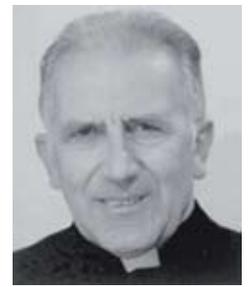


Echo of Mary Queen of Peace

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Fr. Angelo Mutti
founder of Echo of Mary

Medjugorje, 25 September 2011:

“Dear Children, I call you so that this time may be for you all a time of witnessing. You who live in the love of God and have experienced His gifts, witness them with your words and life that they may be joy and encouragement for others to the faith. I am with you and incessantly intercede before God for you all, that your faith may always be alive and joyful and in God’s love. Thank you for responding to my call.”

A Live, Joyful Faith in God’s Love

We live in a world where peace is provisional and transient, where justice is relative, where money is sought after as the main good for individuals and nations; in a world where man’s value no longer resides in being God’s image but rather, coincides with his purchasing power, and in a world where the body is no longer God’s temple, but a form of merchandise to be exchanged. Well, in this world, Mary calls us to bear witness: **I call you for this time to be for all of you a time for witnessing.**

This invitation is open to all, but is specifically addressed to those who believe they have the requirements to meet it: **You who live in the love of God and have experienced His gifts, witness them in your words and life, so that they may be to the joy and encouragement of others in faith.**

If we live in God’s Love, if we have experienced His gifts, we have a duty to bear witness to them. Not beautiful discourse, nor wise plans or affirmations of principle are what it takes to jolt souls and hearts. Instead, a few simple words that burst forth from a life that is truly lived, words that are merely uttered but that have the substance of a reality that is experienced and not only dreamt of; these can move a person’s heart and soul.

Today, at least in Italy, but perhaps also elsewhere, people are much more interested in life testimonies than theoretical discourse; and this is particularly true for our young people. This is a beautiful thing that gives hope because, at least in this field, it indicates a priority of interests for a world of human beings rather than stereotyped images. Perhaps it is still too early to say, but this renewed attention towards life testimonies seems to indicate an inversion in the trend that might free man from the flat television puppet images to then rediscover him in his original greatness of God’s image, and even more: the image of the son in His Son Jesus.

Mary’s invitation is important for our



*“For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. I will set up over them one shepherd and he shall feed them. And I, the Lord, will be their God.”
Ez 34:11, 23-24*

salvation and that of others, these two things are often not separate, but intimately connected to each other (cfr Ezekiel 3:16-21). This is valid for everyone, but especially for educators and parents in particular.

I am with you and incessantly intercede before God for all of you, that your faith may always be alive, joyful and in the love of God. How could the faith of those who feel loved and saved by God, of those whom the Father elevates to His side in His Son, not be alive and joyful? If our faith is not alive and joyful and immersed in Love, then it is not true faith. How many of us need to reflect on this, but not to try and understand faith, rather to blindly dive into it! It is sufficient to think of the bond between Love and Faith to make us ask with a contrite spirit, “Lord, increase our faith!” (Lk 17:6a).

Paul teaches us: “Nothing shall be able to separate us from the Love of God which is in Jesus Christ, our Lord” (Rm 8:31-39). Truly nothing and no one can separate us from this Love if not our own will. Only we ourselves can deliberately refuse his Love. What a terrible, yet, divine freedom that God gives us! Let us abandon ourselves to His Love, and with Mary’s help, who **incessantly intercedes for all of us before God**, we will save ourselves and those who are moved by our words and above all by our life, to live a joyful faith that is rooted in God’s love.

Peace and joy in Jesus and Mary.

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Medjugorje, 25 October 2011:

“Dear Children, I look at you and in your hearts I do not see joy. Today I desire giving you the joy of the Risen One, that He may lead you and embrace you with His love and tenderness. I love you and I pray unceasingly before my Son Jesus for your conversion. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Joy of the Risen One

There is a true joy, a great joy, a joy that is intimate and transparent at the same time, that is very fragile yet indestructible; a joy that does not lessen when shared, but that actually increases; a joy that does not know how to remain hidden, and that is actually prone to overflowing, that can be given without being lost. This joy, that the world does not know, is nearer to us than we might dare to hope because its dwelling place is man’s heart: this is what God wanted when he created man in His image. And when man evaded the gift, God did not abandon him to his fate of decadence and death, but made himself a gift to man in Christ Jesus!

Today, over two thousand years since the Coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh, we should all know that He is our Joy; we should all experience this Joy, we should all live on this Joy, yet this is not the case. We know this well, but it hurts our hearts to hear our Mother say to us: **Dear Children, I look at you and in your hearts I do not see joy.** These bitter sweet words are for us all: believers and non-believers, lay people and consecrated people. Furthermore, for those of us who are so-called believers, they reveal serious responsibilities that we have before God and before our brothers and sisters.

