



Echo of Mary Queen of Peace

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Message of the 25th of November 2009:

“Dear children! In this time of grace I call you all to renew prayer in your families. Prepare yourselves with joy for the coming of Jesus. Little children, may your hearts be pure and pleasing, so that love and warmth may flow through you into every heart that is far from His love. Little children, be my extended hands, hands of love for all those who have become lost, who have no more faith and hope. Thank you for having responded to my call.”

Loving hands to give back faith and hope

At the beginning of Advent, during this time of grace, Mary called us all to recommence, to begin over, inviting each of us to renew prayer in our families. To grasp the grace of the time that we are living in (in this case Advent) we need to tune into the right wavelength (the Love of the Father who gives us his Son), we need to eliminate reception disturbances (sin and everything associated with it) and listen in so as to then open our mouths at the right time (prayer). **Renew prayer in our families**, because the place of waiting in every life is family, and therefore the family must prepare itself to welcome Jesus who is being born. The novenas before the crib, interwoven with Rosaries, laments and popular songs, that the whole family participated in, are still a sweet, destroying memory and the cold of the homes, heated badly or not at all, did not discourage the extension of that simple and small but true family liturgy. Now, in the homes of so-called wealthy countries, which are heated beyond all dimensions, there are no more sounds of out-of-tune laments but rather, persuasive words which, accompanied by sweet Christmas melodies, rain down upon you from a television set erected like an altar, and the liturgy of consumerism asks you only to consume, to consume to the extent that you feel ill, until such time as identifying yourself with what you are celebrating, until becoming the object of consumption yourself.

Joyfully prepare for the coming of Jesus, Mary says to us and these seem like meaningless words for men of today and far from the real needs of the person, yet they are the keystone for the existence of the individual, of society and the whole of humanity. If the world still exists it is because Jesus came into the world; if the world will be saved and not annulled, redeemed and not dissolved, it is because Jesus saved it already, because Jesus conquered death. We cannot fail to await Jesus with immense joy, great joy, eternal joy. Even those who read these lines when Advent is over will not be excluded from



“Being-with is the deepest desire of love, it is the only thing that counts: being with he whom we love, being with he who loves us. All of the rest is secondary; it is not necessary for things to change, as long as there is the presence of the loved one. This is exactly what the Lord promises us and give us. He does not change things, but he enters into them and so, given that he is there, everything is changed within”.

A. Vanhoye
(“Il pane quotidiano della parola”)

the possibility of uniting themselves with us; when said well, prayers reaches God’s Heart and there, time is eternally Present, there is no past, there is no future.

Children, may your hearts be pure (let us turn to the Sacrament of Confession) and **welcoming** (let us free ourselves from all useless rubbish, let us make space within ourselves; is this not a fruit of the *fasting* that Mary invites us towards so often?) **Pure and welcoming hearts so that love and heat might begin to flow through you in every heart that is far from His love** [from Jesus’ love]. A pure heart is necessarily similar to Jesus’ Heart, to Mary’s Heart and is therefore capable of welcoming every man, every person, following the example of Jesus and Mary. Actually, what’s more, a truly pure heart is a heart that is totally immersed in the Heart of Jesus, and that is nourished by His Love and lives on it and this Love will lead to those who are far from it. And so human action will be the vehicle of divine action and so it will truly be saving, and Love will triumph as announced by Paul (1 Cor 13, 1-13) and as wished by Mary: **Children, be my outstretched hands, loving hands for all those who are lost, who no longer have faith and hope.**

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Message of the 25th of December 2009:

“Dear children! On this joyful day, I bring all of you before my Son, the King of Peace, that He may give you His peace and blessing. Little children, in love share that peace and blessing with others. Thank you for having responded to my call”.

Share...

While the powerful man of the time calls everyone to participate in the census, probably to update the tax registers, and everyone is involved in this calling, another calling resounds in the air, which also has to do with the entire population, but it is a calling that does not come from the earth but from the heavens and it is not delivered to the army but rather, to a group of people believed to be at the margins of the society of the time: shepherds (cfr Luke 2, 1-20). More than 2000 years have gone by since then and this call still resounds on earth today and, like then, it calls people individually, one by one, to register, not in a book made of paper, but of divine flesh; not to identify each of them with a number, but to give each of them a name, the same name, the Name of Jesus! This is Christmas, and to reduce it to a memory is to debase it to a feeling, perhaps still capable of making some chords vibrate within the heart, but incapable of changing our lives, of becoming our lives.

Christmas is not within our grasp, it does not depend on our merits or on our organisation, nor does it depend on our abilities; it is not something to do but rather to grasp, to welcome, to live: it is an event, it is the Event! It is “a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laying in a manger”; it is “the child born for us [not of us], the son that was given to us” (cfr Is 9,5). It is an event that cannot be enclosed within a date, it is in fact an event that is underway until the end of the world and until then it personally calls on each of us, whether we welcome it or refuse it. By *that child*, we are called not to register in a list of people, but rather, to welcome His Life in us: *as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God: to those who believe in his name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God* (John 1, 12-13).

“Dear children! On this joyful day, I bring all of you before my Son, the King of Peace, that He may give you His peace and blessing. Peace is not a promise but a reality: the Son born for us, offered to the men that God loves, that is, to everyone; it is a gift for this earth that does not know peace because it seeks it as its product and does not accept to receive it as a gift, the fruit of Love. Peace is the fruit of the Tree of Life, now it is no longer prohibited for man, actually it is generously offered to those who ask for it as a gift and

Me in Africa, a bishop and...poor

do not seek it as their conquest. Jesus awaits us; Mary brings us to Him to grasp peace and blessing from Him and in Him. Peace and blessing are not distinct gifts but a single gift; they are an attribute of Jesus, actually Jesus himself. He is our peace and our blessing and for this reason we cannot possess him.

Peace and blessing should be shared with others or they will wither and crumble in our hands. **Little Children, in love share this peace and blessing with others.** Love is the atmosphere that keeps these gifts in their original purity and freshness, this is the humus that makes them grow *until such time as He returns*, until such time as the universal and definitive triumph of the Kingdom of God. The peace and blessing of Jesus must be shared in love; this is not a wish but an order that Mary gives us and that summarises the Life of Jesus, what He did and what he said, the life of the Apostles and of the first Christians, the life of the Saints from the origins until our time. It is not sufficient to say *May Jesus bless you, or May Jesus give you peace* but we must bear witness to the peace and blessing of Jesus in everyday life. In the measure in which His Love will inhabit our actions we will experience His Life in us and it will be Him who speaks in us and through us and our word will be His and it will be efficient and will do what it says because He is the Word that is made flesh. *Jesus, I love You, Thy Kingdom Come, let it be done onto me according to Thy will!*

N.Q.

