

Echo of Mary Queen of Peace

Sept.-Oct. 2006 - Echo of Mary Ass., Admin. Bessica, PO Box 47, I-31037 Loria (TV), Italy. Yr 22 #5
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Our Lady's message, 25 July 2006:

“Dear Children, at this time do not think only of rest for the body but, my Children, seek time also for the soul. In silence may the Holy Spirit speak to you, and may you permit Him to convert and change you. I am with you and before God I intercede for each of you. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Give time to the Soul

Christ in us is the mystery of salvation hidden for centuries and generations, but now manifested to his saints, says St. Paul (cf. Col 1:26-27) as he acknowledges having received *the grace to preach to the gentiles the infinite riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God* (Eph 3:8-9).

With the coming of Christ; with His Life, Death and Resurrection, the Revelation of God, Creator and Father, came to an end. We know all we need to know for our salvation. What else is missing? *“Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (Jn 3:3), says Jesus to Nicodemus, adding: *“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (Jn 3:5).

Now, as then, it is not enough to know. One must let himself be helped by Wisdom, opening his heart to the action of God's Spirit, so that man's actions are a reflection of the grace of God.

There is the risk of seeking refuge in a personal god, made to our own image – and this would be idolizing; and there is also the risk of extrapolating the Word and the Sacraments from the Spirit which generates them, and once again this would be to substitute God with an idol. These are two aspects of the nature of man born of the flesh (cf. Jn 3:6). Do we really mean it when we pronounce the words: *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done”*? Is prayer for us talking with God, or is it a list of needs that we present to Him? When we call Him *our Father* do we also intend desiring to be His children? Talking to God is not like talking to another person, not even a very important person. He is infinitely much more. Unless we are willing to trust Him with everything we have, we are likely not to give Him anything.

“At this time, do not think only of rest for the body but, my Children, seek time also for the soul,” urges Mary. This time right now for the northern hemisphere is time for summer vacations, and particularly in the wealthier countries



“Young people, I invite you to seek the Lord every day, for all He desires is that you be truly happy. The recital of the Rosary can help you to learn the art of prayer with the same simplicity and depth of Mary.” Benedict XVI

ever more time is dedicated to the body and to appearance, and ever less time to the life of the soul, and to the inner encounter with God. Our God is a *jealous God* (cf. Ex 20:5); also time is His gift, and to Him we ought to orient, dedicate and offer it. This doesn't mean time would no longer be ours, but when offered up to the Creator of time, it does not go wasted, but is put to good use – for our own benefit and that of others. Through the help of God we are also enabled to live our time to the full.

“In silence may the Holy Spirit speak to you, and may you permit Him to convert and change you,” Mary's message continues. Our Lady points out that for **conversion**, we need to create silence so we can hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and this requires prayerful listening. We also need to allow the Holy Spirit to break down our barriers so He can work conversion in us, and this requires surrender to God.

May it not be that we accuse God of our lack of response to His Love! We alone are responsible when we impede Him from reaching us. We alone are responsible when we refuse Him, and when we prefer a plate of beans over our birthright (cf. Gen 25:29-34). *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel”* (Mk 1:15).

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Our Lady's message, 25 August 2006:

“Dear Children, Again today I call you to pray, pray, pray. Only in prayer will you be close to me and my Son and will you see how short this life is. In your heart a desire for Heaven will be born. Joy will begin to rule in your heart and prayer will begin to flow like a river. In your words there will only be thanksgiving to God for having created you, and the desire for holiness will become a reality for you. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Desire for Heaven

The human creature is an expression of God's Love. If only man would keep this in mind, it would help him from losing the dignity with which he was created! The relationship between God and man does not concern the Creator and His creatures alone, but involves all of creation *which awaits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God* (Rm 8:19). When a person is revealed as a child of God he frees not only himself, but the “world” which surrounds him from its bondage to decay (cf. Rm 8:21). How real this rings today; for it is clear to all how nature suffers the detrimental effects of this failed revealing of the children of God.

Man was made in the *image of God*; and through Christ we have become *children of God*. It is for this that Mary was given to us as Mother by Jesus as He was dying on the Cross. The children of God needed to be generated. For this reason Mary untiringly visits us and calls us: **“Dear Children, Again today I call you to pray, pray, pray.”**

Prayer opens the soul to God's Love; making us able to receive the sacramental graces, and to bring His Love to the world. So prayer cannot be reduced to something mechanical or automatic, but must move the heart of the person saying it and the Person receiving it. Our prayer must call down the Church - triumphant, militant and suffering Church. It must invest and involve the entire universe; it must place man in the bosom of God.

“Only in prayer will you be close to me and my Son.” Therefore, outside of prayer we will not be close to them, but will remain distant, closed up in our egos and our problems, and unable to harvest the true greatness and beauty of life. Close to Them **we shall see how brief this life is**, that is, we shall have the wisdom to re-dimension those expectations and hopes which are founded exclusively on man and human science, and we shall understand how time is a gift of the Lord. We will

stop expecting from the world that which can be found in God alone.

“In our hearts will be born the desire for heaven.” Then, everything will be put back in its proper place, according to God’s design. **“Joy will begin to rule in your heart and prayer will begin to flow like a river.”** In God everything is natural, because our nature is divine. When everything in our lives is oriented to God, the peace and joy that come from the living waters of His presence in us is stronger than life’s ups and downs. Our prayer, then, will be words of praise and thanksgiving. **“In your words there will only be thanksgiving to God for having created you, and the desire for holiness will become a reality for you.”** Holiness is life in God, and if we – in every circumstance – are able to always praise and thank God, then we are already in Him, and sustained by His holiness and grace.

Thank you, Mary, for your words of life and grace, and for your humble and tangible presence in this blessed land; for the warm embrace in which you hold us when we contemplate your messages.

N.Q.

Pope Contemplates Holy Face of Christ

“Your face, Lord, I seek. Hide not your face from me” are the words of a psalm that express the profound yearning in every man to see God, face to face, already here on the earth; a yearning to know the Unknowable, to discern the Unfathomable. And guess what? The eternal God, out of love for His beloved creatures, took a human face.

