



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace

138

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Our Lady's message of 25 Feb. 1998:

Dear Children, Also today I am with you and I invite you all once again to draw close to me by means of your prayers. In particular, I invite you to renunciation in this time of grace.

My dear Children, meditate and live, through your little sacrifices: the Passion and Death of Jesus for each of you. Only if you draw close to Jesus will you understand the incommensurable love which He has for each of you. Through prayer and your acts of renunciation you will become more open to the gift of faith, to love for the Church, and to those around you. I love You and I bless You. Thank you for responding to my call.

Live Jesus' Passion by practising renunciation

Draw close to me: Come, children, listen to me! When you pray whilst looking at me in the Holy Spirit - without distraction or personal gain - I am with you and I speak to you. Today I will teach you to live this time of grace, which is a good time for your conversion.

By inviting us to meditate and live the Passion and Death of Jesus (through little sacrifices), our Blessed Mother places us before the event of the Cross, and this is the essential mystery which makes us understand the true meaning of life, for to draw closer to Jesus is to understand the immeasurable love that He has for each of us.

God made us, not because He needs us, but because He wanted us to share His eternal happiness. Man, though, created his own aim in life, but his state of well-being where God does not exist, is destined to end in nothing. God, in His Mercy, came down to us and paid for all of us, to give us the possibility to leave the wide way and to learn of His incomparable Love and thus the eternal happiness for which we were created and which, through our sin, we renounced.

The Cross is the book in which the Saints read the Truth, Wisdom and Love of God: His love is such that it surrounds us and it saves us. That is why Our Lady reminds us that we should meditate - which means "to place in the centre" - the Passion and Death of Jesus, which give meaning to our lives. She also invites us to live them, that is, to bring our lives in line with Jesus' way, and this means to renounce all those things which take us away from God.

So, we must turn off the voices of the world which resound in our ears all the day long and tune in to God's Love, accept His teachings and follow His way. Then it will be easier for us to offer small acts of renunciation (e.g. say no to our ways of reasoning, discussing, complaining; to our vanity, curiosity, excess spending (give what is extra to the poor), gluttony and the other little things to which we are attached.

Then we will be able to renounce sin: fast from sin and from the occasions which lead to sin, fast from the things you are attached to, fast on bread and water, fast from the television and magazines, suggested Our Lady to Jelena's group. When Our Lady assures us that She loves and blesses us, it is to take us onto this way of salvation which is none other than Jesus' Cross so that we can love It with all our heart and share all the more in His unfathomable love.

In doing so we become mirrors of Jesus and His love, and a reminder for men of the Truth about life and salvation. Through our sacrifices, which help us meditate the Cross, our hearts open up to everything else, such as a deeper faith, love for our Church, and love for others, especially for "those who do not yet know God's love" for whom Our Mother prays unceasingly. Our hearts are then able to grow to become similar to Jesus'. Fr. A.

Turn off the TV Turn on your Heart

The journey towards the Holy Easter, which has just begun, is a time of grace not to be wasted. No liturgical time is the same; Advent and Lent of this year are not identical to Advent and Lent of last year. Each time is a new chance; each is a unique and unrepeatable chance to advance in Love and to give space to Jesus in us.

Lent is a special time; it is an invitation for us all to meditate on the Passion, Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, unless we break away from our world, renounce something, create silence around us; unless we turn off the channels of our every day life and turn on our hearts to Jesus and Mary, we will not gain anything from this grace-filled time. We have to tune in to the wavelength of Love, but to be able to pick it up we need to be humble and attentive, because God's love is not intrusive, overpowering or imposing, but is infinitely discreet, immense, eternal and patient.

So, let us turn off those channels of ours called fear, anxiety, worry, worldly interests, egoism, etc. and draw close to Jesus and Mary so that we can feel their Love and experience the mystery of Resurrection which the Passion and Death of Our Lord continues to operate in us today.

Nuccio

Our Lady's message of 25 January 1998

Dear Children, Today I invite you all once again to prayer. It is only with prayer, my children, that your heart will change and become better and more sensitive to the Word of God. My Children, do not allow Satan to carry you away and do with you as he wants.

I invite you to be responsible and resolute, and to consecrate yourselves each day to God, in prayer.

Do not let Holy Mass be for you a habit, but life. When you live the Holy Mass every day you feel the need for holiness and you will grow in holiness.

I am near you and I intercede for each of you before God, that He may give you the strength to change your heart. Thank you for responding to my call.

Pray to change your heart and drive back Satan

In this message Mary warns us against Satan who wants to distract us from prayer to make us do what he wants. Our Lady thus invites us to be responsible and resolute in driving him back by consecrating ourselves every day to God so that we can grow in holiness.

I invite you all once again to prayer. He who does not pray interrupts his relationship with God and his dependence on Him, in the belief that he is self-sufficient, and thus ends up on the way of deceit. He who prays is attentive to God's will and asks for His grace so as to carry it out. And that is how prayer changes your heart; it exchanges carnal feelings with God's feelings. "While you pray I am able to act in your heart," Mary once told us. Without prayer everything worsens.

Prayer is an open channel between heaven and us through which passes God's grace and His Spirit. He gives us a new heart able to love God and our fellow men, because when our heart meets God's heart (which speaks to us, loves us, and is merciful) it changes to conform to His, and we become the trusting children who can obtain everything from the divine goodness: Everything is possible for those who believe:

Your heart will become more sensitive to the Word of God. God always speaks to us, especially in the Word announced by the Church. What impedes us from listening to it, accepting it and appreciating it, and thus doing as it says? Without a doubt it is our heart so full of other things which has no room for God. The unspiritual man does not understand the things of the Spirit of God (1 Co 2:14). Prayer is the good ground in which the Word takes root and bears fruit, because it allows the Spirit to work.

Mary once again talks about Satan: do not let him carry you away and do with you as he wants. We must not forget that man's life on the earth is a battle (Jb 7:1), and the more one desires to live with God the more the battle is harder. When Satan is thrown out by He Who is Stronger, it is Satan's desire to go back into the soul he was thrown out of; for this Jesus does not tire to tell us: keep watch and pray; pray without tiring. A Christian cannot ignore Satan's existence and his work and thereby become his victim without realizing it.

The Council reminds us that: "Man is unable to overcome the attacks of evil on his own, thus he feels chained up. However, the Lord Himself came to free him and to give him strength, by renewing him from within and throwing out the prince of this world" (Gaudium et spes, no. 13). Thus, "he who prays saves himself; he who does not pray condemns himself," and so, Satan tries to distract us from our prayer, using all his strength, empty promises and pretexts. It is when you don't pray that Satan finds free ground and open doors.

Live the Holy Mass - Mary asks us to be responsible, but for what? For our lives, as they belong to God; for our Christian vocation, as we are responsible for all those who wait on our witness to find the Good; for the Church, which we cannot betray and for which we cannot be dead weights. And we must be resolute, for the key to our lives is in our own hands; it depends on our will.