“If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation!”

This is what is affirmed by the Holy Father in the traditional Message for the World Peace Day that is celebrated on the first day of each new year. In his Message for 2010, the Pope “proposes **“a cosmic vision of peace”** (...) that is brought about in a state of harmony between God, humanity and creation” and “within such a perspective, environmental degradation not only expresses a rift in the balance between humanity and creation, but a deeper deterioration of the union between humanity and God”.

To urgently and responsibly face the consequences caused by this lack of harmony, Benedict XVI invites humanity to renew and strengthen that alliance between the human being and the environment, which must be a mirror of God’s creating love, from which we originate and towards which we are travelling”.

It is from here, although we often forget it, that the peace that each man needs in order to live and that continuously escapes us, is generated: “If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation!” - in fact, in his message the Pope continues – “The search for peace by all men of good will, shall be facilitated by a shared recognition of the unbreakable relationship that exists between God, human beings and the whole of creation. Illuminated by divine Revelation and following the Tradition of the Church, Christians offer their own contribution. May they consider the cosmos and its marvels in the light of the Father’s creating and redeeming work, which, with his death and resurrection, has reconciled with God “both the things that are on earth and those in the heavens”.

Editorial staff

Dear Sirs,

I have just returned from the experience of the African Synod in Rome feeling encouraged and I have decided to attempt to put the guidelines set out to face up to the formidable obstacles and problems that pose a challenge to the Church in Africa, into practice. In my meetings with priests and in my pastoral visits, I have attempted to explain the contents and the conclusions of this important ecclesiastical event. A simple and effective way of doing this is the radio programme during which, every two weeks, on Sunday evenings I explain and re-launch the proposals of the Synod, adapting them to the local context of Uganda. And so I spoke about the situation of women in Africa, family, climate change...and I will proceed by choosing one theme that is particularly topical for my people on each occasion...

Is everything ok then? Not exactly. When faced with the vastness and complexity of the problems evoked and the inadequacy of our forces, it is difficult to escape a feeling of impotence. Listeners sometimes ask me: “What about us, what can we do?” And the subtle temptation suggested by “good sense”, is to answer: “Humanly speaking, little or nothing!” Speaking, seeking and proposing solutions is one thing. But putting them into practice is an entirely different matter... Not only do the big problems of reconciliation, justice and peace in Africa cause a sense of impotence and discouragement, but sometimes even simpler things are sufficient...a little stone in our shoe is sometimes sufficient to prevent us from walking properly!

Four days ago I witnessed and participated in a truly extraordinary event: the Episcopal ordination of the new bishop of Kotido in Karamoja. But I was unexpectedly struck by a deep sense of inadequacy and poverty. Given that I was one of the three consecrating bishops, I found myself physically near the new bishop during the ceremony.

And so I re-experienced my own ordination: “You have been chosen by the Lord. Remember that the bishop must seek to serve, more than to command... As a father and a brother, love all those that God entrusts to you...” And again, at the time of the delivery of the ring and the pastoral staff: “Take this ring, as a seal of your faithfulness. Protect God’s bride, his Church... Watch over and protect the flock that you are the shepherd of...” Before the beauty and the greatness of such a duty, how could I fail to feel small, poor and inadequate? Today, actually more than four years ago, because this is not simply a profession to be learnt... And then, there is faith in service, which cannot be taken for granted.

I returned to Lira with the image of Bishop Filippi in my eyes and in my heart with the Gospel open and his head resting on it. “Receive the Gospel and preach God’s word...” It is a question of having the gospel in your head and above all, in your heart. We are not invited to preach our ideas but His Word. It is not always easy, and often the outcome is uncertain. Along with the joy of occasionally seeing the fruits of the Spirit of God in the works around me and through my ministry, there is no lack of moments – that seem to be

multiplying during this period – during which I experience my own inadequacy before the duty that I am entrusted with, my poverty and fragility.

And so? The question is not only valid for me. I know that in different circumstances, it also happens to you that do not reach the desired result, that you feel inadequate and you learn before what you would like to and should do; to feel small and poor, incapable of giving the love, the attention and the help that others rightly expect from you, in your family, at work, in society. This situation of poverty and weakness is the right moment during which to welcome the gift of the coming of He who has taken on our weakness and made it His own and who comes to bring it to us, to fill it with His love and His strength!

Giuseppe Franzelli
Bishop of Lira (Uganda)



The flag of Europe

The European Court of human rights has hunted the crucifix out of schools; nevertheless, Europe remains under Mary’s protection. Everything is in her hands: even the flag belongs to Her.

This is what happened to Chiara Lubich in August 1999 during the report that she was making in Strasbourg to the members of the European Parliament: she was presented with an article from a French magazine, signed by the Abbot Pierre Caillon, who wrote: *I would like to tell you a beautiful story. One day in Lisieux I met someone who said to me: “I’m from Strasbourg and I’ve also been asked to design the flag of Europe. I had an idea to put the twelve stars of the Miraculous Medal of Rue du Bac, in Paris, on a blue background.*

Despite the fact that over one hundred designs were submitted over a period of 5 years, it was Our Lady’s flag that triumphed out of modesty, discretion and humility. It recalls the readings of the mass of the 15th of August: “A great sign appeared in the sky. A woman dressed in the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head”. Obviously this is the flag of all Europeans and, as usual, people avoid evoking its religious meaning, by virtue of inviolable laity. But people have the right to know how things originated. The twelve stars never corresponded to the number of countries. All those who want to work for peace will be happy to know that the flag of Europe is that of Our Lady, Queen of Peace”. And so the populations of the European Union who gather around “Our Lady’s” flag have reason to be joyful, knowing that they are beneath Mary’s protection, she constantly watches over us and assists us with her Mother’s heart.

Pietro Squassabia

IN THE YEAR DEDICATED TO THE PRIESTHOOD

A Priest through Christ, with Christ and in Christ

"And do not be called 'teachers', for one is your Teacher, the Christ" (Mt 23, 10). A few years have passed since my ordination as a priest, but the awareness of the apostolate that I must fulfil is maturing within me more and more: to be a priest who is called to go through all the steps taken by Jesus throughout my life.

