

Echo of Mary Queen of Peace

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Our Lady's message of 25 March 2007

“Dear Children, I desire thanking you with all my heart for your Lenten renunciations. I desire urging you to continue to live fasting with an open heart. By fasting and renunciation, my Children, you will be stronger in the faith. In God you will find true peace through daily prayer. I am with you, and I am not tired. I desire bringing you all with me to Heaven, therefore, decide every day for holiness. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Fast with an Open Heart

At the beginning of the fifth week of Lent, Mary opens her message with a clear and explicit note of gratitude: **Dear Children, I desire thanking you for your Lenten renunciations.** The time of Lent is a time of special grace; it is a time of liberation from everything that weighs down on the wings of the faith, and on our hearts, making us close up within ourselves. Lent is a time of purification, conversion and return to the Father.

Our human nature, marked by sin, leads us to dissipation, dispersion, and failure, and not only if we leave the Father's house, but also if we live and work there (cf. Lk 15:11-32). Simple respect of the law doesn't guarantee integrity; instead, we must let ourselves be touched by his Love, and let it penetrate and be absorbed by our beings till it is Christ-Love who lives in us (cf. Jn 17:26).

To fast is to renounce everything that doesn't help lift us up to God; everything - big or small - that tends to put ourselves in God's place or in our neighbour's place. The prophet Isaiah, after listing the contradictions of a merely exterior and formal fast, says: *“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”* (Is 58:6-7). Is it not this, the **fast with an open heart** that Mary asks of us? Is it not sobriety in our eating habits, and in our lives? combined with a certain austerity in our behaviour, and purity of thought? Is it not care for the substance rather than for the appearance? and living the beatitudes, and fleeing from what displeases God? (cf. Lk 6:20-26).

“My Children, through fasting and renunciation, you will be stronger in the



Mother of the Eucharist

faith,” says our Blessed Mother. While the goods of this world (or rather what the world considers to be goods) are pursued through hoarding, if not more or less illegal appropriation, faith grows through renunciation, and emptying of self. Faith is removing ourselves from the centre, to put God in the centre. Faith is emptying self to allow God to fill us. *When I am weak, it is then that I am strong* (2 Cor 12,10).

Our faith allows God to possess us, and the stronger our faith is, the fuller is God's possession, the more is the fullness of the Spirit in us, which we perceive as a soave and profound peace: that peace that the world cannot give.

In God you will find true peace through daily prayer. Pray always, without ever tiring - not just as a duty, but as a response to God's Love. Even as we work, we can keep our hearts open to God, invoking Him with merely a sigh of love, by saying or thinking His Name: Jesus, Jesus, Jesus... or that of Mary; or with brief invocations to the Holy Spirit. Speak to Him, or listen... always with an open heart. **Mary is with us, and she is not tired.** So how could we tire of Her? **Let us decide every day for holiness, and She will bring us with her to Heaven.** It is her desire; how could it not also be ours? Let us heed the calls of our heavenly Mother, and through her intercession, we shall rise at Easter, and every day, in Christ our Lord.

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Our Lady's message, 25 April 2007:

“Dear Children, also today I call you anew to conversion. Open your hearts. This is a time of grace; while I am with you, take advantage of it. Say: ‘This is the time for my soul.’ I am with you and I love you with immeasurable love. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Time for My Soul

In those days John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea, saying: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”* (Mt 3:1). Jesus also calls us to **conversion** with similar words at Mt 4:17 and Mk 1:15. The **conversion** to which Mary repeatedly calls us is inner conversion, conversion of the heart. Her call to **open our hearts** is necessary for our salvation.

It is not a question of believing that God exists (Satan knows this too, but he certainly did not convert); and even believing in God is not sufficient if it doesn't change our life; and we can even be pious and “religious” without being converted.

Conversion is fervent desire to contemplate in Christ the Face of God, to discover in every heart at least one heartbeat of His own divine Heart, and in every gaze a spark of the Fire of the Holy Spirit.

But conversion is above all a work of the grace of God who makes our hearts return to Him. The strength to begin anew is given us by God. The human heart is converted by looking upon Him whom our sins have pierced (cf. CCC 1432).

Conversion is fruit of the encounter with Jesus Christ: God who became Man for our sake. Conversion is life in Christ; journeying along the roads of our life alongside Him, bearing our cross with love and for love's sake. All of us, converted or not, shall find ourselves sooner or later at the decisive crossroads, where we shall be asked to choose Jesus or eternal death. The Galilean victims of Pilate killed in the Temple, or those that died beneath the fallen walls of the tower of Siloam were not, Jesus tells us, more sinners than anyone else, but He adds: *“if you do not convert you will all perish as they did”* (Lk 13:1-5).

We cannot convert after our death! **“This is the time for my soul,”** Mary invites us to say to ourselves. Our own lifetime is the only time in which we express our desire to be saved. Not only, but this time of ours is also blessed in a special way by God. It is **time of grace** because Mary is with us; it is a time of grace for as long as she is with us. **Let us profit by it then,** take advantage of it, and earnestly pray from the heart for God's grace. Today it will be easier for us because

of Mary's presence: she will assist, protect and lead us to the wedding feast that is ready. The King is in a hurry to replace those who declined his invitation, and sends out his servants to summon everyone, bad and good alike, to present themselves in wedding garments (Mt 22:1-14). The parable speaks of servants giving wedding garments to the invited; whilst for us it is Mary who weaves and gives us the prescribed garment **with love so great its depth, height and breadth cannot be measured!**

May each of us heed her call, and dedicate **time to the soul** (both Benedict XVI and Our Lady continue to urge us to read the Word of God), and in prayer let us ask for the strength and capacity to entrust ourselves and our lives to the Father without reserve and without fear, but rather with joyful trust as she and her Son did.

N.Q.

Benedict XVI to Youth: "Do not be satisfied!"

Young people were a priority in the mind of his "beloved predecessor," and also in Benedict XVI's heart young people occupy a privileged place. He often addresses to them words of Truth, which like the rays of the sun, disperse the fog of ideas imposed upon them by the world. Young people in their tender years - like flowers that have just blossomed, so fragile and delicate - are exposed to the aggression of a system that challenges, provokes and strips them, and denies them the answers to even their most basic questions. **"Dear young friends, how important it is today to not merely let oneself be taken here and there in life; not to be satisfied with what everyone else thinks and says and does..."** said the Pope to nearly 50,000 young people gathered in Rome for the World Youth Day (this year celebrated on a diocesan level).

