



# ECHO OF MARY

## Queen of peace

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Our Lady's message 25 Nov. 2001:

**Dear Children, in this time of grace, I call you anew to prayer. My Children, pray and prepare your hearts for the coming of the King of Peace, that with His blessing He might give peace to the whole world.**

**Apprehension is getting a hold on hearts and hatred reigns in the world. Therefore, you who live my messages: be light and extended hands for this unbelieving world, that all might come to know the God of Love.**

**Do not forget, my Children: I am with you and I bless you all! Thank you for responding to my call.**

## Extended hands for the world

Just after the beginning of Advent our blessed Mother once again invites us to pray. My Children, pray and prepare your hearts for the coming of the King of Peace. We are invited not to limit ourselves to exterior gestures, but to live this time of grace most profoundly. It is yet another precious occasion for true conversion, that the Spirit in us might be freed; He who already intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words (Rm 8:26).

We need to pray and prepare the heart so that the wait is not spent in practical rites and external religious formalities, but is oriented towards an earnest and radical renewal of life, so Christmas isn't just a celebration of a past event, but is a real encounter with God, a person needs adequate preparation.

We need to prepare our hearts so they can become cribs for Christ who is born. He doesn't ask much - a stable will do - as long as it is open and can receive Him. And it doesn't matter that we are unworthy. If we desire for Him to come; if we trust Him, and if we are surrendered to Him, then He will come! And when He comes the ice on our heart will melt, and whatever is weighing it down, and all the worries which stop us from seeing His Face will fall away.

The King of Peace will come, and His blessing will bring peace to the whole world. This is what the angels announced on that first holy night (Lk 2:14); a multitude of people during 2000 years have heard it, but it has yet to reach all humanity. Still today darkness covers the earth, thick clouds cover the peoples (Is 60:2).

Apprehension is getting a hold on hearts and hatred reigns in the world. When violence is offered in response for violence, and hatred for hatred; an endless spiral of death is activated. Each person, and each Christian in particular, is called to question himself about the events which are shattering the world, and about any personal responsibility. Even the most insignificant person must bear the enormous responsibility of letting Christ live in him, which is making a decisive contribution to the world's salvation.

Therefore, you who live my messages: be light and extended hands for this unbelieving world, that all might come to know the God of Love. What came to be through Him was life, and this life was the light of the human race (Jn 1:4). The Light is Jesus Christ, and the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness did not accept it (cf. Jn 1:5). Live Mary's messages and be light for the world: it takes more than listening to the messages to take Christ to the world. He can't be closed up in philosophical expressions, or in religions. If He isn't alive in us then our faith is meaningless. To be light means to be Christ's dwelling place; it means letting Christ live in us. Not even John the Baptist, whom Jesus said was the greatest amongst those born of a woman, is the light (Jn 1:8); only the Word Incarnate is the true light. If Christ lives in us we will be light and blessing - extended hands - for the world so that all might come to know the God of Love.

Could there be a better goal for Christmas? Let's live the messages of Mary, Queen of Peace, and the world will have peace!

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Message of 25 December 2001:

**Dear Children, today I invite you and I urge you to pray for peace. Especially today, as I bring the newborn Jesus in my arms to you, I invite you to be united to Him through prayer and to become a sign for this restless world.**

**My Children, urge each other to pray and love. May your faith be incitement for others to believe and love more. I bless you all and ask you to be closer to my heart and to the heart of little Jesus. Thank you for responding to my call.**

## **I bring to you newborn Jesus**

It is Christmas. Just as she did 2000 years ago, Mary today carries the newborn Jesus in her arms. Today, like then, she brings Him to the world, offering Him to us. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given (Is 9:6). In Him alone can we find salvation. He was and still is a sign destined to be rejected (Lk 2:34). In our world today this "contradictory sign" is evident to all: violence is condemned by the majority, yet violence is used to respond to violence; we are capable of battling to save a life, but in a thousand other ways we also sow death; we want peace, yet we try to establish it through war.

Mary, in silence, continues to offer us her peace. That peace is Jesus Christ! (Eph 2:14). Without Him there is no peace for individuals and no peace for nations. True peace is found in that little baby who lies in a manger at the fringe of society, far from the palaces of the powerful and rich. He is the peace which the world does not know and cannot give (Jn 14:27). That baby whom Mary offers to the world will grow and will cry over Jerusalem (Lk 19:42): If you in your turn had only understood on this day the message of peace! But, alas,

it is hidden from your eyes! He is the way to peace and we are all called to recognize this. Mary not only invites us anew, but she urges us to accept this call. We can almost see her motherly concern for our delay; that we might not find the way of peace closed for us too! We are called to pray for peace today and especially in this time of Christmas in which Mary brings the newborn Jesus to us. We ought to pray so the encounter with Jesus is not formal and exterior, but real, and concrete, and profound, and such that our life is completely transformed. This encounter should lead us onto a journey ever closer to His own, all the way up Calvary, so that together with the Apostle we can say: I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20). Then we'll be united to Him, and we'll be a sign for this restless world. And we'll be salt for the earth, and light for the world (Mt 5:13-14), and our faith will be such that it urges others to believe and love more. But without Him salt becomes tasteless and light loses its luminosity. Let us be united to Him, then, so the Spirit can mould us; and the infinite distance separating us from Him will be reduced, and we'll be closer to the Hearts of Mary and little Jesus - closer, ever closer, so close that we'll perceive Their heartbeats within our own, and we'll be a sign for those we meet: a sign of Their presence, which passes, not through words, but through the Spirit, in the silence and humility of true love. Love is true when it is offered, not imposed; when it builds up, not destroys; when it unites, not divides; when it is a gift with no claims attached. N.Q.

## **Pope and Mary think alike: "Fast and pray for peace"**

Assisi will host the third meeting for representatives of the world religions on 24th January (there was one in 1986 and in 1993) to "pray for the overcoming of opposition and the promotion of authentic peace... In particular," said the Pope, "we wish to bring Christians and Muslims together to proclaim to the world that religion must never be a reason for conflict, hatred and violence. In this historic moment, humanity needs to see gestures of peace and to hear words of hope."

The Pope also invited all Catholics to make last 14 December a day of fasting, "and to pray fervently to God to grant to the world stable peace based on justice, and make it possible to find adequate solutions to the many conflicts that trouble the world." Adding: "May what is saved by fasting be put at the disposal of the poor..."

Fasting, as one of the tools of asceticism, is common to most religions, and together with prayer, alms giving and pilgrimages, is characteristic of biblical spirituality which inspires also Islam (though via an apocryphal source). Fasting always has been a part of Christian spirituality, especially during Lent and other intense moments of petition. There are various ways of fasting: some refrain from food and drink all day long, others take only one meal in the day, while others take nothing but bread and water.

