



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace

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Christmas message, 25 December 1998:

Dear Children, Also today I rejoice with you and I invite you to the Good. I desire that each of you meditate on and bear peace in your heart and say: "I want to put God first in my life!" That way, my children, each of you will become holy. My children, say to each person: "I love you," and they will pay you back with good, and the Good, dear children, will dwell in the heart of each person. My children, this evening I bring you the Good of my Son Who gave His life to save you. So, my children, rejoice and hold out your hands to Jesus Who is only good. Thank you for responding to my call.

At Christmas tell each person: "I love you!"

In the place of a Christmas which creates anguish, Mary offers the man of today a Christmas which heals. In the simplest of terms She points out what Christmas really is and the changes it should bring about in us, so that it becomes a programme of life. I rejoice with you: At Christmas Our Lady naturally rejoices for the gift which God gives us through Her and She invites us to accept it as the only Good. We are invited to do three things:

1. Stop for silent meditation. How easy it is to be distracted by "things of Christmas" which create sensations and emotions, but impede us from contemplating the true meaning of Christmas! Instead, we are being asked to open our hearts to God and meditate on the way He came down to be with us, and we will understand the greatness of the man in us and in others, and we will understand how to love that man: 'just the way God loves me.'
 2. Then each of us will carry peace in his heart, above all from the acceptance of the forgiveness which He offers us. After all, how can one accept Jesus if in a state of sin which is denial of love?
 3. Then say: I want to put God first in my life. Love the Lord your God with all your heart... All else comes from the acceptance of Jesus Who looks at no one but the Father. And the Angels will sing: peace on earth! It's useless to talk of peace when God, the Truth, does not occupy first place in our lives. To decide is enough to become holy. See how Mary makes everything so simple?!
- Here is how to obey the Father: Jesus says to me from the crib: accept my love and love as I love. Our Lady adds: My children, say to each person, "I love you." How often have we seen the youth from the "Upper Room Community" look each other in the eyes and say, "I love you," as they exchange the sign of peace? It is the natural consequence of Christmas. Then why should we not do the same, and say: "I

love you" to our parents, relatives, the aged, our neighbours, the not-so-friendly persons, our spouses? Why should we create barriers between ourselves and the others when God descended from His throne to come among us? Who are we to say no to others?

Note that Our Lady did not say to love everyone in a general sense (too easy!), but to say to "each person": "I love you," thus, also to those you do not like. This is conversion and true peace! With the "I love you," Our Lady means: "I care for you", "you are important to me." If it's other sense of "attraction" has prevailed perhaps it is because we stopped using its deeper sense. The Bible specifies: agape love (agape in Greek means love). Moreover, the dictionary lists as the #1 meaning for love as: " paternal benevolence; etc." So let us not fear when we say: "I love you"; a pure look in one's eyes cannot be mistaken for passion.

This rather unusual task entrusted to us by Our Lady is also full of promises: our brother/sister will pay us back with good - sooner or later (a drop of water will erode a rock). And: the good will enter the hearts of each person. This is the only way for the world to find peace. Like every mother, Mary is always optimistic because She can see that in God it is possible for every person to bow down to the forces of love so that one big family is formed.

So, rejoice and hold out your hands to Jesus, as He holds out His to you. It is in not wanting Him, Who is only Good, that you harm yourselves. So decide to look only at Him and to tell Him always your "yes" so that you and the world around you begin to change.

Fr. Angelo

* Pope has been telling enemies for some time: "I love you," and these have been "paying back with good." Bit by bit "the ice has melted" (23.1.86). Fidel Castro visited the Pope in the Vatican, then invited him to his forbidden Cuba. Now, after decades, Castro has restored Christmas as a civil holiday, and at the end of January will welcome his one time enemy to Cuba.

* Also to his would-be assassin the Pope has repeatedly said: "I love you" and has even visited him in prison. Now, Alì Agcà does not conceal his affection for the Pope, offering a wonderful testimony of Fatima and of the certainty that God loves everyone and that "Paradise is open also for the other religions." The frequent exchange of letters with Fr. Furlotti, "the first priest who wrote to me," attests to this.

* Catholics in South Korea say "I love you" to North Korean. Animated by Card. Kim, they launched a prayer movement in 1995 for peaceful reunification, and work to help the North Koreans by providing food and technicians. They also created a committee to promote mutual forgiveness and reconciliation - part of this programme being the formation of pastors and mission-aries to work in the North after reunification. The miracle, it seems, is close at hand.

Jesus our Good, our Only Good

We search for good in every situation; we want physical, material and spiritual well-being. We wish to stay well, live well and go well in our jobs, in our towns, with our relatives and friends. The adjective our, however, reveals the bad root that disorients our search. It happens that for "our own good" we mortify the good of our brother/sister and whether fully intentionally or not we thereby degrade our true

nature: from creatures made to the likeness of God we lower ourselves to the same level as animals. To put God first in our lives, more than an objective, must be an ardent desire dictated by love, by our response to God's Love. This is the way to holiness and is a way which everyone can find. Let yourself be loved by God; let His love penetrate into your life and then accept It. The rest will follow naturally. So hold out your hands to Jesus, accept this God Who came into the world to offer His divinity and His very life to you. All together, let us hold out our hands in a single gesture of acceptance and of offering: Jesus in us and us in Him. With simple hearts (it does not take intellect) meditate on the love He has for us, look up at Him, contemplate Him and He will fill your heart with peace which will spill out onto the world.

So not "our" good, but the Good which is Jesus, is what we must search for. Then, nothing will curb the Love, and the Good will dwell in the world, among us and in each of us. Then our joy will not be to the detriment of the joy of our brother or sister and it will not depend on external circumstances, because it will be in us and nothing will be able to remove it because it springs from God, from that God Who lives in us. Nuccio

Be aware of your Christian vocation

Our Lady's message 25 November 1997:

Dear Children, Today I invite you to understand your Christian vocation. My children, I have been and still am guiding you in this time of grace so that you may become aware of your Christian vocation. The holy martyrs died giving witness: "I am Christian and I love God above all else."

Children dear, also today I invite you to rejoice and to become joyous and responsible Christians aware that God has invited you in a special way to become hands joyfully outstretched towards those who do not believe and who with the example of your lives receive faith and love for God. Thus I ask you to pray, pray, pray, that your heart be open and sensitive to the word of God. Thank you for responding to my call.

This is what the message for the new year of the Church means: recognize, oh Christian, your divine call, and spread the fragrance of awareness-of-God to those who ignore Him. With prayer you will understand and fulfil this great task.

1. Our Lady is inviting us to understand our Christian vocation, adding that She has been with us in this time of grace so we can become aware of our Christian vocation. This vocation is the reason why we live; it is God's call to share in the divine life (1 Pt 1:4). It began with our Baptism, with which we entered into communion with the three Divine Persons.