The bewilderment often seen in the eyes of the young - though it may be covered up by an ostentatious and false security - is clearly fruit of an absence: the absence of Jesus Christ, because when Jesus is present many questions find their answers, and above all, His Love impedes other poisonous "loves" to pollute sensitive young souls.

"What does it actually mean to follow Christ?", the Pope asked in his homily. "It is an interior change of life," he replied. "It requires me no longer to be withdrawn into myself, considering my own fulfilment the main reason for my life. It requires me to give myself freely to Another - for truth, for love, for God who, in Jesus Christ, goes before me and shows me the way. It is a question of the fundamental decision no longer to consider usefulness and gain, my career and success as the ultimate goals of my life, but instead to recognize truth and love as authentic criteria. It is a question of choosing between living only for myself or giving myself - for what is greater. And let us understand properly that **truth and love are not abstract values; in Jesus Christ they have become a person.** By following him, I enter into the service of truth and love. By losing myself I find myself." (Editor)

Holy Father Turns 80

Pope Benedict XVI turned 80 last 16 April, the day after the first Sunday after Easter which became the Sunday of Divine Mercy under John Paul II to fulfil a request that Jesus asked of the Polish nun St. Faustina Kowalska. And it was precisely **in the sign of Mercy** that Benedict XVI celebrated his birthday, as he revisited the eight decades of his own life in the light of God's goodness, in a sun-lit St. Peter's Square. "In these days illumined in particular by the light of divine mercy, a coincidence occurs that is significant to me: I can look back over 80 years of life," he said.

With emotion and gratitude the Holy Father spoke of his life lived in the shadow of love of those to whom God entrusted him, and more recently of St. Peter. "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me" (65:16). I have always considered it a great gift of Divine Mercy to have been granted birth and rebirth, so to speak, on the same day, in the sign of the beginning of Easter. Thus, I was born as a member of my own family and of the great family of God on the same day," said the Pope who was baptized the day of his birth.

At a time when the family is seriously threatened by the mentality of this century - ever more oriented towards non-commitment in everything - the Pope is grateful for having been given to experience the love of a family. "I have been able to experience what "family" means; I have been able to experience what "fatherhood" means, so that the words about God as Father were made understandable to me from within; on the basis of human experience, access was opened to me to the great and benevolent Father who is in Heaven.

"I thank God for enabling me to have a profound experience of the meaning of motherly goodness, ever open to anyone who seeks shelter and in this very way able to give me freedom. I thank God for my sister and my brother, who with their help have been close to me faithfully throughout my life. I thank God for the companions I have met on my way and for the advisers and friends he has given to me.

"As I continued on my path through life, I encountered a new and demanding gift: the call to the priestly ministry... With the increasing burden of responsibility, the Lord has also brought new assistance to my life. I repeatedly see with grateful joy how large is the multitude of those who support me with their prayers; with their faith and love they help me carry out my ministry; I see that they are indulgent with my shortcomings and also recognize in Peter's shadow the beneficial light of Jesus Christ."

Expressions of affection from all over the world crowned this day of festivity which also included a concert of classical music in his honour, which clearly filled him with happiness. Pope Benedict, in fact, has a passion for music and enjoys playing his piano which went with him to the Vatican.

"As I look back in life I thank God for having placed music in my life: a companion for the journey which has always given me consolation and joy... I also thank the people who since my early childhood

helped me to love this fount of inspiration and serenity."

And on the same note the Holy Father expressed his acknowledgement for "those who unite music to prayer in the harmonious praise of God and of His works. These (people) help us to glorify the world's Creator and Redeemer." Ed.

World Congress on Mercy

From 2 - 6 April 2008, the first World Congress on Mercy will be held in the Vatican, announced Cardinal Schönborn. He said the opening date of the congress was chosen to coincide with the 3rd anniversary of the death of John Paul II who often called on the faithful to become "witnesses of mercy." In 2002, talking of Divine Mercy JP II said: "Apart from the mercy of God there is no other source of hope for humanity."

St Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938), known as the "apostle of Divine mercy," was canonized by John Paul II on 30 April 2000. Card. Schönborn said: "Many believers took it as a sign that John Paul II died on the vigil of the Sunday of Divine Mercy."

The congress will be an interreligious event: "... a bridge to other religions, but also to agnostics and atheists." Orthodox Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow is enthusiastic about it, said Rev Chocholski, secretary general of the congress. (Website I World Congress of Mercy: www.dsfi.fr/wacom)

WORDS FROM BENEDICT XVI

Divine Mercy Sunday

"God's mercy accompanies us daily. To be able to perceive his mercy it suffices to **have a heart that is alert.** We are excessively inclined to notice only the daily effort that has been imposed upon us as children of Adam. If, however, we open our heart, then as well as immersing ourselves in it, we can be constantly aware of how good God is to us; how he thinks of us precisely in little things, thus helping us to achieve important ones."

Hell Exists and is Eternal

"God's mercy and love are great, but those who reject him should know that **hell exists and is eternal,**" said Pope Benedict XVI. "Only God's love can change from within the existence of the person and, consequently, the existence of every society, because only his infinite love liberates from sin, the root of every evil," he said.

"Christ came to tell us that he desires all of us in heaven; and that hell, which isn't spoken about much in our time, **exists and is eternal for those who close their hearts to his love,**" Benedict XVI said. The church reminds people of heaven and hell in order to stress that "there is a responsibility before God, that there is a judgement, that human life can either turn out right or come to disaster." The Pope emphasized that God also offers mercy and forgiveness for sinners. God represents justice, but he is first of all love, he said. "If he hates sin, it is because he loves each person infinitely." (25 March 2007)

Our Lady of the Pillar patron of Spain

“You haven’t heard of *Nuestra Señora Del Pilar*!? But she’s the Patron of all Hispanic Peoples! .. So, tomorrow we shall take you there.” It was during my visit to Madrid at the beginning of spring that I thus came to know of this story which is both fascinating and important. It is important because the shrine came to be after an apparition of Mary 40 years after Christ’s death (40 AD), that is, while she was still alive.

