



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace

162

March-April 2002

Our Lady's message 25 January 2002:

Dear Children, At this time while you are still looking back at the past year I invite you, my Children, to look deeply into your hearts and to decide to be closer to God and to prayer. My Children, you are still attached to earthly things, and little to spiritual life.

May also my call today be a stimulus for you to decide for God and for daily conversion. You cannot convert, my Children, if you do not abandon sins and if you do not decide for love of God and of neighbour. Thank you for responding to my call.

Deep into your heart!

The message opens with a scene, a scene that is both a prologue and a synthesis of its contents. There we are, still looking back at the past year, and there's Mary, calling us to look deeply into our hearts. Her intention isn't to distract us from the events of last year, but to look into them and examine them, there in the depth of our hearts. In the depth of our souls, where it's easier for us to hear God's voice, we can find the light which will enable us to draw on the things which happen in us and around us and be spurred on to live a fuller Christian life, hence to decide to be closer to God and to prayer.

If, within our hearts, we contemplate the Lamb of God who sacrifices Himself so that we might live, how can we justify the terrorist who sacrifices his own life to sow death? And at the same time how can we justify people who respond to violence with war? On a more personal plane, how do we react when we are offended? And how important in our lives is the faith that we profess?

Our Lady's vision is clear: Children: you are still attached to earthly things, and little to spiritual life. We are attached to earthly things; we live for them, we sacrifice the greater part of our lives to them, either totally or nearly forgetting about the Spirit in us. The spiritual life Mary calls us to has nothing to do with escaping from reality, neither is it a refuge meant for particular moments or circumstances in our lives. It is a call and a prompting to decide for God, which is to give to Him that place in our lives which belongs to Him, and to "build our existence on rock" (Mt. 7:24).

Daily conversion means to follow Christ day after day: work with Him, rest with Him, love

with Him, suffer with Him, enjoy with Him, breathe with Him. In Jesus Christ we have been given everything by God; and in Him our response to God's Love finds fulfilment. When "the eyes of our hearts are enlightened" (by His Spirit who lives in us) "we are able to know what is the hope to which he has called us, and what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints" (Eph 1:18).

Conversion is without doubt a free gift by God, but precisely because it is a gift, it is offered to us, not imposed on us; so it is up to us to accept or refuse it. Since conversion means to accept Christ, it is also necessary that we abandon our sins and decide for love of God and neighbour, because Christ cannot live where there is sin, or live in a loveless heart.

Conversion means to respect our baptismal promises and that we apply them to our lives. "Not every one who says to me: 'Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7:21).

Doing God's will is living according to His wishes, and these are found in the person of Jesus, our model. Even if we try our hardest to imitate Him, we would surely err; we would so easily lose the way and replace Him with idols. The only sure way is to let Him live in us, and this is where Mary comes to our aid. She for first let herself be filled with God, and she knows perfectly well how to teach us, guide us and mould us. It is something she has always done, ever since He entrusted us to Her care when He was dying on the cross. Right now she is carrying out her task in an exceptionally explicit way. So, what better thing to do than entrust ourselves to our Blessed Mother, and to accept her messages deep in our hearts; then Love will surely triumph in the world.

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Our Lady's message of 25 Feb. 2002:

"Dear Children, In this time of grace, I invite you to become Jesus' friends. Pray for peace in your hearts and work on your personal conversion. My dear Children, only in this way are you able to become witnesses of Jesus' peace and love in the world. Open yourselves to prayer so that prayer becomes a need for you.

Convert, my Children, and work so that as many souls as possible might come to know Jesus and His love. I am close to you and I bless you all. Thank you for responding to my call."

Jesus' Friends

"Lord, the man you love is ill" (Jn 11:3) Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, sent to tell him. "In this time of grace I invite you to become Jesus' friends," Mary, our Mother, tells us. As His friends, our relationship with Him should be vital, concrete, real. As His friends - as Lazarus was - we should speak to Him, confide in Him, enjoy His closeness, and spend lots of time with Him. Jesus is not an historical character, or a God who once came amongst men; He is alive, His presence in the world is real. "He is with us always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20).

This is a time of grace, a time in which Jesus calls us out of our tombs, as He did with Lazarus. It is time for conversion, to pass from death to life. "Pray for peace in your hearts and work on your conversion," Mary urges. Jesus' personal love for each of us awaits our personal response; i.e. our conversion. No matter how virtuous and pious we might be, our response can never be adequate without the Holy Spirit's help. So that the Holy Spirit is able to help us we need to open our hearts, i.e. surrender our lives to God: something Mary has asked of us many times.

It isn't difficult. All we need do is take those first few steps as suggested by Mary, and it won't take long before we'll be running. Then, our prayer will become a vital necessity, an experience of joy: open yourselves to prayer so that prayer becomes a need for you. Open yourselves to prayer so it becomes a living expression of a vital relationship with God, a two-way encounter, made up of listening, of communication, of communion. This way, prayer acquires power which is capable of moving our hearts to conversion; it accompanies our faith journey; it allows for deep experience of God.

Prayer and conversion are essential for us to witness the peace and love of Jesus in the world. One can only witness what one has experienced. "Our witness would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first contemplated his face," said the Holy Father in *Novo millennio ineunte*. Mary is asking us to be friends of Jesus, to witness to the world "what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have watched and touched with our hands" (1 Jn 1:1). And we shall be Jesus' friends, and after the resurrection we shall be loosened and called to go, as Lazarus was. We shall be freed of the bandages which the world binds us in: grudges, hatred, bad temper, distrust, selfishness, doubts and worries; and, risen, we shall go out into the world. To work for the kingdom is above all to work on ourselves, within ourselves; it is allowing ourselves to be ever more deeply possessed by the Spirit of Love. This is the conversion which makes us able to work so that as many souls as possible might come to know Jesus and His love.

N.Q.

Church and China; on normalizing relations

"China and the Catholic Church are two of the most ancient "institutions" in existence and operating on the world scene. Both encompass more than a thousand million sons and daughters. It is no secret that the Holy See hopes for the opening of some form of dialogue with the Authorities of the People's Republic of China." With these words, John Paul II appealed for dialogue between China and the West, on 24th October last, a day of celebration for the fourth centenary of the arrival in Beijing of Fr. Matteo Ricci, a celebrated son of the Jesuits, and a great Italian missionary, humanist and man of science, highly esteemed by both China and the West.