For Christians, fasting is also a means for social orientation, as we don't fast for the sole reason of doing penance, but are invited to share with the needy by giving up what we save on a day of fast, and to live a more sober lifestyle.

It is notable that the Pope's words at the Angeles of 18 November echo Our Lady's messages at Medjugorje. From the very beginning Our Lady has asked us to fast and pray for peace; and today after twenty years of scepticism and "silence" (by the Church which "counts") we

rejoice at the Pope's call, for not only does it reflect an old tradition, but also the calls of the Queen of Peace. The novelty about the day of fast was that it coincided, or better, was chosen to fall on a meaningful date for Muslims. The 14th December was also the last day of Ramadan, which is the holy month for Islam, dedicated to prayer and fasting. On that same day, the faithful of the most numerous religion in the world entreated the God of Abraham for the gift of peace. The Pope's invitation is to be viewed in connection with his visit to the mosque in Damascus last October (where he paid homage to the tomb of St. John Baptist). His is an invitation to us all to pick up the "holy weapons" of prayer, fasting and dialogue, to engage in authentic "holy war".

However, when the Pope's gestures are not considered in their entirety, they run the risk of being misunderstood. The main risk is religious syncretism, or that superficial way of retaining that all religions are the same, that both good and bad, right and wrong, are equally distributed, that the sons of Abraham (Jews, Christians and Muslims) are destined to become a sole religion made up of the positive aspects of each. The idea might sound inviting to some, BUT it excludes extremely important and fundamental differences. The first one regards the person of Jesus Christ who for us Christians is the Son of God and sole Saviour; for the Jews He isn't even a prophet; for the Muslims He is a great prophet, but inferior to Mohammed. The differences are as equally great with regards to other fundamental Christian truths, such as the Trinity, Incarnation, the Cross and Resurrection.

On a different level (less doctrinal, but closer in spirituality and religious practice) even the man-God relationship is looked upon differently. Islam is a law-binding religion which stresses the absolute obedience of man to God (muslim = one who submits to God), while Christianity does not exclude the law (in its religious sense), but transcends it in the dialogue with God, in the loving relationship between the Father and His children (each Christian is God's "child", not slave!) which supersedes all law-binding fears.

The Pope, too, in his document, Dominus Jesus, confirms the faith of the Church which proclaims that salvation is had only through Christ. It isn't, then, a question of making a new religion, or pretending that "we're all alike." It isn't even a question of praying together, but of being together in prayer: praying one beside the other, and no longer one against the other; it is a question of proclaiming to the world that religion must never become reason for war, hatred or violence, and that fanaticism has nothing to do with faith. Prayer should bring peoples and religions together respectfully and peacefully, as they adore the one and only, truly great and merciful God.

Mirco Trabuio

## Grateful to the Pope

"I thank the Pope for engaging the entire Church in a fast so that the world might never know again the horrors of war," said Padre Divo BARSOTTI in his comment to the Pope's gesture of 14 December. Padre Barsotti is an elderly Italian theologian and founder of the Comunità Figli di Dio (Sons of God Community) near Florence.

"Prayer," he continued, "is the means which allows us to enter into communion with God. Its aim isn't war, but it isn't peace either. Through prayer a relationship between man and God is established, allowing him to surrender to God ever more profoundly, and to accept

God's hidden will. Nonetheless, if it doesn't directly ensure peace for the nations, it purifies man's heart, enabling him to accept God's hidden will."

Many Christians accepted the call to prayer, but some questioned the proposal to fast.

"Prayer and fasting are related," added Padre Barsotti. "The more man is able to detach himself from physical gratification, the better his soul is able to communicate with God and obtain responses for his requests."

The Holy Father went even further, though, when he set the day of fast so it would coincide with a Muslim day of fast. Padre Barsotti commented: "It is meaningful that today's two positions in greater conflict should be united in prayer. The unity that God wants to establish amongst men must first of all be realized in this unity of all men before God. When prayer is earnest and touches God's heart, it comes naturally that all human divisions are overcome, for God is above all forms of division."

## **Save the Children!**

A defenceless Newborn Child in a humble grotto gives back dignity to every life that is born... His features are the features of every human being that is born, no matter what race or nation he belongs to.

These were the expressions of joy and adoration by John Paul II in front of the creche in St. Peter's Square on Christmas Day. With gratitude the Pope greeted the divine Child who bears in his little hands the secret of peace for mankind. He is the Prince of Peace!

Before the mystery of Jesus' infancy the Pope did not hesitate to express his worry for the world's children: many, too many children, are the innocent victims condemned to suffer the consequences of inhuman conflicts.

To save the children also means to save the hope of mankind. And today, that Child born in Bethlehem is asking us to do just that. That Child is our God; a God who became man so we would have the right to hope. He was born man so He could heal life's wounds, and even give meaning to death. With the God-Child, the Father destroyed sin, and placed in the world the seed of a new humanity, called to fulfil the original plan of creation and to transcend it with the grace of redemption. \*\*\*

## **The doors of hell will not prevail**

We've heard him say many times: "the main task of the devil is to make people believe he doesn't exist!" Padre GABRIEL AMORTH, world-renowned exorcist, is the founder and honorary president of the international association of exorcists. With years of experience in the fight against the Evil One, and profound devotion for Our Lady, he says: "I entrusted myself to Our Lady when I received my mandate, asking her to envelop me in her mantle where I knew I would find sure refuge. Since then I've received a lot of threats, but I've never suffered any harm."

Every now and again Echo will publish reflections by Padre Amorth, so we are better able to understand how this supernatural and occult force is able to threaten our lives and cause

even intense suffering and enormous difficulty to whomever is exposed. We don't intend alarming anyone, or accusing the devil of all wrongs. We just want to throw light on the matter for the sake of our spiritual life, that it might be healthy and balanced and that we are surrendered to God, and to Mary, the Woman of the Apocalypse, who symbolizes the Church which will crush the devil's head definitely. Padre Amorth says: "The Holy Spirit guides the Church, and the doors of hell will not prevail, but it is also true that the Church must be aware that hell is a reality which threatens the lives of the faithful, and must therefore take the necessary steps to protect the faithful."

Sadly, the situation is different. The number of officially nominated exorcists is terribly low, a sign that the clergy and episcopate believe neither in the devil nor in the power granted by Jesus to drive him out. "Unlike the Orthodox Church and various Protestant Churches, the Latin Church practically abandoned the ministry of exorcism as far back as three centuries ago. We're looking at entire bodies of bishops who are contrary to exorcisms, and entire nations without an exorcist, like Austria, Switzerland, Spain and Portugal. A truly frightening shortage!