Everything that is part of the Priest's ministry (to celebrate the Eucharist, to forgive sins, to heal, to free from evil) is nothing other than a repetition and actualisation of the mission of Jesus, the Redeemer on earth. And in order for this to be possible, the priest must continuously work in his own soul to look more and more like him. For this reason I can see that it is not sufficient to go through what Jesus experienced on the outside, but I recognise that I must be ready to carry and feel what He himself carried within himself and felt.

Pain accompanied his mission, even if it was always united with the joy of doing the will of the Father and giving men back their lives. In his life on earth, Christ not only suffered because he felt men's sin, but also because as a man, he had to deal with all the consequences of sin that mark the life of every creature. And so he suffered poverty, humiliations, and misunderstandings. He suffered due to the death of his putative father. He suffered when he began his mission, being separated from his Mother and leaving her alone. He suffered due to all the pain that he had to cause her and for all the pain that struck those whom he loved.

But his greatness was expressed in free and pure acceptance: Christ accepted to feel and carry all of that pain in order to break the chains created by evil that would have bound humanity forever if He had not given his own life, together with his Mother, to give man back the possibility of getting back up.

This mystery is truly great and so is the meaning of the priesthood in which He consecrates us through the mission of the Church! It is He who imprints the seal of his priesthood on us. It is he who spreads a protective cloak over us so that this priesthood so wanted by the Father from eternity might be holy, and so that nothing and nobody might block the action of grace within us. In this clarity of grace, our willingness and our answer are integrated; communion in prayer is inserted and it makes this gift active. Being united with God and experiencing communion in prayer is in fact the basis of Christ's priesthood because it is born in communion.

And if the priest experiences the unconditional offer and the union with God, his work will become more powerful, because his action and blessing are united with those of Christ, Saviour of the world. It is no longer the priest who transmits the life of God that he possesses, but it is Christ himself who, through him, touches souls, in order to free them from all links to Satan and to heal them. And it is Christ himself who struggles in him against evil and cancels out the forces of the

shadows, protecting the souls of the weaker.

The more the souls of the priests know how to enter into divine life and into the mystery of the priesthood, the more Christ's priesthood will be able to act in them, and thus reach many souls and make them rise up. Only through the priesthood can God's grace communicate completely with men, and only through the priesthood can every payer, every supplication, every request for forgiveness, every form of praise and everything that men experience, be elevated to the Father.

I thank you "Rabbi" for the words that I hear within my heart, those same words that You addressed to Simon Peter: "Do you love me more than others?". In this question, which is also a choice, you invite me not to let any burden come about within me, or any worry or fear. You ask me if I love you more than others because you want me to discover that your love is stronger than death, love is strength and it can conquer all evil and all death. Thank you because you teach me that I must never fear any call of yours, but I should think only of loving you with all of myself, because it is love that unites us with You.

Lord, I pray to you for all those whom you have placed alongside me and who have asked for my prayers, so that they might welcome this ability to love that You imprint within us, and so that they might all experience this love and bear witness to what it means to experience the resurrection.

Father K.B.

In Prayer

"In prayer, ask for these things and have a sense of familiarity with them at the moment of your supplication. Be moved by passion and desire!

Implore God in a fired up manner and in your prayer let your heart burn so that mercy might be enflamed and made man in you, so that the enflamed passion of his love might be moved in your heart".

(Issac the Syrian, *Spiritual Discourses*)

*"My life, Lord,
simple and straight like a flute
so that you might fill it,
fill it with your music.*

*"My life, Lord,
soft soil in your hands
so that you might give it a shape,
the shape that you wish.*

*"My life, Lord,
a free seed in the wind
so that you might plant it,
plant it wherever you wish.*

*"My life, Lord,
a dry little twig
so that you might light it,
and that it might burn for the poor
and for you".*

(Latin-American Prayer)

Young man, are you thirsty? ...come to me!

The world is thirsty, it is thirsty for God and it is dying of thirst without even realising it. Every young man is seeking his own happiness and is sensitive to values such as freedom, truth, and selflessness. Thirst is the same in everyone, and **those who are truly young are looking for it**. There is a sort of inner calling, something that is awoken within. I only realise this because the gaze of a young man changes when I speak of happiness or freedom, when I share my experience of God. The gaze changes and reveals an uncontrollable interior motor of hope...**THIRST**.

Then human reactions come about, like a sort of self-defence: everyone has accumulated many disappointments and there is a great fear of suffering. So, once that moment has passed, that special light seems to disappear from the eyes of that young man: the rigid control of rationality comes back...But at this stage words are no longer important, it is sufficient to welcome those who stand before us with his reactions; a loving gaze, a question that goes right to the heart of that person will be worth much more than many wise arguments.

I experienced all of this during the "**street evangelisations**" organised by the "Nuovi Orizzonti" community and by "Sentinelle del mattino", initiatives that provide an answer to the most urgent need of this time: **to announce the Gospel to the new generations**. This Mission usually avails of the collaboration of around one hundred young people who have already met the Lord during their lifetime. They were **sent to the street two by two to meet other young people** – in squares, in bars, in the courtyards of the universities, on the beach, outside discos, wherever they are – even late at night, to bring them a simple annunciation, to present their testimony and to propose a new meeting with the Risen Jesus.

There are many refusals and much scorn but all those who open themselves up to listen remain touched within, perhaps by the serenity that they recognise in the "missionaries" and some of them accept to try to enter a church again after many years: Jesus the Eucharist is there waiting for his children until late at night, an exchange of gazes is sometimes sufficient to allow walls to tumble and to bring about tears of joy. We participate in miracles, and it is so obvious that we are not the ones to convert others. We are merely tools and spectators.

Why should we take the first step towards "those who are far away"? Anyone who has touched God's love and has changed their life, wishes to share their joy with others, but there are many obstacles and brakes that we put in our own way. Perhaps the key is in the words: "*Let whoever is thirsty come to Me*". It is the same thirst that burns in everyone, even in those who seem closed off to any experience of faith. Let everyone carry within themselves that same need to love and to be loved that finds full fulfilment only in the relationship with the fountain of pure Love.

And so it is up to each of us to communicate the marvellous revolution of love brought about by Christ: the Mission is open to those who feel the desire to participate, but we are all called, indistinctly, to communicate silently with God in simple everyday situations.

Francesco Cavagna

The Friend

"He who finds a friend finds a treasure" (Sir 6, 14). Wisdom, *"man's friend"* (Wisdom 7,23) wanted, in an established time, to openly manifest his friendship towards men, and so he descended onto earth and took human form and a name: Jesus. And so men discovered an all-new friendship, that they did not know before, because they met Jesus, the friend who loved them to the extent of giving his own life. The people of the time remained surprised by this gift of His and by the trust that he had placed in them. And so, those who believed in Him rejoiced about having their Lord as a friend and understood that friendship could not exist without full trust in the Friend.

