

Echo of Mary Queen of Peace

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Our Lady's message, 25 January 2006:

“Dear Children! Also today I call you to be bearers of the Gospel in your families. Do not forget, my Children, to read Sacred Scripture. Put it in a visible place and witness with your life that you believe and live the Word of God. I am close to you with my love, and I intercede before my Son for each of you. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Bearers of the Gospel

“Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for I must stay at your house today” (Lk 19:5), says Jesus, and Zacchaeus receives Him with joy and the encounter changes his life as Jesus confirms: “Today salvation has come to this house” (Lk 19:9). “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever” (Heb 13:8), and today like then, Jesus comes to look for and save those who are lost (cf. Lk 19:10).

Jesus comes to ask if he can enter our home. Our home is our heart, our soul, our family, our house. Jesus comes and brings salvation, but we cannot receive it within our sitting room. He comes to establish himself in our life, to be our Life. The encounter with Him ought to radically change our life. The change is not necessarily instantaneous, but the encounter with Him must be the beginning of a process of real conversion. The times and ways may vary from person to person, but there is only one way and that is communion with Christ Jesus.

Mary invites us to be **bearers of the Gospel in our families**, that is, to accept Jesus - the Word made flesh, the Word of Life - into our families. When He is missing, it is light, wisdom, peace and love that are missing. We can find surrogates, but these would be temporary and inadequate remedies, and sooner or later ineffective remedies. *In God alone does my soul rest, from him comes my salvation* [Ps 61 (62)]. This rest for the soul is surrender to God: necessary for communion with Jesus Christ, necessary for communion in the family and the Church, fundamental for the Kingdom of God.

The invitation to be **bearers of the Gospel in our families**, is addressed to each and all of us: father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister. Each must **bring the Gospel** to each other so he can live his role to the full (cf. Mk 3:35). This way, *Christ will be all in all* (cf. Col 3:11). **Do not forget, my Children, to read Sacred Scripture.** The reading of, and the listening



“Lent is a privileged time of interior pilgrimage towards Him Who is the fount of mercy.”
Benedict XVI

to the Word is a channel of communication between man and God; it is a disposition to be open to His grace; it is to immerse oneself in His Spirit.

Mary had already asked us to place the **Bible in a visible place** (18 Oct. 1984; 25 Aug. 1996), to be **bearers of the Word of God** (25 Aug. 1996), to read it and live it (25 Aug. 1993; 25 Aug. 1996), to **read it at home** (18 Oct. 1984; 14 Feb. 1985; 25 June 1991; 25 Aug. 1996). Today she again invites us to **place it in a visible place and witness with our life that we believe and live the Word of God.** The Bible (in a visible place) at home is a banner that expresses our belonging to the heavenly Homeland. It is a declaration of our identity as children of God in Jesus Christ. This declaration, however, must be authenticated by the witness of a life that imitates His life, that follows in His steps, that carries the perfume of Christ.

Though we are aware of the infinite distance between what we are and what we are called to be, between our humanity and Your divinity, Jesus, we shall not stop beneath the weight of our poverty and misery. With serenity and humility we desire journeying with You Lord. Mary is **near us and intercedes for each of us** with her Love. In her hands our limits offered up to You will become fuel for the fire of Your Love. Thank you Jesus; thank you Mary!

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Our Lady's message, 25 Feb. 2006:

”Dear Children, In this Lenten time of grace, I call you to open your hearts to the gifts that God desires giving you. Do not be closed, but with prayer and renunciation say ‘yes’ to God and He will give to you in abundance. Just as the earth opens to the seed in springtime and yields a hundredfold, so will your heavenly Father give to you in abundance. I am with you, my Children, and I love you tenderly. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Say Yes to God

Each year the Church unites herself to the Mystery of Jesus in the wilderness by way of the solemn forty days of Lent (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 540). **In this Lenten time of grace, I call you to open your hearts to the gifts that God desires giving you.** Lent is a special time of grace which we ought to cherish by living this time with an open heart. Being mere spectators is not enough; we must be players. It is a salvific time, and we must enter the mystery that we contemplate, be a living and active part of the mystery. **Do not be closed, but with prayer and renunciation say ‘yes’ to God.**

The call that Mary continues to address us from Medjugorje is particularly pressing this time, but also laden with promises. If you have already said ‘yes’ to God, renew your ‘yes,’ entrust it to the Baptist in the waters of the Jordan, that the heavenly Father may bless it. If you have forgotten the ‘yes’ said time ago, be now *reconciled with God* (cf. 2 Co 5:20). If you have yet to say your ‘yes’, say it now, right now; you are still in time. May each of us open his heart to God: **with prayer and renunciation say ‘yes’ to God.**

The ‘yes’ that God awaits from us is the, *Behold, be it done unto me according to Thy word:* the response Mary entrusted to the Angel (Lk 1:38). It is the *Behold, I come, oh Father, to do Thy will,* pronounced by Jesus (Heb 10:7-9, Mk 14:36). It is not a matter of repeating formulas, or of inventing new ones, but of letting ourselves be reached by God through prayer and renunciation. And then of remaining with Him, communicating with Him, just as Jesus did, as Mary did. We must *renounce* the voices that drown out His Voice, the lights that cloud over His Light, the loves that destroy true Love, the riches that dissipate true Wealth, the hopes that suffocate true Hope. Renunciation equals fasting.

Prayer is a vessel for God's salvific grace. To pray is to breathe in God's Spirit;

it is to plunge oneself in God, to be shipwrecked in His Love. *To pray* is to praise God in all circumstances, in joy and sorrow, fatigue and rest, health and sickness, because He is always by our side, even when we are not aware of it. We are never alone; *Jesus is with us every day... until the end of the world.*

In this time of grace let us say **yes to God**, and renew our baptismal promises: our faith in Christ and our rejection of Satan and all his works and seducing ways. Let us seek out the forgiveness of our sins in the sacrament of confession to be reconciled with God and with our brethren. Let us seek in the holy Eucharist the gift of life in Christ and the strength to offer ourselves to God for the sake of our brethren. **Do not be closed, but with prayer and renunciation say 'yes' to God and He will give to you in abundance.** Yet, His gift has already been given us: it is there before us, within us even, and awaits only to be recognized and accepted. It is Jesus Christ Himself!

