

Echo of Mary Queen of Peace

July-August 2004 - Echo of Mary, Queen of Peace, P.O. Box 27, I-31030 Bessica Treviso, Italy.
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Our Lady's message of 25 May 2004:

“Dear Children, Also today I urge you to consecrate yourselves to my Heart and to the Heart of my Son Jesus. Only in this way will you belong to me more with each passing day, and you will inspire each other all the more to holiness. This way joy will reign in your hearts and you will be bearers of peace and love. Thank you for responding to my call.”

In the Heart of Mary In the Heart of Jesus

This call by Mary is not new (see, for example, the message of 25 Oct. last), yet it renews life. It doesn't reveal yet it is decisive for the future. It doesn't expound difficult doctrine yet it is full of Wisdom. **“Also today I urge you to consecrate yourselves to my Heart and to the Heart of my Son Jesus.”** To consecrate oneself means to reserve oneself. To consecrate oneself to the Heart of Mary and Jesus means to place oneself within their Hearts, to live life from within their Hearts. It means to love with their Love, to pray with their Prayer, to speak with their Word, to think in their Thought.

Heart stands for soul, body and mind all together. Thus, to stay in their Heart means to live of Them. How can this be possible? Mary asked a similar question (Lk 1:34) and the Angel's reply is valid also for us: the Holy Spirit will descend upon us and will make possible that which is humanly impossible. Let us ask the Holy Spirit for this gift, and let us ask with faith, hope, love, and all our strength. After all, He would be simply carrying out His job, for the Spirit generates life, and with Love He accomplishes the Father's Will. He who bore God to a human creature, Mary, will bear us in the Heart of Mary and Jesus, and rouse up the *new life* marked by our life in God and God's life in us.

Then, life will no longer be a succession of days and seasons, but existence unshackled by time; no longer a slave to the transient, but free in God; no longer conditioned by the laws of physics, but enraptured in God's Love. And the *civilization of Love*, upon which our beloved Pope often calls our attention, will blossom. This *civilization of Love* isn't an optional, for it is clear to all that without it the world will fall headlong into self destruction.

Consecration to Mary and to Jesus can't be an isolated gesture; something you do once and for all. Since it is *life* in Jesus and Mary, it must develop and grow day



The Queen of Peace has been visiting her children at Medjugorje for 23 years.

by day. **“Only in this way will you belong to me more with each passing day, and you will inspire each other all the more to holiness.”** Yes, the fruit of lived consecration is holiness, which is to belong definitely to God, to remain in God. The soul, not weighed down by oppression or envy, will ascend because we will exhort and encourage each other because we will care about the holiness of the others as much as our own. **“This way joy will reign in your hearts and you will be bearers of peace and love.”**

Peace, love, and joy unmistakably express life in God. The world, too, seems to offer these gifts, but while the former are consequences of holiness, the latter are a feeble imitation. In God, peace, love and joy aren't aspects of life, but are Life itself; they are Jesus. *“Abide in me and I in you”* (Jn 15:4). *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you”* (Jn 14:27). *“I have told you this so that my own joy might be in you and that your joy be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you”* (Jn 15:11-12). Holiness is not imitating some of Jesus' virtues, but is accepting Him without reserve. Not even the awareness of our sin must obstruct this acceptance. When we are stripped of everything - of our sins and virtues, our doubts and fears, our earthly certainties and precautions founded on worldly wisdom - then there will be room in us for the Holy Spirit, and we shall be **“joyous bearers of peace and love”**.

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Our Lady's message, 25 June 2004:

“Dear Children, also today joy is in my heart. I desire thanking you for making my plan realizable. Each of you is important; therefore, my Children, pray and rejoice with me for every heart that has converted and become an instrument of peace in the world.”

Prayer groups are powerful, and through them I can see, my Children, that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Mary's Plan

“The more the Holy Spirit finds Mary, His dear and inseparable spouse, in any soul, the more active and mighty He becomes in producing Jesus Christ in that soul, and that soul in Jesus Christ.” (True Devotion to Mary, St. Louis De Montfort, 20).

According to the tradition of the Catholic Church, this is Mary's task. *“Seeing His Mother and the disciple He loved standing near her, Jesus said to His Mother: ‘Woman, this is your son.’ Then to the disciple He said: ‘This is your mother.’”* (Jn 19:26-27) It's a double-sided call: it doesn't only commit Mary, but also the beloved disciple, John, and in him all mankind.

Mary's plan is nothing else but the fulfilment of the Son's testamentary will which she received at the foot of the Cross. So since then, as with the first community of the Apostles, as at Lourdes and Fatima, Mary works to bring the world to God, and she works through her children. **“I desire thanking you for making my plan realizable.”**

At Medjugorje, perhaps more than elsewhere, we are called to a particularly pure and deep faith, one which allows total surrender to God. If this call is not new in Church history, it is new that at Medjugorje it is addressed to the greater majority and not reserved for a selected few.

This general call brings to mind the wedding banquet (Mt 2:1-14), and there is a certain urgency or entreaty to be quick, not to delay, accompanied by a prolonged wait so that as many people as possible can find refuge in the New Ark. Without fear, but rather with Mary's joy in our hearts (**“Today joy is in my hearts”**) we must take her calls seriously. With Mary's help we shall be able to surrender ourselves to God, and thus come to know the Father's Love, and be able to love and desire His will, and experience Jesus' peace.

Mary thanks us for making her plan realizable, for receiving Jesus in our souls, hearts, minds and lives. What should we say? How can we thank her? **“Pray and rejoice with me for every heart that has converted and become an instrument of**

peace in the world.” This is how we can thank her: pray to be united to her and to God, rejoice for having found the lost pearl, the lost Eden. We are called to live Love, to experience peace and joy, to bear concrete witness in our everyday lives. We will not be exempt from going through life’s trials: suffering, pain, betrayal, humiliation, sickness, death. But in all these things we are more than winners by virtue of Christ Who loved us.

“I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rm 8:37-39). Let us go out like lambs amongst wolves, without haversack, but with peace which can be received or refused, but is never lost because if it is refused it returns to us (cf. Lk 10:3-6).

Prayer groups are powerful because of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. *“If two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my Name, I shall be there with them”* (Mt 18:19). How much more then, if groups ask to do God’s will!
N.Q.

Europe denies its Christian roots

Europe is celebrating the birth of its new Constitutional Treaty: a great thing politically, socially and economically; a shame the same can’t be said of its religious nature which Europe has chosen to deny.

Despite the Pope’s authoritative interventions in which he called for a rediscovery of its Christian roots, **the old Continent’s newly-agreed Constitution failed to mention Christianity**. Seven countries, supported by several others, had asked that mention be made, but they were up against the ever more dominant “ideological laicism” which prefers to deny the truth than to have to face matters which would emphasize its blame.

