia." At Cagliari on 3rd December there were 6,000 people at the sports centre for the day of prayer (the 3 Rosaries, story of Medjugorje, prayer, songs, Mass and prayers of healing). At Nuoro the Bishop gave permission for the meeting to be held in the church of St. Francis and there were about 1,000 people. At Sassari, the sports centre was filled to capacity for the day of prayer.

* International meeting for priests in Medjugorje from 1 - 5 July 1997 organised by Fr. Slavko and Fr. Cosimo Cavalluzzo. Priests with special charismas (such as inner healing) will be invited. For information telephone 387-88-651988; fax 387-88-651444. First 40 to book will be housed in the Domus Pacis retreat house.

* NEUM - Those who arrive at the airport of Split and require transport to the hotel should advise the Medjugorje Mir Association of Split of the time of arrival: fax 385-21-361354

* Colin Macnaught, fervent distributor of Echo in Australia, returned to the Father on the 9th December. Mary Immaculate took him with Her; She will console his wife and nine children and through the intercession of Blessed Mary MacKillop will inspire someone to continue with his work at the Sentinel.

Heaven, hell and purgatory exist

In Her messages, Our Lady has often spoken of Heaven, sometimes of purgatory and a little of hell. When She showed these three places to the visionaries, Our Lady specified: "I have shown you all this so that you know it exists and so you can tell the others." (Jesus said the same thing to Sr. Faustina.) She also said: "Reincarnation does not exist, because after death there is eternity... It is false to teach that one is born more times" (24 July 1982). Why should She specify this? Because today there are Catholics who live by a self-made religion from which they have excluded purgatory and hell.

The Church Catechism affirms the existence of hell and its eternal state: "The affirmations of Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church on the subject of hell are a call to the responsibility incumbent upon man to make use of his freedom in view of his eternal destiny. They are at the same time an urgent call to conversion... God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end. In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want any to perish, but all to

come to repentance (2 Pt 3:9)." (cfr. CCC 1036, 1037)

When Jakov lost his mother, Our Lady consoled him by telling him on that same day that she was with Her. Since Our Lady had said that only a small number of souls go directly to heaven (most go through purgatory) I asked Jakov what great merits his mother had acquired to permit her to go to heaven so quickly. He replied: "Nothing special. She obeyed God's commandments, the Gospel teachings and Our Lady's messages."

I also asked Vicka, since she is Jakov's cousin. She replied basically the same thing: "Nothing special. My aunt was a normal woman; there were no miracles, nothing extraordinary, but she put her heart into everything she did. This is what Our Lady is asking for. Each person has a different task in life; what counts is doing it with your heart." For Vicka this is all quite normal. "We make things seem so complicated; we think we need to do great things. No. What counts is one's heart. God looks at our heart."

On death Vicka has said: "It is like going from one room to another, or from one side of the room to the other." We know that both she and Jakov saw heaven, hell and purgatory. "I cannot describe the happiness of the elect. There are no words to describe it." In 1986 Our Lady said to Jelena: "If you abandon yourselves to me, you will not even notice the passing from this life to the other. You will begin living heaven here on the earth."

* I took Our Lady's message to Poland in October. I met children, adults and adolescents in parish communities, schools and universities, and even those who live on the margins of society. On the last day a young student told me he was not a believer and that his father worked for the Communist party. He listened to the message carefully and in the end asked to be blessed. He then came to the Mass with us (he had never been to Mass). To the priest who accompanied him home that evening he asked about baptism... (Fr. Sr. Emmanuel's diary)

Throw out bitterness which comes from idolatry

Receive God's love which fills you and become missionary

Behind missionary action lies "essential work of Christ's saving love which is the force that comes from Jesus to save the world," said Father Tomislav Vlasic at the conclusion of his visit to north Italy on the 20th October. "Without that force and that love, money and action are worth nothing. In the Mass we repeat: Lord I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word... This word is an action by God who saves."

Fr. Tomislav then told of a woman who suffered attacks by Satan who tried to suffocate her, especially during a voyage in which black masses were organised. She went to Medjugorje and participated in a Mass beneath the big tent during which Satan left her. She said that after she was never bothered by him again and that she felt "filled and strong" and that she feared nothing.