It didn't come from us, but from God Who chose us before the world was made to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence, determining that we should become his adopted sons through Jesus Christ and share in his inheritance (cf. Eph 1), and Who called us out of the darkness (a life of sin which leads to a dead end) into his wonderful light (1 Pt 2:9). For this reason we rejected Satan, his works and his empty promises, and we professed our faith in Christ and His Church: an immense fortune which requires also that we change our ways. I implore you, writes St. Paul, to lead a life worthy of your vocation... do not go on living the aimless kind of life that pagans live who are made blind by their whims. (It is a good thing to read all of chapter 4 of Ephesians.) How can we then play with fire and go

back to being slaves of sin and lose God's gift of eternal life (Rom 6:23)? Yet, there is so much indifference and refusal of God's gift which should instead fill us with joy and awake in us a desire to respond accordingly.

2. At this point Our Lady offers us the example of those who lived their Christian vocation to the point of giving their lives. The holy martyrs died giving witness: I am Christian and I love God above all else! And we, perhaps, feel ashamed to be Christians in the presence of others.

It takes a radical decision on our part, so that we can say: "I have been called to follow the Truth even if this means the cross." Jesus' way is narrow; it is contrary to the way of the world, but we know where it leads, and Jesus has never let anyone down. We must not hesitate: we were not given a Spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power, and love, and self-control (2 Tim 1:7).

3. We must rejoice at being Christians, says Our Lady, and be happy that we can return God's love, but also that we can take our gift to those who do not know Him; we are responsible for them. To stretch out one's hands does not mean to conquer; Mary wants to use us to reach Her many far-off children, and in particular She means through our example. People do not want to hear talk about God; they need to see those who love Him above all else. So, not sad Christians, but Christians who are happy to believe and love Him such. Thus, always be happy in the Lord... and your kindness will be evident to everyone (Ph 4:4).

4. The insistence used by Mary in repeating: pray, pray, pray, brings to mind those precepts that God said we should say at every step, with each breath, so they can be written in our hearts (cr. Deut. 6:6).

No prayer means no spiritual growth; it means being stuck on the wide way of the world, and so what could we give others? You cannot communicate to others that which you do not live. With prayer, instead, the heart opens up to the Word of the Father and thus can be filled with His love.

Being knowledgeable, or knowing how to distinguish the truth is not enough, for that is still not knowing how to love, and is the old error of Gnosticism. Knowledge gives self-importance - it is love that makes the building grow (1 Co 8:2). Paul also insists that piety (love) should be added to the doctrine (cf. 1 Tim 6:3-6). If we open up to God in prayer, He will enter with His light and make us comprehend His Word, and the good news will be irresistible.

Fr. Angelo

The Year of the Holy Spirit

Send your Spirit and renew the face of the earth (cf. Ps 104)

The second year of preparation to the great Jubilee of the year 2000 is dedicated to the Holy Spirit and we are called to re-discover His presence and action in the Church and in each of us. "Disfigured by sin and death, man remains in the image of God, in the image of the Son, but is deprived of the glory of God, of his likeness. The Son himself will assume that image and restore it in the Father's likeness by giving it again its Glory, the Spirit who is the giver of life" (CCC 705).

The Holy Father says in the Letter on the Third Millennium: "The Spirit makes present in the Church of every time and place the unique Revelation brought by Christ to humanity, making it alive and active in the soul of each individual (no. 44). In our day too the Spirit is the principal agent of the new evangelization. Hence it will be important to gain a renewed appreciation of the Spirit as the One who builds the Kingdom of God within the course of history and prepares its full manifestation in Jesus Christ, stirring people's hearts and quickening in our world the seeds of the full salvation which will

come at the end of time" (45).

It continues: "Christians are called to prepare for the Third Millennium by renewing their hope in the definitive coming of the Kingdom of God, preparing for it daily in their hearts, in the Christian community to which they belong, in their particular social context, and in world history itself ... There is also need for a better appreciation and understanding of the signs of hope present in the last part of this century, even though they often remain hidden from our eyes," and he stressed those in society: "scientific, technological and medical progress in the service of human life, a greater awareness of our responsibility for the environment, efforts to restore peace and justice," and those in the Church: "greater attention to the voice of the Spirit through the acceptance of charisms, and the promotion of the laity, a deeper commitment to the cause of Christian unity and the increased interest in dialogue with other religions and with contemporary culture" (46).

To conclude: "The reflection of the faithful in the second year of preparation ought to focus particularly on the value of unity within the Church, to which the various gifts and charisms bestowed upon her by the Spirit are directed" (47). ... "Mary, who conceived the Incarnate Word by the power of the Holy Spirit and then in the whole of her life allowed herself to be guided by his interior activity, will be contemplated and imitated during this year above all as the woman who was docile to the voice of the Spirit, a woman of silence and attentiveness" (48).

It is good to remember: Jesus stood up and proclaimed: 'If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink! He who believes in me, as scripture says, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (Jn 7:37-39). Edit. team.

LISTEN

Listen, let your heart keep seeking,
 Listen to his constant speaking,
 Listen to the Spirit calling you.
 Listen to his inspiration,
 Listen to his invitation,
 Listen to the Spirit calling you.

(From "We Pray and Sing to the Lord," St. Paul Publications, Africa)

Padre Pio from Pietralcina was proclaimed "heroic in the practice of virtues" by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Thus the Church proclaims him "venerable," making us hope that he will soon be proclaimed "blessed." The Congregation said that the holiness of Padre Pio's life, which sprang from an intense love for the Church, was severely tried by the Church and is an extraordinary model of identification with the crucified and risen Christ."

Many have asked us to publish the Act of Love as revealed by Jesus to Justine Klotz, for the salvation of many souls. It has ecclesial approval. "Jesus and Mary, I love you! Save priestly souls, save souls. We beseech you, allow us to repeat this act of love a thousand times, with our every breath, our every heart beat." The same was revealed to Sr. Immaculate Bretonne: "Jesus, Mary, I love you! Save souls." Each act of love is a soul saved, Jesus promised.

Pope, helmsman, guides to 3rd millennium

John Paul takes glance at present tragedies...

(From the Urbi et Orbi Christmas message)

"Today, a day full of joy for all, a day filled with so many calls for peace and brotherhood, more intense and sharp become the imploring cries of peoples who long for freedom and harmony, in situations of disturbing ethnic and political violence.

Today there resound more strongly the voices of those who give themselves generously to breaking down barriers of fear and aggression, promoting understanding between peoples of different origins, colour and religious creeds. Today there appear more tragic to us the sufferings of peoples fleeing to the mountains of their own land or seeking a safe haven on the coasts of neighbouring countries in order to pursue the faint hope of a less precarious and more secure existence.

More distressing today is the tense silence of the ever growing multitude of the new poor: men and women without work or shelter, infants and children injured and violated, adolescents enlisted in the wars of adults, young victims of drugs or attracted by deceptive myths. Today is Christmas day, a day of confidence for peoples long divided who have finally come back to meet one another and talk. These are often timid and fragile prospects, slow and tiring dialogues, but animated by the hope of eventually reaching agreements which respect the rights and duties of all.