This definition came from an announcement by the President of the Polish Episcopal Conference in which they express their regret at the “disdainful” decision: “(It is) a falsification of the historical truth; a conscious marginalization of Christianity which for centuries has been and continues to be the religion of a decisive part of Europeans. The ideological laicism manifested in this stand taken by some European governments meets with our firm opposition and our preoccupation for the future destiny of Europe. Faced with this situation, we urge all men of good will to reflect on the future of a Europe built upon the omission of fundamental values.”

However, there is a very interesting detail of the new Constitution which gives Europe, ironically, **a precise Christian connotation: its flag**. “In the definition of its symbols, this same Constitution solemnly reaffirmed that the European flag is to be light blue with twelve stars placed in a circle,” says the well-known (Italian)

writer *Vittorio Messori*. “Well, it happens to be that the colours, the symbols and the disposition of the stars in a circle come directly from Marian devotion. The stars are those of the Revelation; also the colours: light blue represents the colour of the sky, white represents virginal purity. **So even if few know it**, the flag which flies atop all public buildings in the UE was invented by the painter Arsène Heitz who found inspiration in his fervent Marian devotion: **modelled on the “Miraculous Medal”** which he wore around his neck.

In 1955 his drawing was officially adopted as the flag for the new Europe (the Commission was headed by a Jew who totally ignored its real significance!). The artist, **who did not reveal the religious source of his inspiration**, managed to convince the Board that twelve was symbolic for antique wisdom, a “symbol of fullness,” and that it should not be changed even if the member countries should exceed that number. And this is what has happened: according to the new Constitution the number of twelve stars shall never be changed. Twelve stars: a prophetic symbol from Revelation; a crown on the “Woman dressed in the sun.”

Another meaningful coincidence is that the solemn session during which the flag was adopted was held on a day which was not specifically chosen but determined according to political commitments of the heads of state: it was the 8th December, feast day of the Immaculate Conception!”

A mother never disowns her own children!
Red.

John Paul II:

**“Young people of Switzerland,
set out on your way!”**

With these words John Paul II concluded his address to the 14,000 young people who attended the **National Meeting of the Catholic Youth of Switzerland** at the Ice Palace of **Bern** on the **5th June**. “The Lord goes with you,” he reassured them as he urged them to go beyond the infinite series of troubles encountered by today’s youth: “The Gospel of Luke tells the story of an encounter: on the one hand there is the melancholy procession accompanying the young son of a widowed mother to the cemetery; on the other, the festive group of disciples who follow Jesus and listen to him. Today too, young friends, you can find yourselves part of that sad procession... if you allow yourselves to give in to despair, if the mirages of the consumer society seduce you and detach you from true joy to swallow you up in transient pleasures, if indifference and superficiality envelop you, or if, as you face evil and suffering, you doubt in God’s presence and God’s love for every person and seek to appease your inner thirst for true, pure love in the drifting of confused emotions.” Yet, it is “at those very moments that Christ comes close to each one of you and, as he said to the young man of Nain, **he says a word to you which comes as a shock: Arise!**”

JPII’s voice is as usual powerful and trusting. He knows that the young people love him and believe in him and in his faithful coherence to the Truth, which he has demonstrated particularly during moments when mankind has risked the most, that is, when **John Paul II didn’t fear making himself an enemy of the world’s “powerful” in the defence of peace and equity**, and when in a world full of compromises and turbid alliances he had the courage – despite the frailty of his age and ailing body – to rise above everything and everyone to show the only way that leads to good: which is Christ.

“It is Jesus himself who stands before you, the Word of God made flesh. He is the *‘true light that enlightens every man’* (Jn 1: 9), the truth that sets us free (cf. Jn 14: 6), the life that the Father gives us in abundance (cf. Jn 10: 10),” continues the Pontiff. “Christianity is not just a book of culture or an ideology, nor is it merely a system of values or principles, however lofty they may be. **Christianity is a person, a presence, a face: Jesus**, who gives meaning and fullness to human life.”

In a Switzerland fragmented in its faith, even within the Catholic Church, and where it is often difficult to remain firm in one’s faith when Church doctrine (according to the Petrine ministry) is attacked so harshly, well, amid this, the **young people had the audacity to invite the Pope**, and challenge the extremist currents (the excessively conservative and the radical liberalists) which tried with every means to discourage the visit.

“I too was 20, like you” confided the Pope. “I enjoyed sports, skiing, acting. I studied and I worked. I had desires and worries. In those years, now so long ago, when my native Land was wounded by war and then by the totalitarian regime, I sought the meaning to give to my life. I found it in following the Lord Jesus.”

These words, heard by the thousands of exulting hearts, aimed at encouraging the Swiss youth to rise above prejudice, schemes, and dangerous anti-conformism by which the older generations are conditioned: **“The second invitation I address to you is ‘Listen!’**. Do not tire of training yourselves in the difficult discipline of listening. Listen to the voice of the Lord who is speaking to you through the events of daily life, through the joys and sufferings that go with it, the people who are close to you, the voice of your conscience thirsting for truth, happiness, goodness and beauty. If you are able to open your hearts and minds with readiness, **you will discover ‘your vocation,’** in other words, the plan that God in his love has devised for you from eternity.

There is yet another invitation, a third one: young people of Switzerland, **‘Set out on your way!’** Do not be content with discussion; do not wait to do good for opportunities that may never come. The time for action is now!”

Sunday 6th June, Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. The Allmend piazza in front of the Ice Palace in Bern was crowded: 70,000 people came to



participate in the solemn concelebration of the Eucharist. "What is the truth – or we should say: *who* is the truth? This is the question that men of the third millennium ask themselves. We cannot suppress the response because we know what it is! **The truth is Jesus Christ**, and we are called to bear witness to this truth with our words and especially with our life."

Not doctrinal rules did the Holy Father give to the Swiss faithful, but the living face of Christ, whom he carries impressed in his eyes and in his suffering body which he doesn't spare as he continues his international pilgrimages.

His last thought, of course, was for Mary as **he entrusted the Swiss People to the Blessed Virgin**: "I wanted to entrust the youth of Switzerland in a special way to Mary. For five centuries the young people of this country have assured the Successor of Peter and the Holy See the precious and esteemed service of the Pontifical Swiss Guard.

S.C.

Queen of Peace, obscurantist or in line with the times?

by Fr. Nicolino Mori

I was particularly struck by the theme of the recent **World Day of Social Communications** desired by the Holy Father: "**The Media and the Family: a Risk and a Richness.**" It brought to mind the messages of the Queen of Peace at Medjugorje, in which she invites families to turn off the television to make room for dialogue and prayer. "*Dear Children, the Lent is for you a special stimulus to change your life. Begin from this moment: unplug the television, and renounce so many other useless things*" (13 Feb. 1986).

