



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace

83

June 1991

Our Blessed Mother's message of 25 May 1991

Dear Children, Today I invite all those who have heard my message of peace to seriously and lovingly put it into practice. Make it part of your daily lives! There are many people who think they are doing a lot just by talking about the messages, but they do not live them. My Children, I invite you to life, and to change all that is negative in you, so that everything will become positive, so that everything will become life. Dear Children, I am with you and I desire to help each one of you to live, and by living, to witness to the good news. My Children, I am with you to help you and to lead you to heaven. In heaven there is joy, and it is through joy that you can start living heaven right now. Thank you for responding to my call.

MESSAGES OUGHT TO CHANGE OUR LIVES

Our Lady particularly wants us to prepare for the 10th anniversary of Her presence amongst us. I think this preparation includes stopping to reflect about ourselves. Mary stressed: "Many people think they do a lot by talking about the messages, but they do not live them," so it is important that we stop to think about our own response to the message. If we live the messages, we are better able to understand them, and we allow them to transform us. That way, God's peace is able to shine through us for others to see. Peace comes from the very deep of our hearts when we encounter God. If we have this peace we are joyous, and our witness becomes a witness which redeems, which bears good news. Our Lady's call this month, is to encounter God through prayer, so that He can transform us, and others through us. Prayer:

Oh Lord, at the end of May, the month dedicated to our Mother, we pray to You that our hearts may open just like nature opens up in this month of spring and becomes beautiful. We pray to You that in this month we may open our hearts to all the messages received by Our Lady and that they may become part of our beings and thus transform us. Send Your Holy Spirit so that we may all bring to You, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the gift of peace and joy for the ten years of our Mother's presence. May the peace and the joy within our hearts be the peace and joy of all humanity. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Fr. Tomislav Vlasic'

MEDITATION by Padre Remo:

God's Will demands obedience, not talk. What Our Lady has said to those who think they do lots by talking about the messages, Jesus also said about the Pharisees, who talk, but don't act, who build their houses on the sand. Put my message (of PEACE) into practice, lovingly and seriously. Seriously is when we decide to do what She asks of us. Lovingly: "If I am without love, nothing will do me any good" (1 Co 13). This is how we recognize love: "He gave up His life for us" (1 Jn 3.16 & 4.9). "Love is not made up of great feelings, but in accepting the will of God" (St. John of the Cross).

I am with you and I wish to help each one of you because carrying out the message is beyond human capacities, it needs the grace of Jesus Christ. Without His grace we can do nothing: therefore we are asked to pray and it is through prayer that we can discover that even the good news contained in the Gospel is true.

We are also invited to search our consciences. There are no heavenly interventions that serve to wake up men and make them change lives. There are many more people who talk than people who act. There are many people who come and go to Medjugorje; but they do not live the messages - when they return home they live as before. The Medjugorje movement is very big, but the results are not those that heaven had hoped for - groups depopulate because people do not persevere. Young people come to the groups, stay for a while and then disappear... We've got to lead people to consecrating themselves to Jesus and Mary, but with a real and intense consecration.

Speaking of love, Jesus says: "You pretend to love one another," because the only love is His suffering and dying for us. No other love exists. There's a lot of pretending in us, a lot of apparent 'responses' - but our response must be decisive.

(Fr. Remo)

Fr. Slavko's comment:

I would like to suggest that we all look for the negative things in us during this month - in ourselves, in our family, the prayer group and even in the committees, the peace centres, among those who publish things: if they accept others with real joy and peace, in a positive manner, or if they only criticise. I also believe that we Franciscans who work here must ask ourselves how our relation with the bishop is going. There is need to make drastic changes, because there are many negative things that we can change into positive things. But you see, all of this can be done through prayer.

Fr. Slavko

POPE'S PILGRIMAGE TO FATIMA

The Pope visited Fatima in Portugal from 11-13 May, to: "thank Our Lady for having saved him during the attempt at his life of 10 years ago," and for having protected the Church in these years of rapid and deep social change, thus giving rise to new hope for the many people suffering oppression under atheist ideologies. He recalled St. Augustine's response to a group of Christians from his church when the Vandals attacked the city of Hippo: "Do not fear, this is not an old world coming to an end, but the beginning of a new world."

In his prayer of thanks, John Paul II entrusted his hopes and the future of the world to Mary: "Often the men of this century have wanted to possess everything, and in doing so they have lost God... Nonetheless, after many centuries, we now hear from all over Europe the need to return to the Gospel. It is absolutely necessary that the human web of society be reconstructed on Christianity. We believe that man's profound aspirations can find the right answer in Christ and Christ alone. "

The Pope, in his strong convictions, re-proposed these themes of thanksgiving and entrusting our lives to Mary, especially during the prayer vigil at Fatima the night of 12 May: "Thank you oh Heavenly Mother for having lovingly guided the nations to freedom... we greet You as the most perfect image of freedom and liberation of humanity and the cosmos... I urge you dear brothers to persevere in this devotion to Mary... Beloved Mother, help us in this Godless desert where our generation and the generation of our children seem lost, so that they may finally find the divine spring of their lives and there repose. "

The Pope expressed his conviction at Fatima that the liberation of the Eastern Bloc countries was due to Mary's intervention, but he also stressed his worry for the future in an appeal to Mary and to all humanity: "The new situations of the nations and the Church are once again precarious and unstable. There is danger that Marxism may be substituted by another form of atheism, that in cancelling freedom, tends to destroy the roots of human and Christian morals... The nations that have just recently acquired freedom and are now busy constructing their future need You. Europe needs You - from the East to the West it cannot find its true identity without discovering those common Christian roots. The world needs You - to solve the many and violent conflicts that still threaten so many.

