



Our Lady's message, 25 September 2007:

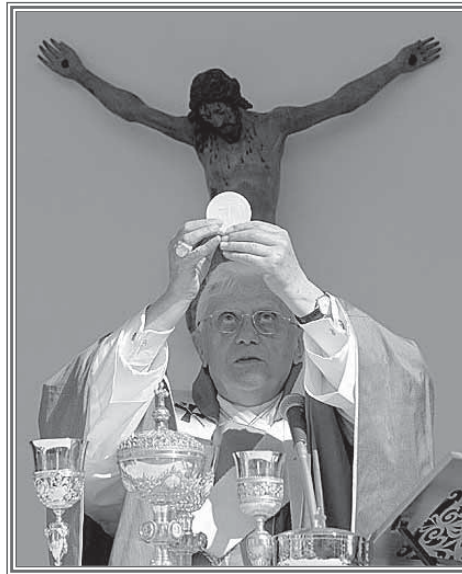
"Dear Children, Also today I call you to inflame your hearts ever more ardently with love for Jesus Crucified; and do not forget that out of love for you He gave His life so that you may be saved. My Children, meditate and pray that your heart may open to God's love. Thank you for responding to my call."

Hearts Enflamed with Love For Jesus Crucified

He is here for the ruin and rising of many in Israel, as a sign of contradiction, that thoughts of many hearts may be laid bare (cf. Lk 2:34-35). From the moment of Jesus' presentation at the Temple, the words with which Simeon addressed Mary continue to resound, day after day, in the history of mankind, and will continue to do so till when *God will be everything in everyone* (cf. 1 Cor 15:28).

Before Crucified Jesus there is no reasoning or human logic that can stand. All our paper castles collapse; the limits of our thoughts are laid bare. *When I shall be lifted up, I will draw everyone to me, says Jesus* (Jn 12:32). It really wouldn't take much to let oneself be immersed in that Love, to allow oneself to be drawn to Him and disappear in that open Heart. All it would take is our *YES*, like the one pronounced by Mary; and yet how much resistance we put up, and changing of mind, and humming and hawing. We raise walls of difficulty between us and God, between our cult and Love. Yet, perhaps Jesus Crucified still moves us, only it is an occasional thing, tied to particular liturgical moments, crushed by a thousand other occupations, submersed by our duties: social, family, even religious duties. Perhaps there is still space for Crucified Jesus in our life; but do we know how to recognize Him when the cross upon which Jesus is laid is not the traditional one, or when it weighs heavily on our own shoulders?

"I call you to inflame your hearts ever more ardently with love for Jesus Crucified," Mary urges us rather strongly I would say, as she is inviting us to burn with love; and with that same Love of Jesus; indeed, with Jesus Himself. Otherwise, (our love) remains but a case of alms-giving, an offering, a mite; and this is even worse for it gratifies and dulls the conscience. Jesus Crucified is a *sign of contradiction* for all: for Christians, non-Christians, believers, and non-believers alike. One can be indifferent,



"In God who becomes man for us, we all feel loved and welcome; we discover that we are precious and unique in the eyes of the Creator"

Benedict XVI

or be moved; be hostile or feel admiration; however, for as long as one remains not converted, the differences are insignificant. Vane is the death of a God if all it can wrench from us is a tear or two that run down the cheeks without changing us. Yet God is being patient with us all, wanting *nobody to be lost, and everybody to be brought to change his ways* (cf. 2 Pt 3:9).

If we believe in his Love, repentance should come spontaneously; with sincerity: **"Do not forget that out of love for you He gave His life so that you may be saved. My Children, meditate and pray that your heart may open to God's love."** Mindful of this unconceivable reality, of God who becomes man and takes upon himself the sin of the world, dying a shameful death for love of us, how can we remain closed to so much Love!? Let us open our hearts with trust; the Father awaits us, He is ready to welcome us back and endow us anew with the dignity of being His children.

If you think you've wasted all your occasions, and you think you don't deserve forgiveness, run to the Father! Even if your life has been spent sowing death, run to the Father! Offer Him yourself, just as you are, and you will find yourself transfigured in Jesus Christ. And if you have spent your life serving the Father, remain in His house. Open your heart before Jesus Crucified, humbly imploring His Spirit to infuse you with awe and gratitude, and especially with love. Peace and joy in Jesus and Mary.

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Our Lady's message 25 October 2007:

"Dear Children, God sent me in your midst out of love; to lead you to salvation. Many of you have opened your heart and accepted my messages, but many have lost their way, and have never known with all their heart the God of Love. For this reason I call you to be love and light where there is darkness and sin! I am with you and I bless you all. Thank you for responding to my call."

Be Love and Light

In Mary God became Man; through Mary He came amongst men. In Mary the infinite distance between God and man because of original sin, is annulled. Now, God can abide in man; and the communion between the two takes on new profundity, it becomes real, even tangible. St. Paul was moved to say, in fact: *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"* (Gal 2:20). Mary is the privileged Place for the encounter between God and man. It is in her that we can more easily encounter God, just as many great saints over the centuries have acclaimed, and as the Catholic Church has always taught.

"God sent me among you out of love to lead you to salvation." These words of Mary tells us about the role assigned to her by God in His plan of salvation. The moment she pronounced her *fiat* before the Archangel Gabriel, Mary became the Place of encounter between Creator and human creature, Mother of the Man who crushes the head of Satan (cf. Gen 3:15), the Arc of universal salvation. In Mary man finds not only his lost dignity, but he acquires a new one, for now he is the son of God, now he can call God *Father*, and receive His embrace as a *true son in His Son, Jesus Christ*.

Why marvel at Mary's apparitions and their intensity? Wouldn't it be normal that her work be intensified so hearts can be prepared for when Her Son returns? It is the Love of God that saves us, but is not Mary the most pure expression of this Love? When she brought God into the midst of men she made a decisive contribution to the salvation of mankind; and today she is still being used by God **to lead us to salvation**. Once again, it is her yes to Love that opens the way to salvation.

Yet, despite the power of her intervention and intercession, our will has the stupendous and tremendous power to refuse the Father's Love that she offers us in Jesus. **"Many of you have opened your heart and accepted my messages, but many have lost their way, and have never known with all their heart the God of Love,"** today Mary tells

us. This immediately brings to mind the parable of the sower (cf. Mk 4:1-20) which makes us understand that it isn't enough to start out, not even if full of enthusiasm.