These messages surprised me quite a bit at first, making me wonder if it were possible that Our Lady should come down from heaven to tell us to turn off the TV. Can this means, by now so common, really conquer our civilization and be so harmful? Aren't these messages just a bit too obscurantist? Is there need for such extreme methods? But having read the Pope's message for the World Day of Social Communications I've come to realize how Our Lady is right. Even more so, her presence is a prophetic one which helps us read into the phenomena of our times, offering at the same time adequate solutions.

The Pope recognizes that thanks to the television and new systems of communication today's families "are able to have direct access to the vast resources of communications and information and make use of them for education, cultural enrichment and spiritual growth." I know for myself how useful the television can be, as I comment the Sunday Gospel on a private TV station.

JPII also says, however, without fear of seeming an obscurantist: "Yet the media also have the capacity to seriously damage families when they present an inadequate or even distorted outlook on life, on the family, on religion and on morality."

What is so dangerous about these means of communication? Of course, the blame

can't be put on the instruments, but on the way they are used. These days the mass media represent an avid occasion for making money or for providing rungs to the power scale. These things don't belong to God, but to the world, or rather, to the devil. And just as he deceived our forefathers, the devil still today deceives us, and he uses the mass media to continue sowing his lies and deceiving ways

Today, through the television and other means of communication, **the world and the devil hold their "teaching" sessions 24 hours a day**, day after day. It is said that on an average people "attend these lessons" between 3 and 4 hours a day. So what effect can the Sunday sermon or the pastor's lesson (deserted, in any case, by the majority); what effect can they have against this deceitful "word" which bit by bit enters into one's eyes, mind and heart?

The most serious harm caused by the media is precisely this: that when they are not used with discernment and a critical spirit – or better still, with a spirit of faith – God's thought is replaced by the thought of man and he falls under the devil's influence. It is for this that today we have a wide-spread mentality whereby people live as if God didn't exist, or as if God were an enemy to overcome.

This doesn't make the Word of God, true and eternal, any less valuable; but it demands from us all, especially families, a new type of vigilance, and it opens up a new front in the battle against the Evil One. No one, at any time, should feel safe; those who stand should watch out lest they fall.

We don't know all the mechanisms behind communications, and thus, we are not always sufficiently informed to discern the truth from deception. Moreover, the TV is a type of Trojan horse which enters into our homes rather furtively and easily becomes the master, impeding dialogue, distracting you and making you lose time, turning you into a dependent, and just when you're feeling tired and think you'll relax before it, it is then that you are most vulnerable. It happens to everyone, including priests if the sorry testimony of the old priest is true: after a life of fighting to preserve his pureness and priestly chastity, he was threatened by the TV which with great ease brought into the presbytery all those things that he had fought to keep out.

On one of my first pilgrimages to Medjugorje I heard, with surprise, that Jelena's father had got rid of his television set. Now I understand how right he was, and how Our Lady's recommendations are so true and wise: turn off the TV!

So what ought we do? I don't think there's a single rule that can be applied to everyone, but the Pope points out important criteria: "**Communication, in all its forms, must be inspired by the ethical criterion of respect for the truth and of the human person,**" otherwise, "the moral stature of persons grows or lessens according to the word and messages they choose to hear." "*The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil*" (Mt 12:35).

Through His Vicar God continues to speak to us: "It is vital to learn how to use the media wisely and prudently," stresses the Pope. If you have ears to hear, pay heed!

Earthen Vessels

So full of life it could no longer contain it, the earth has released the life it was silently bearing, generously showering us in an abundance of colours, scents and freshness. But where were these colours hidden: a myriad of hues of varying intensity now scattered in fields and along roadsides, beautifying balconies and gardens? Where were they lain, the petals of this rose now unfolding so elegantly? How could the dry branches of the wisteria vine hide this glory of mauve clusters now sweetening the air and enlightening hearts?

Spring is here, in all its beauty, and though we might often take it all for granted, one only needs to look beyond a little further to see the mystery that each time reveals new secrets. **Nature is the best book in which to see God's face.** Each season bears a different expression of His face; conducted by Wisdom all things are brought to maturation, in perfect harmony with each other. Everything is punctual and responds with obedience to the impulses of time, mysteriously synchronized to the laws which every being bears within itself: they are the laws which regulate growth and bring all creatures into the fullness of life.

I look out the window of the chapel in my convent and my heart is delighted as I see the thousands of red poppies inflaming the side of the mountain and the golden field of growing ears of grain. My gaze lowers, closer to home, and admires the intricate weaving of branches, the architecture of the leaves and of the wings of birds: all so admiral, so perfect...

It is a dawn at the end of May, and from the open window next to the Tabernacle I see the sun rising, and as though it were a play of mirrors I see two *suns* reflecting each other, both of them sources of life, light and warmth: one the creature, the Other its Creator.

It is precisely in this space which separates them that the soul must seek every response to so much beauty and perfection. It isn't just a matter of science or art, but of love which flows out from God's heart and is manifested in us, in His creation. Here, in front of the Eucharist, the questions are transformed into silence, admiration and gratitude, and quieted with rays of clarity. In this God here before me, mysteriously hidden in a fragment of Bread, every existence is recapitulated in Him: from Him they depart and to Him they return because every birth and every death, every form and every substance is contained in Him. In this space, the blue sky out there beyond my window is impressed in my soul, bringing cheer, serenity and comfort.

As I write I am ever more enveloped by the sun that has dispersed the darkness that was. As I pray, Eucharistic Jesus fills that senseless void that I felt when I awoke. I don't need to do anything, just stay here and surrender myself to Him. And while in this part of the world people are waking, I allow God to take care of the world that I bear within me: my past and my present, those who love me and those who ask for support, the facts of yesterday and the plans

for today. **It all appears immobile, yet it is all in motion**, moved by the invisible life which unceasingly gushes from the bosom of the Most Holy Trinity in Whom all is generated and all is linked.

In a few days it will be Pentecost. The air is already laden with patient expectation and anxious impatience, in the certainty that the Holy Spirit will make spring blossom in us, extracting from every soul that potential of life and beauty that we all bear within ourselves and which often lies dormant.

Just as the earth is enriched by fruits and flowers, aromas and flavours, we too can make our surroundings richer if we allow the Creator Spirit to express Himself in us. Our bodies, like precious caskets, are not always aware of the treasure they contain: *"We have this treasure in earthen vessels,"* points out St. Paul, *"to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us"* (2 Co 4:7).