May the new nations not re-open the wells of hate and vengeance, may the world not give in to the allurements of that false welfare that mortifies the dignity of man and jeopardizes the world's resources... Mary, watch over man and the new situations of the nations that are once again threatened by war... Watch over the Church, a target for the continuous attempts by the spirit of the world to undermine her. "

(by Paola)

Ali Agca said: "It's a miracle"

I know that I aimed right. I know that that bullet was mortal.. Why are you not dead then? What is this 'Fatima' that they talk about? These were the words that Ali Agca said to the Pope when the Pontiff visited his would-be killer in jail in December of 1983. Cardinal U. Poletti was present during the visit. According to the cardinal, Agca was convinced that the Pope owed his life only to a miracle. The cardinal: "The attempt of the 13th May 1981 is an authoritative and divine confirmation of the events of Fatima. The most authentic interpretation of the facts was given by the would-be killer himself."

MARY: REPEAT THE APOSTLES CREED OFTEN

Besides indicating the Rosary as an indispensable prayer, Our Lady has also called us to say the Apostles Creed before every other prayer.

We have reduced the truths of our faith (Creation, original sin, Christmas, the Resurrection, Heaven, Hell, the devil, the Sacraments) to fables or legends which keep the children happy, or to frighten them to make them behave, while adults coyly smile upon hearing about them (so that even children nowadays are reluctant to believe - how can they believe in Heaven when they have everything a person could ever want?)

On the other hand, what values can these mysteries have when we empty them of their significance - when we reject that love/donation and that daily battle against our corrupted world, to seek the god of profit, pleasure and human glory?

Mary comes to our aid and teaches us to recite: I believe in God, the Father Almighty... not in almighty man. God does not cease to talk to us through world and daily events, to lead man back to His heart. He makes us (man of progress) see ourselves as we are (powerless creatures) in front of calamities where there is no cure: earthquakes; pollution of the earth, the seas and the air; hurricanes; AIDS; cholera; hunger; underdevelopment - for the greater part of the earth.

God says: Are you not afraid of yourselves? Peace comes from God alone. Men need to return to faith in a Father and in that reality that should have been part of God's plans: i.e. brothers in His Son. When in God, not even the worst suffering of a countless number of people, is lost, because it becomes part of the redeeming price of the cross. The poor will be saved, the rich will be lost. New heavens and new earth will be prepared with purification.

Fr.A.

HOW TO DEFEAT THE EVIL ONE

If we look at the many messages in which Our Lady at Medjugorje warns us about Satan, we also realize that She gives us a remedy to defeat him. They are the same remedies found in the Gospel. Let's begin by recalling that the activities of the Evil One (the preferred term in the NT to indicate demons) has two aspects: the ordinary activity we are all subject to. Jesus wanted to be similar to man in everything except sin, and in being so, He also accepted to be subject to this ordinary activity of the devil, otherwise known as temptation. How can we defeat it? Jesus gives us the answer: "Keep watch and pray that you will not fall into temptation" (Mt 26:41).

The Queen of Peace encourages us to pray in all her messages; and She continually warns us about Satan's activities, of the temptations offered by the world and our weak nature.

Then there is Satan's extraordinary activity. Satan has powers, by Divine permission, which are the cause of particular torment. They are usually listed under five forms: external torments, possession, oppression, obsession, infestation. We will come back to this in more detail the next time. Now I want to stress why Our Lady does not insist on these singular forms, but rather on the means at our disposal to defeat him. At times, prayer and vigilance are not enough. Our Lord asks more of us - He asks us to fast, and He especially asks us to

practise the virtues, in particular, the virtues of humility and of charitable love.

These two virtues (humility and charitable love) are typically Christian, and they torment Satan. Satan is completely arrogant, proud and rebellious. There is no doubt that pride is the strongest of vices, so much so that in Psalm 19 it is called "a grave sin". The devil can do nothing when faced with a humble soul. Note that there are two aspects to humility, and these complement each other. They are recognizing ourself as nothing (being aware of our own weaknesses), and trusting in God who loves us and provides for all our needs. The devil knows this, and tempts us accordingly.

The queen of virtues is charitable love, and it has many aspects: donation, donation of self, being meek and understanding... and it is something that the devil does not comprehend. There is also an heroic aspect to this virtue (and perhaps the most difficult precept of the Gospel) that is particularly powerful against the devil's attacks and against any victories that Satan may have had over us. This heroic aspect is forgiving and loving our enemies with all our heart (i.e. forgive and love those people who have hurt us and perhaps continue to hurt us).