It is Christmas! This straying humanity of ours journeying towards the Third Millennium, awaits you, Oh Child of Bethlehem, who come to manifest the love of the Father. You, the King of Peace, invite us today to fear not, and you open our hearts to prospects of hope. [...] God made man lies here today in the manger and silently the universe contemplates him. May humanity recognize him as its Saviour!"

... and at future hopes

(Audience of 19 Nov. '97) Though he called this century about to end a "century of death," the Pope, like the old Prophets, sees the present darkness and confusion as preparation for the return of God. "Not darkness, but God's love will envelop the year 2000," describing the future as "time of grace" during which "the divine plan of love for all humanity and each one of us is fulfilled. That is why, as we look to the future, we are full of hope and are not overcome with fear." Instrument necessary for the fulfilment of this plan is the great Jubilee of the year 2000.

"Before the turmoil felt here and there in the continents, before the pressing rhythm of things and values being overthrown, undermining convictions and even the life of nations, I make mine St. Augustine's hope expressed before the assault of the Vandals: Do not fear, dear children, this is not an old world about to end, but a new world about to begin. A new dawn is breaking in history's sky which is inviting Christians to be light and salt in a world greatly in need of Christ, man's Redeemer..."

Mary's living miracle. Pope and people's apostle. Martyr of our century. Curved over the weight of his Church shaken by crisis. Dead tired and marked by illness, he suffers, thinks, prays. He knows what to say and has the courage to say it. He reads, every now and again looking up, and word after word, he finds the strength to announce his message. And he becomes youthful again.

And then: a tornado of love, of veneration, of respect! The old guard are thankful, many young people are ready to follow him. All over the world those united to fight the Lord and his Consecrated one tremble. Let us pray for the Pope, for his friends and his enemies and for the new youth.

(From Eco dell'Amore, 50th anniversary of Aid to the Church in Need)

Enter 3rd Millennium with Mary

(At the Angelus of the Immaculate) "Humanity in our time, now preparing to enter the third millennium, find in the Immaculate Virgin the model of expectation and the Mother of hope. She teaches us to avoid fatalism and passive resignation and every temptation to millenarianism. She teaches us to look to the future, knowing that God is coming towards us; we are called to prepare for this meeting in prayer and in watchful expectation."

To Mary Immaculate

(Rome, Piazza di Spagna, 8 Dicembre): ...Abide with us, Immaculate Mother, in the heart of our preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. ... We would like this eventful century of ours and the second Christian millennium to close with the seal of the Trinity. ... Thus, in the sign of the Trinitarian mystery, the Church in Rome, united with believers throughout the world, approaches in prayer the end of the 20th century, to enter the third millennium with a renewed heart. ... We greet you, Immaculate Mother of God! Accept our prayer and, as Mother, deign to bring the Church in Rome and throughout the world into that fullness of time towards which the universe has been advancing since the day your divine Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, came into the world...

"From the justice of each comes peace for all"

This was the theme for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1998. Justice: "moral virtue and legal concept," is most complete when founded on love, which in turn "is most significantly expansive within a concept of mercy." Hence, justice is indispensable for peace, and the Pope warns against the danger of marginalization of vast sectors of mankind, tied perhaps to the globalization process, and in doing so exhorted Heads of State all over the world to eliminate all forms of injustice within their countries and in their relations with other countries.

More specifically, the Holy Father indicated four concrete ways to intervene: total remission (or at least partial) of foreign debts; fight against corruption; healing of the scourge of usury; adoption of suitable ways (including on a legal level) to stop all forms of violence and/or exploitation of women and children. The promotion of justice and the building of peace are closely interacted, and justice must be founded on respect for human rights which are universal, inviolable and inalienable.

Fatima helps view this century

"In the cold slumber of man's refusal of God his Mother protects him with her mantle"

The Holy Father participated in spirit at the celebrations for the 80th anniversary of Fatima with a Message that reveals his prophetic vision of our century. After asking Mary to prepare the Christian people for the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, he said: "Fatima helps us see the hand of God, our providential Guide and patient and compassionate Father also in the 20th century," marked by positive and negative signs of the times both for the Church and for the world: "the crises, desertions and many sufferings of the Church's members, but also a renewed and intense feeling of solidarity and mutual dependence in Christ's Mystical Body; the separation from and abandonment of God by individuals and societies, but also the in-breaking of the Spirit of Truth in hearts and communities to the point of

sacrifice and martyrdom to save 'God's image and likeness in man.'

In analysing the human separation from God in the light of Fatima, we should recall that it is not the first time that, feeling rejected and despised by man but respecting his freedom, God allows man to feel distant from him, with the consequent obscuring of life which causes darkness to fall on history, but afterwards provides a refuge. This already happened on Calvary, when God Incarnate was crucified and died at the hands of men. And what did Christ do? After invoking the mercy of heaven with the words: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do (Lk 23:34), he entrusted humanity to Mary, his Mother: Woman, behold your son (Jn 19:26).

A symbolic interpretation of this Gospel event enables us to see reflected in him the final scene of the well-known and common experience of the son who, feeling misunderstood, confused and rebellious, leaves his father's house to wander into the night... And his mother's mantle protects him from the cold during his sleep, helping him to overcome his despair and loneliness.. Beneath the maternal mantle, which extends from Fatima over the whole world, humanity senses anew its longing for the Father's house, and for his Bread (cf. Lk 15:17).

Dear pilgrims, as if it were possible to embrace all humanity, I ask you to say in her name and for her sake, We fly to thy patronage, Oh holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all dangers, Oh glorious and blessed Virgin.

Woman, behold your son. Thus Jesus spoke to his Mother, while thinking of John, his beloved disciple who also stood at the foot of the Cross. Who has no cross? To carry it day after day, following in the footsteps of the Master, is the condition the Gospel imposes on us (cf. Lk 9:23), certainly as a blessing of salvation (cf. 1 Cor 1:23-24). The secret lies in not losing sight of the first Crucified One, to whom the Father responded with the glory of the Resurrection and Who began this pilgrimage of the blessed. That contemplation took the simple and effective form of meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary, popularly venerated and recommended with great insistence by the Church's Magisterium. Dear brothers and sisters, recite the Rosary every day. I earnestly urge Pastors to pray the Rosary and to teach people in their Christian communities how to pray it. Help God's people to return to the daily recitation of the Rosary, this sweet conversation of children with the Mother whom they took into their house (cf. Jn 19:27)."

In the end our Holy Father invoked "for everyone, and in a special way for those who suffer, God's comfort and strength, so that they may be willing to complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions (cf. Col 1:24), recalling that "the salvation of many depends on the prayers and voluntary mortification of the members of the Mystical Body..."

The message someone tried to hide...

