



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace

135

September - October 1997 - Yr.13 #5 - [Info](#)

Our Lady's message, 25 July 1997:

Dear Children, Today I invite you to respond to my invitation to prayer. My children, I desire that in this time you find a corner for personal prayer. I desire to guide you towards prayer of the heart. This way only will you understand that your life is void without prayer.

You will discover the meaning of your life when you discover God in prayer. Thus, my children: open the door of your hearts and you will understand that prayer is joy that you cannot live without.

Thank you for responding to my call.

Find a space for prayer with the heart

Mary, discreet as always, takes the opportunity of this time of vacation to repeat what we have been hearing (shame on us) for the past 16 years: an invitation to personal prayer. Mary knows how things stand and She sees that not enough pray the way She means. Yes, there's prayer in the Church, participation at Mass and the liturgical prayer, the Rosary, especially in the groups, and other forms of group prayer, but is this enough if hearts do not open to God and do not change? Does God have an active part in our life because of our prayer?

Mary wants to correct our ways, our void formalities, our way of living and working not centered on God's love, our way of running our lives without permitting the Holy Spirit to guide us. Again, She wants to correct our way of professing the faith, of speaking, of teaching without the authority which comes from God.

Our Lady invites us to find a corner for personal prayer, away from the din which surrounds us and from the worry of our daily tasks. It must be a silent place; St. Catherine chose the attic. Personal prayer means in particular a decision to pray, to dedicate time to God, as opposed to praying because others pray. Some say they pray while doing their daily chores, or while driving, but this is not the personal prayer that Mary means.

Once, Our Lady expressly said: You will not understand the value of prayer unless you say to yourselves: "Now is the time to pray. Now, nothing else is important to me, no other person is important to me except God" (2.10.86). Decide to consecrate a time in the day to meet God in silence (25.7.89). Jesus invited His apostles to come aside in a secluded place and rest for a while.

This space for personal prayer could be spiritual exercises or a retreat, so necessary to restore one's strength. Carlo Carretto proposed "one hour a day, one day a month, one week a year." Now is the right time.

Personal prayer is prayer with the heart to which Mary, after so many years, desires to lead us. Praying with the heart is making space for God so He can meet us in the depth of our hearts. It is being open to Him so we can accept His Word, so we can ask to be forgiven and feel forgiven, so we can receive help, and so we can confront ourselves with Him and get to know His ways and correct our crooked ways. The apostles prayed with the heart when they were gathered around Jesus to tell him what they had done and taught (cf. Mk 6:30-31). Let us also learn to tell Jesus all about ourselves and our problems, so He can illumine, purify and direct us to the light of the truth of His love.

To pray with the heart is to place our-selves before Him even when we feel nothing, so He can pray and work in us. Better still, it is surrender to Mary - for example, by praying all 15 mysteries of the Rosary each day.

Those who have experienced prayer with the heart understand that life is void without prayer, for the meaning of life is the loving relationship with our Creator through Jesus. It is a gift which must be dis-covered and to receive it we must be open, just as parched land opens up to receive the rain. We must be strong and ruthless in our decision to break away from old habits, and to persevere and be patient. In the end God will let Himself be heard and He will fill us with incomparable joy, without which we cannot live, for worldly joy founded on one's self quickly comes to an end and is devoured by the thirst for further conquests.

Jesus, instead, teaches us to abide in His love, as He abides in the Father's love, so that his joy may be in us and our joy be full (cf. Jn 15:9-11). Only this joy can satisfy and is lasting, like God. Fr.A.

Our Lady's message of 25 August 1997

Dear Children, God grants me this time as a gift for you so that I can teach you and guide you on the way of salvation. Now, dear children, you cannot understand this grace, but soon the time will come when you will bemoan these messages. Therefore, my children, live all the words that I have given you during this time of grace and renew your prayer till it becomes joy for you.

In particular I invite all those who consecrated themselves to my Immaculate Heart to become an example for the others. I invite all the priests and the religious to recite the Rosary and to teach the others to pray. My Children, the Rosary is particularly dear to me; through it you open your hearts to me and I am able to help you. Thank you for responding to my call.

"Listen! You will bemoan this time of grace!"

With a hint of sadness Our Lady places us before the responsibility of deciding to treasure Her presence. Never has She tired to speak to us from heaven where She sees the earthly events in the light of eternity. In fact, it is upon this brief life that our eternal happiness depends. This is the time in which Satan will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect (Mt 24:24). Precisely for this reason Mary received from God the grace to help her children - to teach and guide them on the way of salvation - so they do not get lost. Thus, for 16 years, with motherly concern, Mary has been offering us practical guidelines from the Gospel. We need all the words She has given us in this time of grace to come out unharmed from the terrible net of allurements. Those who live these words feel God's peace, even amid the confusion which Satan sows among the Christians. What a gift God has given us! Is it not true that we too have experienced it?

Now you do not comprehend this grace (of my presence): even those who respond to Mary's call cannot

fully under-stand it. But soon the time will come when you will bemoan it: those who refuse it or do not take it seriously will grieve over this lost occasion. Could the word soon mean that the apparitions are about to end? In the Bible, soon is said by one who is not in our dimension of time, thus it does not necessarily mean in a short time . It rather means: HE WHO HAS TIME MUST NOT WAIT.

For whom does She say these words, so serious? Above all for those who accepted the messages but then abandoned them after the initial enthusiasm wore off, preferring the wider, easier path. But also for those who, not discerning the times, refused them. And also for those who lose time in arguing over their authenticity. These have lost the occasion and will grieve over it. If we are not among these it is by no merit of our own.

To accept and to live Her words means above all to pray. In all Her messages, Mary exhorts us to pray. Mary overturns our pastoral (Echo 134, p.1) based on program-med activism which so differs from the problems in the Gospel centred on inner relationships with God, giver of all that is good, especially of true love for the others.

Why does She say: renew prayer? If we limit ourselves to reciting them, as if to fulfil a duty, our prayer does not produce fruits of life. To renew prayer means to keep on starting over again, for it is easy to fall asleep. It also means to follow inner inspirations or impulses received from the Word of God or from the example of others which Our Lady places before us. Then we will see the fruits of prayer, like the strength to defeat sin, and it will become joy!

Out of all the prayers Our Lady again recommends the Rosary. Yes, because with the Hail Marys we continue to open our hearts so that She can help us. With Her invitation to all those consecrated to Her Immaculate Heart we understand that it is these that She uses to reach out to others. So it is our duty to be an example.

Mary particularly calls upon priests and religious to recite the Rosary. Sadly, even whole congregations and institutes have discarded the Rosary. If only they knew how effective the three rosaries are. She asked us to say these each day when She appeared on the feast of the Assumption that first year of apparitions. Saying the three rosaries is a means to surrender our-selves totally to Her and to be protected from the attacks of the enemy.

With the three rosaries Mary takes us up in Her arms, taking care of our worries and needs and helping us to persevere in the grace with ease. If we teach the others to pray we will see Mary's graces and favours multiply. "Mary never lets herself be outdone in generosity and she gives herself without reserve to those who place their trust in her" (Montfort no. 181). Fr.A.