I have often had to exorcise people possessed by the devil, and when the exorcism is ineffective, I have had to find the cause that was impeding the action of grace. With the person's help then, I interrogate the person to see if there are feelings of hatred, or if he/she is just holding a grudge against someone; or if he/she is unable to forgive with the heart: a virtue which Jesus demands of us so that He may give us His forgiveness. I ask about love: to see if there is someone who is not loved sincerely; searching among the closest relatives, friends, colleagues, among the living and even the dead. The exercise of looking deeper for a cause is nearly always successful. It must be clear to all that it is useless for me to continue with exorcisms whilst such an obstacle is still on its feet - it must be removed.

I have seen cases where people have forgiven with their hearts, I have seen cases of heroic reconciliation, cases of prayer and mass celebrated for enemies who continued to cause hurt. Once the obstacle is removed, God's grace comes down in abundance.

Let it be clear in your minds that one can be freed of Satan just through the Word of God, and prayer, and the sacraments, and forgiveness, and sincere love - without exorcisms. And remember that exorcisms have no effect if these practices are lacking. I would like to end with a true fact: who are the ones most assailed and attacked by Satan? The youth.

Therefore, their victory over evil is worth double. St. John reminds us of this when he exclaims: "I am writing to you young men who have defeated the Evil One" (1 Jn 2.14).

The Holy Father recalled this phrase during his visit to the island of Sao Miguel in the Azores (11 May 1991) and continued with: "Be strong for the battle. Not the battle against men, but against evil; or better, let's call it by name - against the first author of evil. Be strong in the battle against the Evil One. His tactic is to not reveal himself openly, so that the evil baited by him is developed by man himself.. We must constantly go back to the roots of evil and sin, to get to its hidden mechanisms. Young people, you are strong and you will defeat the Evil One if the Word of God remains in you."

Fr. Gabriel Amorth

Regarding the third secret of Fatima.

I've been asked to express my opinion on the third secret of Fatima, since I have studied and written at length about the subject. We mustn't forget, however, that the text of the third secret has still not been made public. When Pope John XXIII read it for the first time in August of 1959, he also made the main members of the Secretary of State and the Holy Inquisition read it. I have the list of names. After they had expressed their opinion, the Pope dictated a note to his secretary (Msgr. Capovilla, who was also my main informer) that he attached to the envelope containing the secret. The note obviously contained the reasons why he decided not to publish the secret. The same reasons were shared by Pope Paul IV and are shared by our present Pope, John Paul II.

I believe that we must not forget how this type of prophesy is generally conditioned (to man's answer to God's call). The important thing is our conversion, our sincere return to God, a life of prayer. As far as the future events are concerned, some of them have already happened: Russia spread her errors to the whole world, causing wars and persecution; Russia was consecrated to Mary's Immaculate Heart by the Pope and bishops of the whole world on the 25th March 1984; and last, a true fact that we would have thought impossible - the regimes of Eastern Europe have been overturned. There are still some things missing (but we are the protagonists, with our conduct!) and that, in any case, will end with the triumph of Christ prepared by the triumph of Mary's Immaculate Heart. So let us not be curious; it is time for conversion and the Rosary!

Fr. Gabriel Amorth

THE GRACE OF BEING A PRIEST

Max Thurian, well known former monk and theologian from Taizé in France, and now a Catholic priest in Naples, wrote this profound reflection dedicated to priests.

(...) The specific nature, the charism of the priestly ministry, conferred to him with the sacrament of holy orders, is first of all the state of being consecrated to God alone, in a special communion. Then, it means to guide God's people in adoration, in the announcement of the Gospel, in interceding and in sanctification. There has been too much space given to the service a priest gives to a community; because a priest must first of all be a man of God. Before the communal aspect of priesthood (lending services to the community) his personal relation with Christ is foremost; it is the very essence of the charism he receives in the holy orders.

A priest is chosen, first of all, to be completely at God's disposal by means of special grace. It is this grace that then gives rise to the service offered in favour of others. Priesthood, then, is a special communion between the priest and Christ, and a fruit of this communion is service for the benefit of others.

This supreme love through contemplation of Christ must be found again, as it is this that gives a priest his most profound significance. Perhaps there has been too much focus in these last decades on the social and ecclesiastical service that a priest renders to a community, and not enough on his true call which is being chosen for contemplation of

God's love. It is this part of a priest which should be a stimulating example for God's people and a fount for the pastoral activity of a community.

