

Echo of Mary Queen of Peace

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Our Lady's message, 25 March 2006

“Courage, my Children! I have decided to lead you on the way of holiness. Renounce sin and set out on the way of salvation, the way which my Son has chosen. Through your tribulations and sufferings God will find the way of joy for you. Therefore, my children, pray. We are close to you with our love. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Courage, my Children!

On the day the Catholic Church celebrates the solemnity of the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38) Mary's message gives us hope while also urging us to decide. The first words on their own express an urgency: **Courage my Children! I have decided to lead you on the way to holiness.** That “**courage**” is a call to come out of our sepulchres. *“Awake, oh sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light”* (Eph 5:14). Yet, it is more than a call. It is a decision which Mary has already made, that she is determined to fulfil.

It is not up to us to delay, by asking *how it is possible* (cf. Lk 1:34), but only to say “**yes**” – *yes, I am ready to let myself be led onto the way of holiness*; or if we so choose we can respond: *no thank you, I prefer to remain where I am.* Mary, however, doesn't even seem to consider a negative response, for she immediately indicates this way: **“renounce sin and set out on the way of salvation, the way chosen by my Son.”**

It is the Lenten way proposed each year by the Church, which leads to the Resurrection. It is the way of the Cross already taken by Jesus and which He freely chose: *I lay down my life of my own accord* (Jn 10:18). It is Love which lets itself be nailed to the Cross to become a CROSSROADS of salvation: *Body given for us* (Lk 22:19), *Blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins* (Mt 26:28). It is on this Way that Mary desires leading us; there is no other. Christ is the Lamb that was slain, and we - assimilated into Him with holy Baptism - are other lambs like Him. *Feed my sheep* (Jn 21:15) Jesus ordered to Peter.

Mary has decided; and we can no longer delay. We must decide now. That we may not weary our God (cf. Is 7:13), let us hastily lay aside all feelings of haughtiness, every spirit of arrogance, tyranny, division, and pride, and every sin. Let us stop contemplating ourselves, and turn our eyes, heart and soul to God.



May - an entire month with Mary

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your doings, cease to do evil, learn to do good, to seek justice (cf. Is 1:16-17). It is time we **set out on the way of salvation.** It is not an easy way, but it is the only one that takes us to God. The **way of holiness** is already traced out, and is paved with the beatitudes (Lk 6:20-23). We are all called to holiness (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2013). *Be perfect then, as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Mt 5:48).

On the way we shall encounter **tribulations and sufferings**, but these are companions of every man's life; they are not characteristic of the **way of holiness.** Characteristic of this way, instead, is the way one comes through the tribulations and suffering. We can face them alone, or we can face them with Jesus. We can seek support and consolation from the world, or from God. **Through your tribulations and sufferings God will find for you the way of joy.**

Allow yourselves to be led by Mary. As the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit she will know how to lead us with the Spirit's Wisdom and with the sweetness of her Immaculate Heart. So let us **pray**; let us turn off the channels of our television, and tune in to the *Channel of Love.* **We**, says Mary, **are close to you with our love**, where “**we**” stands for God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and the Virgin Mary. Is there anything else we could need?

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Our Lady's message, 25 April 2006:

“Dear Children, Also today I call you to have more trust in me and in my Son. He has conquered by His death and resurrection and, through me, He calls you to be a part of His joy.

You do not see God, my Children, but if you pray you will feel His closeness. I am with you and intercede before God for each of you. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Part of His Joy

“What is truth?” Pilate says (Jn 18:38), asking himself rather than Jesus, for He then, *“went out to the Jews again”* (ibid.) without waiting for Jesus to reply. Yet Jesus had only just said that He was born for this. *“For this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth,”* and that *everyone who is of the truth hears His voice.* If Pilate had listened perhaps he would not have asked that question. Pilate, however, is not willing to heed the words of Jesus. He is closed up in himself, in his own culture and power, and in his idolatry of Caesar and of self. Closed up as he is in his own idea about life, he loses the only chance to enter into Life!

Are we so different? Today like then, or perhaps even more so today, we adore our idols and at times pass them off as expressions of God's will; and we thus more or less abuse the Name of God. Mary has always said to us that only sincere surrender to God is an efficacious antidote to the poison of the old serpent (cf. Nm 21:9 e Jn 3:14-15). We must look up to Jesus on the Cross to be drawn to Him (Jn 12:32), to be assumed in Him, to be - through Him - surrendered to the Father. Crucified with Jesus, we can hang up on the wood of the Cross all that denies His Love. United to Christ to be One in God, we can be one with our brethren. To be *everything in everyone*, said Paul (1 Cor 9:19-23) for love of Christ and of the Gospel.

“Dear Children, also today I call you to have more trust in me and my Son,” says Mary. This increased trust that she asks for isn't just another step ahead, but demands radical change. It is conversion to Christ, founded on faith in Jesus and Mary and not on our own ideas. So it isn't a question of *doing* something for Christ or for the Church, or even for the world, but it means to *be* in Christ and of Christ; to live in Him and of Him, to breathe in Him and of Him, to be assimilated into Him so that all our actions, reactions and relationships are in Him.

Jesus is the Truth, and we ought to testify to this with all our life. **“He has conquered by His death and**

Pope teaches us to celebrate Easter

resurrection and, through me, He calls you to be a part of His joy,” Mary says in her message. The victory of Christ is absolute, decisive and definitive, and we are called to be, with Mary, part of His joy, by entering Heaven. The blessed Virgin is the Door to Heaven, and we are called to enter it through Her. Jesus is the victor, and He opens the door to Heaven for us, but Mary is the threshold, and she introduces us.

This joy must shine in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God that shines in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). This authentic joy is our witness. We are always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh (2 Cor 4:10-11).