Just as the earth opens to the seed in springtime and yields a hundredfold, so our heart opens up to God's Kingdom that *descends as rain on the grass, as showers falling gently on the land* – so that in the world, *justice will blossom and peace will abound* (cf. Ps 71:6-7).

Mary is with us and loves us tenderly: tender like a new bud in springtime, like the Life in her that blossoms and is donated to us. It is the bud of the *root of Jesse* (Is 11:1) that awaits to blossom in us. N.Q.

Pope's First Encyclical A God who is Only Love

A pope's first encyclical is said to be *programmatic*, a kind of manifesto of the style that Peter's successor desires giving to the Church during his pontificate. And how could one not see in the title of Pope Benedict's document the will to begin from the foundation of Christianity: *God is love* (1Jn 4:16), so that this humanity ever more divided amid the sea of options proposed by society might be shown the tracks that lead to God.

It is only from this statement that one can begin to comprehend the mystery of a God who took on flesh and died on a cross to save his own children. It is only in this light that one can accept the precepts of a faith that invites us to continually welcome, comprehend and have mercy on one and all, including enemies. Only in the perspective of the love of God - who is love - can any order be made of the bazaar of "loves" that man procures to satisfy the deep yearning he experiences in his heart.

A problem of language

"Today, the term "love" has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words, a word to which we attach quite different meanings," begins the Pope, who then asks a question: "Are all these forms of love basically one, so that love, in its many and varied manifestations, is ultimately a single reality, or are we merely using the same

He died a year ago, and it seems like yesterday. Then, we felt orphaned, but his presence is so strong that now we almost don't miss him. Yet how we feared to lose him! and how many times did we think another pope could never replace him, so used we were to his way of guiding the Church.

The events contradict us: **JOHN PAUL II** continues his mission from his place in heaven. He is free at last of a body which had become too cumbersome for his soul which instead was ready to give himself in a more radical way for his children. And in his place we have been given a new Pontiff of similar stature.

Usually on an anniversary, especially if it's the first, many words flow for the occasion. The following words were written two days before the death of Pope Wojtyla. They are still steeped in the spontaneity of the moment, and express the commotion of a heart filled with gratitude as it prepares itself to bid goodbye to its beloved father.

Rome 1st April 2005

"The world is an altar that sings glory to God with the beauty of nature, in a singular and unique melody expressed in the glimmer of the stars, the voice of running water, the warmth of a fire, enflaming the Creator's passion of joy for His creation. The earth is an altar; it

It was a day in spring

nourishes the living beings, and gives light to the many spring times in the heart of a man that opens up to the infinite love, that unique and unrepeatable miracle that lights up every fraction of time.

Man, God's beloved and chosen creature, blossoms as the spring and opens up to the light and warmth of the sun to reveal the beauty of the infinite colours and their multiple nuances enhanced by a soul in God's grace, radiating the beauty and the perfume around him as a corolla of a flower.

John Paul II, authentic man, completed by God, donned with a robe woven in the most precious fabric: the fabric of truth. It purifies the peoples and sustains them when they totter. John Paul II, pilgrim of the world, in a single embrace you build up God's people, mending lacerations and distances in hearts. You offered up your own heart, completely, and for everyone without distinction. And in your self-offering your heart was lacerated even more and it poured out upon us the love of the Father.

You are as a precious flower that blossoms in the holy spring time, sanctified by the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ; you came into full bloom to be robed in light for our sake, to bring us all to God, in His infinite glory.

Thank you Holy Father: Friend, Brother, Father, Mother!"

Tommaso C.

word to designate totally different realities?" The Pope's response is supported by the definition of God as love: "The name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence... For this reason, I wish in my first Encyclical to speak of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others."



Which love are we talking about?

Love as *charitas*, charity, love in its fullest form, made up of worldly love, *eros* (ascending, possessive or covetous love) together with love grounded in and shaped by faith: *agape* (descending, oblation love). Two elements, typically thought to be contrasting, yet they can never be completely separated: "Were this antithesis to be taken to extremes, the essence of Christianity would be detached from the vital relations fundamental to human existence, and would become a world apart. Yet *eros* and *agape* can never be completely separated. The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized," says the Holy Father.

Purification leads to true love

Benedict doesn't avoid warning us of the dangers of degraded love to which the world today has become accustomed, that we might attain the love which promises infinity and eternity. "Purification and growth in

maturity are called for; and these also pass through the path of renunciation. Far from rejecting or "poisoning" *eros*, they heal it and restore its true grandeur," he points out. "Nowadays Christianity of the past is often criticized as having been opposed to the body; and it is quite true that tendencies of this sort have always existed. Yet the contemporary way of exalting the body is deceptive. *Eros*, reduced to pure "sex", has become a commodity, a mere "thing" to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity." He then adds: "True, *eros* tends to rise "in ecstasy" towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing."

Harmony of love

The challenge of *eros* is overcome when both body and soul live in harmony. "Love is indeed *ecstasy*, not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God."

It is part of love's growth towards higher levels and inward purification that it seeks to become definitive, and fully realize its human and divine promise. "Man is truly himself when his body and soul are intimately united; the challenge of *eros* can be said to be truly overcome when this unification is achieved," says Papa Ratzinger.

Giving of self out of love

The first part of the Encyclical is concerned with redefining the meaning of love so that its true essence may be evident. A Christian, though, is also challenged to *love his neighbour as himself*. Thus, Christians have always given utter importance to “works of charity.” Awareness of this responsibility has had a constitutive relevance in the Church from the beginning, and numerous are the religious institutions founded on assisting the needy in body and spirit. “It is only through serving the poor that my eyes are able to see what God does for me and how He loves me,” continues Peter’s Successor. However, he also makes it clear that when charity isn’t rooted in a personal relationship with God it is a form of social assistance. Charity work, he explains, must be more than mere philanthropy.

