



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace

144

March-April 1999 - [Info](#)

Our Lady's message of 25 Jan. 1999:

Dear Children, I invite you once again to prayer. You do not have the excuse of having to work more since nature is still lying in deep sleep. Open yourselves up to prayer. Renew prayer in your families. Place the Holy Scripture in a visible place in your families. Read it, meditate, and learn how God loves His people. His love is seen in today's times too, for He sends me to invite you on the walk of salvation.

Thank you for responding to my call.

Open yourselves to God

Renew family prayer

This renewed invitation to prayer is, in particular, addressed to the agricultural parish of Medjugorje. Mary repeats the call She made at the beginning of the apparitions when the local people filled the church for the evening Mass during the winter months. Today She observes: you do not have the excuse of having too much work to do in the fields, because nature is still dormant.

This makes one ask: are we dispensed from prayer when we have too much work to do? Not all all. To the same men and women Mary said on 30 May 1985: May prayer be, my Children, daily nourishment for you, especially in these days when the fieldwork is so tiring that you are unable to pray with the heart. Pray, and you will be able to overcome every fatigue. Prayer will be for you joy and rest. It is clear that Our Lady did not say these words for the parishioners alone. While she understands our fatigue, she also offers us the means to overcome it and receive joy and rest.

Open yourselves to prayer. One cannot pray and remain closed to God, which would be prayer with the mouth and not with the heart. Prior to prayer it is necessary to invoke the Holy Spirit so He can empty our hearts of our things and fill them with Himself so we can meet God. And if there appears to be a wall between you and God you have to insist on invoking the Holy Spirit. This is a sign that the heart wants to open up to Him. God will try you to see if you really want Him; and if He can see that you seek Him, He will arrive.

To be open to God is to care about His will, rather than your will, or your problems for which you want an answer. He wants our heart so He can fill it with Himself. Regarding our problems He says: seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness; and all the rest shall be yours as well (Mt 6:33), casting all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you (1Pt 5:7).

To have an open heart is not only for prayer time. An open heart allows God to enter our lives and lead them according to His will. Prayer begins after having prayed, when you have begun a new relationship

with Him and care about doing His will.

Renew prayer in your families. How many times Our Lady has told us this! The family is saved and remains together when it prays, because when family members check themselves against God's will, there is no room for disorderliness. Then why: renew? If you have abandoned prayer, you should begin to pray again; but in particular, you should put new life in your prayer so that it doesn't become stale and turn into habit. On other occasions Mary has asked that members of the family/group be more active (through examination of conscience, prayer intercessions, a thought inspired by the Word of God, etc.). Our Lady also repeats (and seems to say "in the place occupied by the television"): place the Holy Scripture in a visible place, read it and meditate it. Thus, the family makes a clear choice: man shall live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Mt 4:4) and not by the empty models which the world heaps on us day after day.

And you will learn how God loves His people. We must keep this always in mind, otherwise we forget why we live! God so loved the world that he gave his only Son (Jn 3:16). The message makes it clear that every page of the Scripture which we read in the family contains this love, even if it can't be seen first off. It takes the eyes of faith, illumined by the Holy Spirit, to comprehend.

Now, in His ongoing love, God sends His Mother - He sends me in the present time to call you on the way of salvation - as yet another act to prove His infinite love for us. Let's not take this loving gift lightly then, and close our eyes on the prodigies which Mary's apparitions have fulfilled in people's hearts!

Fr. Angelo

Our Lady's message of 25 February 1999:

Dear Children, Also today I am with you in a special way contemplating and living Jesus' Passion in my heart. My dear Children, open your hearts and give me everything that is in them: your joys, your sadness and your every sorrow - even the slightest - that I may offer them to Jesus and He, with His immeasurable love, will burn and transform your sadness into the joy of His resurrection. That is why, my Children, I now invite you in a special way to open your hearts to prayer, so that through it you may become friends of Jesus. Thank you for responding to my call.

Give me your sorrows; Jesus will change them into joy

For Lent Our Lady is inviting us to participate in Jesus' Passion so that we can also share in His glory. That I may share his sufferings so as to attain the resurrection from the dead (cf. Phil 3:10).

Mary is with us to meditate on the Cross because for love of us her Son suffered and died to change our destiny. The call to meditate Jesus' Passion in the Via Crucis (Way of the Cross) is for us too. Isn't it true that we feel different after bathing in the sorrows of Jesus' Cross? And let us not forget the Via Matris in which we meditate on the sword of sorrows which pierced Mary's heart.

In Kibeho in 1982 Our Lady offered the chaplet of seven sorrows as a valid remedy for what we would call the ail of the century, that is, the denial of sin and thus the absence of repentance necessary for God to forgive. We know by experience how efficacious it is!

Mary not only meditates, for though she is in a place of happiness, she also lives Jesus' Passion and ours. She asks that we open our hearts so we are not discouraged at the thought of the sorrows which await us, and to which we would succumb if we did not know what comes after the cross. Mary knows that it is the glory of resurrection. The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Rom 8:18).

Open your hearts and give me everthing you have in them. Give me your sadness, worries, and anxieties for the future; give me your depression, failures, illnesses and infirmity, and even your slightest sorrow. Why, we may ask.

Our Mother knows our temptation to refuse suffering which Jesus also experienced: Father, remove from me this cup... and God's silence: My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? She knows that we are given to rebellion of the cross and that we are easily put down. >> pg 8

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Give to me - because Mary knows how we end up losing the grace of the cross. But our crosses will turn into joy; similar to a woman who suffers for the pains of birth. When they are assumed by Jesus they will become reason for joy and together with St. Paul we will say: immense is my joy in every tribulation.

Give to me - for Mary is the Mediatrix of all graces. Recall Cana when she saved a family from being humiliated. Give me also your joys because these could easily divert you from the truth. She will purify them and ensure they are put to good use.

Since Mary knows it is impossible for us to overcome the trial of passion she says: give everything to me and I will offer it to Jesus. It is important for us to understand that Mary's involvement in our offering, purification, conversion and resurrection is necessary for the immeasurable triumph of love which Jesus Christ is working!

Jesus will burn our sorrows with His infinite love, to transform them into the joy of His Resurrection. We can live this experience right now, and the time will come when we will be as He is (1 Jn 3:2).

Then Mary urges us to open our hearts in prayer so we can become Jesus' friends. So let us take advantage of this time of grace to become just that. May our prayer be more real; may it teach us to say as He said: not mine, but Thy will be done. This is being His friends. By accepting Mary's help to enter His Passion, we will be able to enter, with Jesus, the Father's joy, which no one will be able to take from us.

Fr. A.

