



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace

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Our Lady's message 25 Nov. 1998:

Dear Children, I invite you today to prepare yourselves for the coming of Jesus. In particular, prepare your hearts. May holy confession be for you the first step to conversion; and so, dear Children, decide for holiness. May your conversion and your decision for holiness begin today and not tomorrow.

My Children, I invite you all to the way of salvation and I desire to show you the way to paradise. Hence, my Children, be mine and decide with Me for holiness.

My Children, take prayer seriously, and pray, pray, pray.

Thank you for responding to my call.

Conversion equals decision for holiness

Christmas is a special occasion for conversion, and Our Lady invites us to prepare ourselves; and stresses: in particular prepare your hearts, so we don't get lost in the rest. Our Mother assumes the role of John the Baptist who preached: repent, for God's Kingdom is at hand (Mt 3:2), and: prepare the way of the Lord, by straightening the paths, so that He can come to you. This means to crush the mountains of our pride and vanity and fill in the abysses of our sins.

The first step for conversion is confession. Even the crowds who went to the Baptist confessed their sins (Mt 3:6). And he asked for worthy fruits of conversion; that is, to change one's ways, and works to prove it. For Our Lady these fruits are working at holiness (She repeats the word three times!). There is no sincere response to our penitence and to God's forgiveness if not the decision to follow God's way.

Our Lady speaks clearly: there is no room for compromise. As God's children, we must renounce Satan and his works! With the frequent use of the word "holiness" Mary is helping us to become familiar with the word which can rouse fear amongst Christians too. For our modern-day culture where man seeks perfection outside God's plan, holiness is something abstract and abnormal, an exaggeration of past times.

Instead, holiness is the natural development of divine life of which we are part; it is the search of everything which is pleasing to God; it is a pure life where there is no room for sin. Holiness is life's only aim when you have come to know God; so much so that God commanded it right from the Old Testament: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy (Lev 19:2). And in the New Testament Jesus says: You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48). St. Paul says: This is the will of God: your sanctification (1 Thess 4:3), that is, develop the seeds of holiness which you receive through the sacraments: we have been sanctified as we are called to be saints (1 Cor 1:2). God chose us

before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him (Eph 1:4). "At the end of one's life there will be only one sad thing; and that is to not have been holy," said Edith Stein. Our Lady stresses the need of this decision for holiness: decide today and not tomorrow, because this is the way of salvation, the way to paradise. Mary says it clearly.

With every Christmas Jesus offers Himself again, that He may live in us, in our flesh, so that He can heal it and sanctify it and make it divine. Thus, to our poor flesh He gives the strength so it can live as He does. This is the real meaning of incarnation and John says clearly: whoever does not acknowledge Jesus as coming in the (and our) flesh does not belong to God. It is the spirit of the antichrist (1Jn 4:3 and 2Jn 7).

The joy of Jesus' presence in us will console us for every trial, and His light will surely be in our eyes. Thus, our life will have the taste of heaven and it will be a true witness for all those we meet. Of course, the way of holiness is not an easy one, and falls are natural, but Mary ensures us Her help. She invites us to place our decision in Her hands: decide with me for holiness, and begs us to trust Her completely: be mine; and once again She stresses the importance of prayer taken seriously: pray, pray, pray. Each day we must pray, as though we had never prayed, till our life becomes prayer.

Fr. Angelo

"At the end of our life only one thing will sadden us: not to have been holy."
Edith Stein

Mary's Christmas message, 25 Dec. 1998:

Dear Children, Amid this Christmas joy I wish to bless you with my blessing. In particular, my Children, I give you the blessing of little Jesus. May He fill you with His peace!

Today, my Children, you do not have peace, though you aspire after it. For this reason, together with my Son Jesus on this day I invite you to pray, pray, pray, because without prayer you have neither joy, nor peace, nor future. Aspire after peace and seek it; God is true peace.

Thank you for responding to my call.

There is no peace without prayer

We thank you, Mary/ Mother like no other,/ on this solemn feast,/ to lazy and distracted children/ you offer precious advice./ Veiled it may seem:/ beware fellow children;/ see the Way!

In the message of Advent Mary told us that there is no conversion without decision for holiness; and in fact, man seeks the perfect, not the imperfect, wholeness, not portions; full attire, not rags. Here we are talking about wedding attire!

In the Christmas message Mary repeats that there is no peace without prayer. True peace is the gift of Jesus, and it flows over into the family and community.

For us, everything begins with Christmas: God offers Himself to man to live in him and make him become, like Jesus, a beloved son. And today Mary offers Him to us with renewed joy: not only does she give us Her motherly blessing, but also that of her Son Jesus, for as Mother, she possesses Him and dispenses His goods (see Montfort no. 24, 27). These goods bear the name of peace: peace on earth

among men with whom He is pleased (Lk 2:14), i.e. those who have accepted Him. His blessing fills us with His peace - similarly, Jesus promises full joy to His disciples who observe His commands (Jn 15:11).

Today you do not have peace, though you aspire after it. All men desire peace, but this peace does not come from us; we cannot create it by removing obstacles or by filling ourselves with things, and neither can we expect it from those who do not have it. Great men and false prophets of every time promise: "peace, peace" but there is no peace (cf. Jer). When people say; 'there is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them (1 Th 5:3). True peace can come only from God; thus we must ask Him for it.

It cannot be attained without prayer, or rather, without continued prayer: pray, pray, pray. Mary does not want to deceive anyone; she has always said that prayer is the sole condition for Peace. Just about everyone says prayer is necessary, but will from page 1:

add: "let's not exaggerate!", so that our space put aside for prayer is reduced, for there are so many other things to do. But, unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain (Ps 127). Mary insists on prayer; super efficiency and the rush to do things, even in men or women of the Church, is typical of those who have set aside prayer. But without prayer man is left to himself and becomes sterile, and there is no real inspiration in him or in his work.

Here we could learn from the oriental religions where man attains fulfilment through contemplation, and for the sake of spiritual realities he forgoes fleeting things.

If we experienced God's peace when we made space for Him in our lives, then we should also see how our hearts are troubled by fears, worries, thirst to possess, etc. when we don't pray. Not only, but our relations with others shatter at the slightest disagreement; whereas, the peace of Christ must rule in our hearts (Col 3:15).

Without prayer you have neither joy, nor peace, nor future. This is scary. Of course, the world built without God has no future, but also our works and projects will fall into nothingness if they are not consonant with God's plans. Only that which is part of His plan can remain. We can know what His plan is if we let ourselves be guided in prayer: he who does not gather with me scatters (Lk 11:23), but he who does the will of God abides for ever (1 Jn 2:17). For those who trust in God also suffering and sacrifices are full of hope: everything works for the sake of good for those who love God (cf. Rom 8:28), thus also their future is in safe hands. He who abides in the shadow of the Almighty will find refuge under His wings (read Psalm 91).