"When divine action penetrates a soul and fills it, the negative forces are annulled and the evil escapes. I ask you: do you also want to experience this? ... I can offer myself for you in the Mass, I can show you the steps to follow, but I cannot go the way for you; only you can. God's love is free for all, but when it is offered you cannot refuse it or say you have no time."

Fr. Tomislav then spoke of the example of Jesus, of John Baptist and of the saints who accepted God's love and placed themselves totally at its disposal. Mary Immaculate's only concern was to find God; She was humble and poor like all creatures are; She could do nothing, but She gave Herself to God: Here I

amk:

. Her soul was open and able to receive the grace, so God's mercy was able to penetrate Her and Her whole life was spent in this journey. Not even at the foot of the cross did She stop before Jesus' suffering, but went on and accepted everything that God wanted from Jesus' sacrifice. This is why She was able to participate in His glorification and at Pentecost was able to receive the grace of the Spirit together with the Apostles.

"St. Francis heard Jesus' word from the crucifix and he decided for God's love. He advanced, but before he died he said: 'I have done so little; I would like to begin now, because the way opens up continuously; God is immense, His richness is seen wherever we look. The treasure is prepared for us.'

So go to God and look for life. Do not look for health, for things, for solutions [to your problems], but look for the life that God gives to his creatures, because He gives Himself totally to man, just as life fills man. We, however, look for other things; life gives us so many things, but we are unable to find the Life. God gives 'the Life;' God gives fullness. When you have found the true Life, not even a thousand problems can trouble you because you are stronger than death, than sickness and than trials.

Look for Life, come to God even if your hands are empty. If you are a sinner go before God and tell Him: 'I am a sinner, forgive me,' but acknowledge your sin, don't let your sin close you off [from God's saving grace]. When you feel that you are nothing, go to God and tell Him: 'I am nothing, I'm looking for You, I want Life.' When you are humiliated and you remain in your humiliation you are like a person in his grave and weeds grow over you. These weeds are called envy, jealousy, tension, worry and bitterness. If you sink down into your misery then you remain in your misery; but if from within your misery you lift your eyes up to God and say: 'Father, remove me from this misery; I do not ask You to condemn my adversaries, nor to give me health, all I ask is life in You,' and this will elevate you to God and you will experience life in God.

Behind all your problems, behind your every sin, there is an idol which you adore. St. Francis, whose soul was elevated to God, was not disturbed by thieves or sinners. Souls like his are not vulnerable and others feel well in their company.

God's mercy is prepared for us and we can receive it. What we have to do is this: arrive at God to feel loved by Him, both spiritually and physically, when we are troubled and in pain: all over, always. It means being assumed and elevated to Him. If you do not feel infinitely loved by Him than you cannot be a missionary; all you can do is transmit the theory of Christ or become a fanatic. On the other hand, he who feels warmed by Christ's gratuitous love and does not obstruct it, feels penetrated by this divine force - and this is mission.

Let us not wait passively, though, for God's merciful love. God needs our bodies and our souls. His mercy becomes active through our eyes, thoughts, desires, reflections and meetings. We can become missionaries of Christ's merciful love if our being is transformed in Christ. How wonderful it is to feel forgiven! But you must learn to absorb God's mercy. How wonderful it is to be transformed from bitterness into sweetness!

'But how do I get rid of the bitterness,' you ask? Behind your bitterness is some sort of idol which you adore, so be rid of this idol which gives you bitterness, for behind the offence which makes you bitter there is something else which [for you] is more important than God. So, when someone touches it, you become bitter.

How you would desire to have Mary's happy face! If you feel loved by God and you offer yourselves to God's will, then also your physical appearance begins to change. Others see in you a different person; your character changes. In that moment the saving action works in each of us, and by working through us it is able to work around us.

I beg you: do not go with your thoughts to Africa! Go to your homes, to where your husband, your wife,

your child or your mother-in-law is. If Christ's saving force is present there; if you love those in your own family with merciful love, then you can be sure that this saving force will go to all the other countries. Do you daydream about going to Africa, but are unable to love with Christ's merciful love your own mother? Then you are just kidding yourself; it's only a way of escaping.

This evening I strongly desire placing you in the Heart of Jesus Who loves you and Who is not troubled by your sins or weaknesses or complexes. If you desire giving everything to Him and live according to His Heart; if you enter into this Heart, then you will experience the saving force, not only for yourselves, but for all men!"