Pope's mission in America in defence of life and the oppressed

John Paul II was in Mexico in January to hand over his Post-Synodal Exhortation to the bishops of America. He used the occasion to announce the Gospel of life in the continent which is home for the greatest number of Catholics in the world. He chose a poor people, which lives close to the most powerful in the world, to cry out: Happy are the poor, but woe to the rich, to those who are full and now laugh. He chose the Shrine of Guadalupe where the Mother of God came to save the threatened existence of the indigenous peoples, to condemn all forms of anti-life activity. The Pope was greeted with immense enthusiasm and millions of little mirrors which reflected light onto his approaching plane. And every night beneath the window of the Nunciature where the Pope was guest, 250 guitarists played serenades in his honour.

He spoke out about the truth regarding the oppression of the poor, of ethnic groups, of the indios and chiapas peoples: a real tragedy suffocated by official silence.

"Never again!" - In the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe he said: "The time has come to banish once and for all from the continent every attack against life. No more violence, terrorism and drug-trafficking! No more torture or other forms of abuse! There must be an end to the unnecessary recourse to the death

penalty! No more exploitation of the weak, racial discrimination or ghettos of poverty! Never again! These are intolerable evils which cry out to heaven and call Christians to a different way of living, to a social commitment more in keeping with their faith. We must rouse the consciences of men and women with the Gospel, in order to highlight their sublime vocation as children of God. As a matter of urgency, we must stir up a new springtime of holiness on the continent so that action and contemplation will go hand in hand."

To Our Lady of Guadalupe he placed "the hopes and longings of the indigenous peoples with their own culture and legitimate aspirations to which they have a right."

In the Azteca Stadium he met with "representatives of all the generations of the century" and said: "Since some of the powerful have turned their backs on Christ, the century now ending is impotently witnessing the death from starvation of thousands of human beings, although, paradoxically, agricultural and industrial production are on the rise; it no longer promotes moral values, which have been gradually eroded by phenomena such as drugs, corruption, unbridled consumerism and widespread hedonism; defenceless, it beholds the growing gap between poor indebted countries and others which are powerful and affluent; it continues to ignore the intrinsic perversion and terrible consequences of the 'culture of death'; it promotes ecology, but ignores the fact that any attack on nature is deeply rooted in moral disorder and man's contempt for man!"

Two opposite worlds meet - Mexico and St. Louis (USA) where the Pope met face to face with Bill Clinton. In his official address, the President praised the Pope's work for peace in the world, while the Pope, with measured words, called America to its great responsibility before the world. In this fourth meeting with the Polish Pope, the most powerful man of the world perhaps trembled with his senses of guilt and spiritual inadequacy before this old man who, despite his fragile appearance, is as hard as steel. The meeting did not change the President's mind about the death penalty or the attacks on Iraq, which was bombed during the meeting. Clinton is the President of globalization of markets, but the Pope launched another type of globalization: that of solidarity amongst all men.

Of the youth he asked sincerity and pureness - They were enthused by John Paul during the meeting in St. Louis' great temple of baseball, the Kiel Center. The Pope invited them to follow Christ, saying "they would feel the same great enthusiasm that they experienced during the recent baseball season as you train for a different goal: the goal of following Christ, the goal of bringing his message to the world." He exhorted them to always tell the truth in a world which is in need of light. "When you were little were you sometimes afraid of the dark? Today you are no longer children afraid of the dark. But you realize that there is another kind of darkness in the world: the darkness of doubt and uncertainty, of loneliness and isolation, of violence and indifference, of sexual abuse and of drugs that destroy the body, mind and heart.

There is something terribly wrong when so many young people are overcome by hopelessness to the point of taking their own lives. And in parts of this nation laws have been passed which allow doctors to end the lives of the very people they are sworn to help. God's gift of life is being rejected. Death is chosen over life, and this brings with it the darkness of despair.

Do not listen to those who encourage you to lie, to shirk responsibility, to put yourselves first. Do not listen to those who tell you that chastity is passé. In your hearts you know that true love is a gift from God and that it respects his plan for the union of man and woman in marriage. Do not be taken in by false values and deceptive slogans, especially about your freedom. True freedom is a wonderful gift from God, and it has been a cherished part of your country's history."

The young people were delighted to see the Pope handle his walking stick as though it were a hockey

stick. And he was delighted to receive a real hockey stick and jersey with No. 1 and John Paul II printed on the back.

Holy Mass at huge indoor stadium, St. Louis' Trans World Dome - The Pope launched an explicit invitation to the US to change direction regarding respect for life and moral truths. To the Catholics in particular he said: "As believers, how can we fail to see that abortion, euthanasia and assisted suicide are a terrible rejection of God's gift of life and love? .. The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life!"

Sadly, a recent poll in Missouri holds that 86% of Catholics (Catholics form the majority) believe that it is possible to be good Catholics while disagreeing with the Pope's teachings on abortion, divorce, priestly celibacy, sexual permissiveness, etc.

General satisfaction was felt for the significant gesture made by the Governor of Missouri who graced a prisoner due to be put to death on the same day as the Pope's visit. And at the General Audience of 10 February the Pope said: "This meeting, with the motherly assistance of Our Lady of Guadalupe, has indelibly marked America's history." **

Father's Love is human and maternal

The fatherhood of God as revealed in the Old Testament was the subject of the Pope's catechesis at the General Audience of 20 January. "The divine fatherhood in Israel's regard is marked by an intense, constant and compassionate love. Despite the people's infidelities and the consequent threats of punishment, God shows himself incapable of forsaking his love."

"He expresses it in terms of deep tender-ness, even when he is forced to lament his children's lack of response: It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks, and I bent down to them and fed them. How can I give you up Ephraim? How can I hand you over to Israel? My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender (Hos 11:3f., 8, Jer 31:20)."

"Even the reproof becomes the expression of a privileged love, as the Book of Proverbs explains: My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights (Prv 3:11-12)."

"Such a divine fatherhood, which at the same time is so 'human' in its forms of expression, includes all the features which are usually attributed to a mother's love. Although rare, the OT images in which God is compared to a mother are very significant. From the Book of Isaiah, for example: Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me. Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you (Is 49:14-15). And: As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you (Is 66:13).

Thus, God's attitude to Israel also appears with maternal features, which express tenderness and understanding.

During Lent practise charity

The Lord will prepare a banquet for all peoples (Is 25:6), was the theme of the Holy Father's Lenten message.

"There are many like Lazarus who knock on the door of society - all those who have no share in the material benefits which progress has brought. There are situations of persistent misery which cannot but impinge upon the conscience of Christians, reminding them of their duty to address these situations both as individuals and as a community.