Mary’s first apparition

Tradition has it that St. James the Greater (son of Zebedee, brother of John, senior in age to James, the brother (read cousin) of the Lord) was in Caesarea Augusta (present-day Saragossa) evangelizing, but the Apostle was feeling disheartened by the failure of his mission and was about to return to Palestine when one night, on the banks of the river Ebro whilst in deep prayer, he received a visitation by the Virgin Mary. She appeared before him in body and soul, being carried by Angels on a column/pillar.

Most important Marian Shrine

The apostle built the first chapel of what was to become one of the most important Marian Shrines in the world: the **Basilica/Cathedral of the Pillar** (pillar). What has a pillar got to do with it? This also was carried to Saragossa by the Angels. The Blessed Virgin stood on top of it and asked the Angels to allocate it, thus indicating to James (known as Santiago: Sant Iago = Saint James) where he should build the temple. Mary was taken back by the Angels. One of them, however, by divine will was to remain as custodian of the holy location from which copious graces began to flow. The pillar remained in place as proof of her visitation and as a pledge of her protection over Spain.

Kissing the pillar

For centuries, rivers of pilgrims have continued to visit the Shrine of Saragossa. Many have desired kissing the alabaster pillar used as a base for the image of the Blessed Virgin. The value is not in the object; it is the faith with which one approaches it that makes it precious.

Woytjla, the pilgrim

In November of 1987 John Paul II was extremely happy to make a pilgrimage to the land of Spain where he was much loved. In particular his pilgrimage took him to the Basilica of Saragossa. On that occasion he said: “Today I have fulfilled my desire to kneel, as a devoted son of Mary, before her holy pillar... The Christians of Spain have seen in this pillar a clear analogy with the pillar that guides the journeying of the people of Israel towards the promised Land (cf. Nm 14:14), that accompanies the new

Israel, the Church, in her pilgrimage towards the promised Land, Christ the Lord. Our Lady of the Pillar is a radiant beacon... The Pillar is considered a symbol of the Spaniard’s strong faith, and is also an indication of the journey that leads to knowledge of Christ through apostolic predication.”

Hispanidad Day

The feast day of Our Lady of Pilar is 12 October, a national feast day called hispanidad day (also known as Columbus Day) celebrated by Hispanics the world round. Under the Catholic King of Aragon and his wife Isabella, devotion to Our Lady of the Pillar took on national importance; and Christopher Columbus, in his travels, spread the devotion to other lands. We know, in fact, that one of his ships was named Santa Maria; and in a surprising coincidence, the date he discovered America was precisely the feast day of the Pillar: 12 October.

The great miracle

In 1640, 19 year old Miguel Juan Pellicer fell off the cart he was driving, and the wheel ran over his right leg beneath the knee. The wound was such that it was necessary to amputate the leg. The young man, a devotee of the Virgen of Pilar, had entrusted himself to her intercession, and after the operation, had remained a certain period of time at the shrine to beg for alms, given that he was no longer able to work and did not want to go home to be a burden on his poor parents at Calanda. Whilst here, he used the oil from the votive lamps of the shrine – when this was changed – to rub on his wounds, even though the doctor had advised against it.

However, the miracle happened after he had returned home to live with his parents. One night, after he had entrusted himself to the Virgin, he fell asleep, but he was woken by his parents who for first had noticed what appeared to be two feet poking out from the end of the bed. What an incredible surprise for them all: Miguel had two legs again! Not only, for his wasn’t just a new leg, but was the very same leg that had been amputated two and a half years previously, bearing the scars of old wounds including the surgical removal of a cyst. The case had obviously stirred up a lot of attention, and a board, which was set up to study it, asked that the amputated leg which had been buried in the cemetery of the hospital be exhumed, however, the leg was no longer there.

News of the great miracle quickly spread throughout Spain, and motivated the construction of the present-day basilica over the original chapel. It is visited by thousands of pilgrims from every social class. Here, where the Patroness of Spain has been present for two thousand years, they find consolation, love and blessings.

S.C.



Woman clothed in the Sun

simple thoughts by *Pietro Squassabia*

On summer nights we can observe the moths as they are attracted to the light, and are often trapped by it. We too, are attracted by the lights of the world and are often transformed by them. True light, however, comes only from God. Jesus Christ is the true light; He is the Light. And it is to this light that our souls feel drawn, that our souls yearn to bathe in.

We are all called to become light. The woman clothed in the Sun did just that (Rev 12:1): she let herself be so attracted by the Sun that she was completely absorbed and transformed by it. The Sun is Jesus, who *came as a rising sun* (Lk 1:79). This sun shines always, and though it appears to die on the day of Passion, when *darkness came over the whole land* (Lk 23:44), it is not so, for darkness can never defeat the light.

Who is this woman clothed in the Sun? Mary, Mother of the Church is the Woman clothed in the Sun; the Woman who by the Sun was made totally pure and holy, all alight with the fire of love. Her Lord made her like that. Mary is not the Sun, but she shines like the Sun because she let herself be lit up completely by the Sun. It is for this that to see Mary is to see Jesus; and to speak to Mary is to speak to Jesus, and for the same reason, when Mary comes (to us) she brings us Jesus. She always points us to Jesus. Her greatness is in this. She is totally on fire with Jesus and with His love, to the point of becoming another Jesus.

How could we not be stunned by such a creature that possesses the beauty of Jesus, that is, of God! What a gift you have given us, Jesus, in Mary. Blessed be the Cross from which you said: “Behold you son,” and as you indicated John you meant all of us. How can we thank you for giving us such a Mother? Perhaps the best way of saying thank you, is by making ourselves completely available for You, by entrusting ourselves entirely to You, as she did.

We praise you, Mary, for the way you bear the Light. We praise you because you always offer us Jesus, who is the Light. How could we fear the darkness of the night with a similar splendour! Mary, make us always able to receive the Light so we can become a little like you, for you are the most beautiful example of what Jesus’ transforming love can do. That way, we too will look a little like Him and be able to transmit the Light to others, to our brethren; and then perhaps we will experience the splendour of Paradise already on this earth. □

Be Holy as I am Holy!