When a priest becomes a bishop, he will have before him an article from the Code of Canon Law which gives him absolute authority to nominate exorcists. Given that he has to make such an important decision, the least any bishop should do is assist at an exorcism, but unfortunately, this rarely happens." Such is Padre Amorth's sad but realistic comment. When John Paul II learnt of this unbelief amongst the bishops he remarked: "Not believing in the devil is the same as not believing in the Gospel!"

This ignorance within the Church weakens the battle against the Evil One, and blunts the weapons which the Church has possessed for centuries. Such is the case with the new edition of the Ritual for Exorcisms presented by the Italian Episcopal Conference. Padre Amorth explains: "The second Vatican Council had requested a revision of some of the passages contained in the old Ritual, which means that some parts needed correcting, but it didn't need rewriting!

The old Ritual contained prayers with 12 centuries of experience. We exorcists have all experienced that the prayers from the new Ritual are totally ineffective."

We asked the expert for further clarification: "Part 15 refers to curses and the proper attitude to adopt. A curse is harm caused to a person by having recourse to the devil. The devil's operators have various ways of doing this, including sorcery, witchcraft, spells, voodoo and macumba rites. In the Roman Ritual it was explained how to proceed. Instead, the new Ritual prohibits exorcisms in these cases. This is absurd! Curses are by far the most common cause of diabolic possession and of evil or injury procured through the devil; something like 90 per cent. It's like telling exorcists to stop working!

At another part - no. 16 to be precise - it says that exorcisms should not be done when the presence of the devil is not certain; but this certainty can only be had by performing an exorcism."

As we have seen, lack of experience in the field can be harmful, even when the harm is limited to not being able to resolve the damage caused by Satan. By now it comes natural to ask: were any experts (i.e. exorcists) in the commission which worked on the new Ritual? One would think not. In any case, the Church herself has provided a way out of this "accident" by not imposing use of the new Ritual, so that exorcists can request permission of the bishop to continue using the old one.

Padre Amorth continues: "Everything should be blessed and protected: houses, schools, means of communication... These days, however, protection against the devil has become practically inexistent. There are no more means of defence; no more prayers of defence. Jesus Himself had taught us a prayer of liberation with the Lord's Prayer: 'Deliver us from the Evil One; deliver us from Satan,' which wasn't translated correctly into Italian, so that today we say: 'deliver us from evil.'

Evil has been generalized, so that the fount of it remains hidden, but the evil which our Lord, Jesus Christ, taught us to combat is a person and his name is Satan."

Also in her messages Our Lady has taught us to be decisive and conscientious in the fight against the Evil One: "Dear Children, today as never before I am inviting you to pray... Satan is strong and wants to destroy not only human life, but the very nature and the planet on which you live" (25 Jan. '91). "I invite you to engage in battle against Satan through prayer. You already know his plots; so he will now intensify his action" (8 Aug. '85) "No matter where you are, it is only through prayer that you can overcome Satan's influence" (7 Aug. '86). "Pray constantly. Pray more. This way Satan will be driven away from here" (5 Sept. '85). "If you pray, Satan is unable to cause you any harm, because you are God's children and He watches over you constantly. Pray; and may the Rosary be always in your hands as a sign to Satan that you belong to me" (25 Feb. 1988).

Hence, we are called to keep watch and to take an active part in the battle, but Our Lady's words are also consoling, as she assures us that through prayer, love and the sacraments we will be protected, and that we can also help drive out the Enemy, not only from our own lives, but also from the lives of our many brothers and sisters who suffer. Padre Amorth concludes: "The Church continues in her journey; it is normal that there should be weaknesses. It is the Holy Spirit which holds her up, therefore, Satan, with all his attacks, can only hope for partial results, even important ones; but he can't win the war."

Stefania Consoli

## **Bishop, servant of the Church**

The Bishop, Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World. This was the theme for the work of the 10th General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which brought 280 prelates from around the world to the Vatican last October. The purpose of a synod is to assist the Pontiff with their counsel.

Faced with rapid social changes and new pastoral challenges, the Church examined the person of the bishop, his role in the Church and in society, and ways of making his mission more effective.

At the opening of the Synod, the Pope said that for the Pastors' word to be credible they must give proof of conduct detached from personal interests; and he particularly stressed the beatitude of poverty. "We are compelled to look into our hearts to discern what is our attitude towards earthly goods and the use we make of them. We are asked to verify to what extent the personal and community conversion to an effective evangelical poverty has taken place in the Church. The route of poverty will allow us to transmit to our contemporaries the "fruits of salvation." As Bishops we are called upon, therefore, to be poor at the service of the Gospel. Starting from this attitude, the Bishops are called to raise their voices in defence

of the least... to point out with courage the social sins that are the fruit of consumerism, hedonism, and an economy that produces an unacceptable gap between luxury and misery." The Bishop's mission depends on his personal holiness, therefore it must be nourished by intense prayer and the sacraments.

The assembly of bishops underlined the need to stimulate missionary action in the entire Church community, particularly amongst the laity, for the Church's mission demands that everyone participate actively and responsibly. It wasn't a coincidence that the Synod was held in the month dedicated to the Missions and the Rosary.

Besides being a custodian and a teacher of the faith, a bishop must also be a father, brother and pastor of his people, so that the gift of the faith is communicated to all with a language that today's man is able to comprehend. M.T.

## **Silently He grew, hidden in the virginal womb**

**by Padre Daniel Ange**

The mystery of Christmas is still fresh in our hearts and minds... that time when the Son of God becomes man to share with us our life on earth. This marvellous event turned the world upside down at the time, and still today it continues to draw our attention and admiration for the way God took on a human aspect so He could be seen and touched by men, could live with them, then die for them.

Padre DANIEL ANGE's book "Young, just like you", is an inedited description of Christ starting from when He was in Mary's womb. With his keen, shrewd spirituality, this French priest ably projects images which are both profound and poetic.

Come, come see our Lord, while still in His Mother's womb. Watch as He slowly takes on human form. With each passing day His genetic patrimony unfolds before us.

A Baby's Face, formed in the image of His Mother's Face - His facial features are emerging; that Face which every man would love to see. But it is still the Father's secret, and not even Mary can see it yet. Only God can see; He Who knits us together in the womb; for Whom there is no secret; and for Whom even the darkness is not dark, and the night is bright as the day (cf. Ps 138:11; Jer 1:5).

