



ECHO OF MARY Queen of peace

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Our Lady's message, 25 July 2003:

"Dear Children, today too I call you to prayer. My children, pray until prayer becomes joy for you. Only in this way will each of you discover peace in the heart and your soul will be content. You will feel the need to witness to others the love that you feel in your heart and life. I am with you and I intercede before God for all of you. Thank you for responding to my call."

Peace and Joy

I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and cleaving to him; for it means life to you and length of days (Deut 30:19-20). Pray to remain united to the Lord. "Dear Children, also today I call you to prayer." Pray to receive the light which enables you to distinguish the way of life from that of death, and to have the strength that enables you to choose the way of blessing rather than the way of curse. It's not an easy choice as it's not made once and for all, but must be renewed time and again, and also because the so-called worldly wisdom leads to the way of curse, not the way of blessing.

We take the way of curse each time trust in man overshadows faith in God, or when human interests induce us to lay aside the Gospel, or when the arrogance of power threatens the foundation of divine justice, or when the pride of intelligence prevails over the lowliness of love, or when science pretends it can eliminate the mystery. We do it each time we think we can do without God or substitute God. It is Satan's old deceiving game

which still today seduces man and drags him onto the way of curse.

"My children, pray until prayer becomes joy for you": the antidote for Satan's venom is: *pray, pray, pray*, says Mary who comes to Medjugorje to pull us out of the curse and lead us onto the way of blessing. Prayer, if said with the lips, that doesn't melt a hardened and distant heart, isn't enough. We need to immerse ourselves in prayer and live it. It is as necessary to us as the air we breathe. Praying is not giving up to the power of a tyrannical god, but is opening self to the divine regality to which God, our Father, calls us, so that we might be in communion with Christ in the Kingdom prepared for us. Prayer doesn't frustrate our human dignity, but it exalts the divinity in us. Thus, it must be more than external practice; it must be communion with Christ. Prayer rises from a soul which is open to His presence; from a heart which rests on the Lord's Heart; from one which the Holy Spirit is able to penetrate.

This way **prayer becomes joy**: *the joy of Jesus is in us, and our joy is full* (cf. Jn 15:11). This joy is not the fleeting joy which is subject to life's circumstances, but is the joy which descends from communion between creature and Creator that no human event can remove. When Christ came into the world He touched human reality in all its forms, He redeemed everything that He visited, and now there is no suffering without hope, and no pain without consolation. Neither is there sin too great for which we cannot beg forgiveness, or death without resurrection. **"Only in this way will each of you discover peace in the heart and your soul will be content."** Christ is our peace (Eph 2:14); Christ is fullness of life (Col 1:19), and the knowledge of His presence in us produces in our heart that peace which the world cannot give (Jn 14:27); then our soul will find happiness in its Lord. From this comes the need **"to witness to others the love that we feel in our heart and life"**. Our Blessed Mother tells us this, so let us take her messages seriously, for as long as she **intercedes on our behalf** we have the possibility of making her teachings become fruitful for us. Peace and joy in Jesus and Mary.

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Our Lady's message, 25 August 2003:

"Dear Children, today too I invite you to thank God with your heart for all the graces He gives you also through the signs and colours of Nature. God desires bringing you close to Him, and He urges you to give Him glory and praise. Therefore, my Children, I invite you anew to pray, pray, pray; and don't forget: I am with you! I intercede before God for each of you that your joy in Him might be full. Thank you for responding to my call."

Glory and Praise to God

Most High, omnipotent, good Lord, / Praise, glory and honour and benediction all are Thine. Praise be to Thee my Lord especially for my brother sun... for sister moon and the stars, in heaven... for brother wind, and for the air and clouds... for sister water... for brother fire... for our sister, mother earth... for those who forgive for the sake of Thy love, and endure infirmity and tribulation. May Thou be praised, my Lord, for our sister, bodily death... (Canticle of Creatures, by St. Francis of Assisi)

Together with St. Francis we give praise, glory and honour to God for the signs of His presence in the world and in every creature. To be able to grasp the signs we need to prepare ourselves to receive God's graces. **"I invite you to thank God with your heart for all the graces He gives you also through the signs and colours of Nature."** The Lord's graces are superabundant, but we aren't always aware of them, and so they slip away from us and we lose the benefits we would have otherwise gained from them. **"God desires bringing you close to Him, and He urges you to give Him glory and praise."** To praise God brings blessing upon us and on the entire world. So, praise God in every circumstance, in every moment of the day, in everything you do. Praise and glorify God in your every deed, your every thought, all your relationships!

Praise Him in the brother and sister that are next to you, but also in those you occasionally meet; in those who love you, but also in those who hate you; in those you like and in those you don't! **"Praise and glorify God in the signs and colours of Nature"**: in the sun which is fount of life, and in the frost which kills; in the calm sea and in the storm; in new life being born and especially in life entering eternity. Praise and glorify God in all life's ups and downs: in joy and in sorrow, when you're happy and when you're sad, when you're well and when you're ill — so that **our joy in Him might be full!** It isn't evasion or fantasy; it's recognizing God's active presence in the world. It's expressing and acknowledging that *He is Who He is!*

Praise and thank God as you *look at the birds of the air.. and consider the lilies of the field...* and hand over your worries to Him: *do not be anxious about what you will eat or wear* (Mt 6:24-34). Praise and glorify God, surrendering yourselves trustingly to His Love. *Bless the Lord, o my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!* (Ps 103:1). In everything be a canticle of praise and glory to God: your soul, senses, and body; for everything comes from Him and must return to Him. **"God desires bringing you close to Him."**

May it be that we let Him be close to us, for His closeness transforms, renews and redeems us, and makes us similar to the Son. May it be that we let Jesus live in us, and the Father to fulfil His will in us. May Mary, who **intercedes before God for each of us**, obtain the fullness of Jesus' Life in us so that *in thy presence there may be fullness of joy, o Father, and pleasures for evermore in thy right hand* (Ps 16:11). Mary: my Mother, and my trust! In thee I rest, that I might rest in God. Peace and joy in Jesus and Mary!

N.Q.

Our Life is a Rosary

I was in a small town celebrating Mass and speaking on the Rosary, and I asked: "**What do you think the Rosary is?**" Not a word. I insisted, and gave them a bit of help: "What do we contemplate with the Rosary?" After a brief moment of silence a young girl (about 6 or 7 years old) spoke up: "We contemplate the life of Jesus." I was amazed; and my heart rejoiced as I repeated Jesus' words: *I bless You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do* (Mt 11:25-26).

