



Our Lady's message, 25 July 2007:

“Dear children! Today, on the day of the Patron of your Parish, I call you to imitate the lives of the Saints. May they be for you an example and encouragement to a life of holiness.

May prayer for you be as the air you breathe, and not a burden. My Children, God will reveal His love to you and you will experience the joy of being my beloved. God will bless you and give you grace in abundance. Thank you for responding to my call.”

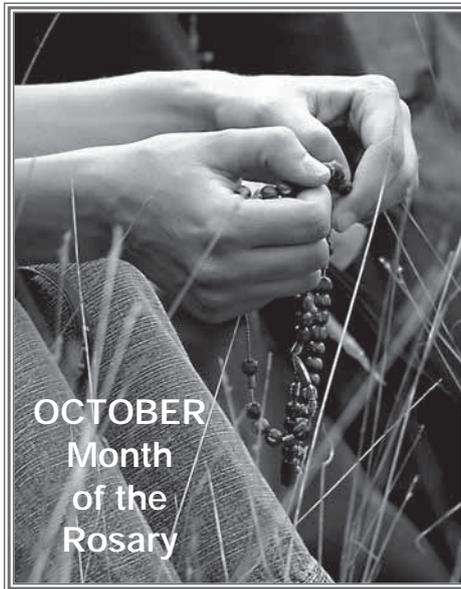
Imitate Lives of Saints

Holiness does not consist in sitting at the right or left of Jesus in His Kingdom, but in drinking from His same cup (cf. Mt 20:20-23). Mary invites us once again to **imitate the lives of the Saints**. She already called us to this on the 25th September 2006. Holiness isn't a set of rules to respect, but a way of life to be lived, and when someone accepts Jesus for the sole sake of Love, thus without reserve and without calculation, then His life will flow in that person. Jesus says: *“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father if not through me. To know me is to know the Father”* (Jn 14:6-7).

It is only through Jesus that we can reach the Father; that is, to be holy. And it is only in Jesus that we can know Him and love Him. To know Jesus isn't the same as knowing everything that the holy scriptures have revealed about Him, because a historical knowledge of Him is insufficient if it doesn't open the heart and mind to an experience of Him and the desire to be in greater communion with Him. Instead, one needs to have Jesus as a companion, friend, and brother along life's journey. One really needs to let Him cut through, soul and body, to become His living image.

This is what happened, and still happens today by seemingly common people, but whom the Church acknowledges as being holy. **Mary has invited us to imitate their lives**; not to imitate something of their character, but to draw from that fire of divine Love which worked in them and which can and wants to work also in us. **The saints are for us an example and a stimulus to a life of holiness**, Mary says. And we will learn that **prayer** – to which Mary continues to call us – will no longer be a burden, but will become as **natural as breathing**.

To stop breathing for several minutes would put our physical life at great risk. Likewise, if we stop praying our spiritual life is put at great risk. Rather than set aside a time for the Lord of time, our every moment should be His: whether waking or



OCTOBER
Month
of the
Rosary

“Pray the Rosary always. Pray it often, at every possible occasion. Satan tries to destroy this prayer, but he will never succeed. It is a prayer that reigns over everyone and everything. Mary taught us to pray the Rosary, in the way that Jesus taught us to pray the Our Father.”

St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina

sleeping, our soul should be drawn by Him. This relationship of love between creature and the Creator ought to be like breathing: so spontaneous and natural that we don't even realize we are doing it.

“My Children, God will reveal His Love to you,” Mary goes on to say. We shall come to know His Love which has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and in Jesus we shall find our personal and filial response and **experience the joy of being Mary's beloved**. And *this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent* (Jn 17:3). This life doesn't begin after death, but now and here on the earth, because it is on this earth that *Christ consecrated Himself*, and it is here in our earthly existence that we can be *consecrated in the Truth*, that is, in Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 17:19).

To the youth who seek new experiences we suggest to not exclude the experience of life in Christ. Instead, try out how it can be possible to give oneself totally to Him, and find oneself in Him and be truly free and master of one's own life. *The Son of Man has the power to give his life and to take it back again. Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, my soul! I will praise the Lord for as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God for as long as I live!* (Ps 146).

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Our Lady's message: 25 August 2007

“Dear Children, also today I call you to conversion. May your lives, my Children, be a reflection of God's goodness, and not of hatred and infidelity. Pray, my Children, until prayer becomes life. That way you will discover the peace and joy that God gives to those who are open to His Love.

And you that are far from God's mercy: convert, that God may not become deaf to your prayers, and that it might not be late for you. In this time of grace, then, convert and give God first place in your lives. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Conversion and Life

Our gestures and actions, thoughts, desires and projects - even when apparently insignificant - are not without meaning for our own life and that of the world. And we can also say that the decisions of the powerful in the world are not as determining for the fate of mankind as one might first think. What really counts in a life is its degree of conformity to God's original project; the conversion of individuals and of families. In the economy of salvation there is greater worth in the holiness of someone completely unknown by the world than in the arrogance of whoever is in power at the moment.

We are taught by Holy Scripture that history is written by God. Yet, to think that we can do without God is the temptation that accompanies every generation.. But the antidote to this old poison hasn't changed either, and Mary never tires of telling us: **“Dear Children, also today I call you to conversion.”** This hasn't to do with good intentions, but with our very life that ought to **reflect the goodness of God, and not hatred and infidelity**. Since this isn't something we can do on our own, we need to implore from God the grace to be a **reflection of His goodness: Father, not my will, but Thine be done** (Mk 14:36), in the knowledge that in His Will alone can we, as men and women, and as God's Children, find full realization; in doing His will that our hearts can experience His Love.