China is officially an atheist country, but has followers of Buddhism and Taoism, and 12 million Catholics (1% of the population) divided between the Official (Patriotic Church) which the Government acknowledges, and the underground Church which has paid for its fidelity to Rome with the persecution, imprisonment, exile and blood of its many martyrs. Besides the political questions (still open after more than half a century) and the understandable difficulties concerned with reconciliation of two communities which have

refused one another for decades, there are no deep doctrinal obstacles which might impede the unification of the Chinese Church.

The government of Beijing asks the Holy See to break its diplomatic relations with Taiwan (the democratic Republic Of China: an island once governed by China, but a sovereign state since its founding in 1912, but which China wants to control), and not to interfere in China's internal affairs. This means to limit the Vatican's possibility of nominating Chinese Bishops from among people not wanted by the Beijing Government; and for the Vatican not to intervene on China's social questions, such as the forced sterilization of women practised by the Chinese Government as a birth control method, and against which the Church has often spoken out.

A normalization of relations between China and the Church, could bring an end to the harsh persecution of Chinese Catholics, and favour the evangelization of a vast nation (nearly one fifth of the world's population). Many international observers see China as one of the greatest powers of the future exercising an ever-growing influence on Asia's political, economical and cultural world. Hence the importance of the Chinese Church's role in the Asian Continent where Christianity has so far been scarcely accepted, despite the generally strong sense of religion amongst Asians.

In his commemoration speech, the Pope asked forgiveness: "I feel deep sadness for the past errors, and for the limits of the past," referring in particular to those missionaries whose action was conditioned by difficult situations connected with complex historical events and conflicting political interests, and in certain periods of modern history marked by a kind of "protection" by European political powers. The missionary action in China was greatly weakened also because of contrasts, arguments, and rivalry within the various religious orders, and theological disputes, which impeded Christianity from becoming an accepted religion in China as far back as the XVII century.

The Pope praised Fr. Ricci's authentic missionary action: "the Christian revelation of the mystery of God in no way destroyed but, in fact, enriched and complemented everything beautiful and good, just and holy, in what had been produced and handed down by the ancient Chinese tradition ... just as the Fathers of the Church had done centuries before in the encounter with the Greco-Roman culture."

The Pontiff concluded: "The present moment of profound disquiet in the international community calls for fervent commitment on the part of everyone to creating and developing ties of understanding, friendship and solidarity."

And may this be inspiration for us all not to repeat the errors of the past as the West is newly evangelized!

Mirco Trabuio

Still too many Catholics in Chinese prisons

Government continues to arrest underground bishops and clergy! A secret Communist Party document stated that "in view of possible relations with the Vatican, control on Catholic communities must be increased and the CCPA (Chinese Catholic Patriotic Assoc.) must be empowered." Recent events regarding the underground Church in China reflect these instructions to the letter. In seven parts, the document was drawn up between 1999 and 2001. Shortly after this, a law was passed for the control of 'heretic religions.'

"Arrests and re-education treatment of Catholics are considered measures to prevent 'social disorder.' But in no way can under-ground Catholics be said to engage in anti-social or violent activity. On the contrary, all over China theirs is service of charity in orphanages, schools, medical dispensaries," informs Fides Agency. At the beginning of Lent, Fides gave a list of 33 bishops and priests (many of whom are aged) who have either disappeared or been confined to strict house arrest. Imprisonment and re-education labour is meant to convince them to pass over from communion with Rome to obedience to the Beijing regime. In A document it says: "The Vatican attempts at every occasion to interfere with the internal affairs of the Catholic churches in our country, to attract the patriotic believers and incite them to rebellion."

The international community, it seems, prefers to turn a deaf ear to China's disdain for human and religious rights, eager as it is to gain a hold of the country's vast market. We "free Catholics" are left with the duty of praying for the persecuted, and for religious freedom in China.

S.C.

Train of Religions THE VOYAGE

The white train with six carriages set forth from the Vatican train station early in the morning on an unusual pilgrimage on 24th January. The uncommon aspect to it was not so much the event, but the train's pilgrims. The carriages were all first-class, of the type with no compartments, so the guests were free to move about, meet and greet each other, and converse. The train, baptized the "train of religions," took the more than 200 representatives of world religions to Assisi; who had responded to the Pope's appeal: "We have come to Assisi on a pilgrimage of peace. We are here, as representatives of different religions, to examine ourselves before God concerning our commitment to peace, to ask him for this gift, to bear witness to our shared longing for a world of greater justice and solidarity."

This was not the first time that world representatives had met in Assisi to pray together. John Paul II first invited them to the home of the "poor man of Assisi" in October 1986: "the prophet of peace known as Francis is loved not only by Christians, but by many other believers and by people who, though far-removed from religion, identify with his ideals of justice, reconciliation and peace," explained the Pope in his speech.

The two-hour train ride through the countryside of Lazio and the mountainous region of Umbria recalled Pope John XXIII's visit by train from the Vatican to Assisi and Loreto on 4 October 1962. The "good Pope" understood the need to be close to the people by living their same experiences in all simplicity. Also John Paul II desired this "special" train ride be "as normal as possible," so that the world might see mankind as a sole family, despite the variety of its members. Said the Holy Father: "With daily renewed wonder we note the variety of manifestations of human life, from the complementarity of male and female, to a multiplicity of distinctive gifts belonging to the different cultures and traditions that form a multifaceted and versatile linguistic, cultural and artistic cosmos. This multiplicity is called to form a cohesive whole, in the contact and dialogue that will enrich and bring joy to all."

ECUMENICAL SPIRIT

An invisible thread pulled together different races, cultures, and faiths. "We praise God for the beauty of the cosmos and of the earth, the marvellous 'garden' that he entrusted to men and women in order that they might cultivate it and tend it (cf. Jn 2:15). It is good that people remember that they find themselves in a 'flowerbed' of the immense universe, created for them by God," said the Polish Pope, who appeared particularly well and in good health. Each representative came to express his faith in God, who is PEACE; in God "who is everything, and in the end everyone will have to give an accounting of themselves to him," of what they did with their own lives, and if they respected others' lives.

There were 12 religions, over 50 delegations, 200 representatives united under a huge tent in front of St. Francis' Basilica. In the morning a group of representatives presented their testimonies to peace, to do their part in "fending off the dark clouds of terrorism, hatred, armed conflict." There was no risk of confusion or of syncretism: "We wish to listen to one another: this itself is a sign of peace, and serves to scatter the shadows of suspicion and mis-understanding."