The presbyterial ministry has been rightly reconsidered with relation to episcopacy, diaconship, laymanship; but we must not forget the priestly character of presbyters. A presbyter is not just an elder, someone who holds a responsible position in the community, a specialist in ecclesiastical life, of the word and the sacraments. He is also, and above all, a priest chosen to belong completely to God in view of the liturgy of adoration, of the offering of the people to God in prayer, in the consecration of others and himself through the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

This priestliness, which puts him in a unique, sacramental and contemplative communion with Christ, obviously makes him the man of the Eucharist: he who proclaims the Word of God, who offers the Father the memorial of the Son's sacrifice and consecrates the Body and Blood of the Saviour with the power of Jesus' same words and the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the celebration of the Eucharist is for a priest a fount from where he draws his personal life and all his pastoral activity. It is here that he finds his intimate identity, the essence of his charism, the nature of his ministry, which is above all intimate contemplation with Christ, liturgy of adoration, priesthood that offers to God those entrusted to his intercession and whom he consecrates by means of the power of the Word and His Spirit. In the Liturgy of the Hours (the breviary), the priest continues during the day his personal dialogue with Christ: he is a man of prayer and of the Church. With the psalms he thanks God and fights against the forces of evil, he shares the strength of the sick and the anxiety of those in danger. In the readings of the Bible and of the Fathers, he conforms his spirit and his heart to the thought of God and the Church to then communicate it to others in the course of his pastoral activity. Through intercessions, he presents to God all those who have been entrusted to his ministry, so that they may be transfigured by the Holy Spirit. He exercises his ministry of intercession for all those who have been entrusted to his ministry, he places them in his heart and before God so that they may be enlightened, sanctified, consoled, healed ...

This ministry of incarnation places the priest in a strict communion with the Virgin Mary. The Blessed Virgin received the ministry of intercession at the foot of the Cross, and She maternally intercedes for all Christ's disciples. (Redemptoris Mater)

A man of intercession, the priest is a man who listens. The need to be heard is very great for the man of today, particularly among the youth. When a person is lonely and feels abandoned, and suffers from anxiety, he seeks company: someone to talk to, to confide in, and from whom he may receive consolation and advice. A priest can offer all this and more, because he receives the charism of sacramental absolution that ensures the believers of God's infinite pardon. Through this ministry of reconciliation, a priest communicates the force of the Crucified and Risen Christ, Who forgives and purifies.

In the celebration of the Eucharist (Word and Sacrament), in the Liturgy of the Hours, in intercession, in listening and absolving, a priest is in his true "element"; he revives the charism of his holy orders and renews his identity among God's people. It is there that his personal and pastoral life is born and is nourished. The formation of a priest begins and is renewed in the certainty of being chosen, according to one's will and God's call to live this personal, sacramental and priestly communion with Christ and which can only produce a pastoral action that builds up the Church and reconciles men.

(From "Osservatore Romano", 23 Nov. 1990)

"THIS IS THE VICTORY OVER THE WORLD: OUR FAITH"

The following is a summary of the first two parts of a meditation by Cardinal Biffi:

1. Faith is acknowledging that Jesus came to lead man back to God (not to satisfy our wills). Faith is "man's acceptance of the saving action by God, our Father," in the knowledge that all men are alike in God's eyes: no matter whether a person is right-wing or left-wing, rich or poor, or what his social status is; we are all creatures of God, brothers in Christ. Primarily, it is the acceptance of a fact that that can transform, that involves our destiny; and this fact is the coming of the Son of God amongst us (cf. Jn 1:12).

"The coming of Christ was not destined for a single person or group, but for the whole world. In fact, St. John says: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3.16)

"Two things must be clear:

First, the Son of God did not come to re-order the earth, or teach us how to live better with greater ease, or to guarantee that the earth's riches would be shared more fairly, or to ensure political peace; these are all admirable goals, but they cannot be compared to that great event called incarnation of the Word. To put order in the human family, the mystery of a God who becomes man is not necessary - it isn't necessary, and if it were the case it wasn't sufficient. There is something tragically comical in the hypothesis that the Son of God becomes a man to bring us greater wellbeing, more stable peace and fairer jurisprudence and doesn't succeed. And he doesn't succeed!

But then again, there is nothing among the writings concerning Jesus that even hint that He came for these types of reasons. In the light of this, we can now explain why His irruption into our life was without importance (except where concerning the faith), and in the same sense He left without making headlines: Tacitus wrote two lines about Him, Svetonius wrote two obscure words about Him, Giuseppe Flavio made a quick comment about Him. Except for the community of believers, all His works, schooling and sacrifices did not leave a mark. Jesus wasn't interesting for the newspapers of His time. But if we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, then we must say that He didn't leave a sign in secular circles, not because He wasn't historically interesting, but because He didn't want to. In other words, because He never thought to change the social structure of the time, nor to make the course of events go in any other direction.

Second clarification: The Son of God who becomes part of human life, does in fact, end up radically changing the course of events. He may not have made many headlines in His days, but the history of the universe has been forced to recognize that a new era began with His birth... And it is because man is a unitary being, that if the renewing action that comes from the Risen Christ reaches his heart, then his whole being, his way of acting and judging.. will end up being transformed. Christianity enhances man; it makes him new. Thus nothing that

he does or thinks can be compared to what a non-Christian does and thinks. We cannot believe that the Word of God becomes a man only to nourish the secret religiousness of the individual, whilst leaving human reality unchanged in others. A faith that does not diversify the believer from the others - a socially insignificant faith - could no longer be the enthusiastic faith of the Acts or in the writings of Paul and John.

