



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace 125

February 1996 - St. Peter's Chair - Yr. 12 #2

Christmas 1995 message:

Dear children, Also today I rejoice with you and I bring little Jesus to you that He may bless you. I invite you, my children, to make it so your life is united to Him. Jesus is the king of peace and only He can give you the peace that you seek.

I am with you and I present you to Jesus in a special way, now in this new time in which one must decide for Him. This is a time of grace. Thank you for responding to my call.

How to decide for Jesus in this "new time?"

1. Marija said that on Christmas day Our Lady came with baby Jesus and was very happy. The Queen of Peace came with Jesus, the King of peace, to bless us and give us His peace: peace on earth (peace which He gives to His disciples at the hour of passion to help them) I leave you peace, I give you my peace. Peace which is greater than all knowledge, and which must rule in our hearts (cf. Col 3).

Peace is a gift greater than all gifts; it is restful because it offers God's security to those who seek it: Shalom! It is a gift that everybody wants, but only Jesus, King of Peace, can give you the peace which you seek.

2. This is why Our Lady invites us to live in a way so our lives are united to Jesus, like branches on the vine: without me you can do nothing...To remain in Him His words must remain in us (Jn 15). If a man loves me he will keep my word and we will come to him and make our home with him (Jn 14). This is commonly called being in God's grace. We need to continually draw from the fount of grace. That means prayer and the Sacraments: the Eucharist where we are united to Jesus' offering, and His Word which is our food.

At Adoration we become His friends and fall in love with Him, and at confession we receive His forgiveness and the strength to start again. Prostrated before His cross we learn to love like Him. A similar encounter with God makes us new again, it makes us see what God wants from us and we receive the strength to do His will, and time and energy is multiplied for the many good works.

3. As always, Mary ensures us that She is with us and that She presents us to Jesus to be protected and

strengthened by Him. Why now in a special way, in this new time where one must decide for Him? This new time is the time of the great trial in which the Woman, with Her children, fights the dragon (Rev 12:13, 17). The devil, knowing that his time is short, will produce false signs and prodigies (as we can see)... to seduce if it were possible even the elect; while the Son of man will call his servants bearing the seal of the living God from the four corners of the earth (cf. Mt 24:24; Rev 7:3; 20:8-9).

We must make a decision that will bind us to Him: you are either with Me or against Me! (cf. Mt 12:30) because only Christ wins and so we will win with Him. He, our God, will care for our needs and fill us with peace and security, fullness and abundance. If we decide for Him all the ways are open to us: O taste and see that the Lord is good (Ps 33) the psalmist tells us. When we take Jesus into our boats all the storms are calmed. So let us say: Here I am, and He will be with us. You too, decide for love (20 Nov. 1986).

It is also a decision to stay with the Church in this time of bewilderment because these are evil days (Eph 5:16); not with an "idyllic church" (a temptation by Satan which would lead us to being another sect), but with the Church of Rome, in filial obedience to the Pope: symbol of unity among the members of Christ. He who remains faithful to the Pope will be spared in the general confusion which has already begun, because the forces of hell will not prevail against the Church of Peter.

4. This is a time of grace. Every day of Mary's guiding presence truly is grace. Let us recognize the time of her visit so as not to be excluded from her peace (Lk 19:42,44).

In this time of wide-spread apostasy, the heavens have opened thanks to Mary and graces are showered down upon us. And you will see greater works than these. He who places his trust in God and accepts His Mother's call knows this only too well.

Fr. Angelo

Message of 25 January 1996:

Dear children, I invite you today to decide for peace. Pray to God to give you true peace. Live peace in your hearts, my children, and you will understand that peace is a gift from God.

Dear children, without love you cannot live peace. The fruit of peace is love and the fruit of love is forgiveness. I am with you, my children, and I invite you all to forgive first of all [those] in your family, and then you will be able to forgive the others. Thank you for responding to my call.

Above all, peace and forgiveness in family

Fr. Slavko phoned in to Radio Maria from Uganda, for the explanation of the message: a follow up of the Christmas message where Mary invited us to be united to Jesus so we might have peace.

1. Now in this first message of the new year Mary invites us to decide for peace. Nothing can come of anything without this decision. Not even God can give us peace if we do not decide for it. With peace come also respect, defence, love and service in favour of life, the Pope says in *Evangelium vitae*.

2. There is a second condition to having peace, though. It is praying to God so He might give us peace, for He is the true peace and can donate it. At times we expect peace from others, but true peace is God's

gift: I leave you my peace. Don't think that peace can be given by others; open your hearts instead to Mary's words. Why then do we still not have peace despite the prayers, the Masses and the fasts? Because, despite everything, there has not been a radical decision or constant prayer.

3. Mary tells us what the consequences are of having peace in us. From peace comes love. Without love there cannot be peace, and vice versa. And: from love comes forgiveness. Therefore, our will to desire peace must embrace all the people and situations around us. A person cannot want peace and at the same time exclude love and forgiveness from his life. Our decision cannot be a divided one, but must be a decision for God and for all that He wills.

4. Our Lady is with us, and as a Mother, She aims at concrete things. Peace must begin first of all in the family, by forgiving family members. We are deceiving ourselves if we think we have peace and love, but are unable to love foremost our family or community. It is most difficult to forgive and offer peace within the family, especially when there is someone who has wronged us, but we must take this step; then the rest will

be easier. Of course, God wants to give us

peace, but our collaboration is necessary. St. Augustine said: "He who created you without you cannot save you without you."

May this message accompany us during Lent: it will both stimulate and motivate us, and begin to heal many relations in the family, the Church and in new relations.

UT UNUM SINT!

Open wound in Christ's Body: celebrating separate Eucharists

For Christians to be credible, Unity of the Churches is a must: As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (Jn 17:21).

The Pope said at the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (17 January) that the worst sign of the division among Christians is the separate Eucharists. To be able to celebrate together the Lord's Supper, reconciled and in full communion, is the object to which all the initiatives of the ecumenical movement are oriented.

Reflecting on the readings from Revelation, proposed by the mixed Committee as a common reflection for the week, the Pope thus spoke about the history of division: After their first fervour, the Churches are now living in an atmosphere of tepidity and religious indifference. They have adopted attitudes of self-sufficiency and pride: "For you say, I am rich ... and I need nothing" (Rv 3:17). What is worse is that they are not aware of their sad plight. ... This is why the invitation to acquire "white garments," like those worn to receive Baptism and which symbolize purification and new life, is clearly addressed to them. The Pope then pointed out that the initiative of unity comes from God Himself: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." He knocks. He wants to be in communion with the master of the house shut up in his home! "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with

me" (Rv 3:20). He then expressed his eagerness for the day when all Christians will be reconciled and in full communion and able to share in the same Eucharist. (...) How important it is to persevere in prayer! Prayer both expresses and nourishes the hope of full communion in faith, in life and in bearing witness together to the Gospel of Jesus during the third Christian millennium. It is the true source of the quest for full unity.

In stressing the urgency for unity, the Pope praised the various steps taken by the ecumenical movement: dialogue with the Orthodox Church, a common declaration of faith for Churches of the East and the Assyrian Church and the dialogue with Christians of the Reformation, "marked by deep commitment, both fruitful and full of promise... that has brought to light unexpected possibilities for resolving these questions."