Says bishop, Mons. Paul Hnilica: "Sadly, this appeal by the Pope was not made known when it should have been. The letter signed by John Paul II on the 1st October 1997 was published only on 15 October by Osservatore Romano. Thus, more than half a million faithful, plus 20 bishops and 500 priests, present in Fatima on the 13th October, were unable to hear these inspiring words.

Despite this inconvenience, this message remains one of the deepest comments to the meaning of Our Lady's appeal in Fatima, given for our times. We are convinced that with these words the Pope has given us in condensed form the fruit of lengthy reflection on the importance of the Fatima events for the entire world. Not only, but he courageously made an unprecedented appeal, I would say, to bishops and priests all over the world to pray and teach others to pray the Rosary every day. We are therefore obliged to

confront ourselves with this message. In fact, it is our faith that allows us to see in the Pope not only a human figure, but the Vicar of Christ who, more than all the other bishops put together, is inspired by the Holy Spirit to guide the Church on the way of salvation.

If John Paul II called Fatima a "refuge" which God gave to the man of the 20th century who has fallen into a "cold sleep" because he abandoned God and lives in the dark, then we should not underestimate his analysis. The Pope is not one to be pessimistic; what he is doing is reminding us of the way things are and offering us a remedy: God's Mercy which is given to us through the maternal mediation of our Co-redeeming Mother, our Mother of Sorrows, at the foot of the Cross. It is She who spreads over all of us what the Pope calls Her "maternal mantle," that we may "sense anew the longing for the Father's house and for his Bread" (cf. Lk 15:17)...

Let us treasure these words, especially now when the serpent is biting down harder. That old serpent, Satan, is furious and uses all his means to suppress the Mother and the Child (cf. Rev 12:4). So we don't fall asleep, let us grasp onto the Word of God which is being offered to us in this time when floods of other, senseless, words threaten us..."

Civitavecchia, appendix of Medjugorje

"The months of November and December," says pastor, Fr. Augusto Baldini, "were extremely busy with pilgrims arriving by the bus-load and every other means, particularly on feast days and the eves of these. There has been a noteworthy increase in the number of foreign pilgrims." The four priests who help the pastor, busy full time with Holy Mass, evening adoration, and confessions, say that they have witnessed real miracles of conversion, and that testimonies by pilgrims who have received spiritual graces and physical healings are being registered continuously.

For the feast of the Immaculate Conception, celebrated with a solemn Mass, the shrine was brimming over with faithful. The Filippino community of Rome organized a pilgrimage for the day, with Salesian priests from various parts of the world, present in Rome for a course of studies, concelebrating. On the occasion a big statue of the Queen of Peace (2m high) was inaugurated, together with a big cross (7.5 m high) donated by faithful from Dozulé in France.

The Bishop announced the publication of a pastoral letter, in accordance with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which will serve to guide the devotion to Our Lady of Tears. Mons. Grillo has also published a book about the facts of Civita-vecchia, and a local poet has dedicated to Our Lady of Civitavecchia a book of poetry, written in the local dialect.

Besides the interest shown by Frs. Laurentin and Amorth, also the press and television continue to follow the events.

* Formative Seminar for guides of prayer groups, charity centres and pilgrimages at Hotel Sunce in Neum from 9-13 March '98. Theme: The Spiritual Movement of Medjugorje. Bookings at fax 387-88651444. Double room: DM280 (single: +40DM). To book transfer from Split airport to hotel, fax 385-21361354. For simultaneous translations bring ear-phones (can be purchased in hotel)

News from the blessed land

Group leaders on what is needed at Medjugorje

From 28-30 November, a national meeting for organizers and guides of Italian pilgrimages and prayer groups was held in Pescara.

The parish priest of Medjugorje, Ivan Landeka, held a talk on Mary's role in the history of salvation and on the spiritual movement of Medjugorje, drawing on the historical context. Among other things he said: "The events of Medjugorje (Mary's presence, Her messages) must always be of prime importance, while the people involved in the event (the visionaries, priests, etc.) must remain secondary. Woe betide us if the people become more important than the events! It would be a signal of danger," he said.

Fra Miljenko Stojic, director of the Information Centre of Medjugorje, spoke on what is done to welcome the pilgrims and on the activity of the information centre which opened 4 years ago. He recalled that the information office is open every day from 8 - 5 to assist the pilgrims and to co-ordinate the meetings. He spoke on the importance of advising the Centre well in advance of the arrival of pilgrims so that the Centre can better organize meetings, etc. (at fax no. 00387-88-651444). The official news of the Shrine is published twice a month in the main languages by the Centre in the Press Bulletin. Fra Miljenko reminded those present that there are 380 cases of healing accompanied by medical documentation.

Observations

Various observations and proposals were made by the participants:

- It should be considered that the majority of pilgrims present at the evening liturgy in Medjugorje is not Croatian.
- So that the life of the parish is not suffocated by the enormous flow of pilgrims, it was suggested that a separate church be built for the pilgrims and that the church of St. James be left for the parishioners. The representatives of Medjugorje replied that there already exists a project to substitute the big tent with a large building which may house three separate halls, and is expected to be ready for the 17th anniversary.
- It is felt that there should be priests from the various languages permanently available in Medjugorje so that the pilgrims are always able to avail of confession (it has happened that for the Italian pilgrims a confessor has not always been available). However, it is not easy to find priests who wish to stay on for a certain period of time, such as a year.
- So that Medjugorje may become a true ecumenical centre, it was recommended that certain nationalistic forms of ostentation be avoided, since Mary is the Mother of all, including the Orthodox, the Muslims, etc.
- Medjugorje, centre of charity for all the poor of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Friends of Medjugorje should continue to provide aid because unfortunately the situation has not changed for the many refugee camps which are still in grave need.
- That meetings be organized for the pilgrims with the friars and the visionaries is fine, but they should also be guaranteed moments for silent meditation.
- Those who accompany pilgrimages should always remember that it is above all Our Lady who conducts the pilgrimage.
- Groups who decide to follow in the wake of the Medjugorje messages should not try to seek special recognition, but simply become members of the Church who work for the Church.

Alberto Bonifacio

A Brazilian Bishop and the Queen of Peace

At the beginning of November 1997 the auxiliary bishop of Brasilia (capital of Brazil), Monsignor Juan Evangelist Martins Terra, visited the Shrine of the Queen of Peace and spoke to the Press Bulletin about his experience.

The Bishop gave a general description of the Church in Brazil and in particular in Brasilia (a city of 3 million inhabitants with a Catholic majority) and said that the presence of the sects is counteracted by an excellent charismatic movement within the Catholic Church. He went on to say that with 45 members from this movement he travelled to the Holy Land and that on the way back they stopped in Medjugorje. He said that in Medjugorje he was able to perceive a special devotion to the Virgin, adding that also in Brazil Our Lady is especially venerated at the shrine of Abresida.