“You do not see God, my Children, but if you pray you will feel His closeness,” continues our blessed Mother. Prayer is necessary, not because it is imposed by a God of vanities, but because it puts us on the right wavelength where we can tune in to God's Heart. His heart beats in tune with ours; our heartbeats merge into His. It is in this consonance that we can become aware of His closeness, of His presence. Peace and joy in Jesus and Mary! *N.Q.*

John Paul II Priest and victim

At the first anniversary of the death of John Paul II it was seen that people's love for him had not faded, but rather, that his memory is firmly engraved in our hearts. Pope Benedict said of his “beloved predecessor” on the occasion:

“On 2 April last year the beloved Pope John Paul II was living through the last phase of his earthly pilgrimage. His agony and death constituted almost a prolongation of the Easter Triduum. ... ‘God tested them,’ it says in the Book of Wisdom, ‘and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them’

The term ‘burnt offering’ refers to the sacrifice in which the victim was entirely burned, consumed by the flames; consequently, it was a sign of total offering to God. This biblical expression reminds us of John Paul II's mission. He made his life a gift to God and to the Church and, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, he lived out the sacrificial dimension of his priesthood.

Among the invocations dear to him was one that comes from the Litanies of Jesus Christ, Priest and Victim: *Jesus, High Priest who gave yourself to God as offering and victim, have mercy on us.*

How frequently he repeated it! It expresses clearly the profoundly priestly character of his whole life. He never made a mystery of his desire to become increasingly one with Christ the Priest through the Eucharistic Sacrifice, a source of tireless apostolic dedication.”

Easter day actually lasts a week, and it was in this Easter week that Benedict XVI celebrated his first year as Pope. It was the 19th April when he was elected. His pontificate is still young compared to John Paul's, but has already shown clear signs of strength and stability.

Naturally, any comparison with his predecessor is arbitrary and superfluous given the profound difference between the two Pontiffs. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that there is a line of continuity especially in basic decisions. Hence, we do not lament his illustrious predecessor, but rather, we are delighted in his style which delves deeper into the contents of the faith with wisdom and elegance.

His talks and interventions that deserve our attention are numerous, but our little paper does not have the space for them. Thus, we have decided to dedicate this page to the reflections Benedict XVI offered his flock during the Easter celebrations which are at the heart of the liturgical year and fulcrum for our life in the faith.

Secret of life is in offering up oneself

The secret of life and of love is in offering oneself, said the Pope at the Palm Sunday Mass. “There was a time - and it has not yet been completely surmounted - in which Christianity was rejected precisely because of the Cross. The Cross speaks of sacrifice.. instead, we want life in its entirety, without restrictions and without sacrifices. We want to live, all we want is to live,” said the Pope in realistic tones. Then he added: “We do not find life by possessing it, but by giving it. Love is a gift of oneself, and for this reason it is the way of true life symbolized by the Cross.”

God's rainbow

“The prophet (Zech. 9) speaks of a king of peace: he will cause chariots of war and war horses to vanish... break bows and proclaim peace. This is brought about in Jesus through the sign of the Cross. The Cross is the broken bow, in a certain way, God's new, true rainbow which connects the heavens and the earth and bridges the abysses between the continents. The new weapon that Jesus places in our hands is the Cross - a sign of reconciliation, of forgiveness, a sign of love that is stronger than death.

Every time we make the Sign of the Cross we should remember not to confront injustice with other injustice or violence with other violence: let us remember that **we can only overcome evil with good** and never by paying evil back with evil.”

Cross consigned to young people

“Today, the Cross that was recently the focus of the World Youth Day in Cologne is being consigned to a special delegation so that it may begin the journey to Sydney, where in 2008 the youth of the world are planning to meet again around Christ to build with him the Kingdom of peace. From Cologne to Sydney - a journey

across continents and cultures, a journey through a world torn and tormented by violence! Symbolically, it is like the journey the prophet pointed out from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth. It is the journey of the One who, in the sign of the Cross, gives us peace and makes us become messengers of reconciliation and of his peace.”

A priest is: being a friend of Christ

The morning of Holy Thursday the Church solemnly celebrates a Mass that recalls the institution of the priesthood. During this Mass the Chrism is blessed (holy oil used for anointing in various sacraments). It is a beautiful moment in which the priests gather round their bishops and renew their promises. “Being a priest means becoming an ever closer friend of Jesus Christ with the whole of our existence. The world needs God - not just any god but the God of Jesus Christ, the God who made himself flesh and blood, who loved us to the point of dying for us, who rose and created within himself room for man,” the Pope said in his homily. “This God must live in us and we in him. This is our priestly call: only in this way can our action as priests bear fruit.”

Let us offer our own flesh

The Pope again stressed the value of offering oneself as a privileged instrument for those who desire collaborating with Christ to form the Church: “One becomes capable of salvation only by offering one's own flesh. The evil in the world must be borne and the pain shared, assimilating it into one's own flesh as did Jesus. Jesus assumed our flesh; let us give him our own. In this way he can come into the world and transform it.”

Rejection of love makes us unclean

“Only love has that purifying power which washes the grime from us and elevates us to God's heights,” said the Pope at the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday.

“The Lord's love knows no bounds, but man can put a limit on it.” *‘You are clean, but not all of you,’* the Lord says (Jn 13:10). What is it that makes man unclean? It is the rejection of love, not wanting to be loved, not loving. It is pride that believes it has no need of any purification, that is closed to God's saving goodness. It is pride that does not want to admit or recognize that we are in need of purification.”

“Slaves” of love

“God descends and becomes a slave, he washes our feet so that we may come to his table... He is ceaselessly this love that cleanses us; in the sacraments of purification - Baptism and the Sacrament of Penance - he is continually on his knees at our feet and carries out for us the service of a slave, the service of purification, making us capable of God. His love is inexhaustible, it truly goes to the very end.

But there is another, deeper dimension. The Lord removes the dirt from us with the purifying power of his goodness. Washing one another's feet means above all tirelessly forgiving one another, beginning together ever anew, however pointless it may seem. It means purifying one another by bearing with one another and by being tolerant of others..."

Find our place in *Way of the Cross*

"In the Way of the Cross, we cannot merely be spectators. We too are involved, so we must seek our place. In the Way of the Cross, it is impossible to remain neutral. Pilate, the sceptic intellectual, tried to be neutral, to remain uninvolved; but precisely in this way he took a stance against justice, because of the conformism of his career," said Benedict XVI on the evening of Good Friday at the Colosseum where the Way of the Cross is traditionally relived, the place of martyrdom for thousands of Christians.