Mary is co-reedeemer even without new dogma

No other Marian dogma will be pro-claimed by the Church following requests for a new dogmatic definition of the titles Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate. The Commission (of which Laurentin was part) of the Marian Academy established to discuss and analyze the question, responded at the Congress in Czestochowa: "It is not opportune to abandon the path marked out by the Second Vatican Council and proceed to the definition of a new dogma." The four existing dogmas are: Divine Motherhood (431), Perpetual Virginity (649), Immaculate Conception (1858), Assumption (1950). The Declaration observes that while each of the proposed titles can be given a content in conformity with the deposit of the faith, they are "ambiguous as they can be understood in very different ways." The Pope, in Redemp-toris Mater, conceives of "Marian mediation" as "motherly mediation" setting it within the treatment of spiritual motherhood and seeing in it the highest expression of her co-operation in the work of salvation.

Pope in Paris: "Come and see where Christ lives"

500,000 young people from 140 countries greeted the Pope in front of the Eiffel Tower on Thursday, 21st August with a feast that continued for 1 hours beyond the set time.

On Saturday morning the youth formed a human chain, 36 km long, around Paris as a sign of universal brotherhood. Then in the evening 800,000 participated in the 3-hour baptismal prayer vigil for the world's youth. On Sunday morning 1 million young people crowded the Longchamp racecourse and at least 200,000 the surrounding park.

The sultry weather did not have the better of the Pope who led the celebration which lasted from 9.30 to after midday when he concluded with the Angelus and announced that St. Therese of the Child Jesus, the saint of the youth and of the little way, will be declared "doctor of the Church." Then he announced the venue for the next international meeting: "I'll see you in the year 2000 in Rome. He who lives will see!" The mass media of France, very sceptic prior to the vigil, were surprised by this triumphal setting which welcomed the shaking but intrepid Pope, by now the only authority on morals which the world listens to. The essence of his message was closed up in that Teacher, where are you staying? Come and see (Jn 1:38) which John Paul II wanted as the theme for the meeting. With it the Lord invites them to enter into direct contact with Him, to share His journey (come) and to know in depth His person (see). The message is clear: to understand Christ it is not enough to listen to His teachings; you must share His life, experience His live presence... But now Christ dwells in the Eucharist (this is my Body given up for you... do as I do) and in His people, the People which follows Him, the crucified and risen Lord, the Teacher who has the words of eternal life. It is here that man must find Him.

It is a dramatic call for the youth who believe, and through them for the entire Church, that they live Jesus' message today, or rather, that they embody Jesus himself so that those walking aimlessly in the dark and those searching for Him can hear the reply: Come and see. The challenge belongs to us all and places an enormous responsibility on us. We must be like a mirror, where others look and see Jesus their Saviour. If the world cannot see this today then the fault is ours because He made us salt of the earth and light of the world and His witnesses!

How different, this prophet and those Christians who jump for joy at seeing such triumphs, but have trouble following the way indicated by their Pastor. More than ever the Pope is the suffering Servant: laden with the Cross he is determined to face the difficult path which leads to the third millennium. Prophetic signs in Paris: The Pope dedicated special attention to the marginalized, calling the young people to an active love in the imitation of Frederic Ozanam who was declared Blessed on Friday in the basilica of Notre Dame. "When men suffer, are humiliated by misery and injustice and are denied their rights, rush to serve them. He who loves does not stop to make calculations, or to seek advantage; he acts in secret and freely, knowing that in Christ no one is inferior or superior." In 1851 he wrote: "Learn to defend your convictions without hating your adversaries, to love those who think differently than yourselves."

In reference to Baptism, which he conferred upon 10 adult catechumens from different countries during the vigil, the Pope said: "From Baptism comes the strength to bear witness to Christ by your concern for a life that is upright and faithful to the Lord, maintained by means of a spiritual and moral struggle... Faith and moral behaviour are linked. ... In order to respect fundamental values, Christians also

experience that suffering which can result from moral choices. Dear young people, this is the price of your witness. I count on your courage and fidelity. ... Become a missionary of the Gospel, by living it in your daily life."

The Pope humbled himself when in the name of the Catholics he asked forgiveness for the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day, calling it "an event of very obscure causes. Christians did things which the Gospel condemns." He referred to the slaughter of 5,000 Protestants (the Huguenots) ordered by the Catholic Queen of France on that night in 1572. Also the Bishops of France had asked forgiveness for this massacre.

"Only forgiveness, offered and received, leads little by little to a fruitful dialogue which will in turn ensure a fully Christian reconciliation... If I speak of the past, it is because acknowledging the weaknesses of the past is an act of honesty and courage which helps us to strengthen our faith, which alerts us to face today's temptations and challenges and prepares us to meet them."

This is the umpteenth mea culpa by the Pope done in the name of Christians, after asking forgiveness for the wrong done to Galileo, the victims of the slave trade, the Indios peoples who were forced to receive Baptism, the victims of the crusades and the religious wars, to women and to the Hebrews.

In his testimony of the truth it was significant that he paid homage to the tomb of world-renowned scientist Jérôme Lejeune, a staunch and impassioned defender of the right to life of the unborn threatened by abortions. The Pope appointed him as the President of the Pontifical Academy for Life when it was established in 1994. The Pope's gesture was not appreciated by the French secularists.

With regards to the Church he said: "The Jubilee invites us to take account in faith of the history of the Church with her exceptional developments, but also with her errors and the division of Christians... I know that in the West the Church is experiencing a drop in religious practice and a drop in the number of priestly and religious vocations. This means that the Church is going through the trial of the Cross; she must remember that nothing is greater than her Teacher."

A demanding challenge that which the Pope proposes to the youth and to all of us! The young people are more sensitive to the calls of conscience; they love this Pope and they trust him: It is for this that he turns to them.

The challenge will be accepted when rather than admire and applaud this charismatic figure, they accept the Gospel message and live it in their daily lives, even when this clashes with their idols. Then also these young people will be able to say Come and see where the Teacher lives. The Teacher dwells amongst us...

Prayer based on biblical reading

After his brief vacation in Val d'Aosta, the Holy Father said on 20th July that the summer period of rest is a good time to pay attention to the needs of the spirit and to nourish it every day with the Word of God.

The Word will not fail to enrich the holiday season with a particular note of spirituality, that will lead us then to live our regular activities with a renewed soul. Scripture is in fact a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life and the supreme rule of her faith. It is like thirst-quenching water and food that nourishes the life of believers. I thus invite everyone to cultivate a more intense and frequent contact with the Word of God, letting its healing and creative power work in us. Perhaps life's frantic rhythm often prevents many people from taking up the Bible as they would wish. Why not make the most of the holidays to bring it with you and reflect on one or other of its immortal pages?

Learning to read Sacred Scripture is fundamental for the believer: it is the first step of a ladder which continues with meditation and, thus with real prayer. Those who can dedicate the necessary time and

commitment to it, gather abundant fruits.

In this year of preparation for the Great Jubilee... we pray that every Christian and whoever is in search of the truth, may become a pilgrim of Sacred Scripture.