Yet two thousand years later I can see that which even Mary could not see. For millennia mothers were unable to see how their babies grew, and now, thanks to modern-day technology I can see a baby's face as early as three months; and I can imagine the face of my God as He grew in the Virginal womb. I am taken aback each time I see one of these photos; it makes me think how our God wanted to be the same! I see the face of an unknown baby and can almost see in him the presence of my God!

So, day by day, His little body is formed. Mary's life moulds His own little life thanks to the umbilical cord. If God wanted one of these too, wouldn't it be that one day we could be united to Him through the umbilical cord of His grace, in His Church?

Mary gives shape to her baby's features; and since He receives His humanity only from her, never has another baby looked so much like his mother than our God! How genial!

Everything that God gives His Son in His humanity passes through the Mother. Did not the

Father desire sharing His only Son with her? But in a certain sense they bring Him up together.

Today, thanks to highly advanced scientific studies, we better understand the incredible influence a mother has on the formation of her baby. But perhaps mother's have always intuited what scientists know today, i.e., that babies are extremely sensitive to the mother's state of mind. Whatever she feels, thinks, experiences, hears, is in some way transmitted to her child: her worries and her joy, her fears and her peace. If all this is transmitted, then how much more is her spiritual life transmitted to the child!

Understanding this enables us to imagine what Jesus received from Mary. She associated Him to her own prayer. No other mother has been able to transmit so much spiritual life to her child! (Oh, if only mothers would seek blessings for their children during pregnancy! Thankfully, this wonderful tradition of the Church is being rediscovered in numerous countries.)

And what about you? Perhaps your mother didn't lead a spiritual life; or maybe it was too superficial for you to draw benefit from it. Perhaps in that moment of your life you were deprived of the most essential thing, which is the life which flows from her soul.

Today, however, through the inner experience of being re-created, and re-conceived, you can be born again with Jesus in Mary's womb, and receive from her that which you didn't receive from your own mother. You can enter into communion with the mystical life of the Virgin Mary. Do you believe this?

... and this is our God!

A chronological and... chromosomal flashback - Let's now follow our God in that amazing itinerary which will enable us to penetrate the heart of our cosmos. (For our departure I chose the traditional date of 25 March, knowing that it is an imaginary date, set in reference to 25 December, a date chosen by Christians of the 3rd century to Christianize the feast of the Invincible Sun.)

13 April: on his eighteenth day he is 2 mm long: the size of a wheat grain! Yet his heart - God's heart - has begun to beat. Thanks to the ultrascan we can see it, this little muscle which is still open, but which is already pulsating. God's life on earth begins with this little open heart; it will conclude with an open heart; and it will remain open, forever open (cf. Jn 19:34).

21 April: now we can see his arms; those arms which one day will be laid open on a cross in a sign of God's covenant between heaven and earth.

23 April: his legs are visible; they will take him all through Galilee, then Judea.

25 April: the thirtieth day, and this little divine embryo, this tiny being 1 cm long (ten thousand times the size of a fertilized ovule) rests calmly in his little world... and this is our God!

Early May: his eyes and lips can be seen: eyes that will reflect the light of heaven; lips that will proclaim the truth (cf. Mt 5) ... and this is our God!

15 May: the fiftieth day and his hands appear as tiny flowers; already complete with finger prints - unique finger prints. What blessed hands! One day they will work with wood, and caress the sick and the children... and this is our God!

31 May: an ultrascan can pick up the regular beat of his little heart: 65 beats a minute; of that little heart that will never stop loving. So great is his love that he allows it to be

pierced... HE is our God!

Early June: his skeleton is taking on shape, his muscles also. Safe in his little nest he measures 3 cm. and weighs 11 grams: less than 2 pages from a book! ... and this is our God! In just two months this tiny being has made incredible progress, with all his organs now formed.

10 June: there they are: ten little toes, like little dots on the end of his little feet... and this is our God!

Mid June: if he feels a caress on his forehead he will turn his head and move his hands... and this is our God!

End June: ten cm. long, and fortyfive grams. His hands and vocal cords are completely formed; also his eye lids which remain closed for six months. And of course now we can see that it's going to be a little boy! ... and this is our God!

End July: all the details are complete: fingers, knuckles, nails, eyes, eyelids, ears.

Early August: he can hear noises from the outside world; his hair is growing, he is starting to move; his heart beats faster; and little veins under his skin quickly carry the blood around his little body.

End August: at long last Mary can feel her baby's movements; while he practises the art of swallowing. He is 25 cm long, and weighs 500 g.... this is our God!

End September: snug in his transparent cradle, he sleeps from sixteen to twenty hours a day; or sucks his thumb... and this is our God! Yes, God sucking his thumb inside a woman's womb!

End October: 30 cm. long, he weighs about 1 kg. His five senses are awakening.

November: how beautiful he is now, with smooth and rosy skin. His lungs are getting ready for the big day; his skull is still a little soft... this is our God!

Mid December: his little legs are bent up and his arms are crossed, with very little room for him to move around. The time is near!

The months have passed quickly; but before we get to Bethlehem, before the night of his birth, tell me: would you have wanted your God to be any different? Tell me: aren't you happy.. proud.. of this God?

## **God is born in the flesh You are born into the Light**

The sweetest night of all - The time has come for him to come into the world. This special moment has been portrayed by great artists, great poets, and great musicians, in an attempt to describe an event for which words, colours and notes cannot suffice. Words become senseless stuttering; only our heart is capable of responding, in silent adoration.

Along a roadway, in the heart of the night - His time is nearly up, yet there they are, Joseph and Mary, forced to abandon the security of their home in Nazareth, to leave behind the familiar things which provided comfort and a sense of belonging. They accept this new situation of instability and uncertainty without objections, and without complaining. They have placed their trust in God, and like Abraham they leave without knowing where they are going (cf. Gen 12:1). Their destination is Bethlehem, but where will they stay, how long will they be? It is enough for them to know that God will not abandon them.

Come and see! Come see this young couple; there they are in the crowd, in the long caravan of travellers on the move for the census, in a kind of exodus or mass displacement. There they are amid a noisy crowd of people, right when they needed the quiet and privacy of their

home, now that the baby's time is drawing near.

But Mary, heavy with baby, crosses hills and dales without complaining. Who would have thought that this young girl was the real temple of Jerusalem? That she was the real ark of the covenant? That she was the dwelling place of God among men, His first home? Only Joseph is able to comprehend something of this mystery.

God will be born on the road because He seeks those who wander without direction; ever seeking the lost sheep (cf. Lk 15:4). God will be born in the middle of the night, because He is the Light and He comes to seek those who lay in the shadow of death. He comes to illuminate all our nights with His light (cf. Jn 1:5). God will be born poor, absolutely poor, so He can reach out to the poorest. There is no poverty too poor for Him; no misery that He cannot transfigure with His light.