"We have seen that on the Way of the Cross, Paul found the zeal of his faith and kindled the light of love. We have seen how St Augustine found his way, as well as Francis of Assisi, St Vincent de Paul, St Maximilian Kolbe and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. So it is that we too are invited to find our place, to discover with these great, courageous saints the way with Jesus and for Jesus: the way of goodness and truth."

Stations of consolation

When we think of the suffering Jesus took upon Himself on the Way towards Calvary we are often led to consider the evil of man, and perhaps feel guilt, but we also need to consider the positive figures that remain close to Jesus. The Pope thus pointed out other 'stations'. "But we have also seen stations of consolation. We have seen the Mother, whose goodness stays faithful unto death and beyond death... the courageous women, who stood before the Lord and were not afraid to show solidarity with this Suffering One... (and) Simon the Cyrenian, an African, who carried the Cross with Jesus." We see, then, that "through these 'stations,' that consolation, just as suffering, is never-ending."

The way of mercy

The Pope thus invites us to change our way of looking at the Way of the Cross that is "not simply a collection of the obscure and sad things of the world. Nor is it a form of moralism, ineffective in the end. It is not a cry of protest that changes nothing." It is instead the, "way of mercy that puts a limit on evil. This is what we learned from John Paul II. As the way of mercy it is the way of salvation. Thus, we are invited to take the way of mercy and with Jesus, put a limit on evil. Let us pray to the Lord to help us be 'infected' by his mercy. Let us pray to the Holy Mother of Jesus, the Mother of Mercy, that we too can be men and women of mercy, and thereby contribute to the world's salvation," he concluded.

What does 'rising' mean?

The Saturday night Mass is the celebration of the great mystery on which is

founded our Christian faith: the Lord's resurrection from the dead: unheard-of, decisive event! for the destiny of mankind. In the homily of the Easter Vigil Benedict XVI asked: "Of what exactly does this 'rising' consist? What does it mean for us?" To reply the Holy Father borrows a word from the theory of evolution: "It is the greatest 'mutation,' absolutely the most crucial leap into a totally new dimension that there has ever been in the long history of life and its development: a leap into a completely new order which does concern us, and concerns the whole of history."

It sounds rather complicated, so the Pope, to explain to us, continues to ask questions: "What does it mean for us, for the whole world and for me personally? Above all: what happened? Jesus is no longer in the tomb. He is in a totally new life. But how could this happen? What forces were in operation?"

An explosion of light

Here is the answer: "His death was an act of love. At the Last Supper he anticipated death and transformed it... Resurrection was like an explosion of light, an explosion of love... It ushered in a new dimension of being, of life in which, in a transformed way, matter too was integrated and through which a new world emerges," he continued. This great explosion, as the Pope has called it, also involves all of us: "The great explosion of the Resurrection has seized us in Baptism so as to draw us on... Baptism means that we are not dealing with an event in the past, but that a qualitative leap in world history comes to me, seizing hold of me in order to draw me on... The Resurrection is not a thing of the past, the Resurrection has reached us and seized us. We grasp hold of it, we grasp hold of the risen Lord, and we know that he holds us firmly even when our hands grow weak. We grasp hold of his hand, and thus we also hold on to one another's hands, and we become one single subject, not just one thing. *I, but no longer I* is the formula of Christian life rooted in Baptism, of Resurrection within time. *I, but no longer I*: if we live in this way, we transform the world."

He is not here!

"The Son of God did not remain in the tomb, because it was not possible for him to be held prisoner by death, and the tomb could not hold on to 'the living one' who is the very source of life," commented Pope Benedict on a sunny Easter Sunday. "The lifeless body was suffused with the living breath of God and, as the walls of the tomb were shattered, he rose in glory. That is why the angels proclaim *he is not here*, he can no longer be found in the tomb... (for) he conquered death... and he opened the earth, throwing it open towards Heaven."

Benedict concluded: "May the Risen Lord grant that the strength of his life, peace and freedom be experienced everywhere. Today the words with which the Angel reassured the frightened hearts of the women on Easter morning are addressed to all: 'Do not be afraid! ... He is not here; he is risen.' ... Let the people of the third millennium not be afraid to open their hearts to him. Christ is now alive and he walks with us. What an immense mystery of love!"

Those Blessed Wounds

by Stefania Consoli



How can it be? How can we bless a painful sign caused by suffering?

How could we be happy with the memory of a pain, we of a world that teaches the contrary and attempts to remove every trace of pain and sorrow? Yet the signs on the body of the Risen One are truly blessed. They tell of His passion, His mission consumed on the cross; they witness the unique act of eternal salvation.

They are there, still open on Christ's now glorified body, forever alive in a way unimaginable for the human mind, but perceivable by the senses possessed by the soul. Yes, the soul can see, feel and touch the things of heaven.

To Sr. M. Marta Chambon – French mystic of the 19th century – Jesus one day said: "*My holy wounds support the world... ask me that you may love them constantly, because they are a source of every grace. Invoke them often; cast your neighbour into them; impress in souls devotion to them. From my Wounds come fruits of holiness. Through meditating upon them you are newly nourished by Love.*"

Then, we must invoke these wounds, and pray for the grace to love these blessed wounds. From them come salvation and light, the same light that flooded the closed sepulchre and broke the seals of death. They are open fountains that offer beverage to those who thirst for justice, peace and indulgence.

Contemplation before the Crucifix sharpens the memory of something familiar that moves us to compassion – it is the paradox of the cruelty of the passion and the meekness of Jesus who permitted it.

When we fix our eyes on the Crucifix grace touches our mind's eyes and ears to help us understand the *Man* who sustained that horrendous act for us; to help us know the King that wore the crown of thorns that relentlessly pierced his head. As we contemplate those hands and feet pierced through for love of us our heart is touched by God, moved by His Grace.

But there's a wound that opens more deeply, that goes straight to His Heart. Christ calls us into this Wound, to place ourselves on His Heart, to feel its warmth, and hear it beating – for us, for love of us.

The *poor* are especially invited. Those begging for salvation should rush to that fount of forgiveness that will never dry up. Rather, it is thrown wide open at every Mass to pour forth the Blood that washes, nourishes and purifies penitent hearts.

The weak, the fragile, the unsure are called - we are all called - to find refuge and protection in His side. There we shall be hidden from vile gazes, and exposed to one gaze only: that of Mercy.

