



ECHO OF MARY Queen of peace

165

September- October 2002

Message of 25 July 2002:

Dear Children, Today I rejoice with your Patron Saint and call you to be open to God's will, so that faith may grow in you; and through you, also in the people you meet in your everyday lives. My Children, pray until prayer becomes joy for you. Ask your Patron Saints to help you grow in your love for God. Thank you for responding to my call.

Be open to God's will

"Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven" is what we say each time we recite the Lord's Prayer taught to us by Jesus. However, is the meaning we give to it the same as His? And is our prayer animated by the same spirit? Thy Will, o Father, is to be desired, sought, loved ... certainly not suffered or feared. In accepting Thy Will joyfully we find fulfilment, and our human dignity is exalted, not humiliated. Thy Will be done, o Father, on earth as it is in heaven - with the same degree of perfection, and in full communion with the Angels and Saints.

Being open to God's Will, unconditionally, with total trust and surrender, in communion with the Saints, is what is being asked of us, so that we might experience God's love not only with them but also thanks to their intercession. And together we shall all rejoice.

"Today," Mary says, "I rejoice with your Patron Saint: " St. James the Apostle and brother of St. John, son of Zebedee. The Apostles, James and John, are great saints, yet they too needed time to mature and come to comprehend God's will and wisdom: " 'You do no know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?' They said to him: 'We are able.' He said to them: 'You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father' " (Mt 20.22-23).

"Be open to God's will" - so that faith might grow in us, and not only in us, but "also in the people we meet in our everyday lives." This is allowing His Will to be done; it is allowing God's plan for each of us to take shape. May Your Holy Spirit, o Father, come upon us to open our minds so we can comprehend everything that Christ has said to us (cf. Jn 14:25-26), so our hearts open up to Love, and our souls are raised to communion with the Saints.

"Ask your Patron Saints to help you grow in your love for God." With just a little more humbleness, perhaps we would be able to perceive something of God's infinite love, given that the learned and the wise of this world find it hard to comprehend. How could suffering, defeat, pain and humiliation be understood by man who lives in a world which idolizes precisely the opposite? Yet it is through Christ's passion and death that He saved the world!

Christ's sacrifice is proof that God loves man. This mystery, first revealed two thousand years ago, is still in part hidden; it awaits to be penetrated by the life of Christ in us. At the same time, Christ's sacrifice is proof also of God's love for Jesus, and perhaps this mystery - not totally revealed - is even greater. It awaits for Christ's life in us to grow so that we will be able to recognize the Father's love in our Cross.

Father, grant us the grace of believing that Your love and Your will are perfectly identified in each other. Grant us the grace of surrendering ourselves to You with infinite trust. We ask this of You in the name of Mary - grant that She might obtain for us this grace, for She Herself implores for this grace on our behalf with Her presence in Medjugorje. We know that we are unworthy and that on our own we are incapable of truly surrendering our lives to Your Merciful Love; but it is precisely for this incapacity of ours that we place our every trust in You and in Jesus and Mary!

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Message of 25 August 2002

Dear Children, also today I am with you in prayer, that God might give you an even stronger faith. My Children, your faith is little and you aren't even aware of how much; despite this, you aren't ready to seek the gift of faith from God. That is why I am with you, my Children, to help you comprehend my messages and to apply them to your lives.

Pray, pray, pray! - for only in faith and through prayer will your soul find peace, and the world will find joy in being with God. Thank you for responding to my call.

An even stronger faith

Also today I am with you in prayer, that God might give you an even stronger faith. Mary cares very much to let us know that she is with us! We too like our friends and loved ones to know that we think of them and care about them, but often our words are expressed in general or even formal terms. However, even when our sentiments of solidarity are sincere they are still limited by our own humanity.

When Mary says "she is with us," the power behind her statement is much more than we could ever imagine, but since our free will enables us to close ourselves to grace, its effect is limited through our own fault. What a tremendous responsibility! We cannot hide behind life's difficulties either, as there is no event - not even the most tragic - that can impede us from living our faith. Rather, it is often amid difficulties that faith buds. So let us implore from God the gift of faith - not the kind that pleads for solutions to our problems, but the kind that changes our life. "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you" (Eph 1:17-18).

The hope to which we are called is Jesus Christ and His life in us! Our faith enables us to adore the Father in Jesus (Jn 4:23-24). Mary, who received from the Holy Spirit the gift of generating God in man, is hence the Mother beyond comparison; and she is with us in prayer. What a great gift this is, and how powerful is prayer said with Her! We mustn't forget, however, that She is with us in prayer so that God might give us an even stronger faith. And this is precisely what we need - absolutely and urgently. Our faith is so little that we don't even realize that we need to seek this gift of faith from God. How many useless things we ask of Him! while we fail to ask for the one thing we really need; real faith! We think we pray, speak to Him, but perhaps all we do is talk to ourselves. We think we listen to Him, but perhaps all we do is listen to ourselves.

Mother dear, you know what it means to have God in your heart, in your mind and in your soul - pray for us that we might create within ourselves a space worthy of God. May Christ alone live in us, thanks to your intercession o Mother. May we recognize and adore Christ alone, especially when we suffer and are humiliated, that His sacrifice may be blessed in us. May our souls experience the peace that comes from Jesus (Jn 14:27), and the world will find joy in being with God. Thank you, Mother, for being with us!

N.Q.

Pope with his young people!

Toronto, July 2002 - Created for the youth, with time it became so popular that it is now considered a number one event. "One of the principal reasons for World Youth Day is to bring together young people who will commit themselves, in the strength of their faith in Jesus Christ, to the great cause of peace and human solidarity." Great numbers of young people from around the world meet every second year at a different venue where their hearts beat in unison in an expression of love for the one and true God.

This year, too, expectations were met; but above all, the Pope was there! despite his age and his frail health. He deeply wanted to be there with his youth from whom he draws renewed enthusiasm and health.

He was there for the opening. "Often, even without having met you, I have commended you one by one in my prayers to the Lord: He has always known you, and He loves each one of you personally," said the Pope at the welcoming ceremony on 25 July. And he was there thanks to a loud speaker as the Jubilee Cross made its way through the streets of Toronto. "Many and enticing are the voices that call out to you: many of these speak to you of a joy that can be had with money, success, power. Mostly they propose a joy that comes with the superficial and fleeting pleasure of the senses," said the Pope with extreme realism. But he also encouraged them: "It is only by walking with Christ that we can achieve joy, true joy! Let the light of Christ shine in your lives!"