The Spirit of God which *"hovered over the waters"* (Gen 1:2) desires continuing His creating action in us and through us. Almost as though we were wind instruments He desires playing a new song to the world, and on each of us a different tune is played, but the breath is only one and belongs to the Lord. It is He Who animates and harmonizes us to make our lives and the communion between us become a vibrant symphony. When we are inwardly open to the Life which flows through our beings to fill us, it surprises us to see so much abundance and variety and we ask ourselves: **where in me was all this beauty hidden?**

Stefania Consoli

The Most Important People in the World

One day I prayed to God to let me meet the most important people in the world so that I could learn from them and become like them. I thought that with money, fame and skill I would be able to do great things and please the Lord. My silly prayers were all so perfect, I had my life programmed to a tee, and everything seemed so clear; it seemed to me that there was no reason why the Lord should say no to me.

The Lord did indeed listen, and almost without realizing it, I found myself taking part in a Lourdes pilgrimage by train as a stretcher-bearer, but my initial enthusiasm soon cooled down, and I began asking myself what I was doing there. I felt out of place. The gazes of the sick people pierced my heart; I was unable to look them in the face or help them. Once at the hospital I saw that each volunteer went into a room to take care of the sick. I stayed in the corridor and prayed insistently to the Lord to give me strength, but I was petrified. Who would I meet? What would I have to do?

There was only one room in which no volunteer had entered... so in I went, and its occupant said: 'This is your first time, isn't it? What's your name?' The eyes of that woman shone with joy. Then she asked me: **'What do you think suffering**

is?' I didn't know what to say, though I thought it could be compared to lack of happiness and life. She clearly suffered but her will to live was also very clear, and though she had spent 40 years of her life in pain she was unable to hide her joy.

Vera wasn't at Lourdes for a miracle. She went every year to **thank the Lord for her cross which she lovingly embraced**. For Vera, **suffering was the greatest possible grace** and she was even jealous of her cross, never even desiring to change her physical condition. During her calvary she never confided in herself, but continually asked God for the strength to go on, and the more her body was pinned to the bed, the more she knew all she could offer to God was her suffering.

At the end of the pilgrimage Vera gave me a prayer she had written: *'Praise to you Queen of Heaven, glorious Mother of the afflicted. You alone can give strength with the love of a mother. Grant us comfort so we might accept with serenity even the greatest suffering, and ever trusting in your Heart, might we offer it up to your glorious Son as He offered His to the Father for our salvation.'*

She offered herself every day and every night: a lamb immolated for the salvation of souls. I helped her in a material sense, but what she gave me was much greater and nobler. She woke me from my sleep; she gave my soul a good shake and made me look at life with different eyes. The Lord had mercy on me by putting me in front of a person who for the world was a sick person with no hope, just waiting to die. 'I bless you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you kept these things hidden from the wise and intelligent and you revealed them to the little ones.'

Only now do I realize how the Lord answered my prayer, and **made me meet the most important people in the world**, so I could learn from them. Not only I, but many others began living again thanks to Vera. With her sacrifice she brought many souls to the Lord; and the fruits have greatly multiplied. Her treasure was closed up within the mystery of the offering, and she shared it out most generously to us poor and sick people so we could discover life and the Christian vocation. **I owe my conversion to Vera**, and still today I recall her with great joy.

I frequently visited Vera despite the distance which separated us, eventually taking my fiancée. She also fell in love with Vera. My fiancée and I then decided to go to Medjugorje for New Year's Eve, and once back we went immediately to Vera's, only to discover that she had passed away.

However, our journey as a couple continues to grow under the sun of self-offering, and at Medjugorje the Lord wanted us to meet the brothers and sisters of the 'Kraljice Mira' Community who are called to offer their lives without reserve and with complete freedom for the love of God and mankind.

Together with them we are learning more about this journey of offering which Vera first showed us, that we too might become lambs of offering.

Alessandro Macinai

"I exist to cry out..."

In the month of June in the year 2001 I had a memorable encounter. It was 10 pm; we had just concluded the evening prayer and the Piazza of the Shrine of Loreto was alive with voices, greetings, smiling faces and "good nights." I walked over to a cot expecting to see a child, but instead I saw an adult woman with a tiny body (58 cm!) and a resplendent smile.

I offered my hand to greet her, but the sick woman responded most kindly: "Father, I can't shake hands because it might fracture my fingers. I suffer from osteogenesis imperfecta and my bones are extremely fragile. Please excuse me."

Of course there was nothing to excuse, but I was fascinated by her serenity and sweetness, and desired knowing more about her. "Father, under the pillow of my cot there's a small diary. I wrote my story in it. If you have the time you can read it."

I took the diary and read the heading: *"Happy to be alive!"* I turned my eyes once again to gaze on that **crucified mystery of joy** and asked: "Why are you happy to be alive?" She told me, and I in turn tell all those who teach and all those who truly love the young people: "Father, you can see my condition.. but my story is even sadder. I could entitle it "Abandonment"!"

Yet I am happy because I have understood my vocation. Out of God's plan of love, **I exist to cry out** to those who have health: 'You don't have the right to keep it for yourself; you have to donate it to those who haven't got health, otherwise yours will rot in your egoism and it won't give you happiness.'

I exist to cry out to all those who are bored: 'The hours in which you are bored are lacking in others who need affection, care, and company. If you don't donate those hours to others they will rot and won't give you happiness.'

I exist to cry out to all those who live by night and rush from one discotheque to another: 'Those nights, you know, are lacking, drastically lacking in the lives of the many sick and old and lonely people who wait for someone to come along and dry their tears. And tears are lacking in you, for tears are the seed of true joy. Donate your nights which you now waste, otherwise they will become the tomb of your unhappiness.'

I looked upon the sick woman who spoke from her **authoritative pulpit – the pulpit of sorrow!** and I dared not comment because it was all wonderfully and dramatically true. The sick woman added: "Father, isn't my vocation wonderful?" In reply I bowed my head – and I agreed!

Mons. Angelo Comastri
(An excerpt from "Dio è Amore")

"In the evening, when I was praying, the Mother of God told me: *'Your lives must be like Mine: quiet and hidden, in unceasing union with God, pleading for humanity and preparing the world for the second coming of God.'*"

From St. Faustina Kowalska's **Diary**, 625

Miracle of Medjugorje

Many of us are witnesses of this “miracle,” but perhaps we aren’t aware of it or of its worth. But it is right to consider miraculous that which has been happening in a little town of Bosnia-Herzegovina **for the last 23 years**, and which has changed the lives of thousands of people. We don’t mean the miraculous healings (that these are important no one doubts), or any other sensational events, but the extraordinary reality which has become ordinary precisely because the Queen of Peace appears daily.