Mother Teresa and other saints

The saints are a living testimony to this. “In the example of Bl. Teresa of Calcutta we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbour but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service,” emphasizes the Pope while he specifies that love of God and love of neighbour cannot be separated, but are a sole commandment. “Love of neighbour will no longer be for (us) a commandment imposed from without, but a consequence deriving from (our) faith, a faith which becomes active through love.” Love grows thanks to love.

Charity always more than only activity

“If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Co 13) says St. Paul in his *ode to charity*, which according to the Pope has to be, “the *Magna Carta* of all ecclesial service; it sums up all the reflections on love which I have offered throughout this Encyclical Letter. Practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ. My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them: if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift.”

Serving others correctly leads to humility

The one who serves does not consider himself superior to the one served, however miserable his situation at the moment may be. “Christ took the lowest place in the world - the Cross - and by this radical humility he redeemed us and constantly comes to our aid. Those who are in a position to help others will realize that in doing so they themselves receive help; being able to help others is no merit or achievement of their own. This duty is a grace. The more we do for others, the more we understand and can appropriate the words of Christ: ‘We are useless servants’ (Lk 17:10). The more we are aware of bringing God to others as a gift, the more effective will our love be in changing the world.” *Editor*

Pope sings Mary’s praises

Benedict concludes his Encyclical with praise for Mary, “Mother of the Lord and mirror of all holiness.” To Mary, who knitted love into every moment of her life, who became the mother of Love, are dedicated the last words of his letter on love. His words are full of grace and tender love for the little woman of Nazareth.

“In the *Gospel of Luke* we find her engaged in a service of charity to her cousin Elizabeth... ‘My soul magnifies the Lord’ (Lk 1:46). In these words she expresses her whole programme of life: not setting herself at the centre, but **leaving space for God**, who is encountered both in prayer and in service of neighbour - only then does the world become good.

Mary is great because she wants to magnify God, not herself. She is lowly: her only desire is to be the handmaid of the Lord. She knows that she will only contribute to the salvation of the world if, rather than carrying out her own projects, she places herself completely at the disposal of God’s initiatives.

Mary is a woman of hope: only because she believes in God’s promises and awaits the salvation of Israel, can the angel visit her and call her to the decisive service of these promises.

Mary is a woman of faith: ‘Blessed are you who believed,’ Elizabeth says to her. The Magnificat - a portrait, so to speak, of her soul - is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the Word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the Word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the Word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the Word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate.

Finally, **Mary is a woman who loves.** How could it be otherwise? As a believer who in faith thinks with God’s thoughts and wills with God’s will, she cannot fail to be a woman who loves. We sense this in her

quiet gestures, as recounted by the infancy narratives in the Gospel. We see it in the delicacy with which she recognizes the need of the spouses at Cana and makes it known to Jesus. We see it in the humility with which she recedes into the background during Jesus’ public life, knowing that the Son must establish a new family and that the Mother’s hour will come only with the Cross, which will be Jesus’ true hour (cf. Jn 2:4; 13:1). When the disciples flee, Mary will remain beneath the Cross; later, at the hour of Pentecost, it will be they who gather around her as they wait for the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:14).

Mary has truly become the **Mother of all believers**. Men and women of every time and place have recourse to her motherly kindness and her virginal purity and grace, in all their needs and aspirations, their joys and sorrows, their moments of loneliness and their common endeavours. They constantly experience the gift of her **goodness** and the **unfailing love** which she pours out from the depths of her heart. The testimonials of gratitude, offered to her from every continent and culture, are a recognition of that **pure love** which is **not self-seeking** but simply **benevolent**. At the same time, the devotion of the faithful shows an infallible intuition of how such love is possible: it becomes so as a result

of the most intimate union with God, through which the soul is totally pervaded by him - a condition which enables those who have drunk from the fountain of God’s love to become in their turn a fountain from which ‘flow rivers of living water’ (Jn 7:38).

Mary, Virgin and Mother, shows us what love is and whence it draws its origin and its constantly renewed power. To her we entrust the Church and her mission in the service of love:



Holy Mary, Mother of God, you have given the world its true light, Jesus, your Son - the Son of God. You abandoned yourself completely to God’s call and thus became a wellspring of the goodness which flows forth from him. Show us Jesus. Lead us to him. Teach us to know and love him, so we too can become capable of true love and be fountains of living water in the midst of a thirsting world.

Benedict XVI

WHAT THE POPE THINKS OF...

THE EMBRYO

Let’s take a psalm (138), and we’ll see how in the psalm the human being, while still an unformed presence in the womb, is the subject of the Creator’s loving gaze. He is still an “unformed substance” in his mother’s womb: described in that term as a small, oval, curled-up reality, but on which God has already turned his benevolent and loving eyes.

In the psalm there is the symbol of

the potter and of the sculptor who “fashions” and moulds his artistic creation, his masterpiece. “

The idea in our psalm that God already sees the entire future of that embryo, still an ‘unformed substance,’ is extremely powerful,” he commented. “The days which that creature will live and fill with deeds throughout his earthly existence are already written in the Lord’s book of life.” Thus, once again the transcendent greatness of divine knowledge emerges, embracing not only humanity’s past and present but also the span, still hidden, of the future.

Life, a gift we cannot waste

How many forms of life, and how much vital energy gushing forth continuously from the bosom of the Father to continually generate the earth! It is a perpetual motion that cannot be halted because God is the source of life which is eternally open. We can admire it in the fleeting life of a flower, or centuries-old trees that watch, immobile, as generations come and go. It can be admired in animals, and we can be surprised and fascinated by the variety of species, and even more so by the knowledge that it was entrusted to man that he might draw life from life.

In these creatures, however, life begins and after a certain period of time – be it long or short – life comes to an end. Not so in man. Life is a free gift, that once conceived will never end. Our earthly life comes to an end, when our bodies cease to function, but our life continues in that eternal dimension hidden in the mystery which has been revealed to us through Jesus Christ and is the foundation of our faith.