We must jolt ourselves out of a faith which is sleepy, accommodating and exterior, and incapable of making our spirit able to generate Christ in us. If our faith is not the fire of the Spirit that raises us up to Christ Jesus, it is only an exterior gloss that conceals our real selves, and a dangerous spiritual state of trance.

A faith that does not generate joy is a cold faith, a faith to distrust, a faith that does not convince men and maybe not even God. Certainly it cannot be the faith in Christ that we know from the Gospel, or the faith that draws energy from the practice of the Sacraments! Neither can the joy that comes from communion with Jesus be in those who are incapable of bringing joy to their neighbours, whether they get on well together or not. And so? We should feel discouraged, yet by the grace of God, Mary comes to us: **Today I desire giving you the joy of the Risen One, that He may lead you and embrace you with His love and tenderness.**

The joy that we cannot generate can be found and drawn from the Risen One: it is the fruit of the Death and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus, and so we are even more obliged to welcome it and cultivate it within ourselves, given its origin and nature as the fruit of Love. Perhaps this is the **conversion** that Mary has been incessantly asking of us throughout these long years of presence in Medjugorje.

Peace and joy in Jesus and Mary.

N.Q.

Silence, a liturgy

Passages dedicated to those who wish to meet the Lord, face to face, heart to heart...

“In quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Is 30:15)

Often there is much noise within us, even when we don't speak! May the Lord let us carry our burden in silence, the bother of the day, resting in him, in the certainty that he is taking care of us.

Understand – the Lord says to us – that “in quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Is 30:15): by living and seeking out the Lord in calm, in silence, in recollection, in profound attention towards him, in trust lies your strength, in not becoming agitated... The Lord is not in anxiety. You must not engage in dialogue with the world, with the seducer. The most eloquent answer is the silence that denies everything that he has insinuated.

“I will bring her into the wilderness and speak comfort to her” (Hos 2:16).

This is a strong, irresistible call, to do God's will. Silence your own will and silently adhere to God's: this is the communion with the Lord that makes us a single spirit with him.

“Let the whole world be silent before him” (Hab 2:20)

The whole world that lies within us must be silent: a world of confusion, vanity, anxiety, and misery. Let us bring this world of ours before God, and let us set it down in silence, as we adore Him. We feel it our duty to create this silence that quietsens the whole world through our own person. A silence that is humility, acceptance of the mystery, acceptance of not understanding, and instead is believing that every event in history is guided by God and brings forth the journey of salvation for everyone.

“Be silent in God's presence” (Zep 1:7)

This silence in the presence of the Lord is knowing how to remain in silence with true humility before our brethren. It is a silence that must slow down our impulses, our ideas, our self-love, our pride, and our presumption. It is the silence of not being rebels, not mistrusting, not murmuring, not judging, not defending ourselves, not wanting to be right, but instead of recognising ourselves as poor and awaiting salvation by a God who became Poor.

When the ego speaks, God remains in silence, because when the ego speaks it no longer knows how to listen, but it engages in a dialogue with the evil one, and allows its ear to be perverted by his lies.

Children of a King

“So you are a king?” Pilate asked the man standing before him, splendid in his dignity despite the fact that his lacerated flesh carried the marks of hatred and violence. “It is you who says it: I am king” replied the Lamb, humble and ready for the slaughter.

A powerful king and an inoffensive lamb. The conqueror of death and a man brutally crucified. Divine knowledge and foolishness for men... Paradoxes, apparent contrasts. But not for Our Lord, destined to be the stumbling block and the sign of contradiction for human reasoning that always wants to keep things under control, only to assure itself dominion over them.

“It is you who says it: I am king. I was born for this and for this I came into the world” replies Christ (John 18:37). And then there is silence. The Roman governor remained confused. Not wanting to risk his prestige, he washed his hands in the ritual gesture to show he was not responsible for his murder. Yet the water of cowardice only gave him the illusion of having removed that inconvenience and he could not suppress that phrase that still continues to resound in history, rebounding from one century to another to provoke the pride of the arrogant: **“I was born for this... to bear witness to the truth.”**

He was born for this and for this he gives us his Christmas. Not for our false lights that attempt to mask what we do not want to see, but because Christmas is a night of birth, an event of light, the regal entry of a little king. Born for us. Born to make us children of a king. It is lovely to think how Advent is enclosed within two solemnities that speak of royalty: Christ the King of the Universe, and Christmas, the day for which Isaiah had prophesied. *For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be*



called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice (Is 9:5-6).

Hence, it is nice to link up these two events, reflecting on what God himself wanted to say to us when he presented himself to us as a king. The words of brother Michael Davide can help us, a Benedictine monk and the curator of the comments to the readings for the Mass: “Royalty is nothing other than the ability to perceive and welcome littleness; royalty is nothing other than freedom from ourselves to have eyes for others. In Scriptures the true king can only be a shepherd like David (1Sam 16:11) whose life is dedicated entirely to taking care of his flock: *“I will feed my flock and I will make them lie down”* (Ez 34:15).