On 25th June (the Anniversary of the apparitions) we are called again to reflect with greater attention on the profound meaning of Mary’s prolonged presence in the world. It is very unusual: it has never happened before, even though the Mother of God has appeared numerous times in the past; and perhaps it won’t happen again.

Those who believe know that **Medjugorje is a very important chapter in the book of Salvation**. They are pages of history often misunderstood, opposed, misjudged and criticized, even by those in the Church called instead to protect and promote it. But it is also very much loved, this “story of Medjugorje,” as an advocate of peace so needed by the world.

Medjugorje, so full of stones and lacking in other attractions, is loved by those who have found themselves and the meaning to their lives; by those who have found the courage to be audacious witnesses of faith in an unbelieving and indifferent society; and by those who had lost their personal dignity because of dependence and slavery and have found the freedom of being God’s children.

They are men and women who have allowed themselves to be worked on by Grace. They’ve looked in their hearts and questioned themselves, and they’ve decided to abandon the false security offered by the world, to begin a new journey full of light. It is not always easy or comfortable, but it saves.

Thus, the *miracle of Medjugorje* is “the presence” of a most pure Mother who **continues to generate the response** in the hearts of her children; of a Mother who continuously accepted God’s will even when things seemed impossible.

In a world full of falseness and illusions, where man is used to passively living by the choices of others (politicians, leaders, traders, mass media...), Mary’s eternal *yes* has opened in Medjugorje the door to many other *yesses*. Her constant readiness to carry out God’s plans has shifted our consciences made lazy in this technological era. Encouraged by the *Gospa’s* example, **people have responded** and have started marching. In these 23 years we have seen a continuous blossoming of new conversions, of radical changes of life-style. The priests have heard profound and sincere confessions, the kind they don’t generally hear in their

parishes. The young people have found the way and many have become priests and religious. The sick have stopped complaining and have understood that to offer one’s suffering is worth more than regaining health.

The miracles of this Shrine are not received by remaining inert. We are called to a full participation; to abandon a state of sickness and death through prayer, sacrifice, and the sacraments... and we’ll be given a **“dynamic healing”** which will reach down to the most profound layers of our being till we are completely redeemed. The Queen of Peace doesn’t want “miracled” people, but healed children, who actively collaborate in their own process of salvation.

Hence, **twenty-three years of apparitions can’t be an episode to comment**, then file away, but are, instead, an event to be contemplated then lived.

In today’s world where everything is disposable, the duration of the “Medjugorje phenomenon” at times creates scandal: “why so long?” many ask. If in the past it took centuries to build a cathedral, today everything is prefabricated and mounted very quickly. We are no longer used to long-term projects, those that require commitment and self-denial, and so we can’t comprehend that the Queen of Peace is building, brick after brick, the heart of a demolished, degraded and dejected humanity. She knows that it takes time to teach us to grow *“in wisdom and grace”* (cf. Lk 2:52), the way she did with her child Jesus.

“Pray, pray, pray... Peace, peace, peace... Fast...” Tirelessly and ever patient, Mary continues to repeat these words to us till we make them ours and begin to live them. In fact, **though the fruits are copious and positive, there is the risk that we become accustomed to Grace** and take it all for granted. Fired by initial enthusiasm we accept her invitations and put them into practice, but then if the initial zeal fades we let proposals become habit, and at a certain point we might even become “bored,” and like an old dress, we put aside every good deed. But Mary is always the same: ever attentive to the voice of God, ready to serve Him and offer us all her love.

This year too, **pilgrims from all round the world came to Medjugorje to celebrate the Gospa** and she was very happy to see so many grateful and affectionate hearts, but how many will allow Mary to “live” in their souls and not just be a statue on their bedside table? to allow her to be the queen of their families? or a mother who corrects us when necessary? How many will stop closing her up in exterior devotions to begin listening to her from within their hearts?

The answer is in our consciences. We, her *“Dear Children,”* have received everything from Mary and we should give everything to her, so that Mary’s face is made visible in the world. We are responsible for the grace we receive through her, and we can’t let it be wasted. So let us offer up to God a faithful *“yes”* and Mary will continue to rejoice: *“Thank you for responding to my call...”*

Stefania Consoli

The “new time” depends also on us!

A great French mystic from the Franciscan Third Order, Filiola, received a rare grace when Jesus placed His own Heart within her heart, allowing her to experience His joys and sufferings! In her book, she writes of the deep suffering she experienced each time Jesus showed her evil being done inside the Church. She felt the unbearable pain of Jesus in agony, at Gethsemane! With her simple words (she had no education), she heartbreakingly cried out to Jesus in pain and begged Him to have mercy on the world. Fortunately, she also saw the chosen few who are building what Jesus calls “the Church of Light”. When she witnessed the beauty of this reality at hand, she went into a rapture. (The blossoming of The Church of Light might be what the Gospa calls the “New Time”: see message of 25 Oct. 2000:

“Dear Children, today I wish to open up my motherly heart to you and I invite you all to pray for my intentions. I desire renewing prayer with you and I invite you to fast, which I wish to offer to my Son Jesus for the coming of a new time, a time of spring. In this Jubilee year many hearts have opened up to me and the Church is being renewed in the Spirit. I rejoice with you and I thank God for this gift. And I invite you, my Children, to pray, pray, pray until prayer becomes joy for you. Thank you for responding to my call.”)

Filiola was willing to suffer anything so that this Church of Light might rise in full splendour and open its doors to all of Her lost children. Like Marthe Robin, whose cause is progressing in Rome, Filiola saw the New Pentecost of Love coming after a time of purification. Five years after Filiola’s death (1976), Our Lady appeared in Medjugorje (1981) and what does she do if not precisely build up this Church of Light, first in each person’s heart, then in our families? How can we not jump with joy for such a gift! and not follow with enthusiasm such a Mother!

Recently in Medjugorje an American priest shared a conversation he had with Mother Teresa about the world. Basically he said Mother Teresa believed **spiritual poverty to be a deeper sore today than material poverty**. The emergency is now to treat the spiritual poverty. In order to heal this sore, we need to understand our *Royal Priesthood of the Laity* and live it anew, in its fullness! Then she gave the remedy par excellence: live Holy Mass, respect, love and adore Jesus in the Eucharist. Radiate Him to others. This is living our Royal Priesthood. This is building up the Church of Light.

On Podbrdo, when pilgrims join Ivan’s prayer group at night, Our Lady always appears happy and joyful. She greets us: *“Praised be Jesus, my dear children!”* and, with her hands extended, she prays over us and blesses us with her motherly blessing. What an immense grace for those present! Just to receive this blessing from the Mother of God, it would be worth while coming all the way from Australia >

AN INTERVIEW OF VICKA

“Paradise here on the earth”

We met on her birthday. She was serene, smiling, available. Also on that special day she did not want to miss her appointment with the pilgrims who wait for her at the blue stairs to hear her tell of her encounters with Our Lady.