I carry out my priestly ministry at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary at Pompei which was founded by a layman, **Blessed Bartolo Longo**. He was a lawyer in Naples who suffered great anxiety because of his dabbling in spiritism. One day, full of anguish and worried about the salvation of his soul, he heard a voice in his heart say: "*If you seek salvation, spread the Rosary.*" It was Our Lady speaking to him. The bells of a small church close by were tolling: it was midday, so he kneeled for the *Angelus* and made a decision. He said that if Mary promises to save whoever spreads the Rosary, then **he wouldn't leave this earth without having spread this devotion**. And from that moment on Bartolo Longo began a process of **assimilation of the Rosary**, which is to assimilate Christ Himself since the Rosary is the meditation of Christ's life.

It wasn't long ago that we found it difficult to comprehend this prayer which many considered poor, but today, thanks especially to the Holy Father who has given us such a powerful document on the Rosary (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*), we understand its meaning, and that it is the contemplation of Christ's face with Mary. In contemplating Christ's face we open up to receive the mystery of Trinitarian life, and experience ever anew the love of the Father and delight in the joy of the Holy Spirit (RVM, 9). "*Beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being changed into his likeness, from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit*" (2Cor 3:18). Mary takes us by the hand and leads us to her Son; and with the Rosary she fulfils the task of transforming our lives in Christ. Thus, we have the mystery of Jesus' life descending into our own life; and our life in Christ becomes a Rosary. The mysteries of the Rosary are the mysteries of our own lives, and while we undertake our faith journey we become aware of how the stages in Jesus' life are the same as our own.

With the *Mysteries of Joy* we experience the immense joys of being Christian. After all, isn't joy a Christian's main trait? How could we not rejoice knowing that the Lord has announced He has a plan for each of us, just as He did for Mary (at the Annunciation)!? We also receive God's announcement that we must conceive Christ in our souls, but to conceive Him we must first be inwardly disposed to receive Jesus so that He can become flesh in us. The Holy Spirit comes to our aid by expressing our prayer and our love to the Lord.

With the *Mysteries of Light* we contemplate Jesus' public life when He revealed Himself and the Father through signs, words and prodigies. As disciples, aren't we all called to indicate Christ just as John did with the Lord's Baptism? Behold, *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (Jn 1:29). And aren't we also called to reveal the merciful face of the Father?

With the *Mysteries of Sorrow* we contemplate God's infinite love for each of us. He loves us in a way that no one else can love us. Greater love has no man than to lay down his life for another. *He became obedient unto death, even death on a cross* (Ph 2:8). If you say your love for God is great, then how could you even think of acting differently? How could we not see the value of all the suffering, all the injustice and the oppression around us? All the evil in the world gives us the possibility of being united to Christ's passion.

With the *Mysteries of Glory* we contemplate here on the earth, those things which no ear has heard, no eye has seen, or which has ever entered the heart of man (cf. Is 64:4). *Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts* (Rom 5:5). With this hope in our hearts our lives are better. St. John Vianney said that even our sorrows melt like snow in the sun.

Our journey is not different to that of Jesus. He for first went from affliction to joy, from failure to success, from temptation to victory, from birth to death. *In every respect He has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning* (Heb 4:15) even though He suffered the effects of sin; and in the end He went from death to glory. It is for this, and in virtue of Christ's humanity which he lived out to the full and which was glorified in the Holy Spirit, that we participate in His life. Everything in our life has value. In Christ nothing is lost, not even our tragic fragility or our sins; but rather, it was precisely for these that the great Redeemer came.

When we say the Rosary we wish to say all of this. It is the gospel we live out daily; it is the life of Christ in us. That is how Blessed Bartolo Longo meant it; and how the Saints mean it. Even though they may have not explicitly spoken on it or spread this devotion, it is because they witnessed with their lives which had become a Rosary.

Fr. Andrea Fontanella

Roses for Mary

We are not the first disciples of the Lord, or the first to be devoted to His Mother, so it might help to take a look at the origins and the components of the prayer of the Rosary.

A BIT OF HISTORY...

SEEDS

The seeds which gradually blossomed into the Rosary were planted in the XII and XIII centuries, particularly by the *Cistercian monks* who were very devoted to Mary. The monk's duty to serve God is divided between the cult and manual work; and in the fields, labourers would come to help the monks. Religious and lay persons were united in perennial prayer and praise, but this vocal prayer which accompanied artisans and farmers, for obvious reasons, had to be simple and repetitive, for it served as a sound track for the work of people most of whom were illiterate. Thus, the simplest prayers for the unlearned were the "*Our Father*," the "*Hail Mary*" and the Creed. These were memorized and recited in church, at work, and whilst journeying.

HOW IT SPREAD

The Rosary was spread thanks mostly to the work of the mendicant orders, especially the Dominicans who were sent to preach conversion of heart to the people. Conversion requires prayer and penance, so prayer had to be simple and repetitive so it could be recited everywhere and at all times. It had to suit every cultural environment and help people contemplate.

EVERYONE'S PRAYER

The Rosary soon became everyone's prayer. Princes and beggars, doctors and the illiterate prayed it. It spread more quickly when the plague, famine and war loomed over people's heads, making them fear death. From St. Pius V to Paul VI, all the Popes insisted on the recitation of the Rosary, especially in difficult times.

ROSARY — ROSE GARDEN — ROSE BUSH

I don't know who it was that first transformed the Hail Mary's so as to form a rosary (rose

garden, rose bush), or a crown of roses for Our Lord's Mother, but I imagine it must have been a poet. From the name we learn that the encounter with Our Lady could never and must never be out of obligation, or be a boring duty. Instead, it is a way of offering to Her a *crown of roses*, where the rose is symbolic for kindness, affection, love, respect, free gift, gratefulness, acknowledgement and the offering of self in the desire to serve.

A BODY THAT PRAYS

The Rosary is, in fact, a person-*body* that prays: whilst kneeling, or sitting; in the office or at home, or whilst walking, driving, or crammed into a tram. The words flow out from the bobbin of our memory even throughout distractions as we make our way through the traffic, or work the land, or as we admire nature when the Hail Mary's help us to keep pace along the mountain paths, or when they keep rhythm with the gentle lapping of sea water against the shore. At times our Rosary alternates from distractions to moments of attention; or at other times the rhythm of it charms us into a state of wonder and joy. **In our frenetic times the Rosary is the best tranquillizer, donating serenity and peace to mind and body.**

A SOUL THAT PRAYS

The person-*soul* savours the prayer of the Rosary. While we pray the Rosary we are given inspirations; it is where our thoughts and plans can mature, where problems are resolved, where we receive answers to our questions. With the Rosary we are helped by Mary to open up to God; we offer up our free time so it can be filled with Him. It is the **emptying of the soul** so it can **receive and live and enjoy His presence**. Rosary after Rosary, as the days and months and years go by, we are gradually brought to live the *mysteries of redemption*.