PRAYER

The Prayer for Peace which came next was perhaps the most important moment of this Day of Prayer. The various delegations went to "the arranged places in order to beg from God the gift of peace for all humanity," each in their own way. The Christians joined the Holy Father in the Lower Basilica. Others were given space within the Sacred Convent; the room for Muslims faced the Mecca, and in all the rooms allocated for non-Christian groups, symbols of Christianity had been removed, "out of respect for one another's religious traditions." "We wish to show the world that the genuine impulse to prayer does not lead to opposition and still less to disdain of others, but rather to constructive dialogue," the Pope pointed out. This is the meaning of prayer addressed to the same God even though it be in different forms. And as though to seal this solemn hour of shared intentions the Franciscans then offered them a meal in Franciscan style of simplicity, garnished with warmth and fraternity.

COMMITMENT TO PEACE

In the afternoon twelve leaders read the Commitment to Peace, which was the great new item of the day. On behalf of all the representatives, these committed themselves to promoting and safe-keeping human life and peace. The Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I, announced: "We affirm that building peace requires loving one's neighbour in obedience to the Golden Rule: Do to others what you would have them do to you." Therefore, we commit ourselves "to educating people to mutual respect and esteem," added the Sikh representative. And to: "forgiving one another for past and present errors and prejudices," said the Orthodox Bishop, Vasilios. The Confucian representative declared: "We commit ourselves to taking the side of the poor and the helpless, to speaking out for those who have no voice... out of the conviction that no one can be happy alone."

The conclusive words rang out loud: "We, as persons of different religious traditions, will tirelessly proclaim that peace and justice are inseparable. Security, freedom and peace will never be guaranteed by force but by mutual trust."

LIGHT SCATTERS DARKNESS

Significant was the gesture of giving the Holy Father and the Representatives a lighted lamp

to be placed on a pedestal in the centre of the platform. When placed together the many little flames gave off much more light and warmth. They represented the flames of faith and hope in God, who is "pure light"; and the flames of love which gush from hearts able to love without conditions or interests, in virtue of God who is Love. "The shadows will not be dissipated with weapons; darkness is dispelled by sending out bright beams of light. Hatred can only be overcome by love," said John Paul II who confirmed and concluded the shared commitment to peace in these words: "Violence never again! War never again! Terrorism never again! In the name of God, may every religion bring upon the earth Justice and Peace, Forgiveness and Life, Love!"

EMBRACE OF PEACE

The lamps were not the only things lit up; for faces, too, had taken on a new light which shone from the eyes and smiles of all, and reflected sentiments of deep gratitude and joy as they embraced one another in a sign of peace as the Day came to a close. It was time to leave; the train was already waiting to take them back to Rome. After one more day together in Peter's City, each of them returned home to light up in their people the lamp of forgiveness and justice. "Go forward into the future holding high the lamp of peace. The world has need of its light!"

Stefania Consoli

Church celebrates new Saints

Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, the Capuchin friar with the stigmata; Josémaría Escrivà de Balaguer, founder of Opus Dei; and Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, the American Indian who had visions of the Virgin of Guadalupe (in December of 1531), will soon be declared saints. (Padre Pio will be canonized on 16 June.)

When the Pope signed the decrees, next to the cardinals, bishops, postulators of the causes, and representatives of the related religious congregations, there was also the young boy who had been miraculously healed by Padre Pio: Matteo Pio Colella, and his parents. The miracle attributed to the Capuchin (born in Pietrelcina 25 May 1887; died 23 Sept. 1968 in San Giovanni Rotondo, southern Italy) came in the same year of Padre Pio's beatification.

The Media and divination

Means of communication such as the television, news papers, magazines and radio (the mass media) were designed to be at the service of information, of culture, of entertainment; however, ever more frequently, they have become channels for messages which are both dangerous and deviating for the souls, minds and consciences of those who, aware of it or not, are their targets.

Padre Gabriel Amorth describes the causes and effects of this phenomenon to help us discern.

In Italy, 12 million people resort to clairvoyants, fortune tellers, and other such instruments of the devil. Most recently, the arrest of Wanna Marchi made headlines in Italy when it was revealed that she had extorted millions from viewers (on a private TV for such people who

sell charms, potions, consult the cards and spirits, etc., editor's note). And where do most people first turn to in a paper or magazine, if not the horoscopes? And too many spend too much time and money on trying their luck at lotto, the pools, quiz shows and the like, to the point, for some, of not working while they wait for the lucky strike.

Why do so many make use of this million-dollar "business"? If a lot are attracted by the idea of earning easy money, many others want to know about their future, or wish to influence other's lives. And for this, many have recourse to the occult, led by the desire to speak to the deceased, or out of curiosity or superstition. The mass media give plenty of space to this type of research, and it cannot be denied that behind it is superstition, and that many are obsessive about it.

If we look deeper into the matter of divination and occultism in particular, we find that the true cause is lack of faith. Man has turned away from God and the means which bring him closer to God (prayer, sacraments, priests), and turned instead to the esoteric world. Yet the Bible warns against sorcerers and augurs at least 30 times. In Deuteronomy we read: "When you come into the land God gives you, you must not fall into the habit of imitating the detestable practices of the natives. There must never be anyone among you who makes his son or daughter pass through fire, who practises divination, who is soothsayer, augur or sorcerer, who uses charms, consults ghosts or spirits, or calls up the dead. For the man who does these things is detestable to God" (Dt 18:9-12).

Too many think they can get away with statements such as: "I believe in God, but I don't go to church." But the Gospel says: "It is not those who say to me: 'Lord, Lord', who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 7:21). The media, which could influence and educate people to positive values, have chosen to be channels for these negative actions, to the detriment of man.

Fr Gabriel Amorth

A Saint for Peace

"Everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Mt 19:29).

Our Lord and Teacher asks us to forgo all our possessions to inherit the Kingdom. The instructions are clear enough, but putting them into practice isn't that easy. St. Nicholas of Flüe (affectionately known as Brother Klaus in his homeland, Switzerland) was one who fully embraced this radical call, and applied it to the letter.

Brother Klaus was born on the Flüeli (a plateau near Sachseln) in central Switzerland, on 21 March 1417. The eldest son of pious parents, from his earliest youth it became evident that Klaus was fond of prayer and the practice of mortification, while never neglecting the labours of a peasant boy. As he grew he proved to be a capable farmer, military leader, councillor, and judge. Highly esteemed by his fellow countrymen, he refused the office of governor several times.

"Whoever leaves his children and land..." In the meantime, at the age of 30 he married Dorothea, and they had ten children: five boys, five girls. Though he married to obey the

will of his parents, he lovingly cared for his wife and children while all the time leading a life of contemplation, prayer and fasting, and was the object of both heavenly visions and diabolic assault.