It isn't enough to **open one's heart**; it must be kept open, and opened up ever more so that Jesus can fill it with His Love. It isn't enough to **accept Mary's messages**; they must be lived and applied, so we can be transformed by them. Not an easy thing to do; it takes effort, self-denial and humility. It requires drawing frequently from the Sacraments, especially Confession and the Eucharist. It takes unreserved surrender to God's Will.

To be love and light where there is darkness and sin requires holiness of life, and letting oneself be guided by the Holy Spirit in every occasion and circumstance to be able to repeat after Paul: "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me*" (Gal 2:20). Then we will know God's love with all our heart, and the fullness of His love will pour out onto those who grope in the dark, and His light will disperse every seduction, crush every sinful thought, eliminate every fear of God, and mistrust in Him, and creatures will be reunited to the Creator, so that *when the Son of Man comes back, he will find faith on the earth* (cf. Lk 18:8). NQ

498 Blesseds for Spain

An historical beatification ceremony took place the 28th October, when the Church raised to the glory of the altar almost 500 martyrs killed during the religious persecution in Spain in the 1930's. "This beatification is an extraordinary event; a reminder that the testimony of martyrs is a great sign of hope," said Fr. Camino, spokesperson for the Spanish Episcopal Conference. They "keep alive in us the hope that their testimony is stronger than the supposed power and manifest violence of the false prophets, with their vain promises of paradise on earth and with their atheism."

The tremendous religious persecution during the 1930's in Spain is only a part of the great persecution felt by Christians of all confessions during the XX century all over the world, particularly in Europe. There were many people assassinated in Spain, during the '30s, before, during and after the Civil War. Those who were assassinated expressly and specifically because they did not want to renounce their faith and their fidelity to Christ and the Church, are martyrs.

[Today's blesseds] were not at war with anyone, and they died giving a testimony of love and forgiveness of those who were taking their lives only because they were Catholic," affirmed Mons. López, bishop of Salamanca. By beatifying them "the Church doesn't want to accuse anyone. Instead, she wants to offer them to today's believers as models of fidelity, and to today's Spanish society as a call to reconciliation and peace through love and forgiveness."

What was most notable in the lives of those beatified is "the mix of strength, and at the same time humility, with which they accepted the tragic situation of having to choose between their lives or their fidelity to God and the Church," said Fr Camino.

FATIMA: ninety years of grace

Precisely ninety years ago at Fatima the Virgin Mary appeared to the three shepherd children to give them important revelations for mankind. The events are well known by us all. It is a story, it seems, that is only partially concluded. We know some things have come to be. In Medjugorje, Mary said "I desire concluding that which I began in Fatima."

The celebrations this year followed one another in a crescendo, and came to a conclusion on the 14th October with Holy Mass being presided over by Card. Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State. He recalled the last of the apparitions: "Conversion, change of life, abandonment of sin, reparation for the brethren who offend God: this is Fatima," he said in his homily before the thousands of pilgrims.

At the end of Mass there was the live telecast of the *Angelus* with the Holy Father from Rome. "In Fatima, for ninety years now, the appeals of the Virgin Mother continue to echo, calling Her children to live their own

baptismal consecration at every minute of their lives," said Benedict XVI.

"Everything becomes possible and easier if we live that entrustment to Mary made by Jesus Himself on the Cross, when He said: "Woman, behold Your son!" She is the refuge and the way which leads to God," stressed the Pontiff who called all the faithful "to personally renew their consecration to Mary's Immaculate Heart" saying the daily recitation of the Rosary is a tangible sign of that consecration.

At Fatima, as we know, the Virgin presented herself as *Our Lady of the Rosary*, insisting strongly that we **recite the Rosary every day** to obtain the end of the war. For this reason, in his Angelus message of the 7th Oct. (feast day of Our Lady of the Rosary) the Pope invited everyone to recite the Rosary for peace in the families and the world. "Our Lady has asked for this in various of her apparitions," he explained. "The Rosary is a means given us by the Blessed Virgin to contemplate Jesus, and through meditating upon His life, to love and follow Him ever more faithfully."

Redazione

I was there...

The name alone of Fatima probably makes most of us think of a far-away place, however, the mention of the White Lady of Fatima certainly warms hearts as they think of the Immaculate Heart of the Mother.

Personally, this year has been one of great grace: on the 90th anniversary of the Fatima apparitions I celebrated my 25th priestly ordination anniversary. Being there on the 13th October (the anniversary date of the sixth apparition by Mary to Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco) is to enter into a vortex of light that calls to mind the miracle of the sun on that same date in 1917; a vortex that lifts the soul up to God and makes it attentive to the needs of others.

What struck me the most during my pilgrimage to Fatima? What remained most impressed in my heart when I contemplated the sweet yet sad face of the ever Virgin Mary? I wish I knew the language of the angels, or possessed the style of St. Bernard to describe my impressions. I can only speak merely as one whose heart is in love with Our Lady, and whose heart feels immensely loved by her in return.

I was impressed immediately by the simplicity and sobriety of everything, from the protagonists, to the messages, the image of the Virgin, and even the environment. There is sobriety everywhere, and a climate of penitence and reparation. The Gospel of the Mass in honour of Our Lady of Fatima, that tells of the crucifixion of Jesus, concludes with: "*and the disciple took her into his own home.*" **What fascinated me the most was seeing how Jesus continues to give us His Mother**, and continues to entrust us to her: the sweetest of mothers. It is often said that the way to Christ is through Mary, and this is true, but in that blessed place, Jesus also gave us the wonderful gift of her immaculate heart: Mary truly concerns herself over us and intercedes on our behalf!

With the sobriety of the protagonists, I mean how the three children were drawn and fascinated by the "Lady who was brighter than the sun" and tried to **satisfy her request for prayer and reparation** in everything, from simply foregoing a drink, or giving their snack to someone who was without, to the more heroic gesture of accepting their death at such an early age, and the suffering it entailed, and **being happy to thereby console the hearts** of Mary and Jesus. Then, there's the **essentiality of the messages** and the determination and incisiveness of the images, such as the vision of hell, and the sacrifice - even to death - of the many faithful priests and even the Pontiff. There is also a **discretion and respect** that accompanies everything.