Also international institutions, national governments and centres controlling the world economy must all undertake brave plans and projects to ensure a more just sharing of the goods of the earth..."

Young people, rediscover confession

The Holy Father's message for the next world youth day, to be celebrated by dioceses on Palm Sunday, says: "Young people, the Father loves you; but to meet and experience this love, you need to rediscover the beauty and the wealth of grace contained in the sacrament of reconciliation..." He described his appeal as urgent, because the more the man of today loses his sense of sin, the less he is likely to ask for God's forgiveness.

Joy of forgiveness - On Ash Wednesday, the Pope added: "Lent is the time of a particular concern on God's part to pardon and forgive our sins: it is the time of reconciliation... In effect, man is not restored to friendship with God until the words: "Father, I have sinned," flow from his lips and his heart. His efforts are then made effective by the encounter with salvation which takes place through Christ's Death and Resurrection. It is in the paschal mystery that the penitent receives the gift of the forgiveness of his sins and the joy of being born again to eternal life."

"Persecuted because of my Name"

The Lord's disciples will suffer persecution, even within their own family and community; for the genuine spirit of Jesus contrasts so greatly with the world. Jesus told us so. Also societies and nations continue to persecute the Christian name and those who belong to the Church. We see this in Sudan, Pakistan, Birmania, Turkey, Vietnam, Egypt, Algeria, Rwanda, and especially in China. In many countries Islamic fundamentalists are trying to root up the Church.

Tragedy in South Sudan - A real genocide is being wrought by the Islamist government against Christians and other non-Muslims. Besides the systematic policy of slaughter and destruction, aid is even impeded from reaching the starving people. A British parliamentary has described the blockade as a "monstrous evil." "It is not a problem of enough resources; the Sudanese Government is deliberately inflicting this starvation on these people for its own ends."

And aid launched from planes is not always effective, as people who walk for miles to reach the announced place for the drop, often die, exhausted, on the way. Malaria and other denutrition related illnesses reap many victims, mostly children.

Moreover, thousands of children (as many as 10,000) have been abducted from Nth Uganda and held captive. These are given rudimentary training and sent to fight; the girls are raped and beaten and given as wives to the rebel commanders.

Yet Christians resist - A nun, one of our readers, writes: "The Church in Sudan is so tried, in this country run by Islamic fundamentalists, yet her strength comes from Mary and the Rosary which is recited everywhere: in centres and poor huts, and by the young and old. In the Cathedral of Khartoum the Bishop recites the complete Rosary with the faithful every Saturday afternoon.

The power of this prayer is seen. Our Christians, though disarmed, are not afraid. The government keeps us under constant control, and disperses the centres where people pray and find aid. In schools, and on the radio and television there is only Islam, yet you should see how even young pupils defend their faith.

They are not afraid to say, "I am Christian and I don't want the Koran." The Church here is alive and witnesses her faith. Both young and old seek out God; they thirst for His Word."

(Sr. Stefania Bassan, 8.12.98)

Poverty and persecution of secret Church in China

Two Chinese bishops were invited to the recent synod for Asia but the government of Beijing did not give them permission to leave. One wrote to the Pope: "Physically, I am absent; but my heart is constantly with you." In China the faithful from the "secret" Church are continually persecuted. A secret document published by "Fides" says that the intention of the regime is to eliminate all those Catholics who refuse to adhere to the government-controlled patriotic church. On 21 February the press released the news that hundreds of faithful from the province of Begoin were arrested, and their bishop imprisoned.

There are hundreds of clandestine seminarists, priests, nuns and bishops. The eldest have spent years in prison or in labour camps, and the youngest know that they could be arrested at any moment.. We met one bishop who has spent up to 6 months in prison each year since 1986 for the most varied reasons. He is full of joy and fears neither danger nor misery.

These bishops are extremely poor, and ask for offerings for Masses so they can finance the formation of the many young men who want to become priests. There is no scarcity of vocations here.

There are many nuns who work secretly and risk their lives to evangelize and teach Catholic children (religious education is forbidden below the age of 19), and to run an orphanage for disabled children. They are not orphans, but due to the "single child" politics of China, parents keep only the perfectly formed ones. The state-run orphanages refuse the disabled children, but the nuns take them in, baptize them and give them affection and medical care. Many of the girls become nuns, despite incomprehension, family discord, and the risk of being discovered. One of them said she did it "to honour God and save souls."

Fasting practised by 20 Chinese seminarists - "At 3.50 in the morning, with our faces covered by scarves and hats, a peasant woman led us silently across the dark fields till we reached a low and humid building. We were led into the chapel where twenty young men were already on their knees in prayer: the Chinese priests of tomorrow. After a lengthy Mass they did a few exercises in the yard outside before returning to the freezing chapel for the Rosary. The sun had still not risen.

The seminarists then took a bowl of porridge for breakfast. They would not have eaten anything else till their second and last meal (of vegetables) at 4 pm. On Fridays they eat only once and on Wednesdays and Saturdays they take only bread and water. They never eat meat or eggs.

One of them said as he smiled: "We think our life style has to be lower than that of other Christians. Normally, it is not a burden for us because through prayer we feel close to God." At times, though, it is hard to bear and in that case prayer has to be more intense. "In the beginning," he added, "it is very hard, but with prayer we are able to see better what our scope in life is and that makes us happy."

(Taken from Eco dell'Amore, Sept. '98)

Moving voice from Vietnam - "I'm 70 years old and quite sick., but I have more energy than many young people. Prayer and zeal burn me up; in effect, Jesus said: I have come to set a fire upon the earth.. Just quietly, last Christmas the archbishop of Hociminville (Hanoi) came to celebrate midnight Mass in this dark corner of the slums with this small parish group without an identity. I'm in charge; and the

Archbishop came directly to my home without any pomp at all. Thanks to him, the Word was made flesh and came to live in our tent. We were all moved to tears for this new Bethlehem in Hociminville. I am translating Mary's messages of 1998, but I haven't got them all. That is why I knock at your door, so that despite the distance and my humble conditions, I may receive the Echo of Mary regularly."

24 March next is day of prayer and fasts for missionary martyrs.

Seeds of unity with Orthodox

We know how difficult relations between Orthodox and Christians have become just lately, particularly in Russia.

Well, a spiral of hope has been opened: "The Holy Father has received an official invitation by the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Rumenia to visit the country (which has an Orthodox majority). The Pope has accepted. The visit will take place next May."

Practical ecumenism on Volga - The boat church is running at full steam. It was donated by the "Church in Need" to the archbishop of Volgograd. When the bells toll the Orthodox faithful fill the chapel (100 places), while many remain outside. Untiring, Fr. Lardo has promised he will supply a further two boat churches, while others again are being planned for areas where the need is particularly great.