Don't be afraid to follow Christ on the royal way of the Cross. At difficult moments in Church history, the pursuit of holiness becomes even more urgent. Holiness is not a question of age; it is a matter of living in the Holy Spirit."

He was with them at the Saturday evening vigil in Downsview Park where half a million young people waited anxiously to pray and sing with him, and to listen to him. With great affection, they responded: "John Paul II, we love you!"

He was with them at the conclusive Mass on Sunday morning when he handed down to the "new people of the Beatitudes" words to accompany them in their daily mission. "The new millennium opened with two contrasting scenarios: one, the sight of multitudes of pilgrims coming to Rome during the Great Jubilee to pass through the Holy Door which is Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer; and the other, the terrible terrorist attack on New York, an image that is a sort of icon of a world in which hostility and hatred seem to prevail," Peter's successor recalled. "The question that arises is dramatic: on what foundations must we build the new historical era that is emerging from the great

transformations of the twentieth century? Is it enough to rely on the technological revolution now taking place, which seems to respond only to criteria of productivity and efficiency, without reference to the individual's spiritual dimension or to any universally shared ethical values?"

"Dear Friends, spontaneously in your hearts you know the answer, and you are saying it through your presence here. The world you are inheriting desperately needs to be touched and healed by the beauty of richness of God's love. It needs witnesses to that love. The world needs salt. It needs you to be that salt and light.

If a tiny flame can lift the heavy lid of night, how much more light will you make if you all bond as one in the communion of the Church! If you love Jesus, love the Church! Do not be discouraged by the sins and failings of some of her members. Think of the vast majority of dedicated and generous priests and religious whose only wish is to serve and do good!"

"The hope of a new civilization marked by freedom and peace can become reality if undertaken by a new generation of builders. Allow me, dear young people, to consign this hope of mine to you: you must be those 'builders'!" adding that the only material which can build this new city is Christ: "Christ alone is the cornerstone on which it is possible to solidly build one's existence."

S.C.

Fr. Jean-Marie CABES, Mariologist and professor at the Catholic Institute of Toulouse, and for many years the director of the "School of the Gospel" in Lourdes where young people are offered the chance to discern their vocation with the help of the Word of God, also founded the mixed Community "Notre Dame de l'Aurore" (an apostolic branch of the Monastic Community of Jerusalem). Fr. Jean-Marie appeals to the youth to rediscover the joy of being loved.

Mary more youthful than sin!

One day a self-proclaimed atheist asked Bernadette of Lourdes to tell him about the apparitions. Bernadette, tired of repeating the same things, said: "Sir, since you are a great sinner, I will show you the Blessed Virgin's smile" and it was a smile of such simplicity and humility that it let God shine through.

This was one of the things that most convinced the Bishop of Tarbes, who had the task of judging the apparitions and Bernadette's testimony. "Did you see this child?" he asked his advisors after having interrogated her. "Mary doesn't keep anything for herself; but shares

the most secret part of her call with the least of us."

"It was because I am the poorest that the Blessed Virgin chose me..."

Pressured by the civilian authorities who tried to convince her to deny everything, Bernadette just repeated whatever she had to say, thereby avoiding the traps set for her by pretending not to see them. This way, the truth was able to shine through.

We too often try to convince with our exterior self. God teaches us to correspond to others' expectations by letting them listen to what their own hearts have to say. Grace is never imposing, never oppressive.

This was definitely the case with St. Maximilian Kolbe who was left to die of starvation in Auschwitz, together with a group of other men.

When the guards came to remove the bodies, St. Maximilian's looked at them: "Don't look at us with those eyes!" they pleaded. Those eyes stoked up a flame within their icy hearts that they couldn't stand. That flame was a call to be reborn.

In the same way the prodigal son from the parable is welcomed by his father who embraces his son without judging him. The son receives from the father the dignity of a son. The most beautiful gazes are those by people who place their hope in you, by those who see you the way you are in God's heart.

Mary let herself be gazed upon in this way. She didn't try to push her way up, not even when the Angel came to entrust her with the mission of generating the Messiah. She simply responded: "I don't know man. I know only God;" and God acted, and the Son of David became the Son of God.

Young man and woman of today! Do you want this gaze of hope to fall on you? Do you want to let yourself be loved? Whatever your suffering, whatever your sin, tomorrow holds the chance for you to be reborn. At the very bottom of the black pit of your life, there is a smile being offered to you. From the bottom of that mud hole where you're likely to slip, there is a spring waiting to gush forth.

One thing is asked of you: to believe. So that love is not imposed on you, there is need for a little opening in your heart. Don't worry about not being perfect: God can make you holy, but he can't do it without you.

So, grasp hold of the hand being held out to you. It's the hand of He who begs for love. God reached out to Mary because He wanted to come into our world, and He needed an open door. Jesus reached out to the Samaritan woman at the well in the hottest part of the day. He thirsted for the woman's desire and He knew how to reawaken her sense of expectation. On the Cross Jesus launched His last cry: I thirst! Can you hear this cry resounding in you?

Your heart is similar to God's heart; you need to love. It is similar to

Mary's: she let herself be loved. Simply enter into the grace of this unique encounter. Let the mud be washed away; let the hardness be softened. You are poor, just as Bernadette was poor; as Mary was poor; as God with a wounded heart was poor. Whatever your age, just smile, and you will become younger than your sin; you will experience the joy of your own birth, the real birth. You will no longer journey towards death, but you will enter into life. *

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"Medjugorje is not a movement within the Church, but the Church on the move..."

Medjugorje witnesses of joy

Smiling faces and feelings of friendliness typically enriched this year's XIII Youth Festival for the thousands of young people who came to Medjugorje from 25 different countries. Held as usual from 31 July to 6 August, this year's theme was: "With Mary, witnesses of peace and joy" and truly, peace and joy was so abundant that it was contagious. Faces shone with the knowledge that they were loved and accepted by God and by others. With God's grace in their hearts, people learn to accept themselves for what they are, and start loving themselves.