His friendship is also offered to us today, we are also asked to trust Him; only by trusting him in fact, will we be able to feel that he is a friend, and not a stranger, not to mention a person to flee from. And so, let us chase away all fear as regards our Friend, fear that certainly comes from those who do not want our happiness. In fact the Friend only gives, without ever robbing, and even if he were to ask for our life, he would not do so in order to take it away from us, but only to make it more beautiful. For this reason Jesus is the friend in whom we can confide everything, to whom we can entrust everything, to whom we can say: I am all yours; this situation of mine is yours, this is my joy, this is my wish, this is what I am lacking, this is my plan; everything is yours, also my future. If we do this, then perhaps we will discover an ever-truer friendship, an ever-greater communion with the Friend and among ourselves.

The Child, born in Bethlehem, appears to say this to us: trust me, offer yourself to me like I did for you. If you trust me you will understand that *trusting God's love is more important than loving*, you will understand that Mary was made the Mother of God because she fully trusted her Lord. And so your fears will certainly disappear and you will be able to say with me: *my yoke is gentle and my load is light*,

because I will be the one to carry it with you and for you. Then you will discover that you have received the greatest treasure as a gift: Wisdom, which descended onto earth, the Friend who gives himself wholly to you, who trusts you.

Thank you Jesus, because you gave yourself to us. Thank you because you trusted us although we didn't deserve it... but this is what Love does.

The signals... the signs...

Road signs are very important for those who do not know the route yet need to reach a destination. The signs are not the destination but they are important for reaching it. We must not linger too long to look at them, so as not to arrive late or never, but nevertheless, we cannot underestimate them, especially when taking certain roads.

The appearance of new buds on trees indicates that spring is near, that the season is changing or that we will soon see the appearance of not only leaves and flowers, but also fruits. The Spirit also offers us "signs" to point out the Way to us that leads to the Destination, he offers us "signs" that allow us to catch a glimpse of the Fruits.

Medjugorje is not the Destination, which is much more beautiful, it is not the Fruit, which is much sweeter, but it is certainly a valid "sign" that indicates the road that leads to Heaven, a precious "sign" to enable us to see and desire the Fruits.

This is how we should look at Medjugorje: like a "signal", an important "sign" to reach the Destination, to desire to taste the Fruits. Mary, who always indicates God as our destination, who always shows us Jesus as the Fruit, certainly desires this from us: for us to consider "the signals and signs" as valid tools, made available by Providence to reach the banquet of Heaven, especially for those who, like us, need special help in proceeding safely and quickly towards our Destination. □

A hidden pearl

Because Mary remained hidden during her life she is called by the Holy Spirit and the Church "Alma Mater", Mother hidden and unknown. So great was her humility that she desired nothing more upon earth than to remain unknown to herself and to others, and to be known only to God.

In answer to her prayers to remain hidden, poor and lowly, God was pleased to conceal her from nearly every other human creature in her conception, her birth, her life, her mysteries, her resurrection and assumption.

Her own parents did not really know her; and the angels would often ask one another, "Who can she possibly be?", for God had hidden her from them, or if he did reveal anything to them, it was nothing compared with what he withheld.

God the Father willed that she should perform no miracle during her life, at least no public one, although he had given her the power to do so. God the Son willed that

she should speak very little although he had imparted his wisdom to her.

Even though Mary was his faithful spouse, God the Holy Spirit willed that his apostles and evangelists should say very little about her and then only as much as was necessary to make Jesus known.

Mary is the supreme masterpiece of Almighty God and he has reserved the knowledge and possession of her for himself. She is the glorious Mother of God the Son who chose to humble and conceal her during her lifetime in order to foster her humility. He called her "Woman" as if she were a stranger, although in his heart he esteemed and loved her above all men and angels. Mary is the sealed fountain and the faithful spouse of the Holy Spirit where only he may enter. She is the sanctuary and resting-place of the Blessed Trinity where God dwells in greater and more divine splendour than anywhere else in the universe..."

Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort
(Treatise on True Devotion
to the Blessed Virgin n°2, 3,4, 5 and 6)

Chronicles of a city: poison for the heart

Mary is a sweet and reassuring presence in the heart of Christian cities. What does Mary say to the city? What does she remind us all of with her presence? She reminds us that "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" (*Rm 5, 20*) – as the apostle Paul writes. She is the Immaculate Mother who also repeats to the men of our time: do not be afraid, Jesus conquered evil; he conquered it from the root, freeing us from its rule.

How much we need this great news! Every day, in fact, **evil is spoken about, repeated and amplified, through the newspapers, the television, the radio**, allowing us to become accustomed to the most horrible things, making us become insensitive and, in some ways, intoxicating us, because the negative is not fully digested and it accumulates day by day. The heart is hardened and thoughts become darker and darker. For this reason, the city needs Mary, with her presence she speaks to us about God, she reminds us of the victory of Grace over sin, and she induces us to hope even in situations that are humanly more difficult.

Invisible people live – or survive – in the cities, every once in a while they appear on the front page of the newspapers or on our television screens, and they are exploited to the last, **so that the news and the image might attract our attention**. This is a perverse mechanism, which we unfortunately have some difficulty resisting. The city first hides and then exposes to the public. Pitiless, or with false pity. On the other hand, there is the desire within every man to be welcomed as a person and considered a sacred reality, because every human story is a holy story, and it requires the greatest respect.

We are all the city! Everyone contributes to its life and its moral climate, in a positive or negative manner. In the heart of each of us there is the confine between good and evil and none of us must feel that it is our right to judge others, but rather, everyone must feel the duty to improve himself or herself! **The mass media tend to always make us feel like "spectators"**, as though evil has to do with others only, and as though certain things might never happen to us. On the other hand, we are all "actors" and, in good and in evil, our behaviour has an influence on others.

We often complain about the pollution in the air, that it is impossible to breathe in certain parts of the city. It is true: everyone must make a commitment to make the city cleaner. And yet there is another form of pollution, which is less perceptible to the senses, but just as dangerous. **The pollution of the spirit**; this is what **makes our faces less smiley, more obscure**, this is what leads us not to salute each other, not to look at each other in the face... The city is made of faces, but unfortunately, collective dynamics may cause us to lose the perception of their depth. We see everything on the surface. People become bodies, and these bodies lose their soul, they become things, faceless objects, that may be exchanged and consumed.