So that our lives are not left in Satan's power, Our Blessed Mother teaches us to consecrate ourselves every day to God in prayer, so that our enemy cannot find the smallest space in us for himself. So begin by consecrating the day to God during your morning prayer (eg. with the Montfort prayer of consecration), asking God and Mary to bless you, and in the evening examine your conscience, asking God to forgive you for your wrongdoings, then thank Him and offer yourself to Him.

In this message Mary once again talks to us about the greatest of prayers, and that is the Holy Mass, as life, not a habit. Going to Mass out of habit makes the greatest mystery of the earth ineffective, which otherwise is the lever able to move the world. Mass becomes life when we take into the world the work

of Jesus which is renewed during Mass, that is, the total offering of Himself to the Father for the sake of mankind. When lived, the Mass renews us too, making us reflections of Jesus in the world. Of course we are weak, but Jesus offers us His forgiveness at each Mass. To come away from Mass without something having changed in us, without having proposed to do better, is the scandal which lessens the value of the Mass and which makes the far-away brothers and sisters abandon it all together.

To live the Holy Mass every day will make us feel the need for holiness and we will grow in holiness. Our Lady here speaks of daily Mass, a sign that She hopes Her little army of children which by Grace has remained faithful, will decide to go to Mass each day. Our Lady once told the visionaries: "Should you ever have to decide between my apparition and Holy Mass, choose the Mass, for at Mass you encounter my Son."

Then Mary ensures us that She is near us and is interceding before God for each of us, with emphasis on "each of us," so that no one can feel excluded from Her love and Her call. And the reason why Mary intercedes for us: so God will give you the strength to change your heart."

Fr. Angelo

God and satan

Sin has its origin in man's desire to substitute himself for God, and each attempt to do so upsets the divine plan and thus the natural order wanted by God. Due to this, the world passes under the dominion of Satan, who is the prince and the beginning of the refusal of God. Thus, the great deceit is set off: man's desire to be independent of God makes him become Satan's slave, and just when he believes he has obtained his freedom, he has in fact lost it!

We have the possibility to choose between the spirit of Truth and the spirit of falsehood, and in this possibility lies our freedom and our responsibility. We are called to make this choice, not once and for all, but day by day, at every instant of our lives. However, it is not an intellectual, but an existential choice. To live prayer; above all, to live the Holy Mass, permits us to make a real contact with God, and thus advance in holiness. This, in turn, allows the Holy Spirit to generate Jesus in us. This holy way is not a mirage, and it is not the spirit of falsehood trying to seduce our pride, but it is the fruit of the seed which Mary planted and which matures through prayer and daily consecration.

Nuccio

Mary seeks upright souls to channel God's grace

Why have Mary's apparitions multiplied so much lately? Why do they last so long? Why are they often accompanied by tears?

Man has excluded God from his heart, and with God went also peace. There isn't peace anymore between God and man, or in the families, among peoples, or in people's souls. God, however, ardently desires to reach out to the hearts of men, so He sent His Mother.

Now the impassioned appeals of a Mother who repeatedly indicates the way to salvation, should open hearts, yet people no longer want to hear or accept the heavenly warnings so as not to change their hearts,

as at the time of Jesus when some preferred to remain blind: Don't you want to see with your own eyes; don't you want to convert, that I may heal you, forgive you, stay with you and make you happy? (cf. Jn 12:40)

So, what does Mary want to achieve with all Her apparitions? She seems to be saying: "I do not want to reproach you any further" (28 Jan. 1987). All the words of reproach said in Fatima, Lourdes, La Salette... went unheeded. The heart of man did not open, but hardened. Man has wanted to become his own lord, to decide personally, and to create the future on his own, without God and without eternity.

Thus, Our Lady is seeking the "ten righteous people" (nowadays this number must be greater, given the proportions between the Sodom of then and the Sodom of now); She is seeking the Christians who want to become salt of the earth and light of the world. "Know that today you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world" (25 Oct. 1996). Today God is looking for the "remaining faithful" of whom the prophets speak; those "righteous people" through whom this world, so attracted and obscured by Satan, can once again be saved and healed. Jesus Christ has offered us the incredible grace of participating in the work of redemption together with Mary.

With infinite love Mary is teaching those Christians who believe and who already live for the love of God and for their fellow men, and who like Paul say: In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church (Col 1:24).

Appeal to entire Church:
pray for Pope

"Lord, do not let him fall into the hands of his enemies" (from the prayer for the Pope).

May unceasing prayer for the Pope rise up to God, as it did from the first Church of Jerusalem for Peter in prison. We know what this Pope, bulwark and defender of the truth, means for the Church and the world of today. It is clear that Mary has defended him and continues to defend him prodigiously from Satan's many accomplices who attempt on his life. Our Lady, though, needs us all to help Her keep back the hands of the enemies who plot against him: "the hands of the Herods, the Judas', the Caiaphas' and the Pilates of today, so that the infinite power and mercy of the Father can shine its victory over the evil one." With these words Bishop Paul M. Hnilica urges us to pray every day for the Pope with the prayer which Leo XIII wrote "against Satan and his rebel angels." Here is the prayer:

Holy Michael, Archangel, defend us in the day of battle; be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, thrust down to hell Satan and all wicked spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls. Amen.

Make the children pray - The same bishop says to the "Marian families": "In the spirit of the messages of Fatima, and in view of the enormous work awaiting John Paul II for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, and given that this is the year of the Holy Spirit, I invite you to ask your small children (5-10 years old) to pray the Rosary, or at least ten Hail Mary's, for the Holy Father and for Our Lady's intentions for one whole year in the evening prior to bedtime.

This special novena for the Pope can be offered up to God by your family. God will make the same promise that He made to the 3 shepherd children of Fatima: through your prayer He will give peace and will protect the life of the Holy Father, but also your family life so threatened by television which has become, especially in the evenings, the queen of your homes!" (P.M.Hnilica)

The Spirit blows on Cuba

The enormous crowds, the enthusiasm of the people, and Fidel Castro's respect and attention, accompanied the Pope in his historical pastoral visit to Cuba (21-26 January) under the docile and triumphant guidance of the Holy Spirit. The seed sown by the Pope will give its fruit and "nothing in Cuba will ever be the same again."

In his homily on Sunday 25 January in Havana, before a crowd of over a million people, the Pope reflected on the meaning of his visit: "I have come as a messenger of truth and hope. .. From Jesus flows the fraternal love among Cuban Catholics and Catholics everywhere, for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (1 Co 12:13), the Mystical Body of Christ which is the Church. Thus the Church in Cuba is not alone or isolated; it is part of the Universal Church.

As I come among you I wish to bring you the Good News of hope in God. As a servant of the Gospel I bring you this message of love and solidarity which Jesus Christ offers to men and women in every age. This is not an ideology or a new economic or political system; it is a path of authentic peace, justice and freedom." The freedom and independence typical of a democratic country is still lacking in Cuba, however, thanks to a renewed relationship with the Church, Catholics are now allowed greater freedom of expression.