The atmosphere of serenity and happiness which welcomed the 15,000 young people witnessed to the fact that they felt at home in Mary's Heart. Each child feels good next to his mother; and all the more so when that Mother's love is so deep and so pure. Mary's love had drawn them here during the hot summer days where she had prepared for them great spiritual graces. Her love accompanied them on their way home where they returned to their normal day-to-day lives which are often regulated by routine, but which from now on would be coloured by love.

The greatest gift one generally receives in Medjugorje is the conversion of heart, an inner transformation. It helps us live everything in a new way, to look on the world and on fellow creatures through the eyes of God, giving everything new light. It was this certainty that gave serenity to the eyes of the young people at the festival, and put smiles on their faces. Joy gushed forth from every heart - like water from a spring - breaking out into songs and dances and the desire to celebrate. Everyone felt as if they were at home with old friends.

Far from the empty enthusiasm and momentaneous fun offered by the world, the joy of Medjugorje is an expression of profound gratitude which fills your entire being; and this joy opens up to prayer, to adoration, to inner silence, and to surrender to the loving embrace of God the Father.

This is the living Church. Fruit of the grace of the Holy Spirit, it rose forth with great naturalness; with no formalities or rigid structures. It is a Church made up of young people in Medjugorje who seek rest from a world that rushes, that demands, that provokes, and that deceives; from a world that doesn't respect individuality, but wants to reproduce a "globalized" model of perfection, and instead creates inner void, solitude, sense of inadequacy, or aggression, competitiveness and social climbing.

At Medjugorje, next to the Queen of Peace, there is no room for all this. The world stays out, and at Medjugorje one steps into the Heart of God. Here the young people listen, pray and give while Mary does all the rest. As Mother she called them and she will accompany them as they

journey through life.
Stefania Consoli

Voices from the Festival

Once again Medjugorje brought together many and varied personages from around the world - some well-known and some not - to witness to the world's youth gathered here for the annual Youth Festival. The testimonies (translated simultaneously into 17 languages) were light for the way for those who were just beginning and for those who had already undertaken the journey of faith and needed fresh fuel. Priests, religious, married couples, parents, lay people, and of course, the visionaries were called to give witness.

Fr. Leo Maasburg, started working for the evangelization of East Europe after Pope JPII consecrated the world to Mary's Immaculate Heart in 1982. He told how he celebrated Mass at the Kremlin with a bishop and how they consecrated the USSR to Our Lady. He also told the young people of his experience as a spiritual assistant at the service of Mother Teresa when she was visiting foreign countries and opening new Houses. They were together in Moscow and Armenia when Fr. Leo lived there for several months and became the first "official" priest of the Soviet Union.

Fr. Maurizio de Sanctis, better known as Fr. Nike, is a Passionist Father. He spoke about his conversion in Medjugorje ten or so years ago, and how he abandoned his beloved career as a dancer to become a priest. "There is nothing more beautiful than being a priest, and perhaps the biggest sin of us priests is not saying out loud that being consecrated is such a wonderful thing. With just one eloquent word God personally tells me, "I love you." That word is Jesus' Cross. When I was 14 and fell madly in love with a girl I engraved into the first tree I could find a giant pierced heart, and inside that heart I wrote her name and mine. God, too, is madly in love with me, and He also left a tangible sign of His love. That sign is Jesus' Cross. With that He tells me, "I love you..."

Fr. Pavol Hudak, Slovak, had also been to Toronto to celebrate the WYD. At Medjugorje he spoke to the young people about the important subject of love. "I want to bring you a message of love; of Mary's love and human love... Man is born from love and for love. Young people, in particular, seek love and bear it within themselves as their great ideal.

When young people are in love they ought to be a gift for each other. It is by respecting each other that they become beautiful and happy."

Fr. Peter Dugandzic and Sr. Anna Katharina, both converted at Medjugorje. They spoke about the way in which the Lord had led them from a first reawakening of the faith to the call to consecrated life; and of the hard inner battle which preceded their response to the call, and how this then brought them profound inner peace.

FR. KARL WALNER, a Cistercian monk from Austria, with a touch of irony spoke about the Pope's appeals to the world's young people:

Be saints of the Third Millennium

"The theme is vast," said the young monk, "but I want to try to tell you how to become saints!

To start we have to know what it means to be "holy." Don't think you have to become like those plaster figures in the churches, or that you have to stand in a corner somewhere with your hands joined in prayer and your eyes turned upwards... I want to explain the word saint. Everyone wants the same thing these days, and that's to be beautiful. Holiness isn't very popular, but being beautiful is. There is a real industry behind exterior beauty. It is a great ideal for many, but it is also a great deception.

I'd like everyone to be beautiful, but not just on the outside. I'd like them to be beautiful on the inside too. The Church calls this beauty holiness. To be holy means to radiate one's inner beauty.

A few days before my priestly ordination I met the most beautiful woman in the world. Her name was Mother Teresa of Calcutta. I was particularly struck by her face so profoundly marked by wrinkles, yet it shone with a special strength, and that strength came from her bond with God.

A "BEAUTY SALON" - It pleased God to give us a place where we could become more beautiful and where we could purify our hearts: the confessional. Don't be saddened by your sins, even if you think they are always the same. Take them anew to the confessional and allow God to act in you. There has never been a saint in this world who has been able to say that he is so saintly that he doesn't need to confess anymore. To the contrary, the closer man gets to God the more he feels the weight of his little sins. It is when we confess our sins that they no longer are an obstacle on our way to the Lord, but become the means

with which to advance on that journey.

THREE WAYS OF BECOMING HOLY. The first is: be stubborn; then high-handed, and then impertinent... Of course, I mean "holy stubbornness". This quality is useful also in love. I don't think that there is love at first sight, but rather "falling in love" at first sight, which is a flame in one's heart that burns with enthusiasm. Falling in love is already a beautiful thing, but this sentiment must grow to become love. This takes time, commitment and daily struggle. In other words, it takes perseverance. The same thing occurs in our relationship with God. In the parable of the sower, Jesus says that if the seed falls on shallow ground the seed will soon die. Know then, that Medjugorje begins after Medjugorje. Here you are full of enthusiasm, but when you return home you will need to be stubborn to fulfil Our Lady's call.