Justice to the body, creation of God

What is the body? What is the purpose of the body? Why do we have a body?

Perhaps no one has asked these questions which we probably take for granted. The body is an immense gift of God. It is a mystery and it is our responsibility to know it. Years of study, analysis and research are not the key that enable one to understand the mystery of the body, nor to live according to the original dignity it was assigned.

When I say "justice" in reference to the body I refer to that original comportment, recuperated and elevated by Christ to the dignity of being able to stay in God's presence. The unveiling of this mystery belongs to each Christian. He has full access to the knowledge of the mystery, and to the rediscovery of this gift of God which is the body.

The rediscovery of the body accompanies the faith journey of the Christian. It is, in fact, a consequence of Christ's bodily resurrection in which our own bodily dimension assumes the characteristics foreseen by grace, and our obedience to this grace becomes an important element of our life at the service of the soul's relationship with God.

These days the body has been idealized. Man serves the body in many ways, to the extent of becoming enslaved to its appearance. At the opposite pole are those consecrated persons who neglect their bodies as though they were not part of the mission to which they are called.

In between these extreme examples is a wide range of relationships that people have with their bodies. **What we need to ask is: what type of relationship does God want us to have with our bodies?** My personal experience is that human efforts are not enough to create a balance within the body, because without faith the body becomes a container where all the disturbances and dramas of the soul accumulate or are dumped. The answer that leads to unity of the being, through which a Christian can find fullness of truth comes from the **paschal passover of Jesus in man**.

The Lord came to reinstall balance and unity there where division and lack of harmony had lodged. Through coming into the passion and death of Jesus with what we have and are, the way is opened for the resurrection of His life in our own flesh. The body's function is to serve as a temple for the laws of life, and the body is given the task of concelebrating that which the soul celebrates in its union with Jesus Christ. The body thus finds fullness and order.

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies... Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but offer yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness..." (cf. Rom 6:12-13).

Daniele Benatelli

Invoking God's blessing on donated blood

"We who are strong have a duty to put up with the qualms of the weak without thinking of ourselves. Each of us should think of his neighbours and help them to become stronger Christians. Christ did not think of himself." (Rm 15:1-3)

Donating blood for me is always meaningful. It's a thing I try to do in Christ and for Christ, thus I unite myself to Him whilst my blood is being drawn. I wouldn't consider it a sacrifice, of course, but a simple response of love to Jesus who gave me life and health as a free gift, and through donating my blood I become in a small way a gift for others.

Nonetheless, when I give blood I do not go without first preparing for it so that this simple gesture may become a spiritual offering. So I first go to Mass to receive the Holy Eucharist. That way, Jesus is present in my soul and my body and His life and blood circulate in my own.

I also pray during the withdrawal, blessing all the instruments, the environment, the nurses, the other blood donors, so that together with my own, all the blood being donated is offered up to the Father our creator. I pray that it be united to the Most Precious Blood of the Son who redeemed us, consecrating it to the Holy Spirit, who inspires acts of selflessness, so that the act may be *recapitulated* in the Love of God.

I pray for the person who will receive my blood, though I don't know who it will be, invoking upon him or her spiritual health. I feel that my prayer is answered, because this gesture is not just a physical gift; through prayer I unite to my blood my desire for God, the unreserved offering of myself to Him. This gesture, when lived with one's gaze turned to God, becomes a precious appointment that I feel I could never neglect.

"...May he who helps us help you all to be tolerant with each other, following the example of Jesus Christ, so that united in mind and voice you may give glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rm 15:5-6)

The day after the withdrawal of blood, it is normal to feel a little weak, but this also is something to offer, and procures joy because I have given something of myself. This awareness arouses gratitude, and I am strengthened by the **image of a similar exchange in the spiritual field**. Such should be the daily life of one who desires offering his life. If we think that everything is given us, and that that which we renounce, which we feel the lack of, goes to nourish and sustain a brother or sister in need, it becomes easier to remove our gaze from ourselves and raise our eyes to the Lord, to thank Him for each of these gestures whether they be ordinary or mysterious, dark or even painful.

It is necessary to trust in the fact that even if we were to deprive ourselves of everything that we truly need to nourish a needy brother, everything would be given us again, when divine wisdom wills it.

The body itself, so harmoniously and perfectly created, offers us a practical example. A little of my own vital strength goes with my blood to help and sustain another person, but my body quickly becomes active and makes new blood. This mirrors our spiritual nature.

When we realize we are ready to make a donation of our own lives, new spaces are created within us to receive from the Lord new gifts to share with growing joy and gratitude. The blood that is re-formed in my body is the same as the blood I donated, yet it is also new. Likewise, the grace that is given us after a renunciation made out of love is always a new grace, and is precious and unique. We shall thus feel attracted to the Lord ever more strongly; we shall feel the call to enter the circulation of life in the Spirit that is never interrupted: it is one of giving and receiving, dying and rising, receiving love and giving love, that we might be love.

As I contemplate this, donating blood becomes for me a song of praise and thanksgiving to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for the gift of physical and spiritual health, and an external sign of a reality that I desire living ever more fully, without limits and without interruption in my day-to-day living, my prayer, and my vocation. *"You received without cost, give without charge."* (Mt 10:8).

Francesco Cavagna



A Saint in Asia

The friendship offered us by those in the triumphant and suffering church ought to be guarded as one would a treasure. They are no longer weighed down by human limits or interests and their love and concern for us is real.

This is a special year for one of those friends. There's a birthday being celebrated, and we're all invited. An abundance of grace and blessings are being offered to all who care to rejoice

with heaven and earth for the birth of this man who joined

St. Ignatius of Loyola to become one of the founding fathers of the Society of Jesus, and who is likened to St. Paul for his zeal and missionary success.

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER was born in Spain 500 years ago on the 7th April. In 1542 he began his work in Portuguese India. He preached with great success in Goa, then in southern India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), in Malacca, and Japan. Tens of thousands of locals were converted, and many Christian communities were founded. His premature death impeded him from reaching mainland China.