On the difficult relationship between State and Religion, the Pope said the truth with charity, without humiliating or reproaching anyone: "..those political systems which presumed to relegate religion to the merely private sphere, stripping it of any social influence or importance. The State, while distancing itself from all extremes of fanaticism or secularism, should encourage a harmonious social climate and a suitable legislation which enables every person and every religious confession to live their faith freely, to express it in the context of public life and to count on adequate resources and opportunities to bring its spiritual, moral and civic benefits to bear on the life of the nation."

The justice proposed by the Church

The Pope spoke on social themes, indicating the Church "as a teacher in the culture of love and of life." Hence, "it is necessary to keep on speaking on these themes as long as any injustice, however small, is present in the world. There are always people who need the voice of the Church so that their difficulties, suffering and distress may be known. The Church is with them and the Pope embraces all who suffer injustice."

The Church is not limited to the promotion of man's social state. "The Church, in carrying out her mission, sets before the world a new justice, the justice of the kingdom of God (cf. Mt 6:33). .. This is the great change which society needs and expects, and it can only come about if there is first a conversion of each individual heart, as a condition for the necessary changes in the structures of society. The truth of which Jesus speaks is not only the intellectual grasp of reality, but also the truth about man and his transcendent condition, his rights and duties, his greatness and his limitations. This liberation cannot be reduced to its social and political aspects, but rather reaches its fullness in the exercise of freedom of conscience, the basis and foundation of all other human rights."

On the challenge of combining freedom and social justice, the Pontiff recalled that "the Church's social doctrine is meant to be a reflection and a contribution which can shed light on and reconcile the relationship between the inalienable rights of each individual and the needs of society. Hence the Catholic laity should contribute to this fulfilment by the application of the Church's social teachings in every sector open to people of goodwill."

In the hope that the "false conflict between faith in God and love and service to one's country" can be overcome, he indicated the teachings of José Martí, a Cuban patriot from the last century: "An

irreligious people will die, because nothing in it encourages virtue."

The crowd repeatedly interrupted the Pope with bursts of applause and joyful shouts, to which he responded: "You are a very attentive audience", "The Pope likes applause because it allows him to take a little rest". And at the end of his homily he said: "This wind today is very significant because wind symbolizes the Holy Spirit which is blowing over Cuba."

He concluded his homily with an appeal to "let Jesus Christ enlighten you; accept without reservation the splendour of his truth," and with an invocation to the Queen of Cuba, Our Lady of El Cobre.

Also Fidel Castro listened attentively, and heartily shook the Pope's hands at the end. During Mass, men, women and priests offered him the "Lord's Peace." Castro, who had already expressed words of esteem for the Pope, whom he called "an exceptional man, full of charisma, with the temper of a battler," said at the end of the visit that he had "accepted with profound respect also those words which he may not agree with." Perhaps he was surprised to hear the Pope say to the youth: "You are not children of the revolution but of the resurrection," and: "Do not fear; open your families and schools to the Gospel values which are not a danger for any social project."

Did he perhaps understand that the Church is no longer an enemy to fight? But she never has been!

Mirko

The courage of the truth pays in the end. The Pope, a staunch supporter of the truth, has never remained silent about the oppression of the freedom-killing regimes of the East, even when these put on a good face, and in the end they fell. Yesterday he spoke out on the sad situation in Cuba.

On the aeroplane on his way there a journalist asked: "What would you like to hear from Castro during this historical visit?" The Pope replied: "Always and all over I want to hear the truth. I want him to tell me the truth; as a man and as President. I also want to hear the truth about the Country, about the Church-State relationship, about everything that is important. The Cuban President knows who the Pope is and if he has invited him it means that he has already thought about what he might say."

In Cuba things have happened, such as the release of 100 political prisoners, even though it was hoped more would be freed. But the air is fresher now in Cuba.

Civitavecchia: Positive conclusions - Ratzinger encourages Pope has last word

On 19th January 1998 Bishop Girolamo Grillo summoned his faithful, priests, religious and lay workers for the reading of his pastoral letter on the lacrimation of the statue of Our Lady. The letter offers a positive view of the situation three years after the Theological Commission and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith concluded their studies. With this pastoral letter it is said that the study of the case must continue on a higher level given that the event has taken on international tones and that the bishop cannot judge an event which concerns his own person (the lacrimation which occurred whilst holding the statue).

The whole question, says the letter, must now "be analysed by the Pope, through his closest collaborators." At the same time Card. Ratzinger invited Msgr. Grillo to: "continue to offer the pilgrims moved by faith to go to Civitavecchia that same attention and pastoral care which he has so far given them and which is necessary for the promotion of a sound devotion to the Blessed Virgin according to Church teachings." This is explicit acknowledgement that there is an extraordinary Marian movement at

Civitavecchia and that the many pilgrims and relative spiritual fruits cannot be ignored. The letter includes indications for an improved acceptance of and spiritual orientation for the pilgrims. These regard the sacrament of reconciliation (of which there is a great request), adoration, the celebration of the Eucharist, the priestly presence, the spreading of an authentic Marian devotion .. and the construction of suitable amenities and a future shrine worthy of Our Lady.

Third anniversary. Thousands of faithful from all parts of Italy and many representatives from the media were present for the celebrations for the third anniversary of the first lacrimation (2 Feb.).

The parish priest at the time of the first lacrimation, Fr. Pablo Martin Sanguiao, has published a book on the event, the cover of which shows a picture of Our Lady between the churches of Medjugorje and Civitavecchia, which reflects the contents of the book. The book, in fact, ties the facts of Civitavecchia to the message of the Queen of Peace in Medjugorje.

On the evening of 1 February, after the great pilgrimage on foot from the centre of Civitavecchia to the shrine (about 8 kms) the bishop blessed the big statue of Our Lady (a copy of the statue in Tihalina) and the big cross donated by the French pilgrims from Dozoulé (7.38 m high).

On the 11th February special celebrations were organized for the Day of the Sick, with the presence of thousands of faithful who participated in a torchlight parade at the closure of the Eucharistic blessing upon each sick pilgrim.

Saturdays and Sundays are particularly busy days for the shrine, so much so that extra father confessors are needed to be called in from Rome.

Fr. Augusto Baldini, Parish Priest

Kibeho: Bishop's act of reparation after massacre foretold by Mary

Bishop Misago returned for the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, 15 September 1996, to Kibeho, holy place of grace since the supernatural phenomena of the 1980's and now a new Golgotha since the spilling of blood in the fratricidal war between Hutu's and Tutsi's. On that occasion he gave this message to his people:

"The great evils which have fallen on Rwanda over these last years were foretold, it seems, in Kibeho during the apparitions, as were the dramatic times which have hit the Church. We were warned. We did not pay heed. We were asked to repent and to sincerely convert, while there was time. We were not ready to accept the messages.

I have called the Marian shrine of Kibeho the Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows because the words pronounced there by the visionaries and the facts which were observed during the apparitions, especially after 1982, all regarded the theme of suffering and its role in the life of a Christian. One of the messages invited us to recite the Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary and we were all urged to do penance so we could sustain the trials, to offer expiation for the world's sins and share in Jesus' passion for man's redemption."