"Return to Primitive Fervour"

Model of life mapped out by Our Lady for first prayer group

On 25 May 1983 the Blessed Virgin expressed her desire for a prayer group which would be totally surrendered to God. On 16 June Mary dictated to Jelena the rules for the group.

1. Renounce all passions and disorderly desires. Avoid watching TV, especially unpropitious programmes. Avoid excessive sport, immoderate delight in food and drinks, alcohol, tobacco, etc.
2. Surrender self unconditionally to God
3. Banish for ever all anxiety. To be surrendered to God is to have no room in your heart for anxiety. The difficulties will still exist, but they will favour your spiritual growth, and glorify God.
4. Love your enemies. Banish from your heart hatred, bitterness, judgement and preconceived ideas. Pray for your enemies and invoke the divine blessing upon them.
5. Fast on bread and water twice weekly. Assemble in group at least once a week.
6. Each day consecrate at least 3 hours to prayer. Of this, at least half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening. This time of prayer includes Mass and the Rosary. Keep aside moments of prayer during the day and receive Holy Communion as often as possible.

Let your prayer be deep. Do not look continually at your watch, but let yourself be guided by God's grace. Do not worry excessively for the things of the world, but entrust everything in prayer to our heavenly Father. When you are too worried you are unable to pray, because you lack inner serenity. God will see that worldly things are brought to a good end when you make an effort to be open to His. Those who go to school or work must pray half an hour in the morning and again in the evening and go to Mass, when possible. The spirit of prayer should be extended to one's daily work; that is, accompany

work with prayer.

7. Be prudent, because the devil tempts all those who decide to consecrate them-selves to God, and especially these. He will suggest to these that they pray too much, fast too much, that they should be like the other young people and seek pleasures. These must not listen to him, nor obey him! They must pay attention to the Virgin's voice. Once their faith is consolidated the devil will no longer be able to seduce them.

8. Pray very much for the bishop and for those responsible for the Church. No less than half their prayers and sacrifices must be for this intention.

To Jelena Mary said: "I have come to tell the world: God is truth; He exists. In Him is happiness and fullness of life. I have come here as the Queen of Peace to tell the world that peace is necessary for the world's salvation. In God is found true joy from which comes true peace."

"I ask you to commit yourselves for 4 years. It is still not the moment to choose your vocation. The important thing, in the beginning, is to enter into prayer. Afterwards, you will choose correctly."

(From: "Message et pédagogie de Marie à Medjugorje" by R. Laurentin)

Spiritual battle continues in defence of authentic gift of Medjugorje

We strongly believe that Mary's special presence in Medjugorje (a place of special grace, 8.5.86) represents a precious gift offered to the Church and all men of good will in this time which, through Mary, is united to heaven in a special way (25.5.96). These are times of grace in which it appears the Spirit wants to blow new, irresistible fervour onto the Church and the world to "make all things new." The core of this call is the readiness to offer one's life to save the world (25.2.88) [first asked in Fatima of which Medjugorje is the fulfilment (25.8.91)] through a spiritual journey of total surrender to God (25.5.89), under Mary's personal guidance.

Through observing the chronological development of the messages and the wisdom in Mary's teachings - so delicately unfolded - it becomes clear how the full assimilation of the contents of this call cannot happen in an instant. Instead, it needs to be developed within a context of progressive aperture of heart which leads us "to a deep spiritual life, in all simplicity" (25.12.89). This is possible only if we accept in complete docility the way which Mary has so wisely traced out for us, and the spiritual means and instruments chosen by her for the realization of her plans.

It is in this perspective that we can place those special fruits desired by Mary since the beginning of the apparitions (Jelena, 25.5.83) where the fire of communion and offering can burn with special intensity and hence supply "spiritual fuel" for the realization of Her plan of grace. The first of these is the prayer group led personally by Mary through the charismatic gift granted to Jelena. This group was the expression of the deepest contents of the grace granted at Medjugorje.

Then we have the other communities and spiritual families, born from Mary's Heart, often led by Her personally where special gifts do not lack, so as to realize a special movement of offering and profound communion in the Spirit. This is to ensure the complete realization of the plans of grace entrusted to Mary by God, for the final triumph of Her Immaculate Heart which was announced in Fatima.

It does not surprise us, either, that an event of grace of these proportions was made to undergo the evangelical law of contradiction. It was inevitable that Medjugorje should be the object of an extremely violent spiritual battle ("wherever I and My Son are, Satan immediately turns up too," Mary said to

Mirjana 28.1.87).

In the beginning of the apparitions, the enemy ("the one who wants to destroy my plans of peace" 12.7.84) went into action through a phase of violent opposition led by civilian authorities of the Communist regime, and a series of unexplainable misunderstandings, incomprehension, and unmotivated forms of refusal by the local Bishop and other members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Often badly informed, they remained blind and deaf to the evidence and abundant spiritual fruits which gushed over from that fount of grace.

The spiritual battle now appears less violent, but it has taken a much more subtle and treacherous form through the work (perhaps unknowingly) of those who say they accept the spiritual gift of Medjugorje, and even loudly announcing it, but deny its deepest spiritual drive and most authentic fruits. Hence Mary's plan of grace is maimed of its essential components and spiritual instruments which she expressly chose for the complete realization of her plan of love.

Not by chance, the greatest fury is waged against the very heart of Mary's plan represented by those units of fervent communion desired by the Queen of Peace, where the essence of Medjugorje's spiritual charisma is most profoundly expressed. We are talking of those spiritual communities generated by Her Immaculate Heart which have a decisive role in the fulfilment of Mary's plan of salvation for the world. Thus, we witness a systematic darkening of the most vital and authentic contents of Medjugorje's charisma, wrought, paradoxically, also by those with direct involvement who should feel obliged, instead, to ensure its integrity. There is an obvious intent to force it into the narrow logic of "Shrine-Institution," or to pen in only a part of its manifestations while excluding others. The risk is to tragically impoverish the super-abundant spiritual gift and the amazing drive of grace which Our Lady grants.

The bad fruit of this logic is an undue debasement of essential components of Medjugorje's spiritual gift, which is widely felt also among the more sensitive pilgrims.

After the initial impulse generated by the Spirit, pilgrims seek help so they can find those spiritual spaces wanted and prepared by Mary, so as to advance on an authentic faith journey towards the profound levels of communion with the Trinitarian Life which represents the essence of Our Lady's call.