ALL SAINTS WERE STUBBORN. In the Old Testament, we read how the Patriarch Jacob - the father of Israel - fought all night with God's angel. At dawn the angel tried to leave, but Jacob kept him and said: I won't let you go until you have blessed me!

As a priest, this Word has been very useful to me, because you need to be stubborn to become a priest. On the way there you inevitably find many crosses, small and large, and often you are induced to think that God has completely abandoned you. That's when you have to say: "I won't let you go until you have blessed me!"

NOT ONLY BRAVE, BUT HIGH- HANDED. We are called to be truly enthusiastic about God and to have an inner strength so great that it shows on the outside. Why do we Christians suffer from a sort of inferiority complex? Why are we such cowards when we ought to witness our faith? We must be grateful to our dear John Paul II who gives the Church so many Blessed and Saints. It is enough to look at these to see that they too are normal people with sins and weaknesses. However, they weren't afraid to witness their faith.

What we need is the courage of St. Francis who gave all his possessions back to his father; or of St. John Vianney who did penance in the place of those whom he confessed; or of St. Maximilian Kolbe who offered his life to save a father of a family.

"HOLY IMPERTINENCE" in the life of a Christian. When we meet people who live according to worldly models, it makes us ask ourselves if we're normal; afterall, we go to Church while nearly no one else goes; we pray while everyone else thinks it's useless; we try our best to forgive

and be humble while everyone else leads an egoistic life; and we think we're wrong because the world says it's normal to live without God. But this is wrong!

You have to pray to obtain the grace of not being ashamed of showing your faith. Are we afraid that others might think we're mad? Nothing could be better! for Jesus said to His disciples: "happy are you when others mock you and when you are persecuted."

THE EMPEROR'S ROBES. Many of us know the fable of the emperor who was so vain that for a special occasion he ordered a new dress that would leave everyone flabbergasted. The tailor's "clothes" were meant to be made of a special fabric which would be invisible to silly people. The clothes didn't exist at all, but out of fear of admitting one's stupidity no one, including the emperor, said anything. The illusion lasted till a child cried out the truth, and this gave courage to the others to recognize that they'd been fooled.

We, too, live in a world where everything is cleverly deceived. Life without God, without prayer, without the sacraments seems beautiful and attractive, but the truth is that it is all a lie. So what we need is to be sufficiently impertinent to say to the world: "You are naked! Come and believe in Jesus and in Mary and you will find happiness."

(Translated and reduced by the Editorial Staff)

"Cloistered nun in Medj."

"Thank you for responding to my call!" Mary always thanks. This had struck me, but only now do I comprehend!

Whatever the circumstances that bring us to Medjugorje, we are called. As a cloistered nun it was due to health problems that I was able to come (with due permission, of course). Providence saw that I found hospitality at the contemplative Community, Kraljice Mira (Queen of Peace, Wholly Thine...); and it is with immense gratitude that I ask myself why is this granted me, that the Mother of my Lord should call me.

I have always been very devoted to Mary, and she has always made me feel loved. Maybe that's why I didn't feel the need to seek more; but the sensation of being in a dark tunnel when my life and my religious vocation were at risk made me entrust myself, and my health in particular, to Our Lady.

I had vaguely heard of Medjugorje, but I had no particular interest,

even though I was a little curious since it was clearly such an important event for today's world. Once in Medjugorje, I felt immediately the warmth of Mary's tender and loving embrace which filled me with light and peace and joy. In His light we see the light. The experience gave new life to my life, light for my journey, and eyes to see my brethren; and then I realized that truly Medjugorje is Mary's house, a privileged place and a holy place where one can encounter the Mother of Jesus. And, of course, she lovingly leads us to her Son. For the one and only centre of everything is Eucharistic Jesus. Everything revolves around Him, the Lamb Sacrificed and Risen.

How much indifference in our society, for all its centuries of Christianity! Even in our churches and religious houses there are conditions of mediocrity amid tepid routines and fruitless prayer. Yet, despite the many worldly calls, the thirst for spirituality is still alive beneath the layers of ash.

Medjugorje is a centre of spirituality, where you are able to experience silent prayer rising from the heart. Here, it is easy to turn inwards and discover that sacred place deep in your heart where you find that God knows you better than you know yourself, and you discover the image of God which He impressed upon the heart of each of us. In the encounter with Jesus and Mary, and in the light of the Word, it is easy to see the reflection of our own existence; and when our fragile humanity meets the power of God's love it is projected into the infinite spaces of God's plan of salvation. In the light of the Holy Spirit you feel the need to be light, and thus the sacrament of Confession becomes the place for conversion and grace for a new journey.

Many are those who become instruments after this experience, as St. Francis loved to call himself - instruments which draw many others to the freedom of being God's Children who are enslaved and oppressed by their sins and closed up in their tombs of human fragility.

At Medjugorje, Jesus and Mary call us to purify our hearts, so that in all our relationships God's love is able to reach out and touch those with whom we come into contact. Medjugorje has become a symbol for the living Church, where all are brothers and sisters because they are all children of the same Father and Mother. And if Medjugorje is their Home, it is also clear that its boundaries reach out far beyond those territorial limits, to include all those who respond to the call of the Mother.

Mary is a Mother who distributes most generously amongst her children all that she receives in heaven; but she also seeks and asks for helpers. When I was moved to pray for all the women who do not have the chance to experience Medjugorje within their hearts, I also wondered why; and perhaps this opportunity to witness is already an answer.

Mary, a young woman, desires crossing the ocean of time and institutes to freshen up the antique Orders who are keepers of the treasure called tradition; and though old, are able to offer fruits of love and show the world that Jesus is Lord. With her presence and her messages (they contain an incredible transforming power) Mary is the new guide for everyone's faith journey.

Not only the millions of Medjugorje pilgrims, but also those who only get to read her messages, are led by Mary through the darkness of this time to the Light that never sets and to the Peace that lasts forever.

"My Children, understand the importance of my coming, and the gravity of the situation. I desire saving all souls and leading them to God. Let's pray, then, so that all that I have begun might be realized."