Our Immaculate Lady helps us to rediscover and defend the depth of people, because in her there is the perfect transparency of the soul in the body. She is purity personified, in the sense that spirit, soul and body are fully coherent among themselves in her and with God's will. Our Lady teaches us to open ourselves up to God's action, to look at others as He looks at them: beginning from the heart. And to look at them with mercy, with love, with infinite tenderness, especially those who are most alone, scorned, exploited. "Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more".

While we are busied with daily activities, let us lend our ear to Mary's voice. Let us listen to her silent but pressing appeal. She says to each of us: where sin abounded, let grace be much more abundant, beginning from your heart and your life! And the city will be more beautiful, more Christian, and more human.

BENEDICT XVI
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception 2009

Reflections of light from Mary's land

by Stefania Consoli

Which Medjugorje?

One thing is certain: Our Lady does appear in Medjugorje. She has been doing so every day, for almost three decades. But *certain* for who? You who read Echo have probably already grasped the celestial reality that is manifested in the land of Herzegovina. In its tiny capacity in fact, Echo wants to *resound* in the world what the Virgin is saying in Medjugorje – not only in the messages entrusted to the visionaries, but also in the souls of those who have felt touched by the grace present in that place. A light, imperceptible touch, which is nevertheless capable of turning a whole existence upside down.

There is a lot of talk about Medjugorje; there is also a lot written about it. Some people define it a “phenomenon”. This is an ugly definition, but it does attract attention... Yet it leads us to ask ourselves: *what* Medjugorje are we talking about? In fact, it is not sufficient to go to that place, to rediscover faith and then nourish ourselves just with “devotions”. Those who undertake the itinerary proposed by the Queen of Peace should be willing to partake in an incessant, unstoppable, however gradual change: a transformation that might cause its true inner nature to emerge, that which makes it unique before God and men.

We are all on a journey. Nobody can consider themselves having arrived during the conversion route. Nobody can presume that they have reached a degree of purification that is such that they feel better than others. It is not enough to be believers...we need to be credible! The humble docility of allowing ourselves to be led is the only vehicle that delivers us into Mary's hands, it is the yes that will let her show us routes that are more and more restricted, sometimes apparently even inaccessible: routes that may only be crossed if we abandon ourselves blindly to God's guidance, if we leave Him free reign, if we allow Him to act in us and in place of us, without leaving ourselves aside.

Sometimes His initiatives unsettle us and even “scandalise us”, yet Mary invites us to always be grateful, because God's goodness very often passes through routes that appear to be twisted. This is not fatalism: it is faith. We must merely immerse ourselves in grace and leave all the rest.

For this reason, **those who are the spokespeople of Medjugorje** and nevertheless remain on a superficial level are **to be feared**, because they fail to touch the deeper levels of the mystery of man, of the relationship of the soul with grace and with God, that Mary wants to introduce us to almost with a sense of trepidation, yet with infinite patience.

Why do we find comfort in the fact that important men of the Church visit Medjugorje, in however private a form? Perhaps we are consoled by the idea that they too believe and so we see the so longed for official consent on the horizon? If this is the case, let's try to listen on a deeper level to discern when a theme is dealt with in a direct and clear manner or when it is merely touched on from afar, with allusions that would like to hint at something

but that do not actually say it...

If we believe in it, Medjugorje is a fact that is destined to definitively change the course of humanity according to God's loving plans. It is therefore a fact that cannot only be “hinted at” with prudence, it must be witnessed courageously and vigorously, like Mary, who peacefully carried her mysterious maternity, despite the danger of lapidation.

Obviously everyone is free to bear witness as they choose to. But there is a risk for we who are listening: if our consciences fall asleep in the illusion that “something is moving” and in reality it is buried by the weight of compromises, of “this can be said but not this”. Everyone is good at doing this. But instead of ardent witnesses (in Greek: *martyres!*), we only have skilful preachers who do not help us to enter into an ever clearer perception of what spirits are moving our existence; that is, to whom we are entrusting the government of our lives, more or less consciously.

Through the action of the Queen of Peace, the Holy Spirit wants to penetrate the deeper layers of our existence to bring them to the light and heal them, so that we can become witnesses of the risen life, of the possibility of being new creatures, transfigured by grace. A new people, matured in the offering of themselves, capable of being vigilant tools of the struggle against Evil within the Church.

Medjugorje has incurred severe blows during these times, especially in its first witnesses. God allowed this so as to make us grow in an ever greater personal awareness of what is happening there and to help us to stand up by ourselves, to walk in a fast, independent and responsible manner along the pathway traced out by the Holy Virgin. Perhaps the moment has truly come in which we should ask ourselves: “*Someone says this, others that...but what about me, what do I think, or better: what is God saying to me?*”.

Let us not waste grace; let us not risk leaving it to grow tepid by delegating our answer to others. If the fire of true love does not fuel grace, then it runs the risk of being quenched. Let this not be the case for Medjugorje. □

A few notes



about Podbrdo...

LIKE THE WAILING WALL

Large blocks of stone, old and consumed but above all dear to the observant Jews who find their preferred corner of prayer there, it is chosen because they feel that it is nearest to God. It is the only wall that remained after the

destruction of the great Temple of Solomon: a place of faith par excellence, called “the Wailing Wall”, not due to the tears shed there but due to the supplications expressed with the lips and with the whole body that sways in an almost litany-like manner. But that's not all. The prayers, which are taken note of on little pieces of paper, reach the most hidden cracks of the great wall, as though God could read them without anyone else realising it...

I observe the same on Podbrdo in Medjugorje, the hill made of many quarry stones, like caskets, where pilgrims who have reached the summit can hide little notes concealing intimate thoughts, brief prayers and silent requests that only She might read, their Mother, confidante and friend, always ready to welcome the secrets of the children who place their trust in Her.

THERE IS NO ELEVATOR TO BRING YOU UP

You must make the effort, you must be very careful about where you put your feet. Especially in the morning, when the Autumn frost makes the stones slippery and slimy, you must be doubly careful. It is not a comfortable climb like that on the escalators of shopping centres. To climb up the mountain that leads to the site of the first apparitions, you must accept the effort and the discomfort of the route. You must want it and so you must be willing to collaborate.

It is almost an icon of the spiritual life that the Mother proposes to us in Medjugorje: it is not a pleasant walk to be embarked on in a thoughtless manner with no sense of sacrifice. It is a climb up the steep slopes of the faith, where sometimes even the view of the summit is concealed from our sight and we must proceed with the urge of just love and hope. But our commitment, our desire, the generously made efforts, open the hand of grace runs to our aid and brings us, at last, to a place that we didn't even dream of: lifted up, beyond every created thing, to look at the world with the eyes of God himself...