Mary and Joseph desperately need a lodging, a refuge: the time of birth is here. They knock at many doors; but no one opens. A place can be found for everything, but not for God! But still, there are some who welcome Him with extra warmth and extra joy, and make up for those whose hearts are cold. The mineral kingdom offers Him a grotto; the heavens a star; the vegetable kingdom a bit of hay; the animal kingdom the cow and the donkey... And us? We offer Him our sins - after all, that is what He came for: to take them upon Himself and cancel them. And what about His mother? She's a young woman, one of us... given to Him so she could become our mother; and He gives Himself to her so He can become our brother.

Now tell me: would you want your God to be any other way? Don't you feel happy.. don't you feel proud.. about your God?

Padre Daniel Ange

## **A Sinner needs Love**

"The power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy (Lk 1:35)

Mary was asked to make a great act of faith. The Holy Spirit has always existed, in eternity, but to save humanity God sent a Man: Jesus Christ. And to do this He needed the faith of a woman: Mary. She is told she will become a mother in a virginal manner, and for her to believe required a great act of faith. She is given a sign: "Your kinswoman, Elizabeth, in her old age, has conceived a son..." Mary believes, and gives her consent, and the "vision" of the Word of God is incarnated in her heart: "Do unto me according to Thy Word" (Lk 1:38).

The Word becomes reality and the Son of God becomes flesh in the woman's womb.

For God to act, He needs our collaboration. Humanly speaking, Mary didn't know each of us here on the earth, but in her heart she had a vision - the vision of the salvation of mankind - and in this vision she perceived man's redemption. But just as the Lord placed a vision in the heart of the Virgin, we too must ask ourselves if the vision of our salvation and of those whom we love is in our heart. The Church works at bringing salvation to all mankind, but do we have in our hearts the vision of Jesus Christ who died for our sins, who took upon

Himself the sins of all men, including those of Hitler, of Stalin, and of today's number one enemy, Bin Laden? Do we have in our hearts the vision of the power of Christ our Saviour who is the winner in this battle against sin?

For God to win this battle, He needs our faith, the faith of the Church. That is why Mary today is rounding up her children and teaching them to be capable of bearing salvation - to be efficient members of the body called Jesus' Church - to bring salvation to mankind; because with our complaining, our fragility, and our doubts, we will never save the world! Mary, with a simple act of faith, brought Christ into the world.

How powerful an act of faith is compared to all our doubts! And I repeat: that is why Our Lady is rounding up God's people from all corners of the earth, and teaching them, so they can fill in the void in society's "mind": we talk lots, we discuss heaps, but we never pray! Or perhaps we do pray, but how do we pray? The Lord needs hearts that pray and hearts that love.

Last October the Holy Father entrusted all humanity to Mary's Immaculate Heart in a renewal of the consecration of mankind to Mary. But if we want to translate this act of entrustment into simple terms, what can we say? We can say that it takes love to save mankind.

For a sinner to have life, he is not in need of reproaching, or threatening, but of love! That is why God gave us Our Lady as Mother; so this love of God could reach everyone. The act of entrusting a sinner to Mary's Immaculate Heart is the expression of our desire for that person to be touched by Jesus and Mary's love - and the divine love can touch a sinner's heart by reaching out through our own hearts.

A mother has to transmit love to her children. A child can tell it is loved from the moment of conception - a kid doesn't need to grow up to tell if he is loved! At conception a baby can tell if it is loved! It happens that we see sad expectant mothers, the reason being that the baby came along when it was least expected, upsetting its parent's plans! But the child will pay the price for this by remaining without the warmth of his mother's love, and this wound will accompany him all his life long, with inevitable consequences.

It is God's will that mankind should be saved by love, not by a world war. He sent His Son to love sinners by taking upon Himself the sins of men. Our Lady also tells us to fast and do penance for the sake of those brothers and sisters who suffer. We are being asked to love them! A fast has never saved anyone; it is the love which makes us fast that saves, the love which makes us suffer saves, the prayer which comes from the heart saves. So the thing that's missing is love. Our society lacks love; its only love is passion and pleasure!

Jesus said: "I came to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already kindled..." (Lk 12:49). Our families need warming with love, our parishes need filling with love, our churches should overflow with love. Paul VI said years ago: "It is finally time for the era of love to begin; for the civilization of love." Love saves; love makes us comprehend Our Lady's mission which she is carrying out today in the Church: she is gathering up her children to teach them how to love.

We should remember, though, that to love, one must first of all be loved. Those who weren't loved can't love, and will never know how to love as long as they are not loved. Thus, Our Lady is rounding up her children so they can experience her love and show everyone that love is present. She is asking us to become missionaries of love, bearers of love. Of us she asks sacrifice and penance; she wants us to learn to renounce something of our own, learn to walk with the patience of the cross, and then, God's mystery will be revealed to us, because

the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Co 1:18).

So that Our Lady can use us to bring the love of Jesus Christ to sinners, we should begin with those in our own homes, and spread the Spirit of love to all those around us, till this fire burns over the entire earth. This is the mission which was in Jesus' heart when He called the apostles and moulded them so they could set the world afire. This is the mission which Mary had in her heart, and which she today is communicating to us so we can become her children, her faithful disciples, her faithful servants.

Our Lady takes us by the hand so we don't get lost, so we can follow her faithfully, and so that together with her, this mission can be fulfilled by the Church - that is, take Jesus Christ to all men. He is a God which saves through love and forgiveness. We, too, are called to love by forgiving.

Padre Fulvio

(From a registration)

## **"Return to primitive fervour"**

### **Mary and the Scriptures: heed the Mother of the Incarnate Word**

(a continuation)

Our Blessed Mother has on several occasions given explicit indications of certain passages from the Scriptures which are particularly rich in medicinal qualities for the spiritual diseases which afflict today's society.

These diseases are self-sufficiency (in the belief that we can do without God), and idolization of self. She invites us to meditate every Thursday before the Blessed Sacrament on the Gospel passage in Matthew 6:24-34 (No one can serve two masters), so that on this first day of the weekly paschal triduum - which Our Lady says we should all celebrate - hearts are able to open up into an unconditioned and trusting surrender to the Father's merciful love, thereby enabling us to enter into a new and profound communion with the divine life which is present in us thanks to the grace of baptism.

The Queen of Peace also calls us to meditate on the hymn to love proclaimed in the First Letter to the Corinthians, so we are able to more fully accept the gift of Trinitarian Love which is "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rm 5:5). This Love leads us onto the luminous way of the "new creation" towards which the whole work of salvation converges: "Glorify God, my Children, with the hymn to love (Cor 13), that God's love may be able to grow in you day by day to its fullness" (25 June 1988).