.. "My Children, in this your time God grants great graces, but you don't know how to use them. You care for all the rest, but so little for your soul and your spiritual life. Wake up, and say "yes" to God with all your might. Decide for conversion and for holiness. I am with you my Children, and I call you to the perfection of soul of in everything you do..."

The fact that we are consecrated doesn't mean we are converted. Every day His love demands new responses of love, of faith, and of hope.

Every day is time for conversion.

Sr. Franca

INDIAN WHO CONTEMPLATED MARY'S FACE IS SAINT

Mexico City, 31 July - "What was Juan Diego like? Why did God look upon him?" asked the Holy Father at the Canonization ceremony for the Indian to whom Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared in 1531 (today the most frequently visited Shrine in the world). "God chose what is low and despised in the world .. so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1 Co 1). In accepting the Christian message without forgoing his indigenous identity, Juan Diego discovered the profound truth of the new humanity in which all are called to be children of God. Thus he facilitated the fruitful meeting of two worlds and became the catalyst for the new Mexican identity closely united to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

"Return to the primitive fervour" Living Liturgy with Mary

by Giuseppe Ferraro

In a message for the Parish, Mary says that through Her "this time is connected to heaven in a special way" (25 May 1996); and: "I invite you to grasp the importance of my coming, and the gravity of the situation. I want to save all souls and present them to God" (25.8.91) - for this is the time when all of heaven wants to descend to be with us and in us. Mary, first fruit of the heavenly Church, is present in a special way today in the world with her glorified body. With her, the Angels, Archangels, and Saints come down to be with us so that the work of salvation which flows from Christ's paschal mystery can be fully realized in the entire universe, to fulfil the wondrous horizon of prophetic light announced in Revelation: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.. I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride for her spouse" (Rev 21:1-2). That is why Mary calls us today to a new, real, communion with the heavenly Church which already shines with the light of God's pure love which lights up the new creation: "The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall worship Him; they shall see His face and His name shall be on their foreheads" (Rev 22:3).

Mary is guiding us: "towards a new time, a time which God grants you as a grace, that you might know Him even better" (25.1.93) so that we might be ever more fully involved in the triumph of Her Immaculate Heart (announced at Fatima; realized at Medju-gorje) by responding unconditionally to Her call to offer our lives for the world's salvation. "I invite you ... so that with your help everything that I want to realize according to the secrets that began in Fatima may be fulfilled" (25.8.91). "... help my Heart to triumph in a world of sin" (25.9.91). Hence, now more than ever, Mary calls her children to make a new decision for God and for a radical conversion of heart, that they might start on the way that leads to fullness of life in the One and Triune God. This way to full life in God, offered us through Mary in such a special way, is the regal path traced out by the sacrificed love of the Lamb. This already is lived to the full by the Angels and the Saints in heaven, and today wants to descend to the earth to: "clothe it with the garments of salvation, and cover it with the robe of righteousness" (Is 61:10).

Our Lady is calling us now to earnestly become the spiritual flesh and blood of the Lamb's true Spouse who shines without stain or spot before her Lord since she is fully risen in the glory of the Trinitarian Love: "Let us pray, my Children, for those who don't want to know God's love, even though they belong to the Church .. that they might convert, so the Church might rise in Love" (25.3.99).

Mary desires that we accept this current of God's pure Love which flows out onto the world in an extraordinary way through Her Immaculate Heart (the "Eastern Door of the Temple" - Ez 47) so our lives will be united ever more closely to the liturgy of the heavenly Church which eternally celebrates the paschal offering of the sacrificial Lamb to the Father. For the Lamb alone is able to open the seal of life for a world (Rev 5) which closed itself to life because of man's sin and its refusal to recognize God as its Father.

From the start, Mary has been gradually and lovingly leading us to perfect communion with the heavenly Church. Many Medjugorje pilgrims (particularly open and sensitive) are able to perceive a spirituality proper to LITURGICAL TIMES, which can be so tangible and intense as to involve even the natural elements of nature. Through the inner senses of the soul one is able to perceive an inexpressible tenderness at Christmas Time, the sweet and impassioned force of Love belonging to Lent, the ineffable spiritual joy of Easter, and the vibrant power of that irresistible supernatural light of Pentecost. Said inner experiences - not as rare as one might think - are reflected in the messages which the Queen of Peace gives at Medjugorje. At each different liturgical Time the contents of the messages take on a befitting spiritual tonality which enhances them in a way that an ornate frame makes an image more precious.

One Lent, Mary asked the Parish: "This evening I invite you in a special way to honour the wounds, during Lent, which my Son received for the sins of this Parish. Join my prayer for the Parish that His suffering might be alleviated" (22.3.84). "Dear Children, I ask you this evening to especially honour the Heart of my Son Jesus. Make atonement for the wound inflicted on the Heart of my Son. This Heart is wounded by every serious sin" (5 April 1984).

Similar references recur in nearly all the messages given during the Times of Easter, Pentecost, Advent, Christmas, on the Solemnity of the Annunciation, on All Saints, on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, and on the anniversary of the Apparitions. And of late, on the Feast of the Patron Saint, James the Apostle, Our Lady asked us to form a closer and a more intense communion with Heaven through a deeper relationship with God's Saints whom He has placed by our side. "Today I rejoice with your Patron Saint... Ask your Patron Saints to help you be open to God's Will" (25.7.02).

This is the time in which the Father "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4), through Mary's special presence in the world, desires drawing His children closer, and in a definite manner, to the "heavenly Jerusalem and to innumerable angels in festive gathering, and to the assembly of the first-

born who are enrolled in heaven, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (Heb 12:22-24); so that with Mary they might now start living "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1) and be ever more closely tied to the reality of grace of Mary's Assumption into Heaven and Her Coronation on the earth. This closeness will allow Mary to introduce her children more fully into an existence which is transfigured by God's pure love. They too, will be a sign and an instrument of salvation for all creation, and God will truly "dwell with men," and "they will be His people, and He will be their God-with-them" (Rev 21:3).

Giuseppe Ferraro

In Communion with each other and with the Saints

by Fr. Nicolino Mori

"Dear Children, today I rejoice with your Patron Saint ... Ask your Patron Saints to help you grow in your love for God" (25 July 2002). Our Lady is clearly asking us to turn our gaze upwards and acknowledge the friends which God placed by our side to help us on our journey towards Him.