The technical and scientific progress of today has allowed man to delve ever more deeply into the secrets of life, but **at what price? and who will pay the price?**

If we are honest, we know the answer. **Embryos** never born, considered not suitable to be planted in a uterus that didn't generate them, are the objects of frequent experiments. Their destiny? Manipulation and the market. Wasted life, such as the children who are conceived, not wanted and eliminated, as though they were merely "a problem." The number of **abortions** every minute all over the world is enormous. Our world, created that life might abound, continues to generate death.

The means of killing our little ones have continued to become more immediate and even "home-made" such as the much discussed **abortion pill** (RU486), designed - it has been said - to spare women the trauma of surgical abortion, but no doubt to shift the responsibility from those who perform abortions entirely onto the women of their unwanted babies. In truth, all it does

is close the conscience of mothers who are often deceived into believing that their newly conceived child is merely a blood clot. Medical indications describe an "expulsion of embryonic tissue," omitting that a life is being suppressed.

It is one of the many lies behind which is hidden the father of lies, Satan, known also as the great accuser. Women will be left with all the responsibility and inevitable feelings of guilt. Another great lie is calling **contraception** (that which counteracts conception) what is instead abortion. Yet, manufacturers publish the facts on the abortifacient nature of contraceptives, such as IUD's and other methods, and including the contraceptive pill. Official statistics tell us that the pill does not always impede ovulation, so that when conception occurs the hostile environment of the uterus created by the "contraceptive" impedes nidation / implantation of a zygote (a human baby at its youngest stage). This means that the newly conceived child, deprived of nutrition, will die soon afterwards.

It is especially from **women that a cry of alarm** is being raised, particularly by women who under various circumstances have had to get rid of an unwanted pregnancy. It is a critical moment and the would be mother is extremely vulnerable. The devil knows this and exploits the situation, and oft times the mother becomes just as much a victim as her child. But in her heart the burden and the memory remain. But if she opens the door to God - who is life and light - He can transform the sorrowful event into an occasion of **redemption**, for herself, her child, and for others.

S.C.

John Paul II: "I would like to say a **special word to women who have had an abortion**. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try

rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance... You will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord..." (*Evangelium Vitae*, 99)

John Paul II: "...[In] firmly rejecting "pro-choice" it is necessary to become courageously "pro-woman," promoting a choice that is truly in favour of women. It is the woman who pays the highest price, not only for her motherhood, but even more for (...) the suppression of the life of the child who has been conceived. The only honest stance is that of radical solidarity with the woman. It is not right to leave her alone. The experiences of many counselling centres show that the woman does not want to suppress the life of the child she carries within her. If she is supported in this attitude, and if she is freed from the intimidation of those around her, then she is even capable of heroism." (*Crossing the Threshold of Hope*)

Benedict XVI: "In man, whatever his stage or condition of life, there shines a reflection of God's own reality. For this reason, the Magisterium of the Church has constantly proclaimed the sacred and inviolable nature of each human life, from conception to natural end. This moral judgement also holds at the **beginning of an embryo's life, even before it is implanted in the mother's womb.**" (27 Feb. 2006)

Suggested reading: "Forbidden Grief" by Burke and Reardon; "Aborted Women, Silent No More" by David Reardon (Loyola Univ. Press); "A Greater Vision" by Joan Ulicny, "Helping Women Recover from Abortion" by Nancy Michels (Bethany House); "Women Who Make the World Worse, and How Their Radical Feminist Assault is Ruining our Schools, Families, Military, and Sports" by Kate O'Beirne.

Web pages: www.afterabortion.org
<http://www.hli.org/>
<http://members.aol.com/infants1/>

The Way that leads to Heaven

One is the way the Lord trod to redeem us, one is the way that He indicated as bringing salvation. There is no other way. A Christian is one who knows how to recognize this narrow way, and will say yes to Him in a world that seeks it but refuses to understand the meaning of suffering, and is scandalized at every cross.

"Dear Children, from the cross come great graces."

If - out of love of God - we have been able at times to embrace our little crosses that life deals out, then we have surely experienced that these were the most fertile moments in our spiritual life, moments of renewal in a journey towards a new light, in which we were



able to experience Christ Himself suffering with and in us. Yet, despite this we still resist with might and rebellion before unexpected suffering. At times our will is stronger, all the same Christianity should not be confused with stoicism or a state of remaining unperturbed before sorrow and pain.

If on the earth we shall always have to encounter suffering, we must not forget that the Lord promises us complete joy and fullness of life. Does awakening to the call to participate in the continuous suffering of all His members mean we are also called to become witnesses of authentic good news?

How to reconcile all this?

Profound and constant contemplation of the Lord's passion is the answer. Through contemplation of the folly of love that urged

the eternal and infinite God to allow Himself to be slain for our sake, one is given the inner strength to handle the contradiction. This person will feel ever more closely drawn to the love - insane, uncontrolled and uncontrollable - of God: Creator, Redeemer and fount of every good.

Contemplation is more than human reflection; it is looking and understanding with the heart; it is perceiving from within; being united to divine sentiments, and letting oneself be involved in a living relationship with the suffering Christ. He for first travelled down this road of His own free will. Out of love He asks us to follow Him. To follow, or to decide for Him doesn't mean to attract to self every form of suffering, but it means to live in communion with Him everything that comes our way. All we have to do is unite everything that we live to Jesus Christ. Only then shall we discover that Love leads to sacrifice, and sacrifice to freedom!

The gift of Krizevac

As we reflect on all this we can better comprehend the fact that here at Medjugorje Mary gave us the gift of Krizevac: the highest of the hills surrounding Medjugorje. Very special graces are connected with this hill upon which pilgrims practise the Way of the Cross.

What a gift to be able to meditate the Way of the Cross as we climb this steep and rocky hill, where every single step behind Jesus is a step closer to Heaven. The Lord draws us to Himself; He calls us to the heights. Through following Him along the way of sacrificial love, of love totally offered up for the salvation of the world, we come close to Heaven, in a place never before known. From here our view is greatly widened, and with a new gaze we can look back upon the journey so far and intuit how much He has always been close to us. We shall see that it is because He has loved us so much that He lead us to such heights. And we shall finally understand the salvific value of every suffering offered up and overcome in union with Christ.