Give central place to Word of God

The Parish, living cell in the life of the Church, must be built up on the Word of God, which needs to be central. Christian communities are often bound together only by traditional precepts and occupy themselves with only social activism.

Fr. Enzo Bianchi from the Community of Bose said: "It doesn't make sense that for Christians to get to know the Bible they have to go to monasteries, to centres of spirituality or to Bible study groups and that they can't receive teachings on the Word of God right there where they live their faith and share the liturgy. Perhaps this is why those sects which centre on meditation and contemplation are so wide-spread... There is an imbalance in Christian communities where too much emphasis is put on activism, general solidarity and socialization, rather than on inner relations with God - at least this is the picture that one gets of the Church."

Christians must be nourished with the Word of God if they wish to give a meaning to their lives, which is a time of waiting for the eternal life which Jesus earned with His resurrection and through which He gave us the grace to defeat sin, egoism and death. This is the hope that people should find in us, a certainty based on Jesus' resurrection.

Transmit Word of God with simplicity

The Bible contains the Word of God and it teaches us to live in the truth, not in an illusion or in deceit. The first step is to read it with the help of the Church which must explain it in simple ways, for God wants to be comprehended by His children. Thus, it must not be encumbered by a culture or an exegesis not comprehensible to today's Christians and which in the end would only lead them away from the true sense of what God wants to tell them. Nonetheless, it is not so much a teaching of ideas like at school. It must be accompanied by much prayer, both by those who explain and by those who listen, so that the former can transmit the Word of God with the power of the Holy Spirit, and the latter can accept the Word of God not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God which is at work in those who believe (cf. 1Thess 2:13) and their hearts will understand properly what God wishes to tell them and they will be moved by the grace so they can fulfill it.

Where to start when reading the Bible

The faithful who desire to read the Holy Scripture personally must be guided, so they do not make the error of reading it from the beginning to the end, as the books in the Bible were not put together in series for gradual comprehension.

Beginners should start from a simple Gospel, like Mark's which allows for a first encounter with the person of Jesus. Then they could read the Gospel of John which will help them enter more deeply into the mystery of Jesus. After this could come the Acts of the Apostles so they are helped to understand how the Gospel is lived. Then St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians where one sees the life of a Christian community, fruit of evangelization.

Only then should they pass on to the Old Testament, to the formation of the chosen people with Exodus, and then on to the law of election and love in Deuteronomy. For last, they could read Leviticus, Ezekiel

and Revelation which are comprehensible to who has already begun a journey in the understanding of the Bible. Genesis, too, should be read with the help of a guide, because some pages are rather difficult to understand when read with present-day criteria.

A progressive journey

The Pope said that the reading of the Word of God must be followed by meditation. That is, we need to ask ourselves what the Holy Spirit wants to say with those words, and let ourselves be penetrated by them to understand what God wants from us. We should then use those same words to adore, to thank, to entreat Him. This is authentic prayer, taught to us by God Himself. For this inner prayer the Psalms are particularly suitable. Psalms are also used for the public prayer of the Church.

It is not an easy journey, and it revolutionizes one's activities, but it is the Word which takes care of this when we listen to it without prejudices and give it the first place it deserves. The prime thing in our lives is that we listen to our Creator Who speaks to His creatures and Who indicates the way to go.

To the study and meditation of the Word of God we priests should dedicate at least one hour per day so that we do not preach or speak in vain. This will also help us learn the hierarchy of values according to God's discernment, and we will give less space and consideration to what is occupying the greater part of our priestly lives at the moment and which greater satisfies worldly expectations. A Priest

Religious freedom in Russia Reverse motion of Orthodox

President Eltsin, on 22 July, courageously vetoed the law approved by the Russian parliament (337 for, 5 against) which would heavily limit religious freedom for non-traditional religions. Traditional religions are those which are present in at least half the republics or districts: Orthodox, Islam and Hebrew. The Catholics aren't among these, though they have been present in Russia for more than 200 years, thus, they would be subject to approval by local authorities.

The clear, well-documented letter sent by the Pope to Eltsin influenced his decision, as did the risk of losing economic help from the US which defends religious freedom and the sects. The parliament is due to meet again at the end of August, and it is hoped the President will be able to modify the law. Should he not, it will be deferred to the High Court.

The patriarch of Moscow, Alexei, who receives the support of the nationalists and the Communists, protested against the presidential veto. It is comprehensible that the Russian hierarchy be worried: in Graz the patriarch expressed his concern for the arrival of the many missionaries who tend at proselytism in an effort to conquer the void left by Communism, forgetting that there is already a Christian presence with its own history and hierarchy. Worse still is the unbridled invasion by the sects.

There is another reason behind the sudden closure by the Orthodox towards the West. After the fall of Communism the country was invaded by the superficial, miseducating culture of the local mass media, which imitate the worst aspects of western communication. Faced with the risk of losing their identity, they naturally reacted by closing up.

It won't be easy to go back to the authentic, though still imperfect, ecumenic spirit of reconciliation and communion, but ecumenism must go on. The unity of Christians is wanted by Jesus, but we need to ask for it through constant and fervent prayer, and live it in an ascetical sense, both personally and as a community, remembering the qualities which Paul tells us to put on: lowliness, meekness and patience,

forbearing one another (Col 3:12).

The ecumenic meeting in Graz will be remembered for its popular dimension in its search for unity: an unexpected general participation was joyfully visible. "It was a moment of intense joy, marked by a little sadness... Now we know more than ever that dialogue among Christians is demanding, just as the new evangelization is," said Mons. Chiaretti.

Chiara Lubich said: "Ecumenic spirituality is to be lived as the need to keep company with abandoned Jesus. The sorrow of the divisions which still separate us has to do with our closeness to Abandoned Jesus in Golgotha."

Fr. Werenfried, though disappointed that the Orthodox hierarchy supported the law bill which would limit religious freedom, he said in *Eco dell'Amore* that he will not interrupt the Aid to the Church in Need given to the Orthodox popes for their ministries.

News from the blessed land

The Youth Festival and its beloved children

What a marvellous sight it was at the beginning of August that enormous crowd of young people who came to Medjugorje from the five continents to meet God and to pray to and to praise Him through Mary's Immaculate Heart and to hear Her say: You are my beloved child. This was the theme for this 8th international meeting for youth.

Umbrellas were a handy refuge from the sun and heat and thanks in particular to brother breeze and sister cloud, all went well. There were morning prayers, talks, evening liturgy, the Rosary, Holy Mass and blessings and testimonies by young people and the founders of the communities present in Medjugorje. (The absence of Br. Efraim, Fr. Tomislav Vlastic and Marija the visionary - busy with her new baby - was noted.)

A vivacious and festive air was given to the festival thanks to the choir accompanied by the most diverse musical instruments. Under the direction of Agostino a number of novelties were introduced into this year's festival, such as the Mass in Latin. During the offering of gifts a young priest played a sweet and moving melody on his flute.

Of the 6,000 youth present (one of the most credible numbers), the greater part came from the East: 1,200 Czechs, 550 Rumenians, 530 Poles. Then there were Slovaks, Hungarians, etc. Many came from Brazil and Argentina and from the English-speaking countries. There were also many groups from Western Europe. There was a great number of young priests; about half of the 200 present. Simultaneous translations were offered in 12 languages (English, French, Croatian, Italian, German, Czech, Slovak, Polish, Spanish, Rumenian, Korean and Lebanese).