Asking the Saints to help us is not an act of devotion, but an act of faith. Even more so, it is the certainty of those who walk on the earth that they are accompanied by everyone in Heaven. Perhaps we don't think much about it, and that's because accepting this reality which is invisible takes a leap of faith that goes beyond the deceiving visible reality. We are used to this life made of immediate sensations, and when someone talks to us about living in communion with the Angels, the Saints and the Blessed Virgin, it's as if we're being asked to live in the clouds. However, true life is that which comes from them, and they are the real living people. Jesus, too, when speaking to those who opposed Him, says that God is the God of the living, because He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob who are in Paradise. So He is the God of the living, not because you are alive, but because those in Paradise are alive.

God loves to see that those in Heaven and those on the earth are together. Protestant Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died towards the end of WWII, and was arrested because he was the head of a Community, rector of a seminary, and author of a book on "Life Together," said that one of the things for which Christians must be grateful is that the Lord enables them to be together; for the world makes it difficult for a Christian to practise his faith and to breathe in

the spirit of prayer.

It is an enormous gift for Christians to be able to gather together. Bonhoeffer, who experienced those dark years of war and the high-handedness of Nazism, knew how hard it was to find an atmosphere of peace and love and faith. The Lord calls us together, just as He did with His first disciples. The Gospel teaches that this is Jesus' will. If someone says "yes" to God, he will inevitably find himself in a community. If dialogue with the Lord is personal, and our response is personal, it is always a response within a community called the Church, for the Church is a community. The Church is where Jesus said: "Wherever two or three people are united in my name, I am with them."

Jesus united His first disciples in a community. Their origins and experiences were different, but he made them become His community, and with them he began His work of formation.

When we think of formation we think perhaps of studying and memorizing, but this is learning, not formation. Instead, formation is taking on the form (or shape) of something. At the beach children have fun filling up moulds with sand to make shapes. The sand takes the shape of the mould. Therefore, Christian formation means to be formed according to Christ by staying with Christ, without necessarily being indoctrinated or brain washed. Each person goes to Christ just as he is and is gradually made to be like Him, similar to clay in the hands of the potter (cf. Jer).

Jesus gathered up His friends (He called them that) to form them, and to do that He got them to live with Him. He didn't get tired of them because of their weakness or difficulty at understanding.

One of the things they found the hardest to understand was Jesus' servile behaviour. Everyone was waiting for the moment when they would have shared in the power. The difficult thing is taking on the form of Jesus the servant. Even James and John replied to Jesus when He asked if they would drink His same cup: "Of course, we are ready for anything, as long as we have a place next to you, one on your right and one on your left." No one wants to be a servant, because it is easier to be served than to serve - in little and in big things. And it's even harder when some one, imposing himself without reason wants to decide for you.

Our Lord Jesus desires forming His disciples so that they will mature in love, and this means learning to serve, not being served. Mature love is open to others and donates to others. This is written even in the simplest of the books on psychology. In the Greek language one of the ways for saying love is eros meaning passionate attraction that seeks personal gain; and another way (used by St. John) is agape. Agape love is altruistic and helps one grow.

If you think that practising agape love would leave a void in you, let me tell you that precisely the opposite happens. Agape love matures the person who practises it, since it eliminates all those elements that tend to close up a person's love into a form of egoism. But it takes more than good will and resolutions to attain agape love.

Agape love is the fruit of Grace, without which we can do nothing. We need to ask for this grace in prayer, so that we can begin to serve, starting from ourselves by trying to get rid of the instinct in us of wanting to be served. *

News from the blessed land

Jelena's wedding

..brethren, exercise yourselves in charity!
(St. Augustine)

With the musical version of the Litany, the Saints were called to witness at the wedding celebration between Jelena Vasilj and Massimiliano Valente on 24th August in the Shrine of the Queen of Peace at Medjugorje.

Over 500 guests (mostly from abroad) filled St. James church to join the parishioners to pray for this new family. "From his shrine may the Lord bless you.." read Fra Dragan Rucic at the start of the Mass. A choir of splendid voices from Vicenza (Italy), and several soloists, helped make the celebration more sacred and solemn.

"Wine and music gladden the heart, but love of wisdom is better than both. The flute and the harp make pleasant melody, but a pleasant voice is better than both. A friend or a companion never meets one amiss, but a wife with her husband is better than both" (Eccles 40:20-23). With the choice of this reading, the bride and groom wished to underline the value of a holy marriage when it is founded on God.

Precisely because the marital union is founded on God, sponsal love is a responsible love. "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love" (1 Jn 4:7-21).

The main theme of Charity was picked up again in the Gospel: "As the Father has loved me, so I have you loved you; abide in my love;" and in the homily the celebrant invited the couple to practise charity by verifying the quality of their love continually, for even if it is as strong

and pure as crystal it will shatter if it falls. His recommendation was to use St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 13:1) to verify their love: "Replace the word charity with your names; so that you will say: Jelena is patient; Massimiliano is generous; Jelena is never envious, Massimiliano never boasts..."

They smiled radiantly, and it was clear throughout that they were accepting the mission of forming a family with great joy and responsibility.

Witnesses for the bride and groom were Paolo and Marija (Pavlovic)

Lunetti, who will soon be parents again for the fourth time.

(Editorial staff)

"We know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God" (1 Jn 4:16).

This was the Gospel passage that Jelena chose to announce her marriage to Massimiliano. The message in it is essential: God is love. This certainty must be at the base of every vocation so that it might bear fruits of holiness.

In an interview, Jelena and Massimiliano talk about their call to exercise charity within the dimensions of a family.

Constant Call to use Charity

Jelena, here you are before one of the most important events of your life: marriage; which had a beginning, and a time of preparation. How has it been?

Jelena - There was a moment in my life - before I met Massimiliano - when I wasn't sure what I wanted to do in life. At the start I was sure I wanted to marry, then I went through a reflective period during which I considered religious life. I do think that both vocations are beautiful, and the fact that I chose marriage doesn't mean that I think less of the other. I also believe that we have to consecrate ourselves to God in any case, whether we are single or married; and married life is not less committing than a religious vocation. Both vocations involve a donation of self. Discovering this was a surprise for me, too.