Identifying the Christian profession with political and social commitments is one of the most clearly described betrayals in the Gospel. Open the Gospel at any page and you will find Jesus talking about two arguments: the Father and the Kingdom: the Father in Heaven, and the Kingdom which is not of this world. On the other hand, it would be far from the truth to affirm that the Son of God came to dismiss man from his social and political commitments; indeed, when man is aware that God is also Father his life's commitments are renewed and deepened as they reflect God's life-giving love.

2. The world loved by God, is also a Christian's enemy

The term 'world' also deserves reflecting upon. St. John says: "God loved the world so much.. (Jn 3,16). Here the world means men who are objectively awaiting salvation in that they are in absolute need of the Word of God and of the grace, if only for the decency of oneself. But St. John also says: "this is the victory over the world - our faith" (1 Jn 5.4). It is obvious here that world means the humanity that opposes God's initiative and tries by all means to suffocate the light. We must keep in mind then, that there exists a world in perennial contrast with the divine will of salvation that will most fatally accompany the entire human history right up to the moment of last judgement. Over these last decades, in fact, it has been nearly completely forgotten. And perhaps this is one of the main reasons behind the great insipidity that has characterized the various theologies and pastoral proposals.

The truth is that the entire Gospel, and in particular the writings of John, insist on warning Jesus' disciples that they will have to deal every day with allurements and oppressions of the world. There are many citations, some of them are: "We know that we belong to God, but the whole world lies in the power of the Evil One" (1 Jn 5.19). "I passed your word on to them, and the world hated them, because they belong to the world no more than I belong to the world" (Jn 17.14). "You must not love this passing world or anything that is in the world. The love of the Father cannot be in any man who loves the world.." (1 Jn 2.15). It is obvious that this is not the world awaiting salvation. The Didake summarizes this spiritual behaviour of the believers in a short prayer: "May the grace come, and the world pass."

But today's society wants us to think that our world is a new paradise, a paradise that has managed to get rid of the snake even. It is obvious then, that authentic Christianity is not given serious consideration.

(Next month: the second and final part.)

JUGOSLAV BISHOPS' COMMISSION
are preparing pastoral directions

In the ordinary session of the Yugoslav Bishops' Conference, held in Zadar from 9-11 April 1991, the following declaration was approved:

"The Bishops will follow the events at Medjugorje... through the persons of the diocesan Bishop, the diocese Commission and the Commission of the Yugoslav Episcopal Conference for Medjugorje. Based on the enquiries done to date, it cannot be affirmed that (the events) concern apparitions or supernatural revelations. In the meantime, the great crowds of faithful which come to Medjugorje from all parts of the world necessitate attention and pastoral care (which will be offered) first by the diocesan Bishop, then by other Bishops, so that a proper devotion to the Blessed Virgin (and concerning) Medjugorje is promoted according to Church Teachings. For this purpose, the Bishops will release a special and suitable liturgical and pastoral directives. Similarly, through its members, the Commission will continue to follow the events and carry out enquiries into the events of Medjugorje."

(From 'Glas Koncila', 5 May 1991)

Distinctions between a revealed and binding faith, and private revelations.

With the title "More Clarifications on Medjugorje" Glas Koncila (official paper of the Croatian Episcopal Conference) thus commented the Bishops' declaration. "The latest declaration on Medjugorje by the Bishops is a classic example of that well-known practice by the Church otherwise called prudence. It should be noted that the Church shows great respect for the facts with its careful evaluation of its own responsibilities, and has as her main interest the spiritual welfare of the faithful. The whole world has to recognize that for 10 years people from all continents, Catholics and non, desirous of knowing what is happening, have been making their way to Medjugorje.

Is it true that Our Lady appears and gives messages? The Bishops, aware of the limits of their responsibilities, declare that "based on enquiries done to date," this, "cannot be affirmed."

We must bear in mind that there are two ways of seeing things when considering the contents and the sense of this declaration:

The 1st point is essential in this case. The contents of the so-called and possible 'private revelations' cannot be compared to the contents of the revealed and binding faith. Thus, neither the Bishop, nor the Pope have the power to infallibly decide that Our Lady really does appear in a particular place, and neither do they have the power to force the faithful to believe it.

The Teachings of the Church are infallible only when it declares that one thing can be found or cannot be found in the revelation that She Herself received up to the end of the Apostolic era, and which is preserved in the Bible and our tradition. That which is not included in the Bible or in our tradition cannot be declared by the Magisterium as doctrine of faith, nor something that must be believed in. It is not, therefore, to be expected that the Bishops can resolve the questions arising from the Medjugorje events in a manner that we could know precisely what to believe or not.

Why then do they carry out such careful enquiries regarding this phenomenon?

They do it because it is their duty to check whether what is happening there and what they proclaim there is in harmony with the truths contained in our faith and with Catholic morals. If they see there is no opposition, that these apparitions and messages are in harmony with the doctrine of faith and the Catholic morality, then they may declare that there are no obstacles to the flow of faithful in that place, nor to the development of spiritual life according to the spirit of those messages. If, on the other hand, they find something opposing, it would be their duty to uncover the trick and impede any abuse. From the new declaration we understand that the enquiries will continue to be carried out, enquiries also regarding the point just mentioned.