“Pray, my Children, until prayer becomes life for you,” pleads Our Lady. Prayer introduces us into life in God, and should be more than just a part of our life. It ought to be as oxygen for our lungs (see last month's message). This way **we'll discover the peace and joy that God gives to those who are open to His Love, and to His mercy. And you that are far from God's mercy** (those who refuse Him or think they can

Benedict XVI: a Pontiff to know and love better

live without Him) Mary says: convert, **that God may not become deaf to your prayers, and that it might not be late for you.** These words express the immense love of a Mother and her concern for her children in danger. They are not a threat, but an appeal, because the danger is before us all, since we all run the risk of removing ourselves from divine mercy, of turning God into an idol; and we know that idols cannot hear. Even consecrated souls, or “chosen” souls run the same risk; rather they are even more exposed to this danger.

The latter part of Mary’s appeal, I would say, is for all: **“In this time of grace, then, convert and give God first place in your lives.”** They are words that give hope and courage, and should make us even more determined to decide for God, truly and with haste, *because time has grown short* (cf. 1 Co 7:29). If you have not so far put God first, hurry to do so now. If you have done it without acting accordingly, and if you have not realized how you have gradually pushed Him aside, remember that we are still in time because this is a time of grace. But for how much longer?

N.Q.

Join in Simultaneous Worldwide Rosary

World Day of the Rosary: 7 Oct.

It is hoped that millions of people worldwide will participate in the event. Last year, more than 100 countries participated, with rosaries prayed simultaneously in 8,000 locations. Promoters suggest organizing a Rosary Prayer Session in your community, whether it be a massive event in a Church or a Stadium, or just with family and friends” all for the same intentions (see below). “In 2007 we are already celebrating eleven years of organizing this event, in which, with the blessing of Our Most Holy Mother Mary, every year more people and more countries join in to pray the Rosary,” explained Guillermo Estévez Alverde, one of the Mexican laymen who launched the initiative a decade ago.

“During the Worldwide Rosary Day which took place in October 2000 more than 140 countries joined in, with scores of Rosaries organized in Churches, stadiums, Cathedrals, bullfight rings, town squares, jails, hospitals, schools, etc. Many of these events were broadcast over live radio or TV. Millions of people participated all over the world,” said Estévez.

The main event will be held in Basilica de Guadalupe in Mexico City.

The World Rosary will be prayed for six intentions. The intentions are: for the Grace of God to nourish the flourishing of love among mankind; for peace on earth; for the preservation of life and family values; for the Pope and his intentions; to promote priestly and religious vocations; and for local intentions. Further information and suggestions at:

www.churchforum.org/rosario

(from Zenit News)



Benedict XVI: The educational power of this Pope lies in the “certainty of the Magisterium”. His continued opposition to the current thought pervaded by relativism and mistrust in the truth is a courageous

witness for all. He helps the people to see the reasons of truth and of good, helping these to take root in their hearts. It is for this that Benedict XVI is loved and esteemed also by many who aren’t Christian or even believers, but who are in accord with the broad lines of the Holy Father’s defence.

But what does Pope Benedict say? What theme distinguishes him?

Our faith has to do with reason - said Benedict XVI, who helps us to turn our gaze to the centre of Christianity, and to have a positive view of mankind. He tells us that man’s existence is not fruit of chaos, but of Logos, of order.

Many witness to his passion for the truth. So is he all head and no heart? Absolutely not. In fact, his first encyclical is entitled “God is Love,” and he explains how love and reason can walk together. “God is *Spiritus Creator*, he is Logos, he is reason,” he explained in an Audience. “And this is why our faith is something that has to do with reason, can be passed on through reason and has no cause to hide from reason, not even from the reason of our age. But precisely this eternal, immeasurable reason is not merely a mathematics of the universe and far less, some first cause that withdrew after producing the Big Bang. This reason, on the contrary, has a heart such as to be able to renounce its own immensity and take flesh. And in that alone, to my mind, lies the ultimate, true greatness of our conception of God.”

Shepherd and Fisherman

“The Pope has fashioned his ministry - which he called at his election “unheard-of task” - around the images of shepherd and fisherman,” said Card. Grochowski, “and on their value at the service of God’s love for mankind, and on God’s love and on love for neighbour. To feed - he said - means to love; love means to give the sheep the true good, to nourish them with God’s truth... The task of a fisher of men may seem tiring, but it is beautiful and great because in the end it means to serve the joy of God who wants to come into the world.”

From these words by someone who knows the Pope well there emerges an interesting figure, but the person of Benedict XVI is becoming gradually clearer also by the way he “dots his i’s and crosses his t’s” at his various interventions and in his writings. And to him goes our thanks, especially for the lucidity of his judgement and calls. When it comes to telling the truth we at times lose friends and make some enemies, because the truth is harmful to some; especially to those who to light prefer falseness and darkness which they use to hide their own interests.

Fr. Nicolino Mori

When he was elected everyone thought they already knew the new Pope, Benedict XVI, formerly Card. Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. But things weren’t that simple, it seems. Those who have remained with their prejudices continue to be irritated by the interventions of the Holy Father concerning in particular morals and doctrine. Instead, those who love the Pope understand that behind his gentle and reserved ways there is a man who deserves to be known and loved more.

Card. Bertone describes him as being caring and attentive, profound and unassuming, likeable and not at all arrogant. He says his Christian happiness shines clearly; his character is German, his heart is Roman, he is poetic and creative, and especially, he is kind with everyone - he says.

People like this can’t be classified so easily. They are like violets in spring: most delicate flowers hidden under the hedges.

Right Pope for right moment

I am certain that the saying that says the Lord sends the right Pope for the right moment in history contains a profound truth, both for the many pontiffs who distinguished themselves for their holiness and wisdom, and for those whose faults became more evident because of their attachment to earthly things. To consider the more than two hundred Popes since the beginning of the Church one cannot but be convinced of the work of the Holy Spirit in His choice of persons. Here, however, we will consider only the last two.