When they are unable to find these spaces, it happens all too often that their faith remains superficial and sterile, and this impedes that intense drive of grace which burns away every trace of the old man in the vortex of Trinitarian Love which should create in hearts "new heavens and new earth." It is to this that Mary, untiring, wants to lead us, so that we become efficacious instruments in her hands for the world's salvation.

So let us hand over to the Heart of the Queen of Peace our weaknesses and those of the others so that through a more generous prayer and offering on our part, all may become light for the complete triumph of Mary's Immaculate Heart.

Giuseppe Ferraro

News from the blessed land

Franciscans remain in Medjugorje - Many pilgrims have turned to us lately for news regarding the departure of the Franciscans from the parish; news connected with a recently published letter co-signed by Mostar Bishop Ratko Peric, and the Minister General of the Franciscan Order.

The news is not correct. Nor is it correct that some of the Franciscans currently present in the parish have to leave Medjugorje. The parish of Medjugorje is not mentioned in the decree *Romanis Pontificibus* as one of the 20 parishes that the Franciscans are to hand over to the local bishop. In case of a change our Information Office would have informed of it.

Austrian Bishop - "Here we find what is being lost elsewhere: penance, conversion, vocations"

Before his departure from Medjugorje early December, the archbishop of Salzburg George Elder gave us his impressions:

"I have often asked myself: 'Why the repetition of these simple messages? It is always a call to prayer, fasting, penance, prayer for peace. What could the meaning be?' And I understood: 'What does a mother do when she raises her children? She always repeats the same things. Mary does the same in Medjugorje. She teaches us to pray and her method is very simple.'

I have to say that Christ's word helped me to see: By their fruits you will know them! I know that groups from Salzburg often come here and that new prayer groups are constantly starting up and that more and more people say: 'In Medjugorje I received my vocation.' It makes me reflect that we are losing three things that in Medjugorje people return to: penance, conversion and vocations. In Austria we look in vain for these. Conversion is not even mentioned anymore because people "do not need it"; confession is dying out except in shrines and churches of religious orders, and spiritual vocations are fewer all the time!

So I ask myself: 'What must we do for conversion to happen?' I have repeated to the members of People's Initiative that conversion in their programme has disappeared. Conversion is being excluded and confession is being lost and vocations are always less. And we ask ourselves how to keep up the seminary. But all of this is found in Medjugorje!

I have one more wish: that there may be peace here between the Franciscans and the bishop, and that Medjugorje may truly develop in the way wished by Our Lady. I am convinced of the authenticity of Medjugorje; I have believed it for some time, and I desired to come and see for myself.

When I was invited by pilgrims to come here I told them that I was spiritually closer to Medjugorje than some others. My impression was confirmed because of the simplicity of the visionaries and the evening prayer. Everything conforms to the spirit of the Church. At the same time there is much devotion, strong faith and a strong will for conversion and real renewal."

Card. Schonborn: "Wherever Mary is, Church is renewed"

Interviewed while in Lourdes the archbishop of Vienna said: "In Marian Shrines one sees how the Church is renewed. You get the sensation that God is near, and not in an abstract way, thanks to Mary who represents the closeness of heaven to earth like no other."

Asked about Medjugorje he said: "I have not yet been there, but in a certain sense I have been many times thanks to those who have been and in whose life I see many fruits. I would lie if I said differently. These fruits are obvious and concrete. In our diocese and in many other places I witness the grace of

conversion, the supernatural life in the faith, the graces of joy, vocations and salvation, and the rediscovery of the sacraments, of confession. All this cannot deceive. Thus, I can say that the criteria I use are the fruits, and if the tree must be judged by its fruits then this tree is good."

Regarding the various communities in Austria which have risen in the wake of Medjugorje (such as Kraljice Mira and Lamm) he was asked if these offer new prospects for the future of the Church. "Of course," he replied, "I believe that Mary begins her work in silence, but in a very effective way. Man pays less attention to the noise of a crowd, and is rarely touched by debates. Even though dialogue is necessary, it can't suffice, neither for one's personal life, nor for the community. In Mary the Church is always personal, since she is not a large institution nor a great theological system. She is able to be perceived; her maternity, virginity, beauty and her infinite kindness make her comprehensible for the everyday man..

Above all, in Marian places one is able to see how the Church is not primarily an institution, but instead, is Christ's bride for whom Christ gave His life. The Church is wonderful; she is the mother of all men. All this is found in Mary. Wherever Mary is the Church is renewed. Not by chance the communities which rise from the Church are tied for the most part to Mary and to her places of grace."

He was asked about the refusal by certain bishops, despite the fact that the fruits of Medjugorje reverberate worldwide, and whether or not the last document which the Vatican addressed to bishop La Réunion (26 May 1998) contains a satisfactory response. He replied: "The letter by the secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (see Echo 140) is a friendly clarification of what has been the official stance of the Church in the last years, and that is, that the question is consciously left open. Neither does it rule out that the phenomena may contain a supernatural nature.

Of course the Church will not express a definite opinion while the phenomena continue in the form of apparitions or similar events, but the task of the pastors is to promote that which helps growth, and to protect it, if necessary, from any dangers which are of course everywhere. Even in Lourdes there is the need to be constantly concerned that the original gift is not suffocated by wrong developments. Medjugorje is not immune either. In the meantime, it would be important if also bishops dedicated their pastoral attention to Medjugorje so that the fruits are protected against wrong developments."

Results of latest exams carried out on visionaries

After the first studies by a group of French doctors in 1984 and a second set of tests done by an Italian medical team in 1985, a group of European psychiatrists led another series of tests in 1998. At the request of the Parish Office of Medjugorje psychophysiological and psychodiagnostic research was carried out on the visionaries in four different sessions. The official report lists the 14 doctors from various parts of Europe, and the sophisticated tests carried out on the visionaries.

"The results from these psychological-diagnostic investigations show that over the 17-year period, from the beginning of the apparitional experiences, the subjects do not show any kind of pathological symptoms like trance interference, disassociative interference and loss of reality interference. ... Results demonstrate that the ecstatic phenomenology can be compared to the one of 1985 with somewhat less intensity. The hypnotically-induced state of ecstasy did not cause the phenomenology of spontaneous experiences and therefore it can be deduced that the ecstatic states of spontaneous apparitions were not states of hypnotic trance.

Signed: Fr. Andreas Resch, Dr. Giorgio Gagliardi, Dr. Marco Margnelli, Dr. Marianna Bolko, Dr.

Gabriella Raffaelli. 12.12.98

Conclusion: The scientific tests permit us to ascertain that the visionaries are not manipulated, are not acting, and that the (unexplainable) state of ecstasy does not alter in any way their "normal" daily behaviour. No type of pathology was found. Of course no instrument can record what happens during an apparition, but it is to note that none of these tests invalidate what the visionaries say they experience.