The principal part of the declaration, however, make us understand that our Bishops have turned their attention, above all, to the fact that a great number of faithful and other people are going to Medjugorje. The Bishops consider it their duty to make sure that the faith is announced correctly to all those people, that they receive a correct and proper religious instruction, that the Blessed Sacraments be administered correctly and with dignity, and in particular, that the Marian devotion at Medjugorje be developed according to the proper Christian faith.

This position that has been adopted is very positive.

We must, of course, await the suitable liturgical/pastoral directives - as the declaration itself says - for the great assizes of Medjugorje. An old proposal, which Glas Koncila published in its time, will perhaps be realized. That is, it had been suggested that the Bishops' interest for Medjugorje be expressed in two different Commissions. One to continue its enquiries on the supernaturalness of the events, and the other to oversee the gatherings at Medjugorje, to make sure that everything is done in harmony with the faith.

There is the possibility, in fact, that the first of these Commissions will still have to carry out lengthy enquiries and that they may even decide not to emit a definite opinion; whilst taking care of the crowds of people cannot be put off any longer, because the people will continue to make pilgrimages to Medjugorje. For the numerous devotees all over the world, this declaration can serve as an authoritative clarification. In other words, those who will visit Medjugorje for religious reasons from now on, will know that the gatherings held there are carefully and constantly taken care of by the successors of the Apostles.

(Fr. Barnaba Hechich)

MEDJUGORJE YEAR 10, Conference in Florence

In August 1990, at Medjugorje, a girl from Florence came to me to propose a meeting in her city based on prayer, reflections and testimonies, with the theme: "The Facts of Medjugorje."

I judged the idea as being rash and unattainable. She insisted, prayed and organized. That first meeting was held on 5 January 1991, in the church of the Annunciation. I feared scanty participation, but the church was full, and flowing over with people. We prayed with

faith and the Lord touched many hearts. On that occasion someone said to me: "This meeting will open the way for something much greater for Florence."

Not much time had passed when they started talking about a celebration on vast scale, to involve all of Florence, and beyond Florence. The idea took shape thanks to a group of lay people who were particularly touched by the grace of Medjugorje. Various people got together, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Some of them didn't even know each other till that moment. They were providentially gifted with different professional and social qualifications, as if each had been chosen for a specific purpose. They formed a group that took the prophetic name of "Primavera dello Spirito" (Dawn of the Spirit). They prayed and worked very hard, with humility and love, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin. They chose the sports centre for the meeting. The Curia of Florence, as befits the prudence of the Church, chose neither to be directly involved, nor to make any objections. The Cathedral in Florence kindly lent us chalices, about 50 pyxes and vestments for the celebration of Holy Mass.

It was a great success; a success belonging entirely to Our Lady! A young man remarked: "Our Lady called just the right number; the sports centre was full. If She had called less, and there were empty seats, it wouldn't have looked the same." About 15,000 people attended the meeting over the three day period (it has a capacity of 8,000). The participation of the numerous priests was another wonderful grace for the meeting. Participants were devoutly attentive; they listened carefully, prayed intensely and with the heart. They confessed, and with joyful songs they offered up praises to the Lord. Many of those present had not even been to Medjugorje. Someone observed: "Many people had put off their plans to go to Medjugorje due to the unsettled situation in Yugoslavia, but it's as if Our Lady had brought Medjugorje to Florence."

The mass media showed a lot of interest in the conference. Journalists attended two press conferences (specifically organized for them) and were impressed by the meeting, by the way it was organized, and by the attitude of participants (perhaps we should say by the lack of fanaticism). They asked who organized the meeting, and with all frankness we replied: "Our Lady, of course!" as we pointed at the giant poster of her smiling down on the crowd of people as a mother would smile at her beloved Children.

Padre Mario from Radio Maria, Padre Bianchi, Abbe Laurentin, the doctors from the ARPA association, and I reflected on the Medjugorje phenomenon in human, psychological, medical, theological and ecclesiastical terms. But above all, it was a moment of faith, of intense prayer, and an authentic encounter with God; aided by Fr. Jozo's persuasive words, his moving testimony, his prophetic prayer, his unmistakable charism. Vicka held the people's attention and moved their hearts with her words and testimony. The various testimonies of people who had returned to the faith, or had been healed at Medjugorje, roused feelings of gratitude and admiration towards the Mother of God.

Whit Sunday morning was unforgettable with Msgr. Paul Hnilica's presence. He came with a statue of Our Lady of Fatima, which had been blessed by the Pope. Fr. Paul (he prefers to be known simply as Fr. Paul) spoke of his apostolic and charitable work in favour of the Christians in East Europe. The procession with Our Lady, with everyone waving white and pale blue handkerchiefs, and then the consecration of all those present to Mary's Immaculate Heart, the collection of donations for the reconstruction of the churches in the Eastern bloc

countries, the celebration of Mass with everyone writing their intentions on small pieces of paper which were then carried to the altar by Vicka - it was all so wonderful and full of grace. And the Spirit of the Lord was present. The various testimonies will be summarized and published in Echo next month. For now, let me say that the Lord showed us His love also in tangible form with the healing of Anna Conti who had been suffering from osteoporosis, with the gift of the repose in the Spirit for some pilgrims, and many people returning to the faith and the sacraments.