After you realized that you wanted to marry, how did your life change?

J - Above all, I felt that the special presence of Massimiliano helped me grow up. It was as if, without him, I hadn't finished growing up. This can happen when you're alone, but in a couple, if you don't grow the

relationship becomes impossible. In a relationship you're called constantly to exercise charity, to give of yourself. As our journey together advanced, I realized that this vocation helped me mature.

What were the ingredients you used to help this maturation continue?

J - To be frank, prayer; particularly personal prayer. There are things that only God can give us through prayer. I was depending a lot on Massimiliano to help me resolve my problems and free me of my fears, but he wouldn't satisfy my egoistic expectations, so I understood that I needed to mature. Without prayer a relationship decidedly degenerates; you use each other as you would a crutch, and it becomes a handicap for both.

Prayer is also the only true personal space we have. Women today often think that having one's own time means going out with their girlfriends. Their husbands are someone to lean on, someone who can resolve their problems. This way, instead of accompanying each other they try to merge and end up suffocating each other. The relationship then breaks. Prayer is a personal journey, but it is also one you undertake together. It is important to continually invoke God's life in your marriage, because it will be the life they will give.

I also think purity is very important in a marriage, because when we live according to our senses, we are more easily subject to disagreements and quarrels. Protecting one's purity isn't something you do up to marriage but must continue even after. Satan can't wind his way into something that is kept pure, so that those who maintain their state of purity have peace. The devil uses lust to his advantage. I don't mean that a couple might necessarily sin against purity, but that Satan uses this means, because other sins come as a consequence of this weakness.

Scripture compares the soul to a bride adorned with jewels ready to encounter her groom. Being united to God the Groom has always been your soul's desire. Now that the Groom has taken on the appearance of the young man you are about to marry, will something change?

J - In truth, there is only one Groom: Jesus Christ, then there is a husband. My soul is bound to Christ as much as it is to Massimiliano. Precisely for this there is a sacrament, because it is Christ who binds us; it is Christ who marries us.

Perhaps I'll be able to respond better to this once I am married, but I already feel that this sacrament contains a special grace which will

introduce me even more profoundly into the mystery of God. It is all part of God's plan of salvation. Far from being an appendix, marriage is part of the core of the mystery of God. In fact, every couple imitates the Holy Trinity in its fullness of communion. It is dangerous to think of marriage as belonging to just the two of us - as we would forget that it is Christ who creates the attraction between us.

God gave you a gift for the sake of all mankind, and you have always made it available for others. Do you think this grace can continue to be for all after your marrige? Many fear that the visionaries, once married, will be too busy to think of others.

J - My first pilgrim is Massimiliano. Charity never changes, so it is impossible to exercise yourself in charity towards pilgrims and deprive those closest to you of it. Our only task is to love. If this means having to spend time with many, then there's no problem. I don't think anything will change since my husband receives the same love that I give to others through listening to my testimony. I think it's schizophrenic to think of a public mission which doesn't have a hidden, fertile mission.

Massimiliano, would you like to tell us of your meeting with Jelena, and your life together so far, and of what will be?

Massimiliano - When we met some-thing peculiar happened. After my conversion ten years ago I also went through a period of discernment regarding my vocation; and we discovered that we could accompany each other in our spiritual life without excluding the call to respond to God. We started off differently; and our spirituality was different, but this turned out to be kind of complementary, and this was positive. Jelena has been fundamental to my spiritual growth. If I think how it was just a few years ago with respect to now I can barely recognize myself.

Do you agree with what Jelena said were the "ingredients" for the period of engagement?

M - Yes; even though I wouldn't like to give the idea that there were standards. Nonetheless, I would like to add that a couple should have a good spiritual guide. I feel that if we hadn't had one, we might not be here today.

Do you think having a "public person" as your wife might impede you from living a normal married life?

M - For me, Jelena is mostly a "private person" because her public side involves my life only marginally and I participate only relatively. It is definitely something which helps her in difficult moments, but the gift isn't enough on its own. It would be wrong to think that once you receive such a gift, it is sufficient for you and can be managed without a life of prayer and faith. The same thing goes for a couple. The importance of the mission given to Jelena by God doesn't release her from her duty of practising the virtues. I have always tried to live this side of Jelena by being of help to her and by being realistic, for it must never impede us from practising the virtue of Charity.

Jelena, you have always transmitted to others the value of contemplation. How compatible to you think this is with one's family commitments?

J - Being tempted by commitments happens when we think of ourselves as having only bodies. When we realize that we are body and spirit, we behave differently. I must admit that even in my life there have been moments in which I prayed little, and thanks to God I was able to get over them. Now, when I don't pray I don't feel well, so I hope that both of us will always feel the need to pray. Only prayer can give us the strength to truly love. Without God's help you always put yourself first, and this would be disastrous. Without prayer we would be lost.

Besides your guests, Heaven will also be present at your wedding. Which Saints do you feel are close to you in this moment?

J - Our Lady, of course; who is our true Mother, and guide. I feel her presence very strongly at this particular moment in my life. On a more practical side, the Saints have made us feel their presence, and have even sent gifts. St. Augustine gave us the choir; Padre Pio the photographer... They are not just present in our devotions, but also in the special times of our life.

M - St. Frances of Rome who was called to sanctify herself through matrimony and who also founded the Order of Oblates. Then a servant of God, Umberto Mori, father of a family who distinguished himself as a Christian in the world of labour. Then, of course, Blessed Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei, whose writings were very important to my

formation as a Christian. They helped me understand the meaning of holiness in one's everyday life.

(Interviewed by Sr. Stefania Consoli)

Half a thousand priests with Queen of Peace

At the beginning of July Medjugorje held its annual International Meeting for Priests. This year 483 priests from 36 different countries attended the retreat.

"I was impressed by the deep communion which ran amongst us," said Fr. Enzo Berlingeri, "especially after we confessed each other after the Way of the Cross led by Fr. Jozo up Mt. Krizevac. Without doubt, the unity created by so many priests attracts much grace."