“Be Holy as I am Holy!” : mere advice, or a command? Is being holy something we can do on our own? We, expert in all that is technical; can we make ourselves become holy? The idea of making oneself holy is illusory. The Lord desired sharing this gift with us. Holiness is such a precious gift, and without it, it is impossible to enjoy the eternal goods of Paradise. God wants his children with him, He wants them to be eternally happy. For this reason He sent His Son who let His heart be pierced so we could receive the Holy Spirit.

It is the Spirit that makes us holy, and this is the secret. To receive the Holy Spirit doesn't take any particular ability, but just an open heart, and the willingness to receive His vital breath. He helps us to prefer virtue over vice by educating our will and purifying our heart. This is the only way we can hope to become holy, that the way to Paradise can be opened for us.

Gift already granted

We received the gift without cost at our baptism. We don't need to “procure” the Spirit. He already lives in us. However, we have a great responsibility in the use of our freedom by which we can choose God – and allow Him to act in us – or prefer other types of spirits. But we know where these others spirits will lead us. There are heaps of spirits, that come from below and that lead us downwards by awakening in us bass appetites, such as hunger for power, supremacy, control, money, pleasure, self-satisfaction. All these spirits are at the service of our ego, ready to satisfy our every selfish thirst. However, they distance us from the living water that gushes forth from the Truth, from the side of Christ that was opened by the lance, and which is continuously opened on every altar so that we can receive His own holy and immaculate life.

“Unless a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” Jesus told Nicodemus (Jn 3:3), but faced with the Pharisee's bewilderment, He adds: “... unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” This re-birth in us came by virtue of our baptism, but to stay alive in God without falling into the trap of sin that keeps us held “down”, we need to “choose” God's Spirit, to decide for God.

Resolute decision

At Medjugorje, Our Lady has told us many times to “decide for God; place God first” which means to let Him be part of our day-to-day living; allow His thoughts to penetrate ours and guide them towards concrete choices. With the many options that come in a day we will know which ones to prefer, and with time the Will of God will take the place of ours as we allow God to take hold of the helm.

Haven't we begun the day by placing it in God's hands, and found ourselves obstinately wanting to do something and not being able to, so that in the end we have to give up the initiative, and then discover that the end

result is just right, and the way undertaken... unthinkable? These “inspirations” might be silent for the mind, but for the ears of the soul and the intelligence of the heart they are loud and clear, and they are fundamental for directing our steps towards divine Wisdom. To be aware of them, however, we need to silence the other voices that crowd our minds: the voices of our human logic and reasoning, of our worries and fears, or uncertainty, and of our pride and arrogance which make us always want the last word. There are also holy words that need silencing – words picked up perhaps from a book, or a philosopher, or even our own charismas (real or presumed) that stop being gifts when we use them for our own purposes, and instead become disastrous for everyone.

Brave the void

We need to create inner silence, and have the courage to face the void where there are no words or interior discussions; and overcome the fear of the lack of sounds (today's society bombards us with noises, and many prefer to let themselves be deafened by this noise rather than feel the sting of solitude). If we create the right conditions, through prayer, the Spirit will speak to us, but not with human words. His whisper is “as light as the breeze,” the prophet Elijah tells us. So let's fight the temptation to try interpreting it, and let our spirit free to receive the impulses and act consequently... or in other words, simply obey.

To do this, however, we must be docile, which means willing to change our plans if necessary to adhere to a different will. We also need to fulfil the act with facts by using our faculties generously and with trust, without calculating what we might gain. It's like handing over a blank cheque to the Holy Spirit, and in exchange you receive a good that you still cannot see, though you know you will receive it. God doesn't leave us in a void, or abandon us to fumble in the dark – and we must believe this! He will come with the promised good, but only when we shall be ready to receive it. So it is necessary that we begin by investing in God's time, which we know “isn't our time,” and wait. And in the meantime we will learn patience. Patience is fundamental in the journey of holiness.

Dare to be holy

It is fundamental that we audaciously follow God's requests, which at times might seem to surpass our strength and disposition (“Love each other as I have loved you, forgive your enemies...” How many situations in our life that seem impossible!) It is then that we must invoke the gifts of the Holy Spirit because without His power certain things are beyond us.

Divine power will respond promptly, but God wants us to take the first step, that is, to exercise our will as a type of starter engine for the action of the Holy Spirit. This act of will, in all appearance a loss, purifies our heart and qualifies us for new steps ahead.

Self-entrustment helps avoid failure

At this point, let us suppose we have done what we were meant to do, but with zero results. We can now be discouraged by it all, and we can decide to take the human roads – the wider ones where our human justice finds plenty of room for expression. But this is what the world does. What is being asked of us, instead?

The remedy comes from the act of unreserved self-donation to God. This is the capacity of putting ourselves aside and accepting to be losers, defeated and humiliated. It also means to surrender up the temptation to concentrate on the humiliation we have received by feeling sorry for ourselves, or think we have been victimized. In fact, these are like swamps with quicksand that draw us down into the spirals of self-pity and depression.

Self-donation, on the other hand, means to let it all go: both the idea of the good fruits, and the idea of poor results. Our only response is to adore God, and acknowledge His goodness and His lordship and His love in our life. Here then, we have the space where God's Spirit can now act. In our nothingness His everything will be made manifest, and that which only a short while ago seemed opaque and worthless, will suddenly acquire a new light that will light up future horizons.

Consecrated to the All Fair (*Tota Pulchra*)

If Jesus is in us, and if we allow Him to act freely in us through His Holy Spirit, we will begin to live out the Beatitudes (the articles of the Chart of holiness), and they will be woven into our day-to-day lives.

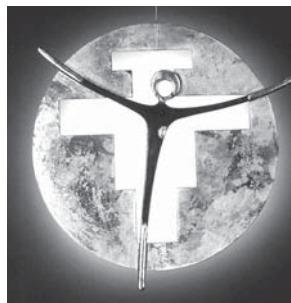
Be holy for I am holy! This will be easy if we become wise, by consecrating our entire day to Jesus and His holy Mother. Consecrating oneself means to make holy our every thought, action and reaction. The act of consecration that we make must not be just a prayer we recite, but the expression of our will to sacrifice our own way of facing the day. This is the meaning of holy: sacrifice something to God so He can use it, in the certainty that our sacrifice will not remain fruitless. At the end of our life we will be able to present to the Father in heaven a basket overflowing with fruits: abundant holiness to thank Him for the gift of the Spirit - who is holy and makes us holy.