Q. When and how did you hear of Medjugorje for the first time?

A. It was 15 years ago when I was in Europe. In Brazil there is a cathedral dedicated to the Queen of Peace. Marija Pavlovic and Fr. Leonard Orec were present when the first stone was laid and blessed. The Catholic Radio of Brasilia, which is named in honour of the Queen of Peace, keeps listeners informed on the events of Medjugorje.

Q. Is this your first time in Medjugorje?

A. Yes it is. We hadn't planned to stop here; it's rather a miracle that we are here. You know, I give Bible lessons and right now I should be teaching, but some rather inexplicable circumstances led me here instead. Both for me and the entire group this pilgrimage has been miraculous for the way we have been able to pray so intensely without tiring.

Q. What are your impressions, as a Catholic, Bishop and pastor of the Church?

A. I have been quite a number of times to Fatima and Lourdes where the events have already concluded. Here, instead, the apparitions still happen and for this one is able to perceive a special divine presence. It seems to me that the entire area lives for the Virgin; is that not so? The whole place lives for the Virgin. I'm surprised that the town hasn't developed more, like Fatima which became a large city. But things are different here: simplicity has been preserved around the church. Yesterday I had lunch with the monks and I was fascinated by their simplicity which I noticed also during the prayer and confessions. The atmosphere here makes me think of the first churches of Jerusalem. I lived and worked there for 2 years as archeologist and teacher of Holy Scripture and I also worked as a pastor in the desert of Syria. I think that the work I did there prepared me for this, so that I could be aware of the wonderful grace and blessing of the Virgin here.

What Pope and many Bishops say

Q. You are a bishop and pastor of the Church. Does it bother you that the local bishop is not in favour of these events?

A. No, because there are other bishops who think differently to him. I could mention those bishops, and priests, who every year go to spiritual exercises in San Marino with Fr. Gobbi. One of these is the archbishop of Pescara, my great friend. He once told me that he asked the Holy Father: "What should I

do when the faithful from my diocese want to go on pilgrimage to Medjugorje?" The Holy Father asked what they do there, to which the archbishop replied: "They pray and confess." The Holy Father then said: "Isn't this a good thing?"

I worked with the Holy Father and with Card. Ratzinger for ten years. Card. Ratzinger is a wonderful man, so full of spirit and such a nice person. At times I hear people say he is severe, but I think he is very kind-hearted. Once I asked him what he thought of this movement and he replied that the tree can be seen by its fruit, because good fruits are a sign of God's presence.

Q. Did Card. Ratzinger tell you that?

A. Yes.

Q. In reference to Medjugorje?

A. In reference to Medjugorje and to Fr. Gobbi; both movements.

Q. When you return to Brazil, what will you tell your faithful?

A. In Brazil we have organized pilgrimages to Medjugorje and to other Shrines. Medjugorje is the one which receives most enquiries, and that is why I have come to give thanks to the Virgin for this great gift. I think that this visit has gladdened many faithful of our diocese.

Q. Will you support those who want to come to Medjugorje?

A. Of course. In Brazil we also have a monthly publication with all the Medjugorje news [the Brazilian edition of the Echo of Medjugorje edited by Servos da Rainha - editor's note]. It is free and is read by many people.

Is Medjugorje aware of this grace?

Q. To conclude, would you like to say something to those who live and work here every day with the pilgrims ; leave a message for the parishioners of Medjugorje?

A. It is said that no one is a prophet in his own town. Many come here to pray, but I wonder if the locals do the same, or if the youth of Medjugorje are aware of the grace which is here, and if they are able to take this responsibility upon them and testify to the faith received from God. This responsibility does not belong only to the priests, but to all the parishioners who consecrated themselves to the Virgin. The inhabitants of Medjugorje should remember this always.

Q. Well, in thanking you, we humbly ask you to remember us in your prayers, and on behalf of our readers we promise to pray for you and all the pilgrims who come here.

(Press Bulletin)

Mexican Bishop blesses new radio station in Medjugorje

On Tuesday 25th November 1997, the new radio station, "MIR Studio Medjugorje," began its activity. It is directed by Fra Miljenko Stojic, and edited by Marija Dugandzic.

The aim of the radio station in Medjugorje is to serve the pilgrims who come here. We hope that with time it will also reach their homes, wherever they are. The radio station was blessed on the 7th November by Mons. Lazaro Pezer, bishop of De Autlan Lalisco in Mexico.

Any donations are welcome. We invite pilgrims to send a CD containing music from their country for us to use to welcome you to the Shrine, and for which we thank you in advance.(Press Bulletin)

Number of pilgrims on increase - The number of pilgrims in October was greater than in previous years, even pre-war times. The number of Communion was 139,000 and the Holy Mass was celebrated by 3,364 priests who came here from all parts of the world - that's an average of 108 priests per day! At

the end of October, as usual, there were great numbers of French people, who generally choose this period to visit the Shrine. There were about 2,000 in all.

Thanks also to the good weather during the Christmas novena many pilgrims climbed the Hill of Apparitions every day at 2 pm to recite the Rosary and other prayers. At Christmas there were mostly Croatians and groups of French pilgrims. The boys from Sr. Elvira's "Upper Room Community" (Comunità Cenacolo - Cenacolo means Upper Room) prepared a splendid nativity scene around the church, using live subjects.

All the visionaries were present at Christmas, except for Ivan who is in the States with his family. After 16 years and 6 months, 4 visionaries (Vicka, Jakov, Ivan and Marija) continue to receive daily apparitions. For Mirjana and Ivanka, these terminated on a daily basis in the early years.

Over the days following Christmas the Shrine filled with pilgrims, in particular from France, Italy, and Germany, who were arriving for the new year which was celebrated with a prayer vigil which began at 10 pm and ended with the Holy Mass. The Consecration, at mid-night, signalled the beginning of the new year. (A.M.)

Peace Centres from Latin America in Medjugorje - Representatives from 20 Peace Centres from various countries of Latin America held their 8th international meeting during the last week of October in Medjugorje. The centres arose to serve as a meeting place for all those who felt touched by Our Lady's call in Medjugorje. The centres spread Our Lady's messages and organize prayer groups and pilgrimages. This was the first time that the meeting was held in Medjugorje. The 350 participants prayed, reflected and shared experiences and discovered the importance of collaborating to ensure that the Virgin's message reaches the world. (Press Bulletin)

Fr. Daniel Ange's defence of Medjugorje against attacks by the French press, entitled Why bombard the Oasis of Peace? which we published in Echo 136, was welcomed by many. The father, at the moment in Brazil, wrote another article as a follow-up. Published by Cahiers d'Edifa, the editor commented: "Daniel Ange's first letter has done a great deal of good to the cause of Medjugorje, which Famille Chrétienne would never have imagined, given the number of French pilgrims present in Medjugorje in October. Many have discovered Medjugorje thanks to his wonderful letter (through our Echo, it reached more than a million readers). His straightforward presentation of the facts makes it is easy for people to discern the truth. (EC)

Sr. Emmanuel, together with Denis and Cathy Nolan and two members of Enfants de Medjugorje, was received by US Congressman, and pro-lifer, Chris Smith. To a group of about 30 people, representatives of various religions, Sr. Emmanuel spoke of the Virgin's messages and cited various testimonies. The climax of the meeting was the moment of prayer - a suggestion put forth by one of the participants - which no doubt was decisive in opening up the useful contacts which followed. "I thank all those who prayed and fasted so that the grace of Medjugorje could enter also this door. Forgive me if I cannot let you in on the details."