John Paul II: like other figures of our time, his witness was extraordinarily exemplary and educational. Only Pope Woytjla could have brought together the two million young people for the Great Jubilee, and the many more that lined up for hours on end to pay homage to his mortal remains. Also Mother Teresa, after her death, was able to bring together Heads of State, most of whom weren’t Christian.

The world, fearful for the cold war and nuclear threats, needed a ray of sunlight to melt hearts and chains. Just as the trumpets of Israel’s priests brought down the walls of Jericho, so did John Paul’s life as priest, bishop and Pope bring down the walls of the totalitarian system of East Europe. This Pope knew how to find unexpected words and gestures, such as kissing the ground, embracing a child, touching a sick person, forgiving his would-be-assassin, asking forgiveness for the errors of men of the Church, asking for a glass of water, placing a prayer in the Wailing Wall of Jerusalem, offering without shame his sufferings to the end. His life was a continual and exceptionally powerful lesson.

THE LITANIES

A Flowering Field for the Blessed Virgin

It is an extraordinary and beautiful sight, that of a field in spring with its many flowers of varying hues, shapes, and scents. The harmony of it reflects the beauty and harmony of the Creator. We could define the praises of the Mother of God, the all holy one, the Virgin Mary, in the same way: that is, a blossoming - spontaneous and sweet, simple and profound - of the **many titles that sing the praises of the wonderful things** God did in the humble Virgin of Nazareth.



to comprehend the meaning and to taste a little of the beauty that has surrounded Our Lady for centuries.

HOLY MARY

Holiness is an exclusively divine attribute, and stands for uniqueness, absoluteness, constancy and also "Being" par excellence. The Trinity, in view of the mission Mary would have been entrusted with, created her to a very high degree, and granted her some divine qualities; the same qualities which will be given to all those who will adhere to God's Kingdom. To acquire holiness means to make one available for a proposal of love that makes one an instrument for the realization of a "plan", and Mary is an excellent instrument in the hands of Providence.

MOTHER OF CHRIST

This title explains the fundamental reason for Mary's beauty. Christ, Only Son of the Father, who is therefore God as is the Father, could not have had any contact with sin; therefore, His mother had to be all holy. This "motherhood" was extended - by Christ - to all those who do the Father's will. Mary certainly does not come in the way, or fear to have to share with us this motherhood; instead, she works to make us all the more able to carry out this will of the Father.

HOLY VIRGIN OF VIRGINS

Virginité is characteristic of one who "awaits", that is, one who isn't occupied with or distracted by things that pass or have no eternal worth. It is the quality by which a person becomes the exclusive gift for him who chose her first and for always. Virginité is to see oneself as the object of divine Love, a vessel that God fills with Himself to manifest His power, faithfulness and fecundity.

This reflection of mine is little more than a child's babbling on the greatness of God who raised up Mary Most Holy; but it is the babbling of a child who feels loved by and who loves very much the Woman who cannot be compared to any other for her beauty and goodness.

(1. to be continued)

Fr. Ludovico Maria Centra, O.S.A.

Love is Joy

Simple thoughts by Pietro Squassabia

I am filled with comfort. With all our affliction, I am overjoyed (2 Cor 7:4).

Some time ago I met an elderly person who though she was sick, she was very serene. I could clearly see the joy in her eyes. I wondered why she was so joyful and from where that joy came. Perhaps all we can say is that joy doesn't depend on age or health, that it isn't something at the grasp of the young and not of the elderly, or of the respected rather than those who are not.

Joy, it seems, has its own strength and courage; it doesn't fear what men fear, and it doesn't fail to appear even when everything seems negative. I am certain that Jesus would not have lost His joy, not even during His Passion. On the other hand, without joy, how could He have said: *Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do* (Lk 23:34), or to the good thief: *Today you will be with me in Paradise* (Lk 23:43).

Joy, it seems, is closely connected to love. **It takes joy to love.** This is the reason why Jesus never lost His joy: because He is love. Satan cannot have joy because he doesn't know how to love. More than this, he fears joy, and he thus flees from a happy heart. Of course, without joy, one cannot love neither God nor men. I think that Mary would not have lost her joy either, not even on the way up Calvary. I think that otherwise she would have had to flee from her Son's Cross.

I wonder: what is joy, or rather: who is joy? Perhaps, joy is more a person than a thing. Joy is closely connected to God; and it seems can only be in God. So, if we do not have joy maybe it means that we are far from God. Joy, I think, is like fuel that gives us more mileage. It gives man the strength to do good things at whatever age. I would say, rather, that joy makes all men "young." That is why we see elderly people who are "young": it is because they have joy. By the same token we see young people who are "old" because they do not have joy.

By this reasoning, we can say that God who has joy is "young", and Satan who hasn't got it is "old." Also Mary, and the angels and the blessed are "young" because they have joy to the full. St. Paul said on the matter: *"You have put on the new nature which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator"* (Col 3:10). The best cure for the "old man" is to have this joy and the youthfulness that comes with it.

Joy is humble, it always forgives, and never wishes someone ill; it never takes revenge, but always procures good for self and others. Joy always trusts the Lord; it is like love. What strikes me most when I go to Medjugorje is the intense joy that invades the hearts of people without any apparent reason. It is certainly the work of God who is Joy, through the intercession of the Mother. So let us not waste the grace received at this holy place, but put to good use the favourable moment. We can ask the Mother for her help, for us and for others, and trust that it will be granted. Then, perhaps, we too will be able to lend her a hand, according to her request.

"After being taken up into Heaven, Mary did not distance herself from us but continues to be even closer to us and her light shines on our lives and on the history of all humanity. Attracted by the heavenly brightness of the Mother of the Redeemer, let us turn with trust to the One who looks upon us and protects us from on high. We all need her help and comfort to face the trials and challenges of daily life; we need to feel that she is our mother and sister in the concrete situations of our lives."