The Queen of Peace's messages contain numerous other biblical references and citations. For example, in urging us to pray without ceasing, Our Lady repeats the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Thess. 5:17, "Pray constantly" (message 1 Jan. 1987). And to make us more responsible in the mission entrusted to us, she cites Matthew 5:13-14: "Comprehend,

my Children, that you are today the salt of the earth and the light of the world" (25 Oct. 1996).

Elsewhere, in her calls to profound prayer which opens our hearts to the regenerative action of the Holy Spirit, she explicitly cites the famous passage from the Prophet Ezekiel (Ez 36:26): "I invite you to open yourselves up to prayer, so the Holy Spirit is able to help you pray, and your hearts can be of flesh and not of stone" (25 June '96).

If we take the entire body of messages into consideration we will see that there is a constant reference to the fundamental truths of the faith, with evident use of biblical expressions, the application of which is in perfect consonance with the authentic Magisterium of the Catholic Church. Our Lady herself identifies the contents of her messages with her Son's Gospel, and though both have different characteristics and scopes, they are both founts of supernatural grace and new life for the world: "My Children, joyfully live the messages of the Gospel, which I have been repeating to you since I came amongst you. My Children, I am your mother and I desire revealing the God of love and the God of peace to you. I don't want your lives to be sad; I would like them to find fullness in the joy of the Gospel for all eternity. Only this way will your lives have meaning" (25 Dec. 1996).

It is also clear that in Medjugorje, Mary's teaching method is both wise and motherly, and that this has opened the way for a new relationship with the Word of God; a much more intimate, profound and vital relationship. But there's more to it than this, for her teaching method is accompanied by a special gift of grace which enables us to assimilate God's Word into our existence and put it into practice. This way, the house of our spiritual life is built on the rock of Christ's Love (cf. Lk 6:46-49), and not on the mobile sand of, alas, that rather widespread relationship with the Word which rests on the plane of critical-exegetic and intellectual-moralistic applications, which are tragically void of the spiritual fruits of real conversion.

This immense gift of grace offered to the world by the Queen of Peace, who comes to propose the fundamental truths of Christ's Gospel anew, comes almost as a last resort out of the infinite and creative love of the Father (who is "rich in mercy"). He wants to break down the hardness and obstinacy which cling to the poor and wounded hearts of His children who persistently refuse to accept the truth and the light. He would like them to open up, at long last, to the joyful acceptance of the Gospel, which alone can give peace, salvation and fullness of new life to those who are oppressed by a dense spiral of darkness, robbing them of hope.

Yet, on the horizon of many hearts the Morning Star already shines, to announce the Dawn of the Sun of justice; it is Christ, true and only King and Lord of history.

Giuseppe Ferraro

## News from the blessed land

\* Medjugorje celebrates Fr. Slavko- On 24 November the first anniversary of Fr. Slavko's death was solemnly celebrated in Medjugorje. The parish priest led a great number of people up Krizevac (Cross Mount) for an intense moment of prayer.

The group remained in silence for some time in front of the 14th station of the Way of the Cross, which is where Fr. Slavko passed away. A memorial stele marks the place and bears a bronze image of Fr. Slavko's smiling face.

Later, at the Mother's Village a beautiful bronze statue of Slavko was blessed in the presence of the orphans. Marija, the visionary, was also present, and received her daily apparition while in the Village.

\* Vicka has announced her marriage to Marijo Mitajovic. The wedding day will be 26 January. Marijo was one of Fr. Slavko's assistants at the Mother's Village, and is from Gradac-Citluk, although he has lived in Sarajevo for some time. The couple will set up home close to Medjugorje. We rejoice with the future bride, while wishing her joy and happiness for her new family.

\* Jakov and Vicka at the Vatican - During the Synod of Bishops last October, Cardinal Dias from Bombay (India) rang Vicka and Jakov, asking them to meet him in Rome where they had a private conversation. Upon their return, the two visionaries said nothing about their trip, but both of them were visibly happy.

(from Sr. Emmanuel's diary)

\* False information about Medjugorje - Parish Priest, Fr. Branko Rados, felt the need to make a public statement to clarify false news being spread about Medjugorje.

"It is nothing new that some people are against the truth; and as such, intentionally or non, they twist the truth. Some untrue information has been circulating of late about Medjugorje. What particularly troubles the numerous friends of the Queen of Peace is a statement supposedly made by Cardinal Vinko Puljic of Sarajevo while at the Synod of Bishops in Rome, in which he was to have criticised the Franciscans of Medjugorje, saying that the Shrine was a source of disorder and disobedience.

Instead, in his talk at the Synod, Cardinal Puljic did not even mention Medjugorje; and the original text is easily available for all to control.

And let me say too, that all Franciscan priests serving in the parish of Medjugorje have been commissioned by the local Bishop. I invite all the friends of Medjugorje to pray, so that the peace and truth of Jesus Christ might reign in the world."

### **Medjugorje's renowned witnesses**

\* Last August the famous Latin-American singer, Emmanuel, visited Medjugorje, and said: "This is my fourth visit to Medjugorje. Although each pilgrimage in this holy place has been different, we have always been accompanied by a strong feeling of peace. This place is an oasis in an arid world. Here you feel protected and are able to find in the depth of your soul the presence of God, of His beloved Son Jesus, and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our shield and advocate.

A pilgrimage in Medjugorje is a spiritual exercise, in which one is able to grow in terms of

love, and also of repentance.

\* Catholic Bishop of Ukraine, Mons. Irynei Bilyk, paid a private visit to Medjugorje last September. He first visited the Shrine in 1989 as a priest, immediately before going to Rome for his secret Episcopal Ordination, to ask for the intercession of the Queen of Peace. This year's pilgrimage was a thanksgiving for all the help received through Our Lady.

\* Mons. Hermann Reich, Bishop of Papua New Guinea, originally from Austria paid a private visit to Medjugorje last September. He said: "This is my first visit. I heard about Medjugorje a long time ago, but only gave it consideration six years ago. I am very impressed by how people pray here. The liturgy and celebrations are very good. The church is always full, which is not the case for many churches in the West, especially in the summer time.

Medjugorje is like the Church in miniature. Though there are so many different languages, you can still understand what's going on; and everybody has the feeling of belonging! Also confession here is something special, but what particularly struck me is that Our Lady always comes back to the theme of prayer - do not tire, keep on praying, pray better - there is much prayer, but perhaps we need to improve the quality of our prayer.

I am certain of Mary's presence here. Otherwise none of this would be possible, there would be no fruits. To today's Christians I say: pray, without ceasing. Even if you do not see the results, keep on praying; make the effort to create a good prayer life. And take the messages of Medjugorje seriously."