Awaiting us is another cross, but it will not upset or intimidate us. We shall recognize in the cross the door that leads to the new dimensions of man transfigured by love; we shall recognize the cross as a sign of extreme love, a fount of life and resurrection, the cross atop of the holy mountain to be a blessing and protection for the whole world, and for the redeemed people a sign of belonging to God. United to this cross we can truly be a living blessing for all that we touch and feel.

What a grace to be a part of this cross! We do not want even the smallest of our daily crosses to be taken from us, for the cross alone fulfils and seals our true and intimate union with God. *F. Cavagna*

Your Cross, by St Francis de Sales

The everlasting God has in His wisdom foreseen from eternity the cross that He now presents to you as a gift from His inmost heart.



Jelena, you have been absent from the pages of Echo for some time. What has been happening in your life lately? Who is Jelena today?

We're expecting our third child, but the pregnancy hasn't been going according to provisions, and I've been confined to total rest. But I've seen how this condition of immobility regards my body only, while my spirit has been able to broaden out continually. So this has been a time of grace for me, because love has two sides to it. There is the joy and the enthusiasm of giving, even though this is accompanied by the cross, but it is when the cross is accepted, that our joy is even deeper. Then, everything is okay. It seems as though life should be always downhill to be true - or that's how we imagine it. However, I am coming to understand ever more how suffering is our true life. So I can say that right now I am living this "true life."

You mean the cross should be a kind of permanent fixture?

The cross is inevitable, but when it is accepted as an element of love, then it takes on so much more meaning and becomes more bearable, I would say even inexistent - or at least the negative charge we feel is greatly lessened.

My suffering of now is not marked by great pain; it's rather an experience of being unable to "produce" according to the mentality of modern day society, for which "being" equals nothing. No one asks who you are... you asked me who I am!

Maternity, rather than doing, is being, and at present I am living this state of being. Mary gives us her example. Her life was a life of prayer, spent listening to the Word, at disposal of the Word whom she bore in her womb. Though she cooperated with Him, it was the Son's work. Suffering places us in this true vision of life, where we depend entirely on the Lord, where it is He who works, and has everything under control

So what is the correct attitude to assume when we suffer?

There are three possible approaches. The first is when a person feels he is crushed by suffering and seeks to resist and fight back. In this case, the person becomes aggressive, even unbearable, for those around him because he wants at all costs to control his own life. The second option is to feel so crushed as to become passive. The person refuses to cooperate and becomes depressed.

The third option is what I would call a type of "dance" where it is necessary for the person to collaborate. In this dance you

JELENA INTERVIEWED

Our Lady told us the truth

feel yourself being carried up by God's energy: the source of this energy is not yours, as it is God who leads. You, however, are not passive, not a puppet being pulled around by God. An interaction takes place. I think suffering must be lived thus, as a dance together with the Holy Spirit. He inspires you, shows you the steps, and you - through following Him - express an act of will. This way, suffering need not be lived as something destructive, or as a defeat. It is important that we neither resign ourselves nor want to impose our will on our lives, otherwise we would find ourselves fighting against God.

Mary often refers to suffering as something to be lived as an offering to God. Man, though, is afraid of suffering. In a world that teaches us to avoid and even anaesthetize it, the words of Mary come to counteract this idea, they come as a medicine. What would you say?

I recently read a book by Benedict XVI called *Maria, Chiesa Nascente*. A lot of its expressions are still impressed in my mind, and I want to use them to say what I'm thinking. You know, without Mary the Church would be nothing more than an organization of persons, and peoples, who try to make a project work. Mary, instead, helps us to understand who the Church really is. She is the Church-bride, the Church who listens, the Church who in a certain way subjects herself - even though this word is not very popular today. In short, the Church is aware of being betrothed to Christ, not an autonomous Church that's "in business." That is why Mary at Medjugorje asks us above all to learn from the Bridegroom, to let ourselves be led by Him, as she did.

In this perspective Mary becomes the central figure in the life of the Church.

Yes, and without Mary our spirituality would risk being mere activism. Only she can teach us to pray. These days prayer is in a crisis, as is listening with the heart to God. So it is right that she should come to teach us again. Without Mary we cannot be what we ought to be! So rather than "doing" prayer, perhaps we should learn something from Mary's way of being. She is a sign of what each of us should be before God. I think it is a great injustice to be deprived of Mary. We need her.

Many people say they can't pray because they lack the time. However, you say that Mary asks us to be "contemplatives" in the world. How can we do this?

I want to refer to the Pope's book again, when he speaks of the dimension of motherhood without which the world could not survive. The problem is that the role of motherhood is almost completely

disfigured in today's world, because all of the tasks that were once a mother's have been removed from her in one way or another, due to a distorted vision of society that makes one believe that if the woman cannot "produce" she has no worth, and does not consider that certain aspects of femininity are fundamental for the collective growth. In his book the Holy Father says that there are some things that need only grow, and someone must watch over that growth.

So the role of the woman in the Church is fundamental in her capacity to make things grow, besides generating them.

I don't think women need to take on men's roles. Perhaps men need to learn who the woman really is, because before God each soul is almost feminine. I don't mean to get philosophical, but I do see that before God the soul is receptive, disposed, and welcoming. Women, then, don't have to withdraw or feel useless in society. They only need to profoundly be themselves to be able to save the world.

It's what Pope Benedict says in his book: if everything was just activism, those things that only need to grow - for example a child in the womb, or a flower - could not exist because they would be suffocated by activism. Without motherhood, without Mary, there would be no prayer. Without prayer one loses time. That is why motherhood is not attractive for many, because they consider time spent talking with your child is time lost.

So the Church needs people willing to "lose time"?

Someone in a hurry cannot have a fertile spiritual life. If a mother's relationship with her children is rushed she cannot live her motherhood properly. Children need their parent's union more than they need bread. Today we worry about houses and things - not that this isn't good - but the interior life is practically ignored.