The Lord didn’t want to remain anonymous, but wanted to be seen, and not only by those of his time. Through some mysterious event the image of Jesus has remained impressed on a cloth, as in a photograph, to be seen by people throughout the course of centuries. One immediately thinks of the Holy Shroud of Turin which was his burial cloth and in which is impressed his mortal body and the signs of his Passion. But there also exists in Italy, at Manoppello in the province of Chieti, a cloth on which is impressed the Lord’s face. This image corresponds precisely to the marks on the Holy Shroud of Turin, however the expression is that of a living man, with open eyes.

Authentic veil of Veronica

It is said that a woman by the name of Veronica wiped the face of Christ on His way up Calvary, resulting in an image of the divine face being impressed on the linen cloth. In the year 1300, the first holy year, the Veil of Veronica was exposed for veneration by pilgrims in the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, but for unknown reasons the Veil went missing; then, after a series of donations it ended up in the convent of the Capuchin Friars of Manoppello, a little



town in the Appennines of Abruzzo.

Scientific research

Scientific research confirms the authenticity of the relic. Recent exams by high definition digital photographs and by ultra-violet rays confirm that in the fibres of the Veil there is no presence of colour, which means that it has not been painted or dyed; and other sophisticated techniques have shown how the image on the Veil is the same on both sides of the cloth, as in a slide.

500 years of devotion

Exactly 500 years ago, in 1506, an unknown pilgrim brought the precious linen or byssus to Manoppello. It was soon placed by the Capuchins in a case above the main altar. Today the faithful celebrate with gratitude the 500th anniversary of this precious relic and the grace given to all who venerate it.

Heinrich Pfeiffer, professor of iconography and history of Christian art at the Gregorian university, affirms that even in the early centuries the Veil was considered not a human work of art. He also affirms that this sacred image was the model for the later representations of the Holy Face, including the portraits painted in the Roman catacombs during the IV century. The German nun, Sr. Blandina Paschalis, expert iconographer, has proved the truth of her assertion that the face of the Holy Shroud and that of Manoppello match perfectly.

Pope: “pilgrim amongst pilgrims”

Pope Benedict XVI paid a private visit to the Shrine of Manoppello to pay homage to the holy relic, following an invitation by the Archbishop of Chieti, Mons. Bruno Forte, on the occasion of the fifth centennial celebrations. Sr. Ana Simic, our representative, was present: *“Simon Peter who was following .. went into the tomb .. and saw the linen cloths on the ground, and the cloth that had been over his head”* (Jn 20:6-7). Today, the Peter of our times came to see and venerate the *linen cloth that was on the head* of his Teacher and Lord. This present day event of grace called to mind that episode of the Gospel and has renewed our love for that Christ of the inscrutable Face, who alone revealed his total love that conquered death. The beautiful refrain sung by the assembly (translated, goes something like): *“Oh Holy Face of Jesus, beauty that has ravished my heart, impress yourself in me so that when you look at me You will see Yourself.”*

It was beautiful, edifying and very moving to see the Holy Father fix his eyes on those of Christ. It was the gaze of someone in love; that of a true disciple for his Teacher. His remaining in prayer before the holy Face, so loved and sought after, was a message for us all, and an invitation to contemplate and to hold our gaze on Jesus. Pope Benedict confirmed his brethren in the faith through his

contemplation. It was assuring to see that his words were confirmed by his deeds.”

Who seeks his face?

“Those who meet Jesus, who let themselves be attracted by him and are prepared to follow him even to the point of sacrificing their lives, personally experience, as he did on the Cross, that only the *grain of wheat* that falls into the earth and dies, bears *much fruit*,” said the Pope in the Shrine at Manoppello. “This is the path of Christ, the way of total love that overcomes death,” and those who take this way, “live in God already on this earth, attracted and transformed by the radiance of his Face.”

His death, we add, was not able to cancel the traces of Christ on the earth, traces that after 2000 years still speak to us of Him. They tell us of His humanity; they reveal to us His face of love and goodness so that we too can try to be similar to Him.

It was very encouraging to see a Pope kneel before a relic, to confirm that popular devotions are not fruit of legends or fantasy, but are rooted in the history of the pilgrim Church who continually seeks His face to adore; a Church that wants to find Him and adore Him. “In order to enter into communion with Christ and to contemplate his Face, to recognize the Lord’s Face in the faces of the brethren and in daily events, we require ‘clean hands and a pure heart.’ Clean hands, that is, a life illumined by the truth of love that overcomes indifference, doubt, falsehood and selfishness; and pure hearts are essential too, hearts enraptured by divine beauty,” said the Holy Father.

“Seeking the Face of Jesus must be the longing of all of us Christians,” he concluded.

Stefania Consoli

Families Meet in Spain

We had the joy of being visited by the **Holy Father!** He came to prepare us for the prayer vigil that was to be held on the **9th July** during the fifth World Meeting of Families at **Valencia**, city of the Arts and Sciences. Spanish families were invited to pray the rosary in the plaza. The wonder of this Rosary, prayed together by so many simple folk who wanted to place their lives in the hands and heart of Mary, was indeed moving.

The entire meeting marked a moment of exceptional grace able to transform persons, cities and nations; and we give thanks to God for having honoured us with this visit by the Holy Father in a country like ours, which today is so much in need of grace and transformation. Our people bear within them the seed of God’s love, but today it is being suffocated! Let us pray that this wave of grace tied to the visit of the Holy Father may change many hearts in Spain!

The Pope became more familiar to us as we listened to his talk, so clear, profound and serene. He reminded us parents that “each generation, all parenthood and every family has its origin

News from the Blessed Land

Mladifest - Youth Festival

One Body

in God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Thus we understood the holiness of our mission: the family as a small tabernacle where God is made present through the love expressed by the spouses for each other and for their children. When the spouses let themselves be loved by God and they correspond to this love, the quality of love in that house is lifted up, because they will tend to love not with one's limited human love, but with the love of God.