Stefania Consoli

Message to Mirjana, 2 April 2007:

“Dear Children, **don't be hard-hearted towards the mercy of God**, who has been pouring out upon you for so much of your time. In this special time of prayer, permit me to transform you. Help me, so my Son may resurrect in all hearts, and so my heart may triumph. Thank you.”

Our Lady added, “Do not forget that your Pastors need your prayers.”



Events of Medjugorje . . .

Together with **SR. HALINA** let's take a look at the little and big events of that small village in Herzegovina where with motherly patience and faithfulness and after nearly 26 years Our Lady continues to visit her children. Her children are those who live in Medjugorje, those who visit as pilgrims and also those whose pilgrimages are spiritual because they are unable to come here physically. **Sr. Halina** is a young religious from the Czech Republic and a member of the Kraljice Mira Community based in Medjugorje.

Before and After Easter

Preparing for Lent

Medjugorje is more tranquil and quieter in this Lenten season as parishioners and pilgrims (not great crowds, but there are some) take the time to look into their hearts and seek personal conversion.

The particularly significant time spent preparing for the most important Mass of the year (of the Resurrection) is indeed important as it leads us out of the shadows of death into the light of the life. So of course, around the church people can be seen **lining up for confession**. It is notable that on the faces of the penitents after their "encounter with the just and merciful God" one can see a renewed desire for God and a new joy born out of trust and gratitude. "... open your heart to God's mercy in this Lenten time. The Heavenly Father desires delivering each of you from the slavery of sin..." (message of 25.2. 2007).

Evening Holy Mass is lived as a "breath that blows away the ashes, lighting up the fire of divine life that desires running freely in those with open hearts" with the help of the readings and the Eucharist.

Many are the people who climb **Krizevac** (the hill of the Cross) to pray and meditate on the mystery of our salvation in a climate of penance, and the people are notably more serious, more silent and more immersed in their contemplation. One can also see in them a countenance of greater peace and strength. "*The two things for which I reprehended my disciples were: fear and sadness*" (anonymous mystic).

There are quite a few people who choose to climb Krizevac in the early morning, a time when nature is very suggestive with its play of shadow and lights which seems to invite us to lift our souls and hearts up, encouraged by the awakening of creation as the shadows of the night are dispersed by the rays of the rising sun which bring their light and warmth.

"*Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer all these things and enter into His glory?*" (Lk 24:26)

18/03 annual apparition to Mirjana

This is definitely a very important event for Mirjana and is often accompanied by



tears of joy, but also suffering. More than a thousand pilgrims gathered round her this year for the annual apparition of Our Lady who promised Mirjana - on the day of her last daily apparition - that she would come to her each year on her birthday. This year, on the occasion, Our Lady gave the following message:

"*Dear Children! I come to you as a Mother with gifts. I come with love and mercy. Dear children, mine is a big heart. In it, I desire all of your hearts, purified by fasting and prayer. I desire that, through love, our hearts may triumph together. I desire that through this triumph you may see the real Truth, the real Way and the real Life. I desire that you may see my Son. Thank you.*"

Our Lady concluded with the precious gift of her blessing, however, she emphasized that it is only Her Motherly blessing and She asked for daily prayers for those of whom She said: "My Son has chosen and blessed." Mirjana clarified that she thought Our Lady was referring to priests.

Annunciation of the Lord

After many days of intense rain a lovely warm sun is finally able to shine on the hill of our heavenly Mother, quickly drying up the muddy path and making the climb up easier for pilgrims on the day of the Annunciation (26 March).

Mary's role as Mother is very clear at Medjugorje. As the humble servant of the Lord, the most important thing of her life is to lead us to the Lord, and this is the reason behind the atmosphere of peace here at Medjugorje. The peace that the "Queen of Peace" brings us can be expressed with Psalm 131, which also gives us an image of Our Lady's humility and desire to serve God.

"*Lord, my heart is not proud, nor are my eyes haughty; I busy not myself with great things, nor with things too sublime for me. Nay rather, I have stilled and quieted my soul like a weaned child on its mother's lap, so is my soul within me.*"

Ever more pilgrims!

With Easter drawing close, the number of pilgrims coming to Medjugorje grows with every passing day, as though it were a Jerusalem of our times. The parish church can no longer contain the multitude of people within its walls...

Holy Week

The way the monks of Medjugorje generously remain available at the service of the faithful and the pilgrims is truly worthy of our admiration and gratitude. This place has become a great confessional for broken and humbled hearts endowed with sincere repentance. Holy Masses are celebrated continually for the crowds of people so that everyone might have the chance to participate with dignity in the life of our Saviour.

"*Offer your life at the foot of the cross, as Mary did, and you will become a servant of every man, a servant of love, a priest for mankind.*" These words from an Italian hymn express well the present atmosphere of Medjugorje.

Easter

"*Wake up from your sleep, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you*" (Eph 5:14)

Behold the power of the Risen Lord who calls us, who calls us every day in every situation of our daily lives. Behold the great and Holy night...

The joy of Easter rings out in hearts and every tongue sings "*Regina Coeli laetare*" – Queen of Heaven, rejoice! The Paschal joy will accompany us for the fifty days of the Easter liturgy.

St. James Parish Announces:

The **Summer Prayer Programme** schedule in Medjugorje began on May 1st. The Rosary in the Parish Church begins at 6.00 pm; Holy Mass at 7.00 pm, followed by the Prayer Programme according to the day of the week. Eucharistic adoration on Wednesdays and Saturdays is at 10.00 pm. Both the Rosary on Podbrdo and the Way of the Cross on Krizevac begin at 4.00 pm.

The **First Aid Station of the Order of Malta** from Cologne (Germany) and their associated volunteers resumed their annual service in Medjugorje on the 1st May. They will be at the service of the pilgrims and the parishioners until 1 November 2007. The Order of Malta invites any volunteers who wish to be involved in this service to contact them. <http://www.malteser.de>

Fr. Jozo: *On your altar place the Bible!*



When we read the Bible, the Spirit and life of God enter and act within us with greater strength. The reading of the Word of God is one of the foundations of the spiritual life. Without this foundation our life will have fragile, weak bases, and it will be a useless, fruitless

life. Our Lady has already asked us many times to place the Bible in a visible place in our homes. That "visible place" is the "family altar" in the living room where the family reunites every day to relax, converse and watch TV. We need to add to this list of activities a new one: a Christian family must have an "altar" around which it can gather together every day to listen to the Word of God and pray together as a family.