Fr. Giuseppe Dossetti and his "paschal community"

Fr. Giuseppe returned to the Father on the morning of 15th December. His life was a meteor shining in the dark. We mention him because we feel more than indebted towards him, who directed our ministry to the primacy of the Word of God, just as the Queen of Peace has done with Her constant call: Give the Word of God first place. Fr. Giuseppe was a man of extraordinary intelligence and experience, "who could have held the highest offices in the state or the Church." He abandoned politics where he helped to architect the Italian constitution (he was also a protagonist of the Council, together with Card. Lercaro), to become a simple Christian, priest and monk with the intent to return to the founts of the ancient Tradition and the Fathers of the Church.

All during his life his main aim was to live according to God's will, without compromises. Thus he was led to a monastic life so as to renew the Church from within and make her capable of apostolic conquests for the sake of her inner wealth.

It was in the wake of this that the Piccola Famiglia dell'Anunziata (Little Family of Our Lady of the Announcement) was founded in 1954. Its main centre is in Monte Sole and it is to this centre that the Cardinal of Bologna entrusted the custody of the holy sites for the martyrs of the partisan war. There are 65 sisters and 25 brothers in convents in Bologna, the Holy Land, Jordan and Calabria.

Their life is built around the *Lectio continua* (meditation of a passage of the Bible, day after day, without interruption): they study it for one hour in the evening, contemplate it for another hour in the morning (after the morning prayers which begin at 4 am) and share it during the Eucharist which finishes about 8 am. The rest of the day is shared between liturgical prayers and manual and intellectual work (in particular translations of the Fathers). The Word of God, which is not only read, but one could say eaten, or rather: "devoured so as to become as sweet as honey in the mouth" as Ezekiel (3) says, is for them fount of prayer, of stability and of peace and attraction for the many souls who thirst for God and those looking for counsel. As was the founder's intention, it is a true paschal community (cfr. Acts 2:42-47).

How "men of the Word" prepare for death -

"We were born with the aperture and the enthusiasm of the Council. Fr. Giuseppe has always taught us to love the Church. We are close to our Bishop and the Pope. This alone allows us to be intellectually and spiritually fertile," explained Fr. Efrem, the caretaker of the monastery in the hills of Monteveglio.

After suffering a stroke on 13th October he was looked after by three confreres in the monastery. He had lost the use of his speech and needed to be helped to do everything. Despite this he did not lose his serenity and sense of humour. He wanted some prayers placed up near his bed: "We praise you and bless you oh Christ because with your holy Cross you redeemed the world," "Into your hands Lord I entrust my spirit," and "Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." With the use of a board and

the letters of the alphabet he was able to form brief phrases. To the few visitors allowed to see him he said: "God is asking this silence of me." During one of Cardinal Biffi's visits he said, "Thank you very much," while in others he expressed himself with intense weeping to express his love for the Church and for his Pastor. "Suffering prepares us for the detachment, but there is no sadness; it is a moment of grace," concluded Fr. Efrem.

Also Fr. Umberto Neri, is a member of the same community. He is a true authority in biblical studies and has written precious books on the matter. He has always united science with the heart, just as the Fathers did and despite the sickness that is destroying him, he continues to work, offering to the Church and her faithful the best of the Fathers of the Church. (Echo also published an article taken from his writings on New Evangelization : nos. 124-127.) "For decades he has illumined us with his words, his teachings and his vast knowledge of religious thinking, and in this last year he continues to repeat to us: 'I also have to teach how to bear a relentless sickness, because it is beautiful to wane in the world to then rise in Christ,' " explained Fr. Righi, superior designate of the Little Family Community.

In the church of Oliveto, at the funeral wake of Fr. Dossetti, together with the brothers and sisters from the community who watched over the corpse of their father day and night, there were also the Presidents, Mr. Scalfaro and Mr. Prodi among those reciting the Rosary for this great man and friend.

Mother Teresa healed Her extraordinary fertility

This time, it seemed that God was calling her. "The patient is exhausted," they declared at the cardiology clinic in Calcutta. The pulmonary oedema made her feel like she was dying. "Let me die," she said, "do not persist with your machines and needles... I cannot be treated any better than my poor." One week later things had changed. "Patricia (the American cardiologist) is working hard because I have to get back on my feet." Patricia commented: "She has a lot of will to live," and Sr. Rio corrected her: "No, she is eager to live to work more for her poor."