In the past Our Lady called them "my beloved sons" urging everyone to be close to them. "Priests don't need your criticism; they need your prayers and your love."

As a Mother, Mary also knows that they need guidance. In a message to Priests, she once said: "I invite you to pray the Rosary. Invite everyone to pray the Rosary! With the Rosary you will defeat all the difficulties which Satan uses to wound the Catholic Church." And: "When you preach, don't use philosophical or theological concepts which the people might not understand. May your words be simple, and may they come from your heart."

The Blessed Virgin also underlines the importance of the great treasure they have been entrusted with, which is the blessing. "The blessing of a priest is greater than mine. If priests knew what they were granting when they bless, they would bless day and night."

(Edit. staff)

* August in Medjugorje - A priest from England told the faithful at the English language Mass to believe in prayer. "Pray.. pray.. pray.." because God hears our prayers. He told how his conversion came about thanks to the prayers of his parishioners. When they got tired of him because he never said the Rosary and clearly wasn't devoted to Our Lady, they started praying for him. Seventy of them "loaded me onto a plane for Medjugorje, as I screamed and kicked" - he said in jovial terms - "while another 200 of them continued to pray from home. Well, the parishioners got what they had hoped for, because on that first trip of mine to this blessed land I converted."

"May your prayer be sincere, detached, hopeful and trustful, and always open to God's will," he concluded, "but do pray, with perseverance and

great trust."

Pope to Fr. Jozo: "I bless you..."

Fr. Jozo Zovko received a thank you note personally signed by John Paul II in which it says: "I grant from the heart a particular blessing to Fr Jozo Zovko, o.f.m.

and I invoke a new outpouring of graces and heavenly favours, and the continuous protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary."

The Pope's blessing brings consolation in a moment when his mission of transmitting the messages of the Queen of Peace has been particularly contrasted.

God never fails to encourage his disciples with expressions of tenderness.

Letters from our readers

Fr. Diego Cancia, Rapallo Italy - When I received the last edition of Echo I read it from start to end, without even pausing. I loved it, and it gave me great joy.. I've started giving it to my faithful, and they love it too. The donation I've included was given to me for a good cause; and I think your apostolate is a very good cause. which I intend to support and encourage. Thanks again, and may Our Lady bless you!

Mirella Fino, Bari Italy - I'm writing to thank you for the blessing and the spiritual wealth which reaches my home through your precious publication. It is an instrument of peace and faith.

Missionaries of Charity, Rome Italy - We are the Missionary nuns of Mother Teresa, and we are all united to you especially through our prayer and in our thoughts. We wish to express our heartfel thanks for what you do for the entire world by spreading the messages of Our Lady. We shall always pray for you as a sign of our gratitude.

Sr. Veronica Wolf, Tyrol Austria - Each time I receive the Echo I rejoice, and I pass it on to the other sisters that they too might receive joy. May the Holy Spirit continue to bless you with abundant fruits.

Fr. Luca Bonavigo, Japan - I have been receiving your lovely publication for many years here in Japan where I have been a missionary for 37 years. I am very grateful

Fr. Carlo Matiussi, Uruguay - Thank you for your excellent publication, and congratulations on your apostolate.

Testimony from the "Friends of Medjugorje" group in Congo

Our group was started by a seminarian at St. Cyprian's Seminary in Kikwit, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. That seminarian, now a priest, first came across a copy of the Echo of Mary in 1988. Other members of the Seminary were also reading Echo. Four years ago a group was formed for all those who were interested in the messages given by the Blessed Virgin in Medjugorje. The number of participants continues to grow. Some have already been ordained, and these continue to radiate their experience wherever they work.

Others, still seminarians, get together to pray the Rosary and to share experiences. And the number of people outside the Seminary who ask to receive Our Lady's messages in the Echo of Mary continues to grow. All of this is motivation for us to continue co-operating with this great work of the Holy Spirit. Seeing those who have preceded us, we are encouraged to follow in their footsteps, in the hope that the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Priests, will keep us under Her Mantle, and that through Her intercession, the messages might reach all generations.

Christophe Kikonzi

Translators of Echo together in Medjugorje

Translators of the Echo of Mary, together with members of the Editorial Staff, spent a retreat in Medjugorje at the end of August to pray together, to reflect on the editorial mission which the Blessed Virgin has entrusted them with, and to plan a new year together under the light of the Holy Spirit, so that our publication might continue to bear new fruits of growth and conversion. Unfortunately, not everyone could make it for the occasion (not an easy task, given that the Echo of Mary is translated into 15 languages).

In particular, our prayer for the hundreds of thousands of readers around the world was lifted up to the Blessed Virgin during the climb up Mt. Krizevac.

Abundant rainfall and a thunderstorm began as we started our way up and it lasted till we got to the top, so that we were the only ones there. It was jokingly said that the bad weather was providential because we needed all the space we could get given the multitude of readers we were carrying with us!

Not at all dampened in spirit, we joyously presented all your needs and

intentions to Mary's Immaculate Heart at the foot of her Son's Cross.

* * *

The Lord is present with His blessing.

It is a blessing which corrects us when we fall, because it comes from the Cross.

Let us not be fearful to carry it and abide in it.

Villanova, 15 September 2002

"Today, I call you" Medjugorje Peace Conference - 25-26-27 October 2002. Bren Events Center, UCI Campus, Irvine, CALIFORNIA, USA.

Information POB 1775, Brea, CA 92822-175. Ph 714-572-9779.

Speakers include Fr. Tim Deeter, Milona (von Habsburg) de Rambures, and Mons. J. Lisante.

* After Holy Communion today I spoke at length to the Lord about people who are special to me. Then I heard these words:

"My daughter, don't be exerting yourself so much with words. Those whom you love in a special way, I too love in a special way, and for your sake, I shower My graces upon them. I am pleased when you tell me about them, but don't be doing so with such excessive effort."

(From St. Faustina's Diary)

Our Prayers for you!

We invite you all to join in our prayers which we offer up to God on the first Saturday of each month. On this day we shall pray for the intentions of readers (these may be expressed within the silence of your hearts and offered up in prayer; it is not necessary that they be written down and forwarded to us). Once a month Fr. Alberto will also celebrate a Holy Mass for the same intentions.