With the help of a group of Croatian soldiers a camp with tents was set up and held about 350 youth. An international group of volunteers provided about 1,500 hot meals.

The Festival, day by day

Sat. 2 August. Fr. Joerg Mueller, a German psychotherapist who became a priest after his conversion in Medjugorje told of the experience surrounding his vocation. Full of joy he told how he felt the strong and jealous love of God inviting him to give himself totally to God. With a freshness that captured people's attention, he exhorted the youth to become true apostles, able to respond to the questions which the world asks.

In the afternoon Ivan recalled that Our Lady asked us to pray all the 15 mysteries of the Rosary every day, and he concluded by making an appeal for prayer in the family, so necessary for families to find peace.

Fr. Cosimo Cavalluzzo, with his vivacious manner, spoke on baptism and the beauty of holiness. His talks were centred around the love of Jesus Whom we should accept into our lives as a friend. He warned the youth against the great danger of the New Age which is a terrible cocktail of all the various religions, reminding them that through Baptism God called us to be His beloved children and that by Jesus' will we also became Mary's children. "You must feel Her motherly presence; it is so delicate. When you are being tried, when you are on the cross, when everything around you seems black, do not be afraid; call Mary. She will not abandon you.

When you, my young friends, seek tenderness and love you immediately throw yourself into the world and, like a sponge, you absorb its many poisons, and you become ugly. No, you must not do this. When you seek tenderness and love go immediately to Mary; throw yourself into Her arms..." That evening many participated in the Eucharistic procession along the streets of Medjugorje which had been decorated for the occasion.

Sun. 3 August - Fr. Gianni Sgreva, founder of the Marian community "Oasis of Peace," analysed the major challenges in today's society in his talk entitled Who do you say I am? He interpreted the motto "You are what you eat" in a materialistic sense (you eat material, thus you are only material) and according to the Fathers of the Church in reference to the Eucharist (you eat Christ, thus you become Christ) and concluded by saying: "your life, communion after communion, must be transformed ever more into the humanity and divinity of Jesus."

Fr. Gianni confided his initial fear and refusal of consecration to the Virgin Mary and his eventual acceptance of it when at a Mass in the chapel of the apparitions he heard the words: Give yourself totally to me. "I heard the words so clearly that I looked behind me to see if someone was there. Now I don't do a thing without Our Lady."

Mon. 4 August was the turn of Sr. Elvira, a vulcano of vitality and founder of the Upper Room Community for drug addicts. Using rather colourful expressions she spoke about the young people intoxicated by the world's vices, and before that by the super-protection offered by their parents who want to keep them under their wings till they become "old maids and old bachelors." She spoke on the importance of prayer, the only real reply to the problems which life presents, and she recalled moments of her own youth when she made the decision to leave everything behind her to become a nun, placing her trust in no one but Providence.

Sr. Elvira treats the members of the community with love, but she is not afraid to correct them when necessary. The youth, in turn, showed their affection for her by dedicating the recital to her.

After her, one of the youth from the community gave witness. Stefano is studying to become a priest in the community and he explained how Sr. Elvira worked for 12 years in the kitchen in her congregation before fulfilling her vocation and call to found the Upper Room Community. "God knows how to do things properly," Sr. Elvira told him as she leapt up onto the stage and sang Risuscitò in an explosion of

joy with her "boys" and Vicka. If God makes us wait it is because He wants us to become more mature in love so that it can turn the whole world upside-down.

In the afternoon there were testimonies by some more of her boys and then by the visionaries: Vicka, Jakov, Mirjana and Jelena.

The recital put on in the evening by the youth from the Upper Room Community, entitled "Come and See," was very successful. Preparations began 4 months ahead, and they even gave up a game or two of soccer for it. In the parable of the merciful Father, adapted to suit the youth of the year 2000, they told the story of the life of a drug addict who begins amid the indifference of the world and reaches the peak of vileness till when from hell the Holy Spirit makes him cry out "Papa!" Seeing him in those conditions the Father is moved; He rushes towards him and throws his arms around him. The Father offers him the healing force of the community with its programme of evangelical life, of prayer and work which leads to resurrection.

To defeat death Jesus continues to remain on the cross for me, and to offer Mary to me and the Holy Spirit Who gives life. This is the explosive and concrete message which the youth of the community bear in themselves. What hidden talents God unveiled in these young men!

Tues. 5 August, Mary's birthday. Fr. Jozo, parish priest of Medjugorje when the apparitions began, talked and prayed intensely. His passionate talk was a synthesis of Mary's messages in the 16 years of apparitions. He invited us to engrave into our hearts the Word of God so it can become alive in our lives: "Let us allow God to write His Word in our hearts, even if it takes hard work and a lot of prayer and prayer that makes your heart bleed."

Alberto Bonifacio gave his testimony as aid carrier and recalled the silent and heroic sacrifice of the many friends, including Fabio, Sergio and Guido who died on 29th May 1993 in Gornji Vakuf while carrying aid to the peoples of Bosnia. It is Jesus Who calls us to help His poor brothers and sisters: Whatever you do for the least of my brothers you do for Me.

After the evening Mass, the youth sang and played with all their hearts in 18 different languages to express their birthday wishes for the Queen of Peace. The Lebanese and the Korean songs were very much appreciated by the crowd.

Wed. 6 August - At dawn on the feastday of the Transfiguration thousands of young people were on Krizevac for the conclusion of the Festival with the recital of the Rosary and the celebration of Holy Mass, the main celebrant of which was Fr. Slavko. They were given the mandate of becoming beloved children of the light through listening to the beloved Son Jesus Christ at the school of the Queen of Peace, Mother of all God's children. Thus the Festival, more beautiful each year, came to an end. (Alessandro)

Observations

1. The organization of the Festival was ably directed by Fr. Slavko Barbaric who gave briefings on the various talks, high-lighting their main points, and intervening at the right moment. With his calm disposition and self-control he created an atmosphere which allowed for attentive listening and punctuality.
2. He carefully directed the youth to the sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). It was noted how the guest speakers also directed the youth to this important sacrament as the starting point for a journey towards God. More than 40 priests were available every day for confessions, yet they were not enough to satisfy the thirst of mercy that the youth felt: some waited in line up to 2 hours to receive God's forgiveness and embrace.
3. Adoration day and night before the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel of the Kraljice Mira community

was the spiritual centre of the Festival.

Blessed be God, for more and more youth are discovering the wonderful gift of contemplation of Eucharistic Jesus in silence.

4. The emphasis put on personal experience by the various speakers helped the youth to see that the priests were there to help them and that the Church was close to them.

5. The final touch was given by Sr. Elvira and her boys. The joy and love which bubbled over from these people touched many hearts and helped to deepen their faith in the God of love and mercy.

The visionaries have the gift of being able to communicate with ease the contents of Christian life. The simplicity which Mary uses when She speaks to them - and to us through them - shines through the visionaries for the benefit of all.