On that little table in your sitting room, put first of all a Cross: the Crucifix, the Teacher of love, from whom was born the family as a Sacrament. The Cross teaches us what love is. It says to us that love is giving one's life for the others, sacrificing oneself for the others; it says that love is forgiving everyone, especially our enemies. Love means to respond to the Father with the Lord's words: "... not as I want, but as You want!" (cf. Mt 26:39).

Next to the Crucifix place a statue or image of the Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. "Behold your mother!" (Jn 19:27) is the testament that continues throughout history and into the future, because it concerns each of us. We need to take the Mother into our own homes, as without her we cannot defeat the crafty enemy. And together with Her the family will find the shortest way to God.

On your family altar place also the family Bible, the Word of God. Each time you take it from the altar you will be able to hear the voice of the Father, just as the Disciples heard Him on Mount Tabor: "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him" (Mt 17:5).

On your altar keep your family Rosary to be used by whomever leads the prayer. On the altar place also some **blessed water**, and bless your home and the family at least once a week. We do it on a regular basis of a Saturday, at the end of the week.

Place on your altar also your **prayer book** and a **candle**. **Light the candle when you read the Bible**, for it is light for our path in our faith journey.

To gather together each day around your family altar is an important practice. Soon the entire family will become aware of a strength that keeps the family united and at peace. This altar, even after you have died, will remain as a sign for your children, and they will hold it as an unforgettable experience and certainty. They will always be able to say to themselves that they know where their parents received strength and found peace. They will know that they too can follow in the footsteps of their fathers.

(from a registration)

A Late Vocation Sr. Rita Marie Sofka, USA

In 1991 my father asked me to see a video of **MEDJUGORJE**. I always loved Our Blessed Mother and it was fascinating to hear that she was appearing in this country, and at the same time it bewildered me that no priest I knew had ever spoken about it. My father told me that it was a protestant man who made the tape. That evening there was a bad storm and I could not drive back to my home, so I spent the night at my parent's house. During the night I really felt Our Lady's presence in the room.

In 1993, after working 26 years, I got laid off from the company. They gave me a year off with a year's salary. The Sunday after when I noticed that my parish priest needed help I volunteered. The priest first asked me to come to daily Mass; then to accompany him to visit the sick; then he made me a minister of the Eucharist. He later asked me to teach catechism to the Confirmation class, and the next thing, to be a coordinator for Adoration. I signed up for my hour, but then I kept going, and staying longer: two hours, three hours, four hours... My friends wondered what I was doing in there, but I felt drawn to the Lord.

At the beginning of 1994 after a pilgrimage in Venezuela during which I experienced many extraordinary graces, I joined two Rosary Cenacles, one of which was a Medjugorje prayer group. In the meantime I had started working again, but I was much more interested by now in all that was spiritual; my whole life was changing, my interests were changing...

One night after a dinner with friends I began to ask myself what it was that God really wanted of me. In the months that followed I had a lot of signs about religious vocation, and I felt the Lord might have been calling me, but this made me angry at first because I was 49 by then and I didn't think anyone would take me. On my 50th birthday, at adoration, I asked the Lord that if it was true that He was calling me to the religious life to give me one more sign. That same evening I received my sign, and

a couple of weeks later, after I had said yes to Jesus, I was offered a pilgrimage to Medjugorje.

Whilst here I had the opportunity of speaking to **Fr. Slavko Barbaric**; I told him about feeling called to the religious life but that I felt I was too old. He encouraged me and gave me precious indications as to how to find the right community. He said: "If you were dating three men and you wanted to decide which man to marry, what would you do?" I said: "I would spend time with each of them to see if we were compatible." He said: "With religious life it is the same. There are three kinds of communities: totally apostolic: they work out in the world; totally contemplative: they pray all the time; and the combination of the two. So, where do you think you would go?" I said: "The last one. I love people, and I love the Lord." He said: "Then go back, visit the communities that are contemplative and apostolic. As you visit them, you will see if you have something in common spiritually, if you have this charisma. When you go to the right one, peace will come over you."

Then, back in the US I learnt of a group of Sisters whom I visited, but I soon realized they were very New Age: they wore blue jeans and didn't lead a community life. Instead, **I knew that I wanted to be in a habit, pray the Rosary, go to Adoration, and follow the Pope**. So it was when I got to visit the Sisters of Life in New York that I knew it was the right community. It was just like Fr. Slavko said: the minute I entered the door I felt this peace come over me.

My vocation is a gift. Our Blessed Mother planted the seed; she truly guided me to a right vocation. Sisters of Life take a fourth vow: to protect life from conception to natural death. We pray four and a half hours a day. By our fasting and our sacrifices, we can save babies. I always wanted to be a mother, to have children. In our community, we take care of pregnant mothers, so I have babies around me all the time! It is a spiritual motherhood! Everybody has his own vocation. Marriage is beautiful. But I found so much happiness as a religious!

(Excerpt from Mir Information Centre
Me ugorje www.medjugorje.hr)

Seminars / Meetings at Medjugorje

PRIESTS - 12th int'l seminar for priests in Medjugorje 2-7 July 2007 with theme: *With Mary in the Upper Room waiting for the Holy Spirit*. The preacher will be **Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa**. Subscriptions can be sent to Marija Dugandzic at the email address: seminar.marija@medjugorje.hr or by fax +387 36 651 999.

Priests are invited to book their own lodgings with families of Medjugorje, and to inform us upon subscription of the name, surname and phone number of the hosting family. Those priests who are unable to organize a lodging can ask us to help them and should mention this in their subscription. Cost of the seminar is to be covered by five Mass intentions.

YOUTH - 18th international youth meeting in Medjugorje 1-6 August 2007. Theme: *As I have loved you, so you should love one another*. The Blessed Mother said on 25 March 2005: "Dear Children, today I call you to love. My Children, love each other with God's love. The Risen Jesus will be with you and you will be his witnesses."