THE JOY OF A LOVELY BATH

It happens to many, at the end of an intense day, to want to shed the weariness of work by desiring a lovely warm and relaxing bath... Once immersed in the bath, the water has the ability to make our whole body feel light and to free our mind and our thoughts.

It may seem an irreverent comparison, we do not want to banalize things that have to do with God, but rather, we want to explain them through simple images, like those that Jesus used in his parables. Let's get back to the image of the bath then; it is what seems to happen to us when we reach Medjugorje... You arrive there and you feel immersed in a dimension that envelopes you, it absorbs whatever negative things you brought with you and it gives you peace; a sense of abandonment that invites you to hand your problems and your worries over, that conveys warmth and a profound sense of wellbeing. It is not the fruit of technique, those proposals made by so many falsely spiritual movements, it is the product of the grace that discretely reaches you and refreshes you. □

A perennial Grace

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb....” (Ex 3,1). This is how the story of an episode that is fundamental in the history of Salvation begins. In fact, it was on that mountain that Moses saw a bush that was burning but that was never consumed; he became curious and approached it to try to understand what this unusual occurrence was. In reality, the extraordinary event had a more important aim: to lead Moses to open himself up to God.

The Lord often uses our human reality to convey a message to us that might penetrate into the depths of our hearts: “When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called him from within the bush: “Moses, Moses” and Moses said: “Here I am”. “Do not come any closer,” God said, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy Ground”. (Ex 3, 5).

We can associate **this episode with what has been happening for 28 years in Medjugorje**. What is extraordinary in that place, in fact, are not the apparitions in themselves, but the grace that they generate in people, a grace that continuously changes the lives of many people.

Before this grace we can only adopt two forms of behaviour: welcome it or refuse it. Those who welcome it enter into an inner process that prepares them for new times – announced several times by Mary in her messages – but that are brought about above all in the person who allows himself to be transformed. Those who refuse grace on the other hand, hide behind thousands of justifications but remain in a vacuum, because grace cannot be operational in them and bring those fruits that are expressed in a spiritual vitality.

The place where Moses saw the bush burning without ever being consumed had a profound meaning in his life: it was sacred and man necessarily had to take off his sandals...Before God and his grace there isn't much thinking to be done. In reality, with that gesture, Moses *took of the clothes of the old man*, his conception of the past and of the future before the Lord who was revealing himself. God is God, if we can say so, and we must adapt ourselves to him.

For this reason, Medjugorje brings news to the fundamental point of our existence: our relationship with God. Medjugorje does not need interpreters, nor anyone to explain how or what to do – God himself does this, like he spoke to Moses that day from the bush. He does it through Mary, Mother full of love, immaculate creature who approaches us with such spontaneity and introduces us to an immediate, living relationship with God.

The novelty lies here, because grace takes everything that has come between us and God away, it causes all forms of approaching God that are not life-giving and all passive religious habits that made us into slaves, to experience a crisis. The grace of Medjugorje does not stop at extraordinary facts, on various phenomena, it goes beyond this. Those who have welcomed this grace, have welcomed a call to free the people who are subjected to slavery.

Moses received the same call from God to free his people from the slavery of Egypt in which the pharaoh kept them. Medjugorje

then cannot be a land of pharaohs, because it is God himself, through his Mother, who gives us the grace that frees us....and this grace, which is so palpable, cannot be enclosed within a *bucket* because it must lead the whole of humanity to participate in God's life. Man grows in this way, he is transformed and freed from that which makes him a slave.

The call of Moses has come about, but the heart of the pharaoh has remained closed. Denying grace, actually means remaining in the dark. Let us therefore welcome the grace that the Lord gives us during this time in Medjugorje, let us say yes to God so that he might conquer all pharaohs that lie within us.

Hrvoje C'uric'



Our future in his hands

The time has come for a strong inner dynamism; we are asked to continuously and tirelessly walk on the pathway of faith. Every day requires new steps to be taken and what was going well for us yesterday must not necessarily be the same today.

We are asked to leave the “old” of the day before: the good and bad experiences that we have lived; the painful things, the things that we have understood and those that remain incomprehensible; our habits, our human security that in reality is only insecurity camouflaged, because our only certainty lies in God and everything comes to us from Him at the right time and in the right measure. We must put our future in God's hands, abandon everything to Him; not only what is far from us and escapes our gaze, but also what is near and what worries our heart.

God has given us the gift of a place in which he sends his Mother to visit us every day to tell us through Mary that He is worried about us lovingly and in a concrete manner, that he is constantly coming to seek us out wherever we are and he gives us all the time necessary (even 28 years and more if necessary) to open ourselves up to Him through Mary's heart.

Through her maternal words, God wants to attract us to Him, he wants to bring us towards an immediate and profound relationship with Him and with the celestial reality. But the Lord also lets us know that we must walk, grow, develop a living dialogue with Him in inner life. For us now is the right moment to see where we are after so many years during which Our Lady comes to visit us, during which Mary comes to help us with her words to progress, until such time as becoming mature, integral Christians, who make a decision to experience the freedom of the children of God – Holiness.

Yes, now is the right time to see where we have stopped: in our old mentality, in the mistaken gazes towards God, in ourselves, in the Church; in the schemes that we made for ourselves or that others transmitted to us, even those that are called to guide us towards the

maturity and Christian freedom and that on the other hand suffocate what they should promote...

Those who have been in Medjugorje and those who, for many reasons have not yet gone there, (Medjugorje is not only for some, because if Our Lady is coming down from heaven it is something that has to do with all of us: this is an event before which nobody can remain indifferent!), we must ask if in all these years our Christian faith has grown visibly, if our gaze towards God's plans has extended, if it has become clearer...

We must not and we cannot stop: we must walk with Mary! It is up to us to experience her presence in a real way, in order to bear witness to God's face which comes to visit us in Medjugorje in Mary's maternal face, so that we might all recognise it and understand God's action in that place where He has given us so many graces. It is not up to us to judge anyone because we are all in the same struggle between good and evil; we are always tempted to sit down and get lost in comfort, in the superficiality of the things of the world and to leave it up to others – whom we consider more suitable – to discern and to decide for us. But God came to meet us...the living God, together with Mary and all of the celestial reality, He wants to live among us. The question is whether we are ready to welcome Him and as such – it would always be Christmas!