"Come to Medjugorje; fix a date now for your 1998 pilgrimage: the fruits are so abundant! Those who receive or help the pilgrims are witnesses every day to the wonderful graces. Just recently we heard the testimony of some healed of their addiction to alcohol, others found peace of mind after years of anguish following the death of a loved one, and many youth have decided for chastity prior to marriage, and more. Fr. Jozo says that to come here is a great gift. So why not ask for this gift?"

(From the diary of Sr. Emmanuel)

Fr. Jozo in Reggio Emilia: the power of prayer

On 30th November the Mir i Dobro Association (which supports Fr. Jozo's works) organized a day of prayer with Fr. Jozo in the Basilica of Our Lady of Ghiara, with about 2,000 people present. In his catechesis Fr. Jozo asked the participants to live the messages which Our Lady gave in Fatima and is giving in Medjugorje, adding that we should live them with faithfulness and simplicity, and to have absolute faith in Mary and to place our every hope in Her.

It was a surprise for some that the participants could remain for more than four hours at a prayer meeting, and all the time be recollected and attentive. And it was so heart-warming to hear of the conversions which God stirred in people's hearts during his recent voyages, in particular to the American continent. The day was a true grace and helped us reflect on the power of the faith and love of Mary's chosen witnesses, when these are open to Her messages!

Fr. Slavko on Prayer

1. Why pray? ...Many Christians are like a student who forgets what he wanted to become. Think of a student who wanted to become a good doctor and then, during the years of study, he forgets that that is what he wanted. What will become of his studies? Each hour of study is time lost. Why study if he can't remember why he studies? Likewise, many have stopped praying because they have forgotten why they pray! For many, to pray means to lose time. For many, to fast means to feel hunger and nothing else. Naturally, if they think like this, they will surely not pray or fast. But when you know why you pray and why you fast it is easier to have peace.

2. When does prayer become joy? - Our Lady has said: "Live all the words I have given you during this time of grace and renew your prayer till it becomes joy for you." To pray is our prime duty! But can prayer become joy? The answer is yes because Our Lady says so. But let us observe the people who pray. On Sundays when you go to Mass in your parish do you get the impression that there is great joy in the hearts of the faithful? How many pray no more! Many pray very little! Many come to Mass, but never pray, so Mass is too long and too annoying.

Where is the joy in prayer? Well let us consider what happens among us. When you love someone you feel joy in his/her presence and the time spent together is always too brief, and if you can't be with this person you feel sad. If you do not love someone you can never feel joy when with him/her. Even thinking of a person you don't love can be distressing.

Thus, if there is love for God in our heart, then we will feel joy because prayer means to "be with God." Without love joy is not possible. This is why many don't pray and don't have joy. And please don't ever say: "I have no time to pray," because this is not true. Instead, it is true that you lack love, and this helps us see the importance of Our Lady's prayer with Mirjana on the 2nd of every month when She prays for the people who have not experienced God's love. One must pray to receive the grace of love!

3. Do you have a corner for prayer? - Our Lady has also invited us to create a corner for prayer. You have heard it many times: a corner where you can place the Bible, a cross, your beads... It should be a

corner with atmosphere which helps you pray. For example, if the family eats in the kitchen or dining room, after the meal the mother (or father) will say: now let's go into the room (or corner) for prayer. This makes it easier to be more concentrated, to enter into the prayer. Look: when you built your homes, you asked the architect to think of everything. In the richer nations space is created also for a second or third car... but who asks their architect to create space for a corner for prayer, or who, when buying a home, looks to see if there is a suitable corner for prayer? It's important that you pray in the family, and for this that there be a suitable corner.

4. Do you pray as much as you eat? - We have to be sincere and admit that prayer of the Catholics is in crisis. Many do not pray at all. Many say they pray, but if you ask them how much per day they often respond: "a sign of the Cross, a prayer to my Guardian Angel, a Hail Mary," and nothing else! Yet they say that they pray! Whoever prays like this cannot say they pray. Prayer is an encounter with God, and if you want to meet someone you need time. We, instead, find excuses by saying we don't have time. Catholics, it seems, are specialized in this excuse!

On the subject of prayer, I have begun to say that if Catholics began to eat as much as they pray then it would only take two weeks to have two thirds of them in the grave and one third with the parish priest; that's if the parish priest survives. I am certain that many of us would be dead already if we'd eaten as much as we'd prayed, and the following would be engraved onto our tomb stone: "Here lies a good Catholic who decided to be honest and eat as much as he prayed." But if we begin to pray as much as we eat then the situation would change drastically!

God created our heart and soul in a way that we need to meet Him on a daily basis. Whoever does not eat dies. Whoever does not keep in touch with God dies spiritually. Whoever is spiritually dead is unable to love, unable to forgive, unable to be a friend and unable to find peace. That is why Our Lady asks us to respond to Her call to prayer, as She wants Her children and families to live, and that the whole world live in peace, for ever.

I hope that this pilgrimage will help you find the response to prayer.

5. Do you pray because you want to? Our Lady also invites us to personal prayer. Personal prayer is prayer that you do with love; it is prayer that does not depend on whether others pray or not, as you will pray anyway because you have decided, out of love, to do so. It is not easy today, especially for the youth, to make a personal decision for prayer. The mentality that we are creating does not help the spirit of prayer or decisions for God to flourish.

For example, I know of some Catholic countries which let 1st grade children decide whether or not they want to go to catechism lessons. It's a type of freedom which could be accepted if extended to the other subjects as well - but perhaps there wouldn't be too many wanting to do maths! Again, some say that they'll let their children decide for or against religion when they turn 18, as they don't want to impose it on them. Okay, but why impose the rest on them? Everything is imposed! Just look at the TV! Our Lady is certainly not one for fanaticism, and She doesn't like to impose things on people, but She does want a personal decision.

Another example: if you see a drunkard in the street drinking two or three bottles at a time, no one says he's mad, but that he has problems and that "the poor thing" drinks. But if you see someone in the street with rosary beads in his hands, what would you say, that he's wise or mad? Most would call him mad! See how difficult it is for some to decide for God, for prayer, for Mass! It's not easy to decide to be different to the others, and often the family doesn't help. That's why Our Lady recommends to join a prayer group which can help you.

So, decide for God and for prayer and you will see that all is possible.

(From a talk by Fr. Slavko - 16.08.97)

Let God decide where to reach out

Marked by sin, weighed down by problems, fears and insecurity, man is in great need of meeting God, to be helped and sustained. In His infinite fatherly goodness, God never fails to open out His arms to whomever searches for Him with faith and a sincere heart. However, to obtain what is necessary for a complete healing, you must sacrifice that which you already possess.