God wanted more from the good Klaus. One day as he was working in the field he received a vision and a compelling call to abandon everything and live as a hermit. He had been married twenty years, and his last child had but recently been born. Unexpected, no doubt, but the call also confirmed a sort of apprehension which abode in the heart of a man who was loved and esteemed by his people; it was a call which induced him to abandon his mundane activities to dedicate himself totally to God.

How could the Lord ask so much, of a family man with public responsibility, and of his family and community? Yet so it was. God sees way beyond our limited vision, and His plan for Klaus was great indeed, and reflected His love for Klaus' beloved country, Switzerland. Klaus, feeling disturbed and oppressed by evil forces, withdrew into pray and fasted to seek the answers to his doubts.

God responded promptly: "He who leaves children, land, to follow me..." He was certain, this is what the Lord was asking him. It wasn't easy for him, but his wife - profoundly Christian - understood that he was "choosing the better part" and consented. In October 1467, with his family's consent and the approval of the holy mother Church, Klaus left, barefooted and clothed in a long robe of coarse cloth, for Alsace where he intended to join a community of hermits. But God wanted him in Switzerland, and at the border a frightful vision terrified him and he heard a voice telling him to stop there. "Everything turned red; it was a moment of panic, and he turned back."

The incident, and the words of a farmer who advised him not to go where the Swiss were detested, helped Klaus discern God's will for him to remain. But he felt humiliated, for he had already left everyone and everything. What should he do now?! He withdrew into prayer, seeking an answer from God; and it was then that he was penetrated by a brilliant light. It struck him in the abdomen, and from that moment he stopped eating and drinking, and for the remaining years of his life his only food was the Eucharist. (Both Church and civil authorities verified the fact and were convinced that his fast was genuine.) In the meantime, he had settled in Ranft, within a few miles of his home, to live his hermitage in silent communion with God.

He had a vision: "The Paraclete was coming towards him. It was the Holy Spirit telling Nicholas to follow Him to the Father; and God the Father appeared to him and thanked him for what he had done for His Son. Nicholas humbled himself". Mystical experiences accompanied his life of contemplation, intense meditation (very often on Christ's Passion) and prayer (the Rosary was very important to him).

"My Lord and my God, remove from me all that might prevent me from coming to You... and give to me all that might draw me to You." This was the prayer which filled his soul and his cell, giving him peace and inner harmony. The grace he received from God was not for him alone, though. Renowned for his holiness and wisdom, pilgrims sought him out: distinguished person from all over Europe came for counsel, men and women from every walk, sick and healthy, came for spiritual guidance, consolation and intercession.

"Peace is found in God because God is peace," Klaus would say. They sound like words which our John Paul himself would say. In fact, in his message for World Peace Day on 1 Jan. 2002, the Pope said: "There cannot be peace without justice, or justice without

forgiveness." "Advice, then, which clearly doesn't age; it comes from that same Spirit which guided Nicholas of Flüe when he was called to act as mediator in a dispute over the extent of the Swiss Federation, thus preventing the eruption of civil war. "Be friendly, for one good thing brings more good things. But if the good thing cannot be reconciled in friendship, then let justice have the better of it."

And as if to echo this wisdom, in 1984 when JP II celebrated Mass in an antique village of Switzerland, he said: "Nicholas of Flüe invites us to make peace, in our own town and in the world, but especially in our own hearts. Peace must be acquired, and endured; we must implore God for it." The Holy Father was already promoting dialogue as the only way which leads to reconciliation: "Goodness and benevolence are the prime and fundamental conditions for the creation of peace in the life of a community and of an individual. We have to accept each other and all our differences, to the point of renouncing many rights even if these are justified."

Brother Klaus died on 21 March 1487 after a brief but intensely painful illness had struck his frail and aging body. He was canonized by Pius XII in 1947. Considered the father of the nation, he never has stopped working for peace in Switzerland which was saved from Nazi invasion. "It was about 9 pm and I saw in the sky - north east of Waldenburg - an intense light which quickly took on the shape of a hand..." tells one man. According to 43 witnesses, it was the hand of Nicholas who once again was protecting his homeland.

Consecration of France and Switzerland to Mary

In various parts of the world the Holy Spirit is inspiring people to pray in a special way for their homelands. People are feeling the need to ask forgiveness of the Lord for all the unfaithfulness committed, and to pray for the realization of God's plan, that each person might respond fully to his or her own calling in life.

Switzerland, founded on 1st August 1291 with a pact between the various cantons and the Lord, has a special place in the heart of Europe. It is a sign of unity and peace for the other countries which have stipulated a similar alliance with God.

After having heard the testimony of a Lebanese woman who spoke about the Novena for the consecration of Lebanon to God through the Immaculate Heart, and of the fruits which followed, a prayer group in Switzerland desired doing the same for their homeland.

Immediately following the proposal a prayer chain was organized. Members committed themselves to praying each day for the duration of nine days for one hour before the Blessed Sacrament (the novena ended on 8 December 2001, the feast of the Immaculate Conception).

The response to the call was overwhelming. People from all over the country wanted to participate, including priests who had involved their parishioners, convents and lay people. Truly, the Spirit blows where he wills!

The initiative has taken up also in France where the novena will be prayed from 21 to 29 March.

Request for Rosary beads, Catholic newspapers, for Ukraine and Lithuania: mail to Tom

Wall, Ballinookera, Whitegate, Midleton, Co. Cork, Ireland

And Rosary beads for: Sr. Margaret M. Kibvemla, St. Mary's Convent Soppo, P.O. Box 64
Buea, SW Province, Cameroon, Africa.

Praying with the "Pilgrim Virgins"

The movement of prayer and peace which has developed around the "Pilgrim Virgins" for the unity of Christians and the conversion of the world, has intensified since the 11 September attack. In those days when Marian intercession was more than ever necessary, organizers were receiving calls from 3 or 4 bishops a day to ask for more statues.

The visitations by these pilgrim statues or icons have been very fruitful, with numerous conversions, of people returning to God and to confession, of adoration and vocations. New "Pilgrim Virgins" will be supplied to anyone who ensures that pilgrimages will be organized for the statues or icons, in the parishes and homes of a community or communities, and that for every visit, the organization will include prayer vigils and evangelization.

We would like to receive news, articles, and photos, as important testimonies for the thousands of people who generously offer the money needed to buy the statues and icons, and for their dispatch. Together, we are helping Mary to continue her "visitation to Elizabeth" around the world.