The Bishop recalled the apparition in which the visionaries were terrified by the sight of blood flowing in the streets of Kigali and all over Rwanda, and he spoke of the massacres of April and May in 1994 at Kibeho and the many victims when the refugee camps had been closed down one year later. For this reason Msgr. Misago has proposed that Kibeho become a holy place for all to remember the role of Jesus' Cross and the value of suffering in the life of a Christian. "A disciple of Jesus never seeks separation from the Cross. A child of Mary is never under cover during a trial. This is the message received by the visionaries of Kibeho."

Perpetual Adoration is held in the Shrine where the Blessed Sacrament is exposed in the temporary chapel because the parish church has been severely damaged. Some pilgrims have asked that a Basilica be built, but Msgr. Misago says that the Virgin did not speak of a basilica, but of a chapel, or rather, of two chapels: a small one and a big one. (Il Segno Oct. '97)

News from the blessed land

Medjugorje prays for Pope as Jubilee nears

The friars and pilgrims of Medjugorje wrote to the Pope on 1 January 1998: "Holy Father, From the heart of Bosnia & Herzegovina we wish to console You by revealing to You the promise we made to the Queen of Peace, Who for 16 years has been appearing here in this place which has become an international centre of prayer and conversion, and which has been visited by millions of pilgrims, hundreds of bishops and tens of thousands of priests.

Your holiness, this is our promise: the Parish of Medjugorje, in view of the forthcoming Great Jubilee, wishes to support You and Your universal ministry with a special daily prayer: that John Paul II may open the Holy Door during the Christmas of 1999.

From the beginning of the apparitions Our Lady has repeatedly asked us all to pray especially for the Pope and for the special plan which She has for the Pope. Today we are particularly aware that this great spiritual battle - which in Bosnia & Herzegovina culminated in war - can be won only with the use of the Gospel weapons which Our Lady calls us to live: prayer, fasts, conversion of the heart, the sacraments, the rosary and consecration to Her Immaculate Heart.

While we are aware of our pastoral responsibility, made heavier since the beginning of the apparitions which draw millions of pilgrims, we feel it our duty to make the pilgrims pray for You, Holy Father. We feel inspired by the Queen of Peace to do so, because She asks us to place Medjugorje at the spiritual service of the Pope, by means of prayer, so that the grace of prayer received by so many here is poured out onto the world, also thanks to Medjugorje's contribution, in support of Mary's Pope: that John Paul II may finish the task which God has entrusted him with.

Mexican Bishop not afraid to risk his honour "The Church here is renewed"

At the beginning of November Lazaro Perez from the diocese of De Autlan Jalisco, came to Medjugorje on pilgrimage with a group of faithful. He said while here: "Medjugorje is well-known in Mexico. I learnt of it for the first time 15 years ago. I must be sincere and say that when we bishops learn of alleged apparitions and similar phenomena we are generally very cautious in our declarations, for fear that a confirmation may generate fanaticism in people with a fragile faith. Well that was my belief in the beginning. Instead I became very interested in the events after having read a book by the theologian Laurentin. In the book he wrote: 'In an era when the gardens of the Church are no longer giving fruit, the moment has come for the Virgin to renew them and give them a new freshness.' I came to the conclusion that the fact that the problems which exist in the Church are still not resolved is to be blamed on us pastors. I did not feel excluded.

We need holy priests and pastors ready to live according to the teachings of Jesus Christ the Good

Shepherd and his Sacred Heart. The unresolved problems have opened the door to atheism, secularism and a consumerism society which has created its own set of values which oppose the Gospel teachings. A theologian friend advised me against coming to Medjugorje, saying that he would not put his dignity at risk by coming here. Prof. Laurentin told me that there are theologians who teach Marian doctrine but do not try to deepen their personal relationship with Mary. All this helped me to become much more interested in the Virgin. I think it is important to pay attention to the good fruits of Medjugorje. I will invite the faithful from my diocese to come here, however, it is a shame that it is so far from Mexico." Mons. Perez spoke of his meeting with Vicka and how she emphasized the importance of the Virgin's messages on conversion, fasting, prayer, forgiveness and holy confession. "Personally," he said, "I think that if the Virgin is trying, through Christ, to re-introduce these values then this should be the fundamental task of each priest and of each bishop. We have to show the faithful that there is a way of salvation in this world because Christ is our way and our Saviour and this is what Christ's Mother is calling us to."

* **The Medjugorje for Children Association**, founded by Swiss pianist Mauro Harsch in 1987 one year after his physical and spiritual healing, celebrated its tenth anniversary last October. It was the first charitable association to be formed under inspiration of the Medjugorje events. It is now active in various countries around the world and works to offer concrete help to needy children, in particular to the poorest, the orphaned and the abandoned. It has also helped realize the "Mother's Village" in Medjugorje which is made up of about 20 cottages, each one of which houses 7 orphans and the relative tutors. Fr. Slavko is in charge of the Village, which now also offers accommodation and assistance to young pregnant and abandoned girls who otherwise would have aborted.

* **Prayer Vigil for the new year** - On 31 December a prayer vigil which concluded with Holy Mass at midnight was held in Medjugorje. The initiative, which began a few years ago, drew several thousand faithful, of whom numerous youth came from various parts of Europe and the USA.

Missionary voyage of Fra Ivan - The Croatian missionaries in Canada and the USA invited Fra Ivan to visit the Croatian communities and prayer centres there during the Christmas and new year celebrations. Fra Ivan was also able to visit the Croatian prisoners due to be heard by the International Court and was able to celebrate Christmas with them. "The personnel were very kind," he said, "and the prisoners, dressed in their best attire, were pleased. I was able to speak to each of them and confess those who desired it. The joyful meeting concluded with Christmas dinner."

5 Seminars of fasting and prayer, organized and conducted by Fra Slavko will be held in the Domus Pacis prayer house in preparation for Easter. Past editions of the seminar have been very successful. The first seminar begins on the 2nd March and the last one concludes just prior to Easter.

Fr. O'Carroll's testimony

Fr. Michael O'Carroll from Ireland is a well known Mariologist and the author of several books on Mary, including a book on Medjugorje. On his latest visit with a large group of pilgrims, he declared: "Medjugorje is a great gift to the Church of today. It is constantly growing and spreading. It is wonderful to see the zeal for prayer and the strong faith of the people and the multitude of penitents and confessors. The Virgin's intercession and power is evident everywhere here. The Pope also acknowledges that. When

Bishop Kim from South Korea told the Pope how grateful he was to him for the liberation of Eastern Europe from Communism the Pope replied: 'No thanks to me, but to Our Lady of Fatima and of Medjugorje.' I personally always experience a renewal of my faith and spirit of prayer here!" He was asked what he thinks of so much opposition in the Church to this kind of event: "In the Church an apostasy is taking place. I personally, together with other Mariologists, see in Medjugorje the continuation of Fatima. In Ireland, through Medjugorje, many people have again found faith, prayer, the sacraments, especially confession and Mass. Our Lady leads us to Jesus and teaches us how to be open to the Holy Spirit.