May, a Month Dedicated to Mary

Very devoted to Our Lady (his Rosary beads were his constant companion) he taught a Christianity based on love and charity. "Everything that he did, he did with intense joy," it is said of him. He especially sought to comfort the sick. News quickly spread that he could heal the sick and even raise people from the dead, his fame preceding him on his missionary voyages, and the sick vied for his presence. In a letter to St. Ignatius, Francis wrote: "... it was impossible for me myself to satisfy all, and at the same time to avoid their quarrelling among themselves, every one striving to be the first to get me to his own house."

Not unlike Our Lady, he instructed and entrusted the good news to "children" and these became valid witnesses: "So I sent round children whom I could trust in my place. They went to the sick persons, assembled their families and neighbours, recited the Creed with them, and encouraged the sufferers to conceive a certain and well-founded confidence of their restoration... God was moved by the faith and piety of these children and of the others, and restored a great number of sick persons to health, both of body and soul." According to witnesses, these children would ask for his rosary beads to place on the sick visited in his name.

Yet, the workers for the vast vineyard were not enough. In his letters Francis expressed his disappointment that too few were willing to put their talents at the service of God: "Many times I am seized with the thought of going to the universities of Europe and of crying out, like a man who has lost his mind..." to give them a shaking, that someone might respond: "Here I am, Lord. What do you want me to do?" like Samuel in the Bible. Many, many people hereabouts are not becoming Christians for one reason only: there is nobody to make them Christians."

Together with St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Francis Xavier is venerated as patron of all missions. He died in 1552 on 3rd December. His incorrupt body is enshrined in the Church of the Good Jesus in Goa, India.

St. Francis Xavier, in this year of grace (3-12-2005 to 3-12-2006) we entrust to your intercession our hearts that they may convert, leaving the rest to the infinite mercy and generosity of Jesus.

B.K. Drabsch

"God has arranged the body so that more dignity is given to the parts which are without it, and so that there may not be any disagreements inside the body, but that each part may be equally concerned for all the others. If one part is hurt, all parts are hurt with it. If one part is given special honour, all parts enjoy it."

(1 Co 12:25-27)

* 20 Tips on Christian Courtship, available for free download at Catholic Chastity Ministry

www.courtshipnow.com

In the month of May, dedicated to Mary, our attention is drawn more closely to the Mother of God. Many are the initiatives that promote devotion to Mary: prayers, processions, pilgrimages to Marian shrines, homilies and reflections. But not everyone is familiar with the origins of these May devotions, so this article intends to briefly consider these, that we may acquire greater awareness and appreciation of Mary's month.

At the origins of Marian devotion

Marian devotion has developed over the centuries. Liturgical feasts dedicated to Mary were gradually introduced; but there are also the various expressions of popular piety that have been accepted and encouraged by the Magisterium of the Church. Already in the ninth century Saturday was dedicated to Mary, and still today it is possible to choose for the Saturday liturgy a memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This choice no doubt recalls the importance of Holy Saturday to understand the role of Mary in the history of salvation. Mary, who became the Mother of the newly-born Church and of every person, awaited with certainty the Resurrection of her Son, and she was there to confirm the apostles and disciples in their unsteady faith. Just as she was present in the newly formed Church, so is Mary close to us in our earthly pilgrimage, and in the Saturdays of our life and history; and even if our salvation is already wrought by Christ, it is uncompleted in this life and the world.

Faith of the people

Popular piety has always been an expression of the need of the faithful to be accompanied by the love of a Mother throughout life's ordeals. To her they have entrusted their own lives, their families and their nations. Marian devotion has developed over time, and at the end of the XVI century an entire month was dedicated to her. At the time an efficacious apostolate for the people was through pious exercises, while the Liturgy of the Church remained more difficult and distant from the people.

May is associated with the blossoming of flowers, with the rebirth of nature, with the sweet scents of spring. This represents an image of beauty and the splendour of life - and this is how Mary has always been perceived by the people.

The Byzantine rite dedicates the month of August to Mary. It is in this month that the solemnity of Mary's Dormition (which we call the Assumption) is celebrated, while the Coptic Church dedicates to her

the month of Kiahk (between December and January) when Christ's birth is celebrated.

The Magisterium of the Church has supplied us with a Directory on Popular Piety, so that both personal or community devotion is integrated into the apex of Christian life: which is sacred Liturgy. Everything must flow into sacred Liturgy, and the harmony that comes of this helps each person to reach maturity in the faith and in the spiritual life.

Every healthy form of popular piety witnesses the faith of the simple at heart, while its roots are always deeply planted in the mysteries of the Christian faith, and will lead to a vital bond with Christ, based on belief in Him. It will prepare the heart and open the way to an encounter with Christ in the liturgical celebration of the Holy Mass.

Mary always leads to Jesus

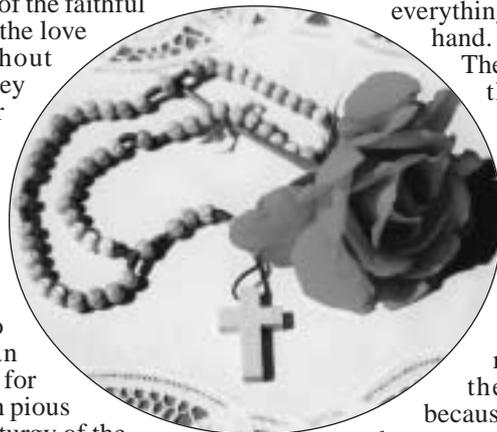
The month of May provides for us the time and occasion to reflect and to work on our personal conversion, to find the space for extra personal or communal prayer. Many and varied are the initiatives proposed. The important thing is that these proposals are in harmony with the liturgical time and feasts of the moment. Often May is included in the fifty days of Easter, so our pious exercises can reflect on the participation of the Virgin Mary in both the paschal mystery and Pentecost. Furthermore, Marian devotion points immediately to the Incarnation of the Son, and it is here that we discover the true face of Jesus, who received His humanity through her. Through meditating on the mystery of Mary's life, we are encouraged to feel that the encounter with Jesus, God-with-us, who shared in our earthly life in everything but sin, is more at hand.