The Lord Jesus is king because he lived the mystery of submission to the Father to the utmost, knowing how to take care of his brothers. The secret of Christ's royalty is a game of submission, a game of humility that passes through humiliation

Every reality, every person has a deep, intrinsic, inalienable link with the Lord himself, who bound himself to humanity to the last. The end of the story, of all our stories, is that “God is everything in everyone” (1 Cor 12:6) and we approach or distance ourselves from the logic of the Kingdom in the measure in which we notice or fail to notice or live or fail to live this reality. And so the solemnity of Christ the King is given to us to enable us to examine the centrality or otherwise of the presence of God in our lives: the Lord Jesus is king because he was able to relate to the Father and to everyone and everything, and he did this in the logic of submission and service. Only in this way can we be free and therefore, authentically, be kings. In fact, submitting ourselves, accepting the existence and difference from others, freeing ourselves from all claims over others, makes our lives independent from others and dependant only on God, and our relationship with God makes us not need to free ourselves from others, being free from all claims”.

(Taken from Daily Mass, Nov. 2011)

Let us not be tricked by false silences: true silence is, first and foremost, what makes us remain quiet. If we do not silence the ego, we can go into even the most deserted desert but it is an illusion: the greatest obstacle remains the one that separates us from God, that keeps us ignorant, that does not allow us to know the You.

In our interpersonal relations, how many times does this terrible character come out – the ego – which goes into conflict with others, which makes so much noise that it deafens us, that it makes us incapable of being present before the Lord, understanding his voice, of tasting the things on high, experiencing the mystery of Christ which is a mystery of humility, silence, poverty, abnegation.

The Lord looks upon the humble: a gaze that strips all the good and all the evil >>> that lies within man. Before the reality of evil

that lies within us and with others, what must we do, if not come out of ourselves, enter into his holy temple in silence, with humility, and throw open our gaze onto him, the Holy one? Only if he finds us prostrate, humble, in silence of compunction will he embrace us with his gaze of compassion and lift us up.

May the Lord make us capable of a “humble, simple, discrete, silent service, of brothers”. Being silent: a service that does not proclaim itself, does not boast, does not repeat itself, does not speak about itself, and does not claim payment. A service that is known more by God and less by others, and that, in the evening, always leaves the suffered, sincere conviction in the soul of having been merely servants.

Excerpts from *LITURGY OF SILENCE*, by **Anna Maria Canopi**, Benedictine

Benedict XVI On the Reality of Death

*Road to death is way of hope;
it passes through our cemeteries*

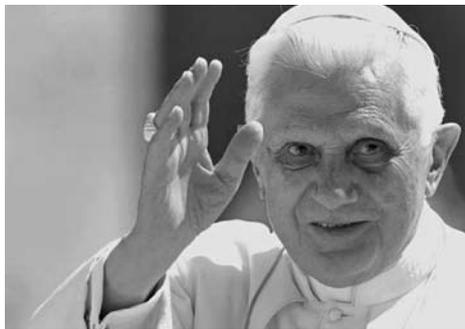
“Human beings have always cared for their dead and sought to give them a sort of second life through attention, care and affection. In a way, we want to preserve their experience of life; and, paradoxically, by looking at their graves, before which countless memories return, we discover how they lived, what they loved, what they feared, what they hoped for and what they hated. They are almost a mirror of their world.

“Why is this so? Because, despite the fact that death is an almost forbidden subject in our society and that there is a continuous attempt to banish the thought of it from our minds, death touches each of us, it touches mankind of every age and every place. And before this mystery we all, even unconsciously, search for something to give us hope, a sign that might bring us consolation, open up some horizon, offer us a future once more. The road to death, in reality, is a way of hope and it passes through our cemeteries, just as can be read on the tombstones and fulfills a journey marked by the hope of eternity.

“Yet, we wonder, why do we feel fear before death? Why has humanity, for the most part, never resigned itself to the belief that beyond life there is simply nothing? I would say that there are multiple answers: we are afraid of death because we are afraid of that nothingness, of leaving this world for something we don't know, something unknown to us. And, then, there is a sense of rejection in us because we cannot accept that all that is beautiful and great, realized during a lifetime, should be suddenly erased, should fall into the abyss of nothingness. Above all, we feel that love calls and asks for eternity and it is impossible to accept that it is destroyed by death in an instant.

“Furthermore, we fear in the face of death because, when we find ourselves approaching the end of our lives, there is a perception that our actions will be judged, the way in which we have lived our lives, above all, those moments of darkness which we often skillfully remove or try to remove from our conscience. I would say that precisely the question of judgment often underlies man of all time's concern for the dead, the attention paid to the people who were important to him and are no longer with him on the journey through earthly life. In a certain sense the gestures of affection and love which surround the deceased are a way to protect him in the conviction that they will have an effect on the judgment. This we can gather from the majority of cultures that characterize the history of man.