Our world reminds me of a silent film: there are events that we see, but we can't see the real meaning of things because we don't listen to God's voice in us. We live life badly because we don't realize that human relations - which mirror our relationship with God - are the most important thing on this earth.

Why do you think relationships clash?

I think because we cultivate our own projects, which at times can be obsessions; and because we're obsessed with reaching a certain point without ever listening to the Holy Spirit, or to others. We really need to be in harmony with God and with those around us. We can't have everything the way we want them.

I would say that it would be better to prefer the other to self. I know it's very hard, but when we treat others this way, they too begin to treat us in the same way. So it's for our own good, really. We concern ourselves with our own things, without considering that only good can conquer the heart of another. The more we are allied, the more this good grows also within us.

Mary has prepared us over these years, and she desires that her children today be ready. Habit can weaken one's initial zeal. What would you say to those who've responded to her call?"

I would say that prayer must dilate the heart; and that often the heart is instead closed. Love is missing. The wine is missing, like at Cana. Gradually, one tires along the journey. We have to trust Our Lady; believe that she told us the truth; and we shouldn't doubt, or lose our faith. I see that often people feel isolated, as if deciding for God meant withdrawal. Instead, when you decide for God you enter into the heart of the world. The world desires God, but it's like an immature child that can't hear the voice of its parent.

You've been in Rome for many years

spiritual father, and founder of a Community that now counts more than 2,000 members and is present in various parts of the world. Despite this, there was only one thing that he wanted: **to seek God,**" said Card. Antonelli at the funeral. "He would often say that death doesn't exist, and if it does it is only as a medicine that once and for all opens us up into God's infinite love. The older he got the more he felt he was living. The peace and joy that he radiated with increasing intensity testified most splendidly that for him death was the fulfilment of life."

The deepest memory lies with his Children who accompanied him over the years, and in their collection of teachings and writings (more than 500 books published), memories and especially his fatherly love that was never lacking. **"Have trust. Death does not frighten me...** I am leaving you only apparently. Really, I am with you more than before," he said in the last message which he dictated a few months before he died to his successor Fr.

now. How do you relate with Medjugorje today?

For me Medjugorje is not a place, but a state of being. Before I spoke of a silent film, whereas I think of Medju as a film with a very deep sound, and where there is great awareness of life and life's destination. Here, instead, there's no conscience; we don't know where we're going. We're going, but without knowing where. Medjugorje is this awareness of God in us, where it is normal for everyone to think that God is with us, despite all the limits that exist. I've noticed that at Medju love remains always, even if people weren't to speak well of each other, behind there is still this love which is committing. Here instead it seems that there is a total non-commitment, in everything!

What is your mission?

It's not a profession, that's for sure. Not even an activity which I don't think I'll ever take up. Probably, I think I'll especially live the *Incarnation* in every aspect of my life and be in a certain sense a bridge. I wouldn't like this to sound too vain, but lately I've been thinking that all of us should be like Mary, in that she is a mirror of God's work, so that the world might believe in this Presence. In short, I'd like to realize the Christian life: that is, lead an ordinary life that is also extraordinary. In other words, make those choices that the world by now finds profoundly disturbing.

Do you have a word for the Church of today?

I strongly feel the universality of the Church. I think that we have a very big family, and that we can't close ourselves up in our own little family. I am a mother of children, but I see how they share my same destiny, which is to be a part of this big family. So the word you ask for is: love!

(interviewed by S.C.)

Fr. Divo Barsotti returns to the Father

Years ago Fr. Barsotti had agreed to grant me an interview for the Echo of Mary, but due to his illness I put it off. While I regret doing that, I am consoled knowing he is even closer now that he is freed of his body and can communicate via the Spirit. "It is rather relative that the wall of the body should impede us from being together. Our union with God (Father) is not in the experience of our senses, but in Christ who united us to Himself and wanted us to be one Body with Him," he had written before falling sick.

Fr. Divo Barsotti departed for heaven on 15 February in his house *Casa San Sergio*, the little hermitage in the hills of Florence and home for his Community of the Children of God which he founded in 1948. "He was a priest, mystic, writer, theologian, preacher, counsellor and

Serafino Tognetti. "I will not abandon anyone," he continued. "I exhort you to be united; do not doubt, do not be dispersed, do not be discouraged..."

Touching words that each of us can make his own, for they bear within them the concern of the shepherd who knows how to protect his fold and guarantee *green pastures* for his sheep. They are words that bear the mark of a man who "knows the way home" and who for all his life sought complete union with God: "I live in constant anxiety, an ever growing yearning to reach Him."

We entrust him to Our Lady to whom the 20 year-old Divo professed his act of offering: "I desire for my entire life to be an act of love for you, my sweet Queen, and as proof of my love for you, beginning from this instant I offer myself entirely to you, together with all my belongings, and **I offer myself to God as a victim of holocaust**, with supplications that He might consume me ever more in His love."

Editor

Why Are You Afraid?

Perhaps Christ would say this to us today. In the Gospel, at the time when He was walking in the midst of men, He often said: *Do not be afraid!* (Mt 28:10); *Courage, it is I, do not be afraid!* (Mk 6:50); *There is no need to be afraid, little flock* (Lk 12:32); *Do not be afraid, only have faith!* (Mk 5:36).

He was the long-awaited Messiah; the people got to know him and his new teaching gradually. But we, Christians of today, have known him for centuries. We have countless experiences that witness to this truth: **if Jesus is with us there is nothing to be afraid of!** So why do we allow fear - under its various forms - to shamelessly invade our inner spaces? Why do we harbour fear that tangles and binds us, removing our peace? Above all, why do we allow others to subjugate us by manipulating our fear? If man was created to be free, we must know that fear is one of the shrewdest robbers!

Why and where fear is born, I know not. There is no doubt an abundance of texts on the subject. Many are the causes and factors for which a fear, when generated, remains hidden within us. It would be interesting to know more. However, here we are concerned with the inner mechanisms that impede the soul from growing in wisdom and grace (cf. Lk 2:40) according to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

It is not rare that some like to hold others in their power, and to exercise that power they touch on our vulnerable spots through awakening our fears. If they are successful, it means that our fears are rooted there where we are most exposed.