The Pope also reminded us that: "Faith is not merely a cultural heritage, but the constant working of the grace of God who calls, together with our human freedom, which can respond or not to his call." And whether one responds or not, Christian parents are all the same called to give a credible witness of their Christian faith and hope, so that God's call and the good news of Christ will reach their children with the utmost clarity and authenticity.

A café to promote vocations!

My husband Oscar and I had the opportunity to run a "vocational café" (Café Vocation.com) as a part of this Meeting for Families. The coffee house is a relaxed place with live music and free internet access; a place where one can meditate on one's calling in life, or in other words, on the plan that God has for each of us in this life, or in different words again, on one's happiness.

Next to the area where the café was located, we set up a chapel, and in the chapel the Most Blessed Sacrament was perpetually exposed, in the certainty that He would know best how to illuminate the thirsting hearts of the thousands of youth that visited the café. Many priests listened to confessions for hours, as well as giving counsel to those who perhaps for the first time were inquiring into their life's calling. Now we must pray that they might find the answer.

The many hours spent working on this project were compensated by the presence of grace: the chapel of adoration was always full; and people had to line up to confess. Seeds were being planted; the thirst for God was re-awakening. There were even some conversions, such as with the sound technician. At our first meeting we didn't get a good impression of him... and it turned out that he didn't either of us (he confessed this to us later). It so happened that when we explained to him that the groups couldn't play for more than 20 minutes because there had to be space for testimonies, and that the volume could not be very high because people in the café had to be able to hear each other talk, he thought he'd not accept the job.

A man who had been far from God for many years returned to God because of his work in this café! He rediscovered the joy of feeling loved by the Lord. The most moving thing was the look on his face: in the beginning it was rather lifeless and tense, as though life had worn him out. At the end of the week he seemed transfigured, full of love and the joy of God. Without a doubt, all the work and effort put into organizing the café was worth it just for this soul!

Georgina Trias, Translator, Spanish Echo

A song, warm and rhythmical, rises from their joyful hearts, as also their minds and bodies praise the King. In dozens of different languages and prayers, with hundreds of different colours and thousands of voices, there is something new and unique going on in Medjugorje. It cannot go unnoticed by anyone, but rather, the life it brings urges you to come and be part of this one body, which is the springtime of the Church, and the mystical body of Christ.

It is the Youth Festival... in its 17th year! Each year, though, is new, with new grace, new people, new prayer and new enthusiasm. *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*, is this year's theme. Young people – of different extract and from different countries - came in response to an *irresistible* call. All young people have in them an authentic seed of goodness, as well as a desire for the truth, generating an inner quest in their souls. Young people have the capacity to recognize what is real and authentic, and are thus able to leave everything for it: sell everything and depart, and **offer themselves...**

So here they are singing and praising the Lord amongst these barren hills and trodden stones. Here they are adoring Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. A chosen people, they are true Christians who live the faith, who know how to see in that piece of bread the Saviour, the Redeemer of mankind. And they are ready to adore Him and give everything to testify that He is God, true God, the only God.

God is the centre; He alone the motor, the source and the purpose of so much joy. They know this and are ready to witness, and this alone endows this gathering with something that goes beyond passing enthusiasm... Jesus too is present, and He gathers all together under His Name, and they become one body, His Body.

The very first evening the 50 nations represented were presented one by one, each one cheering and happy to be here. When Br. Jean Paul, practically the only pilgrim present at Medjugorje from Lebanon, came to the microphone, loud applause filled the entire plaza.

The void created by the absence of Lebanese pilgrims was greatly felt, because a group of pilgrims from Lebanon have been attending for some years. "We didn't forget you, dear people of Lebanon," said Fr. Marijo at the beginning of Mass. "We had set aside a frequency for you (for the simultaneous translations). Your flag is flying along with the others. If this year the frequency destined for you is unused, there is nonetheless another frequency that can reach you because it knows no barriers. It is the frequency of prayer, and of love."

What joy and what strength come from participating at holy Mass – the plaza full

beyond capacity, and the sun setting in its glory! Each holy Mass is so priceless; it truly makes up for whatever discomfort one might have experienced to get here, including voyages of 20 and 25 hours. And what joy and what strength to see how everyone around you is participating in a **living liturgy of salvation**: not passively, but by allowing oneself to be moulded and transformed by God's grace which is given freely; by the heavenly gift of a God who abides in our midst and who reveals Himself in the face and voice of the brother or sister next to you.

What joy and what strength to relive the most discreet and the greatest miracle of Christian life: God who descends from heaven into the bread on the altar around which are gathered today **30,000 youth**. Then, from the altar He descends even lower to visit us: He descends amongst us, and disappears in our midst. Carried by the hands of the priests He walks on the gravel, amongst the benches, the sweat, and the tiredness of the people to reach each one singularly and visit each one personally, and to touch each one there where he most needs to be touched by God's love.

And it is as though prayer is rising from a single body. Each soul the Lord encounters is lifted up in prayer, and receives His blessing.

"Come sanctifying Bread. Come and transfigure us. Come and live in us; come and transform us; come and make us holy. Come now in this brother in front of me; come and fill that gaze so full of desire; come with your seal to protect forever the hope shining on that face... Come in this sister, come and dwell in her. Come in this friend; come so he can take You back with him. Come and accept the renewed offering of my life..."

The awe and gratitude shines on faces; and joy explodes into a song of thanksgiving that rises up to heaven as one voice. Jesus is with us to sing the praises of the Father, happy to be here amongst His beloved creatures.

What joy and what strength... Yes, it is so: **joy gives strength!** It is vital strength that cannot be contained but must be shared; it is courage for the future; it disperses doubt and defeats the burden of fear and indifference.

Without a doubt holy Mass is the most important part of every day, and the most appreciated, even if not everyone is aware of this. I think only in heaven will we fully comprehend the salvific value of every prayer offered up round the Eucharistic sacrifice of the altar. Only in heaven shall we know what ample spiritual realities are moved and healed because of this prayer.