The heart of it is the call to love and honour Mary's Immaculate Heart, and out of love to make acts of reparation to atone for the many offences. Devout pilgrims making their way down the plaza on their knees, and the revered silence at the Chapel of apparitions speaks the message out loud. Pilgrims' eyes, often damp with tears, are drawn almost magnetically to the "white figure" in front of the Chapel: the Image of Our Lady. The heart is ravished by her humble and sad, yet motherly gaze. Though she sits on a Queen's throne one is drawn by the tenderness and attentive gaze of this Mother of humility.

What is it in the Mother that attracts so much? What does she give that makes you go home so full of peace? What is it that binds you to her so tenderly? It is the chain of the Rosary: a simple means for the simple of heart, in Paul VI's words. **Tis the secret of Fatima.** Tis being closely united to the Most Holy Trinity through the intercession of the Immaculate Heart of a Mother who desires the good of each of her children. Thank you, Holy Trinity, fount of every gift; thank you for Mary, the most beautiful and holy gift you could have given us.

Fr. Ludovico Maria Centra, Augustinian

THE LITANIES

by Fr. Ludovico Maria Centra

A reflection on the Litanies, part two.

In the previous edition of Echo I imagined the Litanies as a lovely garden and every title or invocation as flowers that enhanced Mary's beauty. This time I want to consider three of the titles that are found at the centre of the long list of invocations. I have skipped the others, not because they are not beautiful or meaningful, but because they are more easily comprehensible. Before I begin to attempt to interpret these three titles, I think a little explanation is due to help us benefit as much as possible from the "spiritual nectar" they contain.

The series of invocations that make up the Litanies are expressions of **images and symbols** to illustrate the virtues and prerogatives of the Mother of God. I like to make a distinction between image and symbol. An image is a tangible or visible representation of something. A symbol is an object that evokes a reality that would be otherwise difficult to define in abstract terms. I think we modern-day people have lost the meaning enclosed within the images and symbols, but it wasn't so when the Gospels were written or for the antique times in general. Jesus himself used images, though he preferred the use of parables which are confrontations made with aspects of everyday life.

The images in the Litanies are drawn from the Old Testament and are thus doubly significant. There is the meaning which comes from the image itself and the meaning which comes from the use or the elements connecting it to Holy Scripture. We must remember to keep this in mind when trying to understand them. It should be noted that the images and the symbols of the litanies are accompanied by very meaningful biblical-spiritual attributions.

MIRROR OF JUSTICE

All the virtues were reflected in her soul as in a mirror: humility, chastity, meekness, patience, mercy, faith, hope, charity. She perfectly mirrored the image of her Son. In biblical language justice is the perfect observance of God's commandments. Mary responded perfectly to God's will, thus she is the reflection, or mirror, of God's own holiness; she is the mirror of justice.

When Mary, the all beautiful, looked into her heart she recognized that everything was a gift from God; she saw how He was the fount of everything that is good and beautiful. Thus Mary was able to say in the Magnificat: "My soul doth magnify the Lord." Mary mirrors God: His justice, His mercy, His love, His beauty.

SEAT OF WISDOM

"Seat" invokes the word throne. Mary bore the King; she received and offers us the Word. So, as the seat of wisdom, we mean she who receives wisdom and she who possesses wisdom.

Wisdom is the virtue that connects man's

SIMPLE THOUGHTS by Pietro Squassabia

The Littlest One

Born of a woman, he became a little babe for love of us. All during his life he became little for love of us; and he used every possible opportunity, according to a plan of love. To come down to the earth Jesus was born of a woman, and with this he was able to be called the son of man, even though he was the son of God. So that he could be poor, the hotel was full, and he was born in a stable. To be proclaimed to the people he used the mouths of shepherds, and in those days shepherds were looked down upon. To carry out his daily life he chose to be the son of a carpenter, and in those days carpentry was a humble occupation. During his lifetime he didn't make a house, so that he could say: *foxes have their dens and birds their nests, but the Son of man doesn't have anywhere to lay down his head*. He didn't gather up treasures on the earth, but only in heaven from where thieves cannot steal; and he suggested to his followers to do the same.

During his lifetime he preferred humble and simple things. Even when they asked him who the greatest in the kingdom of heaven was, he called to himself a child, saying that unless we become like him we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven; to make us understand that we can be similar to him through being little. One day, perhaps because he saw that the people around him were tired and oppressed, he said: "*Learn from me; I am meek and humble of heart. And you shall find rest for your souls*" (Mt 11:28). We know that meekness and humility are qualities that belong to the little and the poor. And he made himself little and poor all through his life, out of love for us. "*He was rich but he became poor for you sake, to make you rich out of his poverty*," says St. Paul (2 Cor 8:9).

Jesus became the littlest and the poorest of all, so that no one could say he was littler or poorer than Him. In this way, we can all become rich with Him. That is why Jesus is the first poor man whom we ought to serve, and for the same reason we should always see Him in every person who is in need of material or spiritual help. Perhaps this is the only way we can give very much to the others. Mother Teresa of Calcutta used to say: "We give too little to the others if we do not give them God."

In this child born in a stable we see only the beginning of the goodness and sweetness of our Lord and Saviour; of the Love that Jesus will bestow upon us for ever and ever. So let us pray that we be granted to become similar to Jesus and know how to give Him to others. Perhaps this is what the newborn Child desires too.

Wind Jacket

What could it be, this *icy wind* that gets into the heart and soul of one who seeks the Lord? It is real, and shouldn't be shrugged off, this contrary "wind" that freezes the spirit. I mean strong, freezing wind, that gets into your bones and makes you feel miserable. On days like these what you need are warm clothes and a really good wind jacket. The effect of prayer can be compared to this wind jacket. Prayer is what makes us be able to bear the wind. Perhaps this is why Mary continually calls us to pray.

The Rosary is like a very cosy wind racket that protects us from the cold. Its strength should not be under-estimated. Thank you, Mary, for being the golden house with impenetrable walls that stop the wind from entering; and thank you for making room for all of us. Thank you, Jesus, for teaching us to pray; and thank you because you are our Prayer, our defence against the *icy wind*.

deeds and thoughts to God, unlike today's man who places his strength in the human sciences (history, psychology, pedagogy, sociology).

For a believer, true wisdom is to look upon God and in his heart meditate on how to imitate God. Mary possessed and practiced this true wisdom in the highest degree. Mary is the "seat" because she bore within her the Incarnate Word, and also because, having decided to become a disciple of the Son of God, she acquired the wisdom that makes one desire living according to God's will.