Edmond Fricoteaux

For information and donations, contact: Notre-Dame de France, 48 avenue de Paris,
F-91410 Dourdan, France. Fax France 164 596522. e-mail: olbns@easynet.fr

A Museum for Mary of Nazareth

"All generations will call me blessed" prophesied the Virgin Mary, and truly, in everyone's languages and by all generations, She is called blessed. She has been prayed to, loved, celebrated, sung, and honoured by all peoples on all continents, much more so than any other creature, because She was chosen by God to bring us His Beloved Son. Yet, there is no where on earth where all this can be witnessed; where peoples might admire the grandeur, beauty and depth of the mystery known as the Mother of God.

But now there is a project to build an international Marian Centre in Nazareth, in front of the Basilica of the Annunciation, with the participation of all the Christian Churches in the Holy Land. This will allow the 500,000 tourists and pilgrims which visit Nazareth every year, and the city's inhabitants, and all those who will visit the website, to enter into the mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus in Mary, with the help of historical, cultural, archeological, artistic and ecclesial data.

The idea is gathering much enthusiasm in the Holy Land, in Rome, and all over the world. The Marianum and the International Marian Academy will promote the project, while 4 cardinals, 3 patriarchs and 10 bishops from seven different churches have so far offered their support.

In the meantime organizers would like to form links with all the shrines and movements of Mary's children. For further information contact: Friends of Mary of Nazareth Museum, 59 ave de la Bourdonnais, F-75007 Paris, France. Fax 0142 506835, e-mail olbns@easynet.fr

"Return to primitive fervour"

"I am with you..."

In numerous messages Our Lady has taken particular care to let us know that this is a time of grace, and that she is with us: "Dear Children, ... I am with you to lead you on a new path, towards a new life" (25 Oct. 1992). This really is the most important of Mary's messages at Medjugorje which she gives for the world. Today, in a special way, Our Lady walks beside her children: "My Heart carefully follows your progress" (25 Dec. 1986). The presence of the Queen of Peace in the world is, in fact, a great gift of grace which gushes forth from the Father's merciful love which desires to: "make all things new" (Rev: 21:5), through Mary, who: "shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, as a sign of sure hope and solace to the people of God during its sojourn on earth" (Lumen Gentium, 68). Mary assures us: "Out of the goodness and love of God the Creator, I too am with you as a gift" (25 Oct. 1995), and: "Out of love for man, God has sent me amongst you, to show you the way to salvation, the way to love" (25 April 1995).

The Magisterium inspired by our present Pontiff seems to echo these words loaded with prophetic grace: "During this time of vigil, Mary, through the same faith which made her blessed... is present in the Church's mission, present in the Church's work of introducing into the world the Kingdom of her Son. This presence of Mary finds many different expressions in our day..." (Redemptoris Mater, 28).

Precisely in our day, with the powers of darkness becoming ever more aggressive, there is also an extraordinary power of grace being poured out into the world. This extraordinary grace finds its source in the burning love of the Holy Trinity, and is sent to the world through Mary who is the perfect Ark and Sanctuary. As a part of the eternal plan of God, this gift of grace by the Emmanuel, by the God-with-us, by the Creator of the universe who lowered Himself to lead man back to the fullness of life, passes through the humble service of Mary who is called to generate continuously the supernatural life of the Word of God within the souls of Her (and His) children. From the Magisterium of the Church we read: "In this singular way she cooperated... in the work of the Saviour in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace" (Lumen Gentium, 61).

Mary's extraordinary presence in the world, in a time when it seems great signs come to announce an imminent fulfilment of the work of salvation, prefigured in the Book of Revelation ("And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" - Rev. 21:2) is inscribed in the heart of that great cosmic battle between the "Woman adorned with the sun" (Rev. 12) and the terrible dragon: "father of lies and a murderer from the beginning" (Jn 8:44) which "now more than ever... wants to show the world his shameful face, and through it sweep as many people as possible onto the way of death and sin" (25 Sept. 1991).

In this scene of the decisive confrontation between the children of the light and the powers of darkness which are so evident in our day, Mary is with us in a special way to protect us and lead us to the complete and final victory of Her Immaculate Heart announced at Fatima: "I am with you and I intercede for you before God, that He might protect you" (Medj., 25 Feb. 1992); "... that with your help everything I intended to realize with the secrets that

began in Fatima might, in fact, be realized. I ask you to understand the importance of my coming and the seriousness of the situation. I want to save all souls and offer them to God" (25 Aug. 1991).

Our Lady also asks us to recognize and to thwart Satan's subtle strategy, which is to confound hearts through obscuring their capacity to discern, and inducing them not to consider the immense gift of Her special presence amongst men as being fundamental for today's world and the Church, but to rather categorize it as "just another" of the many private devotions. "Pray, that you might be able to comprehend what God desires telling you through my presence and the messages I give you" (25 Nov. 1991); "Thank God for granting that I should be with you, for I tell you that this is a great grace" (25 July 1992); "I am with you, even in these troubled days when Satan is trying to destroy everything that my Son and I are constructing... Hence, my Children, pray to be able to comprehend everything that God grants you through my coming" (25 Sept. 1992).

This extraordinary grace of salvation which the Father offers to the world - that men's hearts and the whole of creation might be regenerated through renewed acceptance of the river of new life which gushes forth from Christ's paschal mystery, today relies on the unconditioned response to Mary's special call by her children, whom God chose right from the beginning to be "the Lamb's companions" (Rev. 14), among those "one hundred and forty-four thousand who have his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads" (ibid.), who "sing a new song before God's throne" (ibid.). It is the liberating and joyful song of the souls who have offered themselves wholly to God through Mary's Immaculate Heart.

Those who decide to unconditionally place themselves at the service of this great plan of grace and of salvation which God is offering to the world, are given to hear from Him, through Mary, the same words He spoke to Moses on Mount Horeb: "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt; and have heard their cry... bring forth my people out of Egypt... I will be with you" (Ex 3:7-12).

The Queen of Peace promises the gift of her very special presence next to those who, with sincerity, open themselves completely to the unconditioned offering of their life for the sake of their brethren. She offers their "yes" up to "Jesus, that they might be filled with His grace" (25 May 1992) and become the keys that unlock the Father's Merciful Heart and unleash the rivers of living water over the arid world which so desires peace and true love. "Dear Children, I invite you to open yourselves up to me and become instruments in my hands for the world's salvation" (25 March 1994); "...that a river of love might flow amongst the people who are full of hatred and lacking in peace. I invite you, my Children, to become peace where there is none, and light where there is darkness, that every heart might accept the light and the way of salvation" (25 Feb. 1995).