Pope Benedict XVI (Angelus, Solemnity of the Assumption)

News From Medjugorje . . .

RETREAT FOR PRIESTS

(2-7 July)

The presence of over 600 priests around the external altar, behind St. James Church, made us understand that the retreat for priests had begun, under the guidance of Fr. Tomislav Ivancic, a well-known priest and professor of theology at Zagreb. Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa (Capuchin monk and official Vatican preacher) was meant to be preacher at these spiritual exercises for priests this year, but unexpectedly his participation was impeded.

These priests, young and not so young, create a perfect icon of the children so loved by the Queen of Peace: gathered together under her "motherly wings" and hailing from 46 different countries. Gathered there around the altar there seemed so many, but in reality they are still too few for the harvest of the world's fields.

On the 2nd July, the day the retreat began, Our Lady spoke through the visionary Mirjana of the importance of priests and the priestly blessing.

The "COMING and GOING" of PILGRIMS

These last few weeks here at Medjugorje have been very hot and dry, burning not only the grass but also the shrubs typical of this region in Herzegovina, and also the skin of pilgrims. The hills that surround the shrine have been blackened here and there by fires which have been lighting up several of the past night skies. Nothing, however, could impede the flow of pilgrims. The land is showered, not with rain, but with the prayer and silent beating of hearts turned to God. I am often surprised by the serene looks of people whose legs are tired and swollen by the heat.

18th YOUTH FESTIVAL

(1 - 6 August)

"Love one another, even as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34)

"Dear Children, today I call you to love. My Children, love each other with God's Love. The Risen Jesus will be with you and you will be my witnesses." (Message, 25 March 2005)

Flags from many countries (at the festival more than 50 different nations were represented), lifted up high and blowing in the wind, created an image of communion amongst the young people as they all listened, prayed, sang and danced beneath the blazing sun of Herzegovina. Praising God with their every movement and gesture happiness radiated from their faces. Three or four different flags on the same pole was a simple way of expressing that peace and unity becomes natural when we know how to *"love each other as Jesus has loved us"*...



There was so much variety, noticeable in peoples' faces, hairstyles, way of dressing, the colour of their skin, eyes, in their ages... The nicest thing was to encounter so many smiles: people smiling at each other in the crowd gathered round the church of St. James (an estimated 30,000 participants at the festival) and feeling one of the family.

The dust was raised when the young people danced, and the same dust covered their feet when they knelt before Jesus in the Eucharist during Holy Mass and Eucharistic Adoration. I am certain all can confirm that the biggest crowds were precisely during these two moments of prayer with the Eucharist!

Behold Him Who is the centre of our attention.

Behold Him Who has the power to speak to our hearts.

Behold Him Who renews His offering for us at every holy Mass, Who remains with us every day hidden in a piece of bread to become our "daily bread"!

Many were the testimonies given: by the visionaries (Marja, Mirjana, Ivan, Jakov), by the clergy and religious (Mons. Domenico Sigallini, Fr. Jozo Zovko, Sr. Elvira, and others), by former drug addicts (New Horizons Community, Sr. Elvira's Cenacle Community), by people from the world of music, cinema, politics, and the mass media. Their words certainly offered a "flash" of light to each of us, but the greatest light came from Him who can heal our hearts: the true light of our only true God. Our Lady often says to us: *"give God first place in your lives."*

The days of the Festival came to a conclusion at dawn on the 6th August, feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, with the celebration of Mass atop Krizevac. It was an appropriate festivity and place to mark how God desires moulding and transforming us and giving His grace to those whose hearts are open and generous and wish to work for the renewal of the face of the Earth.

The following words were addressed to us: **"the real festival begins when you go back home."** It is true that our day-to-day life, our cross and the world that awaits us will be the test that will show which and how much fruit will come from the seed that was sown in the terrain of our souls.

"Love one another, even as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34)

Mirjana: apparition of the 2nd of the month

Mirjana Soldo receives a monthly apparition, at times in public in the pavilion of the Cenacle Community. At the end of the apparition she transmits any eventual message Our Lady may have given.

Message of 2 August: "Dear children, Today I look in your hearts and looking at them my heart is seized with pain. My children, I ask of you unconditional, pure love for God. You will know that you are on the right path when with your body you will be on the earth, and with your soul you will always be with God. Through this unconditional and pure love you will see my Son in every person. You will experience union with God. As a Mother I will be happy because I will have your holy and unified hearts. My children, I will have your salvation. Thank you."

Mirjana said of the apparition: "At the beginning of the apparition our Lady showed (me) what we can expect if in our hearts there is not holiness and brotherly union in Christ. It wasn't at all nice. She exhorted us to pray for our pastors because she said that without them there is no unity."

Message of 2 Sept.: "Dear Children, in this time of signs of God do not fear, because I am with you. God's great love sends me to lead you to salvation. Give me your simple hearts, purified by fasting and prayer. Only in the simplicity of your hearts is your salvation. I will be with you and lead you. Thank you."



A Selection of Testimonies:

The Priests

“I came to encounter Priests from around the world that come here, to experience communion with them, and union with Christ, independent of where we come from or live. We belong to Christ and to Mary. We came to encourage each other and to carry on.”

“This is truly a holy place where we know Heaven comes down to touch the earth through the Mother of God. I have been profoundly touched.”

“This is my first time at Medjugorje. I came because I had seen the many fruits. There was something that always concerned me: I had the impression that here at Medjugorje Our Lady spoke too much, but upon seeing the fruits I told myself to come and see. What one experiences here is simple yet very profound.”

“I was surprised by the change in preacher, but I see in this the action of the Holy Spirit who loves to confound our plans. In this retreat I have understood that I am not to try to save first my parishioners, but first myself! If I sanctify myself, they will follow.”