Fra Slavko in Slovenia - From 11-15 January Fr. Slavko Barbaric, together with Nono Bulic and Vincenzo Cazzaniga from Sr. Elvira's community, conducted the Medjugorje evening prayer programme and various other meetings on the theme of drug addiction. The occasion was the publication of Fr. Slavko's new book: "Pearls of a Wounded Heart."

Many people were drawn to the meetings, both for the prayer and for the problem of drug addiction and the possible liberation from it. The meetings were held in schools and churches, and broadcasted via radio and TV. The local papers also showed a great deal of interest in the young people from the Cenacle Community. Towns visited were Ljubjana, Kranj, Jesenica, Maribor, Novagorica, Capodistria, Portorose and Leskovec near Krk. The archbishop of Ljubjana, fra Frane Rode, received the youth, while Fr. Slavko met a group of 30 priests from Maribor and bishop Franco Kranberger.

Fr. Jozo in Lebanon, Syria and Korea - Invited by bishops and prayer groups, Fr. Jozo was away for approximately one month. Upon his return he told the journalists of Slobodna BiH: "The messages of Medjugorje have reached the whole world. I saw how many people have changed life and how they wish to listen to the witnesses from Medjugorje."

In Beirut he met Cardinal Sferirom and Bishop Saad. "The Apostolic Nuncio, Mons. Bortolasio, asked to speak to me in private; he thanked me for what I did for Lebanon and the rest of the world. He told me he had been to Medjugorje and that he acknowledges the importance of the messages, and added that he is happy for them."

In Korea the meetings were held over a 15-day period in churches and sport centres. On all occasions people came in great crowds to hear Fr. Jozo talk.

My visit to one of Sr. Elvira's Communities - Fr. Gasparino said: "I spent the first night of my pilgrimage to Medjugorje in Sr. Elvira's community in Ugljane (Sinj). It counts 30 male members. We arrived a little before midnight. What a lesson I got that night, and I understood that Our Lady wanted me to observe the love they have for prayer and the Eucharist.

Above my room, at 2 o'clock in the morning, I heard something move. I realized that the lights were on in the chapel. I got up and went to pray. There were 15 men on their knees in front of the Eucharist, in silent adoration. They were volunteers for night-time adoration.

What wonderful things God has done in this community! This used to be land full of scrub and rocks; now it is a garden. It was transformed by these same men. Now it is a little village of stone houses which lacks nothing. There is a kitchen, a dining room, a laundry, a baker's oven, a stable with cows for milk, a soccer field, a workshop, fields and a vegetable garden. It was all created by these young men whom Sr. Elvira brings up through her drug-healing prayer therapy: 3 Rosaries a day, meditation of the Gospel morning and evening, and a very strict revision of life.

I understood that we have to give ourselves a good shake and do much more in our prayer, work, and education of young people on the life of grace."

"Encourage young people to life of consecration" - "Do not return home without promising Our Lady

to begin a new life of prayer, and without asking yourselves the most important question about life:

'Lord, what do you want of me?' " Thus said Fr. Gasparino at the youth festival in Medj.

"I touched a hot argument," he said, "and I was referring the words of Sr. Elvira, who said: 'I believe the Lord calls many young people to a life of radical consecration to Him, and that priests do not have enough courage to support them.'

To the youth I said: "When you seek out the answer from the Lord, and you think you are being called to marriage, it will be a holy matrimony. If you feel you are being called to the priesthood, say: 'Here I am, Lord.'

If you need advice, seek out a priest, and if you wish, I will be available at the Cenacle Community."

Well, I had to dedicate nearly 12 straight hours to listen to the young people who lined up for hours to ask me about their vocational problems. Yes, the Lord calls many young people at His service; all it takes is the courage to help them.

Young people present for New Year's eve - The prayer vigil was attended by thousands of pilgrims from all over the world, most of whom were young. It began at 10 pm with prayer guided by Fr. Slavko. At midnight was the solemn moment of consecration. All remained in silent adoration, then songs of joy followed.

On Saturday the 2nd we were present at the apparition to Mirjana beneath the big tent at Sr. Elvira's community. When Our Lady arrived we saw the face of the visionary light up. She prayed the Our Father with Our Lady, and recited the words very slowly so as to meditate and savour each word. (Alberto Bonifacio)

Vicka, who had been bedridden for some weeks due to bad back strain, courageously resumed her talks with pilgrims in January. She was very tired and had lost weight (see photo), yet as soon as her health permitted she went to the Holy Land and on the 11th Feb. was in Lourdes.

Lesson by "poor" Christians

Sr. Emmanuel's 40-day mission around the world began in America where she was accompanied by Denis Nolan. She was given space on television, and was widely watched in the Caribbean islands...

"In Asia I was accompanied by American priest, Fr. Tim Deeter. He has a special charisma for young people (he will be in Medjugorje for the next youth festival). The message was well accepted everywhere, and in particular by the youth.

"I was particulaly impressed," she tells, "by my visit to Kerala in India, where the Catholics lived Our Lady's messages long before the apparitions. In the beginning I was careful not to be too heavy-handed as I explained Our Lady's five requests. When they heard that She asked for the entire Rosary each day, they were surprised and said: "Sister, only lazy people stop at that. Here we pray even 10 full rosaries a day."

When I suggested monthly confession to them they told me that they confess every week. Then when I talked to them about the lack of priests and invited parents to be open to eventual priestly vocations for their sons, they all agreed. In fact, they have so many priests that they are able to supply communities abroad.

The bishop of Pala told us that it was during the Marian year of 1987 that graces began to shower down from heaven. In that year the faithful organized a non-stop Rosary chain, day and night. [Something similar happened to us when Our Lady's visit was taken seriously.]

Blessed poverty! "They announced the Gospel to us." - One evening we met with a group of Hindus. As we spoke to them about God, they flooded us with questions about Jesus and Mary. We were profoundly touched by the simplicity with which they accepted our replies. One Hindu mother taught her children: "The God of the Christians is all good. You should not be afraid of him, for he is not like our gods. He never punishes and he loves us very much. His love is so great that he died on the cross for us. And believe me: no other god would have done this for us. I say that this god is my favourite one; he is the best of all." One of her daughters became Christian at 40 years of age and now she radiates Jesus' love.

We went to many homes including the poorest ones, and in each of them there was a prayer corner decorated with flowers, lamps, candles and incense. God truly is given first place in their lives. Their pure hearts and childish joy were for us a shower of graces. It was them who announced the Gospel and messages to us. Their intensely intimate relationship with God is due to their great poverty. They have not yet been touched by the materialism of death which devastates the west. They are free!