Knowing all these facts, so obvious, it is also a real mystery to me why the official Church does not accept it. But this shouldn't worry us. Let us continue to respond to the calls of Mary, and all the rest will come when Providence wills. Take care of Medjugorje. It is hope for everyone!"

(From the Press Bulletin)



Sr. Emmanuel was in Malaysia, Singapore and Australia early February to speak about the Heart of Mary, according to the teachings of Medjugorje. In Malaysia she was able to meet various bishops who encouraged their priests to open their churches for prayer meetings in the spirit of Medjugorje.

"The example of one bishop particularly moved me. After his return from Medjugorje he began to live the 5 'stones', fasting twice weekly and animating prayer vigils in his cathedral. He spends the whole night of the first Friday of the month before the Blessed Sacrament together with his faithful, with prayer, songs and meditations. His zeal and simplicity of heart is truly moving. The result: hundreds of baptisms per year.

The youth present at the meetings were splendid, asking for explanations so that they could put the message into practice. They were sincere and truly desired drawing closer to Mary. In Australia Fr. Tim Deeter accompanied me to the various meetings in churches and schools. His testimony is worthwhile putting in a book."

"Beware of false voices," said Vicka recently. The visionaries of Medjugorje say that Our Lady has never said that the daily apparitions will soon cease or be revealed. Instead, Our Lady continues to ask that we pray for Her intentions and that we faithfully live out Her requests. What Our Lady wants is that we pray for Her intentions and faithfully live Her call.

It was not Our Lady who asked for four days of fasting and prayer because of an imminent war. These are uncontrolled voices, which perhaps start from a pilgrim who misunderstood, and then the so-called message goes around the world.

Hand over steering wheel of your life to the Virgin - An elderly priest replied to a young woman in Medjugorje who asked what plan God could have for her:

"When you go from Avignon to Marseilles at night, the lights of your car do not light up all the 100 kms that separate the two towns, but only that part of the road which you need to see. The Holy Virgin does the same when She guides you. She wants to take you to Paradise, but She does not light up all the way, only that part which is necessary for you to go on. If you try to see a kilometre ahead you could end up not noticing the curve which your lights are showing up. Likewise, if you keep your eyes on the rear vision mirror you could end up a tree. So take each day as it comes; entrust yourself to the Blessed Virgin!"

Now, one year later, she says: "That advice changed my life. I put my future in the hands of God's Mother, and in the place of my worries and fears I now have profound joy from feeling so safe in Our

Lady's hands. A few weeks after having met that priest, Jesus called me to a radical change. Fortunately, I had been prepared and was able to say "yes" to Him. I pray for the young people, that they might entrust their future to Mary and stop tormenting themselves; that they surrender themselves to Her; take refuge in Her. When you turn the lights of your vehicle on, renew your "yes" to Mary and live your life day by day!"

Halls instead of tents. Work is still under way in Medjugorje. One of the big green tents has been dismantled and in its place a conference hall will be built. The hall will have three sections and will hold thousands of persons.

A Cardinal in Medjugorje? The Archbishop of Vienna, Msgr. Christoph Schönborn, was ordained a Cardinal by John Paul II on the 22nd February. On the 26th September last, Msgr. Schönborn allowed Fr. Jozo to talk about Medjugorje in his Cathedral, which for the occasion was full. Fr. Jozo told us something about his conversation with Msgr. Schönborn.

"He has understand very well the meaning of Medjugorje and the movement which was born from it. I spoke to him about our problems and in particular about the fruits which come from God's Mother, Her apparitions, and the messages She has been giving in Medjugorje for more than 16 years. Msgr. Schönborn spoke to me about Cardinal Ratzinger, saying that he has recognized the importance of the fruits of Medjugorje. He also said that nearly all the candidates in his Seminary received their call from Medjugorje. I invited him to visit Medjugorje and he replied that it would be a good thing. He told me to continue to work at the service of the Blessed Virgin."

(From the diary of Sr. Emmanuel)

Interview with Marija: from prayer comes gift of faith

Alberto Bonifacio interviewed Marija at Monza on the 14th January last. The following is a summary. When asked if she knew what the Pope thought of Medjugorje, Marija replied in detail, giving numerous testimonies which prove that the Pope truly is interested in Medjugorje (it is known that he reads the Echo). Alberto then asked: "But do you think that he personally believes in Medjugorje?" Marija replied: "Yes, because he has said so on various occasions."

Alberto asked: "Did Our Lady ask you to choose the religious life?" Marija replied: "No! Our Lady has never explicitly asked us to choose the religious life. In the beginning we read the stories of Lourdes and Fatima and we thought that the apparitions would have lasted 18 times at the most, as at Lourdes, and that we would have ended up in a convent like Bernadette and Lucia. I was more than certain that I would have entered a convent, as were Ivan and the others." Marija went on to tell of the various circumstances which led her to choose married life, and of how she manages to reconcile her family life (she has three sons) with her role as visionary.

Alberto: "After 16 years of apparitions has anything in your relationship with Our Lady changed?"

Marija: "No, nothing... If anything Our Lady appears younger than in the beginning.. and with the help of God and Our Lady we have matured."

Marija then mentioned various testimonies (of people whom she knows personally) to show how through suffering one is able to meet Jesus, to prove that the Cross is a mystery of salvation, and she goes on to invite all to offer their sufferings for the sake of their brothers and sisters and for the souls in Purgatory. Alberto asked why she thought Jesus' offering on the Cross was not enough for our salvation, and why we should have to suffer too.

M. "We often say that suffering is a mystery, but I say that it is through suffering that we meet Jesus on

the Cross. So many have told me that it is through their suffering that they found Jesus... We tend to lament over the death of our loved ones, saying: 'He was still so young,' etc., for we would like to live a long time, and we never consider eternity. We must, though, pray for the people who assist those who suffer, that they may be able to help them offer their sufferings also for the others.

When Alberto asked how long she thought the apparitions would last, Marija replied that she didn't know, and added: "We once asked Our Lady when the apparitions would finish, to which She replied: 'Have you become tired of me?', so after that we no longer asked.

Alberto asked: "In this world where there is so much evil - for example abortions, divorces, criminality, marginalization, wars... do you think that Our Lady will continue to shed tears, or will chastisements be sent upon mankind?"

Marija: "I always say that Our Lady is a teacher who wants to re-educate us. When a person doesn't give God first place in his life he is capable of anything, like stealing, killing, etc. So when God is first in our lives the rest comes as a consequence. I think that Our Lady came to re-educate us in faith. I have seen how Our Lady takes us to Jesus, how She indicates Jesus and the Church, and also the prayer group where we are able to meet and pray together, to help one another and share experiences of daily living. She said that faith is a gift and that through prayer we can obtain this gift of faith. She said we have to pray to have this gift of faith."