“Today the world has become, at least in appearance, much more rational, or rather, there is a more widespread tendency to think that every reality ought to be tackled with the criteria of experimental science, and that the great questions about death ought



to be answered not so much with faith as with empirical, provable knowledge. It is not sufficiently taken into account, however, that precisely in this way one is doomed to fall into forms of spiritism, in an attempt to have some kind of contact with the world beyond, almost imagining it to be a reality that, ultimately, is a copy of the present one.

“Dear friends, the Solemnity of All Saints and the Commemoration of all the faithful departed tells us that only those who can recognize a great hope in death, can live a life based on hope. If we reduce man exclusively to his horizontal dimension, to that which can be perceived empirically, life itself loses its profound meaning. Man needs eternity for every other hope is too brief, too limited for him. Man can be explained only if there is a Love which overcomes every isolation, even that of death, in a totality which also transcends time and space. Man can be explained, he finds his deepest meaning, only if there is God. And we know that God left his distance for us and made himself close. He entered into our life and tells us: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (Jn 11:25-26).

“Let us think for a moment of the scene on Calvary and listen again to Jesus' words from the height of the Cross, addressed to the criminal crucified on his right: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43). We think of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, when, after traveling a stretch of the way with the Risen Jesus, they recognize him and set out immediately for Jerusalem to proclaim the Resurrection of the Lord (cf. Lk 24:13-35). The Master's words come back to our minds with renewed clarity: “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” (Jn 14:1-2). God is truly demonstrated, he became accessible, for he so loved the world “that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16), and in the supreme act of love on the Cross, immersing himself in the abyss of death, he conquered it, and rose and opened the doors of eternity for us too. Christ sustains us through the night of death which he himself overcame; he is the Good Shepherd, on whose guidance one can rely without any fear, for he knows the way well, even through darkness.”

Pope Benedict XVI, 2 Nov. 2011

General Audience 14 Nov. 2011

Trust in the Father's Will

When asking the Lord for something in prayer, we must not expect an immediate fulfillment of our will, of our requests

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In our continuing catechesis on prayer, we now consider Jesus' own prayer, particularly in the context of his miracles of healing.

Both the cure of the deaf man (Mk 7:32-37) and the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44) show us Jesus at prayer before cases of human suffering.

His prayer on these occasions reveals not only his profound identification with the suffering but also his unique relationship with the Father.

In the case of the deaf man, Jesus' compassion leads him to introduce his prayer with a deep sigh (v. 34).

In the case of Lazarus, he is deeply moved by the sorrow of Martha and Mary, and weeps before the tomb of his friend.

At the same time, **he sees the tragedy of Lazarus' death in the light of the Father's will** and of his own identity and mission.

Jesus' example teaches us that in our own prayers we must always **trust in the Father's will** and strive to see all things in the light of his mysterious plan of love.

We too must join petition, praise and thanksgiving in every prayer, knowing that **the greatest gift God can give us is his friendship**, and that our example of prayer can open our hearts to our brothers and sisters in need and point others to God's saving presence in our world.

Pope Benedict XVI

Message to Mirjana, 2 Nov. 2011

“Dear children, the Father has not left you to yourselves. Immeasurable is His love, the love that is bringing me to you, to help you to come to know Him, so that, through my Son, all of you can call Him ‘Father’ with the fullness of heart; that you can be one people in God's family. However, my children, **do not forget that you are not in this world only for yourselves**, and that I am not calling you here only for your sake. Those who follow my Son think of the brother in Christ as themselves and they do not know selfishness. That is why I desire that you be the light of my Son. That to all those who have not come to know the Father – to all those who wander in the darkness of sin, despair, pain and loneliness – you may illuminate the way and that, with your life, you may show them the love of God. I am with you. If you open your hearts, I will lead you. Again I am calling you: pray for your pastors. Thank you.”

Goodbye!



Over the past twelve years of my work with the Echo, as I put the magazine together I would try to put myself in your shoes, to discover what you might like to read and what words might help you grow in your journey of faith. Dear readers of the Echo, you became as family members to me, who are thought of dearly. Today I place myself as in your presence to say goodbye to each of you with friendship and gratitude. With this issue in fact, I finish my work as the head of the editorial staff.

It was a great honour for me to do this work for the Queen of Peace after the death of Fr. Angelo who created this magazine.

Our Lady's soft, maternal, providential voice continues to echo out in Medjugorje, reaching even those who are furthest away from that little centre and, as we have often noticed, the Echo has the grace and the ability to reach no less than 133 countries throughout the world... a lot of places!

This diversity of populations has always impressed me, because humanly speaking it is impossible to communicate with so many populations and cultures, that are so different from each other, using the same words, the same articles. But the Echo allowed us to do this, because it was made to echo the only truly universal language throughout the world: the love of God brought to us by Our Blessed Mother in a particular way at Medjugorje.

It was a wonderful adventure. I loved the Echo very much; it motivated my commitment, it gave meaning to my little and large efforts, made me tenacious in times of difficulty, and loyal when it seemed that everything was about to come to an end. It was a love that was returned abundantly.