6 December (one week later): Mother Teresa was walking around on her own visiting and blessing the other patients. She was of good humour and had a good appetite. 8 December: she was back at work and had the list of all the homes photocopied as she plans to visit them all. In the meantime, in the Church of St. Mary, about 70 young women were making their temporary vows and 43 their perpetual vows.

"Another 100 have asked to be admitted," Sr. Rio murmured, "and even Mother Teresa finds it hard to believe. That's double last year's number!"

There are by now 4000 nuns belonging to her order and 500 convents in 101 countries! "It is God's gift for your sufferings, Mother." "No," replied Mother Teresa, "for the sufferings, sacrifices and prayers of all... Lord make us worthy to serve our fellow men." What is the secret of this fertility? Every morning before beginning the day's work each nun spends one hour in personal prayer and every evening they celebrate Mass and vespers together.

Fr. Lorenzo Milani died in Florence, where he lived and worked, in 1967 at the age of 44. He was rather well-known for his revolutionary anti-conformist ways, but little knew just how faithful he was to the Church. One of his impassioned testimonies follows.

It it's true that Jesus wants an authoritative Church - for the truth must be objective, not subjective - then I would not leave the Church for anything in the world. I know what it's like to live outside the Church; a

young student trying to find the truth with the Gospel in his hands finds himself before a myriad of words which can be interpreted in a thousand ways, not knowing what to do...

Religion consists in accepting the truth as the Almighty has given it, and not believing in something built up in our own minds: the truth is given from Above, through the revelation, the holy book, the Church. When you start thinking like this and if you are at least a little consistent, at every page of the Gospel you should start doubting your own interpretation.

A person is religious when he interprets the writings, which he believes come from heaven, in a way that comes from heaven. Otherwise he's no better than Capitini who said he accepted the discourse of the Beatitudes in the Gospel, but not the others. This is a very ordinary way of thinking when with your own mind you decide what is true and what is not.

If you admit that religion is accepting things from Above, then there is nothing more religious than the Catholic religion ... because here we have the book the way it was given from Above and its interpretation the way it is given from Above. Take this, it is my Body, this is my Blood! How could you accept this if you interpret it yourself? When Jesus spoke about eunuchs, or castrated men, the Church says that He was alluding to the virgin state. When He spoke about "body and blood," the Church says He meant it literally. A person with the present-day critical mentality would interpret this differently, and someone else differently again.

This Church is the one with the Sacraments. I can't receive absolution of my sins from the L'Espresso (a secular weekly). It can only be given by a priest. And if someone wants forgiveness for his sins he'll go to the silliest or most backward of priests to get it, rather than to a modern, intellectual, cultured priest from the middle class who calls himself my friend and similar. I am not at all like those...

If I had to choose a religion, I would choose the Catholic one, because among the really important, fundamental things, it has the sacrament of confession and that's why I love being Catholic: so that I can continue to receive and give forgiveness of sins.

The slightest quarrel with the Church removes this power from me. And who could give it back to me? Benedetti perhaps? or Falconi? [noted Italian intellectuals of the secular thought]. Could they also give me Communion and Mass? If they were able to believe that the Church is entrusted with the fundamental truths; if they cared about these and not the little political truths which concern them... I mean fundamental truths like God exists; Jesus is the son of God; that He meant it when he said, "this is my body"; the resurrection, eternal life, etc.... if we realize that the Church contains these truths and that she has the means to arrive at them and the doctrine and sacraments to arrive at them, then why do they come and ask me: "If you think the way we do why don't you leave the Church?" But where is it that I think like them? In some tiny external detail which regards politics and social life, perhaps... You see, this is the reason why I can't even entertain the idea of coming with you...

(From the registration of a conversation)

How to Pray? a saintly monk was asked. "I know no more after having read many books and taught many others than what a poor beggar taught me when I was little. My mother used to send me to give alms to the poor. One day - I was about 7 or 8 - an old beggar woman asked me after I had given her some bread: 'My little child, do you recite your prayers well?' I replied: 'Yes, my mother makes me recite them every day.' She continued: 'And what do you think of when you recite them?' ...I was feeling quite embarrassed.