Before returning to Tihalijna, Fr. Jozo said: "OK, very OK! In all the places I've been to so far, I've never seen such a devoted gathering, such profound prayer." During her stay in Florence, Vicka received her daily apparitions in her room in the monastery where she was a guest. At the end of the meeting, she told us how Our Lady had expressed Her immense joy and gratitude for the successful meeting.

Fr. Barnaba Hechich

Extraordinary Healing at Florence

Journalists and correspondents from various TV stations, and including one of the national networks, were present at the meeting in Florence. The Lord, in His goodness, donated Anna Conti with a physical recovery. Anna is a housewife, 51 years old, mother of 2 young men and married to a retired pastry cook. She was suffering from a serious form of osteoporosis and discal hernia - she walked with great difficulty, aided by crutches. She said: "During the laying on of the hands, I felt a cold shiver go down me and then my face flushed. Then I realized that the intense pain had stopped. I feared that it was an illusion, but then I was able to get up - I let go of the crutches and started walking with great ease."

HE BROKE WITH SATANIC ROCK

He's a young long-haired man, tall and pleasant looking. Practically unnoticed, he made himself available for the Irish pilgrims all last summer. He accompanied them up Podbrdo and Krizevac. He prayed with them, spoke about himself and his conversion. When asked to sing during the evening adoration he happily conceded, but he never told the Franciscans in Medjugorje that music had been his vocation. When they found out, they asked him to tell them about his life, his rock and roll group, and his experience in Medjugorje. He thus replied to Fra Slavko's questions:

Q. Your name is Robbie, isn't it? You've been here a long time, yet I don't know you. Please tell me something about yourself.

A. Yes, my name's Robbie Ugrley. My life is much like that of other young people in Ireland, and perhaps all over the world. You see, I come from a broken family. My parents separated, and their separation caused a deep wound in me and in my brothers and sisters.

These wounds cut into me, and they made my infancy an unhappy one. I didn't like studying, but I did finish compulsory school. I received no religious instruction. By nature I am a calm type of person; I like to think and read. I read a lot, you know, and I'm also a bit poetic. Perhaps it was this that helped keep me sane after my parents' separation. I had found a job as a waiter in a pub and I dedicated my spare time to music. Then one day something happened.

Q. Do you want to tell us what it was?

A. Sure. A girl came to work in the same pub; we both had the same shifts. She brought enthusiasm into my life. There was something in her that awakened feelings deep down in my heart. I wasn't in love; it was something else. Something new shone out from that girl and lit up my heart. It was the way she spoke, and her smile, and the way she treated people. We spent time talking things over. She brought peace into my life.

Q. What has this got to do with Medjugorje?

A. This was my first impact with the messages of Medjugorje that had been incarnated into that girl. She had never spoken to me about it before. She laughed and said: "I went on a pilgrimage to a village in Yugoslavia where Our Lady - the Queen of Peace - appears. The Blessed Virgin continually invites us to peace and She gives us peace. I've experienced it. Before I went on that pilgrimage, my life was senseless, I was restless and nothing satisfied me. Then all of a sudden, I felt my spirit immersed in a very strange feeling - it was inner peace." I listened to her and believed everything she said. And me? .. I had not been to church for a very long time - at least 10 years. I thought that the things she said were out of my reach. When she showed me the photos of some of the visionaries and I saw that they were normal looking people, I wasn't sure - to me people who see Our Lady had to be saints, with a halo over their heads.

But that girl continued, undaunted, telling me about her experience, and my heart opened more and more ... but it froze when she said that Our Lady speaks about Satan. Yes, Satan exists, but there was a certain resistance within me that didn't want to admit the reality of his activities

Q. When did you start going to Mass?

A. She asked me to go to Mass, but without insisting... She started telling me about the Mass for youth on Thursdays in Dublin. Her words touched my heart. My idea of Mass was very different to what she had told me. She invited me to go and see, at least once, to get an idea. I accepted because she said she would have come with me and going together with her seemed better. It really was a wonderful experience to see a group of young people pray - it was something strange for me. After two hours they said it was over, but I would have liked it to last for ever, and from then I started going to Mass. For me it was a profound encounter with God - just what I had been looking for.

Q. How and when did you decide to come to Medjugorje?

A. Much time had passed. After all of this, I joined a rock group called Winters Reign - I was a key member. We quickly became popular in Ireland and England, and in Czechoslovakia. According to some, we would have become stars. They loved us

everywhere and the young fans thronged around us. But there were also drugs, alcohol and sex, every possible pleasure just lying at our feet...

Q. I'm sure you realize that this type of music collaborates in direct with Satan. What do you think of this, and what do you think of the young people who listen to this music in pubs and discos?