To the Youth: how to respond to today's challenges

At Numana in Ancona, from 3rd - 6th January, Fr. Tomislav held a meeting for the youth following a specific request by them. The participants numbered about 300. While the theme was: "Look at God with your heart," ever present was the Pope's message for the 13th World Youth Day. The youth, not without problems and hopes, came looking for the truth and for replies. Msgr. Angelo Comastri, bishop of Loreto (he organized Italy's participation at the last Youth Day in Paris) was present on the Sunday and he celebrated the Holy Mass. He brought "warms greeting in the Holy Spirit" and the hope that there will be "witnesses of the Truth who will accept God's Kingdom which is to come."

"Respond to the challenges" was the theme chosen by Fr. Tomislav for his talk on the 5th January.

Following is a summary.

1. The cage - "When a mouse is kept in a cage for a long time, it dies upon being released, unable to resist. Many people seek God as a refuge and are unable to live. They hide themselves in a hole. This happens to those who seek refuge in a convent and to those who develop within themselves a religious aspect which does not fully blossom: they create for themselves a cage. Those people who do not confront themselves with life's trials do not fully develop and are not strengthened. God, instead, wants to give to each person a personality which is able to sustain the confrontation with all life's challenges and be able to find the replies to all life's questions. Our life is a mystery, but the mystery is illumined by the Holy Spirit."

Fr. Tomislav used examples to show that the lack of positive replies to life's challenges leads to attitudes of renunciation and superficiality which block a person from "entering deeply and opening up to the full Truth."

2. Forms of defence which impede a positive response" - "Not only is remaining in the cage an attitude of indifference, but it is one which destroys, for indifference is part of hatred." Thus, not only do we destroy ourselves with similar attitudes, but we destroy those around us. People who are closed up in themselves generally justify themselves by saying things like: "I don't know any better; I don't know what to do," but in reality behind these expressions are a habit and perhaps a liking for the "cage."

"Mary," said Fr. Tomislav, "could not understand but She was open to God's omnipotence, and this

aperture allows one to respond to the world's challenges. Defence defends the evil in us; it defends a sick layer of ourselves. There are three forms of defence: psychological defence, spiritual defence, and Satan-provoked defence with the aim of keeping us in the cage. An attitude of defence can thus favour Satan's work within us.

3. How to let Jesus respond in us to the challenges - "The living Eucharist: Jesus' work continues to the end of time. We need to give ourselves to Jesus so that He can act in us: give Him your eyes so Jesus can see, give Him your feet so Jesus can walk. Some give everything, even their flesh and blood.

Jesus lives in people, and in these people He continues to forgive and to encourage and to make those in the dark come out.

We cannot respond to the world's challenges unless it is Jesus Who does it for us. Jesus in us, in communion with the Holy Spirit, responds to life's challenges... Without aperture to the Holy Spirit Jesus cannot even be conceived in us.

When Christians know how to look at the Cross, beyond the Cross, beyond the death of the Son, as Mary did, they are no longer crushed by the world's provocations. So I say to you: do not run away from trials, for doing so is to run away from yourselves and from those nearest to you; it is to wander aimlessly as Cain did. Rather, live the spirit of aperture there where you are.

Usually people try to run away from trials, but when you are in God your every failure becomes a force which carries you forward. However, when you have everything and when everything goes well for you, you cannot discover or experience this force. Often, in the spiritual life people want to reach a certain level, then rest, as Elijah did. But to stop so as to define a spirituality, "a cage," is to remain blocked, and thus you are unable to grow."

A flower in the guitar. On the last day of the meeting a brother from the community found a flower and a note in the chords of his guitar. The note said: "Your smiles broke down our resistance. Now that we are more open we look forward to the next meeting, when we will be able to pick up every word!" Nicola

Seed of grace: Fr. Slavko's voyage to Poland

"I've come to Poland to pray with and thank the pilgrims who have been to Medjugorje and who asked me to visit them here," said Fr. Slavko on visit with two members of the "Upper Room Community," ex drug addicts, Boris and Niksa.

The visit by witnesses from Medjugorje roused up a lot of interest. All the churches where the prayer meetings were held were filled to capacity and beyond. The meetings lasted about 3 hours and more. In the larger cities, such as Cracow, Poznan and Warsaw, dozens of buses brought faithful from near and far. About 20,000 Poles have visited Medjugorje, so apart from these pilgrims, the meetings drew many new people who wanted to hear about the messages.

Several thousands also listened to Fr. Slavko on the radio (Radio Maria in Poland), and for the first time I noted a lot of interest in Medjugorje by the mass media (papers, radio and television) including the non-Catholic media. By the questions being asked, it was easy to understand that for many, Medjugorje was something new.

Fr. Slavko stressed his belief in the visionaries who see Our Lady, saying that the messages She gives are prophetic. He did not try to force his belief on anyone, but used logical argumentation and unemotional speech. "For Christians the most important thing of all is faith in Jesus; faith which conforms to the Gospel and the teachings of the Church," he said.

"We (Franciscans) do not feel that we are being disobedient to the Bishop or to the Church. Come and

see for yourselves. Medjugorje was not thought up by the Franciscans. The only thing they did was accept Medjugorje and to try to treat the messages seriously, and to preach them and live them. The Franciscans took upon themselves the suffering which it causes."

Before such events the Church waits, which is the wisest thing. Medjugorje is a work of God, because there is no human power in any part of the world able to give such good spiritual fruits. We know that the Holy Father desires to visit Medjugorje; it has been confirmed many times.

Though it had not been planned, Fr. Slavko met two bishops: one in Cracow and Koszaline where Mass was concelebrated with the Archbishop, and one in Czestochowa with the General Father of the Pauline convent. Furthermore, they were able to pray in front of the relics of St. Stanislaw and Poland's holy queen (Edwige).

*** Witness by former drug addicts** - Boris and Niksa, to give testimony to their healing and conversion, besides the prayer meetings in the churches, went to schools and educational centres, centres for drug addicts and prisons. These two young men, sincere and joyful, considered it an honour to be able to share the Good News of God's immense love and mercy with the Polish people. After one of their meetings they proudly showed me a handful of earrings which the young men had in the lobes, noses and even on their tongues. "Look," they told me, "here is another of Our Lady's successes. We spoke to those young men about our conversion and about the community and at the end, after we had suggested it, they removed their earrings and exchanged them with Our Lady medals." I asked what they'd do with them and they said that they will offer them to Our Lady on the Hill of apparitions.

At a meeting with drug addicts in a prison, Boris and Niksa made them reflect on their future: "What choice have you? Either life or death! It is not possible to be freed of drug addiction without help," Boris said in harsh tones to a young man covered in tattoos, and: "All your resolutions are worth nothing without spiritual support, prayer, and help from someone who has already been healed. I too used to think the same way as you, but it didn't help me. I know what prison means too, because I spent time in a military prison. And see, these hands which once only knew how to steal, today do good. Since God renewed my life all I do is give thanks. Don't kid yourselves that you'll be able to kick the habit on your own. Most of my friends who didn't go to a community are already dead; they either committed suicide, or were killed."