6. Given the readiness of the youth and of the special grace of Mary, some suggested it would have been opportune to offer concrete ways of advancing on a spiritual journey which the youth were beginning, to ensure an ongoing conversion, however, it seems that the multiple ideas and differences in opinion impeded this from happening.

7. Some felt that the programme was too intense and did not allow time for reflection. It can be said, though, that the Festival was for all a beautiful gift. For the beginners there was the discovery of God and of the meaning of life. For the others there was the confirmation that you cannot fight the enemy with your own strength, but with the armour of light which comes from prayer with the heart, and this is what Mary has been telling us for 16 years. (Daniele)

NOTICE: The main-language editions of the Echo of Mary in Medjugorje are now available in the new premises of the MIR-Shalom shop, opposite the church, to the right of the statue of Our Lady.

It happened on the Anniversary

On the 25th June, after the lengthy prayer of healing said by Fr. Jozo over the sick, a group of Polish pilgrims stopped before the outside altar with Sr. Alexandra. They stayed till late into the night, praying in a circle around Justine, a little girl in a wheelchair. Two Italians from Modena remained after being attracted by their ardent prayer. They then joined the others when they prayed over little Justine. One of them placed their hands on Justine's tiny, stiff legs.

At a certain point in time Justine began kicking her feet and with a choked voiced she cried out "Jesus." Her mother held her hands out to her and she got up and began walking on her own. The others watched in amazement as she walked up the steps and around the altar. In the end they all sang: Glory to God! Hundreds of cases like this are recorded in the Presbytery, to testify that Mary came to visit mankind and She leaves signs, that all may believe. (mp)

Jelena's experience:

how Our Lady taught us to pray with the heart

25 year old Jelena Vasilj studies theology in Rome. During her vacations in Medjugorje she often speaks to the pilgrims and answers their questions with wisdom; now with theological precision as well. This is what she told the youth at the Festival:

We visionaries are testimonies that God calls us personally. In December of 1982 I experienced the presence of my guardian angel, and later on of Our Lady who spoke to my heart. The first call was one to conversion, to pureness of heart, so as to be able to accept the presence of Mary... My other experience

concerns prayer. Today I will speak to you of this.

The most encouraging thing is that God calls us; He then reveals Himself as He who is, who was and who always will be. The first conviction is that God's fidelity is eternal. This means that it is not only us who look for God, for it is God Who found us first.

What is Our Lady asking of us? That we look for God; that we have faith. Faith is not a thing; it is the heart at practice. God speaks in the Bible a thousand times; He speaks of the heart and asks for conversion of the heart. The heart is the place where He wants to enter; it is the place of decision. That is why Our Lady at Medjugorje asks us to pray with the heart, which means deciding to give oneself totally to God... When we pray with the heart it is giving ourselves. The heart is also the life which God gives us, and which we are able to see through prayer.

Our Lady says that prayer is authentic when it becomes the gift of self, and when the encounter with God makes us feel grateful to Him: this is the most obvious sign that we have met Him. We see this in Mary: after the Annunciation when She visited Elizabeth, gratitude and praise was born in Her heart. Our Lady says to pray to receive the blessing, and this blessing was the sign that we had received grace, that is, that we were pleasing to God.

Our Lady showed us different ways of praying, for example with the Rosary... The Rosary prayer is very valid because it includes the important element of repetition. We know that the only way of being virtuous is to repeat the name of God, to have Him always present. That is why saying the Rosary means to penetrate the mystery of the heavens and at the same time, as we renew the memory of the mysteries, we enter into the grace of our salvation.

Our Lady convinced us that after the prayer of the lips comes meditation and then contemplation.

Searching for God in an intellectual sense is okay, but it is important for prayer not to remain intellectual, but to go beyond this, towards the heart. This type of prayer is the gift we received and which allows us to meet God. This prayer is silence, where the word lives in us and bears fruit. The most shining example of this silent prayer is Mary. The main thing that allows us to say yes is humility.

The big problem in prayer is distraction and also spiritual laziness, and the only thing that can help us is faith. I need to close myself off from my surroundings and in prayer ask God to give me a deep, strong faith. Faith helps us know the mystery of God, and then our hearts will open. For spiritual laziness there is only one remedy: asceticism, the cross. Our Lady calls us to see the positive aspect of renouncement. She does not ask us to suffer for the sake of suffering, but to give space to God. Also fasting must become love; it leads us to God and allows us to pray.

Another element in our growth is community prayer. The Blessed Virgin always tells us that prayer is like a flame and that all together we become a great force. The Church teaches us that our adoration must not be just personal, but also on a community level and that it calls us to be united and to grow together. When God reveals Himself in prayer, He shows us ourselves and He shows us reciprocal communion. Mary places the Holy Mass above all prayers. She said that during Mass heaven descends upon the earth. So, if after many years we have not understood the greatness of Holy Mass, we cannot understand the mystery of Redemption.

How has Our Lady guided us during these years? It has been a journey of peace, and of reconciliation with God the Father. The good that we have received does not belong to us and thus it is not just for us... She directed us to the parish priest of then to begin a prayer group and She promised that She would lead it Herself, and She asked us to pray together for four years. So that this prayer would be rooted in our lives She asked us to meet once a week, then twice, then three times.

1. The meetings were very simple. Christ was central. We had to recite the Rosary of Jesus which is centred on His life so we could understand who Christ was. Each time, She asked us for penance, for

conversion of the heart, and if we had some sort of a problem with someone that we should ask forgiveness before coming to pray.

2. Little by little our prayer became prayer of renouncement, of surrender and of gift of self, in which we had to give to God all our difficulties. This lasted 15 minutes. Our Lady called us to give all ourselves and to belong totally to Her. After this the prayer became prayer of thanksgiving and it finished with the blessing. The Our Father is the essence of all our relations with God and each meeting concluded with the Our Father. In place of the Rosary we said seven Our Father's, Hail Mary's and Glory Be's, especially for those who were guiding us.

3. The third meeting of the week was for dialogue, an exchange among ourselves. Our Lady set the theme and we spoke on it. Our Lady told us that like this She gave herself to each of us and shared our experience and that God enriched each of us. It is extremely important to be accompanied spiritually. She asked us to have a spiritual guide because to understand the dynamics of a spiritual life we need to understand the inner voice, that inner voice which we must seek in prayer, that is, the will of God, the voice of God in our heart. (4 August 1997)

Rosaries for China. Bishop Tong has said how a congregation often shares one rosary as they are not available to buy and the people are so poor. If anyone has a rosary to give... Contact: Bishop John Tong, 116 Caine Road, Hong Kong

"Priests at Mary's school"

This was the theme of the 4-day retreat for the 120 priests who came from all over the world to take part in the retreat led by Fathers Slavko, Cavalluzzo (from Naples) and Jozo (present for only 1 day). It was a success, and will be repeated next year. Fr. Slavko said: "Many said how they re-discovered the value of prayer, the joy of being priests, the value of the Eucharist and particularly of confession." One from Brescia said: "It was a heavenly experience, both because of Mary's presence and the brotherly communion experienced by all, thanks to the fathers who led the retreat and the visionaries."