Andrea Toeglhofer

AN OPEN LETTER

Dear Editorial Staff,

lately there is much talk within the settings associated with Medjugorje of the fact that due to certain events, official recognition by the Church is late in coming...I have reflected on this for a long time and I must confess that I do not mind at all that it has not been approved, because when it is, it will no longer be the Medjugorje that overturns and shapes the soul, but perhaps it will be a “common” place of prayer and faith somewhat like the other more famous Marian shrines, and we will not longer breathe in the PURE and SIMPLE air of the LIVING and WORKING faith in people's hearts, with thousands of conversions...

Have you ever asked yourself: if God wanted it to be, it would have been recognised long ago! Why is it not? Because recognition by men is not important for God (and He doesn't need it), but rather, what is important is the concrete and continuous action of CONVERSION that Medjugorje exercises.

I believe that the presence of luxury hotels and shops animated by important financial interests may be a form of “degradation” of the SPIRITUAL action that is currently underway. Believe me.

Therefore, I don't mind in the least that approval has not come yet, I would however ask for those who have freely chosen to live the teachings of the Queen of Peace to be respected...Let us not forget, however, that the pain of our rights that are denied (as believers) purifies us and raises us up!

Hermann Zagler

BEARING WITNESS...

A caress from God

Spiritual experiences are a great gift, a "Grace" that is a foretaste of the love that we will receive and embrace fully when we are in the greatness of God in a complete manner.

There are signs that should also be grasped when they seem far away and we are immersed in daily life that plans out how our lives unwind. God, who loves us with a fullness that we sometimes fail to understand, knows our solitude and for this reason he puts spiritual friends alongside us, strengthened by Him.

Thanks to the invitation from a couple of dear friends during the month of August, we shared an extraordinary spiritual experience in Medjugorje with our eldest daughter.

During those days we felt how great God's love is in our personal history and our family. A special grace accompanied us from the **first steps on the rocks of Krizevac**: "Something" mysterious touched us.

We prayed together, praised the Lord and gave thanks. Our prayer was often united with a strong spiritual emotion, but our soul was calm and brimming with joy.

God's love penetrated into the depths, it worked...and it still works. Our family members were with us too, in spirit, along with our dearest friends and the people who had asked for our prayers, the ill in particular. There was a spiritual embrace between us...a silent and releasing cry.

As we were climbing up towards the great Cross, beneath the sun, we stopped off at the stations, with the Rosary in our hands and on our lips...God's love accompanied us. We too, like Jesus who received the words of the Father from the clouds "This is my chosen Son...", felt like we were chosen, intimately loved by God.

The walk to Podbrdo was rich with grace also. In the beginning we saw some

shops on the main road, as is customary for all religious places, but this did not disturb us, because we felt much more within our hearts...We started the climb up to Apparition Hill over the stones, in silence. A peace invaded us and with a hand we touched a truth that often, over the years, we had only grasped through the voices, but above all, the life, of many people near to us.

We felt the presence of Mary. An infinite joy...We stopped in front of the statue of Our Lady, we knelt down and we said a silent prayer. Around Christ on the Cross we shared an intense prayer and presented the wounds of our life to him and that's not all... We asked Mary to alleviate the suffering of the sick and those who are under strain with her caresses. And once again all our friends were there, all of them...everyone who is dear to us...

We would have liked to have remained there for a long time. Then our gaze moved to the spaces around there and we thought that right there, Mary took the same route, she spoke like us, but with new words that caress humanity; she listened, loved, shared. As we were going down, our gaze met the gaze of the other pilgrims; their shining eyes, their fraternal smiles, their shared feelings...

In an era that is so secularised, Mary's action is alive and it reaches the intimacy of our hearts. For us it was not a human experience; Medjugorje truly is a special place, where **the presence of God and Mary is evident everywhere**. Many years of married life, the gift of children even through adoption, trials and tests have sometimes led us to be very rational. This is just to say that what we experienced was not a superficial sense of grandeur.

When you leave Medjugorje **you feel called towards a renewed journey, of offering your life**. All of this is a gift, a caress from God. On the way home, our 21 year old daughter told us that Medjugorje gave a meaning to her life, to her summer, meaning that young people too are also in search of something else...which can be found.

Lidio and Mina

Towards the space of affection

«Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth....» (Lk 1,39)

Mary begins her journey, the metaphor of all the journeys of the soul and life itself. When you open your life to God, then you must no longer have any home.

The dynamics of existence go from the inside towards the outside, from our home towards the space of the world, from the I towards the space of affection and relations.

Accompanying Holy Mary in her journey of faith, going from one house to another with her, we realise how much of the Gospel comes about on our streets and in the homes of Palestine, we realise how the story of Jesus is set within homes – and then amidst rivers and lakes, on roads and in villages, on the hills and in the desert... much more than in the synagogue or in the temple; we realise how the home and the "profane" space are the place where salvation happens, and daily life is the pastry into which the yeast of the gospel is poured.

How I love Mary's freedom. She is free to leave in a hurry, to not allow herself to be influenced by anything, to do something that was very far from her plans up to a minute previously.

As free as a bird in the air, as a wild flower, as a lily in the field that receives pollen when the wind blows, that takes the sun and the water simply when they come. How I love this ability to experience life as though it were a continuous germination, a life made of buds. But this is the way every life is, not a book already written, not a plan to be carried out, complete, compact, heavy, but the invention of roads and the care of buds.

How I love this life of Mary where nothing is pre-established. Where life sprouts free and happy. *Magnificat!* It is so corroborating to imagine life as an open system and not as a closed system. To imagine life, faith, the Church, God himself as open fields. A girl travelling over the mountains of Judah.

(Taken from: *Le case di Maria*, by Ermes Ronchi)



Mary's words:

The annual apparition to Jakov 25th December 2009

"Dear children! All of this time in which God in

a special way permits me to be with you, I desire to lead you on the way that leads to Jesus and to your salvation. My little children, you can find salvation only in God and therefore, especially on this day of grace with little Jesus in my arms, I call you to permit Jesus to be born in your hearts. Only with Jesus in your heart can you set out on the way of salvation and eternal life. Thank you for having responded to my call."

Messages to Mirjana

2nd November 2009

Dear children, Also today I am among you to point you to the way that will help you to come to know God's love, the love of God who permitted you to call him Father and to perceive him as Father. I ask of you to sincerely look into your hearts and to see how much you love him. Is he the last to be loved? Surrounded by material goods, how many times have you betrayed, denied and forgotten him? My children, do not deceive yourselves with worldly goods. Think of your soul because it is more important than the body; cleanse it. Invoke the Father; he is waiting for you. Come back to him. I am with you because he, in his mercy, sends me. Thank you."