Aspire after peace and seek it, because it can be found. It is very close, for Jesus is our peace (Eph 2:14). Let us remain in Him and we will become workers of peace in a world which does not know peace.

Fr. A.

Fides et ratio

Faith and reason enhance one another

"Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth." These are the words, addressed to the bishops, but easily understood by all God's people, which open the 14th Encyclical by John Paul II. Called Fides et ratio, it regards the relationship between faith and reason. It is a reaffirmation of that which the Church has sustained over the course of centuries on the

profound tie and the equilibrium between the requests of reason and the needs of faith. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger confided that the Pope had been thinking of a similar document since the beginning of his pontificate. Here we try to synthesize the motivations which made this encyclical necessary.

Modern-day philosophy is under crisis. On one part it is widely influenced by currents of rationalistic thought which tend to deny the existence of God, Christian Revelation and man's capacity to reach »» the knowledge of truth. Thus, philosophy (reason, orderly rational thought) is reduced to the mere examination of worldly realities, and does not consider the metaphysical realities (the reality of the divine and supernatural), which in the past was its preferred object. The encyclical warns against those errors found in lines of thought which are particularly widespread today; such as eclecticism (elements drawn from a variety of sources), historicism (each period of history has its own beliefs inapplicable to any other), scientism (validity given only to that knowledge acquired in the laboratory), pragmatism (not necessary to think, but only to act), nihilism (rejection of all values and belief in existence), immanentism (only this world exists), marxism (human institutions economically determined; class struggle saves humanity), and atheism; but without expressing condemnation.

On the other hand there is the opposite tendency in fideism which fails to recognize the importance of rational knowledge and philosophical discourse for the understanding of faith. It reduces faith to mere sentimentalism. One currently widespread symptom of this fideistic tendency is a biblicism which tends to make the reading and exegesis of Sacred Scripture the sole criterion of truth, ignoring that "the supreme rule of the Church's faith derives from the unity which the Spirit has created between Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and Church Magisterium in a reciprocity which means that none of the three can survive without the others." [55]

With this encyclical, the Pope clarifies the Church's position with regards to the faith-reason relationship. He quotes from the Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Filius*, and Leo XIII's encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*, and a brief recollection of the history of the relationship between faith and reason in the Church is made, with emphasis being placed on the importance of St. Thomas Aquinas' "enduring originality of thought": "the Church is justified in consistently proposing St. Thomas as a master of thought and a model of the right way to do theology." [43]

] In the last centuries, though, "there has been a growing separation between faith and philosophical reason.... while each without the other is impoverished and enfeebled. Deprived of what Revelation offers, reason has taken side-tracks which expose it to the danger of losing sight of its final goal. Deprived of reason, faith has stressed feeling and experience, and so run the risk of no longer being a universal proposition. It is an illusion to think that faith, tied to weak reasoning, might be more penetrating; on the contrary, faith then runs the grave risk of withering into myth or superstition. [48] What is expected of philosophy is that it helps one to raise one's glance and fix higher goals. There exists, of course, a double order of knowledge: that of the faith, in which man with the supernatural help of grace, accepts revealed truth, and that of reason which rests solely on intellect. It is clear that the truth of Revelation "is neither the product nor the consummation of an argument devised by human reason. It appears instead as something gratuitous, which itself stirs thought and seeks acceptance as an expression of love." [15]

Reason can, however, when left to run its course, reach the threshold of the door to faith, but to enter that door it must make a final decisive step, and that is, to accept the mystery of the Cross. "The true keypoint, which challenges every philosophy, is Jesus Christ's death on the Cross. It is here that every attempt to reduce the Father's saving plan to purely human logic is doomed to failure. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the learned? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the

wisdom of the world? (1 Co 1:20), the Apostle asks emphatically. The wisdom of the wise is no longer enough for what God wants to accomplish; what is required is a decisive step towards welcoming something radically new: God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise ...; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are (1 Co 1:27-28). The wisdom of the Cross, therefore, breaks free of all cultural limitations which seek to contain it and insists upon an openness to the universality of the truth which it bears. What a challenge this is to our reason, and how great the gain for reason if it yields to this wisdom! Of itself, philosophy is able to recognize the human being's ceaselessly self-transcendent orientation towards the truth; and with the assistance of faith, it is capable of accepting the 'foolishness' of the Cross as the authentic critique of those who delude themselves that they possess the truth, when in fact they run it aground on the shoals of a system of their own devising. The preaching of Christ crucified and risen is the reef upon which the link between faith and philosophy can break up, but it is also the reef beyond which the two can set forth upon the boundless ocean of truth. Here we see not only the border between reason and faith, but also the space where the two may meet." [23]

It was not by chance that the encyclical, though published on 14th October, is dated 14th September which is the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross.

"Philosophy must obey its own rules and be based upon its own principles; truth, however, can only be one. Christian Revelation becomes the true point of encounter and engagement between philosophical and theological thinking in their reciprocal relationship. It is to be hoped therefore that theologians and philosophers will let themselves be guided by the authority of truth alone so that there will emerge a philosophy consonant with the word of God." [79]

The message contained in *Fides et Ratio* could be synthesized by St. Augustine's words on the importance of philosophy, quoted in the encyclical: " 'To believe is nothing other than to think with assent... Believers are also thinkers: in believing, they think and in thinking, they believe... If faith does not think, it is nothing.' And again: 'If there is no assent, there is no faith, for without assent one does not really believe.' " [79]

Mirco

The Pope has said

* The year of the Father in preparation of the Jubilee of the Year 2000 has begun. On the 16th December the Pope began a new series of catecheses on the Father at the general audiences. The Father is the destination to which each person tends, as Jesus says: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God (Jn 20:17).

* The biblical Jubilee, which meant that every fifty years liberation was proclaimed throughout the land to all its inhabitants (Lev 25), was the occasion for the Pope to speak on behalf of all the world's poor. The time is ripe for profound social changes; daily events say that a change must come about. The cry of the poor is heard all over the earth, where 20% of the population share 80% of the resources, and 80% of the population is left with only 20% of the world's resources. For some time the Holy Father has been asking the rich countries to eliminate or at least reduce the foreign debt which suffocates the poor countries.

Now, he fearlessly asks them to offer remission to the illegal migrants who have left their home countries in search of a house and job. The Holy Father, who often pleads for the ceasing of conflicts and for the banishment of weapons, "will continue to ask for new gestures, and he for first will make many significant ones" (J. Cottier).