The most difficult thing to offer up as sacrifice is one's own logic; those convictions of ours which we consider perfect and which are loaded with experiences and habits (especially on a spiritual level), and which block God's creativity and make us rigid and severe, as with the pharisees of Jesus' time. Another thing is our justice which urges us to say "I'm all right," or, "that is an injustice." So also our justice must be offered to God in sacrifice, otherwise we are dead to the life of Grace. In fact, it often happens that virtues cannot enter us because our hearts are all taken up by logic, justice and human formality, relentless judges and severe advocates...

[We could say that God writes the stories of our lives continuously into our hearts, but that we would like to see the end of the book so we can confront ourselves with others, live on the joy from our experiences and be in possession of something stable. But while we have stopped to look back, God continues with His unpredictable project, and we get left behind.]

Hence it is necessary to enter into a profound silence in which we can encounter God, and from Him expect every reply. In this inner silence where we encounter God, human words neither help us nor offend us, because nothing and no one could ever remove from us "that hope which hopes beyond all hope." There will no longer be reason to fear because God will provide for our every need in all situations and circumstances.

Being totally surrendered to God helps free our soul from the slavery of sin, so it can open up to the action of Mercy. The Pharisees instead possessed a perfect sense of human justice and logic, but they were closed to the divine Mercy.

For this reason prayer must not be the quest for goods or solutions, but rather a desire to be filled with God's Mercy, Grace and forgiveness. Of course this entails sacrificing all the rest, in the certainty that we will receive what we truly need. It's a question of knowing how to place everything on the altar; the more we give to God, the more He can give to us.

The basis of a spiritual life is feeling that God is God, that God is the Lord, that God is the Saviour, and knowing how to exclaim with trust: "My Lord and my God," as St. Thomas did after Jesus' Resurrection. To do this, however, we must be free of every certainty and experience of which we are so 'rich.' In fact, these are generally loaded with expectations which end up impeding the liberating action of the Holy Spirit in us. Moreover, the expectation of success and spiritual fruits becomes an obstacle in us, even more so than material impediments, because the former is created in the name of God.

If we allow God to proceed in which ever way He wants, and change our previous experiences, He is able to lead us onwards, drawing us closer to Him. However, this also means wanting to die to our own knowledge and predictions and deciding to cross the bridge of our weaknesses, fears and darkness with courage.

Our relationship with Grace is able to develop and mature when we are aware that we can do nothing on our own, so we pray and wait on God's help with faith. This is the only way that God can use us according to His design which is unknown to us. The only spiritual experience of any value is our capacity to believe unconditionally in the divine Providence, in the truth that God is God, and in the certainty that our passage through darkness, sorrow, and weakness is an offering which pleases Him.

(From a conversation with Fr. Tomislav)

Dishonoured novice forgives and accepts life

For the celebration of 'Pro-Life Day' (1 Feb.) we offer to our readers this moving testimony: a letter to the Mother Superior of her Congregation.

"My name is Lucia Vetruse. I'm one of the novices who were raped by the Serbian soldiers. I'm writing to tell you about what happened to me and my sisters Tartina and Sendria.

Spare me, I beseech you, from providing the details. The whole thing was atrocious, so atrocious that it can't be spoken of if not to God, under Whose will I placed myself when I took my vows and consecrated myself to Him. The tragedy is not only in the humiliation that was forced on me because I am woman, nor in the irreparable damage done to my way of life and vocation, but also in the difficulty I have in comprehending the event in the light of faith. I have no doubt that it is all part of the plan God has for me, and I still consider Him my divine Groom.

Just a few days before I had read Dialogue of the Carmelites by Bernanos and I had thought of asking the Lord to allow me to die a martyr. Well, He didn't waste any time, and what martyrdom! At the moment I am going through an anguishing inner darkness. They destroyed the project of my life which for me was already definitive, and in doing so they drew up a new one which I am still unable to decipher.

As an adolescent I wrote in my diary: "I own nothing, I belong to no one and no one belongs to me." Instead on a night that I'd like to forget, somebody took me and robbed me of myself, making me his. When I came back to my senses it was dawn and my first thought went to Jesus in agony in the Olive Grove. A terrible battle was going on inside me, not understanding how God could allow me to be destroyed right there in those things which had become my reason for life, and at the same time I was asking myself where this would lead me. I got up, exhausted, to prepare myself and to help Sr. Josephine. I heard bells tolling; it was the near-by monastery. I crossed myself and mentally recited the hymn of the liturgy: "On Golgotha, Christ, the true paschal Lamb, paid the ransom for our sins, that we be saved..." So, Mother, what is my suffering compared to that of Jesus to Whom I promised a thousand times to give my life? I said to Him, "May Your will be done now that I have nothing else but the certainty that You, oh Lord, are near me."

I am writing to you Mother, not to be consoled, but to ask you to help me give thanks to God for having united me to the thousands of fellow countrymen whose honour has been wounded, and to help me accept this unwanted pregnancy... My humiliation is added to that of the others and all I can do is offer it as atonement for the sins committed by the anonymous rapists and for the peace between the two ethnic groups, and accept the dishonour, offering it to God's mercy. Don't hold it against me if I ask you to share in this seemingly absurd "grace." I had cried over the loss of my two brothers, assassinated by the same people who terrorize and attack our towns. I thought I had cried all my tears, that it couldn't be possible to suffer more than that or with such intensity.

Every day hundreds of people, hungry and trembling with cold, with desperation written on their faces, come knocking on the door of our convent. A few weeks ago an 18 year old girl said to me: "You're lucky because you chose to live in a place where evil doesn't enter," adding: "You don't know what dishonour is." After having reflected I understood that this was my people's sorrow, and I felt nearly ashamed for having remained outside of it.

Now I am one of them; one of the many anonymous women of my people, the body of which has been

torn to pieces and the soul plundered. The Lord has made me penetrate the mystery of that shame, and more, He has given me, a nun, the privilege of understanding the diabolic force of evil... My story is their story, and my resignation, sustained by faith, will serve if not as an example, at least as comfort for their moral and emotional reactions.

The slightest sign, a word, a helping hand, may suffice to stir up the hope of this 'unknown army.' God has chosen me - forgive me the presumption - to guide the humiliated persons towards the dawn of Redemption and freedom. They will not be able to doubt of my sincerity or my intentions because I too come from the borders of abjection...

It's all over Mother, but it is also just beginning. When you telephoned me, after saying words of comfort for which I will always be grateful, you asked me: "What will you do with the life that has been forced on you?" I felt your voice trembling when you asked me that question to which I could not reply immediately. Now I have made my decision: the baby is mine and I will keep it. I could give it up, but he or she has the right to receive its mother's love even if I had neither desired nor wanted it.