The Mother of God, as the first disciple, entered the fullness of life because she always lived in perfect Grace as a redeemed person, and she wants to accompany each of us down this same road. She is for us the full of grace, because it was through her that we received Salvation and that we continue to receive all the graces necessary for our journey and our spiritual life and so that we can open our hearts to the love of the heavenly Father.

Each form of Marian devotion must therefore help us to welcome into our lives this Mother, as John did at the feet of the Cross, so that Mary can be at our side in our daily lives, and lead us to holiness.

Then, we will never be alone, for wherever Mary is, there is also the Most Holy Trinity.

Sabina Rosciano



La Piccola

(on Mary's lowliness)

"My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour, for he has looked upon his lowly handmaid" (Lk 1:46).

Mary wasn't considered a notable person in her time. She didn't count as might a doctor of the law or a sage would. As a young girl she was scarcely considered, particularly for those times. She didn't even belong to a well-to-do family, as when Jesus was presented at the temple, she and Joseph offered two doves: the offering of the poor. Not even when she became the Mother of God was she given any consideration. No one noticed her, and not even Jesus appeared to show her any particular attention.

As a person Mary is discreet, never speaking much; but she is attentive when she listens, keeping everything in her heart. The gifts she received are not wasted, but she makes them produce fruit. She doesn't impose herself, but lets herself be guided. **She is "la piccola" (the little one).**

One might wonder how God chose her for His mother, or what was it in her that appealed to Him. What exam did Mary – the little one – pass to be found worthy of becoming the Mother of God? What strategies did she use to become the chosen one? Perhaps the secret is precisely in her littleness. And if one asks what qualities God found in her to be so pleased with her, we come to the same conclusion. The answer is always the same: her littleness. Mary is the little one who allowed God to work in her, and He was able to fill her with gifts, with grace, and she became the all pure, the all holy, the all love, totally offered up to Him.

It is Mary's lowliness that makes her great; her lowliness that protects her from evil, her lowliness that makes her the Mother of God. **It is her lowliness that draws down God's benevolence,** and He, the all holy, all good, all righteous, is so pleased with her lowly heart that He makes her not only all beautiful but also invincible... then and now.

We too can imitate Mary. We too can choose to occupy the last place, the place for lowly people. *"I bless you Father, ... because you hid these things from the learned and the clever, revealing them to mere children"* (Mt 11:25). If we were convinced of this, we would never complain about our place in life. We would accept, like Mary and the saints, the place allotted us by Divine Providence. We would be happy with our lowly state, and we'd see the joys and sufferings of life with different eyes. It is for this that the evil one always tries to make us seek out the first place, to make us desire greatness.

He, who is great in arrogance, would drag us into the abyss. Jesus, instead, says: *"When you are a guest, make your way to the lowest place and sit there, so that when your host comes he may say: friend, move up higher"* (Lk 14:10). God invites us to choose the last place so He can lift us up to Heaven.

Chiara Lubich once said very eloquently: "when someone makes himself little the devil cannot see him and therefore he cannot harm him." So Mary, **the little one, immunized herself against evil.** The Lord's action – the antidote to sin – is thus efficacious in the lowly; and it doesn't seem to take effect in those who prefer to be big.

Jesus too put himself last according to the Father's will. More than becoming little, He let himself be totally destroyed, and the Father exalted him and filled him with glory. Mary too put herself last; becoming little and was able to say: *all generations will call me blessed.* If we make ourselves little – the opportunities are there for all – we too would be happy like Mary, now and in eternity.

If we try journeying along this same way, we will come to realize that we're given the light we need to clearly discern those things that procure us life from those that procure us death.

If we ask Mary she will obtain for us the wisdom of heart to understand that being little is not bad, but is a good, and a privileged way to live life to the full. Then perhaps we'll know how to praise and thank God, as Mary did, for the wonderful things the Father works in us and in others.

Pietro Squassabia

News from the blessed land



25 YEARS OF GRACE

The 25th June 2006 marks the 25th year of Our Lady's apparitions at Medjugorje.

It is an extraordinary fact from many points of view which has made and will continue to make rivers of ink flow.

However, it's not Our Lady's purpose to have books written or to have priests discuss the matter. The purpose of Our Lady's presence amid us is to save the world, or rather, each of God's children born into the world.

This 25 year marker brings to mind another one: the Jubilee - which also falls every 25 years and has been called "year of grace" since Old Testament times. In particular I'm thinking of a verse from Isaiah: *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord ... has sent me to bring good tidings to the afflicted, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour"* (Is 61:1).

This verse seems to echo what is going on in Medjugorje. Who more than Mary has received the gift of the Lord's Spirit? She is His bride; she conceived of Him; she was overshadowed by Him, and so that this may not appear a singular case, she shared the gift of the Spirit with the Apostles at Pentecost, that is, with the dawning Church.

Mary is hailed as a "pre-eminent and singular member of the Church" (LG 53 – a Vatican Council II document), and as such she possesses in super abundance all the characteristics and functions that Jesus, Head of the Mystical Body, transmitted to God's people: prophetic, priestly and regal functions.

A prophet is a prophet because he is sent, and Mary has said often that these apparitions are not an initiative of hers, but that it is God who sends her – when and where He wills. So, it makes no sense when some ironically complain of Our Lady being "overly talkative." A prophet sent by God is a watchman and as such cannot remain silent before danger, otherwise he would burden himself with enormous responsibility.

As a prophet, Mary comes to bring the good tidings. It is significant that the Blessed Virgin should call the words addressed to the visionaries and to us "her messages." The words of Mary, at times so tender and sweet, at times severe or veiled by sadness, are in any case an echo of the Good News, of Jesus' Gospel, for she too is at the service of the Gospel, or rather, as JPII called her, she is the "star of the new evangelization."

The messages of Medjugorje are good tidings because they come to console the poor and the miserable, and to bind up the wounds of broken hearts. A broken heart equals conversion, and conversion is the underlying theme of all the messages. Conversion is neither impossible nor mortifying, but is the only right thing man can do: that is, give first place to God.

Those who go to Medjugorje today can still breathe a sense of peace, simply because things are exactly the way God desires. First comes God and the things of God; then the rest. Spiritual harmony is reflected in the harmony of the entire environment, and Mary – who is still the faithful servant of God – is justly called the Queen of Peace.