Married Couples - 8th int'l seminar for married couples, in Medjugorje 31 Oct - 3 Nov. 2007. Theme: *Dialogue in the Family* "Dear Children, I beg you: begin to change life in the family. May the family be a harmonious flower which I desire giving to Jesus." Send subscriptions to same address as above. Number of participants limited to space. Please book latest by end Sept.

“OFFER YOUR LIVES!”

A Fragile Body

by Ana Glasnovic

Beyond Death

by Stefania Caterina

It may seem strange to ask why we offer up our lives, what it is that urges us to undertake this journey. Starting from my own experience I can say that the donation of self begins with a sincere desire to no longer live for self, but for God. The true reason that urges a Christian to offer himself as a *“living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God”* (cf. Rm 12:1), should be to allow God to live and act in and through him. Without this fundamental decision for God, the offering of self remains vague and unfruitful. Our Lady at Medjugorje has called us numerous times in her messages to place God first, and I believe this means that God ought to govern our lives and be the sole fount of our being and doing. *“He must grow and I must diminish”* (Jn 3:30). We offer ourselves so we can belong to God, be in God, and be purified of every egoism and rebellion, the sad inheritance of the original sin.

We offer our lives to be transformed. Freed of every attachment and every aversion, stripped of ourselves and our ambitions, we become new creatures who trustingly surrender themselves to God. The Lord needs new creatures to make his new people, that is, the Church that lives according to his divine laws of love and that proclaim his salvation to the peoples. God can mould us only if we are pure. In fact I think it is impossible to proclaim his salvation when we are attached to ourselves and full of ideas and projects of our own. We would risk turning the Lord’s vineyard – where we have been called to work – into a sad stage of our own vanity.

Freed of egoism, we feel desirous to place ourselves at God’s disposal, for his plans. It couldn’t be any other way, because he who loves desires offering himself and offering his life to others.

We offer ourselves as a witness to life. How? By making manifest in ourselves the life that we received: *“something... that we have heard, and seen with our own eyes, watched and touched with our hands...”* (1 Jn 1).

In the foot steps of the Apostles we too become witnesses and heralds of the Word of life. With generosity we offer the wealth that God pours out; we become men and women of faith, hope and love. This probes consciences, and calls to life all those who are tired and discouraged. Our proclamation

becomes credible in the amount that we manage to witness life lived authentically. I think our society is overflowing with false announcements and empty promises, and badly needs an authentic witness of the truth. The sincere offering of oneself is what makes us credible.

There is an even more profound reason that urges us to offer our lives. We offer ourselves so we can participate in the work of Redemption. When we fully receive Jesus Christ in us and offer ourselves wholly to Him, we become His living members. He calls us to share with Him, on our crosses, the pain and sorrow of the world; to lift up to the Father the cry of humanity. He also calls us to make manifest the power of the Resurrection. This way we become light of Christ, the paschal light that divides every darkness and defeats death.

Jesus wants us close to His Heart; He wants to count on us; He wants to trust in us. He calls us to work for the good and the salvation of many, to lift up our gazes beyond the barriers of the earthly life; He wants to introduce us into the mystery of salvation. He can do this only if we offer Him our lives and leave Him free to act in us..

It is His love that gives us the strength to offer ourselves, and we can do nothing without Him. If we offer ourselves with sincerity and trust, then our love for God and for our neighbour will grow. Our self offering, then, helps us to enter into communion amongst ourselves and with the Church. Through becoming one with God, we become one body. Nothing, not even death, can break our communion with Christ and in Christ.

When we offer ourselves we already taste here on the earth the sweetness of the beatific life. Our lives take on deeper meaning and dignity. We are living creatures even when our daily existence includes pain, sorrow or death, because we have the capacity to go beyond death.

Personally I am infinitely grateful to God for having showed me this journey, for having called me to undertake it, and for having given me the strength to respond.. I cannot see for myself any other possibility of fulfilling my life beyond this vocation of self-donation. My task is to respond to the call which has infinite and unexpected turns to it, just as God’s love is infinite and surprising; as His ways are many and surprising, but of them lead to true happiness.

(End part 4. To be continued)

It was pleasing to God to mould me into a frail and delicate vase *“to reveal the richness of his glory and his mercy”* to his people (cf. Rm 9:23). When I started to experience physical pain, and the fragility of my body became more apparent, I didn’t want to accept it; I couldn’t see how it fitted into the meaning of my life. I first reacted with fear and reluctance. When despair grips at your heart you see suffering as an enemy or a thief who has come to steal what is most precious to you: your health. Thus, suffering is not accepted and becomes an unbearable burden that gradually crushes you. I knew that God loved me infinitely, and He alone could help me in this situation which from a human point of view was hopeless. The difficult condition into which I was plummeted made me pray ever more fervently in the hope that God would heal me and free me of this burden.

Time passed, but my health was not improving. I was caught by a strange fear; I thought that God had forsaken me. However, God never forgets us, and neither does He pay heed to our egoistic prayers and desires. I later understood that God had hidden Himself from me for a while so that my faith, hope and love could be strengthened. God is a good father, and in His goodness He grants us much more than what we think, but we refuse it or aren’t able to comprehend it.

It was thus that I could not comprehend God’s plan for me until I submitted to His will. When I had completely given in I was overcome by a great peace, and then the Lord gave me a clear response. It happened like this: One day I was in my room **praying with the Bible** (I have always found much consolation in its pages). I opened it and my gaze fell on chapter 11 of the Gospel according to John. I was amazed as I read: *“Lord, the one you love is sick. When Jesus heard this he said: ‘This sickness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it’”* (Jn 11:3-4). Though I knew this Gospel passage referred to the death and resurrection of Lazarus, at that moment I knew with certainty that those same words were being addressed to me.

An indescribable happiness came over me, and I could feel how Jesus’ words had really opened up the sepulchres that were within me: the sepulchres of fear, resistance, anger, vane expectations and impatience. Freed of these chains my soul was lifted up to God and felt fulfilled and appeased, for *“Your love for me has been so great; you have rescued me from the depths of Sheol”* (Ps 86:13). Thank you Lord because for me you have done much more than what I asked. You have healed my soul and you have prepared for me a body to be an altar worthy of You, and on this altar, next to Your sacrifice, You will offer also mine. *“You wanted neither sacrifice nor offering; a body instead you have prepared for me”* (Heb 10:5). When God reveals His plan of salvation for us, it is then that we comprehend how much our body – in all its sickness, weakness, sinfulness and limitations – is created for the glorification

“To love is so simple, but those who know the secret are rare indeed, even amongst religious. Love is real only when there is oblivion of self. Too often people love but themselves through those whom they think they love.”