May we imitate the Virgin and listen, meditate and live the eternal Word who will grant wisdom to our heart as we journey along the paths of life.

CAUSE OF OUR JOY

Mary is cause, or reason, or fount of our joy. In the Old Testament "fount" or "font" indicates a place where an indispensable gift (such as water) is made manifest for man,

and it is also – or perhaps we could say it becomes – a place of encounter. The fount, or fountain if we wish to consider water as our example, is the visible part of something that though it is present, is not visible. Water that gushes from the tap is not born of the tap, but comes from very far away. However, the fountain is the place where water is made manifest. Mary is the "place" where the joy of being full of God is made manifest clearly and abundantly.

The Christian experience of joy is not a second rate experience; neither is it an attempt to hide the difficulties of life. Joy is a reality. It's what makes man say that God is infinite joy and satisfaction and well being despite the evil and wickedness of man and of Satan, man's worst enemy.

When Mary gave birth to the Son of God, she became the fount that showed the world the "mystery hidden for centuries", and this is reason to **warm our hearts and make them leap for joy**, a joy that shall never end.

A Life in the Shape of a Cross

by Stefania Consoli

The piazza is crowded. The people are buzzing with curiosity. There's a young man, whom everyone knows because he's the son of a wealthy merchant, and very popular of his own account with his peers: here he is, having taken off all his clothes he is now laying each piece of his sumptuous garments in the arms of his father who is astonished and confused by such an unusual, even theatrical, gesture.

"To date I have called you my father on earth; from now on I can say with certainty: Our Father, who art in heaven, for in Him I have put my every treasure; in Him I have placed my trust and my hope." (Franciscan Fonts 1043) This was the first public announcement that **Francis, a young man from Assisi**, had made regarding his radical conversion from the reckless young man that he was to the saint we all know and love.

Without beauty, without majesty, no looks to attract our eyes (Is 53:2)

Francis had recently discovered those words in the Gospel that are able to shatter our weak human certainties. "Sell everything and give it to the needy... love those who persecute you..." he had read, and he decided to follow these words to the letter, without compromise, without comfortable adaptations. God, and God alone. His Word, nothing else...

Francis was generous, he always had been, lavishing out generously upon his friends with banquets and else. This generosity followed him into the new life he was about to begin, and he gave himself over totally to his God of "beauty, justice, peace, and security... Our fill of sweetness."

It happened eight hundred years ago and was the beginning of a way that endless streams of people would continue to walk along – men and women, laypersons and religious – that over the centuries have desired following in the steps of Francis, to be at least a little like him.

He emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave ... (Phil 2:7)

What was the secret of this man with such an ingenuous and disarming attitude, with rags on his back and bare feet? Of this man, who though he had much had become nothing so he could have Everything? What shape had his life taken that made him so popular?

It was the shape of a **cross**, and **Francis had sewn it onto himself**. He wore it symbolically in his tunic which was cut out in the shape of a cross, as if to say that he lived in the cross and took it with him

wherever he went to preach. So he wore the cross on his back, as a sign for others to see. Yet much more profound was his inner degree of conformity to the cross from which Christ himself had once spoken to him in the antique church of San Damiano. "Go and repair my house..." he had said; and Francis went.

Young Francis had understood that to repair the tumbling walls of the Church, threatened by a spirit of power and wealth that drew people away from the evangelical essence of her beginnings, he would have to make

recourse to the same means of salvation proposed by the Messiah: **the cross**. (Salvation, not foolishness! Cf. 1 Cor 1:25). So he didn't hesitate to **strip himself of everything**, but truly everything, to choose a poverty which meant that often he would experience hunger pangs. What mattered to him was that people should know that being freed of material goods meant to be able to obtain the true Good. It was the teaching of Jesus who became flesh: he emptied himself of his divine wealth to become weak amongst the weak, and bring us freedom.

They pierced my hands and my feet

The life he had embraced led Francis ever closer to his Model; so much so that he experienced the Passion of Christ; and the signs of this Passion were impressed into his body to make him similar to Christ Crucified. This profound experience was granted him from On High, however, the merit of letting himself be continually crucified in an invisible, but real way was his, as he willingly handed up his own rights to God. In whatever circumstance he considered himself the least, which is why with the nails of humiliation he pierced his natural human pride and vanity and the lusts of the flesh. And as Jesus with arms stretched out over the cross gathered up into his pierced heart the decadent world, Francis - the universal brother - overcame his natural inclinations and to all: the good and the bad, the beautiful and the repugnant, he offered the embrace of Christ.

Today you will be with me in paradise (Lk 23:43)

With his eyes fixed on Jesus Crucified, who knows how many times Francis must have contemplated those crucial moments when Jesus saved the world! On the wood

where He died, Jesus had expressed the summit of his mediation between sinners and the Father; **with the offering of his life** he created the **bridge of reunification** that had been destroyed by sin. Jesus wanted every man to be with him in paradise, and for this he offered himself in ransom.

Francis, too, burned with desire to see everyone in paradise.

One day after bitterly weeping over the poor, unfortunate sinners, he received an apparition. He took courage and begged the Lord that all sinners visiting the church (Portiuncula) and confessing their sins with a contrite heart might receive full pardon. Jesus granted it, and ordered Francis to present this request to his vicar. What Francis was asking of Pope Honorius III was a new kind of indulgence. The Portiuncula indulgence was the first plenary

indulgence that was ever granted in the Church. *"I do not want years, but souls... every one visiting the church and there confessing his sins with a contrite heart to be as pure from all sin and punishments as he was immediately after baptism..."* To gain the Portiuncula indulgence is to obtain the remission of the temporal punishments that one would be obliged to atone for either here or in Purgatory, and one can, if he sins no more, go immediately to heaven after his death. After the Pope had come to the conviction that Jesus Christ himself wished it, he confirmed the indulgence. When the church was consecrated, Francis greatly rejoiced: *"I want to send you all to heaven!"* (Indulgence subsequently extended by Popes to all parish churches, to be gained on first Sunday of August.)

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit

With these words he breathed his last: says St. Luke in his account of Jesus' last earthly moments upon the cross when he surrendered up his life to the Father and was thus able to fulfil the new Passover. His surrender was total, and full of trust in the divine plan for eternal resurrection. It was because of this surrender and full trust that he was able to accept divine will to the very end, even when his body was lacerated and he was immersed in pain and sorrow.