Here then are the young people who now return, each to his own reality. Here they are, as they leave and are dispersed. With their prayer they will remain united and strengthened, and be spiritually sustained by each other. Each has his own dose of daily difficulties to deal with,

including many other young people who do not know and do not accept this God who is so humble and so immanent. Each has the desire and the certainty, however, that he is a child and a witness of Mary for these times. F.C.

Now over to them

Susanna, 25 years old:

This is the third time I have come to Medjugorje. The first time friends had brought me. It was a wonderful experience, and I discovered a new dimension of the faith. I think if Mass at our parishes were accompanied by singing like this, and with the same degree of enthusiasm, people would live Mass in a much better way.

This time the pilgrimage wasn't a group experience. I came on my own, and I'm living it on a **more intimate level**. Being here has awakened in me a desire to know more, to seek more profoundly and to find some answers to my life that I know only God can give.

Christopher, 20:

This is my sixth time at Medjugorje. Coming here means getting away from the world, and being given a spiritual overhaul. **Each time I go back home the smile on my face lasts about a month...** so Medjugorje is something that leaves its mark.

Each year is a different experience; something that makes you want to come back. I don't think I have as much fun as I have here in any other place. It's so neat to see so many others of my own age all here together to witness that Our Lady appears, and to rejoice in her real presence which touches the heart. This is Medjugorje.

Anna Delia, 23:

This festival has helped me overcome definitely my sense of solitude. I have never felt this comfortable in the crowds at concerts; crowds always made me feel lonely... but not this time! I met people who have truly given so much!

Just like every other believer, I knew that we had to work to build the good in the world... and here I saw the commitment of so many others, and I felt called to give my participation. **I have finally understood that it is possible.**

I had fun taking photos, but even this was not without meaning. I saw and understood how beautiful the human person is, in all his various expressions – of joy, inward attention, even sadness. I noticed a particular sweetness in the persons that I have never seen anywhere else. One wouldn't think that guys "like this" could actually exist. My only fear is not being able to pray again the way I have prayed here.

Giacomo, 16:

I didn't know anything about this place, and when I read the messages of Our Lady

I didn't believe them. I thought they were all alike, so **I came here to Medjugorje without expectations**; and I found something fantastic. Today in the western world, to pray is almost a crime, instead here I feel the desire to pray, and after having prayed five rosaries with the others I still feel like praying more, on my own. Here I seem to be my real self and to enter into communion with the others. It is like taking off your heavy armour and being truly free; and things take on meaning.

All this recharges you for your return to Italy, and you face life in a new way, knowing that everything you do is not an end to itself, but can have a spiritual meaning. To be able to tell others about this place it isn't enough to visit the visionaries, know the messages, or hear certain testimonies. Here there is an atmosphere, something that goes beyond and involves your whole self. It can't be explained; besides, there is nothing more complex than understanding the faith.

I will surely return and try to bring others back with me, because it isn't easy to transmit all this with just words. Yes, I hope to make this place known, also and especially for those who derided me when I said I was coming here.

I would like to be able to pull those people out of what they call life but in reality is mere survival. I am grateful to Mary for having brought me here at 16 years of age.

Fr. William, 27:

This event at Medjugorje is always an intense moment of interior life also for us priests. We need to return to the essential, that is, to Jesus in the Eucharist and in the Word. We should always do this, but these (extra occasions) are always very special. Here, Our Lady calls also the young people to the essential, to build up a life according to the heart of God and the Gospel.

For the civilization of love to be born young people need to see that there are persons who want it, others like them. Today, the response of the world weakens this enthusiasm, and discourages. **To experience the Church alive gives a shaking to your faith.** This type of encouragement is able to awaken surprising resources of enthusiasm and generosity within young people. The motto we chose for our little group in this pilgrimage is precisely: "As long as there is Christ there is hope."

Alex, 20:

This is my first time at Medjugorje. If I had to say why I came, I think it'd be to find the truth. Last year I went to Cologne, and I think the atmosphere is similar, but here there is more spirituality. You can tell it's a blessed land. The best moment was night adoration. I don't have the right words to say what I felt, but I got to the church when it was nearly dawn; I was tired and sleepy, but then I began to pray and I felt something inside of me, and the

tiredness left me instantly. It was a beautiful experience.

Francesca, 21:

The first time I came here it was because the pilgrimage was the prize for a literary contest. Today I am here for the fourth time. This time confession was so different for me, thanks particularly to the preparation our parish priest gave us. I understood what it meant and how to prepare for this sacrament. I hope that the group that has formed with this pilgrimage might continue to get together for community prayer. We are already organizing when to come again, and we want to bring new people with us.

AND:

Barbara, Stefania, Carla: The days here have allowed us to see how the voice of Christ is really present in the depths of hearts, and how His word is unique and a certainty for your life. Together with thousands of young people we have contemplated the face of Mary, she, who from heaven keeps us close in her loving embrace and calls us her children

Alex: Medjugorje is able to touch the heart of anyone who visits this blessed land. Here, the voices of Mary and Jesus are louder and clearer. Each person here is given something precious to carry in his or her heart and transmit to others, to keep it and make it multiply in one's own life.

Fr. Vincenzo: To come back to Medjugorje, to the source of my priestly vocation is to fall back into the arms of Mary, Queen of Peace. She takes care of the true needs of her dear children. To be here amongst so many young people who desire life, truth and a healthy prospect helps you rediscover how only God can fulfil one's expectations. Young people are the hope and the future, and here you can see how their hearts are touched by the superabundant joy for a church called to be the good of the world. It is both fascinating and contagious to see how so many youth respond with joy. Their testimony reminds us of Mary's "yes" to the will of God.

Silvia: Thanks to this pilgrimage I have discovered the value of prayer, especially what Our Lady calls prayer with the heart, which is to simply and sincerely dialogue with Mary and Jesus, and thus be able to offer up with joy each little gesture of daily living which at the same time abounds in such grace that we are often unable to see it. Thank you Mary!!

Message to Mirjana, 2 Sept. 2006:

I gather you under my motherly mantle to help you come to know the love of God and His greatness. My Children, God is great; His works are great. My Children, do not deceive yourselves that without Him you can take even a single step. Go and witness to His love. I am with you. I thank you.