Q. Vicka, Our Lady has been visiting this land for 23 years and she has given us so much. Some pilgrims, however, limit themselves to “asking” and they don’t always “hear” Mary asking: “What will you give me?” What do you think?

VICKA: Man is in constant research of something. If we ask Mary, our Mother, for true, sincere love she is always willing to give it to us. And in exchange she expects something from us. I think that today in particular we live in a time of great graces, in which man is called not only to ask but also to give thanks and to donate. We are not yet aware of how much joy there is in donating. If I sacrifice myself for the Gospa (because she has asked me) without seeking anything for myself, and I ask for something for others, I feel a special joy in my heart and I see that Our Lady is happy. Mary rejoices when we give and when we receive. Man must pray, and through prayer, offer himself. The rest will be given him when the time is right.

Q. Generally, though, when man suffers he seeks a way out or a remedy.

VICKA: Our Lady has explained many times that when God gives us a cross (sickness, suffering, etc.) it ought to be accepted as a great gift. He knows why it has been given us and when He will remove

>> from page 5: or Japan! When the apparitions in Medjugorje stop, we might lament, “Oh, if only I had gone over there whilst our Mother was still visiting!”

Ivan often says that the most important thing during these encounters is that we are gathered together with our Blessed Mother. **She comes to bless us and pray with us.** The lack of peace in our families concerns her very much because the world will have no peace unless we make peace in our hearts and in our families. If we want that joy, peace, and holiness to return to our families, the remedy is this: *bring prayer back into your families!* The School of Mary is so simple! **But courage is necessary to stand for her and say NO to our false gods:** television, food, computers, cars, toys... which are pressing us from all sides and draining our families. *“Satan wants war”* says Our Lady! Whoever is on a battlefield and does not fight has already been beaten. Putting Christ in the first place and fighting on His side against Evil is not an optional, but a question of survival.

Sr. Emmanuel (Children of Medjugorje)

it. The Lord wants our patience. In this regard, Our Lady says that when the gift of the cross arrives, we are not ready to receive it and we always say: ‘why me?’ She says that if we begin to thank and pray by saying: ‘Lord, thank you for this gift. If you have something else to give me I am ready to accept it; but I beg You to give me the strength to carry my cross with patience and love...’ that if we do this we will receive peace. Our Lady stresses that we can’t even imagine how much value our suffering has in the eyes of God!

It is very important to pray for all those who have trouble accepting the cross. They need our prayers, and with our life and example we can do much.

Q. What about moral and spiritual sufferings which aren’t easy to manage? What have you learnt from Our Lady over these years?

VICKA: Personally, I am very happy because I feel immense joy within me, and much peace, partly because I desire being happy, but mostly because Our Lady’s love makes me so. Mary asks us to be simple, humble and modest. I try with all my heart to offer to others what Our Lady gives to me.

Q. When you witness and say how Our Lady took you to see paradise, you mention a type of “passage.” I think that if we offer ourselves and desire going beyond suffering, the passage is present also within our souls. Is it so?

VICKA: Of course! Our Lady said that paradise is lived already on this earth, and that it simply continues with our death. But that “passage” is very important, for if I live out paradise here and I feel it in my heart, I will be ready to die at any moment without asking God why. He wants us to be ready every day, though none of us know when our time will be. So the “great passage” is nothing else but our readiness. Some put up resistance and fight against the idea of death. That is why God offers us another chance through suffering: to give us the time and the grace to come out winners in this inner battle.

Q. At times, though, fear prevails.

VICKA: Yes, but fear doesn’t come from God. Once Our Lady said that if we have joy, love, satisfaction in our hearts, these feelings come from God. But if we feel restless, unsatisfied, hatred, and tension, we must understand that these feelings come from somewhere else. It is for this that we must discern, and as soon as we feel restless in our minds, hearts and souls, we have to throw it out immediately. The best weapon to drive it out is with Rosary beads in our hands, and prayer with the heart.

Q. You speak of the Rosary, but there are various ways of praying...

VICKA: Sure, but Our Lady recommends the holy Rosary, and if she says this, it must mean that it is pleasing (to

God). Nonetheless, any prayer is good when it comes from the heart.

Q. Can you speak to us of silence?

VICKA: That’s not easy because I’m hardly ever silent! Not because I don’t like it; I think it is very good. In silence man can question his conscience, he can collect himself to listen to God. But my mission is to meet people and everyone expects a word from me.

I ask for silence when I ask people to be quiet while I pray for their problems and difficulties. This moment lasts between 15 and 30 minutes. These days man doesn’t have much time to stop and pray in silence, so that’s why I offer them this opportunity so that each can reflect and look into himself. Then, with time, his conscience will bear fruit. People say they feel well during this moment as if they could experience paradise, and it makes them happy.

Q. But I think at times that when these moments of “eternity” are over people begin talking loud again and are distracted and lose the grace they received in prayer...

VICKA: Sadly, yes. Our Lady says about this that many times people listen to her message with one ear and they let it out the other ear and nothing remains in their hearts! It’s not the ears that are important, but the heart. If man decides to change himself he can (from within his heart). If, instead, he seeks what is always best for himself and remains in his egoism, he makes Our Lady’s words vain.

Q. Tell me about Mary’s silence. How are your meetings with her now? Do you pray, converse?

VICKA: Most of the times we just pray. Our Lady loves praying the *Creed, the Our Father, the Glory Be*. We also sing together. We don’t remain much in silence. Before Our Lady spoke more, but now she prefers praying.

Q. You mentioned joy before. The man of today needs it a great deal, but he is often sad and unsatisfied. What do you suggest?

VICKA: If we pray with a sincere heart for the Lord to give us joy, it will not be lacking in us. In 1994 I had a small accident. To save Grandma and a nephew from a fire I got burnt. Things really looked bad: I was burnt from my waist up. At the hospital in Mostar I was told that I’d need plastic surgery. In the ambulance, on the way there, I asked my mother and sister to sing. They were surprised, and seeing how disfigured I was they couldn’t think how it could be possible to sing. But I told them to be happy and thank God.

In the meantime I didn’t have plastic surgery... and friends were perplexed by my serenity because the fire had truly disfigured me, but I told them I would accept whatever God sent me, even if it meant staying like that. Believe me, after a month there wasn’t a trace left, not even a little scar! I was beside myself with joy. Everyone would say: ‘but have you seen yourself in the mirror?’ and I would respond no, as my mirror is inside myself.

If man prays with his heart and with love, joy will always be in his heart, but today man is always so busy with unimportant things and he escapes from what can give him joy and happiness.