Ecumenical dialogue put to the test in Russia

The ecumenical dialogue has made steps ahead in Russia and has won over some of the 600 popes from and near Moscow who were summoned by Patriarch Alexei II on 21st December. During the meeting there were violent reactions by the nationalists and ultra-traditionalists who go against ecumenism. They accuse the movement of "propaganda in favour of the uniates (a derogatory term for those in the east who are faithful to the Pope) originating in the Orthodox Church by the Crypto-catholics who are manoeuvred by the West."

To be more precise, the accusations are made against the community founded by Fr. Men (the priest killed in Moscow in 1990) and Blagoviest (Good News) Radio of Moscow where both Catholics and Orthodox faithful work together and which continues to gain popularity. This radio station is financed mostly by Fr. Werenfriend Van Straaten's Aid to the Church in Need. "The aim of the radio station is to make the Gospel known by people in a society where every sense of religion has gone lost," says the station's manager, Fr. Ivan. "It is not a diocesan, nor an ecclesial radio; simply a Christian radio which attempts to face the problems with an open mind. It seems that for some it is more important to be Orthodox or Russian than it is to be Christian. Someone obviously wants us out."

During the meeting, Patriarch Alexei spoke harshly about the pro-Catholic popes, saying that no one would hold them back should they decide to leave the Orthodox Church: it is known that the Patriarch is pressured by the right wing conservatives and the Communists who are gaining ground anew and who continue to find new reasons to attack him and invite him to resign.

So the time is still not ripe for the historical meeting between the Pope and Alexei II which had been planned for June 1996 in Hungary. "A new date and place are yet to be decided," declared the Vatican's spokesman, Navarro Valls. However, one encouraging note is the meeting in Rome - after a 5 year freeze - between a delegation of the Russian Church, headed by the Metropolitan of Moscow, Kirill, and the Counsel for Christian Unity headed by Card. Cassidy on 12-13 January. The watchword: intensify dialogue, but avoid every form of Catholic proselytism in Russian territory. The Metropolitan also met with the Pope.

"God's madmen": tribulations for Catholics in Byelorussia

The same mistrust for the work of Catholics hasn't spared Byelorussia either where most of the priests are foreigners (mostly from Poland). They are seen as emissaries of the Vatican or of a foreign power and the government has introduced severe restrictions on them: their presence is tied to a 1-year permit and they are not allowed to move out of their assigned parish. "It shows the unfriendly attitude of the Orthodox hierarchy towards Catholics, due to the 'historical-canonical territory assigned to orthodoxy,' " said the 80 year-old Cardinal of Minsk, Kazimierz Swiatek, who was in Rome.

"It has even been forbidden to shake hands with Catholic priests. They are seen as intruders despite every

effort on our part to overcome the existing barriers and to initiate not only ecumenical dialogue, but also constructive co-operation... Our mission consists in [the work of] new evangelization, for which we need to use the two languages: Russian for the major part and Polish for the diocese of Grodno which once belonged to Poland. This work, though, is possible only through constant commitment and dedication on the part of the clergy. ...

During a visit to a distant parish I asked a young priest who had just arrived from Poland who it was that forced him to come to such an isolated place. He replied: "I'm one of God's madmen." Fortunately, we have many of these so-called madmen." The Cardinal hopes to see the Pope in Minsk for the 6th centenary celebrations of his cathedral.

Seeing the distress of our brothers from the East helps us see why we need to pray and offer penance in favour of the unity desired by Jesus, and to be united among ourselves!

Taizé youth want "poor and simple Church"

"We do not like the Church to be severe, so we should not be severe with her. Let us instead lovingly share the burden of the Church which is entering the new time of deprivation. Adorned with essentiality she gains credibility and trust. When, in the profound simplicity of the Gospel, the Church is close to our fragile hearts, it takes only a few words to transmit the faith in Christ."

These words were pronounced by Frère Roger in Poland at the conclusion of the annual meeting: five days of prayer and soul-searching attended by 70,000 young Europeans. It was significant that at Mass, celebrated in the Cathedral of Wroclaw, the Archbishop Cardinal Gulbinowicz sat among the faithful. A group of young people who had strayed from the Church heard the message on TV and phoned Frère Marek, the Polish "brother" of the Taizé community, to tell him of their decision to return to the faith. What was it that made thousands of young people dare the freezing temperatures, to settle for a meagre meal or cup of tea, or remain seated on wooden planks for the prayer? Without a doubt it was freedom that makes man decide for unconditioned love, and a need, the intensity of which increases with the knowledge of God's love.

Pope takes first step towards Mons. Gaillot,

the Bishop of Evreux who was suspended last January for his open dissent with the Church, by receiving him for half an hour on 21 December. In the meeting, which was "cordial and without reproachment," the Pope expressed his hope to see him work always more for the ecclesial community. The Bishop said: "My hope is to continue working with the associations of the excluded." The Pope emphasized: "You are a Bishop and you must find a bond with the other Bishops."

To the journalists Gaillot later said that he noted in the Pope a desire to find a solution before his visit to France in Sept.

Change of attitudes in Greece?

Our Greek translator writes: "After a period of hostility towards the Holy Father, things are changing. Patriarch Parthenos of Alexandria, who recently appeared on Greek TV during his visit, used expressions of admiration for the Pope and his two encyclicals on unity. That's not all. The meeting between Patriarch Bartholomew and the 150 bishops in Lourdes has been inspiration for many radio transmissions in Greece in favour of unity. These are followed by many Orthodox faithful.

(Sr. Despina)

"Give children a future of peace!" after so much violence

The children: last year the Pope wrote them a letter, this year he dedicated his message for the World Peace Day to them, with the above theme. The Holy Father addressed "men and women of good will, inviting them to help children grow in an environment of authentic peace, being their right and our duty." With a note of sadness the Pope then observed how in the past year the rights of innocent lives were violated.

[In the last decade 1.5 million children died in armed conflicts, 4 million were left invalid, blind, or with brain damage, 5 million became refugees, 12 million were uprooted from their homelands, many tortured or made to watch all forms of violence, many used by adults to commit violence... In Ruanda, they even executed others of their same age. Then there are the cases of denutrition, sicknesses and abandonment which are so common among the poor peoples.] And how many other forms of violence, less noticeable, but no less terrible...

"When children are assisted and loved they themselves become protagonists of peace and makers of a world of fraternity and solidarity. If the family is where children are first introduced to the world, then the family must be their first school of peace... where they are to learn about the history of peace, and not only about the wars that were won or lost. They must be offered examples of peace and not of violence! Peace is God's gift, but it depends on man's acceptance of it to construct a world of peace, which is possible only if men's hearts become simple like those of children. This "becoming small" is an aspect of Christianity which is both profound and paradoxical..."

In St Peter's Square on 1st January the Pope exclaimed: "The children of the earth are the promising new shoots of the third millennium: for their future they call upon the leaven of peace, the legacy of a more united and fraternal world. Let the world, in such great need of peace, listen to their plea! Children embody the human family's hopes, its expectations and its potential. They are witnesses to and teachers of hope, a sentiment which they live with joyful enthusiasm. Let us not disappoint the hope in their hearts, let us not stifle their expectation of peace!"