HE WHO PRAYS IS FAITHFUL

Praying with the Rosary is contemplation, not meditation. Meditation requires silence and concentration for the mind to penetrate truths and values. The mysteries of the Rosary don't speak of truths or values, but are the memorial of facts which happened in the story of salvation. And these are fulfilled in the Father who sends His Son, born of woman, to redeem His brethren so they can be adopted as children. He also sends the Son's Spirit, and within our hearts the Spirit cries out for us: *Abba* (Dad / Pa) (cf. Gal 4:4). "*In the first mystery we contemplate*" — with the Rosary we contemplate facts, scenes, episodes which are brought to mind; and we become actors and spectators because they are made present in us in a mysterious way through Baptism and with the Death and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Rm 6:3). This is the memorial which places us next to and in communion with the people who worked for our salvation and who give foundation to our hope.

PRAYER PAR EXCELLENCE

The Rosary is a prayer which has formed generations of faithful. It is the prayer for the living and the dead. It is the prayer for the needy; in it they place all their tribulations of the present and their hopes for the future. It is the prayer for the wealthy and learned, for the laypeople, the bishops and the clergy; it is the prayer which the Popes of the last 500 years have recommended; and it is recited by Catholics the world wide, bringing all of them together into the same family. They are God's little ones if they are not arrogant before God and His Mother.

(a liberal extract: *Il Rosario*, by S. Zardoni)

John Paul II to the Youth:

"Behold, your mother!"

Once again, the Pope appeals to Mary, and urges the youth to have recourse to Her. It rings out like the testament of a father for his children: entrust yourselves to Mary; she is your Mother! The following text is from the **Message** which John Paul II wrote for the **XVIII World Youth Day**; and as always, it bears the image of Our Lady.

My dear young people!

For the 18th World Youth Day I have chosen a theme related to the Year of the Rosary: *"Behold, your mother!"* (Jn 19,27). Before his death, Jesus entrusted to the apostle John what was most precious to him: his Mother, Mary. These are the **final words** of the Redeemer, and therefore they take on a solemn nature and could be regarded as his **spiritual testimony**. The angel Gabriel's words in Nazareth: *"Hail, full of grace"* (Lk 1,28) also cast light on the scene at Calvary. The Annunciation comes at the beginning, the Cross signals the fulfilment. At the Annunciation, Mary gives human nature to the Son of God within her womb; at the foot of the Cross, she welcomes the whole of humanity within her heart in the person of John. She was Mother of God from the first moments of the Incarnation, and she became the Mother of humanity during the final moments of the life of her Son Jesus on earth. She, who was without sin, on Calvary "experienced" within her own being the suffering of sin that her Son had taken upon himself to save mankind. **At the foot of the Cross** on which was dying the One whom she had conceived at the moment of her "yes" at the Annunciation, **Mary received**, as it were, a **"second annunciation"**: *"Woman, behold, your son!"* (Jn 19,26).

The Son upon the Cross can pour out his suffering into his Mother's heart. Every child who suffers experiences that need. **You too, my dear young people, are faced with suffering:** loneliness, failures and disappointments in your personal lives; difficulties in inserting yourselves in the adult world and in professional life: the separations and losses in your families; the violence of war and the death of the innocent. Know, however, that in difficult times, which everyone experiences, you are not alone: like John at the foot of the Cross, **Jesus also gives his Mother to you so that she will comfort you with her tenderness.** It says in the Gospel that "*from that hour the disciple took her to his own home*" (Jn 19,27). This statement does not simply point out the place where John lived. Beyond the material aspect, it evokes the spiritual dimension of this welcome and of the new bond established between Mary and John. My dear young people, you are more or less the same age as John and you have the same desire to be with Jesus. **Today, it is you whom Jesus expressly asks** to receive Mary "*into your home*" and to welcome her "*as one of yours*"; to learn from her the one who "*kept all these things, pondering them in her heart*" (Lk 2,19) that inner disposition to listen and the attitude of humility and generosity that singled her out as God's first collaborator in the work of salvation. She will discharge her ministry as a mother and train you and mould you until Christ is fully formed in you (cf. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 15).

This is why I now wish to repeat the motto of my episcopal and pontifical service: "**Totus tuus**". Throughout my life I have experienced the loving and forceful presence of the Mother of Our Lord. Mary accompanies me every day in the fulfilment of my mission as Successor of Peter. Mary is Mother of divine grace, because she is the Mother of the Author of grace. **Entrust yourselves to her** with complete confidence! **You will be radiant with the beauty of Christ.** Open up to the breath of the Spirit, and you will become courageous apostles, capable of spreading the fire of charity and the light of truth all around you. **In Mary's school, you will discover the specific commitment that Christ expects of you,** and you will learn to put Christ first in your lives, and to direct your thoughts and actions to him.

Dear young people, **you know that Christianity is not an opinion** nor does it consist of empty words. **Christianity is Christ!** It is a Person, a Living Person! To meet Jesus, to love him and make him loved: this is the Christian vocation. **Mary was given to you to help you enter into a more authentic and more personal relationship with Jesus.** Through her example, Mary teaches you to gaze on him with love, for He has loved us first. Through her intercession, she forms in you a disciple's heart able to listen to her Son, who reveals the face of his Father and the true dignity of the human person. With Mary, handmaid of the Lord, you will discover the joy and fruitfulness of the hidden life. With her, disciple of the Master, you will follow Jesus along the streets of Palestine, becoming witnesses of his preaching and his miracles. With her, the sorrowful Mother, you will accompany Jesus in his passion and death. With her, Virgin of hope, you will welcome the festive Easter proclamation and the priceless gift of the Holy Spirit.

Only Jesus knows what is in your hearts, and your deepest desires. Only He, who has loved you to the end (cf. Jn 13,1), can fulfil your aspirations. His are words of eternal life, words that give meaning to life. **No one apart from Christ can give you true happiness.**

(...) **Now more than ever it is crucial that you be "watchers of the dawn"**, the lookouts who announce the light of dawn and the new springtime of the Gospel ... **Humanity is in urgent need of the witness of free and courageous young people!** (...)