If families put material things first they will never be able to hope in joy, but if they desire that God be their light, their centre and the king of their family then they will always have joy. But Our Lady is sad because today Jesus is in the last place for families, or not there at all!

Q. Perhaps we exploit Jesus at times, or want Him to be the way that suits us.

VICKA: I would say that we test our strength against His. For example, in a certain situation we might say: "But I can do this by myself! Why should I seek God if I can be in first place sometimes?" It's an illusion, for we are not given to precede God. But He is so good that He allows it, as a father would with his baby, for He knows that sooner or later we will return to Him. God gives man total freedom, but He always waits for him to return.

You see how many pilgrims come here every day. Personally, I would never say to them: "You have to do this or that; you have to believe; you have to know Our Lady... If you ask me I shall tell you, otherwise I respect your freedom. But remember that you are not here by chance, because you have been called by Our Lady. This is a call. So, if Our Lady has brought you here, it means she expects something from you. You have to discover, in your heart, what it is."

Q. Tell us something about the young people you so often talk about.

VICKA: Young people are in a very difficult situation. Our Lady says we can help them only through our love and prayer. To them She says that all that the world offers today is fleeting, and to be careful because Satan desires destroying them. In this time the devil is particularly active amongst young people and the families.

Q. How does the devil act in families?

VICKA: Families are in danger because there is no more dialogue, no prayer, no nothing! That is why Our Lady desires that prayer be renewed in families. She asks parents to pray with their children, and children to pray with their parents, so that Satan is disarmed.

Prayer is the foundation stone of a family. If parents had time for their children, there would be no problems. But today parents leave children to themselves so they can have more time to themselves and they don't understand that their children are getting lost.

Q. Thank you. Would you like to add anything?

VICKA: I will pray for all of you, especially for the readers of Echo of Mary. I will commend you to Our Lady. May the Queen of Peace bless you with her peace and love. I greet you all most warmly.

(S.C. – Redaz.)

Fr. Slavko's lessons on prayer

The following excerpts are from a book by Fr. Slavko, written in 1999, entitled "Pray Together with a Joyous Heart" (Edited by MIR Medjugorje).

By now it is clear that the Queen of Peace insists on the importance of prayer, for she knows that it is the royal way which leads to a living relationship with the living God. So it is worth our while to give it greater consideration.

Praying together

"I am often asked: what is a prayer group, and what should I do to lead one? My various replies have always wanted to help pilgrims put their good will and resoluteness into practice.

"If two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven, for where two or three meet in my Name, I shall be there with them" (Mt 18:19-20).

From a biblical point of view, prayer in community has a special power. It is important to know that **prayer is dialogue with God**, but we also need to know that it has a specific vocabulary, grammar and contents which we must practise, just as we would do with a new language. To be able to speak a foreign language you need to be able to converse with others, but to do this you need to know the words and rules. It's the same with prayer. To learn to pray well, you must pray together with others, and you also need to pray alone.

The family is the first prayer group. Parents must pray with their children and vice versa. A family that does not dialogue is not a family, likewise a family that does not pray together is not a Christian family. Mother Teresa said: "A family that prays, stays together, and a family that remains together grows in love!"

From a teaching point of view it is important that children see their parents pray, and that they learn to pray with them. Everyone knows that in a child's growing years there is a stage during which he sees his father as the most intelligent and strongest person in the world, and this is important for his personal development. But when he sees that his father joins his hands and prays he understands - though he may not be aware of it - that **there is someone who is taller, stronger, more intelligent, and richer than dad**. Thus, the heart and soul of the child open up to a supernatural experience and are prepared to meet God the Father who is Almighty and transcends every human creature.

If parents don't pray together with their children it is hard to expect that the children will pray. When people today say that young people don't pray, it means the role models were missing.

During their growing years, young people go through a prayer crisis, and this is completely normal because crises are part of growing up, and it is in this context that they have to choose personal prayer

and personal encounter with God. They can last a long time even, but in a family where parents pray with their children, they will overcome any type of crisis and will become more mature Christians.

For one who prays in the family it is easier to feel well in a prayer group. Prayer groups are essential for the faith of young people to grow. It would be very risky if parents didn't allow their children to meet with their friends outside the home. It would impede healthy development in the children and would leave them unprepared for their entrance into life.

To the generic question on how to pray and lead a prayer group, it is necessary to point out that **a prayer group is a group of friends**. No one would ask what you do when you meet friends, as we all know that you talk, sing, remain silent, cry, laugh, rejoice... according to circumstances. A prayer group ought to be conceived in the same way. It is a matter of friends meeting because they are believers, and of believers meeting because they are friends.

The prayer meeting will take shape according to the state of mind of the participants. On one side it is the expression of the individuals' inner state, but on the other side, it must lead to and be inspired by the Word of God.

For this reason it is fundamentally important that each prayer group and group of faithful be aware of their true state and that they find the necessary response and help for it.

(Fr. Slavko Barbaric – end part 1)

Annual Apparition to Ivanka

Visionary Ivanka Ivankovic Elez had her annual apparition on the **25th June 2004**. Ivanka had her last daily apparition on 7 May 1985. On that occasion Our Lady gave her the tenth and last secret. Our Lady told Ivanka that for the rest of her life She would appear to her once a year on the Anniversary of the apparitions.

This year Our Lady entrusted Ivanka with the following message: *"Dear Children, pray for those families who have not known the love of my Son. Receive my motherly blessing."* Our Lady was joyous and spoke at length about her life.

Prayer for a Sick Person

(Jelena Vasilj, 1985)

(3 Glory Be's...) O my God, behold this sick person before You. He has come to ask You what he wishes and what he considers to be the most important thing for him.

You, o my God, make these words enter into his heart: 'What is important, is the health of the soul.'

Lord, may Your will in everything take place in his regard, if You want for him to be cured, let health be given him; but if Your will is something else, let him continue to bear his cross.

I also pray to You for us who intercede for him: purify our hearts, that we might be worthy of conveying Your holy Mercy.

Protect him and relieve his pain, that Your holy will be done in him, and that Your holy Name be revealed through him. Help him to bear his cross with courage. *Amen.*

How to Give Oneself to Mary, Mother of Goodness, Love and Mercy

(Jelena Vasilj, 1984)

O Mother of mine,
 Mother of Goodness, Love and Mercy:
 I love you with all my heart
 and I offer myself to you.
 Through your goodness, your love and your
 mercy, save me!
 I want to belong to you.
 I love you so, and I want you to protect me.
 With all my heart, o Mother of Goodness,
 I beg you to give me your Goodness
 that I might go to Heaven.
 I ask you, for the sake of your immense love,
 grant that I might be able to love everyone,
 as you loved Jesus.
 I also pray to you for the grace of knowing
 how to love you.
 I entrust myself completely to you
 and I wish for you to be with me at every step
 because you are full of grace.
 I wish never to forget this;
 but if one day I should lose grace,
 then please grant it to me again. *Amen*

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.