Queen of the Family!

The Litanies of the BVM represent a worthy crown of praises and titles with which Christians entrust themselves to Mary, asking Her to: "pray for us." John Paul II has added another invocation, the 50th: "Queen of the Family." It was his concern for the salvation of the family that provoked the decision. The 49th, "Queen assumed into heaven," was added in 1950 by Pius XII to proclaim the dogma of the Assumption.

"Let what you say be simply yes or no" (Mt 5:37).

The Holy Father's example: Amid many reticent, hypocritical and complying diplomacies, the Pope openly condemned nuclear experiments which are an expression of the culture of death, even though shortly after he was to meet with the President of a country which promotes them. When he would later shake hands with the president it could be said that he did not make compromises with the truth.

Audacious witness in climate of surrender

Fr. Daniel Ange, a true witness to Christ's Gospel, is the founder of the school of evangelization called "Youth-Light" which works all over the world to help young people discover and deepen their faith. Prior to this Fr. Daniel spent 13 years in the African desert, and 8 in a hermitage in the French Alps. In the interview Fr. Daniel calls the Meeting in Manila the "epiphany of the third millennium," to which the mass media in France gave little coverage [not only France] and which he says goes to show the imbalance in information. He stresses: "It also shows Jesus' sense of humour who allowed for the gathering of 4 million people around the Pope whom the majority of the French media see as a persecutor!"

The Pope - courage of the prophets

Q. What do you expect from the Pope's visit to France next year, for the international youth meeting?

A. I hope in a fantastic awakening of the faith for the Church in France. It all depends on how the Bishops prepare for it. It is an unheard-of grace; do we wish to take advantage of it? With my Belgian origins, I was deeply sorrowed by the coldness with which the Pope was greeted in Belgium. It goes to show how decadent the Church in Europe has become.

The latest documents of John Paul II are extraordinarily Spirit-filled. In this youthful enthusiasm of the Pope we see the breath of the Fathers of the Church. They are beautiful documents which prepare for the third millennium. However, in a full church I found only two people who had read *Evangelium vitae* (Echo 120): the magnificent hymn to life launched against the culture of death; likewise with the two master pieces *Ut unum sint* and *Oriente lumen* (Echo 120 & 122).

Q. What is more dangerous for the Church: totalitarianism of the classic type such as Communism, or materialism of today's Western world?

A. Totalitarianism of the ideology of death diagnosed by John Paul II in Denver and in his *Evangelium vitae*: a phenomenon which can be compared to Nazism, having nearly the same origin. There is a lack of courage in the Church. In this context of cowardice John Paul II decidedly stands out because he has the audacity of the prophets.

Q. In the encyclical '*Evangelium vitae*' we read of civil disobedience before phenomena such as abortion and euthanasia...

A. We make a vow of martyrdom [in the sense: testify with one's own life] and the simple fact that we are Christians is enough to ban us from the core of society. John Paul II calls us to imitate the martyrs of the Eastern bloc, whose courage - as witnesses of the faith - opened up a gap in the wall of communism. Today's generation is called to martyrdom by refusing to side with the ideology of death. It often happens that in schools young Christians are despised, ridiculed, labelled as believers and at times even made to repeat exams.

Q. Is there not a bloodless form of martyrdom today by means of moral lynching or through the media?

A. Yes, in fact, John Paul II evokes martyrdom in all his documents. In Santiago de Compostela in 1989 the Pope expressed his desire to honour the martyrs. More recently, in his *Oriente lumen*, he had the audacity to propose the common canonization of martyrs of Communism to the Orthodox. We are back

in the times of the first Christians with new models of courage. The multiplication of saints' causes is important; it is the sanctification of a person that makes the stars glow brighter in our night.

Chastity - miracle of grace

John Paul II is eager to give saints to the local Church, for every state of life; there is a precise sense in each one. In sanctifying the martyrs of Communism and Nazism he gives value to courage. Anything small, like the Gaillot affair, makes people forget the Church of heaven. In the western world there is a plot to create total silence around God. Yet it is being close to God that determines our real happiness, but the world has forgotten God.

Q. What anti-bodies can be used against the present virus of death?

A. Without the Holy Spirit the present world has so hardened that it cannot go on. In Rwanda, where hell broke loose, there have been miracles of holiness: some who sang the Magnificat while being murdered were found intact months later when their bodies were dug up. We must return to the gifts and charismas of the Holy Spirit, especially with regards to chastity, to recreate Christian life. Recently, thousands of young people have been committing themselves to pre-marital chastity: in the USA, Canada, Brazil, Poland and Italy. This went practically unnoticed by the media. These days chastity is impossible without the miracle of grace, i.e. without a personal inter-vention by God. One cannot be humanly Christian, only divinely Christian. This will defeat conformism of the pagan environment.

To counter theological laxity: a return to tradition

Q. There should be a specific formation to counteract the present-day trends of atheist ideology...

A. Precisely, the drama of today's Church is the theology of suspicion; it's making crowds of Christians pass over to the "New Age." There are books on Jesus which are practically heretic. It is important to note that it is the theological laxness in the western Churches, and not the magisterium of Peter, that impedes unity with the Orthodox! When they sadly note that the Catholic Bishops do not react before the errors of the modern world, they seek and then discover that there is one who does react, and it is the Bishop of Rome. When he publishes an encyclical they say it is Peter who speaks.

The Orthodox are scandalized by the fact that so-called Catholics criticize the Pope. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, which contains numerous references about the traditions of the Eastern Churches, was accepted with relief by numerous Orthodox priests. Patriarch Bartholomew I gave it a positive review and the Patriarch of Moscow, Alexei II, had it translated into Russian.

The Orthodox have a strong sense of tradition which has immunized them against our microbes. Reaction could make the Orthodox Church even harsher, out of fear of being contaminated by western laxness. It urgently needs to find its great missionary streak of pre-Communism times. I can't help thinking of the dramatic situation of the East being invaded by our viruses of death and the sects. Christians of the west and the east must join forces to combat the invasion of sects and the New Age. (by Denis Lensel: from *L'homme nouveau*, Paris, 16.7.95)

Touching hearts

Mary's secret

Without love you can do nothing. - If you live my messages the others will realize and there will be no further need for words.

If you pray and fast with your heart, the ice in the hardest of hearts will melt and conversion will be easy for all those who wish to accept it. - With prayer and fasting you can stop even wars and natural catastrophes. - All forms of agitation come from Satan. - Defeat him with the Rosary in your hands. - Discover in the others the deceit of Satan - May love be your only means. (From the messages of Medjugorje)

Work and pray; in silence pray; love and pray : Do not argue, do not want to be right, but remain silent - Do not judge, do not condemn, but love - Do not reason, or want to know, but surrender and believe - Do not be troubled, do not keep yourself busy, but contemplate (pray) - Do not get worked up, do not worry, just have faith.

When you talk, God is silent, and you say the wrong things. - When you argue, God is forgotten, and you sin.

When you reason, God is humbled, and you think useless things. - When you rush and are agitated, God is driven away, you are in the dark and you trip and fall.