This same surrender and trust was typical of the young man from Assisi, even and especially in the face of great adversity and contrariness. In every situation he entrusted his own life and that of his brethren to the Father. It is not difficult to see then, how Francis could face *sister death* with song on his lips, and consider it entirely normal. He, the "poverello" of God, could do it because he had assimilated the cross till it allowed his soul and heart to soar upwards into the heavens.



"The sacrament of Baptism grants a Christian the strength to enable him to listen to and progressively comprehend the Word of God. It is a gift from on High. Only the Word of God can heal, deter, liberate, and generate one into the life in Christ." (G. Dossetti 1913-1996)

REPORTING FROM MEDJUGORJE ...

FLOW OF PILGRIMS CONTINUES

This past summer in Medjugorje has seen the greatest number of pilgrims to date. Now autumn is well underway and here in this land blessed by Mary the number of pilgrims does not seem to diminish. This can be seen also by the traffic of cars and buses, with number plates from far and wide, and by the amount of people seen coming and going to St. James, especially of a morning when Holy Mass is celebrated in various different languages.

On the new screen set up next to the information office the message of the 25th alternates with the list of Eucharistic celebrations, which lately is particularly long. From this list we also see the countries of origin of the pilgrims. Lately these have been Romania, Hungary, Poland, Latvia, Portugal, Spain, and Lebanon, besides the Koreans and Americans who seem to be always present.

With summer over, the flow of Croatians has also resumed, many of whom come to visit this place of grace of a weekend. On Saturdays, one notices the arrival of the many buses from various parts of Croatia. Both Podbrdo and Krizevac are particularly busy with visiting pilgrims on Saturday mornings: people who either alone or in groups and with great devotion entrust to our Blessed Mother everything that bears down on their hearts.

WE CAN ALL IMPROVE

In one of her messages Mary said how Medjugorje was meant to be a place where hearts could meet, and it is precisely when pilgrims are so numerous and diverse that extra effort is required so that each can find in this shrine a place of prayer where it is possible to meet the living God, and Our Lady truly present. About a year ago a sign saying "silencium" (silence) was planted on both Podbrdo and Krizevac. It is mostly the

big groups that perhaps don't realize that when they pray together aloud, they are disturbing others in silent meditation.

It saddens me to see how some people seem to totally ignore those next to them, as if only their own prayer were important. And there are some who seem to photograph everything and everyone, and even a monk or nun in prayer becomes a souvenir, something to immortalize and take back home.

The saddest thing I find is the apparent lack of respect for Holy Mass being celebrated in foreign languages when groups of people come in to pay homage before the statue of Our Lady, all the time seemingly ignoring the living presence of Jesus on the altar. I imagine they think that because the Mass is in another language it doesn't regard them, mindless of the Lord's sacrifice which is unveiled before us. "What we have in the Mass is not simply a recalling of events-gone-by. Somehow, says the Church, in this act we find the scrim [veil] between time and eternity, or between earth and heaven, or between the seen and the unseen, has been drawn back; we really are in a mystery – we really are at the Lord's own table, like the Disciples in the Upper Room; and at the cross, with Mary and John; and in the heavenlies, with the angels and archangels and the whole company of saints..." (Thomas Howard: "If Your Mind Wanders at Mass").

BISHOP'S VISIT

On Sunday, 23 Sept. Bishop Ratko came to Medjugorje for the official nomination of the new parish priest, Fr. Petar Vlasic', who had taken over this important role already during the summer months. Fr. Petar renewed the promises he made at his priestly ordination, vowing to be faithful to the holy Gospel and to the holy Church of God. Symbolically, he received from the hands of the bishop the keys of the tabernacle: centre of the life and faith of the parish.

you: those ever more pressing and oppressive demands which seem so indispensable but in reality lead to nothing. As soon as you arrive you become aware of "something": a feeling of being made welcome, of being a child needy of comfort and shelter. Then, gradually, as you proceed along the way of prayer, you feel the falling away of the junk that ties you down to the earth, and the unfolding of inner wings that imperceptibly, but really do lift up the soul into a dimension of peace, serenity and love.

At Medjugorje, indeed, you feel especially and greatly loved. You feel it in a personal way, without the need to put on masks to feel accepted. At last, you can be yourself. Things seem to become more harmonious; everything falls into place. This feeling of profound peace - which many "can't find words to describe" - though important, is not the most important aspect. It would **not be correct to reduce Medjugorje** to the sphere of feelings alone, even though these are considered as



As many pilgrims from around the world know, the bishop has still not opened his heart to the truth of the Medjugorje apparitions. Also on this occasion he was not very benevolent towards the monks or parishioners, but left a sense of bitterness. This

made everyone more aware of the need to become an even more convinced witnesses of Mary's presence, knowing that God will do the rest.

Br. Francesco

MIRJANA,

2ND OF MONTH MESSAGES

2 Oct. 2007: "Dear Children, Join me on the mission God has entrusted me with; come along with an open heart and total trust! This way of mine along which I lead you to God is difficult, but persevere and in the end we shall all rejoice in God. Therefore, my Children, do not stop praying for the gift of the faith. Only through faith can the Word of God be light in this darkness that wants to envelop you. Do not fear: I am with you. Thank you."

2 Nov. 2007: "Dear Children, Today I call you to open your heart to the Holy Spirit and to permit Him to transform you. My children, God is the supreme good and therefore, as a mother, I implore you: pray, pray, pray, fast and hope that it is possible to attain that good, because love is born of that good. The Holy Spirit will reinforce that love in you and you will be able to call God Father. Through this supreme love, you will sincerely love all people and in God you will consider them brothers and sisters. Thank you."

With her blessing Our Lady added: "On the way on which I lead you to my Son, those who represent Him walk beside me"

Mary Continues to Call Us

It was full of pilgrims this year at Medjugorje; with persons of every sort, nationality and tongue; some of whom had come alone, others in groups; some had come for the first time, while others felt quite at home. "We have never seen so many! In the summer months alone the number of pilgrims exceeded the usual annual presence," said one of the nuns who assist at the Shrine.