Whose is the fault? Certainly, those who exploit our fragility do wrong, but it's

not up to us to judge. In a way the responsibility is ours because when fear begins to get a hold on us it means that there is **something in us we fear to lose.**

This is the point! The coffer where we keep our interests and property tightly locked up is threatened. No matter how legitimate it is to have these, we are faced with the fear of losing: work, house, wife, rights, reasons and health, without mentioning our very life. These are all holy things, but what do we do with the assuring words of Our Lord? Do we really believe or do we leave them on the pews of our Sunday Mass?

We must realize that at the beginning of this century there lurks in the air a subtle and sordid desire for the **control of all humanity** by forces more or less manifest, that nurtures a climate of instability and fear. The news medias seem more like scaremongers. No one tells us: *Do not be afraid!* Rather, out of love for sensationalism they tend to foster in us insecurity, discouragement and mistrust in a world where "anything could happen to us," resulting in us continually "looking back over our shoulders" as we try to get on with our lives.

"Man, who has snatched your hope?" I heard this at a recent seminar, and it seems appropriate, except that we should replace "man" with "Christian," meaning those who have adhered to the Gospel of hope (cf. 1Pt 3:15), and have believed.

We will not resolve anything if we wait for this system, which has contaminated the globe, to change, for if this is its criteria it can only get worse. We can, however, begin to work on ourselves, by offering ourselves up into the hands of the Lord so He can turn us into *yeast* (cf. Mt 13:33) that is able to make the mass grow so much that it breaks through the rigid walls of the container: that is, the conventions,

structures, and arid institutionalism that we cling to when we are fearful.

What is the first step? Begin by stripping ourselves of our interests: of the will to keep something for ourselves at all costs, or of wanting to self-manage our lives, possessions, and personal relations. If we truly trusted God we would let Him govern everything. If something is meant to be for our good, He will defend it. Instead, if we do not need it anymore, He will remove it, but only to give us something better. And we will see that our fears have no reason to exist, and they will vanish like smoke which is all they are.

Surrendered to God we shall no longer need to fight to keep our goods, but shall be serene and free. Then, we shall begin to be our true selves, without the mask of harshness of one who has to protect his treasure, or of the victim who feels he has suffered injustice. It is preferable to put up with injustice that comes from without while being free on the inside, than to be free externally whilst being imprisoned by terror on the inside.

Poverty of spirit is thus the true antidote to fear. Poverty of spirit is that healthy detachment that enables us to see the fleetingness of life, helping us to fix our gaze on the eternity of God who awaits us. Vast horizons will be opened before us in which we will perceive enticing novelties, those which could not blossom because their place had been occupied by old things we didn't want to renounce.

Why are you afraid, Christians of the third millennium? You have the keys to science, the secrets of technology, millennia of history behind you, yet your life is enveloped by fear! When we unite ourselves to Jesus, who came to free us, our existence is transformed into a "monstrance of hope" - as Fr. Tonino Bello would say. Others will not delay to notice, and they will want to know more.

Stefania Consoli

This is a Time of Grace!

by Giuseppe Ferraro

From the unfathomable depth of the mystery of the Incarnation, the fullness of God's life entered into time. From that moment on a process of recapitulation of the entire creation began within the history of the world in the glorified flesh of the Risen One. This will culminate in the "handing over of the kingdom of God the Father (after) having done away with every sovereignty, authority and power" (1Cor 15:24).

Thus, the work of salvation will necessarily have to be fulfilled within the time that belongs to the history of mankind. Time is, in fact, a dimension essential to the expression of the salvific action of grace. Even in the antique book of Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) we read: "All things have their season..." (Qo 3:1) and we know that when "the appointed time came God sent his Son, born of a woman... to enable us to be adopted as sons" (Gal 4:4).

In her messages the Queen of Peace insistently refers to the special tonality of this time, marked in an extraordinary way by

the grace of Her presence in the world. "*This time is a time of grace and I desire for you that the grace be great*" (message 25 June 1989), "*God grants me this time as a gift for you*" (25 Aug. 1997).

This time is in fact charged with special graces; a time in which God entrusts Mary with a mission that will determine the future of humanity, for which she is calling her children to take a new and decisive step: "*I desire that you all be active too in this time, which through me is bound to Heaven in a special way,*" (Mess. 25.05.1996). A great epoch-making passover that already shines with the light of the new heavens and new earth, appears on the splendid horizon of Christ's fulfilled regality in hearts and all creation: "For he must be king... so that God may be all in all" (1Cor 15:25-28): "*Dear Children, God grants me this time as a gift to you, so that I might instruct you and lead you on the path of salvation*" (Mess. 25.08.1997). "*Increase your prayers because you particularly need to in these last times*" (1.08.1990).

But what is this absolutely extraordinary grace that God is offering his children in this time? It is the possibility

of joining Mary to become vessels of God's life and love for the entire universe! It is given to those who lovingly respond to the call of the Mother. It is for this that God the Creator, through Mary, is calling ranks of children to allow themselves to be interiorly transformed by the action of the Holy Spirit, till their life and hearts are completely fused into Mary's Immaculate Heart, so that through Mary they can be united to the burning Heart of the Lamb who was slain. For He alone, through His regal offering, is able to definitely break the seals of death that still shut off multitudes of souls from the gift of divine life, and to ransom "for God... with his blood... men of every race, language, people and nation" (Rev 5:9), that "everything is subjected to him... so that God may be all in all" (1 Co 15:28): "*This is a special time; for this I am with you, to bring you closer to my Heart and to the Heart of my Son Jesus. My dear Children, I desire that you be children of the light and not of the darkness. Therefore, live what I tell you.*"

The fulfilment of all this, by divine disposition, passes through the "triumph of Mary's Immaculate Heart" (announced at Fatima) and the establishment of her regality over the universe: "*Dear Children, help my*

Humble at Heart

“Learn from me, because I am meek and humble of heart: and you shall find rest for your souls” (Mt 11,29).