When you judge a brother, God is crucified, and you judge yourself. - When you condemn a brother, God is dead and you condemn yourself. - When you disobey, God is distant, and you die.

Mary's secret explained

No one can convert someone else to God. Only God can do that. You are not asked to do, but to love. There are already too many doing what is not God's will; pray and offer yourself for the conversion of sinners.

If one of your brothers is far from God, start praying for him, offer penance and fasts for him. If you meet him, love him; love Jesus in him; see Jesus imprisoned who wants to get out to heal him. He is sick because he doesn't have God, because he can't feel God in his heart.

You can make Jesus rise in him with your love! Do not speak, do not oppose him, do not argue. Contemplate Jesus in him and silently pray for him. Listen to him and let him give vent to his pain and anxieties, let him express his ideas though they may be wrong. Love him the way he is, without judging, or condemning, or interrupting. Justify him before God; pray for him to be healed; offer yourself to God for him; be patient; give him your time, your friendship, your help. If you have little time to give, love him intensely in that time. Nothing else.

While you are silent God speaks to him, while you pray God heals him, while you love God's love can work. All barriers will soon fall down to leave place for reflection, for a liberating cry, for conversion, for a new joy, a new trust and a light that before was unable to enter. You have done nothing, but your brother who was dead is now risen, he who was lost is now found.

News from the blessed land

Village for war orphans in Medjugorje

The Village is being erected in a large area about 2 km beyond the school. It was a nice surprise to see four houses already finished and being lived in. Each has its own bath facilities and can accommodate nine persons. Fr. Slavko celebrated Holy Mass in one of these houses, surrounded by a group of children of varying ages (the first to arrive) and the assistants: about 20 people. Then the happy youngsters carried a blessed statue of the Queen of Peace into each of the houses. Fr. Slavko told us how the littlest ones were in a pitiful state when they arrived, but that now they are happy and settled in.

"In January 1995," tells Fr. Slavko, "we began work on this village for orphans and abandoned children. We bought the land (41,000 sq.m.) from the Shire of Citluk: We will call it 'the Mother's Village' because mothers today are in crisis and so the children are too; too many children are being abandoned, because of war and conflicts within the family. Four houses are already completed and two of these are being lived in. Other children are on their way. Three nuns and a mother of a Franciscan monk will be taking care of them.

We are also building a large preschool for the children from the parish and the orphans - we don't want them to be isolated. There will also be a house for the nuns, a chapel and an office building. Once these are completed we will build other houses for orphans and one for unmarried teenage mothers and perhaps one for the elderly.

So far the houses we have built bear names chosen by the benefactors: Bethlehem: Belgium pilgrims; Bluettenblaetter (sprout): Fondation for Infancy, Switzerland; Petals: Lichtenstein; Licht Mariens (Mary's light): Austria. The preschool will be entitled: St. Therese of the Child Jesus; its benefactors wish to remain anonymous. The Village will have gardens and sports fields.

The message of peace is an invitation to create good conditions for life: "where life is respected and where people love one another is where life is defended and served. This is the beginning of peace" (John Paul II in Evangelium vitae). When and how it will all be done depends on the goodness of our benefactors. So far so good."

(Send contributions to: Fr. Slavko, Zupni Ured, 88266 Medugorje, B-H, via Croatia.)

On Jelena Vasilj ...

She spent Christmas in Medj., then went back to Rome, accompanied by her sister and a cousin, to finish her theological studies at the Università dell'Angelicum. Her wisdom and depth of thought impress many. I asked her: "What does Our Lady teach you in this time, with the locutions?" She replied: "God is present in every part of our life, in the smallest of our daily actions and even in the material and seemingly insignificant things. He gives Himself fully to us every second of the day and we erroneously limit our attention to Him only in precise moments. Of course there must be times where we stop for Him, but we must not cease being open to Him every second. This way we will be made richer for the constant gift of Himself and even the briefest instant will be loaded with immense value. That is how the Virgin lived on the earth; it was a continuous communion with God."

Jelena is 23 years old. She has not decided on her future. Of herself she says: "It is important for me to live the present in fullness. I am not worried about my future because it is in God's hands, nor if I marry or not, for God already fills my heart. Each woman is called to live maternity, but there are a thousand ways of doing this, not just in the carnal sense. I learn from Mary to be mother of souls, even when my head is buried in books. The world does not understand this reality and thus it dies for the lack of maternity..."

(Sr. Emmanuel)

* **Spiritual retreats in the Regina Pacis house.** Fr. Slavko started these two years ago: five days of prayer and fasting on bread and water at Mary's school. The young people who have so far participated say they are incredibly fruitful. [More than 200 people thus prepared for Christmas 1995 in four different turns. A further three turns are programmed for Lent. Translations provided.] For information write: Zupni Ured, 88266 Medjugorje, Bosnia- Herzegovina, via Croatia. Fax 387-88642339

Healed after Communion

Hilary Andrews, 42 years, from England tells how she was healed during a Mass in Medj. "I had suffered from rheumatoid arthritis for 21 years. I was in and out of hospital for most of 1994 without much improvement. 1995 went a little better but I suffered bouts of depression and severe pain. I was confined to a wheelchair for several months; I gradually got better but I had great difficulty going up and down stairs and standing. ... I had no energy; could not even comb my hair, and I felt useless and a burden on my family.

I found the journey there terribly long and difficult: my ankles were swollen and blue by the time we arrived. I struggled to Mass on Friday 6th October, wondering how I would hold out till the end of Mass, but five minutes after receiving Holy Communion I felt the pain slowly drain away. Then I felt like standing tall and stretching my whole body. I felt as light as a feather, then I felt a great surge of energy rush through my body. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I told my father: "I think something special happened to me in the church. Look, I can bend my knees," and I stretched my arms over my head and ran up and down steps.

That very night I climbed to the top of Krizevac and touched the base of the cross and gave thanks to the

Lord." (Reduced from her testimony given at the Rectory of St James)

* **Fr. Slavko, accompanied by Mirjana, left on 15th January for Africa.** First stop: Mauritius, whose population is very sensitive to the Medj. message after Cardinal Margeot's visit to the Shrine. They will then visit the isle of Reunion. On 22nd Fr. Slavko will proceed on his own to Uganda. Also Cardinal Wamala's visit to the Shrine last year has proved fruitful.

* **Vicka departed mid January for Brazil,** where she will stay 2-3 weeks with Sr. Elvira from the Comunità Cenacolo ("Upper Room" Community) for the opening of a new community house for youth in difficulty. Then to Florida to visit the St. Augustine community house in Miami. Many are anxious to hear Vicka's testimony.

* **Fr. Jozo, looking worn out, has returned from his December voyage to England.** He spoke about Mary's messages and Her role in the Church today. He was met everywhere by attentive crowds. In private, he also met the Anglican bishop, Rev. Frank Seargent, and Dr. Richard Marsh who heads the international ecumenical committee. The latter showed Fr. Jozo his rosary beads from Medj. Fr. Jozo spoke in the famous Anglican church of St. Martin in the heart of London, where Fr. Robert Llewelyn concluded the evening by telling how there are two Rosary groups in his parish. "We don't want the Catholics having all the best things," he said. Fr. Jozo, who was on the move for most of the year, has no plans for further voyages. This will leave him freer to follow the pilgrims.