Shalom means peace/fullness of God. Mary enjoys this fullness in Heaven, and by the will of God she spreads it to the earth. If all men heeded Mary's messages, truly the entire world would enjoy the benefits of the sabbatical year, of the Jubilee, with the gift of forgiveness, offered and received, and the retribution of earthly goods according to justice. The fruit of justice is peace.

As all prophets, Mary is not heeded, not even in her homeland the Church. This time is definitely marked by Satan's work, and on many occasions our blessed Mother has warned us about him. If the Lord permits this it is for a greater good.

May this mystery of grace unfold in time, until and in the manner He wills. And may we, who have been touched by Our Lady, obtain in this jubilee year an ever greater fidelity to her messages, the gift of prayer and profound peace of heart.

Fr. Nicolino Mori

17th Int'l Youth Festival at Medjugorje
1-6 August 2006. Theme: **"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"**
Further info at: <http://medjugorje.hr>

The Sky was Opened!

by Fr. Tomislav Vlasic

On the evening of the 24th June 1981 at Bijakovici - a hamlet in the parish of Medjugorje - the sky was opened. No news. Yet extraordinary news. For Christian souls it was something familiar, yet it was also new. It brought new life: faith, hope and love were awoken, activating the divine life in persons.

This novelty for some became life, for others it was a stumbling block. Or rather, the living presence of Our Lady in our midst was for some joy, while others would have wanted to suppress it. As always, jubilation becomes inspiration and promotes the faith in God's people - but when one doesn't believe it creates fear in those "free-in-God-to-choose" people.

The Lord shows His face to His people, and this becomes a sign of contradiction. In this human vortex Mary comes as Mother of all, despite divisions and human reserve; she is, after all, Queen of Peace. As such she announces to every person the grandeur and nobleness of life in God. Despite the different responses to her call, she remains close to the people with her motherly love.

The people recognize *Gospa*

This is what happened. The six visionaries witness having seen the Queen of Peace and the people are immediately favourable. Drawn as though by a magnet, the people obey Our Lady and begin to journey on the way to God. The Lord, on His part, generously affirms the presence of His Mother with graces and signs. The people accept the reality of this special presence of Our Lady who came to settle in the parish of Medjugorje, and Medjugorje begins to spread out to the world.

It is impossible to mention the countless testimonies of parishioners. Nonetheless, I will point out some.

In August of 1981 I asked a man who had just come back from a vacation in Germany: "Ivan, what do you say: did Our Lady appear?" He responded with surprise: "Reverend, you don't doubt, do you?" "I want to know what you think," I told him, and he said: "How could one not believe after all these graces and signs?" I then asked: "What would you say if tomorrow the visionaries said they were lying?" and he responded: "I would say: now you are lying, because Our Lady did appear!"

God thus impressed in the receptive soul of the people a seal. Padre Jozo, as parish priest, walked behind the Virgin and with him the entire parish. It was an honour to be taken off to prison for a night-long interrogation. Joyful testimony lights up the face of a believer, and fear cast away by a soul generates unfailing faith!

The people did not remain on the threshold, but began to live the *authentic* life of the Church: confession, participation at Holy Mass, prayer and fasting became a reality. It was truly a pleasure to lead the liturgy. One of the events that I will never forget is the way the people participated

at the prayer in the autumns of 1981 and 1982, when the work in the fields is less intense. The church was overflowing: two Rosaries, holy Mass and Eucharistic adoration, and no one in the church as much as moved! Silence! The entire parish was like a true and proper convent.

The people were drawn to God. All it took was the slightest sign to get the people to gather. **To live for God was their life!** No one had to force them.



The voice echoes

A parapsychologist from Slovenia, of whom I can't recall the name, wrote down an experience of his in August 1981: "Yesterday I hid out on Podbrdo amongst the thorns. I couldn't go to the site of the apparitions because the police were controlling me. It was about 9 pm. The birds were already quiet. One thing could be noticed: from all the houses rang out prayer and song. Life here is immersed in God. For one who studies this type of phenomenon, this is unique, unrepeatable. A particular dimension of life is manifested here."

Like a radio station, each soul that received the announcement transmitted it to another. The news was for all mankind. It entered through the pores of the spiritual movements: adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, reading of the Word of God and devotion to Our Lady became the basis for the reawakening of the people. The messages touched even non-believers; some converted; others - bound by their fear of God - reported the news but gave it a "hostile character." The correct news, however, reached those who thirsted for God. Mankind was suddenly embraced by the divine news.

The way is opened

Today we are left with the secrets, the questions, the expectations. People's interpretations have changed. Some wander in the desert and at times return to slavery, despite the novelty. But everyone awaits the promised signs!

The way opens up for men of good will. Faithful to God and with the courage of the Holy Spirit, they know how to access the secrets and promises: they are aware that you need to **enter into participation of the mystery and find the Light**. It will be late for those who wait for the visionaries or someone to tell them what to do: they will be blind though they have eyes!

To enter the Light demands total conversion that transforms us into sons and daughters of God created in His image. To be children of God is the aim of Our Lady who calls all mankind that it might enter the

new heavens and new earth (cf. Rev 21:22). This is the REALITY in which the signs given by God that serve as orientation for the journey, disappear.

History teaches that they who totally consecrate themselves, also those who radically live the Gospel are saints: *a small remnant*. Often they are reserved, unseen, persecuted, but God opens the way for them in a silent way. And, He opens the way - miraculously - for all the people, because it is called to enter the promised REALITY. There will be triumph and immense joy!

Courage, and journey onwards! Allow God to lead you, and follow Him. He who tries to close up divine revelations in narrow frames and human interests will remain in the desert or end up in slavery. He who surrenders himself to God will have life in God.

Life in God

One day while I was talking to a nun I asked her: "What do you ask God when you pray?" She replied: "Nothing! What could I ask for if I've already been given everything... God brought me back to life. I simply receive God's gifts and hand them out. The rest is a waste of time. Our Lady's behaviour with God is our model. What more could she have asked for?"

Such is life for one who walks with God. Such is life in the living God: despite life's challenges he is rich in goods - he has everything and gives everything!