Despite the very high temperatures that made climbing the hills an almost heroic act, pilgrims moved about amongst the "cardinal" points of the little town with ease. What was it that made them so vital, so **ready to accept sacrifice**? Certainly not the promise of commodity or flattery; they were moved solely by the desire to encounter Mary, the mother who had called them and for each of whom she had prepared special gifts of grace, healing and conversion.

You usually arrive here **loaded down with the baggage** the world has thrown on

indicators of what is happening deep down. The most important thing to keep in mind is the powerful **touch of grace** which is able to reach the heart and begin a gradual process of sincere transformation and conversion.

It is our Holy Mother who calls us to that land, blessed by her presence; she knows us one by one, she knows our life-story, she knows what's in our heart – the good and the bad. Mary wants to heal the wounds that have built up within us over the years, and in particular to free us of all the negative reactions that have arisen as a defence to the open wounds. Often, those who seem bad to us, bear deep wounds within the heart, and their bad behaviour is a type of defence. Mary teaches us that the bad in us and in the world can be **healed with love**, comprehension and forgiveness. If we respond to her call, and follow her voice, we too will learn how to use this love towards our neighbour whom we perhaps have judged without truly knowing him or his situation.

Sr. Stefania

“TRUST ME”

It all started with a weekend in April in 2003. It was the Sunday after Easter, renamed by JP II: Divine Mercy Sunday. I didn't know that then, and I hadn't even heard of St. Faustina. Not that I wasn't living my faith; rather, I had some time previously begun on a deeper journey which had led me to appreciate Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist at Holy Mass, and I was praying the Rosary regularly.

Having finished my studies, completed military service, and feeling tired with the world, I was seriously thinking about the consecrated life. And it was then that I was struck by a profound inner crisis. God suddenly seemed so distant and everything that for me was a certainty only days before became as though vague ideas in my stormy heart, and it took all my strength not to abandon them.

It was with this inner disposition that I **found myself in Medjugorje** that weekend in April. I say “found myself” because of a series of apparently casual circumstances that encouraged me to follow up on an inner calling. I won't go in to what I experienced that weekend. Each person's experience is different, though all have in common the same Presence, the same Divine Love which Mary, through a special grace, makes particularly tangible. In particular, in my heart I was distinctly aware of this phrase: “Trust me.” I was aware of Mary's **living presence in my heart**; and she was asking

me to surrender myself to her, to let her take possession of my life. I didn't exactly know what this would entail, but it was irresistibly appealing. Some months previously I had read the *Treatise on True Devotion to Mary*, by St. Louis Maria Grignon de Montfort (the same one from which JP II took his motto, “Totus tuus”). Back home I sought out the booklet to read it again; it seemed to me to have a treasure in my hands.

My life continued amid various difficulties: an interesting job that didn't really overly enthuse me, my commitment as scout leader, my interest in the religious life that still hadn't led to anything...

The following August I came back to Medjugorje, and whilst here Mary prepared me to face the very delicate moment of my father's death. My life at this point was, humanly speaking, turned upside down, yet within me burned a presence that cleared the way for me and repeatedly told me: “simply go ahead.”

To go ahead meant to try to live the messages every day, and open my heart to Mary to allow her to lead me on. It meant accepting the everyday situations, especially the most difficult ones: of the type one would normally discard with some sort of self justification to quieten one's conscience. And of course I had to learn to live a life in the light of God's love. At the beginning I prayed almost exclusively to Mary.

Egoistically, with my every Rosary, Holy Mass, and fast **I hoped to relive the sensations** I experienced at Medjugorje.

And this was the most difficult step: detaching myself from the emotions. In fact, after an intense experience of prayer, **we risk attaching ourselves to the sensations lived** and to making those sensations a type of measure or rule.

With time then, I began to feel Mary's presence less and less. It didn't make me very happy, to say the truth, but I began to understand that what Mary was doing was to let go of my hand to teach me to walk; the way mothers do with their little toddlers.

Time went by, and in the summer of 2005 I returned to Medjugorje with some friends. Whilst there, we happened upon a big white house. It was here that a great peace invaded my heart, and this urged me to ask who lived in the house. It was thus that I learnt that it belonged to a Community born from the experience in the prayer group of the two locutionists. I immediately felt the desire to meet the Community, but due to various circumstances this could not happen till the following year.

On the 8th December 2005 I consecrated myself to Mary with the Montfort formula. At the time I was still uncertain what to do with my life, but a series of events led me to make the decision to join the Community. Looking back, I see how God, through Mary, has always respected my freedom, and granted me the awareness and clarity to decide for this new journey that He has prepared especially for me, and for which each day He awaits my renewed decision; my renewed yes.

Andrew

Jelena's Fourth Child Born Safely



Benedetta

Her name is **Benedetta**, which means blessed. She was born **under the mantle of the Queen of the Holy Rosary**, on the 7th October, and is the fourth child for Jelena and Massimiliano.

Readers would know that Jelena had the gift of inner locutions for several years, through which Our Lady led the prayer group at Medjugorje.

“It was a beautiful pregnancy, and immersed in grace,” Jelena told me recently. **“Nearly every day, with the other three children, I was able to go to Holy Mass. Prayer and trust in Jesus made things go well, despite the daily chores of a mother, and as though a fruit of the grace that accompanied our faith journey, Benedetta's birth was quick and easy.”**

In the various articles that Jelena has written for Echo, we have learnt how she sees her motherhood as a privileged “position” that allows her to contemplate

the mystery of life that is born in God and is communicated to each creature:

“In my children I see the image of God still intact. Each morning we read together the Gospel of the day,” continued Jelena, **“and often we even manage to recite the liturgy of the hours. Or rather, I read the psalms and they listen. It would be wrong to think they were too young. For them this daily relationship with God has become normal, in which Jesus truly is a very authoritative friend in their heart. If I say that something of their behaviour displeases Jesus, the children take it very seriously and obey without hesitation. Of course, this demands a great deal of effort on the part of parents, but I do not think there can be love without absolute donation. However, love is like a strange type of purse: the more you give of it, the more it contains.”**

It is edifying to hear her testimony, to know that there are parents who don't fear to turn off the television to tell their children about the greatest story of all: of the incarnation of the Son of God. Parents that do not let themselves be intimidated by the customs of a society that is ever more sophisticated and demanding and that deprives us of the most important time: that spent with each other, and especially with the Father our Creator.