Mirjana did not hesitate to say that Our Lady expects holiness from priests and that also the people expect it. Ivan repeated a message given by Our Lady for priests: Praised be Jesus Christ, my beloved sons. When I see you here I am filled with joy. I bless you all with my motherly blessing. May the spiritual renewal which has begun here continue in your parishes. My dear sons, do not tire to invite everyone to prayer. The Mother will pray to her Son for you all. So pray, pray, pray! Go in the peace of God.

The pilgrims in Medjugorje were often moved by the great number of priests present for the celebrations. **Sr. Emmanuel** gathered up a number of testimonies. A 35 year old priest said: "I had never seen anything like it. Other retreats I had attended involved working with the head, but here it is your heart which is moved. It's as though Mary has done the Spring cleaning in my house: moved things around for a thorough dusting. Now I count on Her to put things back in the right place." Another, from Poland, said: "I received a grace. I am not afraid anymore of speaking to the others. I was invaded by immense peace. I want to bring my fellow priests and all my family here!" A parish priest said: "Prayer was already important for me, but here it became the foundation of my whole life. I have decided to consecrate very much time to prayer, and I have decided to start fasting one day a week, for it is indispensable." Not one of the priests left Medjugorje unchanged.

Bishop from Tanzania says: Learn to carry cross - Newly elected Bishop from Tanzania, Mons. Damian Kyaruzi took advantage of his voyage to Rome where he was ordained bishop on 29th July to visit also

Medjugorje. This was his first visit to Medjugorje. He was struck by the intense prayer of the pilgrims in the church and on the hills. He said, "The pilgrims who come here discover the gift of life and become messengers of peace... When I go back home I will tell my people that it is good to learn to accept whatever life hands out and to carry out to the full one's task in life while looking at and following the way which leads to the Cross of Jesus..."

Bishop from Cameroon says: Take advantage of this time of grace - Mons. Adalbert Hdzana, bishop of Mbalmayo in Cameroon, was in Medjugorje mid June. He said: "I eagerly go as a pilgrim to Marian places; I have been twice to Lourdes and to Fatima, and now I am happy to be here in Medjugorje which to me seems to be the on-going of Fatima. Here I see the realization of the Gospel in the situations common to the man of today. The Virgin speaks in a simple manner, and Her messages do not contain threats or fear. She calls man to love and to trust in God. The contents of the messages conform to the Gospel and to Church Tradition. Mary invites us to accept the sacraments which give us divine life, and to live according to them, in particular reconciliation and the Eucharist..."

If the Church is cautious it is because the events have not finished, but good things have been happening here for a long time. When I go back home I will tell my people of the importance of conversion and consecration. The Virgin continues to repeat to us to be free of sin and to be open to God's love. I invite everyone to take advantage of this time of grace which God is granting us through Mary..." (see Echo 134 p 5)

Archbishop from Colombia, Mons. Fabio Betancourt Tirado, was in Medjugorje for the anniversary with a group of pilgrims from his diocese of Manizales. He said: "This is my first time here. I can feel the presence of God here. I feel the grace that God gives to His faithful through His Mother. The Blessed Virgin here is asking us to listen to the Lord who asks us, through His Mother, to turn away from sin and to become bearers of peace."

Fr. Slavko and Vicka on mission in the Netherlands - Holland is one of those countries which has been profoundly struck by a religious crisis, yet pilgrims from this country continue to arrive. With time they have become witnesses of the Virgin's messages amid their own people. [A sign of their vitality is the lovely edition of the Echo of Mary in the Flemish language. The 8,000 copies are distributed by friend Frank Van Strijthagen from Maastricht.]

Fra Slavko and Vicka were invited to visit Holland at the end of June and during their 3 day stay they met a great number of faithful who took part in the prayer meetings. One of the priests from a parish where a meeting was held commented on how the spiritual movement of Medjugorje brought so much light to the hearts of men, saying that only those who have been here are ready to pray, adore and take part in the Eucharist.

During their stay, Fra Slavko and Vicka also visited General Blaskic (from Croatia) who is awaiting trial, to bring consolation to a prisoner, whether guilty or not.

Church of Medjugorje dedicated to patron of pilgrims!

The feast of St. James, patron of the parish, was solemnly celebrated on 25th July. The statue of the Saint was taken in procession as far as the park where the Eucharist was then celebrated. For the occasion an effigy of St. James in stone relief was fixed to the face of the church, donated by sculptor and military

chaplain, Fra Joakim Gregov from the Franciscan province of Zara.

The parish of Medjugorje was founded in 1892 and St. James the greater, patron of pilgrims, was chosen as its patron saint. Of course no one had imagined then that millions of pilgrims would come here, many more than at Compostela which has been receiving pilgrims for centuries. The old parish church was built in 1897 but it was built on unstable land so a new one had to be built. The remains of the old one can be seen in the park. The present church was completed and consecrated in 1969. Far too big for the few inhabitants of Medjugorje, Providence had something else in mind. Now it is not big enough to hold everyone!

The association of guides for pilgrims in Medjugorje held a seminar from 21 to 24 July for formation of guides. The programme was: the messages of the Holy Scriptures (Fra Miljenko Stojic), Christian messages (Fra Ivan Tolj), the Virgin's messages (Fra Slavko) and tourism and pilgrimages tied to the Medjugorje event (Marija Dugandzic). Those who pass the tests will be able to work as guides at the Shrine. In this way pilgrims are sure to receive valid information and directions. (News taken from the Press Bulletin)

Ivan's group celebrated its 15th year on the 4th July. The meetings include songs for Our Lady, the Rosary and prayers of invocation to the Holy Spirit. They are held on the hill of apparitions and on Krizevac, twice weekly. The 16 members of the group, chosen by Mary, had been at Her school for 4 years before deciding what to do with their lives. At this school, they say that they also learnt how to sing. And what a joy it is for us to hear them sing under the stars. Nonetheless, the quality of a prayer group and its spiritual fertility do not depend on receiving extraordinary gifts, but on the response that each member gives to God in the depth of his or her heart. Therefore, the most "ordinary" of groups can exceed even the "extraordinary" groups. All it has to become is a brooding ground for saints.

The Gospa in television - Sr. Emmanuel's TV programme is being aired by more and more countries. It is also expected to be aired in Romania, Hungary and in Taiwan which, it is hoped, will transmit to mainland China. Promoters of the programme, Children of Medjugorje, P.O. Box 1110, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556, USA.

Marija Pavlovic Lunetti gave birth to her third boy, Marco Maria, on 19 July in Monza (Italy), which is why she was not at the youth festival. Both are well. Our best wishes to all the family. Ivanka, who lives a rather secluded life in her home in Miletina, has three children and would like more.

Surrender to Mary - The father of a Chinese family, of modest conditions, had worked hard to send his son to school in London. The first two years were fruitful, but in the third year he started using drugs. One day he wrote to his father to say that he had given up his studies. What a blow it was for his father! Tears constantly filled his eyes, thinking the worst would come of him. However, both he and his wife, charged with spiritual renewal received through Medjugorje, decided to surrender the entire situation to Mary's Heart, and during prayer the father was inspired to offer up his cigarettes (2 packets a day). It wasn't easy, but out of love for his son he kept it up. A little time after he received a letter from his son saying that he had returned to University and that all of a sudden he felt disgusted by drugs and that he felt an inner strength urging him to continue with his studies. The date in the letter coincides with the "cigarette fast." The father wept for joy as he told this story.