“Here a priest can understand the extraordinary sensation of what Church is. Here we truly experience the universal Catholic Church in its diversity: we all experience the same thing, and we come from different cultures.”

And to conclude, the impressions of Mons. Sebastian Thekethecheril, **BISHOP** of the diocese of Vijayapuram (India):

Why?

“This is the most beautiful place in the

world because the most beautiful Woman has appeared here. Why is she the most beautiful Woman? Because she conceived the most beautiful person: Jesus Christ. Why is Mary so beautiful? Because she is full of grace. Here we can see this grace, especially during this retreat we have seen it. Many priests, more than 600, are here, and I see that they are all happy. Why? It is only when people are filled with the Holy Spirit that they can be happy, now and in eternity.”

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The Youth

Vincent, 17 years old

I came here nearly by chance. I met a priest in a bus and he suggested I come. I told him that I left the Church a long time ago, but then I decided anyway to try this experience. As soon as I arrived I saw kids my own age praying the Rosary and I thought they were all mad. But then I thought that if they were doing it, why should I be the only one not doing it. So here I was the first day at Medjugorje and praying the Rosary. I have lived many other powerful experiences, including the apparition to Mirjana, and the climb up Podbrdo. It had been five years since I entered a church. I really didn't expect to find so many other young people my own age.

Matthew, 20 years old

This is my fourth time here at Medjugorje, and it's always a joy to come back because it's a bit like coming home. On my first pilgrimage I experienced a total change. It was in 2005, and since then I've come back again to get more strength to keep on living the life of every day, with the light of the faith well lit. These days here have been like living in Paradise, because I am able to dedicate myself totally to God. I hope I can transmit my experience by testifying with my life that Christ is my Saviour. I would

suggest everyone to come to Medjugorje: from the youngest to the oldest. I hope everyone decides for conversion.

To give God first place means to surrender totally to Him, to let Him make us what we're meant to be. I have experienced that you can be happy only if you really surrender to God, which is what I hope will be my response. It was God who saved me from the situation I was in, and I hope He will use me as His instrument.

Claudio, 13 years old

Medjugorje is a place where you leave behind your daily life and dedicate yourself to the spiritual life. When you leave behind the stress you are better able to see your own heart. Being here at the Festival with so many people from so many nations, and amid all these flags, has really touched me, and made me think that God has created us all as a single thing, and that we all have to fight for peace, and all adore the Lord. It is sad that we are too attached to our own interests instead of working together. We are all brothers and sisters!

Till I came here I had not encountered the Lord as a person who is close to me; someone to address directly. My prayer has expanded whilst here. The young people out in the world are often far from the faith because they haven't seen or experienced the living God. We have two ways before us: one is right and one is wrong, but sadly many young people see only one.

Andrew, 16 years old

I was especially touched by the celebration of the Mass, and even though it was long, it wasn't heavy. Another thing is that you don't feel shame here for praying, because everyone does it. People even pray on the streets, and it's accepted as normal. I hope I can take this prayer back home: in the simplicity of our everyday life. My parents insisted I come here. I was sceptical at first, but now I'm extremely happy to be here.

Speaking on Prayer

Fr. Jozo:

“Our Lady at Medjugorje calls us to conversion. This means she calls us to begin to pray every day to seek, in the silence of our heart, salvation for our souls. Our blessed Mother tells us that our souls need nourishing with prayer. I feel that prayer is indispensable for the nourishment of our soul, just as mother's milk is to a baby. Certainly: the soul needs food, care and concern and this is provided by prayer.

Every day I witness the fruits of all this prayer. If we stopped praying, at Medjugorje and in the world there would be trees without fruit, there would be desert, the lamps would be turned off and wouldn't be of any help.

Our generation needs the witness of the Church, the prayer of the Church, through which the Lord works and gives signs to

the world. The enemy will do all he can to impede the Church and each person on the journey of conversion. It is up to us to remain at peace, and persevere in our prayer. Let us pray for all the pilgrims and all those who suffer because of Medjugorje. And never let us forget that every pilgrim is fruit of prayer and fasting. Each is a gift.

Through prayer, the Holy Spirit guides you when you pray to discover the will of God, and through His grace and gifts He makes him able to respond with his life: “Behold! Here I am Lord!”. This means saying every day, and in every situation, with Mary: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord.” The fiat of the Blessed Virgin is saying “I believe.” I believe that my God is all powerful and that everything is possible for my God.

Holiness requires the commitment of daily sacrifice and prayer, and a sacramental



life. We discover God's will through the Revelation, and the example and positive inspirations of the saints, through the Church and the proclamation of the Word. We discover God's will also through our own consciences through which the Lord speaks to us.

Often our hidden weakness is in opposition to God's will. True wisdom lies in denying oneself and renouncing one's own will, to accept God's will. This is the wisdom that allows grace to be victorious in us. This is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It has never been heard that someone has become a saint without prayer, or that someone has renounced his own will to accept God's will without the help of the Holy Spirit. To pray with Our Lady is a privileged call to pray with those whom she has invited, those who have heard the grace and have responded.

(From a reflection by Fr. Jozo Zovko)

The Rosary is Young

by Davide Capanna

“Pray... till prayer becomes joy for you.”

I recall when as a teenager I first heard these words of Our Lady: that modest yet constant commitment to keep on praying, and how I began to try putting it into daily practice. I recall that it wasn't easy, and it made me wonder if it really could become joy.



But if Our Lady said so, then why doubt! These words of hers remained in my heart and I think marked out a programme of inner growth, even without realizing it. A hidden joy had been promised me by that message; I knew it was something not impossible to attain. On the other hand, isn't it joy that a boy, a young man, seeks? Through friendship and various forms of fun and interests, we all try to respond to that natural yearning for happiness. In a certain way, Our Lady had challenged me with this message, and I “picked up the glove”.