It wasn't always easy. I needed to be silent and listen, to pray and offer much to put my

own certainties and uncertainties aside and ask the Spirit to inspire me with the contents of the newspaper, which formed surprisingly each time in my hands.

A lot of work, but also a lot of joy, because the letters of thanks and continuous requests for new subscriptions confirmed that we were indeed on the right path. I thank you for this, because in loving the Echo, you let that love come to me and to those who worked alongside me in many different ways.

To respect the structure of the magazine, which necessarily must be a clear reflection of Our Lady's call at Medjugorje, as is desired by members of the Association responsible for publishing it, I feel I must move on to a different media where I can more fully express my experiences. I am convinced that the Medjugorje experience can open up new horizons that are worth developing in a different context.

Rather than say goodbye I should like to say see you again to all those who have followed me up to now and who would like to continue reading about what God is fulfilling in these times of grace.

In collaboration with other people who share my same journey, and any others whom the Lord will call, a website is being prepared that will publish the fruit of our considerations.

If one thing is capable of generating another, then this means that it is a good thing. The Echo, which has always been a very good thing, will continue its journey in someone else's hands and its mission will go on, but it also has the merit of having generated in us the desire to set out on the editorial journey again, through a new tool. I am certain that what God will inspire us with will be a new friend for you on the road that leads from Medjugorje to another unique destination: the meeting with the living God "the prize and destination of the good."

I bid you all goodbye, in the Immaculate Heart of Mary,
Stefania Consoli

A Leap Forward

An important year is about to come to a close in Medjugorje: a year of festivities and celebrations, of balances and memories, of great numbers, such as the thousands of pages written and published throughout the world and the albums full of nostalgic photos; not to mention the river of pilgrims that throughout the year come to Medjugorje. It has been a year in which we all felt the urge to reconsider the dimension of an event that had the power to change the course of our lives. This has been a year of grace, a year in which to give thanks.

But now let us now think ahead, of expectation and hope. For Mary has given us also warnings in her messages, and promises for the future. Every day we need to work on our conversion; and this doesn't mean leaving behind only what we think is bad. It also means not clinging to the things that were good up to a short time ago and that are now no longer necessary because they have already obtained their effect. Sometimes in fact, in the fear that grace is escaping us, we cling to it, anchoring ourselves to a past that is already behind us and we lose the lookout post alongside the "wise virgins" who await the arrival of the Spouse.

Mary is calling us from Medjugorje to return to God because salvation is urgent in a world that is bent under the excessive burden of the selfishness of some and the misery of many others.

The media are trying to spread perturbation, a sense of instability that makes our ability to hope even more fragile, our ability to lift our gaze and understand that it isn't man who holds the key to the fate of humanity.

This is why we must make the most of the grace received over these years from the Queen of Peace. Medjugorje is not just any event, but it is a turning point because "God's gifts and his calling are irrevocable," writes Saint Paul to the Romans (11:29) and they always bear fruit – in proportion to our response.

I do not call you here (to Medjugorje) only for yourselves, says Mary (see message to Mirjana of 2 November 2011). No, we cannot make our experience into a private fact, an occasion for ourselves, because – as Our Lady reminds us – we are not in this world just for ourselves, but to be a people in God's family. A people that lets itself be guided by Mary, to point out to the afflicted of this time, the pathway to return to God. To be light for others, to be a mirror of immense love for those who do not know what it means to be loved, to ignite sparks of hope where there is despair - will not be difficult if we accept to follow Christ by returning to a life of prayer and Sacraments which is asked of us at Medjugorje.

Mary can help us open our hearts to God. She has promised us that she is with us... so that we can make our experience of Medjugorje more than just a beautiful memory or collection of pilgrimages to boast about. Mary points us to the essential Gospel message of fraternal love. She is asking us to leap forward to become a light and illuminate the way for others.

COMMUNIQUE

The Board for the Echo of Mary Association hereby acknowledges Miss Consoli's decision to conclude her collaboration, which terminates with this issue no. 217. The Board thanks her for her generous collaboration.

The Board wishes to reaffirm its intent for Echo to be faithful to the grace of Medjugorje - received and lived in the humility of heart - and in submission and obedience to the Catholic Church and in accordance with her teachings.

The Board of Directors of the Echo of Mary Association

Eleventh Anniversary of Fr. Slavko's Death

Medjugorje, 24 November 2011 – The parish commemorated the 11th anniversary of Fr. Slavko Barbaric's death with evening Holy Mass in the church of St. James concelebrated by 25 priests. Fr. Ivan said in his homily: "(...) Fr. Slavko, rather than preach about fasting and prayer, gave example by practising it himself, thereby encouraging many. He did not have to direct pilgrims to go and climb Apparition Hill and Cross Mountain, because he went ahead of them. So we are proud and grateful for his life and we pray to our Lord to give him the reward he deserves."