An Interview with Fr. Ljubo Kurtovic: Talking about the Festival...

by Alex Borlini



How did the Festival first begin? What was its aim?

This festival began 17 years ago when Fr. Slavko began to help a group of young people understand Medjugorje, also

through the help of songs and personal testimonies. I wasn't here then, so I can't tell you more about that. It was certainly a group of young people who had been touched by Medjugorje and by Our Lady's presence and by her messages. So, gradually, this festival, this international meeting grew.

What form of publicity was used?

Publicity is spontaneous. It's a miracle that the young people come. We do not do any form of propaganda. A young person comes for the festival and goes home and tells others about it. We do not publicize the festival on the television or radio.

How has it evolved over the 17 years?

The numbers of participants have increased. The format has remained more or less the same. At the first festival there were about 100 youth from 4 or 5 different nations. In this festival people from 42 different nations have registered, and it is calculated that 30,000 people are present, and that is without counting those who have not registered, particularly for Mass which is the core part of the day. Confessions can be heard in 19 languages and the Mass is translated into 15.

Have you encountered any difficulties?

Even the organization is practically spontaneous... a miracle. It has been held for many years and some things are run-of-the-mill. The Cenacolo Community helps us with its day of witnessing and especially the recital based on the Gospel that the youth prepare every 2 years. Then there are testimonies of conversion experienced at Medjugorje, or in one's life as a Christian: by nuns, lay people, priests, youth.

What do you think the young people who come here seek?

We have noticed that the young people at Medjugorje appreciate Adoration the most, especially when held late evening with the silence of the night, and the songs and meditations that help them descend a bit more deeply into their hearts. This is so even though some of the songs are rather noisy.

What can you advise the young people who come to the festival?

To let themselves be guided; to surrender to Our Lady – she will lead them to safety, to Jesus. For me this is a miracle. I am just a servant of God's work. It is Our Lady who organizes the Festival, and she also uses us, her children, to help in this organization.

What would you like to tell those who haven't come here yet?

To come, at least out of curiosity. And to see. There are many who come out of curiosity; this too can be a good beginning. One's attitude then changes into something more profound and more serious – it happens within the soul. Unfortunately, there are many prejudices about Medjugorje, and much ignorance and a lot of wrong things are said about Medjugorje.

Apart from the great gift of Mary's daily presence at Medjugorje, are you aware of any special signs or miracles?

At the beginning of the apparitions, during the first months, there were many visible signs, because the visionaries asked Our Lady to do something so the people could believe them. Besides this, as a priest in the confessional I am a witness to miracles that cannot be seen with the eyes. The events of the people who confess here are miracles that cannot be documented. It is written in their hearts.

Can you tell us something about your life?

I was born in 1969 and I came to Medjugorje for the first time as a pilgrim in 1983. It is thanks to Our Lady that I became a monk. I am not a visionary; I have not seen Our Lady. However, she can be "seen" in a way that is even better than the way the visionaries see her. The visionaries see with their eyes, but in prayer one can encounter her even more profoundly. Many pilgrims err when they seek from the visionaries that which the visionaries cannot give them. The visionaries are not the ones who push the buttons. They are merely witnesses, and recount what they hear and see, simply, and with their humanity.

Did you always believe in the apparitions?

When I was 14 I came with my mother on pilgrimage to Medjugorje; we walked 50 km. My faith grew gradually; I didn't immediately believe. I don't tell pilgrims that they have converted, but that they have been reawakened. One then begins a journey, and has all his life to grow and convert. The important thing is to be reawakened, and not be asleep or even comatose.

What would you like to tell priests who still doubt?

I do not try to convince anyone.

What would you advise them?

To come here at least out of curiosity.

I first have to convince myself. There is no need to believe in Medjugorje. There is need to believe in the Gospel. Medjugorje is Gospel. Our Lady here has said nothing new. She has added nothing to the Gospel. All her messages are Gospel, only that they are told with simplicity, in a motherly way. I always say that Medjugorje is not the purpose, but a means that God gives us. One can come close to God even without Medjugorje. But why not use all the means God gives us? I see Medjugorje not as a phenomenon or something sensational, but as a person called the Virgin Mary. One cannot know the Virgin Mary by talking about her, but only if we go down on our knees, and humbly do as she says.

I, too, meet some priests (that make me) shake my head: I see a wall around them. It also takes grace to understand Medjugorje. For me Medjugorje is not a problem but a mystery. All God's works are mysteries; and this mystery provokes priests and also the Church. For sure, just as Jesus was a stumbling block, so is Medjugorje a stumbling block for many. For me, to be against Medjugorje is a sign of spiritual death. Being neutral is honest. To not know something and be against it is inadmissible. Remaining silent when you don't know something is honest.

What is the situation from a canonical point of view, with regards to the Holy See?

John Paul II said many times (in particular to many bishops) that he was in favour of Medjugorje, but he, too, had to respect the Church and her structure. For as long as the apparitions are underway, the Church will not proclaim herself. The Church does well not to say anything; but she also speaks with her silence. If there were something heretical or strange that led people away from the Gospel the Church would not waste time to speak up. She has spoken up in many cases which involved strange phenomena.

The Church is prudent and does well to remain silent. The Church will speak when the apparitions are finished. (However), I am sure of one thing: that it is not important that I be alive or dead. The Church proclaims a saint after the death of that person, but he or she was a saint also before. I don't see the urgency for a Vatican decree; it is urgent, instead, that I convert. This is important.

Message given to Ivan, 8 Sept. 2006:

"Dear Children, In these years that I have been with you I have sown the seed. I desire, my Children, that you grow from this seed to become my flowers. Be my flowers, spread the messages, pray for peace, pray together with your Mother for peace. Thank you, my Children, for responding to my call!"

Mirjana to the Youth: Our Lady Counts on You!