She said: 'Listen, little one, and I'll give you a lesson on how to recite your prayers well and grow up well. When you kneel down, cross yourself well and think of Jesus in front of you ... in the crib... on the Cross... in the Blessed Virgin's arms, and offer Him your prayer as though you could see Him. When

your prayer is over, remain on your knees for a while longer and tell Him all those things you have closed up in your heart: what makes you sad and happy, what you want to do and what you think. You see, my lad, you will not always have your mother close to you, but you will always have the Good Lord with you. You have to get used to opening your heart to Him, to ask Him for counsel and to tell Him all about what you need.' This is prayer," said the monk. "All the books in the world were not able to teach me what that good woman taught me."
(And is this not the prayer of the heart which Our Lady teaches?)

Pope says: "People are dying; nations wash their hands!" - With no peace force or aid for the populations of Africa on the edge of a catastrophe, and with the inertia of the UN, the Pope was urged to cry out: "As the voice for all those without a voice, the Church is asking all those with the power and responsibility not to draw away from this tragedy... Every day we are presented with the horrifying spectacle of people and populations being reduced to exhaustion because of situations of poverty which violently contrasts with the consumerism of the rich countries."(21 Dec.)

Why does the Church not donate its treasures? "Is it possible that every day people die from hunger and the Vatican does not use its treasures to help feed them? Doesn't this contrast with the Gospel message?" some write to ask.

First of all, one must learn not to judge, but to ask oneself: Am I doing everything I can? Do I give at least that which I do not need to the poor? But perhaps these writers refer to the example of the great Saints, such as Ambrose, Augustine and John Chrysostom who did not hesitate to sell the Church treasures to feed the poor.

Times have changed, though, and also the situations of poverty have changed. Then, there were Churches guided by great men who were free to do as they willed. Now there is the Universal Church and the Pope cannot decide alone. The Pope alone may even desire doing certain things, however, the Vatican treasures do not belong to him; they are a common heritage, and it is unthinkable that they be sold so others could exploit the situation and make astronomical earnings. And once that money has finished? The problem is a complex one. For now the Pope's Charity (from entrance fees to the Vatican museums, etc.) feeds many, many needy mouths.

Certain evangelical conclusions will be reached by the entire Church once she is purified. The sum of all the egoistic actions by Christians causes a lessening of grace for the single body, and the generosity which is fruit of the faith and charity of each Christian will make the level of charity of the whole Church rise to the point pleasing to God.

* Friend, Oberto Cattaneo, ex-drug addict who found conversion in Medj. and then remained to work for Our Lady, known to many as the "cleaner of Krizevac," returned to the Father on 25th Nov. To God we offer his sacrifice for the conversion of pilgrims.

* **British readers** can now send their donations for Echo to our account: Echo of Medjugorje, c/o Calum & Mary Anne McFarlane-Barrow, Craig Lodge, Dalmally, Argyll, PA33 1AR, Scotland (ph. 01838-200216). Specify: donation for Echo. (The account number will be advised next issue.)

* All the various language editions of Echo of Mary are available in the souvenir shop next to St. James church in Medjugorje and in the MIR information centre close to the bridge.

The burden of Echo gets heavier each issue. I don't know how long we can resist. Mary continues to

console us with the generosity of readers who send in donations and words of encouragement. Here are a few:

From the USA: Bishop Kosak thanks us for the copies of Echo which he receives and says:

"I pray that you will continue to be a reflection of the angels as you witness your faith."

From Perth (Australia): Anna Danzi says: "Thanks to your prayers and Our Lady's blessing, little Ian has now regained his sight, much to the marvel of the doctors who said it was not possible."

From Dakar: Emmanuel De Kerhoz writes: "Through Echo I felt Mary's call to consecrate my life to the poor of Senegal's capital."

From Madagascar: Fr. G. Bonalumi encourages us to: "continue to write the Echo without worrying about any frills which could be detrimental to the dense spiritual nourishment it contains."

From Kenai, Alaska: Nita says: "I have every copy of Echo I have ever received. It helps me in my formation for the Third Order of the Franciscans."

From Korea: Sr. Teresa Kim Song Hi says: "Thank you for the Echo which I distribute. We offer our prayers so that Mary's message may have effect world-wide."

Blessings upon you all from the nativity scene which gave us the Life and the Light so that we may accept the God of Love and of Peace and live out His call to true joy which gives meaning to our life.

Fr. Angelo

Villanova M. 29 Dec. 1996