How to donate:

1. PERSONAL CHEQUES payable to "Echo of Mary Association" - mail to same at: **P.O. Box 27, I-31030 Bessica TV, Italy.**

2. If convenient, pay into one of our **bank accounts**, specifying donation for Echo of Mary Association:

- **Italy:** Banca Agricola Mantovana, Agenzia Belfiore, Mantova, Italy.

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- **Britain:** Royal Bank of Scotland, 26 George St., Oban, Argyll, PA34 5SA. Acc. no. 8326 0400 154351

3. USA, cheques payable to "Echo of Mary Association" can be mailed to C/o R.&F. Venditti, P.O. Box 646, Pacifica, CA 94044.

4. Australia/Oceania. Echo is now posted from Italy. Please write to us to keep subscriptions up to date, submit donations, etc. (Personal cheques accepted. See above)

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Internet: www.ecodimaria.net
New EMAIL: info@ecodimaria.net

Our Prayers for you! - Please join us on the first Saturday of each month to offer readers' intentions to Mary's Immaculate Heart. Once a month Fr. Alberto celebrates Mass for the same intention.

* **Copies of Echo** available in **Medjugorje at Phoenix Catholic Books**, in main street next to pharmacy.

Requests for Rosary beads:

1. Fr. Alberto Rienzner, Aboke Mission, P.O. Box 43, Lira, Uganda, Africa
2. Donaldson Andemario FO, Marist Int'l Novitiate, POB SN 304, Kumasi, Ghana, W. Africa

Our Readers Write...

Marcelo Bogado, Argentina: Thank you for your publication. I read it very attentively; it helps me spiritually, enabling me to keep on living. Thank you for the love you transmit.

Fr. Alberto Rienzner, N. Uganda: Thank you, thank you, thank you for the Echo of our blessed Mother! Here in Aboke, Lira, we're alive by miracle, since diabolic rebels roam all around. Lord forgive them, they don't know what they're doing... SOS: If anyone has the possibility of sending us Rosary Beads, we'll be very grateful and prayerful! [Fr. Alberto Rienzner, Aboke Mission, PO Box 43, Lira, Uganda]

Lucy Favetta, Australia: I wish to thank you for your inspiring publication. I look forward in anticipation to receiving it. Many blessings to you all.

Okiror Robert, Uganda: I am so happy that the Echo has changed my lifestyle both physically and spiritually. God bless you.

Alison Carranza, UK: Thank you for the blessing and inspiration that your wonderful Echo brings us from Our Lady. It is such a joy to read and strengthens our faith in the work of the Church.

J. Claude Habyariman, Rwanda: I receive the Echo regularly and enjoy it. Thank you for your work that contributes to the salvation of the world.

Marilyn Brandel, USA: I read and re-read the Echo, then make copies for others. Thank you; I will keep you in my prayers.

L. Akindayomi & T. Shobo, Nigeria: We appreciate your wonderful work with the Echo. Parishioners and friends enjoy reading it and we all pray that God will continue to guide and bless you.

Fr. S.J. Joseph, India: The voice of Medjugorje is being echoed in India; soothing the ears and hearts of my parishioners. The Echo is true inspiration to me. Thank you. May your publication be echoed in every nook and cranny of the world, that our dear Mother be loved and followed!

Stefano G., Bologna, Italy: I first found your publication a year ago, and have only recently undertaken the faith journey. Since I've started reading Echo something has changed in me, for the better. I read in one of your editions that a pilgrimage to Medjugorje is always special because of the wonderful atmosphere that is breathed there, so I hope to go soon. Congratulations for Echo; I am happy to send you my donation.

From the Translator of Echo in Greek

Sr. Despina: Dear Friends, apart from being a translator and spreading the Echo discreetly in parishes and many other places, my first concern in the Community is our spiritual life. I also run a language school. I shall pray for you during our annual retreat in July. God bless you.

* Youth Festival Medjugorje: 1-6 August 04

* **Fr. Ljubo Kurtovic** from Medjugorje in U.K. at **Walsingham** on 30 August; at **Birmingham** (St. Catherine's Church, Horsefair) on 31/8
 Info: Birmingham Medj. Centre 0121 604 4061.

ECHO TURNS 20!



When **Fr. Alberto Bertozzi's** priestly vocation was budding and during the years of theological study, he lived in the presbytery at Villanova Maiardina, the parish of Fr. Angelo Mutti, and the birthplace of the *Echo of Mary*.

Fr. Alberto thus witnessed the birth of the Echo, and when Fr. Angelo died, he assumed the role of President of the Association. Still today, he signs off each edition (produced by the Editorial Staff) with his blessing.

"Fr. Angelo's boys"

Why did Fr. Angelo go to Medjugorje? Essentially, for the messages regarding prayer. Back then there wasn't much news. A priest-friend of his first spoke to him about the "phenomenon." His attention wasn't drawn by the extraordinary facts, but by the prayer Mary was asking for.

In fact, for Fr. Angelo, prayer was the most important task of a Christian, and all of us, whom the priests of Mantua used to call "Fr. Angelo's boys", knew that only too well.

So, off we went, in an old mini bus, feeling rather adventurous. I remember that we saw the visionaries from afar. What convinced Fr. Angelo and all of us was the Mass at 6 pm: it truly was an assembly of believers. It all started from there.

Fr. Angelo began frequent pilgrimages to that blessed land. The "*Echo*" was born as a necessary link for pilgrims. *Echo* number one was printed in all of 50 copies! The original was typewritten and copies were made using a duplicating machine. It was necessary to make reprints fairly often.

There was always something new to provide material for the next edition, but the peculiar thing was that the little parish of Villanova walked together with Fr. Angelo in the intensification of prayer, in the sharing of the experience of "bread and water", in the periodical approach to the sacrament of Reconciliation. Nearly immediately the Parish adopted the practice of monthly Confession, and it was a pastoral success. On several occasions I heard the compliments of the father confessors who came to help: "How one confesses well here!" they would say.

It wasn't always easy for Fr. Angelo to write up the Echo. At the beginning he felt this commitment almost as an alternative to his parish duties, but the community assured him: "*The parish is little... don't worry... we're proud to be the parish of Echo!*" I think that the parish contributed as a "theological place" for the composition of Echo, especially at its beginning.

Fr. Alberto Bertozzi

May the Queen of Peace renew her blessing in your hearts and your families.

don Alberto

Villanova M. 1 July 2004