JP II

News from the blessed land

Medjugorje Youth Festival:

Gospa's crown

A few at a time they came: shy, full of expectations, tired and needy of true rest. The Mother was here to welcome and embrace them; to listen to them and to personally take care of all her "dear Children." For many this was a customary appointment, while for others it was the first time in Medjugorje for the youth festival which this year reached its **XIV edition**. This year **40 different countries** were represented with people from all five continents, and amongst these, for the first time, there was a group of young people from Hong Kong, and of Palestinians from Israel. A total of at least 20,000 people were present for the festival. All was translated simultaneously into 17 different languages with the aid of portable radios and head-sets, which were as necessary as the caps and fans and bottles of water to fight the heat. The various languages, however, soon mixed together into a language that everyone could understand: the language of love. Drawn by the profound desire for love, young people came to Medjugorje and found a love which is free, pure, unconditional and disinterested. So different to the love offered by the world, in Medjugorje it is an exclusive love born from the Immaculate and Loving Heart of Mary. The young people sought each other's company, to celebrate, to listen, to learn, so they could be better, and happy, and similar to that God Who became man so He could live amongst them and remind them that they are not only flesh, but above all are spirit. For God - in Whom they see father, brother and friend - the young people put up with a great deal of fatigue, such as precarious journeys; crammed, even makeshift lodgings, and a scorching sun, but nothing could remove their joy and enthusiasm; and nothing could stop

their hearts from opening up to accept all the gifts Mary had prepared for her children. They felt at home, and they felt free to be themselves, to publicly manifest their faith, and to show they were in love with God without the false modesty imposed on them by the unchristianized world. **They held Rosary beads in their hands**, or threw them around their necks, as if to say in a silent but eloquent way that they belonged to the Gospa and understood her call: "*..let the Rosary be always in your hands as a sign to Satan that you belong to me* (message, 25 Feb. 1988).

In tune with this call, the Pope said in his **Message** for World Youth Day: "*Today, my dear young people, I am also, in spirit, handing you the Rosary beads. Through prayer and meditation on the mysteries, Mary leads you safely towards her Son! Do not be ashamed to recite the Rosary alone, while you walk along the streets to school, to the university or to work, or as you commute by public transport. Adopt the habit of reciting it among yourselves, in your groups, movements and associations. Do not hesitate to suggest that it be recited at home by your parents and brothers and sisters, because it rekindles and strengthens the bonds between family members.*"

This year's theme: "*Through the Rosary, Open your Heart to Me,*" was also in tune with Church indications to dedicate this year to this wonderful Marian prayer. It was the same theme to inspire those who were called to witness on how the Rosary provided support, strength and nourishment to their own faith journey. Rather than speak about the Rosary, the entire festival was prayer and meditation. It was as though **each person represented a single bead and that all were linked together into one great set of Rosary beads** offered up to Mary who was holding it close to her heart and at the same time raising it up to God as her most beautiful prayer, which was the life of thousands of young people asking to become holy. Moments of profound meditation alternated with moments of prayer and joyful dance. There were talks by the six visionaries and other speakers; and other moments of total silence before the Eucharistic bread through which Jesus drew every gaze, every thought, and every heart to Himself.

It was precisely in these moments of evening Adoration that one was aware of the immensity of the mystery of the living God making His presence felt in His children, and of them recognizing Him and choosing to remain with Him — without second thoughts. Yet it seemed a miracle that in this day and age thousands of young people should remain in such meditative silence before their God as they adored Him and sought in His Invisible Presence the meaning of life. Who knows how many He might have called to work in His Vineyard!

The Festival always concludes through the celebration of a dawn Mass atop of Mt. Krizevac; and also this year many of the young people started making their way to the top during the night of the 5th so they could find a place and savour the last moments together with friends old and new. And as they recommended to each other: "Next year, same place, same time," they breathed in, together with the cool night air, the Grace which was poured out abundantly upon them; and they filled their hearts and souls with the peace of Medjugorje, knowing that they weren't alone anymore.

Stefania Consoli

At Medjugorje a flame was set alight in me

My vocation was rooted in God. Before the beginning of time God had prepared a plan for me; all I had to do was discover it. "When God set His gaze on me and predestined me, the joy He felt for me was perfect; in that joy there was no fear that His plan should not be fulfilled." (St. Augustine)

When my mother was expecting me she attended spiritual exercises with my father. If it is true that babies "absorb" the external atmosphere before they are born, then I think I can say that they were my first spiritual exercises! I received the first Sacraments in my Parish church, and in the meantime the Lord was working in me. When I was 15 I attended a summer camp, during which I became familiar with the Word of God thanks to a pocket-sized Gospel. On Sundays the Word is given us in small doses, but during that camp I was nourished with whole "loaves" and it tasted good. I remember being struck by a verse from Matthew: *"There are eunuchs who have made themselves such for the sake of the kingdom of heaven."* (Mt 19:12). The following year (1984), during the summer holidays, I joined a pilgrimage to **Medjugorje**, and in my heart a flame was set alight. For the first time I saw great numbers of people on their knees for hours.

I went back home with a great desire to pray. Each time I went back to Medjugorje I received new impulse to do something for God, because He died on the Cross for me! I used to think that I might **become a nun**, but it stayed in the back of my mind till one day a person asked me: "Haven't you ever thought of consecrating yourself?" I said "yes," and that was the springboard which eventually led me to the convent. The next thing, however, was decide where to go. I didn't know any nuns, but I did know that I wanted a contemplative life, and when I joined the convent I felt at home. It was what I was looking for! I had always desired doing something for the others, and I understood that through prayer I could be close to all life's dramatic situations. M. Delbrel wrote: **"Discover God without a roadmap**, knowing that He is there on the way, not at the end of it. Don't try finding ways to find Him, but let Him find you amid the poverty of a banal life." At 20 years of age I entered the Augustinian Monastery to discover God in silence and in prayer, together with the sisters of my community. This is my story, but I know that the puzzle isn't yet complete, that there is still much journeying to do. Each of us has his

or her own gift, or vocation, from God, but the most important thing is "our response and the total dedication with which we embrace this vocation and to which we remain faithful. Not the vocation makes up our holiness, but the tenacity with which we live it." (M.D.) In our "global village" where committing oneself forever rouses a certain amount of apprehension, **Christians need to manifest their fidelity to God** and to His plan of love. Today after 15 years since the happy day I entered the Augustinian Convent in Locarno, in the Italian canton of Switzerland, (<http://go.to/santacaterina>) I thank the Lord and Our Lady for the immense gift of my vocation, and I ask Mary that other young people might have the courage to donate themselves totally to the service of God's Kingdom and for His greater glory.