“Do you want to say it with us?”

My daily prayer back then was made up of traditional prayers and practices, including the Rosary. Thanks to God, I had been taught as a child to recite the most common prayers (the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Angel of God, etc.). The Rosary was recited regularly in our home, having been passed on down the generations as part of our faith. Every evening after dinner my grandmother would begin: “O God, come to our aid,” and the rest of us would follow. When I was a small child my mother would ask me to join in: “We're about to begin the Rosary. Do you want to say some with us? Even just a decade?” Sometimes I'd leave my game, or television, and recite sometimes all of it, sometimes some of it.

It became clear to me that when I did pray I felt extremely happy and satisfied, and when I chose not to I felt sad and unsatisfied. One day, while still very little, I remember how the way I was reciting the hail mary's in a singsong fashion wasn't good enough. Now I can see how God was inviting me not to waste the words I was saying. I began to be more attentive to what I was saying; I didn't want that greeting to Mary to be emptied of its meaning. The Rosary thus became a way of dialoguing with Mary and Jesus, and I was aware of their presence along the way.

I had a different experience some years ago when as part of a group of young parishioners, we were asked to conduct a meeting for the 12-14 year olds. After an afternoon of games and fun, I suggested we pray the Rosary. Their mouths fell

open: “What? The prayer of the dead?” I understood that if the Rosary for me meant colloquy and entrustment to Our Lady, they had probably never heard it being recited except at funerals.

Today I am very much aware of how much grace I have received through the example of my family and the Lord's patience with me.

Faces of the Rosary

I see the Rosary as being typically young and beautiful as Mary is. As a mother she continually gives her life for her children. Her eyes are always upon us, and her arms always full of heavenly gifts for us, if only we would ask for them. Mary is a mother who takes us by the hand, if we want her to, and a way of allowing her to do this is by praying the Rosary.

The Rosary is young, just as Mary is young, and Joseph, that righteous and devoted father; and John the Baptist who proclaimed and died for the Lamb of God, and the Apostles...

The Rosary is young the way we are young. We are called, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to write the history of the Church with our witness, in the footprints of our Lord Jesus.

The Rosary is the life of Jesus Christ, and the Blessed Virgin accompanies us as she points Him out to us. John Paul II said in his Letter on the Rosary, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*: “Reciting the Rosary is nought else than to contemplate with Mary the face of Christ.”

The face of the Lord is eternally young; eternally surprising, eternally enthusiastic, eternally beautiful.

Spiritual Oxygen

Holy Scripture says that “our God is not a God of the dead, but of the living.” Therefore, our expressions of the faith must also be alive, and come from the heart. The Rosary is an expression of our faith, and whether we recite it alone or with others, it should be as something vital; a plea to Our Lady who truly is with us, at our side, and truly present in the bosom of the Holy Trinity to Whom she wants to lead us, so we can personally encounter God.

When we pray the Rosary, let us pray for ourselves, and for all those whose existence is dead-like. May our Rosary be a time of renewal; like a breath of fresh air, except with the Rosary we shall breathe in spiritual oxygen, and it will be strength as we journey along the way of virtues and holy proposals. Our Lady, who is faithful to her messages, will help us find that promised joy.

I hope we'll be faithful to the practice of the Rosary. I hope parents will pray it with their children, that the youth adopt it as their source of power to open God's heart, and to defeat the evil one. I hope the elderly and the sick will not abandon it, but unite

to their fatigue and suffering. I hope that many of us will join together so the world can hear our song of praise and know that prayer is balm for our life, that the Rosary is always young, and current. He who recites it with the heart is always young, because Mary introduces him into the eternal life of her Son, the Risen One!

Dynamic Womanhood

We must believe madly and powerfully in the power of love that is within the woman, and in the special gifts God gives her. The woman is a dynamism. A woman must not remain dormant. If she wants to live her real identity, her true countenance, her real being, her grandeur, she must invoke the Holy Spirit to give her light. All women should become that woman called Mary. If She is not within us, we do not have a model to follow. In our life there must be Mary who knew how to suffer and sacrifice herself for love's sake.

Love overcomes everything; it is essential to life; if we do not place love at the centre of everything that happens to us, we will never know who we are. We have been loved since the beginning of creation; we were created in love and for love. Therefore, to live, we need love more than the air we breathe. When love is not pure, free, real, we are suffocated, as if we were left without air.

To live love is central to our womanhood; it is our existence; it's the true quality of life. There is no cross that can stop you because the love you bear within is stronger; it will lead you beyond, make you able to overcome every barrier and limit. Love, after all, is the beauty of living out our true existence, our life as children, because the source of love is God, our Father.

Sr. Elvira (to her Missionaries)



GOD SEEKS YOUNG PEOPLE with great hearts who can make room for Him in their lives to be protagonists of the New Covenant. To accept a proposal as fascinating as the one Jesus offers us, to make the covenant with him, it is necessary to **be youthful within**, to be capable of letting oneself be called into question by His newness, to set out with Him on new roads. **Jesus has a fondness for young people;** He respects their freedom but never tires of proposing loftier goals for life to them: the newness of the Gospel and the beauty of holy behaviour.

(Benedict XVI, Loreto Agorà 2007)

Cenacle Community *a Miracle of Love*

Men down on their knees

About forty young men, between twenty and forty years old, many of whom are foreigners, especially from the East, recite the Hail Mary each in his own tongue. Every day, here and in all the communities of Sr. Elvira around the world, they begin with the prayer of the Rosary. There are no priests or religious to guide them. They do it all on their own.

Having come from churches that are half empty, and attended by mostly women of a certain age, or children, the first thing that you notice is this: all these men, young men, on their knees praying calmly and attending to every word of the Hail Mary.