"It is a great honour for me to be here with you young people. I want so much to find the right words to tell you how much our blessed Mother loves you! On the 2nd of each month I receive Our Lady's apparition and I pray with her for non-believers; or as she calls them: those who haven't yet known God's love. She asks us, especially from you young people who are the future of the world, to especially pray for these people, because it is due to their unbelief, or ignorance, that there are so many negative events in the world. Our Lady asks us to love them, and not to judge them; she asks us only to pray, and give them the example. When we pray for them, we pray for ourselves, for our own future and that of our children.

Many pilgrims here at Medjugorje think we visionaries are privileged and that God listens more readily to our prayer. This couldn't be more false! Our Bl. Mother does not prefer some children over others. We are all her children, and each of us have different missions: we visionaries to give the messages, you, chosen as Our Lady's apostles, to take these messages to the world. This is what Our Lady told me in her message of 2nd January 2006: "*Dear Children, I have called you. Open your hearts; allow me to enter, so I can make you my apostles.*" So we all have the same importance for our Mother.

As I look at you all my heart is filled with joy. I see flags from Croatia, Italy, Austria, Slovakia... it is so wonderful, but I think we are all gathered here under one flag: the flag of our Blessed Mother. We came to her, bringing our weaknesses, sadness, and desires; our gratitude.

Let me tell you about an experience of mine. One day I was going up Mt Krizevac; you know it's not an easy climb. In front there was a small group of Italians; six of these were carrying up a disabled person on a stretcher. I was behind them, and I noticed how happy they were. A while later a group of Americans arrived, and without many words (all they said was "change!") they took this young Italian on their shoulders and continued carrying him up. A little later, a group of Germans arrived, and without many words, they took this young man on their own shoulders and continued to carry him up. So that young man was carried up Mt. Krizevac by the hands of people from all over the world! It is this that our Mother desires of us, for our hands to be united hands." *Editor*

Message to Mirjana, 2 August 2006

Dear Children, in these restless times I come to you to show you the way that leads to peace. I love you with immense love, and I desire that you too love one another, and that you see in everyone, my Son, who is immense Love. The way to peace passes only through love. Give your hand to me, to your Mother, and allow me to guide you. I am the Queen of Peace. Thank you.

Vicka's Smile

by Francesco Cavagna

I remember well the first time I came to Medjugorje. It was in 1997 and I was 14 years old. That pilgrimage marked a turning point in my life. It gave my life a definite direction. The journey, of course, is gradual, but at different moments I have been asked to give my response to God, and in total freedom I renewed my "yes" each time.

I was a boy at the time, and when I first came here to this blessed land I had no particular expectations or biased opinions of any type. As I look back I think I was simply led here by Our Lady. She took me by the hand and led me towards the God of Love. Till then I knew God only by hearsay, but I was soon to be seduced by Him.

The experience at Medjugorje that touched me the most was the talk by Vicka, and her unforgettable smile. I remember it as though it were yesterday. There was **something profoundly authentic in her smile that drew me**, arousing in me something I can now name: desire for God. Many are the pilgrims that experience this when they listen to Vicka's testimony, and through her simple witness she continues to express a joy that goes way beyond human joy. Her smile reveals the reality of heaven.

I recall that when she had finished speaking, everyone moved towards her, wanting to greet her and shake her hand. I stood back for a moment, then I joined the crowd. Vicka took their hands and smiled at each person, and when it was my turn she looked into my eyes with love, smiled and greeted me. It was special, however, I also know that God's love for each of us is unique. Though he sees the whole universe and loves all creation, He also loves each person as though there were no other.

A Miracle called Love

Each of us yearns to be unique and special in the eyes of someone, because God impressed deep in our hearts the desire to be loved. A soul begins to convert when it ceases to seek the attention of others, and when it opens up to the special love that God has for each of us and chooses the Supreme Good: "My God, and my Everything." Isn't this perhaps the greatest miracle of Medjugorje? Twenty-five years later - even though many things have changed - this unique and precious miracle is still repeated: people discover that they are loved by God and decide to believe in it and to follow the crucified love of the Triune God.

This love is revealed to us when we see it embodied in our neighbour, in those who know how to communicate it gratuitously with their own life. These are real apostles, authentic witnesses that Our Lady is calling for these times. And we are all called to become bearers of grace. Mary calls each of us without distinction.



It is a natural movement where the rule is written within us: when we are filled with God's love, we can (and must) communicate it to others.

Importance of a Smile

I know that each person who offers himself totally to God inevitably bears within himself this joy which must flow out onto others; this interior smile that is reflected outwards in ways and shades that vary. It is the smile of those who have experienced God's Love and know how to live for Him every day. It is the smile of those who surrender themselves totally, who have total trust in the One who desires our good. I don't mean a superficial smile, but the smile of those who, upon encountering suffering, know how to bring hope, who don't flee from sorrow, but share in another's suffering because they know it is merely a means and that it will pass.

This smile shines on the faces of those who have encountered the Risen One after experiencing suffering, the cross and death, and thus become bearers of the good news for all those they meet. It is the humble smile of those who expect nothing for themselves, and it is for this reason that they are free to give, and to give unconditionally. It is the smile of those who experience daily that there is more joy in giving than in receiving; of those who renounce self and live for God and neighbour. This smile is not founded on material joy, it does not depend on passing emotions, but is solid because it comes from a heart that knows it is loved, and because it is founded on the "rock" of incorruptible and eternal love.

Transmitters of Joy

Back from Medjugorje I kept the memory of this smile in my heart. It accompanied me when I returned to school and was immersed in my daily routine. There was a new desire within my heart that made me reject the idea that my life could continue as before. The fullness of the joy and the true life that I had discovered had to be donated and communicated, and I felt the grace of God within me that was changing my thoughts and my gaze, that also touched the people I came into contact with.

I feel certain that it is this smile that shines in every authentic witness of God. I am certain that each person, even the least sensitive, is able to recognize the authenticity of this smile. It is the same smile I found on the faces of the brothers and sisters of the Kraljice Mira Community into which the Lord has called me. It is the smile I have promised to always have on my face, for I feel it is an integral part of my vocation. It is this smile that I wish to donate to the world, to each person, in whatever situation, so as to announce without shame: "The Lord loves you! Let yourself be loved."