* **Confession heals "leprosy"**

In 1983 Mary said: dedicate the first Saturday of the month to reconciliation. Reconciliation means that every shadow of ill-feeling, of tension or of division must go; it means total forgiveness. And confession can do miracles.

Pascal, 42 years, from France, abandoned God and the Church soon after his first Communion, but one day his wife dragged him to a meeting on Medjugorje and he was impressed by it. He tells: "I went to confession and the priest had to listen to 30 years of horror... I was truly astounded though to discover that I was then healed. I had been suffering for 9 years from a terrible form of purulent acne: horrible pimples on my face and chest which left ugly scars. Since I confessed it has all gone, except for a scar or two. Now I pray and go to Mass every Sunday. The hatred and bitterness has gone; now there is immense joy in my heart."

* **Pilgrims ask the visionaries many questions** about present-day problems: on divorcees remarrying, on homosexuals, on priests marrying, on women priests, on reincarnation and Islam and Buddhism, on catastrophic prophecies and the return of Christ, on apparitions, on abortion and on ecumenism... Mary, who partakes in our suffering, responds: In the Gospel you will find all the answers... do what the Church teaches you. On these problems the Church has already made herself clear, and the mandate comes from Christ. Nothing can be added to what she has already said.

All families should have a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, one of the best works under the pontificate of John Paul II. Mary has said of this Pope: He is my dearest son, whom I chose for these times (25 August 1994).

(From the diary of Sr. Emmanuel)

* **The Feast of the Immaculate** saw great crowds of pilgrims arrive from Croatia, Italy, America, France, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Belgium and Argentina. Many brought aid with them. In the afternoon on Podbrdo the Rosary was recited in 9 languages. The Italian national TV was present for the filming of a documentary on Medjugorje and on Sr. Elvira's Comunità Cenacolo

(Upper Room Community) with moving testimonies by the youth.

* **Christmas** - the atmosphere was one of great peace among the faithful who had arrived from many parts of the world. The most numerous were the Italians, the French, the North Americans, the Austrians and the Germans. 3,000 people took part in the prayer vigil which began at 10 pm and ended with the midnight Mass. The Croatian TV, the Associated Press and Reuter all transmitted the various services. Some ministers from the Croatian government were present.

* **New Year** - 3,000 young people, mostly from Italy and the USA, gathered for the vigil which began at 10 pm. It was beautifully animated by the youth from Sr. Elvira's Community. They all greeted the new year in silence, then participated in the Holy Mass which ended at 1.30 am. About 40 young people prepared for the new year with a retreat at the Domus Pacis retreat house.

* **The Seminar on Prayer and information**, to be held at Hotel Alga in Tucepi, will begin at 7 pm on Sunday 17th March with Holy Mass celebrated by Fr. Leonard Orec. It will end on Thursday 21st with departure for Medjugorje at 9 am, a meeting with the press, lunch and a visit to the Apparition Hill and Sr. Elvira's Community. Each day of the retreat will begin with prayer at 7.30 am, a meeting at 9.00, lunch at 12.30, a meeting at 3 pm, the Rosary at 5.15 pm, Holy Mass at 6 pm, then in the evenings either adoration or a meeting with one of the fathers from Medjugorje (Slavko, Jozo, Miljenko, Ivan). The themes: The Word of God in Our Lady's messages (Kurt Knotzinger); With Our Lady in the Third Millennium (Fr. Rupcic); Prayer groups and the spiritual Marian movement (Fr. Slavko), Collaboration among the various groups (Fr. Miljenko), etc.
(From the Press Bulletin)

LATEST NEWS: Congratulations to Paolo and Marija Pavlovic Lunetti for the birth of their second son, Francesco Maria (24 Jan.)

LIVING THE SACRAMENTS to Generate a Live Church

From 3rd to 6th January 1996, Fr. Tomislav Vlastic, accompanied by some members of his "Kraljice Mira" Community, held a meeting in Ancona, with the above theme, for the formation of sacrificial souls.

Despite a few problems with the organization, 700 people managed to crowd the venue and follow the paschal programme of Eucharist, penance and resurrection vigil. The participants were thus helped to gradually detach themselves from the "worldly noises" to be totally immersed in God. The result was an atmosphere loaded with silence and meditative prayer, made more fruitful by personal adoration of the Blessed Sacrament during the nights. God's presence was felt through His copious and tangible graces. Fr. Tomislav spoke of the reality of grace present in the Sacraments, with indications for the man of today to find the right way - the way of Light - with their help, and thus learn to walk with the Church,

making him able to give life to every single sacrament by virtue of the living force that the Church herself received from the Lord.

"Baptism is not something abstract," he said, "but a very tangible reality; it is alive and in each of us who are called to experience it, so that it might not remain just a concept up in the air. Mary Immaculate is the supreme example of this reality: She responded fully to God, though She did not fully comprehend. Her openness thus became the place for the conception of the divine life." Baptism can thus be likened to Advent and Christmas: at Advent souls open to God to prepare a place for the new birth of Jesus and for a new bath in the water of Grace. [Meditate on Mt 3; Rm 5, 6; 1Jn 5:1-3]

"The Sacraments - which should be alive in Christians - are dynamic, just as God's love is dynamic; it, in fact, is never static. This moving force drives us to walk unceasingly in the divine Light also thanks to the sacrament of Confirmation which permits us to distinguish truth from falsehood, the Groom from the seducer." Not only is Confirmation the sacrament of Christian maturity, but in virtue of the Holy Spirit present in the sacrament, it nourishes a non-stop process in us of spiritual growth in faith, in hope and in love. [Meditate on Act 2; 1Co 1:17-31; 1Co 2; Gal 5:13-26]

On the theme of Reconciliation, Fr. Tomislav stressed how a Christian must enter into perfect communion with God. "[As a Christian] you must think of it as meeting your best friend to whom you entrust your weaknesses, sins and frustrations... as a Christian you must overcome the fear, and feel saved by the Lord." Jesus goes out of His way to meet every person; He wants to cure our every wound with the ointment of Grace. [Meditate on Mk 2:1-17; Mt 5:20-24; Lk 7:36-50; Eph 5:1-12; Jm 4] Thus, through the Anointment of the Sick, Jesus promotes our healing, be it physical or spiritual. [Mt 8; Jn 14, 15; Jm 5; Act 3, 4]

"The Eucharist is the heart and the summit of the life of the Church," says the Catechism and Fr. Tomislav underlined the importance of preparing oneself beforehand to correctly participate in the Eucharist and reach the summit. "All we have to do is open our hearts, because everything is already present [in our hearts] by virtue of the other sacraments, and the sacraments find their maximum expression in the Eucharist." This journey through the Eucharist does not end with resurrection, but continues towards God through ascension where the Eucharist reaches its absolute summit because its completion is in the Holy Trinity. [Meditate on Jn 13; 1Co 11:1-32; Rm 12:1-2, 5-16]