In his desire that full light be thrown on the past (Inquisition, slave trade, colonialism, persecution of Jews) he acknowledges "intolerance and even the use of violence in the service of the truth, in certain centuries." He for first asks (cf. Mt 5:23) forgiveness in all humbleness of those who were subject to injustice, but he has asked that historians present the true facts in the light of their cultural and historical context, as "an ethical act by the Magisterium cannot be based on the images of the past spread by public opinion, since they are often charged with an intense emotionalism.. Only when historical science has been able to determine the true facts, will theologians be in a position to make an objectively well-founded judgement."

* "Beauty can save the world" - Citing Dostoevskji, at the feet of the Immaculate in Piazza di Spagna before thousands of Roman citizens, the Pope said: "Yes, your beauty, oh Mary, which is expressed in the Immaculate Conception, can save the world... With you Mary we profess that we want to return to the original, eternal plan of our Creator and Father. Today the People of God and the whole city of Rome entrust themselves to you, the Immaculate Conception. Protect us always and lead us all on the ways of holiness."

* Truth does not depend on basic conviction. The large anti-ecclesial movement in Austria was on the Pope's mind when he met the Austrian bishops: "the truth is not a human creation, but a gift from heaven, that you might transmit it intact, guard it jealously and explain it faithfully." ... "Today there is an urgent need to support the renewal of the Church's spiritual dimension. Questions about her structure automatically take second place when the decisive question about God is put on the Church's discussion agenda... The first question we can be asked as Pastors is not: 'What have you organized?', but: 'Whom have you led to communion with the Triune God?' "

* Respect of human rights is secret of true peace, was the theme the Pope gave to the World Peace Day (1 Jan.). "When one's aspiration is the promotion of human dignity, and one's predominant commitment is to seek the common good, then lasting foundations are made for the building up of peace." ... "The first right of every man is the right to live: do not kill is a divine commandment."

"One of the most dramatic forms of discrimination is to deny to ethnic and national minority groups the fundamental right to exist as such. In the same way, religious freedom is so unviolable as to demand that a person be given the right even to change his religion if his conscience should so ask."

* In the Urbi et Orbi Christmas message the Pope spoke on the contrast between the serenity of the Christmas celebrations and the extremely sad situations of many peoples, and denounced 6 scourges which torment man at the end of the millennium. "May the light which comes from Bethlehem save us from the risk of being resigned to seeing such a tormented and perturbing scene..."

May the Christmas message offer encouragement and strength to all those who work for peace in the Middle East, for the banishment of arms, for the defence of human life, for the banishment of the death penalty, to free children from all forms of exploitation, to stop the bloodied hands of those responsible for genocide and war crimes, towards proper measures in the safeguarding of the environment, of creation and of man's dignity."

* Pope: Moses praying on the mount (Ex 17), or Jacob fighting with God (Gen 32)? The Holy Father is certain that God wants to use mercy with this world and thus he offers himself as mediator between God and his people.

One of his closest collaborators has revealed: the Pope prays ever more; he gets up ever more earlier; his secretaries find him on his knees before the altar at dawn, and it seems that he gets up ever more often

during the night to pray before the Blessed Sacrament (see also Echo 131, p. 2).

He has the gift of continuous prayer; that is, he is always in communion with God even when he receives people, when he speaks, when he gives an audience. It is prayer which gushes from his heart even when his mind is busy with other things. This can be seen by his profound concentration during Holy Mass in crowded squares, which "is not the absentmindedness of an old man, but a presence which absorbs him. How can he not despair upon seeing so much evil in the world? He simply places it all in the hands of his Lord, knowing that God can do everything. Of all the great things he did when he enjoyed full health, he can still do what is indispensable and even more. We have a pontiff, an intercessor, who is stronger today than 20 years ago when he began." (M. Blondet)

Edith Stein: steps towards conversion

"A young woman in search of the truth became a saint and martyr through the silent work of divine grace," is how the Pope described Teresa Benedicta of the Cross on 11 October in St. Peter's Square at her canonization celebration.

The last of 11 children, Edith Stein was born in Breslau Germany (now Wroclaw in Poland) on the 12th October 1891 as the family was celebrating Yom Kippur, that most important Jewish festival, the Day of Atonement. Being born on this day was like a foreshadowing to Edith.

Edith's father, who ran a timber business, died when she was just two. Her biographers underline her life of continued rending and eradication, from when she was little up to her total deprivation and violent death.

Her mother, a very devout, hard-working and strong-willed woman, continued to look after the family of 7 children (four died as babies) and their large business. During two severe winters she gave away their own newly purchased wood cuttings to the poor. Of her mother Edith wrote: "There were no educational principles; to know how to behave we only needed to read into our mother's open heart. She was for us the model of every virtue and all we did was imitate her. One thing that holy Jewish woman - so full of holy fear of God - impressed into our souls was a sense of horror for evil. When she said: 'this is sin', everyone knew that this indicated the worst in ugliness and abomination."

Edith showed a strong sense of morality even as a child. When she was three a friend kept her waiting all afternoon without reason, and when she finally arrived Edith told her: once you've told a lie you can never be trusted, not even when you tell the truth," and only then did she begin to play with her. As a pupil she was bright and intelligent, and she was so sensitive that the sight of a drunkard would disturb her for days. Says Edith: "There were two things that my relatives would say of me; they would rightfully reproach me for my pride, and they would call me the "intelligent one"; both bothered me terribly. The latter because it seemed to me that they were saying that I gave myself airs because I was intelligent, and I also had the impression that they thought it was my only attribute, while I knew that to be good is much more important than to be intelligent."

As an adolescent she abandoned her Jewish faith, though she continued to accompany her mother to the synagogue so as not to displease her. At 14, unable to take the faith of the fathers for granted, she declared herself an atheist; and her search for the truth began. However, the severe morality she imposed upon herself proved to be arid and inhumane. She herself admitted that one of her shortcomings was to unjustly criticize events and people. She would, however, correct her erring ways, and in 1933 she wrote: "If I continued to see man's weaknesses it was not to judge him, but to justify him." And some years

later, matured by prayer, she wrote: "If before I felt pleased with myself, things are now changed. Before I would see evil and try to change it. Later I would see other things - some good, some bad - and realize that it can't all be changed. So, bit by bit, this helps you become little and humble, patient and tolerant of the straw in the eyes of the others, for the rafter in your own eye keeps you occupied. In the end you even learn to put up with yourself in the relentless light of the divine presence, and you learn to entrust yourself totally to divine mercy."