\* Mons. Matthias Ssekamanya, bishop of Uganda, made a private visit to the Shrine last September. He said: "This is my first trip to Medjugorje. What I have seen is very authentic, very Catholic. People here find the chance to renew their Christian life, and my impression is that it should be encouraged.

Back home we do not get much information about what is going on here. I am not in a position to judge, but my personal view is that the devotion here should be encouraged. I have a special devotion to Mary, and this visit was an extra chance for me to cultivate this devotion.

In Medjugorje Mary's love for peace is specific. I will try to increase the awareness that Mary wants her people, her children, to have peace, to pave the way to peace with prayer, reconciliation, good works. For me, all this starts in the family."

\* Immaculate Conception, 8 December - Many groups were present from Croatia, Australia, Austria, England, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy and USA. We are especially glad about the arrival of a group of Australian Aboriginals. At the end of the English Mass they sang a hymn to Our Lady in their native language.

\* 9th Int'l Meeting for Guides and Leaders of Peace Centres, Prayer Groups, Pilgrimage and Charity Groups - in Medjugorje from 17 - 21 February 2001. Theme: "Pray, Pray, Pray."

\* 2nd Int'l Seminar for married couples: "Awaken love in your families" - from 26 February to 3 March 2002. Book by 31 Jan. email: lidija.paris@medjugorje.hr, or at Information Office ph/fax no. +387-36-651-988. Contribution for each couple: 50 DM. Couples are asked to find their own accommodation. Ý(from Press Bulletin)

## \* JAKOV'S Christmas message 2001

"Dear Children, today when Jesus is born for you again, I particularly desire inviting you to conversion. Pray, pray, pray for the conversion of your heart, that Jesus might be born in you all, might dwell in you and reign over your entire being. Thank you for responding to my call!"

## Communion in the Holy Spirit

"The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possession was his own, as everything they owned was held in common" (Acts 4:32). Man naturally tends to form communities, so it is also natural that there should be many occasions in which he has to relate with others in ways and degrees which vary depending on circumstances. However, there is an enormous difference between being together in heart and mind, and being together in the HOLY SPIRIT.

It is the Holy Spirit who communicates the King's secrets to us; who makes us able to comprehend them, live them, and announce them to others. In Him, our state of communion loses all its human conditioning and through Him we become part of God's Kingdom which is ruled by a sole law of Love. The Holy Spirit Himself is the love of the Father and of the Son: a good which they lovingly "exchange."

In the Holy Spirit all one's life is a reciprocal exchange, and it is true that the gifts which the Spirit has placed within us cannot grow if they are not "exchanged," or shared with others. Divine life cannot flow through us if there is not this exchange in the Holy Spirit; i.e. love shared. Hence, our thoughts, and the love we have for others, must be channelled through the Spirit, to make our communicative efforts pure, free, authentic, and able to nourish those who come into contact with us, so that what we give them is God's love, not ourselves. Then our relationships will be purified; and the real inner freedom which comes from this allows the Holy Spirit to act in us according to His, not our, plan.

We have to learn to know ourselves with the help of the Spirit; and understand the gifts which God has placed in others, so we can accept them and utilize them for the benefit of all. This will help widen our vision of others so we can relate with them in a more complete manner, and be able to embrace them with all their inner world; which is what God desires. And we will not be conditioned by their limits, faults, or sins because our vision will pass through the eyes of the Spirit who transcends all our schemes, ideas, and culture, and even our spiritual concepts.

Through intimate acquaintance with the Holy Spirit we are made free on all levels. He helps us free ourselves of our fears, and these depend on our inability to communicate. We fear because in the depths of our soul we don't know how to receive or give love. This freedom of communication offers us the possibility of sharing our lives, of being "one heart and one mind." However, this is still not our objective. There is yet another fundamental step to take, and that is to die to ourselves, to our ways of thinking, and to decide in all humility to renounce the things which keep us separated from the others.

It is a presupposition that we should be ready to forgive those who hurt us, for also when we are closed within ourselves (we feel offended, our pride hurts) we impede the Holy Spirit

from freely flowing through us so He can heal where we've been hurt. Likewise, attitudes of criticism, of arrogance, or of false security represent an enormous obstacle to the action of the Spirit of communion. We must, then, always live as though every moment were new, as though the world were to begin again in our soul, sacrificing our experience, even if we consider it a good experience.

In front of our brothers and sisters we should be serenely "nothing" so that we leave space for the Holy Spirit to act in us on the various levels of our being and eliminate the barriers which separate us. At this point we will be ready to accept God's Love which unites us, making us brothers and sisters.

The Word of God which dwells in the depths of our hearts should be the beginning of our every thought, our every concern, our every movement, and nothing should happen in us without Him. Jesus told the Apostles many times: "don't fear!". The fear in our relationships is born because of others passing judgement on us; but we need to stand up to this fear of being judged, otherwise we won't be able to see ourselves in the others, in the diversity which God has placed in them.

Overcoming the fear of being judged means also to open the door to the Holy Spirit. Many are frightened by "God's judgement", but His judgement has nothing to do with human judgement. It is our own fear that makes us think this. If we do not get rid of this fear we will never be able to see God in His diversity and greatness. If we remain closed in our own little world we will never discover His immense goodness which never judges us. To the contrary, we judge ourselves when we refuse His mercy, His Holy Spirit.

We must learn to go to God and ask for His forgiveness, to go to our brother or sister and ask: "Forgive me!", otherwise: "let's be at peace with one another, and let God right things for us, then we'll see..." This way, all barriers will be quickly removed, and even a surly or touchy person is offered the 'space' (or the occasion) where the Spirit of love can work and heal every wound and relationship.

We have been given the grace to live in harmony; all we need do is decide that the only heart in which we want to be united is Jesus' Heart; and He will continue to breathe the Spirit of Communion into us.

Father Tomislav Vlasic

## **Helping the least...**

Mental homes, lonely and abandoned elderly people, orphans, the handicapped... are the recipients of aid delivered to lands of former Yugoslavia where great misery and abandonment is making life extremely hard. No distinctions are made; as the Pope said at Christmas: "Christ can be seen in all little children: those from Palestine, from Israel, from the USA and from Afghan..."

Alberto Bonifacio says: "We were surprised when the Muslim director of an orphanage asked what made us bring all this aid, adding before we could answer that it had to be our Catholic faith."

Contact Alberto Bonifacio at: Via S. Alessandro 26, I-23855 Pescate (LC), Italy. Fax Italy:

0341-368587

"Dear Children, use your every moment in God's presence. Rejoice that He is so close to you and glorify Him. Live His love and be a mirror of Jesus' light..." It was in October 1987 when Our Lady, through Jelena, communicated the importance of living constantly in God's presence. But we don't always understand how to do this...