Fr. Tomislav did not leave out the "sacraments of service" or "sacraments of mission" as they are sometimes called: holy Orders and Marriage, and concluded by reminding all those present that the life of those who make a total offering of themselves, sustained by living the Sacraments, is nothing more than the life and the mission of Mary and the Saints: i.e. become a "living Sacrament" in Christ's Church. [For holy Orders meditate on Mt 19:16-30; Mt 10; 1Pt 1; 1Pt 2; Rev 5; for Marriage: Mt 5; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3]

Many of those who participated for the first time desired offering their life to the Lord and become part of the fraternity of the sacrificial souls which is present in every region of Italy. Holy Mass celebrated on the day of Epiphany concluded the meeting, however, the participants were invited to continue their meditation with the help of the Bible (readings noted above) to help them enter further into the reality of making a total offering till the next meeting which will be held in Ancona next April. The theme will be Live Church.

fra Kresimir

"Fall in love with the Blessed Sacrament"

"Honour the Holy Eucharist with all your means: by participating at Holy Mass, at solemn Blessings with and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament when and for as long as you can, and think that I AM truly there, the way I was in Nazareth, in Bethany and with my disciples. To abandon my tabernacle and go and pray elsewhere is doing what Mary Magdalene would have done had she left me to go and pray in another room... When you do not run to reply to my voice when I invite you to keep me company; when you leave me alone by not coming, or by not coming promptly, is the same as not remaining with me joyfully, not desiring me passionately, not spending all the time possible with me, as two who love one another would do." (Jesus to Fr. de Foucauld)

"Adore Him in your churches"

St John Mary Vianney, the Curé of Ars, said to an old man who spent hours and hours in church: "Good man, what do you say to the Lord all this time?" "Nothing," he replied. "I look at Him and He looks at me. That's all." Do not be afraid if during Adoration there are moments when you feel bored. When you are under the sun your skin is warmed by it even if you are not thinking about it.

The power of the Eucharist

The height of Jesus' love, through becoming bread, is also the peak of His humbleness and prostration, for not only does He become man, but He also offers Himself to be eaten by us in the form of bread. One day the Pope exorcised a woman whom I know well; she threw herself around a lot without being liberated. When the exorcism was over the Pope said to her: "Tomorrow morning I will celebrate Mass for you." In that very moment the devil departed from her. It is that humbleness that attracts God's graces. Just look at the humbleness of Jesus in becoming bread for us!" (Fr. Gabriel Amorth)

In Phoenix (USA), after a lengthy and tiring meeting with the people, the Pope entered the Bishop's palace and gestured to indicate that he wanted something. They asked if he wanted to drink, given the heat, or use the washroom, but he replied: "Where is the chapel?" He remained there on his own for 20 minutes. (Fr. Jozo)

Sr Lucia of Fatima, a Carmelite nun in Coimbra is now 83 years old. She has made a testament to express her desire to be buried in Fatima, near Jacinta and Francisco, to the disappointment of the nuns in the Coimbra convent. She was very close to Jacinta and a place has been prepared for her next to Jacinta's tomb.

Ecumenical activity on Garda Lake - in the old Benedictine Abbey of Maguzzano now a house for retreats on the Garda Lake. In 1553 Cardinal Pole worked for unity of the Churches in England in this abbey. Fr. Calabria dreamt of creating this ecumenical centre and began by organizing non-stop Eucharistic adoration in the abbey back in 1938. The dream is coming true, for there have been various ecumenical functions held in the abbey of recent.

On the true presence of Christ's Body in Blessed Sacrament, St Cyril says: 'Do not doubt whether this is true, but rather receive the words of the Saviour in faith, for since He is the truth, He cannot lie.' (CCC, 1381)

Evangelization requires Profound Reform (II)

Announce Christ anew with power of the Spirit

1. The time is right - Above all, the author points out that it is not a case of: "today everything has changed." Man is still basically the same, in whatever time and culture he comes from; his actions, passions, desires and madneses are the same. If anything, the novelty of our times are marked by interesting and revealing comparisons with phenomena of the late Empire. However, since there are men whose cultures differ so greatly and since we leave three-quarters of the population to die of starvation or be massacred in wars, it would be an unpardonable error to shape the new evangelization around a type of "homo modernus": a middle-class central-European or American typical of the silly stories on television and cinema.

Research for the new evangelization must not be shifted onto the dead end [system of finding] new ways of presenting the announcement which correspond to the apparent new ways of living and thinking... Our times require that there be new confrontations with realities that have so far not appeared on the horizon, such as aggressiveness in religions and the ideologies offered in alternative to the presumed insufficiency and historic defeat of Christianity - see Buddhism, for example, (more so than Islam) with its power of expansion and sense of universality which promises a happiness of peace through the acceptance of destiny. Then there is the impact with new ideologies: no longer the mythical one of Marxism, but those pretending to be scientific, sociological and psychological, and which are generally scientistic in their self-assertion and total insensitivity to every divine inspiration...

If there are new risks and attacks there are new possibilities for evangelization. In fact, the Church has rarely found herself in the situation she is in today: new horizons and expectations have opened up which have never been seen before. There is absolutely no reason to be nostalgic for the strong Church of a golden past, when she is tied to the world. Furthermore, the lack of strong personalities today, both as teachers of philosophy and political leaders of the people, provokes a void of authority, making people look often in the direction of the Church expecting from her something that cannot come from elsewhere. This requires clear responses.

2. Christianity not an ethic, or "feeling religious," but faith which starts from a Word or an Event - The message to be "renewed," without modifying the terms, is evidently the Gospel itself, without deviating from it for want of timidity or in the quest of something more stimulating. It is a question of understanding how and how much the Gospel, on our lips and in our pastoral activity (as well as in our lives), is able to become somehow "new" for our generation. The problem is a difficult one; we humbly attempt to give some replies.

The first decisive "renewal" should consist in clearly presenting Christianity as a faith. We too, in fact, constantly risk falling into a decline (salt that becomes tasteless) which is where the world would like to see us: as a simple "religion" rather than a "faith," eg., just "feeling religious."

Also the Church today is trying, with difficulty, to make man more perceptive to the invisible realities. But is this her main task? If it were, the challenge of the East and experiences to do with the ambiguous world of yoga and magic (so fashionable these days), would see us more often than not on the loser's side! ...

Neither should we accept with ease the interpretation of Christianity that lists it as an ethic (set of moral values), or rather, a "supplement to an ethic" for a world which shows more than ever that though it is without, it is in desperate need of moral values to continue living, while all the same remaining world. Of course, Christianity is an ethic and always has been, which differs to other religious worlds because biblical revelation says with absolute evidence that God and "light," cult and "good," truth and righteousness cannot be separated.

It is also true that this world is going to ruin because of the loss of moral reference points of elementary simplicity and because of doctrines too easily accepted which are supposed to overcome the limits between good and bad. Christianity, however, cannot reduce itself to this. Christian ethics is nothing more than the expansion and manifestation of the faith. A Christian must act well because he is a subject and a child of God, because he loves and is loved by Christ, because he believes in redemption and in resurrection. A Christian's love for his brothers and sisters is part of this.

Though these religious and ethical dimensions cannot be neglected, or worse, ignored, they still do not represent Christianity. All that pressure put on us today to live and present Christianity in this light has something sinister about it; there is a falseness in it which must be uncovered. So then, what is the meaning of presenting Christianity as a faith? The faith must be seen as an inseparable, consistent and organic union of convictions and choices.