(Taken from Sr. Emmanuel's diary)

St. Therese of Lesieux: "My vocation is love"

She is so popular that her face is printed on t-shirts, yet her face resists the idolatry of holiness. Therese of the Child Jesus, rather than the "saint," continues to remain a sister, a friend, "one of the family." The transparency of her eyes is such that it takes you far beyond the eye itself and even beyond the person of Therese. Those eyes lead to the truth of the soul - hers and of every person, to that well of human suffering into which God Himself descended and from which He re-ascended, taking us with Him. It is Therese's way of being so similar to us that wins us over; it is that way of confessing her weaknesses with the innocence of a child, while we would tend to hide them even to ourselves. Thus, she becomes a friend, able to understand us. Who is weak, and I am not weak? (2 Co 11:29), but once she has gained our trust Therese leads us way beyond ourselves and our worries.

I have seen the affliction of my people and have heard their cry. I have come down to deliver them and to bring them up out of this land (Ex 3:7-8). Like all saints and authentic Christians, Therese speaks to us of the eternal mystery of Easter, of the passage from this world to the Father. But before she could give us the reality of the God who came to live amongst us to save us, it was necessary for Therese Martin to experience exile herself, step by step. At the age of 4 she lost her mother and when she was 10 she came down with a mysterious illness. It was after about seven weeks (it was the 13th May) that Marie, her eldest sister, and Leonie and Celine were on their knees at the foot of Therese's bed, praying. Therese also turned to look at the statue of Our Lady and prayed with all her heart. "All of a sudden the blessed Virgin appeared to me... What went right to the depths of my soul was Her ravishing smile. Then all my pain vanished..."

Twelve years later Therese said of that illness, "It certainly came from the devil who wanted to take revenge on me." Here we see the Gospel written over again by the faith of each generation: On seeing their faith, Jesus healed them.

Therese was healed, but not yet re-born. Years of suffering awaited this fragile and vulnerable adolescent: separation from her dear ones, incomprehension, scruples and anxieties in her spiritual life. She felt paralyzed and "imprisoned in the swaddling clothes of infancy." How could one not see himself in this suffering of hers and not find himself in her sense of solitude? Still a young girl, she had already experienced the truth of man's existence: Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Rom 7:24).

At the age of 14 came the miracle: "In an instant, content with my good will, Jesus accomplished the work I had not been able to do in ten years. Since that blessed Christmas night I have not been vanquished in any battle, but I have marched from victory to victory and begun, so to speak, to run a giant's course." It makes one laugh, almost, to think of the event which surrounded the miracle: her beloved father made a remark which hurt her and made her cry, but in an instant she recovered, dried her tears and was full of joy. "Therese was no longer the same. Jesus had changed her heart." Can an event so small bring about such a change? Could it be that from this whim was born the "greatest saint of modern times"? Scandal -says our pride, but Jesus' little flower saw in that instant of courage all the grace of her conversion. Therese was no longer the same. God, out of His mercy, had changed her. Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

This inner healing was the start of her journey towards God and that miracle of grace and of love led Therese to the point of offering herself as a victim to the Merciful Love for the salvation of sinners. "In no time the Lord was able to free me from the narrow circle that I was turning in, not knowing how to get out. Freed from scruples and excessive sensitiveness, my mind developed... Jesus made me become a

fisher of human beings. I had a great desire to pray and give my life for sinners. I felt Charity enter my heart and the need to forget myself, and I felt extremely happy."

To heal and to love are pieces from the same reality: the soul receives from the Holy Spirit the strength to lift itself up and away from itself, and freed from having to turn around itself, it moves and searches for the Other being and meets Him... "One Sunday, as I looked at a picture of Jesus Crucified, I noticed that no one was collecting the blood he had shed. I therefore decided to remain, in spirit, at the foot of the cross to collect the divine dew of Jesus' Blood and realized that I would, in the future, have to sprinkle it on souls... The cry of Jesus on the cross echoed in my heart: I thirst! These words lit up in me an unknown and very live fervour... I wanted to give a drink to my Beloved and I myself felt devoured by thirst for souls."

The pain of her ego was by now substituted by the pain of God, Who is fount of life. Man's wound is healed by God's Wounds and becomes one with Them. From this point on Therese's sufferings became pains of love for the sake of love.

We too can begin this journey. Therese, healed and freed by Love, is here, like all the saints, to tell us that the exodus from our state of slavery can become a reality. There is no suffering, no misery, no weakness that God our Father does not consider too insignificant to care about. All Jesus wants is to descend into our imprisoned selves, to free us and flood us with love, as He did with her.

(The sisters from the community of Pozzo)

St. Therese's words: "In the heart of the Church... I will be Love... Now I have no other desire but to love Jesus madly. I no longer desire suffering, or death; my only desire is to love. It is surrender which guides me; I have no other compass! I can ask for nothing else with fervour except for perfect fulfilment of God's will.

It is through mercy that I contemplate and adore the other divine perfections, then they all appear to radiate with love. It seems to me that justice itself, perhaps more than any other, is robed in love. What joy to think that the good God is just, that is, that He holds count of our weaknesses, that He knows to perfection the fragile state of our nature. What then should we fear?"

Reproach for preachers - Therese's practical sense demanded that her ardent Marian devotion be transformed into the practice of those virtues which made Mary "All Holy." Thus, from her bed of suffering, she felt she had to make the following reproach for preachers, she who would have liked to preach to tell the others of Our Lady and who poured out her feelings to her sister, Mother Agnes: "Priests have to show us virtues which can be practised! It is good to stress Mary's outstanding features and titles, but above all one needs to be able to imitate Her. She prefers imitation. No matter how nice a homily on the Blessed Virgin is, if you are made to say time after time only: 'Ah!.. Ah!...' you get sick of it! How I like to sing to Her: 'The narrow path to heaven was made easy by you with the practice of the most humble of virtues.'"

Mary welcomes married couples

A recent pilgrimage-retreat was recently held in Medjugorje for 35 married couples. It was a matter of truly taking one's problems to Mary. The retreat was organized by Fr. Urbano, and ably conducted by Fr. Ivan Bradvica. The sense of confidentiality allowed the couples to be open and sincere. It was an occasion for the priests to see how today's couples are in need of help to solve their problems and heal their wounds, even before helping their children. Moments of special grace included Mary's

apparition to Ivan and the climb up Podbrdo and Krizevac where they considered their own lives while meditating on Mary's and on the Lord's Passion.

The testimonies of Vicka, Ivan and Jelena showed that the visionaries have not lost that initial freshness and simplicity. Mary's presence in Medjugorje is all the more evident, more than what man can imagine.