“We burden our children with activities,

as if they were adults even, and we don't realize how they are being crushed by them, but this risks robbing them of their spontaneity and simplicity. Even children's games have become so complicated these days... I am glad that our children have fun and are happy with the little they have,” Jelena concluded.

We wish every blessing upon Jelena and her family in a time when motherhood is undermined by a hedonistic society that encourages women to think more about themselves to the detriment of the family, and of course to society itself. We know our society is the promoter of the culture of death and that through its laws and propaganda consciences are dulled. The first years of a child are the most delicate and important. It is then that the foundations are laid for a well balanced relationship with love, giving harmony and shape to a life that will be called to generate new life according to God's plan.

This is the love that is needed to heal the many wounds of mankind; wounds which no doubt can be traced back to a lack of love and acceptance even in infancy. But where there is life there is hope. And prayer will enhance that hope. And after prayer there is the good example which we hope will help others comprehend the indispensable value of parenthood for the sake of all, and for a better world.

Stefania Consoli

"Until You Come in Glory..."

By Giuseppe Ferraro

There's a vague sense of expectation, almost as an undercurrent, in the message of the Queen of Peace at Medjugorje. Her surprisingly lengthy presence in our midst, the warning that "my apparitions here at Medjugorje are the last for mankind" (msg 17 April 1982), the repeated mention of "a new time" that awaits us: "I am with you and I lead you towards a new time, a time God gives you as a grace to know Him more" (msg. 25 Jan. 1993), tend to awaken in us the drowsy sense of expectation for epochal events for mankind and creation as a whole. It is made more explicit by the part of the message that concerns the secrets: "There are the secrets, my children! It is not known what they are, but when it is known, it will be late!" (28 Jan. 1987)

We baptized Christians have said thousands of times at Mass: "... until you come in Glory," but we must be sincere and admit that perhaps only a few chosen souls truly await "the day of the Lord," which Scripture assures us "will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thes 5:2). In the early Church, instead, the sense of expectation for the return of Christ was more alive, and was expressed in a spiritual tension of the soul which ardently desired full communion with God. In fact, the first Christians awaited the justice of the "new heavens and the new earth" with the vigil and loving anxiety of the Bride in the Song of Songs, and the "blissful hope" of soon enjoying eternal communion with the Lamb.

Down the centuries this strong awareness became progressively weaker, though of course the wait for the day of the Lord remains a founding truth of our faith. With the irruption in time of the paschal mystery of Christ, the history of salvation is pervaded by a new dynamism that rapidly projects it towards its finality. And in fact, it is the Church's await of the "blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of the great God and of our saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13) that allows her to continually draw new grace and receive light and new zeal for her salvific mission. "Therefore, beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace" (2 Pt 3:14).

When the final destination at the end of the way of salvation opened by the Risen Christ becomes vaguer in hearts, it means there is a loss of the true sense of the Christian vocation. The vital experience of the mystical union of the soul with its Creator is also necessary to the Christian vocation to guarantee the renewal of the missionary zeal. This "eclipse in expectation" indicates a more profound spiritual malady, which over the centuries, and under the influence of rationalistic suggestion, has crept into the hearts of the baptized.

It is an insidious illusion, the poisoned fruit of the father of lies, that one can be Christian and at the same time deny

Christ his lordship over the soul, and want to limit one's adhesion to the Gospel on a purely rational and ritual level, and without considering the intimate and profound "infatuation of the heart" for the Person and mystery of Christ (cf. *Novo millennio Ineunte*, 33). It gives rise to a presumptive refusal of the mystical encounter with the divine Spouse who is present within us and ardently desires communicating to us the living breath of the Trinitarian Love. "... prayer can progress, as a genuine dialogue of love, to the point of rendering the person wholly possessed by the divine Beloved, vibrating at the Spirit's touch, resting filially within the Father's heart." (ibidem)

Without this inner disposition, our faith stagnates, and is unable to lift us up out of the old world's dust to generate "fruits of eternal life," and inevitably ends up trickling down into a humanistic, cultural level distant from God's heart.

The Queen of Peace, who knows us better than we know ourselves, and who "loves us with the love of Christ" wants to bring her children back to a living communion with the heart of her Son, who alone is the fount of truth and life for the world. She desires healing us totally of our spiritual leprosy to make us fully suitable for the great mission Christ entrusted to his Church, and thus become worthy vessels to bring God's Love to all people.

Mary appears in this time of ours to accompany the world in a great passover of recapitulation in Christ; He who shall "hand over the kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power" (1 Co 15:24). That is why Mary says to her children: "may my Heart, the Heart of Jesus and your own heart fuse together to become one big heart of love and peace" (msg 25 July 1999). She wants to communicate to them the fullness of the grace of God so that the salvation and the new life of the Risen Lord can spread to the entire world.

The militant Church, in opening up to receive this pure love that already reigns in the heavenly Church, has the task of bringing it to others through her various tasks and missionary witness. The mystery of the Church is fully realized in Mary, and for this reason God sends her in our midst so that the militant Church is made more similar to her: "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, ... holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27), and be made ready for the great wedding feast with the Lamb.

This great gift of grace comes to us through the presence of the Queen of Peace at Medjugorje who calls us to surrender our lives – and offer our lives – to God, so that our souls can become more receptive and

disposed for an intense nuptial communion with the Risen Lord.

Then, our "wait" for him "to come in Glory" shall become a proclamation and a blessing for the world, as our "heart keeps vigil" (Sg 5:2) for the voice of the Groom: "Hark! My lover – here he comes" (Sg 2:8). "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' Let the hearer say, 'Come.' Let the one who thirsts come forward, and the one who wants it receive the gift of life-giving water." (Rev 22:16)



Photo courtesy Matt Ross WYD 2008

Pray, Trust, Hope in the Cross

WYD-SYD 08 - the Cross continues its pilgrimage (at Darwin in the photo) as part of the preparation for a down-pouring of grace in the Great South Land of the Holy Spirit

"You Will Receive Power When the Holy Spirit Has Come Upon You, and You Will Be My Witnesses" (Acts 1:8)

"I ask you, my dear young people, to reflect on this theme in the coming months in order to **prepare yourselves** for the great event that will take place in Sydney, Australia" (Benedict xvi).