This way, Mary's presence amongst us can be seen in its entirety as both announcement and seal of that new "time of peace, which Her Heart impatiently awaits" (25 June 1995): a time of fulfilment for God's work of salvation in the world, when the Trinitarian Communion will be fully present in the hearts and souls of His children, so that He truly will be "God-with-us." And the glorious horizon of light which concludes the vision in Revelation will finally unfold before all Creation: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... Behold the dwelling of God; He lives among men! He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and He will be their God; His name is God-with-them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, nor mourning, nor sadness. The world of the past has gone" (Rev.

21).

Giuseppe Ferraro

News from the blessed land

From pilgrim to parish priest of Medjugorje

A parish priest is burdened with a great deal of responsibility, and when his parish is Medjugorje, that responsibility is even greater, for one of his duties includes the delicate task of receiving the millions of pilgrims which arrive at the Shrine from all over the world. Even a veteran priest might shiver at the thought of taking on such a task, but despite fra Branko Rados' youthful age, (born in 1967) he manages to face it all in the "spirit of gladness" and typical Franciscan simplicity.

In an interview for "Glas Mira Medju-gorje," the young parish priest tells how God led him to Medjugorje, and how He continues to accompany him today in his service at the shrine of the Queen of Peace.

"I was 14 at the time; we were out in the field, bringing in the hay, and the news reached us that Our Lady was appearing in Medjugorje. I had no idea where this place was, so when I got home I looked for it on a map. We were used to praying every evening, but in those days our prayer was particularly intense.

In the autumn of 1981 we decided to go on pilgrimage to the place where She was appearing. We walked; it took us 20 hours, but when we arrived, we saw streams of people coming away from the place of apparition praying and singing. This was already a great sign.

This encounter with Medjugorje was decisive in my choice of the priesthood and consecrated life. "Follow me" I heard Him say, and this was already a great blessing; and that's how I see my work in God's great field called Medjugorje; there's a lot of work, but it's a great blessing. I don't see us as being under a special light, and I'm sure God's choice of people didn't fall on the wiser or more capable. He sent us on mission the way we are, telling us the same thing He told His Apostles: 'Go, and don't worry about what you will say, for at the appropriate time you will be told.' Christ and Mary are our guides; they support us, correct us and encourage us, and pick us up after we've fallen.

Medjugorje is offered, but it is also a challenge. I feel that God gives us much, but He also expects much. Just the way it is for all those who come on pilgrimage, we too have to learn to pray, to serve, to accept the pilgrims, and try to understand them. At this wellspring of faith and prayer, we are given the chance to grow spiritually and to make others richer. Each Mass, each confession, every moment spent in adoration, every rosary prayed both renews us and gives us the opportunity to come close to Christ and to lead souls to Him, because He is what people need. The man of today thirsts for peace, happiness, love, truth; and only Jesus is all this. "He is our Way, Truth and Life."

Here we come into daily contact with people of all different races and provenance, culture

and traditions. We are so different, yet in God's eyes we are all the same. We all praise God in our mother tongues, but together it is a marvellous harmony. We are given the opportunity to listen to other people's sufferings, and many other life stories. As priests, we are needed by the people twenty-four hours a day. That's why it isn't always easy to be patient, polite, friendly. At times - and probably without realizing it - we are cause for scandal; but this goes to show that we are human beings; sinners, and as such we are weak, and the answer that they seek is not in us. Christ is the physician of our souls and our bodies, while we priests are only those who take people to Him.

There is nothing particularly attractive in Medjugorje for people to visit, and they know this. People here don't look so much with their eyes as they do with their hearts. And when a person sees with his heart, and when his heart begins to love, when it has quenched its thirst at this fount, he will always come back.

People have discovered that God here is "closer" than normal; they have felt the strength of the Father's embrace because, as prodigal children, they are returning to Him. God loves them immensely; that's why they come back often. One of the nicest feelings for man is when he becomes aware that his human dignity has been restored to him. God has clearly told many here that they are His children, that He has engraved them in His heart, and that no one can ever remove them from His heart. I think it is precisely this that people seek here, and find here.

In Medjugorje people have understood Jesus' words: "Here is your Mother." That is why all over the world a multitude of people have responded so openly to the call which God has sent to us through Our Lady. Through Mary, God has opened many hardened hearts, He has changed people's future, He has brought happiness into a great number of sad people, and restored peace in those who were without.

We aren't even fully aware of how much Medjugorje has changed the world; how many wars have been averted in families. Millions of people are thankful to Her for this. That is why prayer groups are born everywhere in the world, and why the evening prayer programme of Medjugorje is repeated in many parishes around the world.

Medjugorje is our hope for the future; but above all, it is offered to the world. Our Lady, good and constant in her motherly teachings, calls us to peace. Today there is much talk about peace. Why? Today, everything can be bought, and many think that peace can be bought too. They forget that peace is the product of our heart, that peace is found in God - in Jesus Christ, the King of Peace. They forget that God can do everything in their lives, except one thing: He cannot force us to pray because He respects our freedom.

To get into a room, one has to open the door. For God to come into our hearts, we need to open the door for Him; and that's what praying does."

Medjugorje; the first time

"There we were, waiting for the bus to take us to Medjugorje - the first time for me. We boarded in Rome and made our way to Ancona where we caught a ferry for Split. During the voyage, my thoughts turned to the anticipation of what I'd experience in Medjugorje.

"Will I hear a message; have a vision, experience anything supernatural? Will I have to hide my face from view, as Moses did when he came down from the mountain?" Certainly, these thoughts weren't mine alone, as we all hope for some special privilege or blessing, but probably keep it to ourselves.

Ancona meant customs formalities, boarding and bunking down, and a night ride across the Adriatic. More customs at Split, then a bus ride to Medjugorje. Here we were at last. Medjugorje meant Mass in the morning, Rosary before Mass, and getting to the church early if you didn't want to stand. Then there's Apparition Hill and Cross Mountain: sites of visions, messages and expectation for all. I saw manifestations of piety, charity, forbearance, stamina, endurance and human concern; which often come close to the supernatural, though I didn't witness any special signs from God for myself.

The pilgrimage included visits to the visionaries, and for most of us this meant looking at the back of someone else's head, and catching only a glimpse of them. But don't let me give you the impression that my experience was not a good one. To the contrary, every situation was filled with grace, in complete accord with the Medjugorje message of love, peace and prayer.