Gaston Courtois

of God. **To accept suffering means to free ourselves of our egoistic will** so we can be united to God's will which gives meaning to our suffering. Being united to the divine will always leads to authentic peace and joy which make us happy even when we have to embrace our cross and come face to face with suffering. Suffering can be defeated only after our desire to be freed of it is destroyed. Then, suffering isn't a negative loss, but an immeasurable gain. □

ABBA' . . . PAPA

In a message for the prayer group in March 1985, Our Lady expressed the need to pray with meaning and not with superficiality when we pray the Lord's Prayer.

"This evening, try to place yourself closer to the Father when you pray to Him," saying that it is to Him that we must yearn every day; and for whom our heart must thirst every day. *"Remember that prayer is not really prayer until your heart is happy."*

We hope the following reflection might help.

OUR – do I make my faith manifest in my daily living?

FATHER – God has given Himself to me as Father; He has taken me as His child.

WHO ART IN HEAVEN – my heavenly Father loves me much more than the best earthly father could ever be capable of.

HALLOWED BY THY NAME - am I proud of His Name, do my deeds glorify His Name?

THY KINGDOM COME – am I ready to renounce my "kingdom" which passes, and accept the justice of God's kingdom which does not pass?

THY WILL BE DONE in my life now. Help me to believe and trust that YOU know better and act for the best.

ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN – is my heart open and willing to respect and serve God as the angels in Heaven do?

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD – we especially need from the Father bread for our souls, and to understand that our daily bread can't be given us without prayer.

FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US – am I holding a grudge, am I waiting for the other to change first? Father, we are not good, we are not faithful. Help us not to judge, help us to forgive.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION - Father, deliver us from the great trials. Father, we are weak. Father, may we not be led to perdition through our trials!

DELIVER US FROM EVIL - May we be able to see the good in our trials; may they help us take a step forward in life.

AMEN – Be it so! Thy will be done.

In the Mail Box

We have asked those readers who receive a single copy directly from us to confirm their interest, out of a need to begin a long-awaited control of our database (which contains thousands of names). Our thanks to everyone for taking the time to respond, and please bear with us if you had already recently confirmed.

Maria Vaglio, Italy: I am 81 years old and have trouble walking, but I always manage to get to the post office twice a year to send you my donation. I've been totally deaf for the last 14 years and at times this puts me down, but your paper helps me a lot, and is very important for me.

Sr. Rosanna, Turin: It is a great pleasure for me to receive the ECHO. I have no money to send you, but I will not fail to offer sacrifices and prayers. Forgive me for this, but I felt the need to write to say thank you because Echo is a great help to me.

Noemi, Udine: Thank you for your work. Each time I receive ECHO is like going on pilgrimage once again to Medjugorje. I read it and re-read it and find it so consoling. My donation is on its way.

Fr. G. Grasso, Brindisi: I understand the economical problems, however, I continue to need to receive the paper edition of ECHO. I assure you that I contribute with a donation a couple of times a year, and above all, by praying for you.

Maria Cavallini, Pisa: Dear ECHO, ... I've lost both my parents; I live with my 13 year old cat. I'm 39. With all my heart I ask you to continue sending me your ECHO. I NEVER throw it away because it is so beautiful and teaches me so much...

Sr. Dalila, missionary in Cameroon: I wish to thank you for having sent me ECHO for so many years. I had the chance to live in Medjugorje for three years, so to receive your paper is very important to me. When I read it I feel closer to that blessed land and to Our Lady in particular.

Teresa O'Farrell, Argentina: The Echo of Mary is fabulous. I read it and re-read it, pray with it, and then I pass it on to others. I get it from a friend. Congratulations.

"From your throne of mercy, where you are seated as Queen, turn, O Mary, your compassionate gaze upon us, upon our families... May you take pity on us amidst the trials and tribulations which make bitter our lives. Behold, O Mother, how many dangers in body and soul, and how many calamities and afflictions press upon us... **O Blessed Rosary of Mary, sweet Chain linking us to God,** bond of love uniting us with the Angels, tower of salvation against the attacks of hell, sure harbour in the common shipwreck, we shall never leave your side. You shall be our comfort in the hour of agony; to you the last kiss of life as it slowly fades away..."

(Bartolo Longo, from the petition to the Virgin of the Rosary of Pompei)

Gospa's Messenger

I wonder if you realize how far ECHO travels. Almost unexplainably, it reaches far away lands. It is read in Oceania, in the Americas, in Asia, Africa and Europe. It is read in many countries of the five continents, and for this it is translated into many languages. There are at least 16 language editions, but we know that it is also used by missionaries in various parts of the world to deliver homilies or reflections – written or verbal - in local dialects.

So Mary's messages reach many parts of the world by means of this little instrument. Thus, as a messenger of Mary it carries her motherly words to lands that thirst for words of life. Perhaps Mary rejoices over this little paper that brings to numerous of her children her words of hope, consolation and trust, and that manifests to many the sentiments of her Motherly Heart.

This work is possible also thanks to you, to your prayers and the support you give to this messenger. Let us also remember in our prayers Sister Stefania who works hard and with love as editor of our Echo.

Perhaps our Blessed Mother will thank us for helping her a little in the realization of Her plan in the world.

May Mary bless us and keep us!

Pietro Squassabia

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"Fasting, prayer and almsgiving, express conversion in relation to self, to God and to others. Means of obtaining forgiveness of sins include: efforts at reconciliation with one's neighbour, tears of repentance, concern for the salvation of one's neighbour, the intercession of the saints, and the practice of charity 'which covers a multitude of sins'" (CCC 1434-5).

The Lord bless thee and keep thee! May he show his face to thee and have mercy on thee! May he turn his countenance to thee and give thee peace!

don Alberto

Italy, 8 May 2007 - Our Lady of Pompei