Behind these convictions, however, lie revealed reality and events which happened, i.e., the Word, which comes from elsewhere, and the Event which happened and is proven: none other than the history of salvation (not ideas, myths, symbols, or ideals). The absence of this dimension of the faith (in reference to the revelation, creation and redemption) explains why eastern religions succeed. They, in fact, avoid this obstacle, priding themselves in being founded on reason alone.

Christianity, though, cannot be presented in any other way if it does not want to be absorbed by an ever more worldly vision and enslaved to man's city, like "plaster for a crumbling wall" in a wicked and homicidal society. In no other way can its freedom and prophetic dimension be preserved.

Fr. Umberto Neri (reduced and adapted from the original) To be continued.

Also Cristina paid for her son with her life

"I can't stop thanking you God when I suffer."

Her third child cost her her life. Maria Cristina Cella, 26 years old, died of cancer which she chose not to cure to protect the baby in her womb. She was just another woman: nothing exceptional in her life, first as a university student, then as a wife and mother, except for her donation. At 18 she had a sarcoma removed, but she was completely healed and in February 1991 married a young man from Carpanè, where they settled and had their three children.

Cristina died on 22nd October 1995. "Mummy went to paradise," her children tell. In a letter Cristina

wrote to her third son when he was 1, a month before her death, she said: "Dear Riccardo, I want you to know that you're not in the world by chance. The Lord wanted you to be born despite the many problems. When we knew you were here, we immediately loved you and wanted you with all our might.

I remember the day the doctor told me I had another tumour in the groin. I just said over and over again: "I'm pregnant! Doctor, I'm pregnant!" To overcome the fear of that moment we were given an extra super dose of willpower, and our desire to have you prevailed. I refused to renounce you; the doctor understood and said no more.

Now, Riccardo, here you are, God's gift. That evening on our way home from the hospital, when you moved for the first time, it was as if you were saying: "Thank you Mummy for loving me." How could we not love you? You are so precious. When I look at you and see how handsome and alive you are, I continue to think that there is no suffering in the world that one could not go through for a child. The Lord filled our lives with joy: 3 beautiful children who, by His grace, will grow according to His will. I cannot but thank God for having given you all to us: such a wonderful gift." (Cristina, 24 Sept. 1995 - from the hospital of Marostica)

"Serenity and peace is what she left us," said Carlo, Cristina's husband. "When I met her she was 16 and I was 19. I immediately saw in her the ideal mother for my children. She was always happy, never put herself on show. She was not involved in any particular activity in the town, but everything she did was of immense value. She would often tell me: "Don't waste anything, every breath is important... We were the happiest family of all. We had problems too, but we lacked nothing because we were united by the Love that came from God..."

Carlo continued: "The sorrow we went through was a grace; it was a lesson that I learnt just recently, thanks to Cristina. It was not difficult for her to accept the cross, she was prepared and even thankful to have something to offer in exchange for the good she received from God. On the table beside her hospital bed in Bassano she left a letter in which she said: Your goodness is so great Lord that you desired filling me with joy. I am beginning to love this cross; it is becoming my friend because it leads me to You. I love you Jesus. I would like to shout to the entire world that I love you; and I feel that you too love me immensely."

It was a meaningful lesson for Carlo: "I wouldn't change anything, neither the moments of joy, nor the moments of suffering. Ours was a journey of faith... In her lengthy period of suffering, Cristina always accepted everything. Of course she wanted to live and return to her family, but she gave herself up to God's will because she knew that real love is in God and that whatever He chose would have been for her good and that of her family."

During her last days she wrote: "I entrust my father to You. Teach him that suffering with You is sweet, that every cross carried with You becomes light, because when we donate it to You, You carry it for us. Teach him to love You, then even the greatest sorrow will become joy... Protect and help my mother: help her to understand that nothing is wasted when it is done with You."

Her parish priest, Fr. Teofano Rebuli, who was often by Cristina's side, had suggested more than once for her to do a novena to the recently beatified Gianna (another mother who refused to be cured for cancer because she was pregnant), but Cristina replied: "Why should I pretend to be healed? What have I got that the many others who die for the same illness haven't got? I have already received so much, why should I ask for more?"

Just five days before her death Cristina said: "I know that You want me alone, Lord, to speak to my heart. I am a little afraid, only a little because I can feel Your presence. You are here by my side and You whisper sweet words to me that fill me with joy. I want You to be indispensable for me, like the air that I breathe... Strengthen my faith... You alone fill me; without You there is only void." On 22nd October 1995, the day she died, she said repeatedly: "My peace is in doing Thy will." And she prayed for her

children, repeating their names up to one hour before her death.

Her parish priest has no doubts when he says she was a mystic. In her diary during a retreat she wrote: "Lord, I believe that Your only concern is my happiness. So here I am. Take me and do with me what You will. It doesn't matter whether I become a mother or a nun; all I want is to always do Your will. I know that whatever You choose for me will be the way which will lead me to complete joy. I want to place my trust in You, even if it means suffering or having doubts... Make me suffer if you so desire because it is in suffering that I shall meet You, my salvation" (30 Dec. 1985). Cristina was 16 when she wrote this in her diary, and the Lord took her seriously.

During the chemotherapy sessions (at 18) she wrote: "I did not ask not to suffer, just to be helped to live it according to Your will, because the only thing that counts is doing Your will. (16 Feb. 1988)."

The open wounds of Bosnia

Thanks be to God: after so much war, the fighting has stopped, but peace is still a long way off. After the peace deal in Dayton, Ohio, ethnic cleansing and the conquering of territory are still being authorized. Entire populations, like the Croats of Posavina, have been left to their enemies of yesterday; the Serbs of Sarajevo refuse to stay under the Muslims. Voluntary refugees help to lengthen the lines of all those pulled out of their lands!

And the contradictions do not lack: an "indivisible" Bosnia divided into two states; a nation with 3 different armies; half the land (49%) goes to a third of the population (the Serbs, 33%)! But who will ensure that the hundreds of thousands of refugees get back home, get a roof over their heads and earn a living? In the meantime, a huge deployment of soldiers will guarantee at least no shooting. Peace is yet to be reconstructed, we entrust it to the Queen of Peace.

"Remember those of your own flesh"

Since most of the aid that goes to Bosnia comes from the movement which began with Medjugorje (though the mass media ignore it), we again give space to the tribulations and sorrows of aid deliverers, lest we forget them. It is Our Lady's voice who weeps over Her children and consoles them through us. "Along the way," writes Luciana Randon, "we came across villages completely burned down - some houses still in flames - and we were taken to see mass graves... At Jaice 8,000 of the 50,000 inhabitants have returned, after three years' absence. 4,700 died under the bombs. Every house and the church are destroyed, there is no telephone, no water and electricity is scarce. There is no heating for the patients in the hospital... Drvar and Kupres, phantom towns in the hills, nearly totally destroyed, and now isolated from the rest of the country by the ice and the snow. The doctors of Drvar are begging for equipment for the hospital. The one closest to them is at Livno, 100 km away." (8 Jan.)