## **Journeying towards the Lord**

**by Jelena Vasilj**

At the beginning of a new year it's a good and useful thing to draw up a programme for our inner life and invoke the gift of the Holy Spirit so that God's gift - granted us as an instrument of grace - might bear abundant fruit. Personally, I received a gift of light and wisdom through which I am able to see the mysteries of the faith ever more clearer, thanks to God's liberal intervention, without having to study. But we shouldn't confuse this gift with, say, paranormal experiences such as prediction; because it is grace which God gives to a soul which loves and seeks Him.

Of course, this privilege isn't just for me, for it is what Jesus desires for each of us. He says this clearly in John's Gospel: "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him" (Jn 14:23). Thus, every person is a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. Our Trinitarian God lives in every soul which is born again in baptism He comes to us, to the earth, but above all, He comes inside of us.

At the beginning of this new year we ought to open ourselves up to the flow of divine grace so that the Spirit can make us taste life the way God wants it, the way He has always wanted it, according to the order He has always desired for each of us and which will find fulfilment with the happy vision of His Face.

Which instruments are useful for our faith journey? First of all: prayer; because we need to ask for the grace. It is also useful to be knowledgeable, and informed, to study; but there is a type of knowledge which comes only through faith (human reasoning can even impede the encounter with the Lord). St. Augustine would say that it is necessary "to think according to the faith" because the faith allows us to arrive at certain truths which we would otherwise not know with just human reasoning.

Therefore, it is prayer which allows us to know the Lord through the faith. How should we pray? That's simple: meditation, and reflection on the great mysteries which make up our lives as God's children. This is, after all, the real meaning of the Rosary, since it is each Christian's desire to imitate, and become like Jesus. What we need to do is plant the mysteries of His life in our hearts so they can be transformed into real day-to-day experience. In other words, those mysteries must "become us."

It is clear that the Holy Scriptures must have a central place in our spiritual lives, because our mentality needs purifying; our old self needs to die. And for this to happen it takes a change of mentality (the Greek word *metanoia* - conversion - means just that: change of

mentality). We live in the world, and we see lots of publicity on TV, and hear all types of news; and we don't see how easily these things can influence us so that we no longer take after God's heart. At this point, His Word comes to our aid! for His Word contains the truth. If we read it, meditate on it, and plant it in our hearts, this Word will gradually become ours, and begin to speak to us in our heart. I would say this is the true scope of prayer.

Obviously, the Holy Mass is the core of our spiritual life, because through the Eucharist we are born again from within. The Eucharist is that living bread which we need so we can keep on living. We are able to perform feats to satisfy our hunger, and then maybe not even go to Mass on Sunday.. But we have to understand that it is impossible to maintain a spiritual life without this divine food! That is why Jesus, in proposing this nourishment, wants us to learn to offer ourselves, for we too are Eucharist. We are a sacrifice with all our efforts, with our very being which we must offer up together with Jesus' sacrifice.

Finally, there is dialogue with God which depends a lot on our own need, our profound desire for God. Our passions and desires must tend upwards - just like fire, St. Augustine would say. They must be unceasing prayer which is constant desire for God.

Hence, prayer opens us up to this world - this adventurous world - from which we get faith and hope and charity. Next to prayer, though, I would place fasting which is equally important. You know, we cannot spiritually grow without sacrifice. Our human nature inexorably drags us downwards, to sin, while fasting helps us get up again, and look back up to God. One good thing is that through fasting we learn that we'll never be satisfied on this earth. We often chase after things and easily depend on people in the hope that they'll give us full happiness. But fasting, and the hunger we experience when we fast, help us to understand that we'll find full satisfaction only in heaven, and that there are things prepared by God for those who love Him: things that human eyes have never seen and human ears have never heard.

To do all this we need to ask for Mary's help! Marian spirituality, as I understand it, is very simple; it is made of simple things which guide us towards our own soul and mind, for it is through knowing ourselves that we can begin our journey towards the Lord.

## The Mail

Teresita Lizares, Philippines - "Be assured that the copies I distribute are happily received and shared. One priest shares what he reads in his homilies. Thank you for sharing Echo with us! From it we learn of the beautiful events in the Church that we wouldn't otherwise hear about."

Pamela Whigham, Scotland - "For those of us who can't go to Medjugorje these papers are our main link, bringing us the news, hope and peace of Medjugorje. The precious words lead us, guide us, give us hope and peace, and open our hearts to love"

Johanna Hillingen, Austria - "I thank you with all my heart for your courage and for the beautiful articles and comments of Our Lady's messages."

Jeanny Scheer, Luxembourg - "I thank God for the Echo. Our prayer group (about 40

people) rejoices each time it arrives. So far the priests have been pleased with it too."

Joaquim A. de Oliveira, Brazil - "The Echo provides us with spiritual comfort with its news of the Church. We hear so little of Church news. I translate parts of the Echo for friends and religion teachers."

Fra Benedetto, Palestine - I've been receiving Echo for years; it helps me follow the messages which Mary still offers the Church, and to which I am very attached, just as I was attached to Fr. Angelo from whom I received a very important blessing. Keep on producing the Echo; it does so much good for the Church.

Sr. Apostola, Italy - "My fellow sisters and I are deeply grateful for the Echo. We are old and sick (I am 90), but we read it with immense joy. We all pray for you, that you might continue in the noble and holy apostolate of spreading the Echo of Mary."

\*\* A special thanks to our readers who donate to our bank account in Scotland. Please accept our apologies if we are unable to reply personally to express our gratitude.

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.

Villanova, 12 January 2002

True devotion to the Blessed Virgin is holy. It leads us to avoid sin and imitate the virtues of Mary: her deep humility, lively faith, ready obedience, continuous prayer, universal mortification, Divine purity, ardent charity, heroic patience, angelic sweetness, and heavenly wisdom.

St. Louis Grignion de Montfort

\* Our prayers for you! - We invite you all to join in our prayers on the first Saturday of each month for the intentions of our readers (these can be expressed within the silence of your hearts). Once a month Padre Alberto will also celebrate a Holy Mass for the same intention.

## **The Church in Oceania**

"In the present conflict between a 'culture of life' and a 'culture of death', the Church has to defend the right to life from the moment of conception until natural death... It is not a question of the Church seeking to impose her morality on others, but rather of being faithful to her mission to share the full truth about life as taught by Jesus Christ." (Ecclesia in Oceania, 30)

(P. Roxburgh: please email your request to us again)