A. It was very difficult for me - I felt myself caught between two fires: decide for God, who I had discovered thanks to that girl; or turn my back on Him completely. The whole question concerning the group had estranged me from God and I don't know how or how much I had been tied to Satan. All I know is that it was very difficult to pray. When I mentioned the word 'prayer' in a song, my boss screamed at me as if I was a naughty child. Why? he said, We're not in church, this is rock. Concerning the youth, I must say that people who listen to this music, especially heavy rock, cannot pray - it's impossible. It kills man's desire, both of God and prayer. It kills the beautiful and good feelings in man..., and arouses on the other hand, feelings of violence. It stirs up sexual passions and all other passions. That's why many young people turn to drugs and end up killing themselves. I know others who become victims of money and drugs, and end up becoming shattered people.

In the meantime, the desire to come to Medjugorje grew stronger, but I didn't dare ask for a week off because the boss was a severe, calculating type of person. All he could think of were shows and money. But I waited for the right moment, and oddly enough, he gave me a week off. That's how I came to Medjugorje.

Q. Then what happened?

A. Here in Medjugorje incredible things happened to me. In church, during Mass, I experienced God. He was so close to me. I was singing: "God I give myself to Thee, You are my Lord..." and in that very moment I fell onto my knees and felt God's presence. My heart felt it would burst. I just cried and cried. I don't know when Mass finished, I just know that when I went out of the church I felt a different person - I felt new, cleansed, and I felt terribly happy. I kept on praying the entire week - up Podbrdo, on Krizevac. I felt the need for silence. I was in heaven.

When the time came to go back home, I felt a strong resistance within me. I wanted to stay. I cried all the way to Dubrovnik, though I tried to hide my tears. Above all, I didn't want to go back to Dublin where I would have had to give a concert that same night in one of the best hotels in town. The thought of it all: you know, the songs, the music, the passion, totally disgusted me. But I had no choice, so I went. And I sang well. The concert was a success, but my soul and heart felt empty. I went to bed very late, and in the morning when I woke I could feel God's presence; He was close to me, telling me: "Would you like to decide for me and live happily and in peace, even amid suffering, and then be with me in Heaven? Or do you want to turn your back on me, and lose the way and be forever lost?" I had to make a decision. I cried and said: "Father, I don't want to be this way anymore. I want you to be the most important thing in my life." I don't know how long this lasted, but I do know that I fell asleep again and that my sleep was tranquil. I decided to give up that risky life.

Q. So you said farewell to the group?

A. Of course. It was hard; I felt like a betrayer, as I was a key member and the group was

losing me. These thoughts worried me, but I was resolute and I found the strength to tell them. I broke with the group and came back to Medjugorje and have been here all summer (1991).

MEDJUGORJE IN THE EAST AND THE WEST

Letter from Fr. Tadeusz (Thaddeus): "... The fruits of Echo can be seen maturing day by day. Mirkiewicz's little apartment in Cracow has taken on life and is now a real activity centre for Our Lady to reach out into Poland, Slovakia, the Czech territories, and the Soviet Union. The idea of praying twice a week started in this house and has spread to a few hundred people who now pray in two churches in Cracow and other places in Poland. Echo in Polish, Russian, Ukrainian and Lithuanian is prepared here. Martha is responsible for the lot of it: distribution of Echo, religious and catechism books, rosary beads. People visit the apartment nonstop in search of something that talks about God. A statue donated by Germans left from this house on its way to Ukraine via Slovakia; and it is still in Slovakia! On its arrival it was greeted by about 30,000 people, and they can't part with it. We will send another one to Ukraine, that Our Lady will surely provide for us.

In Torun our brothers send Echo also to Russia, giving it to the Russians who come to the markets here. Our brothers from Torun were also invited to Russia to start teaching the first notions of catechism - many Russians do not even know how to make the sign of the cross. It is quite moving to see these brothers in their encounter with the Lord. Fifty priests from Poland will be going to Russia with the official intention of working with the Poles... "

(Ivano P adds: There are new apostles in Our Lady's 'chain of hearts' who bring rosary beads, books, etc, to Moscow more frequently. An English Jew, converted to Catholicism, takes 60 kg of material each month by himself. On the 1st May, one of Mary's houses in Russia received a statue of Our Lady of Fatima plus a few cases of rosary beads - what joy for these brothers! Pray for Germany - many Marian movements are in a storm, but She is the Victorious One!)

The preparations for Radio Maria are at a good point. In the meantime two pilgrim statues of Our Lady of Fatima are visiting the families so that Torun may become a bridge of evangelization for Russia. There are many conversions. One person, during the presence of Mary, regained her sight. There are many prayer groups and people from these will be helping with Radio Maria.

There are many technical obstacles.. but Our Lady always wins, even if at the last moment. Thanks to Echo, we now have a telephone, a fax and a computer. But there are still so many problems. A small apartment for the radio station has to be restored and another miniature apartment left to us by a woman is in need of a total overhaul. We need \$35,000 - and inflation here reaches as much as 1000%. We have to construct the transmitting tower - it will cost about \$17,000. We humbly count on your help.. (18 May 1991)

(On the 27 May, we sent a further Lit. 10 million, from the donations received by the readers of Echo.)