Looking back on her youthful years as a student, she wrote: "My longing for truth was a single prayer." In a letter dated 1938, in which she speaks of the death of Edmund Husserl (famous philosopher and founder of phenomenology - Edith became his pupil and teaching assistant), she wrote: "God is truth. Whether you are aware of it or not, to seek the truth is to seek God." Many were the conversions to Christianity amongst Husserl's disciples. It was a common thing for philosophy students to be non believers; many came from Jewish families (like Husserl), and others from Christian (mostly protestant) families.

Yet Edith's conversion was not so much due to philosophical reasoning. She does not speak directly about this supreme period in which God's call became more tangible, however, there are various episodes in her life which impressed deep into her soul, so that in her writings we read of the bells of the church of Göttingen which tolled thrice daily for the prayer of the Angelus, and the blessing imparted to his family and workers prior to harvest by a farmer who offered lodgings to her and her friend during a walk in the mountains.

In Frankfurt in 1916 she went to the cathedral and saw a woman with a shopping basket going in to kneel for a brief prayer. "This was something totally new to me. In the synagogues and Protestant churches I had visited, people simply went to the services. Here, however, I saw someone coming straight from the busy marketplace into this empty church, as if she was going to have an intimate conversation. It was something I never forgot."

Another important experience was at the death of friend Adolf Reinach (Husserl's assistant) when Edith went to visit his widow. The Reinachs had converted to Protestantism. Edith felt uneasy about meeting the young widow at first, but was surprised when she actually met a woman of faith. "This was my first encounter with the Cross and the divine power it imparts to those who bear it. It was the moment when my unbelief collapsed and Christ began to shine his light on me - Christ in the mystery of the Cross." Sister Teresa Benedicta told a priest shortly before her death: "I could not have expressed any other desire at the taking of my veil than to receive as surname 'of the Cross'.

And, of course, we cannot fail to mention her brief stay, in the summer of 1921, at the country estate of Hedwig Conrad-Martius (she too was Husserl's student). Hedwig had converted to Protestantism with her husband. One evening Edith picked up an autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila and read the book all night. "When I had finished the book, I said to myself: 'this is the truth' ". The morning after she bought a Missal and a book on Catholic catechism. On the 1st January 1922 Edith was baptized, and received her first Communion.

Edith taught and accepted extensive speaking engagements. "I thought that leading a religious life meant giving up all earthly things ... Gradually, I learnt that other things are expected of us ... so that divine life is carried into the world."

In 1933 darkness grew over Germany, and the Nazi's Aryan law made it impossible for her to continue teaching. "Human activity cannot help us, but only the suffering of Christ. It is my desire to share in it." Edith entered the Carmelite convent of Cologne in October 1933, but not out of escapism. ".. it is our vocation to intercede with God for everyone," and in particular, she interceded with God for her people. In 1938 the Prioress arranged for Edith to be smuggled across the border into the Carmelite convent in Echt. On 2 August 1942 she was arrested together with her sister Rosa who had also converted and was

serving at the Echt convent. Her last words to be heard in Echt were addressed to Rosa: "Come, we are going for our people."

On 9 August Sr. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, her sister and many others of her people were gassed. To anyone who offered to help save her life she would say: "No! Why should I be excluded? If I can't share in the sort of my brothers and sisters then my life, in a certain sense, is destroyed." She was coherent to the Truth to the very end.

Alessandro

United pro-life forces - A league in defence of life: together to fight abortion. The scourge of the century reaps fifty million victims per year (much more than the victims of all the wars being fought at present). Members of the League include Catholic and non-Catholic pro-life associations. The initiative which embraces organizations world wide has been placed under the protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe. An international meeting will be held at the Guadalupe shrine from 27-31 October 1999. Entitled The Guadalupan Appeal it is promoted by the Pontifical Academy for Life. Info at e-mail: advmuno@tin.it

Padre Pio on Prayer

Fr. Gabriel Amorth recalls his visits to Padre Pio over a period of 26 years

"Padre Pio once defined himself: "a poor monk who prays" and the expression has become famous. I would watch him with his beads in his hands. He used to call them his weapon, and he wrote to his spiritual director that he recited at least 5 complete rosaries each day. That means at least 5 hours per day dedicated to the Rosary. He slept very little and was able to do more than one thing at a time. He used to meditate on the mysteries, so that he would visibly suffer the sorrows of Christ's Passion, and he would feel an inner suffering in his soul for the sorrows of Mary, whom he called the greatest of all martyrs, truly the Queen of Martyrs.

The older he got the greater was his need to pray. In fact, during the late 1940's I noticed that he had begun to dedicate less time to confession. There was a time when he confessed for 16 hours a day. Fr. Michelangelo once told him: "Dear Father, couldn't you dedicate more time to confession? You know many people come here from far away, and they have to wait days for their turn." Padre Pio replied: "Dear Fr. Michelangelo, do you think the people come here for Padre Pio? No, I tell you; they come here to receive a word from the Lord. And if I don't pray, what can I tell them?"

His need to pray also sprung from his awareness of being unworthy. He considered himself a great sinner with the continual risk and terror of committing a sin and losing the faith. Thus, he always begged for prayers. I had noticed that all it took to see his face light up was for someone to say: "Father, I will pray for you." Words of gratitude would gush from his mouth, as though he wished to say: "At last, some one who understands me."

His need for prayer also came from his need to be sancti-fied so he could in turn sanc-tify. He particularly tried to impress this upon priests. I recall well when I confessed to him shortly after my ordination (and I told him that I'd just been ordained), and he said to me: "Remember that a priest must act as a pacifier, a conciliator. Woe to him if he is the one in need of conciliation. Never forget it."

Fr. Gabriel Amorth

Padre Pio will be beatified on the 2nd May next. The Pope made the announcement on the 21st December when he declared that the process of beatification came to a conclusion with the miracle wrought in Consiglia De Martino who was suddenly healed after invoking Padre Pio.

News from the blessed land

Christmas apparition to Jakov

Fr. Slavko refers: On Christmas day Our Lady appeared to Jakov as she promised she would at her last daily apparition to him on 12 September. He prepared for the meeting with confession and Mass. Then we went to his home with his family and a few other people. We began to pray and at 11.50 am Our Lady came and remained with him for 18 minutes. After the apparition Jakov said: "Our Lady was joyful; she greeted me in the usual manner (Praised be Jesus Christ) and spoke about the secrets. Then she gave me the following message:"

Dear Children, Today on the day of my Son's birth my heart abounds with infinite joy, love and peace. As your mother I desire that each of you feel this same joy, peace and love in your hearts. Hence, do not be afraid to open your hearts and give yourselves totally to Jesus, for only this way can He enter your hearts and fill them with love, peace and joy. I bless you with my motherly blessing.