2nd December 2009:

"Dear children, At this time of preparation and joyful expectation I, as a mother, desire

to point you to what is the most important, to your soul. Can my Son be born in it? Is it cleansed by love from lies, arrogance, hatred and malice? Above all else does your soul love God as your Father and does it love your fellow brother in Christ? I am pointing you to the way which will raise your soul to a complete union with my Son. I desire for my Son to be born in you. What a joy that would be for me as mother. Thank you."

2nd January 2010:

"Dear children, Today I am calling you too, with complete trust and love, set out with me, because I desire to acquaint you with my Son. Do not be afraid, my children, I am here with you, I am next to you. I am showing you the way to forgive yourselves, to forgive others, and, with sincere repentance of heart, to kneel before the Father. Make everything die in you that hinders you from loving and saving – that you may be with Him and in Him. Decide for a new beginning, a beginning of sincere love of God Himself. Thank you."

The year that I wish for The year that I wish for

With the coming and going of the years – of time that cyclically goes and then begins again – we have the possibility of “zeroing out” certain situations of our life and “starting over” where we experienced failures, where it seemed to us to be ugly, painful and that we would like, in some way, to leave behind in order to turn over a new leaf, to be able to hope for better and give new occasions to life through changed conditions.

In reality, life continues as the fruit of what had been a short time before... If we really think about it in fact, a year that comes to an end is only a social convention, but it is also a form of psychological aid that helps us to ignite new hope and to put a hand to new desires. And so God, who is good, comes to bless us so as not to leave us alone in our dreams as children...

*The year that I wish for is made of stars,
splendid in the dark and calm in the night.*

*The year that I wish for is made of light,
of sun and of warmth.*

*The year that I wish for is woven with peace,
with harmony and good news...*

*The year that I wish for is made
of peace-giving silence,*

but also of joyful and vivacious life,

the fruit of free and knowledgeable creativity.

*The year that I wish for is made of God,
who is all of this and not only the author.*

Because God is light, God is peace,

God is warmth and harmony;

God is life and silence,

creating spirit and infinite hope.

God is good news,

always new in his annunciation

of joy and splendour.

And God is my time,

and God is my year,

that which life gives to me as a gift

so that I might enjoy it to the full,

*every instant, without growing tired of living it
with intensity and passion;*

giving the best of myself in every situation,

*without distinguishing between good
and bad ones.*

Because God is my everything,

my living, my existence;

in Him I lack nothing...

What should we hope for therefore at the beginning of a new year received as a gift? The world hopes for good luck, to be sure of this it tiresomely looks towards the stars, seeking magical solutions to the painful efforts of daily life. The world hopes for

health, and attempts at all costs to contrast the natural course of life, with its seasons and its normal declines. The world hopes for money, success, power...but then it gets disheartened as soon as the system gets jammed and shows its extreme weakness, which is all sent “into crisis”, including the delicate nervous system of those who run around all day: some to survive, some to produce wealth that immediately disappears. The world also wishes for love, and perhaps here we are...but what love? Love made not only of gratification, pleasure, satisfied sentimental claims or love that creates us by loving us, that makes us be ourselves and gives us life, freedom and strength?

If this is the love that we are seeking, then **let's wish for God** at the beginning of this new year. God is this and lot's more. He is a whole world to be discovered, every day, not out of curiosity, but *out of love*; because He attracts us to Him and He fascinates us, He fills the day with meaning and explains every event in truth.

Let us not seek anything more. This will be enough for us. By desiring Him we will find ourselves, and it will be *a year of grace*.

Enjoy the journey!

*Stefania Consoli and the editorial staff
of the Echo of Mary*

OUR READERS WRITE...

Agnes Hoe from Singapore: “Thank you so much for sending me Echo, which I distribute to several Catholics in Singapore. I am sending you an offer to contribute to your excellent work for the Virgin Mary. I wish you all a holy and blessed new year”.

Antonio La Manna from Italy: “Thank you for the service that you are providing, may the Lord support all of your undertakings. With esteem...”.

A missionary priest sends us a text message from Africa: “The Echo of Mary comes to me with the utmost of faith. Thank you very much!”.

Rose Claude da Bruzac (France): “Thank you for these publications that help us in our lives. May peace come and may all of us turn towards goodness, that is, towards Jesus our Saviour. Thank you once again”.

Robert Schmitt from Michelbach-le-Haut (France): “I have been receiving 100 copies of the Echo of Mary for more than fifteen years. After the issues in French that you didn't publish, I thought that Echo no longer existed. I am now receiving my copies again... I am truly happy that you still exist and I hope to continue receiving this magazine. Thank you once again!”. In communion of prayer with the Holy Virgin”.

Maurice le Guellec from Pont-Aven (France): “Thank you because you regularly send us the Echo, which gives us the gift of joy, hope and spiritual wealth. Every new issue is a discovery rich with Mary's messages that invites us to convert our hearts. Your latest September-October 2009 issue was particularly appreciated by a reader, who gave me an offer to send to you. Thank you once again from all the readers for your diligence. Fraternaly, in union of prayer”.

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Echo fully relies on readers' donations.

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

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

Villanova M., 1st January 2010

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You will become a blessing

We are not always sufficiently aware of the fact that the power of blessing works wonders. It is a mysterious force, which is invisible but nevertheless concrete in its action amidst created things. It channels the omnipotence of God himself, because it originates in Him; despite this, it needs channels to meet its destination, like a river needs a bed to reach the sea and to enrich it with the addition of its sweet waters.

That power that is capable of transforming everything that it meets passes through us, through the priestly heart that we received with baptism. Usually however, it remains closed in the drawers of our ignorance, or in those of laziness or perhaps only of indifference. And in this way, the treasure of grace is rendered fruitless.

The Lord has given us a gift, a precious gift, to be administered responsibly: a “*gift*” to “*say*”, because the word flies like the wind and it rests where it is listened to, welcomed, so as to bear fruit. A gift to be given but also to be kept carefully because it has an immense value, so that goodness might penetrate all things and bring it to its full fulfilment. The blessing does not change the nature of things, it makes them happen and causes them to explode with life...

The Lord entrusts this blessing to us at the beginning of every new year; let us make it our own, let us transmit it beyond words, so as to become a blessing ourselves...

**“The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His
countenance upon you,
And give you peace.
So they shall put My name
on the children of Israel,
and I will bless them.”**

(Nm 6, 24-27)