(From Sr. Emmanuel's diary)

Prayer and Fast Seminars (by Fr. Slavko Barbaric) at Domus Pacis house for 1999 (subdivided into language groups): English: 16-21 May. Contact Marija Paulic, Croatian MIR Center Florida, fax 305653595.

Journeying to the Father

Young people from all over Italy were in Numana for the annual meeting led by Fr. Tomislav from 7-10 January. The theme was "Journeying to the Father." For many it was a true and proper walk with moments of battle, expectation and decision. The retreat culminated in the Resurrection Vigil on Saturday, during which the baptismal promises were renewed.

1. What type of Christians are we?

What happens in us? Are we able to see where the darkness is in us?

If we feel crushed, trodden on, then we are still in the dark; and for us Christianity is ideology. If religion and faith are reason to fear for us; if our relationship with God is based on said feelings, then we are still in the dark. If we accept faith simply as a means of consolation, this means we are still infantile, underdeveloped, because from faith comes life, not consolation. Another aspect to consider is slavery to devotion, which instead of changing us, crushes us.

2. A Jubilee to enter the Light - If our spirituality is not centred around the Holy Trinity it remains confused and individualistic. The heart of our inner motivation, it enables us to reach our full identity, which is that of becoming children of God the Father and enter into the full light. This time of preparation for the Jubilee is a great Pentecost, that we may take part in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The key that lets us enter is the cross.

Do you know why many Christians are depressed and weak? It is because they have not accepted the cross of Jesus Christ! In it we have the grace to accept and carry our crosses. It is because we refuse them that we become weaker and weaker. Yet each trial has the function of being an instrument for our purification and the salvation of others! You do not know how many have suffered so that you today have faith. You don't understand how great is the task which Jesus Christ entrusts to you!

3. Meet the Father - The Father is feared because He is unknown; He is unknown because He is feared. Rationally you cannot talk of the Father because He is Fount and Source of everything. The Father

himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father (Jn 16:27). Jesus openly speaks to us of the Father, without images or ideas, and our soul has the capacity to understand his language, thanks to the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus made us able to see the Face of the Father Who loves us; and this is where the conversation between us and the Father begins; it is where man finds his identity as child of God.

In fact, our journey on the earth aims at taking us to complete creativity, in the sense of participating in the Father's creativity as children. In other words: participating in Christ's Resurrection. God the Father to Whom we give ourselves is not a passive reality. His is Almighty, Intelligent and Creator. He acts in us; He is jealous of us in a positive sense; He thinks of us day and night. With this openness, He changes us and transforms us.

4. What type of attitude is an obstacle to this encounter? - The first is to possess: schemes, ideas and one's own way of seeing things. This makes you become like an infertile seed, with many consequences. It leads you to passive spirituality ("I can't; I don't know"), and to indecision. How can this be reconciled with the Father's creativity? What is behind this attitude? In truth, it is a will to possess your sins and your wounds; you want to keep them.

Another attitude is rebellion. When placed before evil man becomes insecure, and in his will to dominate he lets even more negativity grow within himself, as if to overcome and defeat the initial evil. In doing this, though, he lifts himself up as judge, rather than submit himself to God Who forgives and heals. In the end he destroys himself and those around him. Even the slightest closure will lead to this; it is the activity of the demons to accentuate our closures so as to separate us from the Father and make feelings of aggressiveness, hatred and darkness grow in us.

The encounter with the Father is one of healing and reconciliation. Hence, the only way to get out from the darkness is through Confession. It is difficult because we are "in love" with the darkness; but it is only through experiencing the Father's love that we can be reborn and blossom.

5. Live with the Father - Two steps to enter this relationship with the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit: the first step is to open yourself to the Holy Spirit in an unconditioned way.

This means to remove any privileges, the label of "believer", and our knowledge. And at the same time you have to remove any barriers, negativity and miserable situations we may have before us. It means to open yourself in a virginal sense; be totally free, just as Mary was.

The second step is to give up your will. Let me tell you: do not begin to analyze yourself (your good and bad points) because you will find a thousand excuses. Give up your will. Mary's attitude before the Angel was to discern whether or not that was God's will, and when she understood, She gave herself. A similar attitude places us within the moving forces of the Holy Trinity. Jesus gave up His place to the Holy Spirit. He withdrew and the Spirit glorified and revealed Him. The Holy Trinity is the contrary of egoism. The divine persons promote and glorify one another. This helps us understand how we should behave.

6. Live for the Father: be those who are sent - Many young people remain sceptic because they cannot perceive clear orientation in Christians.

Hence, you are sent. The world does not know the Father; this year go and announce Him. You don't have to convert anyone; however, do not close yourself up in your fears and shyness. You cannot fulfil yourself if this mission does not explode within you. Through your complete, unconditioned donation to the Father you will defeat the darkness. You cannot convince the young people, I know, but you can enlighten them with this light that you have! Accept the mission!

Nicola

Edith Stein and Prayer of the Heart

Her life of prayer was based on two pillars: Holy Mass and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. She wrote: "The substances needed for the development of the human organism are transformed in the organism. Likewise, if men receive the Eucharistic Bread with faith they too are transformed and incorporated into Christ in a vital union and are filled with divine life.

The Word became flesh so as to give the life He possesses, to offer Himself and creation ransomed by Him in a sacrifice of praise to the Creator." With regards to this she said: "We must create in ourselves a Eucharistic space; this is certainly the surest way to be and to remain continually united to God, so that we are transplanted every day ever more firmly and profoundly in Jesus' mystical body.

It is necessary to create in our lives a space for the Eucharistic Saviour, so that He can transform our life in His life. Is it asking too much? We have time to talk about every type of useless thing picked up in books, magazines and papers, to go and sit in the coffee shops, to waste fifteen or thirty minutes chatting in the squares - a complete waste, and little by little both time and strength are lost. Is it not possible to keep one hour in the morning for prayer, without distraction, during which one does not waste, but acquires the strength to face the whole day?" "Truly, for this aim, just one of these hours is not enough; one must live the time in between in a way that it is easy to return to the next one. Then it can't happen that we let ourselves go, not even temporarily. With Our Lord, one becomes ever more sensitive towards His own likes and dislikes."

The presence of Christ-God, nourished by prayer, becomes a fount of new spiritual and human sensitivity. One of her pupils wrote: "She would remain for hours before the Tabernacle, totally absorbed in God. Her way of praying touched souls, more than any great discourse." .. "Her presence alone was an invitation to ascend. It didn't take many words to capture our interest; the radiation of her pure, noble and offered heart was enough."