After the apparition Jakov wept for a while. Those of us present, who saw that he remained kneeling, kept on praying. In the end he told us: "I cried not because Our Lady was sad, but because the apparition was so brief." Thus, on Christmas day Our Lady gave us two motherly blessings.(S.B.)

Six Bishops convinced of Medjugorje

The following is taken from the lengthy interviews they granted. In October two bishops visited Medjugorje; one was Brazilian and one Polish. The latter, **Msgr. Albin Malysiak**, worked with the Pope for 20 years. "To work with him was a great joy for me. He is a great man; honest and sincere, he is immensely comprehensive towards others..."

With regards to Medjugorje: "I personally believe that the visionaries have genuine apparitions... It is wonderful to hear people pray in so many different languages as though in one voice. I am pleased to see that many priests come here; and as far as Marian devotion is concerned I am pleased to see that people are loyal to Church teachings and the Pope's proclamations."

Two bishops from Haiti with 33 pilgrims were in Medjugorje from 16-23 November. Msgr. Louis Kebreau, bishop of Hinche, said: "One here experiences inner peace. You simply have to come here and see, and meet and listen to the people to rediscover true Christian faith... Since people come here for inner freedom through reconciliation one notices Satan's attacks more than usual, but Mary's presence gives one strength which is liberating, and light to put one on the right way."

Msgr. Joseph Lafontant, auxiliary bishop of Haiti, often visits Fatima and Lourdes. "But this place is totally different to them," he said. "Everyone has his own personal experience here, though he is amid so

many others." The final incentive for him to come to Medjugorje was Jakov's visit to Haiti last September. He was impressed by the way the faithful at the Mass prayed, and by the fact that so many wanted to confess. "Everyone needs this experience of conversion and reconciliation with oneself and with others."

He came with a heart of stone, and left with a heart of flesh - **Msgr. Kenneth Steiner**, auxiliary bishop of Portland, Oregon (USA) was in Medjugorje from 7-12 Nov. At the Mass which he celebrated prior to his departure he said: "I came here with a very heavy heart, full of stones. These stones I left on Apparition Hill and Mt. Krizevac. Now I return home with a soft heart.... It is a real miracle what people experience here and take home to their families and parish communities... We bishops and priests also need this renewal. I have met many priests who have come to Medjugorje. They have a better idea of their own priesthood."

The Austrian bishop of Salzburg, **Msgr. Georg Eder** was in Medjugorje prior to the feast of the Immaculate. His interview next issue!

All these bishops said they will tell their people to come here for spiritual renewal.

Msgr. Franic: what I learnt in Medjugorje. - Despite his age, retired archbishop of Split spends his time reading and writing, and his afternoons in prayer and adoration. With a smile, and deeply convinced, he admitted that he learnt to pray in Medjugorje and that he has remained loyal to Our Lady's call for prayer. **Parish priest of Medjugorje**, Fr. Ivan Landeka, and Fr. Slavko Barbaric visited the bishop on the 9th October last and referred the above. The Bishop also recalled the words he spoke at the end of the Mass for his diamond anniversary: "Every priest should pray 3 hours per day; bishops 4, and retired bishops 5." He came here for the first time in 1982 in incognito, as he felt responsible for the faith of his people and also because he wanted to make a first-hand experience. Since then he has become a great supporter and advocate of Medjugorje.

During one of his visits the visionary Marija gave him a message from Our Lady which turned out to be a prophecy as every-thing in the message happened just the way it said it would. It regarded something which the visionary could not have known, thus, it was further evidence for the bishop to believe in the apparitions.

An atmosphere of peace, prayer and unity prevailed among the faithful during the Christmas period in Medjugorje. Pilgrims came from all parts of the world. As a novena, the Rosary was prayed on Podbrdo in addition to the evening prayer programme, and during Advent three different fasting and prayer seminars were held for about 150 participants. Christmas eve about 2,000 people participated in the evening programme. A prayer vigil began at 10 pm and concluded with midnight Mass. (From the Press Bulletin)

Value of suffering - Vicka has gone through a great deal of suffering during the last weeks and had to remain in bed for back strain. She was thus unable to greet the pilgrims. She is still not over it. If before she went to console the sick with her visits now she is sharing in their suffering and prays for them by offering her pain. In the 1980's she suffered agonizing pain for other physical problems, and Our Lady had instructed her on the value of suffering when offered to God: "very few understand the immense value of suffering," she told Vicka. "If only they knew what graces come from suffering offered up, for themselves and for others, they would thank God."

Peace in the family is a grace which Mary does not deny to those who trust in her. James and Clara from Normandy were sad for their daughter who abandoned her faith and married a Muslim. He did not

even allow their three children to be baptized. When they went to visit their daughter and her family they were shocked to learn that the two did not get on, and that Marianna (their daughter) had said she wanted to leave her husband and go away with the three children. They asked her not to make a decision until after their five-day retreat in Medjugorje with Fr. Slavko: "You'll see that with fasting and prayer everything can be obtained." The couple placed the problem in Mary's hands with complete trust, and while there they lived Our Lady's five requests with all their might.

Four days after their return to France their daughter rang: "Yesterday my husband desired to speak to me. I thought he would ask for a divorce, but to my great surprise, he asked forgiveness for all the pain he had caused me, saying that he wanted to change, that he loved me and that he didn't want to hurt the children by separating. All I could do was cry." Things truly did change; he became thoughtful and caring, and the three children were baptized.

That's what Our Lady can do when we give Her our complete trust!

On the feast of the Immaculate we went to the Blue Cross for the meeting with Ivan's group. Despite the cold, pilgrims' hearts were full of joy. Mary's blessing gave all those present much peace. According to Ivan Our Lady was very happy. She prayed in particular for the sick and once again she asked us to pray in our families and to prepare ourselves for the great feast (Christmas). (From Sr. Emmanuel's diary)

With pleasure we recall **Sr. Emmanuel's 20th anniversary** of religious life, and we thank her for the precious work she does for Medjugorje.

Mission in France for Mirjana and Fr. Ivan Bradvica who guided the Medjugorje prayer programme in Villefranche near Lyon on 14-15 November last. Over 4,800 people attended. The weekend was a great success, and the presence of the Holy Spirit was felt.

The French National Pilgrimage to Medjugorje was held also this year with 1,500 pilgrims attending from 22-31 October. The intense days of prayer and meditation gave the pilgrims a renewed spiritual charge and they returned home with the desire to spread the message of peace.

Irish pilgrims are amongst the most numerous, with at least 200 weekly between the months of April and October. They are accompanied by excellent guides and priests. On the last week of October 120 Irish guides came to Medjugorje for a retreat to deepen their knowledge of the Medjugorje reality with the help of the priests and visionaries.