Translators of Echo at Medjugorje

United in Offering of Self

This is the fifth consecutive year that translators and close collaborators of the Echo of Mary from various nations have met at Medjugorje in the House of the **Kraljice Mira Community** to grow in spiritual communion and to share their experiences. From **sixteen different countries** we were drawn by the special grace of this jubilee year which marks twenty-five years of Mary's presence.

It is a powerful grace that penetrates and transforms, that doesn't let you depart without having changed you, because this grace brings down the light of God which shines in your darkest corners, allowing you to see where the worldly spirit and your own egoism have taken hold and impede you from walking in the truth and full light. It is a grace which provokes you and calls you to change direction. It exhorts you to straighten up your path to walk towards the essential, and this essential is the encounter with Jesus, who is love incarnated, immolated lamb, living Word of the Father.

Once again Mary used the pastoral experience of **Fr. Tomislav Vlasic** to help the participants of the retreat to advance along this path. The path was not new, but this time the decision to journey along it together was even more intense and meaningful. We of the **family of Echo** felt called to **offer our life to Jesus through Mary** for the salvation of the world. We understood that only if we live the offering of self in communion with each other, can the Echo be an authentic vessel of Mary's thought without orchestration or manipulation. Only if we let ourselves be stripped of our egos to let God act in us are we able to transmit His love directly, without mediation or external interests.

Through prayer, singing, conversation and celebration of the Eucharist, we felt we were *one heart and one soul*, despite the profound cultural and linguistic differences. We understood that only opening ourselves up without reserve to the action of God in us, can He break down our inner and outer barriers and make us the living Church: one heart that beats in the same Body.

It is with this food that we wish to nourish Echo; not with nice words born of theories, but with the wisdom born of complete donation to Mary who continues to call us here from Medjugorje. The call is to be leaven amid our own people, not a mass without form or substance. The call is to be a grain of wheat that is able to *die* under the earth from which we come to bear fruit in due time according to the designs of the Father. It is not for us to know when or what; we must only offer ourselves and remain united in the Heart of the Virgin; to be brothers and sisters able to love one another with the Trinitarian

Love, with the love that never ceases to flow, with the Love that generates and regenerates untiringly, with the Love that purifies, lifts up and introduces (us) into the risen life. We are called to be brothers and sisters able to give one's life for each other to sustain all those who await benefit from the Echo. The way is long and narrow, but also beautiful because it takes us to the heart of the Trinitarian Mystery. This experience of the Easter Passover day by day leads to the freedom that is born of dying to self. We of the Echo journey along this path together, but we would like to explain it to you who read us. Therefore, from now on **we shall publish a column to explain the foundations of this call**, and try to trace out the journey for those who wish to undertake it.

May our Blessed Mother bless our new year of activity and everything it brings.

Stefania Consoli

Mary calls her children to offer themselves completely

This was our first time at the retreat for Echo in the Kraljice Mira Community house. We participated as collaborators of the Hungarian edition of Echo. This year for the fifth time representatives of various nations gathered together to reflect on the mission of the Echo. In Hungary on the 13th of every month we pray before the Blessed Sacrament in the Holy Family Parish Church of Budapest so that Echo might transmit the graces of Medjugorje ever more effectively. At the end of Adoration 3,000 copies of Echo are distributed amongst the faithful.

At the retreat we came to see how Echo is a fraternity united by the unanimous decision to respond to the call to enter and become part of God's love, and that this is the meaning of our life. We would like to proclaim this path to our Hungarian brothers and sisters. The essence of this call is that through the total donation of one's own life (in union with the fraternity) we experience amongst ourselves the love of God, making us able to share it with others. This is possible only if we hand over our lives to Our Lady sincerely and completely.

It is with gratitude that we remember the days spent here; they have given new strength to our mission. With the help of our Heavenly Mother we would like to become living members ready to serve the fraternal communion amid the Hungarian people.

Anikò e Kinga

My impression: I think whoever comes to Medjugorje is particularly aware of Mary's presence. This year at the international retreat held in the KM House, I saw in the gazes, behaviour, and words of those present a note of novelty, tenderness, simplicity, and playfulness, like that of a sweet breeze gently brushing your face. It seems to me that these might be Mary's own qualities, and that perhaps she had distributed them amongst the children who had come here to encounter her.

Pietro Squassabia

Impossible Height

Just as at previous meetings for the Echo of Mary translators and close collaborators, held every year at Medjugorje, once again this year we climbed Mount Krizevac and meditated the Way of the Cross. I knew from the beginning that this year I would not do this climb because of my failing health and back problems. I did want, however, to accompany my friends to the foot of the mount and join in their prayer before the climb. I had thought that at the most I would make my way – with the help of a strong stick – to the first, then maybe even the second station where Jesus takes the cross upon himself. In the back of my mind there was the hope that I might make it to the third station to meditate on the Lord's first fall. I knew that I would not even attempt to make it to the fourth station where the beautiful bronze plaque depicts the encounter between the Lord and His mother.

The memory of the steep climb, the rough, sharp rocks, and the difficulty of finding a foothold was still fresh in my mind. I had decided that after those first few stations I'd go back down, and that even if the descent is more difficult than the climb, other pilgrims on their way back down would surely have offered me their help.

The climb began. As I started off with my group I was quickly joined by one of the priests of the Community: Fr. Lino. He firmly took my hand into his and I immediately felt the effectiveness of his strong support.

"We adore you Christ and we bless you, because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world." We prayed for our peoples; our nations, so that Christ's redemption could conquer in our life and in that of our fellow countrymen. The group remained united, and we advanced with more or less difficulty. My priest friend firmly held my hand and we reached the second, then the third station. Here I sat down; I was tired and feeling the heat. "I'm staying here now; I'm not going any further," I said. "You will make it," was the response I heard as that strong hand took mine and encouraged me to continue. We continued the climb, and each time I felt I should stop he encouraged me with the same words: "You will make it!" How did he know?