Sr. Sandra Künzli

"Return to the Primitive Fervour"

Our Blessed Mother on the Rosary

In all the great apparitions at the end of the last millennium Our Lady never ceased calling her children to be "open to the grace which Christ won for us by the mysteries of his life, death and resurrection" (cf. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, no. 13), through prayer with the Rosary. The Pope, too, strongly invites the universal Church to renew the prayer of the Rosary, seen as an intimate contemplation of the mystery of Christ through the gaze of the Mother's Immaculate Heart. In the same document John Paul II **attributes to the prayer of the Rosary the special power of grace** which is able to lead the heart and mind of God's people back to the essentials of faith, the only source of divine life in the world; to Christ's paschal mystery of death and resurrection which alone can rip open the dense spirals of darkness which now more than ever seem to hold the city of men in a mortal grip. The Pope also explicitly refers to the **numerous and pressing appeals which the Mother of God addresses to her children** of our times: "Many signs indicate that still today the Blessed Virgin desires exercising through this same prayer that maternal concern to which the dying Redeemer entrusted, in the person of the beloved disciple, all the sons and daughters of the Church: "Woman, behold your son!" (Jn19:26) (*RVM*, 7).

At Lourdes and Fatima, and **today in particular at Medjugorje** Our Lady never tires of calling the world to turn to the contemplation of the mysteries of Jesus' life, to remain in intimate and profound communion with the flame of love of her Immaculate Heart so we

can receive the extraordinary graces which the Father has prepared for these our times. *"Dear Children, today I invite you to begin praying the Rosary with a living faith so that I can help you... Dear Children, I invite you to pray the Rosary. May the Rosary be for you a commitment which you will do with joy; and then you'll understand why I have been with you for so long. I desire teaching you to pray..."* (Message, 12 June 1986). *"... may the people pray at least the Rosary every day, with the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries"* (extraordinary message, to Ivan 14 August 1984).

Mary's pressing calls to the prayer of the Rosary can't be reduced to mere devotionism, for they are a part of God's eternal plan to impress the seal of the triumph of Mary's Immaculate Heart into the times when the Son's work of salvation and of the recapitulation of all things in Him will be fulfilled. *"I desire for you all to be active, too, in this time which through me is bound to heaven in a special way..."* (25 May 1996). *"This time is my time, and therefore my Children, I invite you to pray"* (25 Jan. 1997).

The Rosary is, indeed, the spiritual weapon offered to the children of the Church of today, so they can take part in the victory over the powers of darkness in the decisive spiritual battle announced in Holy Scripture; powers of darkness which aim at breaking up the foundations of human life and the communion which exists amongst mankind. *"Dear Children, today like never before I invite you to pray. May your prayer be prayer for peace. Satan is strong and desires destroying not only human life, but also Nature and the planet on which you live. Thus, my Children, pray that through prayer you might be protected by God's blessing of peace. God sent me amongst you to help you. If you wish, grasp hold of the Rosary; even the Rosary alone can work miracles in the world and in your lives..."* (25 Jan. 1991). *"Dear Children, I invite you to renew the prayer of the Rosary in your families. Pray it more often and offer it for peace"* (14 Aug. 1992).

Giuseppe Ferraro

(To be Continued)

We Celebrate the Cross

How do we celebrate the Cross? The Gospel tells us to embrace it; common sense says to accept it, but surely not to celebrate it! Such is the opinion of most church-goers who haven't understood the meaning of that wooden cross on which God chose to die and

which symbolizes our trials and moments of difficulty. It is human, only natural, to think so. However, the Lord Jesus came to overturn man's thoughts and to give everything that is natural and therefore limited, finite and imperfect a supernatural aspect. In this light our opinion of the Cross gains new perspective and instead of refusing it, man is called to accept it and even celebrate it; to celebrate the *"stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles"* (cf. 1 Co 1:23).

Our Lady has often spoken to us about the Cross, especially prior to the **Feast of the Triumph of the Cross** which became a special feast in Medjugorje after 1933 when the people erected the big white cross on *Krizevac* in commemoration of the 2000 years since Christ's death. *"Dear Children, during these days when you joyfully celebrate the Feast of the Cross, I wish that also for you your own cross might become a source of joy. Pray especially, my dear Children, to be able to accept sickness and suffering with love, as Jesus did. It is the only way that I can experience the joy of giving you the graces and the cures which Jesus permits me to grant you."* (message, 11 Sept. 1986)

A thought from **Fr. Slavko** comes to our aid as we remind you that he was born into heaven after having prayed the Way of the Cross on *Krizevac* (on **24 November 2000**). In his book, *"At the School of Love,"* it is written: "Suffering is a mystery even when we reflect on it before the Lord's cross. Though we celebrate the cross with joy it remains an eternal mystery, an unending question. Nonetheless, the cross is a symbol of victory for Christians, and reason for shame and scandal for everyone else. Sickness and suffering become a cross which can easily close up man's heart towards God, creating a greater distance between him and God, and making him utter: 'Why, o God?'. It more commonly happens, though, that suffering experienced by individuals and families generates fruits of faith, love and hope. Not even Jesus was exempt, and He didn't receive a reply in the Garden of Gethsemane, but when He accepted the Father's will He received comfort from the angel. Apart from the question: '**Where are you, God?**', there is another question which we can ask ourselves and others. It is: '**Where are we?**' Much suffering derives from our lack of conversion, and our lack of love, forgiveness and reconciliation. From this come wars, destruction and many other types of suffering. There is the suffering and tribulations of the innocent, caused by others or accepted for the sake of others, and suffering caused because of our love or lack of love towards others.

Mary has the courage to invite us to accept the cross with love; and she holds up her Son as our model. Mary doesn't say to us: "put up with it," for she knows we are weak. She says, instead: *'Pray that you might be able to accept illnesses and suffering with love.'*

Normally, we pray to the Lord to remove our suffering and our cross, which is understandable, but we must also accept the fact that it is indispensable for us to pray to be able to accept tribulations and the cross with love. In the light of Christ's cross, suffering is given an important place in life, for it is no longer seen as a curse or scandal, but as a way which leads to life." These words give us light for our journey, making it

easier, lighter; it increases our trust, even when the way is cluttered with obstacles. Every Friday Fr. Slavko would lead the parishioners in the *Way of the Cross* up Krizevac, till his last time in the autumn of 3 years ago when his parishioners had to carry his lifeless body back down. People listened to him and trusted him because they understood that what he said was fruit of what he had lived. Fr. Slavko taught us a lot, and he continues to do so through his writings which remind us that the cross is the door through which we arrive at a new dimension which has been redeemed and transfigured by the sacrifice of Jesus and by our own united to His.