In Austria, at Sonntagsberg near Linz, Fr. Slavko held a course of fasting and prayer from 2-6 Nov. for about 60 people. On the 6th Fr. Slavko celebrated the Medjugorje evening programme in the Franciscan church in Sonntagsberg for a large group of Medjugorje pilgrims who for years have been meeting weekly for the Rosary and Mass. On the 7th Fr. Slavko attended a prayer meeting in Norimberg which began with the Rosary and ended with Holy Mass and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. On the 8th he met the faithful in Heroldsbach where it is held that apparitions occurred between 1949 and 1952. It had been forbidden to Catholics for 50 years but has now been accepted as a place of prayer. Fr. Dietrich, who is himself a Medjugoroje pilgrim, leads the spiritual programme on the line of that in Medjugorje. In the afternoon of the same day Fr. Slavko met with faithful in Passau.

Fr. Slavko concludes: "The Queen of Peace inspired many to pray, and these people try to carry this spirit of prayer into their homes and parish communities."

Vienna-Mostar via air - Tyrolean Airlines of Austria offer a flight to Mostar every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. Departure from Vienna at 1.25 pm; return flights on same day from Mostar at 3.20 pm.

A formative Seminar of prayer will be held in Neum at Hotel Sunce from 28 February to 5 March 1999. The first 4 days will be dedicated to prayer, lectures and moments of sharing, while the second last day will be a retreat for spiritual renewal. A pilgrimage to Medjugorje on the last day will conclude the seminar.

Tenth international prayer meeting for youth will be held also this year from 31 July to 6 August. The theme will be: God Father - Source of Life.

International meeting for priests from evening of 30 June to midday 6 July. Theme: Priests at Mary's School. For information, fax 387 88 651 444; ph 387 88 651 988 (P.B.)

New Padre Pio Hospital in Medjugorje - "The first section, Regina Pacis Medical Centre, should be operative towards the end of the year. The four storey building is still to be completed, however, we place our trust in Providence. Donations can be sent to: Casa Internazionale della Pace, Via Gen. Dalla Chiesa 38A, I-43015 Noceto (PR), Italy.

Fr. Mannes M. Gizzardì OP

"If all the water in the sea became ink it would not suffice to list all God's gifts."
From the Koran

"Return to primitive fervour" The events of those first days

Fr. Jozo spoke to the youth at the Festival about the beginnings of Medjugorje; we have made a synthesis so that we too may return to the "primitive fervour."

"...On my way back from Zagreb I heard about the apparitions and my first impression was that it was all an act put on by the Church's enemies to discourage and destroy my activity particularly among the youth.

I saw streams of people going up Podbrdo while the Police weren't doing anything. I interrogated the children and recorded everything and all the while I was impressed by their serenity in contrast to my scepticism... One day while I was praying in the church with my breviary and was full of doubts I heard a voice - it was louder and clearer than the one I'm using now to speak to you - and it said: "Go out, protect the visionaries." I left my breviary on the third pew - I recall well - and I went out. I was alone in the church, because everyone was on Podbrdo. I still had my hand on the door knob and I hadn't even put my foot out the door when the visionaries came yelling: "The Police are following us!" I told them: "Come with me," and I took them to a room in the presbytery and locked them in. Then I went and sat outside under the cypress trees. The Police quickly arrived and asked: "Have you seen the children?" "Yes," I said, "I saw them going past," and they ran to the village of Bijakovici.

On the 30th June (1981) I told the people at Mass that the apparitions weren't necessary and that Jesus is found in the church. "What need is there to go up the hill? Come to the church and you will surely find Jesus..."

At the end of the Mass I felt the altar boy tugging at my alb; it was Jakov who had a message for the people. I put him in front of the microphone and he said: "Our Lady desires that we pray with the

Rosary." As I was going out into the sacristy I noticed that the people were not leaving, but instead I could hear them crying. The entire church was crying and I saw many rosary beads. I quickly went back in and recited the Rosary with the people.

A simple phrase said by Mary, repeated by a child, had achieved what I was unable to achieve with 8 months of preaching since my arrival in Medjugorje. Even during the night the church and the square filled with people, and as we continued to pray the Rosary Our Lady appeared and blessed all the people, all those present and the whole Church. Then she said: "Pray every day like this." The people, then, were full of joy because they had known Our Lady's will.

On another occasion Our Lady said we should fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. Everyone fasted on bread and water, even the factory workers. They didn't limit themselves to replacing meat with fish. After 3 days of fasting the confessions began. More than 150 priests confessed all day and night long. The atmosphere in the parish had totally changed. Then, after these 3 days, Our Lady said with joy: "Pray with the heart, not out of habit," and: "Before you pray, each person should ask forgiveness of their enemies, offer them to the Father and desire for them grace and blessings." I told my parishioners and they replied in unison: "Yes," because in Medjugorje in those days everyone was a single heart. But how difficult it was to forgive. After so much initial enthusiasm this was like being in a desert.

I told my parishioners to ask for the grace to forgive and be able to pray again. Everyone in the church was mute for about 20 minutes and there seemed no way out. Then Mary gave us a wonderful gift. A man from the middle of the church prayed out loud: "Lord, I have forgiven; forgive me." And he began to cry. Then we all started crying as though a tap had been turned on. We all felt the need to pray the way he did, and everyone in the church formed a single choir which said over and over again: "Lord, I too have forgiven; forgive me." Then it was possible to pray the Rosary, and we truly prayed with the heart - I'll never forget it - and we understood how love and reconciliation are born.

During the service we really did feel as though we were one, and the day after in the streets more wonderful things happened: people who couldn't stand one another really had forgiven one another, and they began to talk to each other, to take a meal together. The morning after in the sky we saw the word MIR (peace) which moved from Krizevac to the church, as though it were a river of flames. Then we understood what it was necessary to do for the Lord to give us true peace..."

On a different occasion Fr. Jozo told pilgrims: "Happy is the mother of God, but happier still is each person who does the will of God.

'Today I invite you to be with Jesus through prayer,' Our Lady once said. When man accepts prayer fruits mature because God said they will not fail to arrive.

You need to pray with a clean and open heart. You need to pray with the heart. To be with Jesus in prayer takes a great amount of readiness and humbleness. If no one prays anymore it is because families don't pray anymore.... Priests and bishops don't pray either. People like Medjugorje because here you pray.

It's not a modern parish priest that you need; but one who remains in front of the Holy of Holies and prays. If we do not pray in the family - and even if we go to church, to Mass - then we do not have faith. Our "doing" cannot be substituted by any rule which eliminates or reduces prayer.