Former pupils testify: "She didn't speak to us at all about religion, yet we could sense that she lived her faith. To see her pray in the chapel was to see God's mytery in a soul." .. "For the least of favours, she was so grateful; yet she was always willing to receive others at any time of the day no matter how busy she may have been... Very slow at judging others, she had an immense amount of patience and made every effort to get to know us beyond first appearances."

A friend who did a retreat with her during the Holy Week told how on Good Friday Edith spent the entire day in the church, from 4 am to the night without taking food. To those who were surprised at her strict fast she replied: "My 84 year-old mother still observes 24 hour fasts. How can I not do the same thing on the day of my Lord's death?"

Rather than for self-satisfaction, prayer for Edith was the spring where she drew her energy to fulfil her duties; to take the world to God. She said: "To turn into oneself is to gradually come closer to God, it also means to progressively achieve a purer and more realistic attitude." .. "To start, it all depends on having in your every activity a place in which to deal with God, as if nothing else existed - on a daily basis. Then, we must consider ourselves as nothing else but instruments, and the energy that we need for our work as something needed not by us but by God in us."

Also in the Carmel she stood out for her fervent prayer. Long before the community wake-up call she could be found on her knees in front of the open window with her arms outstretched to implore God's mercy for her people. Even with the cold of the winter she prayed in the same way: "to get used to the sacrifice I will encounter in the concentration camp," she explained.

Participate in Christ's redemptive Cross - "Not human activity, but Christ's Passion saves. This is my great desire; to participate in the Cross." With these words Edith explained her entry into Carmel. In a note to the prioress of the Monastery of Echt on the 29th March 1939 she asked to be allowed to offer herself to Jesus' Heart as a victim of expiation for true peace: "that the dominion of the anti-christ may fall, if possible without there being another world war, and a new order may be established. I would like to do it on this very same day, as the twelfth hour is already upon us. I know I am nothing, but Jesus desires it, and in these days He will surely call many others to do the same thing."

She was strongly aware that unity with Crucified Jesus was extremely fertile. "When you are united to the Lord you are omnipresent as He is. Unlike the doctor, nurse, or priest, who can offer their help only here or there, with the strength of the Cross, you can be on all fronts, wherever there is sorrow. The merciful love which comes from the Divine Heart, will lead you wherever He scatters His precious blood which cleanses, heals and redeems."

In Auschwitz eye witnesses say she was an angel of love and goodness. Next to her it was possible to breathe in the supernatural. In the hell of that camp she lived, spoke, and prayed, transformed as she was in Christ. She once said: "The world is made of contrasts, but in the end these will not remain. All that will remain is love. And how could it be any different?"

In Edith the cross was triumphant: "The cross is not an end to itself; it is the triumphant symbol with which Christ knocks on heaven's door, pushing it wide open. Then the divine light floods onto all those who march behind the Crucified One" (Scientia Crucis). "Many of our contemporaries would like to silence the Cross, but nothing is more eloquent than a silenced Cross! Sorrow is truly a lesson of love; sorrow is made fertile by love, love is made deeper by sorrow."

Alessandro

New Rite for Exorcism for neglected ministry

On 26 January an international press conference was held to present the new rite of exorcism. The "Sacrosanctum Concilium" of the second Vatican Council established that liturgical texts be updated. Of these it made particular reference to the sacramentals which include the rite of exorcism.

The new document includes an ample introduction - totally new with respect to the Roman Ritual of 1614 - which summarizes the biblical grounds for exorcism. The Bible, and in particular the New Testament, contains a series of truths which were not necessary to recall in 1614 when the Ritual was published. Today, however, rationalism and unbelief pervade even the ecclesiastical class; hence the excellent preface containing a biblical synthesis of the principles behind the rite of exorcism is more than proper..

What are these principles which the Bible speaks so clearly of? Above all, the existence of angels and demons. Then, in particular, the "power of the devil". To use the words of the II Vatican Council: "all of human history is pervaded by a terrible battle against the power of darkness which will last till the last day" (GS 37).

Besides ordinary action, which is that of tempting man to commit evil, a demon can exercise an extraordinary action, or in other words, an evil and damaging action upon persons, things and places; the manifestations of which vary. The Church has always prayed and continues to pray so that the humble be freed of the devil's traps. This prayer at times takes the form of exorcism which is based on the example of Jesus, Exorcist par excellence (He defeated Satan and gave us the power to defeat him). It is also

based on the special mandate Jesus gave to the Apostles, then to the disciples and finally to all who believe in Him: the power to crush demons. In particular, in the IV century, the Church instituted the sacramental of exorcism with which the Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One or be withdrawn from his dominion.

Look at how many times Our Lady, in her messages of Medjugorje, warned against the devil, and reminded us how strong Satan is and that he wants to destroy her plans. A Christian life, prayer and the sacraments remain the most effective form of defence, but certain cases require exorcism.

It is our hope that the new rite will be the occasion for Christians to be warned of the errors which open the way to the enemy's influence; and at the same time be the occasion for the ecclesiastical authorities to nominate many priests for said ministry. It has been terribly neglected for the last three centuries in the Latin Church, whereas it has been given due attention in the Orthodox Church and in some Protestant confessions.

Fr. Gabriel Amorth

The Feast of Divine Mercy in this year dedicated to the Father will be celebrated with a solemn Mass by the Holy Father in St. Peter's Square on Sunday 11 April (first Sunday after Easter) at 9.30 am.

Sign of blessing from Colombia - Fr. Querubin writes: "We reproduce for each edition of Echo 10,000 copies in Spanish and we give them to 80 distributors. Still, many are left without." Together with Mexico and Ecuador, that counts about 20,000 copies reproduced for Latin America.

* Main language editions of Echo of Mary available in Medjugorje at the Miriam and Shalom shops to right of the church (looking at church) and at the Ain Karim shop, in arcade under International Hotel.

* Travelling to Medj. - By ROAD: bus from Trieste (adjacent to train station) leaves regularly every evening 6pm, arrives in Medj. 8am. Reservations ring Italy 040-425001. By 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. Tichets valid 1 month.

Our deepest thanks to all those friends who continue to help and support us with their help, their words of encouragement and their donations. Mary will compensate you for all that you do, for Echo belongs to Her.

I usually offer my blessing to you all, however, this time I am asking that also all of you send God's blessing to me for my state of health which is completely in God's hands. I ask you also to pray for our new helpers in the editorial and secretarial staff.

Upon you all I invoke the Easter Peace of Our Lord Jesus!

Fr. Angelo

Villanova, 28 Feb. 1999

Thank you for your response to my call.