Yet, they are not angels. They have all experienced a harsh life of drugs; many of them were thieves, dealers, violent in the family, they have experienced gaol (you can see the tattoos on their arms). But now they are here, kneeling, to ask forgiveness, to say thank you for having met at a certain point in their life a messenger of hope.

Each has a guardian angel

When the Rosary is finished, there is the moment of "sharing". This is when they tell each other of their experiences, difficulties and little daily victories. It isn't easy to live with others, for months, even years on end, with people who differ in extraction, culture, and character. The occasions for clashes and incomprehension do not lack. It is for this reason that every new arrival is entrusted to a "guardian angel" who introduces him to the rules (strict) of the community, gives him the good example, advises him and admonishes him when he lapses.

What an extraordinary intuition. It is one of the many that are particular to the style, or rather, therapy of Sr. Elvira. Who better than a former drug addict can understand and help another? There are no salaried counsellors here, only young people who have been welcomed, loved and cared for, and who now return what they received. "When we enter, we're tramps. In the eyes of others we're failures. But I see a miracle if I look with the eyes of God. At times I am thankful for having gone through what I did because it allowed me to rediscover true values," says 42 year old Walter who's been in the community for the last 5. He escorted me all morning with patience around the Cenacle. He we learn – he said – to become humble and simple, instead of reacting, and to keep silent and to swallow our pride.

TV and papers forbidden

They leave the chapel and make their way to the refectory for a meagre breakfast. On the frugal table, laid with grease-proof paper, the smile of their "mother" (Sr. Elvira) keeps watch. They all line up for a slice of "panettone" and a bowl of black tea, herbal tea, or coffee. "It is the only "extra"

allowed in the house," explains Lukas from Poland: 26 years old and another "veteran" of the Cenacle. Here there is no smoking or drinking, no papers or television "which only churns out junk", and no mobile phones. No one has his hands in his pockets, no one goes to lie down on bed during the break. "When we're not working, we talk and share experiences."

More than detoxification from drugs, those who enter the community receive detoxification from the world. They find here a "school of life" that goes upstream.

Ora et labora (prayer & work)

After breakfast all go off to work. Each has his workplace: some as carpenters, others as mechanics. There's a group of young men working in the greenhouse where vegetables are cultivated. Some are working in the potato field, and others are in the kitchen preparing lunch for forty.

There are about 1,200 - 1,300 young people received into Sr. Elvira's communities in various parts of the world. The real problem isn't so much resisting in the community, but going back into the world. In fact, after the initial compulsory period of three years, many remain and work as volunteers. They thus remain a certain distance from the temptations and contradictions of the world, and even choose to become missionaries in far-away countries.

Susanna Agnese (Corriere di Saluzzo)

Fr. Ljubo: *May this oxygen never lack!*

"*May prayer be for you like the air you breathe!*" said Our Lady in her July message. Our body needs air to continue living. We all know what it's like to be left without air. Without air we cannot live; our bodies would die. If we have a corporal organism (the body), we also have a spiritual organism. It can be said that prayer is the air for this spiritual organism. Without prayer we are spiritually dead. Without prayer, man's existence is merely material, the same level as dead matter.

Prayer is not something that has been prescribed, or ordered by the Church, or by God, or by Our Lady. Prayer is not only a pious exercise. It is more than this. Prayer is life. Without prayer God does not have that space where He can come to us, to save us, and heal our heart and soul. Only in the prayer of the heart can God reveal to us His love and we can experience the joy of being beloved children of God and of the Virgin Mary.

We know by experience that it is not enough to know that food is good. We also need to eat the food to keep on living. By the same token, it is not enough to know that God, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary love us; for we also need to experience, encounter, and touch this love of God.

(excerpt: Fr. Ljubo's comment, July msg)

Interview: FR. LJUBO KURTOVIC

"I will not be leaving Our Lady behind!"

Fr. Ljubo, with this interview I'd like to sum up your experience at Medjugorje over these past seven years. Let's start from the beginning. How did you feel when you were told you'd be coming here?

I was a young priest - ordained four years previously. The parish priest then was Fr. Pervan, and when I was told I'd be coming here as a spiritual assistant it frightened me a little. Being newly ordained it came as a challenge. I'd thus far come to Medjugorje as a pilgrim, and it was here that I decided to become a monk; after that I came here a few times also to help with the confessions. It is totally different to come here every now and again, and to live here. To live here is like an immersion; you live Mary's presence in your heart.

And were you enthusiastic about it?

I didn't feel enthusiasm, because it's very difficult for me to get enthusiastic about anything. It took me some time to get used to. At first there was Fr. Slavko, and it was only after he had died that we came to realize how much he did. We had to cover his responsibilities. I got the part of translating and interpreting the message of the 25th of the month, and the various seminars which he used to hold. Of course, I had to "throw myself in" and manage. We have a proverb that says that a donkey can't swim, but if it is thrown into the water it will learn. So I had to learn how to swim.

During these 7 years have many things at Medjugorje changed? For better or for worse? Would you say the spiritual level of pilgrims has risen?

Everyone says that the first 2 or 3 years here was like being in Paradise. Then there was a lot of enthusiasm, but to remain enthusiastic for 26 years isn't realistic. Even these phases of enthusiasm need filtering. However, there are many who have remained on the journey with Mary and try to live according to her indications.

To speak of quality is a bit difficult. I think it is necessary to leave aside the enthusiasm and allow the roots to take hold so that he who has truly decided to follow the Lord may persevere and learn to suffer and remain faithful to Mary's messages. We are all on a journey or quest, and it isn't possible to see what the future holds for us. It is enough that we can see which is the next step to take and to proceed with trust, knowing that the Lord guides everything, and will turn all into good.

What is Mary's aim? Where is she leading us with these apparitions?