"How better to reflect, how better to prepare, than by joining those first disciples with all their doubts and confusions, their awe and excitement, as they gathered in prayer with Mary in the Upper Room and awaited the Spirit of Pentecost? This is our time to do the same... to **SPEND a WEEKLY HOLY HOUR of POWER with CHRIST** and Mary and the saints, awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit at WYD. It will give you the quiet time, the thinking time, the praying time, the emptying-your-head time, the pouring-out-your-heart time, that you need." (Bishop Anthony Fisher, OP, coordinator WYD)

A Special Summer

by Robert Prendushi

When I **translate our paper**, the Echo of Mary, I always think of the distance it will need to cover - this little yet precious paper - to reach all the continents. I see how letters of thanksgiving arrive from far away Australia, Asia and South America... Instead, the distance Echo in Albanian needs to cover is much less, and I think less noted.

This year my wife and I were able to go to Medjugorje. The days that preceded the pilgrimage were as a time of preparation and encouragement. It made a certain impression on me to think that in a few days we would be able to draw from the fount, where our own little paper was born, and also to meet up with the staff and other translators from various parts of the world.

Pleasant surprise

I've been translating the Echo for 15 years, and I see how the role of translator is secondary. For me it is a real honour, and because I live abroad (in Italy, not Albania), I feel indebted to my country.

I wasn't expecting to hear talk of the Echo at the (Albanian) wedding feast we attended: "I noticed you had the Echo of Mary. I'd like to receive it too, in the US where I live," exclaimed a relative of the bride on our way out the Church. "I'd like my children to read Our Lady's messages..." he said, who went on to tell me that prior to the wedding, he had stopped over in Medjugorje with his Croatian wife. "It seems to me," said a third person, "that Our Lady has already answered your wishes," as she went on to present me as the translator of the Echo. At the wedding feast I was further surprised to discover that of the one hundred guests, forty of them were regular readers of Echo.

Feast of the Assumption at Shkodër

When an Albanian Christian arrives in the city of Shkodër, it is only natural for him to stop and pray in the Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel, at the entrance to the city, close to the castle of Rosafa (I hope readers recall the history of this devotion, and the voyage of the image, in 1467, to Genazzano, near Rome. See Echo no. 194).

We were in Shkodër the morning of the 15th August, in front of the church. Many people had come from the surrounding villages to celebrate the feast of the Assumption, which in Albania is not recognized by the State, so it is an ordinary work day. Used, as we were, to see many vacant seats when we go to Mass, it was moving to see the Cathedral (the largest of the Balkans) filled with people who in turn were filled with joy. During the few days we spent there we were able to listen to the homilies by many young priests. After so many years of suffering and martyrdom, the Albanian Church is once again enriched with new worthy pastors. I had the opportunity to converse with them, and it became clear that they were educated at the school of Mary who always leads to Our Lord Jesus.

Destination in sight ...

From Shkodër to Medjugorje the distance is about 300 km, no more. However, to get there one must change buses frequently, and halt at many check points even though the Balkans are formally at peace. The journey is therefore very long. We started off at 4 am and at 5 pm we arrived at the Bosnian border: the country where the Queen of Peace reigns. We arrived at Medjugorje at 9 pm. At long last! It was like stepping into another world! We spent five days at the Kraljice Mira (Queen of Peace) Community. This year there were many of us there (for the annual retreat), especially from the East. They also thirst greatly for the faith, like the Albanians. What a blessing it was to spend five days in that blessed land to draw from the true fount.

Now that I am back home and life is back to normal, I often think of that time and the others with whom we shared a profound communion as we prayed, shared experiences, and listened to the teachings of Fr. Tomislav. Of course, the most special aspect of any pilgrimage to Medjugorje is the encounter with Mary who leads us to Jesus. It was truly an experience that is deeply burned into our heart.

Climb up Podbrdo

Podbrdo, where Mary first appeared, is not overly steep, but it is still a climb, and the surface rough. It is gentle enough not to feel tired when you are back down. No man has set instrument or hand to this hill to make the climb easier; only to set up the stations of the Rosary where the faithful stop to reflect. It is true, however, that some paths have been "cut out" - and there the rocks have been smoothed over somewhat - by the passage of millions of pilgrims from every social extract. And one cannot help but think how much many of them had to save up to come here to fulfil the dream of a special encounter with the Blessed Mother up there on that hill. The murmuring of prayer in so many different languages, like a symphony in honour of the Queen, is another memory that will accompany my days till I am granted the grace of returning once again to Medjugorje and experiencing another special summer. •

"Jesus comes to me every morning in Holy Communion; I repay Him in my very small way by visiting the poor."

"With all the strength of my soul I urge you young people to approach the Communion table as often as you can. Feed on this bread of the angels whence you will draw all the energy you need to fight interior struggles. Because true happiness, dear friends, does not consist in the pleasures of the world or in earthly things, but in peace of conscience, which we only have if we are pure in heart and mind."

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati (6 April 1901 - 4th July 1925)

www.piergiorgiofrassati.org

To all who have been instruments of Providence for Echo, enabling us to continue to help Mary reach her children, goes our heartfelt thanks, whom we remember especially in prayer and at Holy Mass.

If you desire a written response for your donation, please kindly request it. May God reward you and your loved ones onehundredfold!

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From the Mailbox

A. Houtermans, Germany: I'm writing to confirm my desire to continue receiving the Echo, which I find excellent. I've been reading it since 1991 and I would not like to stay without. May God reward you for all the good you do through Echo.

Fr. De Cesare, Mexico: I've been receiving ECHO for years. As a Combonian Missionary I've worked in Mexico for 20 years. Echo helps me a great deal to know what is going on at Medjugorje. I appeal to the readers of Echo to pray to the Lord for all the Missions in Latin America. Blessings upon those who work for Echo. I would appreciate it if you could tell Fr. Jojo about the group of Mexican pilgrims that visited Medjugorje last year: an experience we'll never forget!

R. Bruce, Australia: I have just returned from a beautiful pilgrimage in Italy and Medjugorje. The peace I found in the many Shrines we visited gave forth to my faith, especially Medjugorje. Thank you for the encouragement your paper gave me to venture on this long trip.

Mrs. Carranza, Wales: "... I contribute as often as I can with a donation, but it can never be as much as the great spiritual help that comes from Echo. I always re-read it and keep them for reference. Blessings and prayers!"

Echo online: www.ecodimaria.net

The Lord bless thee and keep thee! May He show His face to thee, and have mercy on thee!

don Alberto

Italy, 12 November 2007