Stefania Consoli

Uganda: order to kill missionaries!

For over two decades a rebel leader and mad visionary, supported by the government of Sudan, has been fighting against the people of North Uganda, and kidnapping their children to fight in front line against their own people. He recently gave orders to "destroy the Catholic missions, kill the priests and beat the nuns." Concerned missionaries invoke the solidarity of the entire nation and of the international community. (*courtesy Prisca*)

The Prayer Group: where Trinitarian Life is Born

We continue with the publication of the testimony by Fr. Tomislav on how to structure a prayer group according to Our Lady's suggestions to Jelena and Mirjana for the Prayer Group which She herself led at Medjugorje.

(PART 3)

The basic elements for a group, indicated by Our Lady are:

1. Enter into Prayer

Through Jelena, Our Lady explained to the prayer group that "*many pray but few enter into the prayer.*" To enter into prayer there are **two steps**:

i) offer up your sins, and the sins of those around you. This means to renounce sin, to detach them from the soul and offer them to Jesus so He might remove them. One's entire being must be involved in this, and be active in expressing to God in the silence of the heart that which concerns one intimately; and in public that which concerns fraternal communion or the sin of the world.

ii) entrust to God all problems so you might blossom from within and also in your relationship with others, in an attitude of serenity, of trust and of love (*Mt 6:14-34*). This is a big job for the group leader, who must gradually help deliver all the members of the group from inner closures, fears, passivity, false spontaneity, fanaticism, arrogance, and emotional evasion. These open wounds and lead to a state of pathos. The leader must be able to promote individual members, without allowing individuals to cover the passivity of others, and he himself should never substitute the others. The priest fulfils the same tasks and comes to comprehend the soul's motions during confession or in private conversation. He offers everything up in his prayer and in particular in the Holy Mass. Entering into prayer doesn't end here, but at every step of the journey it is developed and brought to perfection, and opens up to the infinity of God's action and to the originality of individuals and the group as a whole.

2. Be open and active in the Spirit

This is an important, delicate and simple step. It doesn't have anything to do with charisms or 'extraordinary' things, or theory or expressions of religious emotions. All it is, is opening the heart and listening with one's soul to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and accepting them and living them. It takes honesty, sincerity, humility, simplicity, and elevation above all interests, for the glory of God. It takes fidelity to God's life in the soul. Mary, Bride *par excellence* of the Holy Spirit, will introduce us into this relationship if we are ready and if we entrust ourselves to Her. After Her *yes*, and with our *yes* said together with Hers, the Holy Spirit descends (Lk 1:34-35).

Our Lady, Mother of the Mystical Body of Christ, will help us live our baptismal graces the most effective way possible. In various ways and in various parts of his Letters, St. Paul helps us understand how the Holy Spirit relates with us. Particularly in his Letter to the Romans we read: "*But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him*" (Rom 8:9). And: "*It is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God*" (Rom 8:16). "*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too*

deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom 8:26-27). At the end of chapter 8 (Romans) St. Paul introduces us into the triumph of the life in the Spirit through Christ's love. The group leader should not worry about the eventual lack of "privileged instruments" in the group, but rather, should occupy himself with leading the members to the freedom and the activity of the Holy Spirit.

In August of 1984 I was transferred to Vitina. Prior to leaving Medjugorje I prayed: "Mary, help me to understand how I can help you in the future when I will be far from Medjugorje!" Jelena heard Our Lady's voice say: *"Love! I came from the Love of God; I act in the Love of God. Now I am here, in every family, all over the world. Love and do as I do."* This is difficult to accept for a person used to measuring with his own metre and at the same time is so threatened by Satan. Yet this is the pivot for all our activity. In the love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all the members of the Mystical Body of Christ are united and there they communicate with each other. In this communion we find Mary Most Holy, the Angels, and the Saints. In this communion the group is open to the grace which rises from other groups. The presence of the Holy Spirit will be expressed in the fruits: *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law"* (Gal 5:22-23). From these will be born God's gifts and instruments.

It is very important to be open to the Spirit, and to accept the grace and with Him to remain faithful to the spousal relationship on all levels! This is where true Christian maturity by the group leader is expressed. The priest's role is to "take care of the souls" and as such will pray with simplicity and will help to understand and to accept the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

3. Sharing

Sharing amongst group members means to avail of the dynamics of God's life in souls and in the group which are brought out through those same elements we have already considered, that is: enter into prayer, be open to the Holy Spirit and be active in Him.

What is to be shared? The Word of God and all the inspirations that come from Him. Everything culminates, is verified and is brought to perfection in the Word of God, in His teachings and in His Person. It is the Person of Jesus Christ that gives value to His teachings, otherwise the word would remain theory, ideology; it would be void without the Person of Jesus who in the Holy Spirit leads us to the Father. Sharing each other's inner experiences enables us to walk with the Lord, and to face everything within us that isn't yet redeemed. Our journey leads us to the death-resurrection experience while being open to Pentecost, which is to say the special graces of the Holy Spirit which continually

bring life in the soul to perfection. Even though we still journey towards complete redemption, we can still have faith, hope and love acting freely within us. The Holy Spirit's prayer becomes alive, and is expressed through the person, enabling the person to blossom (Rm 8:26-27).

The group leader should simply discern ways and means of communication for the benefit of the members. He will take care that all the elements so far mentioned are made to work correctly, and that communion with the Mystical Body of Christ is sought. He will leave space for the positive intentions of individuals, and he will guide the group so that tasks, intentions and the group's path are singled out. He will also pay attention that the sharing does not slide back to the human level of giving vent, thereby losing the action of grace.

On his part, **the priest will become ever more silent, as the Lord does when entering into the mystery.** He will lead the persons into the depth of the faith journey. With his openness to the Spirit he will know how to indicate the way to reach profound communion with God. He will pray silently, whilst following what is said, and intervening with discretion. All that is moved within the interior of the group will make up the substance of his prayer and it will be expressed in the Holy Mass which he will lift up to God.

4. Prayer

Prayer should be simple and spontaneous and it should flow forth from the Spirit who moves persons to a complete involvement whilst respecting the stages of journey of the individual. The whole group should be involved, so that no burden remains within a soul, so that no stone remains unturned. The group leader needs to be attentive to the limits and needs of the individuals, and when necessary, to deal with them separately. His sincere willingness to serve God through Mary will open the ways for the group and its members. Prayer should not remain the exclusive property of the individual, but ought to be open to all the needs of the group, of Christ's Church and of the world.