"But what can we do if no one wants us.. or needs us.. or loves us?" asked the Polish addicts. "It's not true that no one loves you! Your families suffer more than you do."

"So what do we do?"

"Return to God; pray and look for a community."

The meeting ended with prayer, and all together (prisoners, former drug addicts and prison personnel) they prayed: "...and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen!"

We thank God Almighty and His Most Blessed Mother for the gift of this visit, for this grace which is the seed of God's Word. From now on it won't be easy for someone in Poland to say that they haven't heard of Medjugorje! The seed has fallen on the ground. Each of us are personally responsible for the harvest it will give. Let us hope in the most possible. Zofia Oczkowska

On his return Fr. Slavko said:

"For what I could see Poland truly does respond to Mary's message. I was particularly struck by Radio Maria in Poland which covers not only all of Poland, but reaches Russia, Ukraine and Canada. It really is a wonderful thing. It is called 'The Voice of Mary in Your Home.' I was with them for two days and I talked and prayed for hours. I also noticed, when talking to the people, that many listen to and pray with Radio Maria."

Also the "Echo of Mary" in its Polish edition, was present at all the meetings. It continues to spread, thanks also to the blessing which our late lamented Marta Mirckiewicz sends down from heaven.

Praying with Mary

In the General Audience of 5 November 1997, the Pope concluded his long series of talks on Mary. The first known Marian invocation goes back to the third century and begins with the words: "We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God ..." However, since the 14th century the most common prayer among Christians has been the "Hail Mary."

In Marian devotion the Rosary has taken on an important role. By repeating the Hail Mary it leads us to contemplate the mysteries of faith. In nourishing the Christian people's love for the Mother of God, this simple prayer also orients Marian prayer in a clearer way to its goal: the glorification of Christ.

Pope Paul VI, like his Predecessors, especially Leo XIII, Pius XII and John XXIII, held the recitation of the Rosary in great esteem and wished it to be widely spread among families. Moreover, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*, he explained its doctrine by recalling that it is a "Gospel prayer, centred on the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation," and stressing its "clearly Christological orientation" (46).

"Distance is no barrier to Eucharistic faith and adoration. We can effectively adore the Word-made-Host wherever we may happen to be, and at any time of the day or night. So dynamic is Eucharistic faith that it is well able to wing its way 'with a fling of the heart to the heart of the Host' from literally anywhere and everywhere." (Mary and the Eucharist, Fr. Richard Foley, S.J.)

Fr. Slavko: How do you pray?

(part 2) Prayer of the heart. Our Lady says: "I wish to guide you to prayer with the heart." Prayer with the heart is prayer said with love; it is the prayer you decide to do out of love. Therefore, you have to free prayer from your feelings. You have to be faithful to your prayer. No matter how you feel today or how you'll feel tomorrow, be faithful to your prayer! If we reflect on this point we will find that there is too much egoism in our prayer. We say: "I'm in need so I'll pray," or, "I can't feel anything, so I won't pray," or, "I prayed, but the Lord didn't give, so I won't pray anymore."

Our prayers can be atheistic, Godless prayers. Even when we say the "Our Father" our prayer can be a Godless prayer. For example: tomorrow at home you notice that you need something; you ask yourself where you need to go to buy it, and you go there. You're only object is that item. You look for it; if you find it you look for the cashier. If you don't find it you decide you won't go there anymore for that item. So you see, many pray like this: "I'm in need so I go to God because maybe He can give me what I need. I pray the Rosary; if God grants what I'm asking for then He is a good God, but if not then I'll pray no more." This way we do not seek God, but things. It is not wrong to ask for the things we need from the Lord, but first you must seek God. You have to be happy first because you have been with God. Sadly, we are like children who seek their parents only when they need them. In similar situations those parents give the least possible, because they know that if they gave everything to their children they would not seek them anymore. If the parents, on the other hand, see that their children seek them out of love then they give all they have.

There was once a person who thanked God for not giving him what he had asked for. We have to change our relationship with God. We often turn to God only in times of need, but when all is well we forget

about Him.

Another injustice which people commit is this: when we are well no one says: "Lord, why me?", but as soon as there is a problem our first question is: "Lord, why me?" So, in our prayer we have to ask for the grace to be able to change our behaviour, then we will see that this prayer, aided by fasts, confession, Holy Mass, etc., will change our heart and will fill it with joy and peace.

(From a talk by Fr. Slavko, 16.08.97)

Healed by Mary to continue mission ministry

Bartholomew Mary Dal Monte was beatified by John Paul II on 27 Sept. 1997.

After 16 years of tireless preaching, a fall on the icy ground in Vienna in January 1768 brought his ministry to a drastic halt.

Long months of suffering followed during his forced stay in Vienna. His evangelization became his example: his patience while forced to remain practically immobile, his capacity to support the severe pain and his acceptance of the whole episode. He wrote: "God is doing with me what we do with bad boys: they're made to remain still or on their knees, and for them it is a terrible penance. It's the same for me; I have to remain still and for a long time."

He returned to Bologna mid May with a fractured left foot and weakened health. At the time of the fall, a noble-looking woman stopped to help him, giving medical treatment to his foot. The doctors said that without that expert first aid, his foot would have been surely lost. Though efforts were made to discover the identity of that woman, it remained a mystery.

However, it seems that the episode was an indication of the care and loving presence of that other Lady Who was awaiting him at the most important Marian Shrine in Bologna where he would have asked to be healed by the Blessed Virgin of St. Luke so that he could continue his missionary work. As a boy he had promised himself to visit this shrine at least once a year.

One morning, in secret, he made his way to the Shrine: 4 km uphill with the sole aid of his crutches. It cost him great effort, but once there he threw himself down before the icon. After he had celebrated Holy Mass, Bartholomew walked back to the town, without the crutches and with a healed foot.

The gift of life, which for him was the same as the gift of the apostolate, had been renewed in him through the intervention of God's Mother, Who granted him to work a further 10 years till the time of his death. The following psalm is fitting for his lips: "O Lord, I am thy servant; I am thy servant, the son of thy handmaid; thou hast loosed my bonds" (Ps 115:16).

How the Curate of Ars won over his parish

The Curate of Ars was sent to a small town near Lyon. The town had been without a priest for twenty years; it seemed that no one noticed him.

Though the church was now open and the lamp burning, people did not go in. They worked their fields even on Sundays. They were a closed people, prisoners of their own egos, which was typical of those who lived in the provinces during those times of aridity and mistrust.

The Curate of Ars did not go out in front of the church to call the people; he didn't walk the streets to try and move them. He didn't reproach anyone. What he did was to remember one of Jesus' most difficult lessons: pray and fast.

He kneeled before the Tabernacle and remained in prayer for hours on end, taking hardly any food and barely sleeping. He had a few potatoes, half rotten, which he ate cold, and slept no more than three hours at night, often on the pavement or brushwood. With time the inhabitants of Ars began to ask themselves what the Curate did and how he lived.

One old lady, more curious than devoted, went into the church. She saw him there immobile, in front of the Tabernacle, with his faded cassock falling off his bony shoulders. Another woman went into the presbytery and found the stove cold, the cupboard bare, the bed with no mattress and no blankets.