Mary herself said: "The most important message I have given you is the call to conversion" which is, after all, an evangelical call. So, her desire is to bring to our attention the truth of the Gospel. She

surely wouldn't have appeared if everything was proceeding well - in the Church and the world. Mary, who is Mother, comes, speaks, advises, and calls us, as mothers do.

Twenty-six years, and that which has been announced has not been fulfilled...

There is man's time and God's time. For God a single day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a single day. Twenty six years are many, and yet they are few. Three years after the first apparition the visionaries asked why Our Lady had been with them for so long, and she asked if we were already tired. Weariness may come because her love and messages are demanding, but she does this for our own good; she came to make us happy, not unhappy. God and Our Lady have never promised us Paradise on the earth; here we are on a journey.

After your experience here, do you think you've changed within? What have you received; what have you learnt?

Being amongst pilgrims and their needs is for us priests (a way of) formation and learning, because in one way or another we also receive. Inevitably, we influence each other. I've understood there are still many steps for me to take. I have never experienced sudden conversions; neither have I fallen from my horse in the manner of St. Paul. In me everything has proceeded along gradually. I need only journey along.

Apart from your experience with the pilgrims, what has influenced you?

Living here has made me ever more convinced of Our Lady's presence. Humanly speaking, it would be easier not to live here, because this is a particular kind of parish. Besides the graces, there are also many crosses and much suffering; and these can help strengthen a person's faith, because it is when we suffer that we learn to pray, and if you decide to suffer with God, then your faith is purified.

What difficulties do you monks encounter here at Medjugorje?

Many people come here and with them they bring different problems and suffering, and also their "spirits" are different. It takes a good deal of discernment, and wisdom, love and patience, and strength, to be able to respond - as priests - to all these needs.

You lead the Adoration before thousands of people. Is it demanding?

It is difficult and demanding, but also very beautiful, because the strength comes from grace. During the prayer of adoration I speak mostly to myself - as a way of introducing the people into a relationship with God. Having a relationship with Jesus myself helps me lead others to Him. Before I came here I had had some experience, only there weren't as many people. As soon as I arrived I began to listen to how Fr. Slavko prayed. We always learn from others. I have learnt much from various people.

You are not particularly effusive; you often seek silence and avoid people. Yet it seems that pilgrims seek your company precisely for this. Do you have a word for them?

There's a fundamental difference to understand. Do they seek me or Jesus? If it is me, then I am happy to keep on escaping, because I wouldn't give anything if it were just me. Here there is a battle being fought; here is the true journey towards Christ. I can say that many are those who seek Jesus.

Do you think the Youth Festival is an important event for Medjugorje?

Yes, certainly. It was all started by Fr. Slavko, a man of great courage and faith who grew at Mary's school. He had the courage to begin everything with a small group of maybe not even thirty people, and from this seed grew a great tree. At present more than thirty thousand people attend. Of course, this is no merit of mine.

What would you like to say to all the young people that will read this interview?

The same that Mary says: "Dear Children, open your hearts; surrender to Jesus; consecrate yourselves to my Heart, and do not fear, for I am with you." You too are with her. Persevere along this journey, even when it is difficult.

Do you think your transfer to another convent far from Medjugorje will be a step forward in your journey?

In my heart I will never leave Medjugorje. I can go bodily, but my roots are here, even if the branches are elsewhere. Here at Medjugorje I have tasted the beauty of my priesthood and I've seen how much people need priests, or rather, they need Jesus through the priests.

So do you read the will of God in this transfer? Do you think it will be beneficial for your soul?

I don't know how it will be, but I think it will be beneficial. One needs to be at a certain distance from God to be able to see Him. Being too close can impede the vision.

After these years here, which event has impressed you the most?

Not a specific event; it's more a case of saying that each event has been very precious. It is in seeing how God works in souls that gives the most satisfaction: you know, seeing how people leave here full of happiness and hope. This gives you the enthusiasm and increased strength to persevere in doing God's will. This image of the people who come here to seek God and leave here happy and interiorly renewed will accompany me. I think this is the most beautiful thing; in reality this is Medjugorje.

You will have to leave this reality and go forth, but Our Lady works everywhere!

I will not be leaving Our Lady behind; I will take her with me! I always tell pilgrims not to leave Our Lady behind. We can take her in our heart by doing precisely what she has been asking us to do for the past 26 years. This is the best way to be always with her, and through her, with Jesus.

(Interview by Francesco Cavagna)

From the Mail Box

Margarita Rincon, Australia: Thanks for sending the Echo which comes as sweet food for the soul. We appreciate the comments by Nuccio Quattrocchi which complement the messages of our blessed Mother. We share the Echo with others.

Mr. Etzkorn, Germany: Despite my 83 years I am still active in the service of evangelization, and I when I am feeling tired I am happy to read and be enriched by Echo.

M. Vitello, Canada: I have been receiving 12 copies of Echo for over a year. The young and not so young people I give Echo to receive it lovingly. I am 83, and I don't go out much, except to Mass... It is a joy to read your Echo.

Blanca Velez, Puerto Rico: You cannot imagine what it means to me to receive your Echo! It keeps me united to the blessed land being visited by Our Lady for so long.

To all who have been instruments of Providence for Echo, enabling us to continue to help Mary reach her children, goes our heartfelt thanks, whom we remember especially in prayer and at Holy Mass. If you desire a written response for your donation, kindly request it. May God reward you onehundredfold!

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QUOTATION: "It is important to see that Eve's firstborn son (Cain) didn't succumb to a little fit of jealousy, but to the deadly sin of *envy*! ... Jealousy seeks the good that is perceived in another person; envy resents it, and even seeks to destroy it. Jealousy can be good or bad, but envy is only and always evil." (Scott Hahn in "A Father Who Keeps His Promises")

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

don Alberto

Italy, 14 September 2007