Later on in the day Fr. Danko Perutina led many faithful in the prayer of the Way of the Cross up Krizevac Mountain. Other celebrations were held during the day, including one to commemorate his work with the *Mothers' Village* which he founded. And an art exhibition was also held in his honour.



Mary Simply Leads us to Jesus

by Bernat Vilarrubias Solanes

Twenty-five years ago on New Year's Day in 1986, I arrived in Medjugorje for the first time with my new bride and some friends and in the ice cold we set down our tent beside the parish church. According to what we had been told, something extraordinary and deep was happening in that small town in Bosnia Herzegovina. Our Lady was appearing... every day! These events had been going on for a few years.

We were certain that in two millennia of history, an event of this kind had never occurred, we knew that on other occasions the Virgin had appeared for long periods of time, but... every day and to six young people!? We were struck by being able to experience such a great grace up so close, but also by the surprising fruits that these apparitions were bringing to people: the three mysteries of the Rosary prayed with the heart, crowds of people kneeling for hours in uncomfortable positions because the church was full. And then the Mass: experienced sincerely by all of the population in perfect communion of spirit, allowing the grace of God in the Eucharist to penetrate the depths of our souls during those moments. For us, that Christmas was a warm and timeless meeting, despite the inconveniences and cold.

We found out that we would be able to participate in the apparition. Those were moments of sincere veneration of Mary. There was also a small group of Italian doctors present and with various instruments they were examining the visionaries from a scientific point of view during the moment of their ecstasy.

A SEED FULL OF LIGHT - In Medjugorje we received a seed and a small light from the Queen of Peace, a promise of future. Then, for twenty-five years we immersed ourselves in the stressful world of modern life. Children, work and thousands of obligations often passed over what truly counts: living true life, our life in God. And yet, despite the difficulties and a rather conventional and shallow faith, the seed and the light of Medjugorje were always there, waiting. Like Our Lady does, with such patience and love, and perhaps suffering, waiting and deeply respecting our freedom.

Over all these years we had been receiving the Echo of Mary, a constant testimony for us, even if we didn't always

Witnessing Medjugorje

read it. But the Echo was always there, like a signal and a promise of conversion, a travelling companion, perhaps ignored sometimes, but other times a breath of air and consolation for the soul.

MARY LIKE THE BAPTIST - The persistence of Mary's presence in Medjugorje over the years led us once again to lift up our gaze and see things within a new perspective. We realised that over these thirty years of daily visits, Our Lady carried out a duty that is very similar to that of John the Baptist (although with more sweetness and gentleness) going beyond the millennial distance; and if we decide to answer, we will obtain the same fruits: conversion of the heart and preparation of the pathway for the coming of Jesus. Prayer, fasting, repentance and forgiveness of sins: this is what clears the road for the Lord.

THIRTY YEARS OF NAZARETH - It took Jesus and Mary thirty years to prepare the mission that God had entrusted to them. We may get some illumination from considering this historical reference. As always, the holy Virgin follows God's plan and so also today she comes to us in Medjugorje. Does this presence of hers have an aim, apart from being a gift in itself? Will her apparitions stop one day and will it all end there? I don't think so, on the other hand I think that all of this action will necessarily lead us somewhere.

And where can Mary lead us if not to her son Jesus? This has always been the case. I believe that God presents simple things to us with respect to our limits, so that we might have a safe understanding of his action, his will, his plan, and also to help us recognise the signs of the times.

In actual fact, as we could have expected, Jesus began his clear and direct action of preparation of his people for the new times that will come, times that we Christians have awaited down the centuries, repeating over and over our belief in His Real Presence. Perhaps because we repeat it wearily, and our faith has waned, that our Blessed Mother has come to strengthen and renew it.

A DEFINITIVE YES - As the fruit of the grace of Medjugorje, after twenty-five years, my conversion came about at the end of a three-year period of living and working in a Muslim country. Mary has so much patience with us... at least with me, as it took almost a lifetime! If up to a short time ago the image that I had of God was according "to my measure", now it is an immeasurable God who is unimaginably great, so great that for the first time I understand the words of Saint Therese: "I live, but I do not live in myself, the good that I implore after my death is great, I die

because I do not die."

I have therefore returned for the second time to Medjugorje with my parents (my mother has been translating the Echo into Catalan for years) and my children, to find myself once again with Mary and to thank her for having guided us with maternal tenderness to Christ and to humbly ask her to continue to come and support us.

And now we continue our journey in our family with our daily things one step at a time. It will be Christmas soon and with a new heart this year we will be able to sing the song of all times: ***Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let Earth receive its King! Let Earth receive its King!***

A letter to the Echo

I'd like to thank you all, because reading Echo on the Internet has given me many hours of peace. In September of this year I had an exceptional experience of faith in Medjugorje. I recently spent four months in various hospitals, it was a difficult journey that tempered me in my spirit. Strange how serious illnesses can strengthen the soul! I promised myself that if I did come out of it I would go to Medjugorje to give thanks to Our Lady for allowing me to remain near my family.