All those who do not pray are against Medjugorje. Whoever does not pray is like the barren fig tree. Our Lady's most common message is this: be with Jesus through prayer, fasts and sacrifices. Mary says: 'You cannot witness and speak of prayer if you do not pray.' Our Lady does not permit us to talk of prayer unless we pray; similarly, to talk of the messages unless we live them. Prayer with the heart happens when we let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit.

We cannot change through intelligence, but with the heart and love. We live in a time of grace, Our Lady

tells us; so let's make the most of it."

Fr. Cosimo: confession heals

In his talk to the youth at the Festival in Medjugorje, Fr. Cosimo Cavalluzzo emphasized the importance of confession which heals from sin: "My young people, look deep into your hearts... What have you gained with sin? Nothing. Instead, you have lost peace, joy, and self-trust... everything. Yet, this is not the last word. God always comes back to look for you. Jesus didn't come to condemn you, but to love you, to heal you and to save you."

Fr. Cosimo listed some of the sins which separate us from God-Love: selfishness, impure thoughts and acts, evil desires, dissipation: all those things which impede us from collaborating with the Holy Spirit, without Whom there is not life, nor true joy, nor peace. He continued by inviting the youth to trust the Church, that same Church wanted by Jesus and through which He is constantly present among us. "In the person of the Confessor who accepts your confession Jesus is present, to meet you, forgive you for everything and love you!"

You can live a life which is pure, humble, truthful and prayerful: our ally is the Holy Spirit Who prays in us and for us! It is necessary, though, for you to seek Him and to know that you can be holy!

Take two vices and, together with Mary, work at beating them. If we try, God will help us because He cares about us. St. Peter says to throw to the Lord our every worry and He will provide. You are a precious child of God, God takes care of you. You are part of this story because you were in God's thoughts. You are that young person who Jesus saw and stopped to look at. Enter into Jesus' eyes. You need Jesus' glance. Thus, no more being discouraged! Jesus is looking at you, He is thinking of you. Pray to the Holy Spirit, for He makes us aware that Jesus loves us, cares about us, and thinks of us constantly. Jesus says: for you I am consoler and love; I am with you. You are precious to me; my heart burns up for you. Think of God's heart burning up for you.

You need a spiritual guide; it is the only way to advance. You need to make some promises, and keep them. You need to become familiar with Jesus in the Eucharist. Let yourselves be kissed by Eucharistic Jesus. Set a time once a week to stay with Jesus, in front of Him. There you will find love, and love will give you joy. Next to the Eucharist, place confession. We must confess often, even if it's the same sin. Open your hearts to Jesus in the confession. He always has something to tell you. Establish a time for confession: once a week, or twice weekly; but don't let more than a month go by. If we do this, we will have joy and peace; and it will be full joy. Also we priests will have full joy! Young people need this; it is their right. Young people! Only God can fill your hearts; give Him your complete and enduring trust. A practical exercise: when things go wrong make an act of faith and say: my joy, Christ is risen! If a tile falls on your head, say: my joy, Christ is risen! Christ's joy must be transmitted because it can't be contained. Hence, if you wish to remain in joy, you need to make a decision.

Jelena: "how Our Lady taught us to pray" (part 2)

Q. Have you experienced spiritual desert?

A. A free trip to Africa! Yes, it is certainly a positive experience that of the desert, and I think that Our Lady sends this heat to Medjugorje, so that you get used to it. There is no other way to purify our beings

which tend towards negativeness, but in the desert there are also oases; so that we no longer fear. A chaotic, frenzied life indicates one's efforts to escape from the desert, for it is in the desert that we have to look at ourselves. However, since God isn't afraid to look at us, we can see ourselves with His glance. I think that a spiritual guide is very useful for this. He can encourage us, because it often happens that people get tired and forget their first love. There are also many temptations, and a prayer group can help much. This is part of the walk.

Q. Have you had locutions with Jesus?

A. Yes.

Q. Have you ever been given the task of advising someone of something?

A. Well Our Lady did not give the gift for this purpose. At times Our Lady has encouraged certain people through the locutions, but very rarely.

Q. In the messages you receive, has Our Lady ever told you anything for the youth or in particular for young women?

A. Our Lady calls young people, and she has said that they are her hope; but the messages are for everyone.

Q. Our Lady has spoken of prayer groups. What should these groups be like; what should they do?

A. In a young people's group it is important to pray and become friends in God, our common good. God is the most beautiful thing that a friend could give. In such a friendship there is no room for jealousy: if you give God to someone you're not taking anything away from yourself, but rather, you are gaining something.

Young people should seek the answer to their lives. In our group we read the Scripture a lot, and meditated on it and talked about it, because it is important to meet God also on an intellectual level. You have to know that you are young people who belong to Christ, otherwise the world will quickly tug you away from God. In our meetings we talked a lot, but in particular, we prayed together.

We prayed and meditated in silence and with the Rosary. Another element has always been our spontaneous prayer which is important in a community. We met for prayer three times a week.

Q. What can you say to those parents who want to give God to their children but these refuse Him?

A. I too am a daughter, and my parents want the same for me. Parents have to know their role. My father always tells me: "I have to admonish you because God will ask me an account of what I did with my children."

You can't choose to give only physical life to children; it isn't an option, for Jesus says that bread is not enough to survive, that it is important to give children their spiritual life. If they refuse, then perhaps God has His own plan for them. One thing is certain; and that is, that He makes an appointment with everyone. Hence if parents have difficulty in communicating God to their children, then they should turn always to God: if it is not possible to speak to others about God, I can speak to God about the others. I would say to be wary of enthusiasm, because it often happens that when we are not very mature we want to convert everyone. I don't want to criticise; however, this is an opportunity to mature in our faith. I don't believe that children will remain indifferent to their parents' holiness. Hand them over to Mary, for she too is a Mother and she will take them to Christ. If you want to offer your children the truth, you also have to offer them love and charity, for truth without charity can destroy. And when we call others to God, we have to be careful not to judge. (Medjugorje 12.VIII.98)

When I think: Our Father!

St. Francis was in Perugia with Fra Leo; they were walking back to Assisi, and given that the way was long, St. Francis challenged him: "Let's see who can say the most 'Our Fathers'." Fra Leo agreed, so off they went happily towards home. Once they had arrived, Francis asked Leo: "How many 'Our Fathers' did you say?" He replied: "I counted as many as 200 and more, but then I stopped counting. What about you?"

Francis replied: "Me? I didn't even say one." "Why?" fra Leo asked him.

And Francis explained: "As soon as I said Pater (Father), it made me think of the relationship between a father and son, and when I said Noster (Our) it made me think that every person in the world is my brother and sister. Then when I got to: Who art in heaven, it made me think that the home of my Father is up there, whilst I am down here on the earth, away from home. That made me nostalgic for my Father's house, and the sadness from being so far away from Him clouded all my thoughts. But the certainty that one day I would return to Him, in that house which I will inherit because I am His son, made me so happy that it filled my heart."