I saw human love demonstrated by people carrying disabled persons up the mountains - the climb is steep and the way is lain with jagged rocks; and there were "guardian angels" helping older pilgrims whose footing and balance were uncertain. And I saw God's love in the lines of people waiting - in the wind and cold - to go to confession.

I also experienced peace! Peace within ourselves, and peace in the world. The kind of peace radiated by people as they patiently waited in the soft rain for a message from the visionary. Medjugorje is a place of hope and grace - hope that the peace needed by the world can spring forth from the hearts of pilgrims who have nurtured the seeds of grace received here. The Blessed Mother is not God, and in all our recourse to Her, she is not worshipped but rather is appealed to as an intercessor. Oh, if only everyone could understand this! At Medjugorje she is present through visions and locutions to a few privileged ones, but this occurs because it is God's will. She entreats us to pray for peace; that God's chastisements might be mitigated. But Mary speaks on God's behalf; her messages are God's messages; her love for us reflects God's love for us!

As I gazed at God's creation from atop Krizevac, I received an inspiration. Our planet amounts to less than a grain of sand on the beach of God's infinite universe. Remove that grain of sand, and what difference does it make? The only value it has is that which you ascribe to it. And so it is with us; we are worth something because God loves us and sustains us.

Just as God is present everywhere, but is specially present in His tabernacles and churches, also the message of "love-peace-prayer" cries out to receptive souls from all over the world, but especially from Medjugorje by Our Lady, Queen of Peace.

Br. Frank Hareslock

Rest in peace, fra Leonard!

Life on this earth ended suddenly for another Franciscan father who was an important element in the history of Medjugorje. Fra Leonard Orec served in Medjugorje from 1988 to 1991, including one year as pastor.

Last summer it was discovered that cancer had already devastated most of his body, but that didn't suppress his positive, battler's spirit; the same spirit with which he started the humanitarian association in Split for the organization of aid distribution during the war. Fra Leonard wrote shortly before his death: "When I left Rome for the hospital in Zagreb I prayed to God not to heal me, or not to do it in a miraculous way, but to help me accept His

will, and if it were possible, for me not to feel physical pain. And He answered my prayers, because I have no pain whatsoever!"

Padre Leonard was buried at Posusje (near Medjugorje) last 23 January.

Vicka, radiant bride

Happy, serene, and radiant! With her usual captivating smile, with which she has greeted pilgrims for more than 20 years as she tirelessly witnesses to her encounters with the Blessed Virgin, Vicka greeted her spouse. A gift from the Gospa, almost a surprise gift, one could say, he will now be Vicka's life companion and will support her in her mission at the service of Mary.

Vicka and Marijo Mijatovic married on Saturday 26 January in St. James' Church, Medjugorje. The ceremony began with Mass at 2 pm. The main celebrant was Fr. Branko Rados, and concelebrating were also two former pastors, Fr. Jozo Zovko, Fr. Ivan Landeka, and twenty visiting priests. The church was not big enough to contain all the parishioners, friends, relatives and pilgrims who desired expressing their joy for the couple. Seers Jakov, Ivanka and Mirjana, with their families, were present.

In his homily, the parish priest encouraged them to continue to be "salt of the earth and light of the world." Both Vicka and Marijo (he collaborated for many years with Padre Slavko at the "Mothers' Village" for war orphans) have so far brought light and salt to many people. Now they will do it together, with the cross in their hands, and together with Jesus who will strengthen their love. For this, after the Eucharist, they stood before the statue of Our Lady to the right of the altar and entrusted their marriage to her in prayer. Youth from Sr. Elvira's community sang and played at the ceremony, and Sr. Elvira was also able to attend towards the end.

The modesty and serenity of Vicka and Marijo were the cause of great joy which could be read on the faces of all those present. Not at all distracted by the flashing cameras and movement within the church, they remained prayerful and concentrated all throughout the solemn Mass.

The couple will live in a small town not far from Medjugorje, but Vicka will continue to receive pilgrims at the bottom of the steps in her old home at Bijakovic.

A weak faith weakens our character

In a world weighed down by a hedonistic, egoistic mentality based on appearance and commerce, where even nature is trampled on, it's understandable that people should feel lost, as though all their reference points had failed them, including their faith. Padre TOMISLAV VLASIC helps us face these problems with a Christian outlook.

This time of uncertainty brings forth all our fragility and weakness. It is often said that those who are more powerful than us will win, and we feel as though we are caught up in a net. The other thing we can do is pray. We can pray also by crying out, by shouting. God, where are you? Why don't you help us? Why don't you hear us?

When the apostles were in difficulty they said to Jesus: "Lord, increase our faith!" But the Lord said: "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree: Be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would obey you" (Lk 17:6). How does this reply by the Lord sound in our heart? I think that everyone would like to have such powerful faith,

and be able to move their own personal mountains, which are their own problems.

This helps us understand the profound meaning of Jesus' reply. An egoistic man would like this faith straight away; a faith with magical powers, which he could use to transform prayer into magical formulas, and give him the power to govern the world on his own. What would happen, though, if God were to give every man the power of his desires? There would be chaos, one war after another, or most probably, one big totally destructive war.

"Behold, the unrighteous man will fall, the upright man shall live by his faith" (Hab 2:4).

Who is upright? He who desires being at harmony with God; who is not attached to anything or anyone which is not in God. Being attached to something or someone nice, or to someone powerful, when these are not in God, is idolatry. We know by experience that idolatry can bring to no good; it is cause of ruin.

The upright man will live by his faith... Faith is a profound bond with God; it is fidelity to God's love. Faith is adoration of God, not of an idol. Faith is the light which makes us understand that everything is in God's hands. Faith is the light which enables us to entrust to God even our deepest self, the mysteries of our life, and everything that touches us. Faith gives us the light to know we can entrust to God all the powerful people in the world and to place under His power every single being on the earth.

With this faith our soul is reborn and raised upwards. God doesn't respond to a soul until it has blossomed, has lifted up to Him, and fulfilled His divine plan. At times the prophets suffered because they felt abandoned by God. Jesus, too, suffered: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" he cried from the Cross. Why does this happen? It happens for our own good, so that our faith might reach out past our reasoning, our forecasts, our limits, including physical limits; and past the boundary of life and death itself, till it is in total harmony with God, so that in the end all barriers between us and God have fallen.

Until we have lifted up wholly to God, there will always be a space within us where restlessness and worries can abide. From within us is born war, accusations against ourselves and others, the tendency to join the powerful even if these are false, to join other people for the sole purpose of having fun, or for one's own interests. This will inevitably lead to ruin, to failure.