At Medjugorje I felt Our Lady's embrace which enabled me to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. During my stay I felt physically good. I had the feeling that I was home. Back into everyday life, my body started to work again with some difficulty, but this is not important, all the grace of those holy places remained within me.

During the first day, upon returning, I felt the suffering of those who are forced to leave their own land and their dearest affections, having left a part of myself, I had to try to find myself again in what I had left.

I want to give thanks to all of you from the Echo who give us the possibility of a continued contact with Grace, and for the useful information also when you return to the normality of daily life, which is sometimes difficult.

I spent a whole afternoon reading your wonderful magazine, it is like a hand outstretched over confines that are so far apart, yet it manages to keep them firmly united. The section on Medjugorje in particular, with its intense articles, passes on the enthusiasm and conviction that are born of a great faith.

With the certainty that Our Lady will give you the strength to continue your precious work, I thank you for being there, I embrace all of you and ask Our Blessed Mary to protect us.

F. Gennari, Perugia

Happy in Hope

With the oncoming of Autumn, the days grow greyer and darker, but the lights and colours of the morning urge us to praise the Creator: "Don't fear," he says, "don't be afraid", for it is He who seeks out the darkest corners of history, to illuminate them and make them fertile with new life.

We are called to keep watch and be ready: Jesus arms us with his words of hope and forgiveness, of consolation, peace and truth. In his hands we are potential works of art that can manifest the beauty and love of a God who is a Father to us.

The Lord finds the time for us and, despite the hurry of our days, he is there beside us, because he has something to say to us; and there is no distance that cannot be covered by his gaze. His presence unwinds over the steps of my life and invites me to a renewal that overcomes all obstacles. Today we are bombarded by thousands of languages, but we need silence to remain closer to Him and reformulate our desires, questions and aspirations.

God gifted us with the ability to love, he made us *a little less than angels*, but often our humanity is wounded. However, we know that the Lord wants rebirth for us and that He is faithful and keeps his promises. If he closes off a space to us it is because he is about to offer us a new possibility among the many marvels of creation.

At times He asks us to leave our securities behind, our home, to embark on a new journey, towards a land that is good for us and for others. Christian life calls us towards radical changes and those who abandon themselves to the will of God know that they are already receiving one hundred fold and they are experiencing a new way of thinking, of communicating and of loving. How many times have we experienced new destinations in the joy of life sharing, gratuitous brotherly love, sincere welcoming experienced in communion.

Today the Lord comes again and everything is possible! In Jesus Christ we can be weavers of authentic links, which are the secret to being careful and ready for what will be asked of us on the new day.

In his letter to the Christians of Rome, Saint Paul points out the right road to us, with its intimate depths: "...flee from evil, attach yourselves to good, love one another with brotherly love, compete in having respect for each other... be happy in hope, strong in tribulation, perseverant in prayer... live in peace with everyone".

There was a man of God who prayed thus: "Oh Lord, I do not know where you are leading me. I do not know what my tomorrow will be like. As I try to keep my hands open, I trust that you will put your hand in mine and lead me home."

May the Lord give us the strength to live in faith so that we might look toward that which has not yet come about, and wherever we walk, may we be the sign of his Love that fears nothing and renews everything.

by Lidio Piardi



Life is Reborn

During the early years of the apparitions, I used to attend a prayer group in Medjugorje. Within myself I felt a strong calling from Mary our Mother to come to know the extraordinary graces of that land. I believe and am convinced that Our Lady called me because she loves me. And I allowed myself to be loved by Her.

I recall how present Mary was during my lengthy illness. I prayed and I didn't feel the need to ask for healing, but help in overcoming all trials and all pain. To offer my illness to the Virgin for Jesus: this was all I had to do. Now I am well, physical suffering has passed and in my heart I know that Our Lady welcomed this offering because She was given it with a sincere heart.

And so I **decided to participate in a pilgrimage**, and in that sacred land where you breathe the air of Paradise, I decided to offer my life to Jesus through Mary. Within myself I felt very little and I felt a question: will I be able?

Yes, I was able, and after that step I see that a great love grows within me every day and it makes me more willing to allow myself to be used. I look at things differently, I deal with suffering with a certain faith that the Lord will not deprive me of anything: "*They looked to Him and were radiant and their faces were not ashamed*" (Psalm 33:6), this is the customary behaviour of the little ones who are always radiant with light and joy.

Of course, **there are trials every day**, but they seem less tiresome if **I offer them up** to our Lord, through Mary. I listen in my heart to understand what God wants from me, with the certainty that He alone can help me. I ask to be able to forgive always so that everyday life might not become unbearable. Offences, in fact, can truly hurt. Differences in character, prolonged silence, a lack of dialogue, humiliation, disappointments cause suffering and sorrow. But if we want to love, we must know how to listen and understand the hearts of others, even if it is tiresome. **Forgiveness is the pathway** that is necessary to give us back trust, to repair and change ourselves and others. Only the grace of forgiveness makes us feel free for the Lord. All we need do is ask for it.