1. Mary is calling you too to this prayer of contemplation, just as she has taught at Medjugorje. 2. How easy it is for us, exiled and pilgrim people, to forget our home land, so absorbed we are by our earthly abode and worried only about possessing as much as possible.

Our Father: from rebellion to forgiveness

The following is Elga's story.

After having said a novena to Padre Pio, friends offered my way to Medjugorje in September 1989. How wonderful it was! Medjugorje truly is the anteroom of heaven!

Back in Mexico I wanted to live all the graces I had received in Medjugorje. Whilst there I discovered that Mary had commented the Our Father for Jelena's group, saying "You do not know how to pray the Our Father." She asked them to recite only the Our Father during the course of the week, so they could learn to pray it with the heart. As soon as they began, each of them experienced some sort of difficulty; for example, some tripped over: "Thy will be done"; or "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

I decided to recite the Our Father for an entire week; and how surprised I was when I realized that I could not even say with the heart the very first words: "Our Father..." I tried and tried again, but it was impossible for me to call God my father. I began to think and I recalled that because of my parents' divorce, my father was not there when I needed him, and that I had become very angry with God Who allowed me to remain fatherless: "How can you ask me to call you father if I don't even know what it means to have one? You know my father left when I was six and I hardly know him because he remarried and didn't care about us."

For the entire week I continued to put God on trial, but towards the end I began to forgive Him. At first I forgave God for allowing my parents to divorce, then I asked Him the grace to forgive my parents for not having done enough to save their marriage, and then the grace to forgive my father for having abandoned us.

The day after, at Mass, I was joyfully surprised to find that the Gospel told of Jesus teaching His apostles to pray the Our Father. On my way back home I couldn't stop myself from yelling out: "Our Father! Yes,

You are my father, my darling father, my dad in heaven and I love you, I love you so much! If you can, forgive me for not having called you Father before this."

I cried and cried, and I begged God the Father to allow me to see my earthly father before he should die so I could tell him I loved him and forgave him. I asked this also for my two sisters.

Five years later I learnt that my father was dying of cancer. My sisters and I went to see him and we asked each other forgiveness. My father expressed sorrow for the pain he had caused my mother, and asked her to forgive him. Each time I visited I spoke to him about God and the Blessed Virgin, and I asked him to ask for God's forgiveness. He replied that he'd never stolen or killed anyone, but I said to him: "Have you always loved God with all your heart and the others as you love yourself?"

"Of course not, but who does?" "Then you should ask God to forgive you for this." He accepted and we prayed together. He even asked me to get my Catholic friends to pray for him, so the Lord would call him soon. During the following days my father didn't suffer and on the Friday he fell asleep in the Lord's peace.

(From Sr. Emmanuel's book, Medjugorje in the 90's. English edition available from Queenship Publishing, POB 42028, Santa Barbara, CA 93140-2028, USA; Archbishop of Kutching, POB 940, Kutching 93718 Sarawak, Malaysia.)

* Main language editions of Echo of Mary available in Medjugorje at MIR-Shalom shop opposite St. James church and Ain Karim shop, in arcade beneath International Hotel.

Incredible miracle by Our Lady - Perhaps we've all heard a friend or relative say: "I'll believe in miracles when I see an amputated leg or arm grow back!" Well, at least once, this really did happen and it's backed up by all the historical documentation that one could want.

Vittorio Messori, famous writer whom John Paul II chose as his interviewer for the book "Crossing the Threshold of Hope," scrupulously examined all the original documentation kept in the town's archives and he has written a book about it, entitled *Il Miracolo* (The Miracle).

It happened on 29th March 1640 in Calanda, a village of the Spanish region of Aragon. That evening, through the intercession of Our Lady of Saragossa, a young farmer suddenly got his right leg back which had been amputated more than two years before.

The entire village witnessed the fact, and only a few hours after the miracle a legal document was prepared by a notary. A few months later the Archbishop of Saragossa opened an austere trial during which dozens of testimonies were heard..

Not only do we have before us a unique event, but we have confirmation of what Mary can obtain from her Son.

"You did it to me" - The Medjugorje Information Centre, which has been delivering aid regularly each month, informs of the tragic situation in some areas of Bosnia. In Gracanica thousands of Muslim refugees (widows and orphans) receive only bread; eight thousand Serb refugees in Nevesinje are without help; unhuman conditions for Croatian refugees in areas not far from Medjugorje who live in shacks without running water; more than a thousand families in Mostar live in misery; and now the refugees from Kosovo. These are just some of the sad situations for which we try to deliver a bit of hope and a ray of God's love for the many brothers and sisters who despair. (Alberto Bonifacio)

Contact your nearest Medjugorje Centre.

The joy of being a priest - Years ago amongst the many letters people gave to an Irish man who made frequent pilgrimages to Lourdes there was one from a nine year old boy who wrote: "Dear Mary, make

me become a priest. Your son Joseph." At the time he recited the Rosary every day as was the norm in his family, though he was not always attentive. Our Lady, however, took him at his word and in 1995 Joseph Quinn became a priest. On 5th October he celebrated Mass in Medjugorje and in his homily he expressed his joy at being a priest with so much eloquence that the 20 con-celebrating priests were moved to tears..

"To have the Body and Blood of Jesus in my hands is an awesome experience each time. Only now, however, that I have come here do I begin to really feel I am a priest because I have discovered the depth of prayer. I would like to say to all priests and bishops to come here and learn to pray.

"Medjugorje did not give me what I had hoped for" - London: a reader is sad because her pilgrimage in 1995 did not have the effect she hoped for, and still today she cannot pray or read the Scriptures or say the Rosary. "Am I the only failure? Why am I not enthusiastic about Our Lady like the other pilgrims?" Dear Friend, Our Lady asks for conversion, but this doesn't come automatically. In Medjugorje one receives the grace to begin, but then it takes the personal commitment of each person to follow the call which is also one of prayer. We also need to be decisive, and we need to persevere. That means picking up and starting again each time we fall.

Without the support of a prayer group or someone to accompany you on the way, it is more difficult. However, God will not fail to give you His grace. So do not chase after enthusiasm, but rather ask God every day for the gift of faith, and remember that Our Lady knows you and loves you. Believe me! We too shall pray for you.

May the blessing of Mary, of the Holy Child, and mine, bring peace to all our helpers and readers, so that in this year of the Father, they may grow in holiness and become witnesses of His love to the world.

Villanova Maiardina,
The Lord's Epiphany 1999

I want to guide you in prayer more and more, from day to day, but I do not want to force you.