Prayer enables us to depart, in the Holy Spirit, for a mission in the universe. With Jesus we advance towards the Father. Prayer is summed up and is projected towards Christ. It is in the name of Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, that the group lifts up its prayer to the Father; He is the springwater of life and it is in Him that our life culminates. If a priest is present in the group he should lead the meeting to its climax; through God's action in his soul he is drawn to sum up everything in the Holy Spirit and to pray in the Name of Jesus. It is the priest who sums up the meeting in Christ, and who immerses everything in the life of the Father: the inward motions of souls, the group's communion, the needs of all men and of all creatures. Even if he should be absent, the priest will "gather up" all the groups under his direction and present them to God in the Holy Mass.

In the priest's absence, the group leader will act in his place, in spiritual communion with the priest. It is good for the *Lord's Prayer* to be sung. In the liturgy, this prayer is recited whilst standing. The six visionaries of Medjugorje say that when Our Lady prays the "Our Father" she stretches her arms upwards and looks upwards at the Father. It is good if we do the same.

5. The Blessing

The word *bless* is related to the Latin word *benedicere* which means to "say well of," or to "praise." The blessing transmits the message of salvation; it transmits the life of God which flows through souls. **It is the Holy Spirit Who communicates the blessing to us; He makes it effective;** and this can be seen in our smiles and in the joy expressed in our desires and thoughts. All one's being becomes an expression of our One and Triune God, and it is transmitted to others and to the universe as a whole. The priest thus grants the blessing and the life of God and of the Mystical Body of Christ which is in God. With the blessing the priest intends to reach everyone, in particular the group and its intentions and plans, that they might be made fertile for the glory of God. And he sends the group (out to the world) just as the Lord sent the Apostles.

6. The leave-taking

This does not consist in saying, "See you next time." If this is all it were, the group would stagnate; the seed would not produce fruit, with time the group would become passive, participation would become burdensome, and the members, instead of receiving the Holy Spirit's promptings, would stay closed up within themselves. It is here, then, that the response and responsibility of members and of the group must emerge. Members go back home and pray, using the grace received to make it fruitful. They face difficulties and involve others of good will in their faith journey; and they acquire experience which they take back to the group so that together they might advance. This way the journey continues and is expressed in the vortex of the Trinitarian life. Members accept the grace of the Holy Spirit; they walk down the paths of everyday life together with Jesus towards the Father. United in the dynamics of the Trinitarian life they receive new graces to go out into the world and make them fruitful in the name of God and for His glory. *"And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it"* (Mk 16:20).

We sat down to converse, and we reflected on the inner disposition which enables you to comprehend God and His plans, an aspect often stressed upon in Our Lady's messages to the Prayer Group: "Dear Children, pray to discover God's plans for your lives."

The Gift of Listening

An Interview with Jelena Vasilj

Jelena, the gift you received from the Lord to guide the prayer group at Medjugorje is related to inner listening. You were more or less asked to "listen with the ear of your heart" and then "transmit" to others the words which came from heaven. What did you do to make this gift grow and mature?

Maturing in this sense doesn't come easily, even though I can't deny the journey covered so far. I do think, however, that the ability to listen is the fundamental attitude for a soul to have towards God; as trans-formation can't come about if we don't listen. This makes me think of a psalm which goes, *"make the light of your face, o Lord, shine upon us."* When we begin falling in love with God we also begin to look like Him because of His light which begins to abide in us. Thus, listening means to welcome and accept the others, and to be open to the others, not according to our own expectations, but to accept them for what they are. And this takes a lot of maturity.

It also takes a lot of respect for what is "different" since we often tend to identify with others and desire that their words correspond to our own opinions.

We mustn't try to find ourselves reflected in others, but we have to let ourselves be surprised — if you will — by them. Now that I have a son I realize how everyday there is something new to discover. Every person is a mystery; all the more so God! You can never understand Him totally, so there's no fear of getting bored!

For the Prayer Group your gift was very important, as it was through your capacity to listen that also the action of others depended. How did you feel about this responsibility, this service, this mission?

I've experienced that it is necessary to know suffering and to deny oneself, for unless you are able to renounce everything, even your own desires, you cannot accept others. Even in God we probably seek our own happiness, and that's fair enough, but that doesn't mean we have to seek self-satisfaction. It's the encounter with God and with others that we have

to seek. We must seek the Giver, then the gift comes as a consequence. If we concentrate too much on a gift received we risk losing sight of the person who gave it to us.

God constantly repeats: "Listen Israel..." Do you think His insistence means we're obstinate?

There's a beautiful moment in the baptismal rite when the priest blesses the ears so they can open up and listen to the Word of God, which is a word that becomes life and gives joy. We also know, however, that our senses are very delicate and need protecting since they also perceive negative things.

How can we identify the voice of God in us?

Without Grace it's not possible. We can open up to God's Grace by paying attention, by listening. For example, Hebrews read the Holy Scripture out loud; they practically proclaim it to themselves. Also our prayer should be a proclamation of God's Word to ourselves. It has happened that I have found replies in things I've written myself after having re-read them. So it's important to let the Word penetrate our souls.

To know how to listen to God means we should know how to listen to others. What is your experience with your baby?

Maternity teaches me to open my ears, because when a baby cries it is for a reason. Making the effort of listening carefully makes it easier for me to know him. It has happened that he's been with a person who has watched TV, but he was aware that he wasn't receiving attention, and started crying. I don't mean that children should be adored or dominate over family life, but it is true that their serenity depends on the attention we give them.

What about in a married couple?

It's the same for a married couple. They must communicate. It's a battle.. but when we manage to make this contact and say to each other how we feel then peace is created. Then each of us feels free to do his own thing and live his own independence. Without this contact even one's independence can be used against the other; as if to say: you disturb me, get out of my space! But when communication is alive, everything we do favours communion.

Do you feel that you are listened to?

Yes. It doesn't come automatically, for we both have our own form of egoism. I have to admit that there is the will to listen to each other. I've come to realize how every now and

again when my husband and I are apart all day long, communicating doesn't come easily in the evening. In these cases it takes time to find the right "frequency." After several attempts we manage to "tune in" to each other again. Married couples must fight to protect the harmony; they have to go back every day to the base to set up the contact again, and to listen to each other. From here they can face all the rest. Otherwise, they run the risk of not building up together.

Does this go for God too?

I think so. We have to do His will, and for this we need to give up our own. This is the cross, it's sacrifice; but you realize afterwards how God protects you from so many things when you have the courage to act according to His will. It takes serenity and patience; as pressure and haste don't come from God.

Like Mary who listened and pondered...