Alberto Bonifacio concludes with his description, no less tragic than Luciana's: "Bosnia's harsh winter has set in. Our thoughts and prayers go to the refugees and homeless without adequate protection or food. We must not stop helping these people! We have our limits, we're tired, impeded by bureaucracy... Lord, have mercy."

Fr. Urbano from the Franciscan Caritas centre in Pescara (south Italy) notes: "Our life is a continuous coming and going, an ugly copy of the stairway of Angels in Jacob's dream." We descend towards misery taking assistance, food, clothes and medicinals. We come back dragging with us a sea of tears, urgent

needs, entreaties and compassion... When this sea meets our homeland - the so-called civil, advanced and Christian land - it often shatters against an ocean of indifference and egoism.

My friends, if only you knew how it rends my heart to see all the ads on the TV for animals, and not have anyone to help a single family coarsened by misery... You are Christian and in your heart you bear the image of the Good Samaritan Who left his heaven of glory to save us, crying out: Go, and do the same (Lk 10:3)."

Contact your nearest Caritas or Medj. centre to help your brothers in need.

OUR READERS WRITE

Asking about Vassula... All we can do is accept the judgement of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which "invites all the faithful not to regard Mrs Vassula Ryden's writings and speeches as supernatural... and the Bishops not to provide opportunities in their Dioceses for the dissemination of her ideas." The Church, as mother, tests the charismas, warns the less-prepared children and gives herself time before making a definite pronouncement. Many "supernatural" fires have been extinguished this way.

The notification dated 6th October 1995, however, does not bear the signature of Card. Ratzinger, or any other, which they normally do. It also admits that her writings contain "some positive aspects." This could mean that one day the notification could change, as has happened for many prophets of past and recent times who were at first condemned, such as St John of the Cross and St Alphonse, Blessed Faustina Kowalska and Padre Pio. The hour of the cross has also come for our Greek-Orthodox sister whose work has favoured the Unity of the Church and fidelity to the Pope, much more than that of many theologians who have poisoned the veins of the Church with incredulity.

Perhaps it was the fear of fanaticism, rather than doctrinal elements, that influenced the negative judgement. You see, some of Vassula's supporters have idolized her, trusting her words (which are subject to human limits) more than the Word of God which is "eternally stable" and more than the Church which is the depositary of the Word and which houses the fire of the Spirit to light the world (see article in Echo 101, page 4). It is an error in these cases to accuse: all good, or all bad; we would risk destroying the good which is present and has been recognized, or of making exaggerations, like saying it is God-inspired Scripture (cf. 2Tm 3:16), or even "dictated" by Jesus Himself.

The notification does not impede the faithful from reading her writings because there is no prohibition, just a warning. The faithful have from the Scriptures a sure standard by which to judge: Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil (1Th 5:19).

Archbishop Francic, an authority on Conciliar theology, says in a letter: "On reading the messages of Vassula Ryden and knowing that she is a daughter of the Orthodox Church, I was very impressed by the faithfulness - absolute faithfulness I would say - of her writings to all the revealed truths, just the way they are taught by the Catholic Church. ... Not only, but I feel I should say that some of these truths which are being questioned by some in our Church, are affirmed in Vassula's books with surprising firmness..."

He examines various points in his letter; among other things he says: "There is no error when, at times, Vassula calls Christ Abba or Jahvé (cf. Isaiah 9:5); nor when she says that Christ will come to this world to create a period of peace, because it regards historical comings of Christ to this world by means of His Church which will be renewed so that Christ's presence is made more visible to all men, just as Our

Lady, the Queen of the Prophets, has promised in Fatima and Medjugorje..." He concludes his letter by joining those Bishops and theologians who defend the authenticity and sincerity of the visionary. (Split, 18 Nov. 1995)

"Why do I have to be so unstable, Lord, and succumb to temptation, though my trust in You remains?" To D.M. the Lord replies: You have yet to learn to cling to Me, to need Me the way you need the air you breathe, to walk side by side with Me and My Mother, and not to trust your contaminated ego which is influenced by Satan. Without Me you can do nothing.

Give your weakness to Me continuously and then you can say: it is when I am weak that I am strongest. Use the words with which the Church of the martyrs responded to Satan's attacks: Jesus is the Saviour! Christ wins! In the Name of Jesus our Saviour!

Mary will say them with you. Jesus, on His part, never tires to forgive you. Repeat to Him: Stay with me, Lord, for the evening is nigh. Embrace Him tightly, like Mary Magdalene, so He cannot leave you. He wants to see how much you trust Him. The rest will follow.

* **Travelling to Medj.** made simpler through Krajina (shorter than coastal road): Take road from Senj to Otocac, Gospic, Gracac, Knin, Urlika, Sinj, Imotski, Grude and Ljubuski. Bus from Trieste and ferry from Ancona depart regularly.

Others write ... to tell us of the wonders Mary is doing through this little paper which echoes Her word. The prayer group in Montreal, Canada, which reproduces 5,000 copies of English Echo and 6,000 of the French Echo has now begun a radio transmission.

The Servos da Rainha of Brazil are producing and distributing 210,000 copies of their Portuguese edition.

Fr. Querubin of Columbia produces 4,000 in Spanish. The surprise is that Fr. Jozo noticed an edition in Jakarta, Indonesia, in the local language!

Concerning the foreign language editions produced by us, the French edition has reached 42,000 copies, with an increase of about 1,000 per edition, and the German edition in Switzerland is spreading fast thanks to Otto Müller. Whether the results are great or small, we thank all our helpers and distributors. After all, it is on love that we are judged.

Echo is fine the way it is - Two letters among the many. From Peru: "Thank you for the precious seed which is the Echo of Mary. Little by little it is changing the hearts of the people in my parish. We really appreciate the pages dedicated to the Church and the Pope which we would otherwise not get to read." (Fr. Stefano)

From Kenya: "I must admit that I have never liked receiving newsletters. I give them a quick look, then throw them away. This time, however, I opened up your Echo out of curiosity and read it all. I thought that perhaps Our Lady is asking me something, after all, on two inexpensive sheets of paper I found news on the Church, on the Pope and facts and examples which one could not find in ten different weeklies! Thank your friends and tell them to continue writing just the way they are." (Sr. Fulgenzia)

To all the deliverers of Echo, we dedicate this letter: "I am one of Our Lady's 'postwomen.' For three years we of our group have been bicycling 12 km to a local Shrine to distribute the Echo each time it is published, reciting the Rosary along the way for all the people we give it to. We then participate in the Mass in the place where, in 1600, Mary appeared to a young deaf-mute girl and healed her. Lots of lights have been turned on here thanks to your little torch (the Echo) and now the night seems brighter. I have to admit that when Echo is not published for your pastoral duties, I am happy, for I get to rest a little and

then the wait makes my heart grow fonder." (Emma Beltrami)

Thank you, Mary, for the little people like Emma, who are our distributors. They draw humility and sincerity from You, making heaven and earth a better place.

Echo is now published less often, so the extra articles allow us less space for the mail and reviews, etc. We do wish to thank all those who sent in Christmas and new year greetings and well wishes for Milena.

The grace and peace of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

Villanova, 26 Jan. 1996

Pray, because Satan is continually trying to thwart my plans.