How could it be that a person who has prayed maybe for years continues to be weighed down by a lot of negative feelings? The answer is because he hasn't lifted up his soul to God, but has wanted something for himself, or has made allies with the wrong people, or bears within himself revenge, or rebellion. A person's request is granted when he has lifted himself up to God, for it is there that he finds fulfilment, and becomes a perfect instrument in God's plan. The more upright people there are in the world - people who remain faithful to Him, and are open to His Grace - the more peace will be able to spread throughout the world.

If our faith is weak, we are weak of character. When our faith is weak, we are fragile, without strength, without courage, without backbone; and that's why our prayer is weak. St. Paul wrote to Timothy: "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tm 1:6). What is this gift of God within us? Ours is the victory over evil, over death. Within us the Holy Spirit is at work; and He wrought Christ's resurrection!! His power is great! When we pray are we able to seize this power?

After every prayer we ought to be serene; feelings of forgiveness should abide in us; we should feel liberated. If this does not happen, it means our hearts aren't open; it means we are attached to something: an image, a person, and this thing weighs down on us, crushing

us. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Tm 1:7).

St. Paul sent his disciple on mission: "Do not be ashamed then of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake, but bear your share of suffering for the gospel with the strength that comes from God" (2Tm1:8). What does it mean to bear our share of suffering? It means, don't be afraid of hardship! and don't let yourself be crushed by it. You have to learn to face life's challenges and trials. You have the strength within you to do this, to defeat evil. So why are you closed off, burdened down? Why are you tense, worried, ashamed? Let the power of God within you shine forth!

When Jesus' apostles asked for more faith, He didn't wave a magic wand, but He invited them to mature spiritually, to reject evil, to rekindle their faith, and to be at harmony with God. These troubled times of ours will never find peace through the use of weapons, politics, or human means, but only through our response to God. May these troubled times of ours be a provocation for us all, that our prayer might be strengthened, and our hearts lifted up to God through our faith, so we can become bearers of peace, and carry God's peace to the world.

Fr Tomislav Vlasic

"Dear Children, I would like you to follow Jesus. My Children, take Him as your example in life. You can learn many things from Him. As your role model He will often prove to be very useful to you in life. My Children, try to follow Him, because He is your Teacher." On 25 Feb. 1989 through Jelena, Mary pointed out that man can live his life to the full if he follows Jesus; the rest comes as a consequence.

Life of the Soul is Love

by Jelena Vasilj

Death is the oldest of man's anxieties, even if this is the very reason for God's coming on the earth. He came to give us the water which gives us eternal life. In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus reveals the Father's plan of eternal life for His children, and this plan is realized through Jesus' incarnation. He said of Himself: "The water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14) Hence, life begins with faith in Him, who unites us to his Mystical Body animated by his Holy Spirit which is the Church. Consequently, if we break away from the fount, we will fall back into the culture of death which is invading our society, and which justifies the death of thousands of little babies in the womb, and promotes contraception and euthanasia. This is happening because people's consciences are asleep.

Besides defending life which is sacred, in this brief reflection I would like to consider the nature of life, because life isn't just breathing air in and out of our lungs, but is also a participation in the life of God who became one of us. With His Incarnation, God revealed to us man's real dignity: with baptism we become His children. "The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rm 5:5). This

makes us understand that the life in our soul is Love, and without this love, the soul dies through sin, because sin destroys God's Love in us.

If a soul is without love, it will inevitably fill up with some other fear. But, "perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love" (1 Jn 4:18). Today, we might associate this with excessive stress which becomes depression. This can be overcome, though, with the help of love, of love towards others, also called the virtue of generosity. A magnanimous soul expands as it feels the need to embrace others (cf. 2 Co 6:12). I was recently impressed by a saintly woman, mother of four, who was also fostering a young girl with problems. As she tried to remove the family from a moment of embarrassment, the mother said: "For me she is not a problem, she is just a little girl," as if to say: I'm not afraid of her problems, because I love her.

Life within Love is dynamic; and it makes us reach ever upwards, towards a person, be it divine or human. The body, too, has its needs, but these must be in harmony with the life of the spirit. The spirit helps us discern so that we are able to truly love, and not render injustice to others. With reference to this, St. Augustine says that the five senses don't lead man to eternity, but to the seeking of or the escape from temporal things. When intellect (for St. Augustine, intellect was comprehensive of love) is joined by wisdom this will guide the soul, and a person will take delight in harmonious voices and sweet scents, rejecting what is unpleasant to the ear and nose. But for what is man's intellect? It isn't to teach him how to discern black from white, but fair from unfair, good from bad, useful from useless, chastity from immodest, that he might love one and avoid the other; and love from hatred, that he might cultivate the former and reject the latter.

St. Augustine helps us understand that a soul is nourished by justice, pureness and goodness. All these things make a soul live. This justice, however, is no different to the divine mercy we experience in the sacrament of confession. It is that same good which comes from God in the Eucharist and in His Word, that pureness which is: upright faith, firm hope, sincere love.

So let's pray to Mary, Seat of Divine Life, so she might teach us and intercede for us so that what came to be in her, might also come to be in us. "Whoever believes in me, as Scripture says, from his breast will flow 'rivers of living water'. He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive" (Jn 7:38-39).

J.V.

* "Medjugorje, Fount of Vocations" is the title of a collection of testimonies being prepared by the Echo of Mary staff in Poland, to tell the stories of priests and religious whose vocations were born through contact with Medjugorje. If you wish to tell your story you can send it in your own language to echo@ceti.pl

May Fr. Angelo (whose 3rd anniversary it was on 3 March) bless this our work and inspire in us all true filial love for our Blessed Mother, to the greater glory of God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

May the Risen Christ fill your hearts and families with His blessings.

Don Alberto

Villanova M. 1 March 2002

The Mail

* From Japan, Fr. Sean Mary Ryle, who recently celebrated his golden jubilee, writes with gratitude for the "informative and spiritually uplifting Echo."

* From Bombay, India, Fr. F. Bernard writes: "... So many non Catholics long for the Echo. They are all devotees of Mary."

* From Uganda: "Heartfelt thanks for the copies of Echo; the students are already enjoying them!" Sr. Claudia Piffer, Kampala

May we remind readers that everyone is welcome to request a single copy directly from us, as we now enjoy quite a good bulk discount with the Post for the dispatch of single copies. Send requests to: Echo of Mary Assoc., Casella Postale 27, I-31030 Bessica (Treviso), Italy