You can't separate the plant from its roots. The seed which falls on the earth has to grow there where the mysterious - though evil - sower threw it. I do not ask anything of my Congregation which has already given me everything. I thank my sisters for their solidarity and care and above all for not having made indiscreet questions.

I shall go with my baby, I don't know where, but God Who unexpectedly broke my greatest joy will show me the way. I will be poor; I will put on my old apron and clogs which the women here use to work in and I shall go with my mother to gather resin from the pine trees of our forests. I will do all I can to break the chain of hatred which is destroying our country and to my baby I will teach only love. My baby, born out of violence, will be a testimony that only one great thing can render man honourable and that is forgiveness." (From Notizie Gesuiti Italiani)

Among fruits of Medjugorje: new Padre Pio hospital

When God touches man with His grace, everything in and around him changes. It's the age-old story of God's mercy... At times God makes Mary His delegate, instrument of His grace, such as at Lourdes and Fatima and now Medjugorje since 1981. Since the Blessed Virgin spoke to the six children, that forgotten place amid the mountains of Herzegovina has become a place of life for millions of people.

Countless is the number of youth who have found God and His Church, and countless are the spiritual and physical healings, the many saved from the clamp of drugs, the priests who have discovered new fervour for their vocation, and people, the majority young, who offer a year of their life as volunteers for humanitarian or religious services. No less important are the social activities and works in favour of the orphans, disabled and drug addicts.

Now, the association named Solidarietà e Aiuto from Parma has decided to build a hospital in Medjugorje, for which all the building permits have already been obtained. The paper from Split, Dalmazia Libera (6 Aug. 96), called it a 'temple of medicine and faith' which the hospital, dedicated to Padre Pio, aims to be.

The land (65,520 sqm) has already been purchased and is near Vionica. For 1998 they plan to start operating with a Sanitary Centre. The Queen of Peace has already helped: Fr. Onelio Ciani, director of a community for disabled people in Udine, has donated to the association a house for the handicapped which he began in Medjugorje and is still unfinished. Further help came from Padre Pio who set up an

encounter between the association and Capuchin Fr. Michele Piacentino, director of a Rehabilitation Centre in Puglia. Together they plan to open up a house in Medjugorje called 'Regina Pacis', God pleasing in the Spring of 1999, with medical and physiotherapy services, pathology lab and more. Donations are welcome. Send direct to them: Solidarietà e Aiuto, Casella Postale 206, 39100 Bolzano, Italy. Fax 0471-283706 P. Mannes M. Ghizzardi, OP (Bolzano)

[Readers are asked not to send donations to us for the various associations, groups, etc. mentioned in the Echo.]

* **International Prayer Meeting for Youth.** The 9th Youth Festival will be held in Medjugorje from 31 July to 6 August. The theme: Come, Creator Spirit. We will publish the programme in a future issue. "Go towards Third Millennium without fear" - The Pope echoes Mary when he says: "Christians are wrong to think of the future in terms of wars and evil. There is only one way for Christians to consider the future: it is our hope of salvation. To think of evil, of chastisement, of war, is to take the way which leads precisely to these things. Your responsibility is to accept the divine peace, to live it, to spread it, not with words, but with your life."

* **For Priests there will be an international retreat**, led by Fathers Slavko, Cosimo Cavalluzzo and Jörg Müller from 30 June to 5 July 1998. For information telephone 00387-88-651988, fax 00387-88-651888/651444.

* **Spiritual Exercises held by Fr. Jozo in St. Joseph's House for 1998:** January 11-15 in German, 18-22 in French, February 8-12 in Italian, 22-26 in Spanish, March 1-5 for Croatians, 8-12 in English, 22-26 for only priests.

The courses begin on Sundays at 3 pm and finish on Thursday afternoons. Fr. Jozo would prefer groups of no more than 40 for each course and he'll be happy to see lots of priests. Book with the father's secretary, Lidia, at fax no. 00387-88-705450.

SOS from aid deliverers - The Queen of Peace is calling all Her children to help the poor. The Kraljica Mira Association is asking for donations of money for the city of Glamoc which was completely destroyed and is now out of reach for aid deliverers' vehicles. For information: Alberto Bonifacio, Via S. Alessandro 26, 22050 Pescate (LC). Fax 0341-368587.

* The main language editions of Echo of Mary are available in Medjugorje at the MIR-Shalom shop opposite the church, to the right, and also in the shop Ain Karim, last shop of the Gallery under the International Hotel: behind the presbytery.

* The 4 volumes of meditations by Frs. Tomislav and Slavko (Open Your Hearts to Mary, Surrender Yourself Totally to Me, Pray with the Heart, I Beseech You: Heed my Messages) are wonderfully sincere to the Medjugorje message and spirit. For a free copy write to: Amici di Medjugorje, Via Nirone 9, 20123 MILANO, Italy.

Travelling to Medj. - By ROAD: bus from Trieste (adjacent to train station) leaves regularly every evening 6pm, arrives in Medj. 8am. Reservations ring Italy 040-425001. By SEA - From Ancona Italy to Split. Departures Ancona: Mon., Wed., Fri. 9pm, Sat. 10pm. Departures Split: Sun., Tues., Thur., Sat.. Reservations fax Italy, Agenzia Mauro: 071-202618; Agenzia Morandi: 071-202296. •

On Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, the Word-made-Eucharist, Card. Newman wrote:

"It is difficult, impossible to imagine, I grant; but how is it impossible to believe? I cannot indeed prove it; I cannot tell how it is. But I say, "Why should it not be? What's to hinder it? What do I know of substance or matter? Just as much as the greatest philosophers, and that is nothing at all."

(This and other wonderful thoughts on the Eucharist can be found in *Mary and the Eucharist* by Fr. Richard Foley, S.J. by Veritas Publications, Dublin, Ireland.)

For British readers we have opened an account at: Royal Bank of Scotland, 26 George St., Oban, Argyll, PA34 5SA. Acc. no. 8326 0400 154351

Our thanks to readers for their donations, in particular from France and Switzerland and all those who send regular donations who with their generosity enable us to send Echo free to the many who can't give anything.

What joy when we hear from our readers who tell us that they've seen copies of our publication in different and at times unexpected places around the world (the Cathedral of Sydney, various churches in London, missions in Sudan where persecution of Catholics is still underway, far-away islands). The missionaries, in particular, write to say how useful they find our little Echo both for their personal formation and for that of their people, seeing in it a gift from the hands of the Queen of Peace. Above all, we thank all those who have prayed with faith and were thus able to obtain from Mary, through unexpected and incredible interventions, that also this copy of Echo could be completed, as my state of health had severely compromised its publication this time. The future of Echo is entirely in Her hands...

May Mary, who donated to us the Good of Jesus, open the hearts of all so we can receive the Holy Spirit in this year dedicated to Him, and become holy and able to tell everyone: "I love you." To all of you I say: "I love you," and I bless you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Villanova M.

12 January 1998

Let all priests pray the Rosary. Give time to the Rosary.