To witness means to transmit divine life. God continues to create, to redeem and to consecrate the soul that He finds willing. One who transmits the life of God pours into others living faith, hope and love. Light casts away darkness and opens up for mankind the way which offers a response to every question - so that mankind knows where it's going.

"I desire showing myself to pilgrims on the face of each parishioner," said the visionaries in *Gospa's* name in 1981. May the new graces of 2006 make all the *elected* luminous, that they may be light to light the way for mankind enclosed in darkness.

There is much darkness in the world, but God's Light is greater. It is the time for consciences to re-awaken; time for us to be bold, that our pride in the mission may show salvation to men. If we are authentic intercessors, as is the Queen of Peace, the open skies will be every day clearer, and the secrets will exist no longer because the Light clarifies every mystery!



“Thank you for responding to my call!” - by Giuseppe Ferraro

The Queen of Peace ends her every message by thanking us “for having responded to her call.” In fact, she has been calling us with endearing motherly passion every day for the last 25 years: “*I am, my dear Children, untiring; I call you even when you are far from my heart...*” (Mess. 14.11.1985).

Only fathomless love, that same love that enflamed the Heart of the Son so much that it led Him to the “folly of the cross,” can explain this incomprehensible “lowering” of the Queen of Heaven and earth, who isn’t afraid to remain lengthily at the door, knocking upon the stone hearts of her children: it is because they are so sick that they are loved even more. Only this inexpressible love urges her to immerse herself totally in the mystery of “kenosis” of her Son who did not consider his equality with God a thing to be grasped jealously. Instead, “he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant... and humbled himself” (Phil 2:6-8). This is the true root of Mary’s humility. Though she weeps *tears of blood for her children that are lost through sin* (cf. mess. 24.05.1984), she submits herself to the precious yet terrible gift of freedom given to each of her children, which is a divine seal: “... *God gave everyone freedom which I respect with love; and I submit myself, in humility, to your freedom*” (Mess. 25.10.1987).

The only weapon Mary uses in this decisive battle against the powers of darkness is the pure love of God that gushes forth

from her Immaculate Heart: that same love able to change at the last hour on Calvary the heart of the centurion, head of the crucifiers. Today, with that same love, she desires working the full transfiguration of the world, making it receptive to the uncreated light of the new heavens and new earth.

Mary’s “thank you” each time surprises us, while also inspiring in us sentiments of filial love, and... a certain degree of uneasiness for the ambiguity of our response to the ineffable gift of her pure love. We know only too well how much obstinate indifference and subtle treason sits deep in the folds of our ailing hearts, that continue to resist to the Mother’s tender and faithful love.

Nonetheless, her motherly heart – more attentive to a spark of good than to an ocean of evil present in the hearts of her children – knows how to recognize and give worth to every little gesture of response to the heavenly gift of Her call. **For this she thanks us**, implicitly entrusting us with keeping it and developing it. It is Mary’s desire to bring it to maturation, so that it will produce currents of life and salvation for ourselves and others.

Mary today is the hand and heart of the Father who is calling His children to the heavenly wedding banquet of the Lamb, to unite them eternally to his regal gift that lights up the new creation: “*Dear Children, decide and believe that God offers Himself to you in fullness. You are*

called, and you must respond to the Father who is calling you through me.” (Mess. 25.10.1987).

The unfolding of the enormous potential of salvific grace that God desires spreading over the world today through the “handmaid of the Lord” depends – incredibly – on **our free response of love to her call**. In this sense, we are objectively responsible for the salvation of a multitude of brothers and sisters throughout the world. “*Jesus... needs you. Your hearts offered up to Him will help Him save the world*” (Mess. 12.03.1984)

We ought not underestimate the decisive importance of the present hour and of our personal response to Mary’s call! Also the prophetic Magisterium of the Pope, in perfect harmony with the message of the Queen of Peace, warns us that the time has come to make unambiguous and decisive choices: “The Cross of the Lord embraces the world; His Way to Calvary crosses continents and time. In the Way of the Cross there is no chance to be neutral. We must look for our place.” (Pope Benedict XVI, 14.04.06).

“*Dear Children, Today as never before I am calling you to prayer... Satan is strong and desires destroying not only human life, but also nature and the planet on which you live... I bless you and I will remain with you for as long as God wills. Thank you because you will not betray my presence here. Thank you because your response is serving the good and the peace.*” (25.1.91).

GOSPA’S Messages to Mirjana & Ivan who asked prayer of you. Our

MIRJANA, 2 April 2006:

“Dear Children, I come to you because I wish to show you, by my own example, the importance of prayer for those who have not known God’s love. Do you ask yourselves if you are following me? My children, can’t you perhaps recognize the signs of the times? Don’t you talk about them? Come along with me. As your Mother I am calling you! Thank you for responding.”

IVAN, 2 April 2006, Milano:

(A translation of) a transcription of a recording of Ivan who gave witness after the apparition of Our Lady at a day-long prayer conference in Milan:

“This evening Our Lady came and was particularly joyous, very joyous. She greeted everyone and said: ‘Praised be Jesus Christ my dear Children.’ After this Our Lady prayed over all of us here with her hands outstretched. She blessed us all with her motherly blessing. She also blessed all the objects, holy objects that you brought for the blessing. Then, she particularly prayed over the priests that are here present. After this I commended all of you here present, all your needs, your families, your parishes and your priests. I particularly commended all of you present here today who are sick, and also all those

who asked prayer of you. Our Lady then said: ‘Dear

Children, also today your Mother rejoices with you. I am joyful, joyful. As your Mother I will intercede with my son for you all. Also today I am calling you, Children, to live my messages. Pray, pray, pray, my Children. Thank you, my Children, for responding to my call.’ ”

MIRJANA, 2 May 2006:

“Dear Children, I come to you as a mother. I come with an open heart, full of love for you. Purify your heart of everything that impedes you from receiving me. That way you will know my love and the love of my Son. My heart desires winning through you and thus to triumph. It is to this that I am calling you.”

*Beloved young people, it is only through **assiduous reading of the Word of God** that you can learn to love Jesus Christ; only in Him that you can come to know the truth and freedom; only through participation in His Easter can you give meaning and hope to your life. (Benedict XVI)*

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May God bless you, and Our Lady protect you, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!

don Alberto

7 May 2006 (St. John of Beverley)