The peak cannot be seen during the climb; only bushes, trees, and rocks – the same ones used by the faithful of the area over many years, and now by millions of pilgrims over the last 25 years since the apparitions. The earth is red, the rocks are rugged, and there are many loose stones that make the climb more difficult. Looking upwards in search of the peak makes your head spin; better to keep your eyes on the track in search of a suitable foothold.

"Let nothing disturb you, nothing cause you fear; God alone suffices!" At each bronze plaque to mark the stations,



the group stopped for a brief meditation – offered by one of the members of the Community, followed by the refrain of a song, like the one sung to the words of St. Teresa of Avila (Nada te turbe). The wonderful view: St James with its twin spires, the cultivated plain so pretty amid the surrounding hills, and the wonderful hue of the Medjugorje sky, speaks of God's Love. His caress is also felt in the gentle breeze and the feeling of family, and the memory of the way He suffered so terribly out of love for us, each of us. And here I was, being taken up this way by a priest friend. How could it be? I felt no pain in my back, yet at home I often feel sharp pain, making me go stiff as I wait for the pain to stop. Yet on the *Via Crucis* of Medjugorje I had no pain! And what to say of my arthritic knees? How could I have made that climb?

We reached the concrete cross, which the inhabitants of Medjugorje built in 1933 to honour the death of Jesus 1900 years previously. I felt deep gratitude, and wonder. We remained on the peak to pray in silence for 15 minutes. Each of us has

something to say to the One whom our heart seeks: words of gratitude, friends and situations to commend, the offering of oneself. What a gift altruistic friendship is! It wasn't easy for Fr. Lino; I understood that it was hard on him. "*Piano, piano!*" he urged me to go more slowly, and in my egocentricity I thought he was worried for me; but then I understood that he felt the burden: "Sweden is heavy" was his comment. I carried up my nation; and the spiritual situation of Sweden isn't easy. I understood that he had helped me carry my burden. The way Jesus does. I also believe that he wasn't totally alone, but that the entire "Kraljice Mira Community" (Queen of Peace Community) had carried us all even before we arrived, and during the retreat, and even on our journey back home. This *Via Crucis* on the mountain – the ascent and descent – that I would not have been able to do on my own, was a very intense moment in which I strongly experienced the generous love of others; of those who live in the wake of Jesus.

Christina Agnani
(Translator for Echo, Swedish edition)

Seeking the Heart

(simple thoughts)

Maybe we tend to say: I've been able to do this or that, or: this work is mine, revealing a note of self-satisfaction, or even pride. So I ask: how will we see our life when it nears its end? I think we'll have a serene and luminous recollection of what God has done in our lives and in the lives of others, and for us this will certainly be reason for joy and peace. Perhaps we shall have a distant and even indifferent recollection of what we will have done on our own; and we may also regret not having the ability and possibility of doing what we were once able to do. God, however, does not so much seek our *doing* – for in an instant He can create the universe – but He seeks our heart, for it is there that He finds His delight.

Jesus also seeks our heart so He can abide there with the Father: "*If anyone loves me... my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him*" (Jn 14:23). How consoling and how sweet are these words of the Lord! There is no doubt that He truly loves us. They show how much He seeks out our friendship and our heart!

Our Lady has often shown us how the heart counts more than our doing. During the Annunciation, the Angel did not ask Mary to do many things, but to open her heart to the Lord. When she gave her consent she generated the Son, and thus became the Mother of God. At the wedding feast of Cana, Mary didn't do many things; she only revealed her concern for others to her Son, and when she told the servants: "*do as he says,*" (Jn 2:15) Jesus worked the miracle and turned water into wine. And what wine! And what abundance!

Mary knows perfectly well that our life is sterile if Jesus does not live in us; she knows that all our action is useless if He is not with us. Perhaps it is for this at Medjugorje that she speaks to the heart,

and teaches prayer with the heart, for she wants to mould our hearts, and make them ready to receive the Lord. She knows, in fact, that Jesus is the humble One, and that He does not enter a heart by force, or oblige a soul to receive Him.

Mary also knows that it is difficult for us to open our hearts to Jesus, and for this she comes to our aid. She also knows that Jesus seeks out all hearts, without distinction: the strong ones and weak ones, for He is Love. She also knows that Jesus has a preference for those hearts which are formed by her, prepared and adorned by her, because she knows His tastes; she knows how He likes hearts to be. He loves to see in man the beauty of the Mother, and be able to perceive her scent.

So let us accept Mary's invitation to open the heart, and with her powerful help Jesus will come to dwell in us. If we do this, our work will bear fruit because it will be blessed by the Father who will see in our works the ways of His Son; He will see that our actions are a little similar to the ways of Jesus, and He will see in us a little of His own Son, and He will be pleased. We will thus be given wings to fly to the help of others and to contemplate heaven; we will be given a keen eye to see the needs of our brethren and to help them; and also to clearly discern good from evil.

Our "doing" will thus bear fruit, perhaps a hundred-fold, and we will do wondrous things because it will no longer be our own doing, but that of Jesus acting in us. And we will understand the words of the psalm: "*If the Lord does not build the house, in vain the masons toil*" (Ps 127). We can therefore say, along with the bride in Song of Songs: "***I sleep, but my heart is awake***" because the Groom, Jesus, never sleeps, but ever watches and works in us, even while we sleep.

Pietro Squassabia

This photo (a detail of which was published in Echo no. 187, p. 6) was shown in Italy for the first time on the television program Excalibur. 7.11.02. Vicka said she recognized Our Lady in the figure of the girl behind her.



Prayer Programme at Medjugorje, winter schedule: Starting 11 September 2006 the winter schedule of the prayer programme will begin. The prayer of the **Rosary in the Parish church** begins at 5pm, **Holy Mass at 6pm**, followed by the usual prayer programme according to the day of the week. **Eucharistic adoration** on Wednesdays and Saturdays begins at 9pm. **Rosary on Podbrdo** and the **Way of the Cross on Krizevac** begin at 2pm.

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God bless you and keep you.
May his Holy Face shine over you,
and may He give you his infinite mercy.
May God's gaze be upon you,
and may He give you peace.

don Alberto

12 Sept. 2006, Holy Name of Mary