"Reverend Father, how do you live?" He replied: "Well.. I live."

Others followed. They saw the Curate down on his knees and they went down on their knees. They heard him pray and they prayed. And they were often moved to tears, because the prayers of the Curate of Ars were so moving that they made you cry.

Others went to the presbytery, in need of advice. The advice of the Curate was so good that some asked to confess, and the confession was so angelic that the people felt edified and relieved. Ars began to change. "Ars was no longer Ars."

St. Francis meditates the Our Father

St. Francis and one of his monks were on their way back to Assisi from Perugia; it was a long walk and Francis suggested to Fra Leone that they see who could say the most Our Fathers during their walk. Once they had arrived St. Francis asked how many he had said. Fra Leone said that he counted as far as 200 then stopped counting. "How many did you say?" he asked. St. Francis said that he didn't even say one. When asked why not, Francis replied:

"When I said Our Father it made me think of the relationship between a father and son and that if God is my Father, then all men are my brothers. When I said Who art in heaven, it made me think that the house of my Father is up there, while I'm here on the earth, outside the house. I became nostalgic about my Father's house and sadness overcame me for being so far away. At that point I couldn't go on, however, the certainty that one day I will return to Him, and remain in the House which will become also mine because I am His son and heir, filled my heart with joy."

How easy it is for us to forget that our homeland is in heaven, absorbed as we are by our land of exile and busied by thoughts of possessing as much as possible those things which we cannot take with us!

Sr. Lucia on 3rd secret of Fatima

On 2 March the press reported that Sr. Lucia, 91 years old and still very lucid, was interviewed by Cardinals Padiyara from India and Vidal from the Philippines. The article quotes the Carmelite nun: "When Our Lady spoke to us about Russia and its conversion, we didn't even know what it was. We all thought that She must have been talking about a wicked woman. Gorbachov, without knowing it, was the instrument in God's hands for the conversion of Russia"

Sr. Lucia added: "Our Lady never spoke about Russia converting to the Catholic faith. Communism impeded people from practising their faith. Now they are free to choose.".. "Thanks to the consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, made by the Pope in 1984, an imminent nuclear war was

avoided."

Sr. Lucia pointed out: "The third secret of Fatima was not meant to be revealed. It was meant to be read only by the Pope and the ecclesial hierarchy close to him and to whomever he desired."

With regards to the content of the secret, it reported that Sr. Lucia limited herself to denying that it "has anything to do with the Second Vatican Council or the Scriptures, or apocalyptic predictions."

The Vatican spokesman denied that Gorbachov knelt down before the Pope to ask forgiveness, but he did not make any reference to the other news.

Many reactions to Fr. Amorth's reply

My dear Fr. Angelo, I was pleased to receive the pack of letters in response to my article in the Echo concerning the third secret of Fatima, etc. - a sign that the Echo is read a lot, and this is pleasing. I feel my conscience is tranquil for having said the truth. Of course I took care to look into the matter scrupulously so as to correctly inform the readers.

1. I have written five books on Our Lady and for more than ten years I was editor of the monthly magazine Madre di Dio and as such I had many opportunities to speak about Fatima. If the third secret has not been published, without a doubt, the reasons are valid ones; those reasons which John XXIII expressed and were shared by Paul VI and John Paul II. Hence, to offer suppositions as certainties is far from serious.

2. I have written three books (in collaboration with other writers) and more than 100 articles on Medjugorje, which are fruit of personal experience. My first article was written in October 1981, only a few months after the first apparition. I would not dare to invent anything about the secrets. The calls to conversion and prayer are continuous and impassioned. The same goes for the assertion: "with prayer even wars can be stopped." It is false to give details not contained in the messages.

3. One would have to be blind to see that the present moment is grave. The creed of the majority of Italians is: "I believe in God, but I do not practise the faith." And to this statement I have always replied that I have never met an atheist devil. That is, all devils believe but do not practise the faith because they rebelled against God.

The Word of God warns us to be always ready, because we know neither the day nor the hour, so that we are stimulated to convert, otherwise, you will all perish, and to keep us ready for the Lord's coming: Come Lord Jesus. We all know that there are enough nuclear weapons to cause a world-wide catastrophe.

4. Marian apparitions, which in these last years have multiplied, are not the foreboding of chastisements, but are impassioned lessons on how to avoid them. They must be seen in the light of conversion and prayer, not of morbid curiosity in the hope of catastrophes which do not convert, or of announcements such as an intermediate coming of Christ, of which neither the Bible nor the Church Magisterium say anything. "Echo" is a serious paper which testifies to serious facts. Fr. Gabriel Amorth

A reader's opinion: "All this talk of future events makes us lose sight of the eternal truths, and we forget to thank God for all the gifts He gives us every day. Let's not forget all the prayers, sufferings and holy works offered up to God, which serve to counter all the evil in the world."

*** International Prayer Meeting for Youth in Medjugorje** - This year will be the ninth edition of the festival. It begins the afternoon of the 31st July and ends the morning of the 6th August. The theme of

this year's meeting is Come, Creator Spirit.

* **Marian Conference** 15-16-17 May 1998, Craig Lodge, Dalmally, Argyll, Scotland. Main speakers: Fr. Aidan Carroll, Wayne Weible, Tony Hickey, Jlena Vlastic.

* **International Retreat for Priests in Medjugorje**, guided by Frs. Slavko, Cosimo Cavalluzzo and Jörg Müller from 30 June to 5 July. For information phone Croatia (00387) 88-651988, fax 88-651888 / 651444

Travelling to Medj. - ROAD: bus from Trieste (adjacent to train station) leaves regularly every evening 6pm and arrives in Medj. 8am. Reservations ring Italy 040-425001. SEA - Ancona Italy to Split. Departures Ancona: Mon., Wed., Fri. 9pm, Sat. 10pm. Departures Split: Sun., Tues., Thur., Sat.. Reservations fax Italy, Agenzia Mauro: 071-202618; Agenzia Morandi: 071-202296.

* The main language editions of Echo of Mary are available in Medjugorje at the MIR-Shalom shop opposite the church.

Two Letters from the Mail

From **Israel**, Sr. Giampiera writes: May the Lord recompense you for the good you do through Echo. If only you could see how your paper is treated with respect! The various language editions I place in the church and taken home by the pilgrims, who come from all corners of the earth. I have never been left with a single copy."

From **Alaska**: I pray that God may heal you so that you can continue to produce the Echo. Here we are so far away from the rest of the world and we starve for the truth and holiness. (Nita Young)

I thank everyone for their prayers and words of affection both for the Echo and for me in this time of ill health. More than ever Echo is in the hands of Our Lady, Who will provide, through our new collaborators, to satisfy the expectations of Her little children all over the world. If the Lord wills, I will remain to oversee the work.

May Mary's blessing be upon you all for an Easter of resurrection, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Villanova M. 3 March 1998

Pray, and in prayer you shall realize a new way of joy.