* Some of the many letters with which Mary consoles us for our fatigue:

A young man who found conversion in Medj. in 1994 wrote: "My heart is filled with joy thanks also to you... Now my life is in God, and nothing of my past is unknown to Him. Each day brings something new because it renews the miracle of Love.... The Echo of Mary is the most wonderful gift I have ever received. It gives me a new spiritual charge each time and such joy! As I read it I am aware of a divine action that accompanies the words. I listen with my heart to Mary's messages which I see as the sweetest words a mother could say and I find the answers for everything I need. Thanks also to your untiring work God grants me such joy. I wanted to share it with you." Ivano

From Brazil - "...Echo always gets here in the crucial moments, when I'm feeling desolated, arid, or when I need to make a decision. I receive so much help from it and pastoral support as well." (Fr. Luiz Carlos di Barro from Corda)

From Catanzaro: "Please do not deprive us of Our Lady's voice. She will support you because it is Her voice." (A. Catroppa)

* To friend in Singapore we suggest you read 1 Pt 2:19-20 and 1 Pt 4:13-16 and Phil 1:29; see also the reply given in Echo 134 p.8. Pray, be an example.

The truth of Medjugorje

On the 16th anniversary bishops Franic and Hnilica, together with the fathers in charge of Medjugorje, wrote a long letter to give testimony in firm yet calm terms to the events of Medjugorje. The letter has been made available all over the world thanks to the MIR Information Office in Medjugorje. We present a summary of the letter.

"The spiritual movement of Medjugorje is one of the greatest and most authentic movements of the 20th century. It involves the faithful, the clergy, the religious and bishops who testify to the multiple spiritual benefits had by the Church... Tens of thousands of pilgrims have been to Medjugorje... and thousands of priests and hundreds of bishops bear witness that people here convert and that their conversions are long lasting.. The number of those who experience Mary's presence and Her special grace cannot be counted. Also countless is the number of spiritual and physical healings and the vocations to the consecrated life..."

The archbishop of Split, Mons. Franic, had no doubts when he said years ago: "The Queen of Peace has done more in 4 years of apparitions than all of us bishops in 40 years of pastoral work in our dioceses." The prayer groups which have sprung up all over the world are a living and active presence within the Church. Proof is the enormous amount of aid from all parts of the world sent to help the peoples of the former Yugoslavia.

The letter mentions the negative judge-ments and ambiguous statements made by the press, making people think that the Church does not think well of Medjugorje and that it is forbidden to go there [of course, the Church can say nothing definite while the apparitions continue]. It also mentions the statement given by the spokesman for the Vatican, Mr. Navarro Valls (August 1996): "1. There has been

no new decision with regards to Medjugorje since the last declaration made by the Yugoslav bishops on 11th April 1991. 2. Everyone can organize private pilgrimages to go there to pray."

It then examines recent world events (Russia, Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina) in the light of the latest Marian messages and sees in them the loving intervention by Mary. Ten years before the war She came to Medj. crying and invoking: "Peace, peace, peace. Be reconciled" to call Her children to conversion so the catastrophe could be avoided. She also did this in Kibeho. Mary preserved from destruction the little oasis of peace in Herzegovina. Through the messages and the grace in Her children Mary wants to bring peace to the lands lacerated by ethnic hatred, and conversion to all men, that they may have true peace. The favourable judgements by the Pope are also mentioned. Though only private, these have been given in many different circumstances. Most of all he has voiced them to bishops, priests and groups of faithful who ask for his opinion. More than once he said that Medjugorje is the continuation of Fatima. "The world is losing its sense of supernatural and the people are finding it in Medj. through prayer, fasting and the sacraments," he said to the medical commission of the Arpa association. To Fr. Jozo Zovko the Pope said: "Protect Medjugorje" and more than once he has expressed his desire to visit the Shrine. "The spiritual movement of Medjugorje was born out of fidelity to the urgent appeal by the Queen of Peace: 'Pray, pray, pray.' Mary led the faithful to adoration of Jesus in the Eucharist, to draw from Him the light of the Holy Spirit so as to comprehend and live the Word of God, to know how to love, to forgive and to find peace... Mary asks for simple, essential things necessary to Christian living which are often forgotten. These are the Eucharist, the Word of God, monthly Con-fession, daily Rosary, fasting... We must not be surprised to note that Satan tries in many ways to destroy the fruits of Medjugorje; nor should we fear contrary voices... This is not the first time that within the Church there are conflicting opinions on supernatural events. We, however, place our trust in the Supreme Pastor... Let us unite our hearts to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. These are the times announced at Fatima; the times of the universal Totus Tuus which, through the pontificate of John Paul II, is spreading to the entire Church, but which also finds a lot of resistance." ... "To the dark forces of evil Mary asks us to respond with the pacific weapons of prayer, fasts and charitable love, which points to Christ and which leads us to Christ. Let us not disappoint the expectations of her motherly Heart" (John Paul II, 7.3.93). Signed: Mons. Frane Franic, Mons. Paul M. Hnilica, fra Tomislav Pervan (Superior of the Franciscans in Herzegovina), fra Ivan Landeka (Parish priest of Medjugorje), fra Jozo Zovko, fra Slavko Barbaric, fra Leonard Orec. Dated 25.6.97

Fr. Slavko on official acknowledgement - "... The controversy with the Bishop of Mostar has not yet been settled. The conflict goes back 30 years and regards the sub-division of the diocesan parishes, many of which he would like the Franciscans to hand over. This is also the reason why Medjugorje has not received official recognition. The Vatican has not opposed it, but individuals are damaging it... The Bishop says we manipulate the people when they oppose the pass-over of the parishes and that we will do the same with Medjugorje. At times I think it would have been better if Our Lady had not appeared in a place where there is conflict... but I am profoundly convinced that the truth will eventually shine out.

Attention! The only **Polish edition** of Echo of Mary authorized by us is the one edited by Ewa Jurasz who has taken the place of the late lamented Marta Mirkiewicz. Requests for copies, donations and mail to: Echo Maryi, 30-960 Krakow, skr.pocz. 188, Poland. Fax (48) 12-6475528

6th Annual YOUTH 2000 Prayer Festival, Scotland at Craig Lodge, Dalmally, was held at the end of June and again it was a great success. Locutionist Jelena Vasilj from Medjugorje attended, and proved very popular with the young people.

Fr. Harry Brock, CFR (a Franciscan of the Renewal) who works with the destitute in the Bronx, NY, led the retreat with inspiring talks centred on the Eucharist. Fr. Harry was accompanied also by Br. Edkins who is a former member of the Krizevak Community (founded at Craig Lodge in 1990). The KC accepts young men and women (20-30 years) who wish to spend a year at Craig Lodge closely following the Medjugorje message in prayer, service and evangelization. In addition to religious vocations, the KC is producing Christian marriages which radiate light to those around them by their example.

* Best wishes and blessings upon Joanne Lanzarini, daughter of Beverley, translator for the English edition of the Echo. Joanne was born 1st June, feast of Corpus Christi.

May the Holy Rosary unite us and keep us in the grace of this time which belongs to Mary, while we live according to all Her words. With Her motherly blessing,

Villanova, 26.08.97

Sped.Abb.Post.3/70, Aut.Trib.Mant.#13-8.11.86; Legal Dir: A.Lanzani;
Printed by DIPRO, Italy, Fax: 0422-840804

Open yourselves to God and God will work through you and give you everything you need.