Yes, Mary is our model. At Cana she didn't fully comprehend the mystery of God who lived next to her, but she was certain when she said: "*Do whatever he tells you to do,*" because she trusted Jesus. Paying attention expresses our own trust in others.

You could hear the voices of Jesus and Mary in your heart. How could you tell the difference?

By the tone of authority. Jesus' word is imposed in a certain sense, you can feel its weight. I don't mean it is commanding, but that you understand it is something you ought to do. It is stronger than your own opinion and demands being preserved whole.

How did Mary's voice differ?

Mary is forever the handmaid. Here at Medjugorje she said: "*I bow down before your freedom.*" It's amazing. Her way of attracting us is so different to that of Jesus'.

You also distinctly heard Satan's voice. How would you describe it?

God is freedom. He always gives you the possibility of choosing. Satan chains you up; and never offers you the chance of deciding. He deceives you. When you think you're free, perhaps all you're doing is choosing not to be free.. like a fish which liberally jumps out of water, then dies.

Was his voice menacing, persuasive?

I was particularly aware of being pressured to act before I could change my mind. I think

sinners feel the same; that they don't really know how they got to be where they are. Satan knows only too well that if we have more time we would probably resist him. This explains why people have trouble doing good, as it seems there is always plenty of time to do it.

How does prayer relate to this reflection on listening?

The Word of God should echo our prayer. It is useless to remain in silence, to meditate, if the word we listen to isn't the right one. **The only way to be certain that it is God speaking to us is to nourish ourselves daily with His Word.** You need to work a lot on "inner words." If they aren't the right ones, then neither will the ones we pronounce correspond to what's on the inside.

I read that the Holy Spirit is like music. We are the instrument and the Word of God is the tuner. The Holy Spirit plays His melody on our strings. When the instrument isn't tuned by the Word of God, we produce noise. For example, when scruples or fear are dominant within us, then that is not the Word of God, for God's Word is peace, joy, trust...

What role does fasting have in listening?

Fasting makes sense only if done for the sake of love. I see the importance of fasting also through my son who doesn't always react well to what I eat. You see, when we fast there has to be someone else at the other end. Renunciation doesn't make sense without love. This doesn't mean we shouldn't fast; it just means that we must love. Fasting helps us create that inner space which makes listening easier. The door to heaven is a narrow door, and if we have too much baggage we won't fit through it. But if we know how to simplify our lives then we'll get through easily. It is then that we'll truly begin listening to each other.

(Interview by Stefania Consoli)

Our Readers Write...

(a selection of letters)

Audrey O'Brien, Dubbo Australia: Thank you for the Echo. I distribute the copies you send me amongst fellow parishioners who await it anxiously.

Fr. Mario, Assam, India: Many thanks for regularly sending us the Echo of Mary. I am always very happy to receive it and read of the wonders Our Lady does for the world, even though we don't always deserve it.

Carlo Dimaggio, NY, USA: I'm writing to thank you for sending me the Echo, and for all that you do. May Our Lady uphold you and guide you all.

Amelia Romanelli, Turin: I so look forward to receiving the Echo. It is so rich in spirituality; it is like a breath of fresh air for the soul; it is good for the heart, the mind and the soul. May the Queen of Peace bless you and keep you always.

Fr. Vincenzo, Bari, Italy: I read the Echo with great interest and enthusiasm. It is truly the echo of Mary's voice which serves to sanctify me. And it is a witness that brings good for those who find it difficult to stay on the Lord's way. May our Lord reward you.

Esther de Babin, BsAs, Argentina: The Echo is the most divine thing that Mary is doing for the world. To receive a copy brings me immense joy. It fills me. It is so rich in hope, life, courage, and comfort in our world so full of hatred. If it weren't for the Queen of Peace who speaks to us there would be just inner death. May the Lord and Our Lady keep you and bless you, so you might continue to keep us close to them.

Stania Cech-Spirek, Slovakia: I greet you and thank you immensely for the copy of the Echo you send me.

Fr. Aidan Carroll, Ireland: Thank you for the lovely Echo and its sublime reading which lifts our souls to God. Echo is a beautiful rose for Jesus and Mary.

Sr. Marija Crucis, Ireland: May God reward you; the Holy Spirit pour upon you His gifts, and Mary keep you under her mantle. Thank you for the Echo.

Roser Balsells, Canada: Thank you very much for spreading Mary's messages. God bless you all!

* **Pope's Silver Jubilee** - Our beloved Pope, John Paul II will celebrate his Silver Jubilee on 16 Oct. 2003. Please remember his intentions in your prayers.

Retreat for Echo of Mary workers in Medjugorje

Also this year *Echo of Mary* translators and workers spent a few days in Medjugorje (27-31 August) to pray and open their hearts to the message which the Queen of Peace wishes to transmit to all her Children also through the pages of our little paper. Grace and Blessing were poured out into hearts, thanks also to the readiness of the participants to respond ever more fully to the Spirit's promptings. It was this desire to be open to God's will and to be one in the same Spirit that brought **over fifty people from 15 different nations** to the *Kraljice Mira* House where a dense programme had been prepared for them. This included talks by **Fr. Tomislav Vlasic**, and moments of prayer, adoration, silence, meditation and sharing.

It was clear to all that to be limpid vessels of the Grace of Medjugorje at the service of the Echo, it was necessary to empty oneself and offer oneself to God so He is free to use us according to His plans. This is the way by which hearts and intentions are purified and it enables one to avoid the risk of using Echo for secondary purposes or personal gains. The importance of being in communion with God and with each other also became clear, so as to be receptive to the language of love which speaks over and above cultural and geographical differences and so that the various editions of the Echo might be marked by greater harmony, and that thus, readers the world wide should be aware of the Spirit of communion and agreement. It was agreed that the Echo could only benefit from this by improving in quality and in depth. In the serene and joyous atmosphere prepared by Our Blessed Mother, participants gained greater awareness of the seriousness of their work, and at the same time desired bettering their service for the good of Mary's little instrument and for its readers. To her offer of love came just as many responses of love in the act of entrustment made by individuals and the group as a whole. All were deeply grateful for this opportunity to improve, both personally and as workers at the service of the Echo.

Editor

Mantova, 14 September 2003

Echo is a free publication. Donations are gratefully accepted; without them we cannot continue to spread the Message to Mary's little children round the world.

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Our Prayers for you! - We invite you all to join in our prayers which we offer up to God on the first Saturday of each month for the intentions of readers (whether specifically asked or simply expressed within your hearts). Once a month Fr. Alberto will also celebrate a Holy Mass for the same intentions.