With His birth in a stable, with His earthly life and His death on a cross, Jesus made it clear for all that He is Humble of heart.

Jesus is the Humble of heart that dons man's clothing, and we can see Him - if we look carefully - in the people we encounter every day: in the needy, lonely people, in any person, rich or poor.

Jesus is the Humble of heart who continually gives, He especially gives Himself to us, He makes Himself little for us, so that we can call Him brother and friend. He doesn't give to crush or mortify us, or to exert His supremacy over us, but to elevate us and draw us to Himself, to create communion.

We cannot live a life fit for heaven if we are not humble, in the imitation of Jesus Christ. May **Jesus, Humble of heart**, therefore make us humble and help us see that when we seek to impress and to be praised, we are impoverished because we don't give to God what is His.

May Jesus who said: *“Learn from me because I am meek and humble of heart,”* make us see how we are foolish when we seek our own glory rather than God's. May He make us see how a proud person does not build up anything, but destroys everything, including himself. May He help us discover that not so much what we say or do has worth, but what we are. May He make us ever more similar to Him, the Humble One; and may He help us discover the treasure for which it is worthwhile sacrificing everything.

Pietro Squassabia

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Our Readers Write...

Fr. Stefano Maria, Bologna Italy: Praised be Jesus Christ! I am an Olivetan Benedictine monk. I'd like to witness that the reading of your holy spiritual journal had more than a minor role in my response to the vocation. God bless all your efforts and dedication!

Fr. Felipe Quineche, Peru: Warm greetings in the Name of Christ Jesus and Mary our mother. With immense joy I communicate that I was ordained a priest for the Diocese on 25 July 2005. I have been receiving the Echo for many years, and it has been a blessing for my life and the life of many others. As a priest I continue the precious work of spreading this paper. I am now working in a mission in the diocese of Callao, a missionary zone of extreme poverty where there is an abundant proliferation of sects, and where the church has just begun its work. I believe this magazine will be of great help to these people who are so much in need. My blessings!

Sr. M.Gregory Rosa, Zanzibar, Tanzania: I am very grateful for the magazine I have been receiving all these years. I have since made my first trip to Medjugorje and I was very much impressed and touched by the attendance of so many thousands and their religious spirit. I myself never prayed as much as I did during that pilgrimage. It is my prayer that all may have the opportunity to make this pilgrimage at least once in their life time. God is so good to have allowed our Mother to visit us all these years! May People everywhere respond to her invitation to pray, reconcile and fast!

* Request for Rosary beads, etc.

1) Fr. Vittorio Grigoletto, Murungaru Catholic Parish, P.O. Box 410, 20117 Naivasha, Kenya, Africa. "I receive continuous requests for Rosary beads for my Christians and catechumens. On their behalf I humbly appeal for rosary beads of any type, even used, crucifixes, and images of Our Lady. I invoke upon you and those who shall help us the blessing of the Virgin Mary, our Mother."

2) Mrs H. J. Lambert, Divine Mercy Prayer House, 68 / 59A-5-5, P&T Colony, Vijayawada 8, A.P, India

3) Mission Catholique, Parroisse Christ Roi, Curè Mr. Mathieu Messangbo, BP 357, Lokossa-Mono, Rep. Benin, Africa

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May the Lord bless you, and Our Lady keep you! And may Fr. Angelo on this his 6th anniversary, intercede for you!

3 March 2006

don Alberto

2006: 5th Centenary of the birth of great missionary priest, **St. Francis Xavier.**
 May he intercede for us!

Immaculate Heart that it may triumph in a sinful world” (25 Sept. 1991). In this special time (*“this time is my time”*), mess. 25 Jan. 1997) Mary calls her *“dear children”* that have been chosen from eternity to become *“citizens with all the saints, and part of God's household... a house where God lives, in the Spirit” (Eph 2:19)* to the fundamental priestly, prophetic and regal service of accompanying the entire creation to the same paschal passover that the Son fulfilled once and for all in the *“hour”* which was written in the heart of the Father and must now involve the entire universe: *“Dear Children, I want you to understand that God has chosen each of you in His plan of salvation for mankind. You cannot understand how great your person is in the plan of God” (Message 25 Jan. 1987).*

It is only in considering this ineffable dawning of grace that we can understand the true meaning of that part of the message of the Queen of Peace - of more intense apocalyptic tones - where she announces the **secrets**, in reference to events which will be decisive for the future of the world, and the great visible sign that will remain in Medjugorje after the apparitions have finished: *“This time before the visible sign, is a time of grace for believers. Therefore, convert and deepen your faith! When there is the visible sign it will be already too late for many” (23 Dec. 1982); “Here there are secrets, my Children! It is not known what they are, but when it will be known it will be late! Return to prayer! Nothing is more important than (prayer). I would like the Lord to allow me to clarify at least in part the secrets; but, the graces that He offers you are already too many.” (Message to Mirjana 28.01.1987).*

The extraordinary grace of the Mother of God's presence thus is part of a greater plan of salvation destined to involve all souls, and since it is mysteriously connected with it, the entire creation which is *“groaning in travail until now” (Rom 8:22)*. It will be, in fact, through the free response of love by those children that She is calling in this time, that the fire of Trinitarian Love will reach all the spiritual places in the universe and consume every shadow of death and sin. Then from the same *dark night* of suffering, pain and death, will bud the paschal light of the new heavens and new earth that radiates irresistibly from the glory of the Risen One.

Happy are those who will have fully accepted the nuptial gift of the call that the Father addresses to His children in time of grace! These will be spared the bitterness of the time of purification, the *“way of the cross”* the world must ascend, a passover necessary to the universe that it might be fully transfigured by the pure Love of the Most High. These then will be called to shine with the same uncreated light of the Mother of God, to become - with Her and as Her - guide and sign of sure hope and salvation for the multitude of brethren still immersed in the darkness. The names of these are written in the Heart of the Father since eternity, and without tiring He waits to embrace them in the New Creation and unite them eternally to the glorious chant of the redeemed: *“We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou has taken thy great power and begun to reign” (Rev 11:17).*