It is indeed true that life is reborn in Medjugorje. Thank you Mary!

Franca, Monza

Medjugorje New Bethlehem

Medjugorje, a new Bethlehem...

Medjugorje thirty years ago: a little town amidst the mountains, as the name suggests, with very few souls, simple people, farmers living a little outside of the world, dominated by a despotic regime without any aspirations to react against it.

Bethlehem two thousand years ago: a few shepherds' houses, simple, humble people.

Two "little towns" which seem similar, singled out perhaps also for the simplicity of their people and their humble, genuine way of life.

Mary gives birth to Jesus, the Son of God, the Saviour, in Bethlehem, and she shows him to the people who come to the stable, to the humble shepherds and the three Magi, to all the range of humanity immersed in mistrust and oppressed by despotism.

I like to think that Mary came to Medjugorje to make it another Bethlehem: on the first day she appeared to the visionaries on a rough and uncultivated high ground, holding the Child Jesus in her arms: she brought Jesus, the King of Peace, into this restless, distracted, unhappy and Godless world, exclaiming: "**Peace, peace, peace. Make peace with God and among yourselves!**" and she herself said that she was the Queen of Peace.

Bethlehem means "the house of bread" and in Medjugorje (as in the Church) everything is centred on the Eucharist, the life-giving bread, that opens our eyes to the value of our existence, that gives us the gift of Love, and we cannot fail to communicate it to others.

Today Medjugorje has become a crossroads of populations, a place where people from all over the world come, where they feel as though one of a family, where **they feel at home with each other**. It is because there we feel welcomed by Love and we feel at home.

This gift of love is given us through Mary. She is the "gushing fountain," a fountain that gives what it receives from the source; in fact it is not the fountain that quenches thirst, cleanses and purifies, but the water of the source that comes from it.

In Medjugorje, many people have found what gives meaning and fullness to this life which is otherwise too arid and opaque. They have **rediscovered faith and they communicated it to others** and over the years, that faith has spread throughout the world.

With her messages, Mary has been guiding us. She teaches us to pray and love, beyond every human reasonability, to offer our lives up for the sake of our enemies, to experience Heaven here on earth, in communion with the Church, even in turbulent times, family situations,

betrayals and persecutions.

Over the years, Jesus has grown within us, taught us and **guided us with his Word**, just like he did in Palestine two thousand years ago.

With her messages, Mary pleads with us to change heart, so that we might contribute to renewing the world, to cleaning it up from the ugliness in which it is immersed, to bring it back to the splendour of its creation and we, who have experienced the passage from the shadows to the Light, from sadness to joy, from worry to peace, that true peace that is born of the meeting with God, who is Peace and Love, cannot fail to bear witness, especially with our lives, to the grace received, the conversion of the heart.

The Bible is not a fairytale; the Bible tells the story of the relationship between God and his creatures, it tells the story of man's fall, but also of his loyalty to his Creator. And so it is up to us to not withdraw into ourselves, it is up to us to leave our plans aside and welcome God's plan, to strip ourselves and make ourselves into His instruments of joy.

The fruit of adhesion to God's will is joy for us and for others. The angels in Bethlehem announce joy, a great joy. Welcoming Jesus means to have joy even when we are dealing with the mentality of the world that criticises and fails to comprehend. The disciples of Emmaus were sad and afraid because with the death of Jesus, "their" life plan disappeared before their eyes, but when they meet the Risen One they feel a fire in their hearts, they recognise him and quickly return to firmly bear witness and celebrate the Resurrection, ready to support God's plan.

In Medjugorje Mary asks us to be new apostles, to live love and announce the salvation and peace that only come from Jesus. (***You who live in the love of God and have experienced His gifts, witness them in your words and life, so that they may be to the joy and encouragement of others in faith***" 25 Sept. 2011).

In Bethlehem the angels announce to the shepherds "Peace on earth to all men of good will," and Mary invites us to leave everything, our petty interests, our short-sighted plans, to incarnate the peace and joy of God in our lives and bear witness to it. But to achieve this we are asked to be as children, to become small, ready to welcome the breath of the Holy Spirit and to offer our lives up so that God's will might be fulfilled (***sacrifice your lives for the salvation of the world***" 25 February 1988).

It is not by coincidence that every message that Mary gives us at Medjugorje begins with the words *draga djeco* (dear children), because that is how she wants us: **with a heart as simple and open as that of children.**

C. Appugliese

Our Life in the Chalice

"May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the praise and glory of his name, for our good, and the good of all his Church". We have repeated it countless times, perhaps without grasping its depth. We offer God a sacrifice: "Mine and yours," the priest says.

This is the moment of the offertory, it is the moment to bring God all the fatigue of our work, everything good that we have managed to do during the day.

But that's not all. Also the pain that we have experienced, the suffering that we managed to carry with love, and put up with in silence for the good of others. This is the moment to ideally bring them to the altar as a precious gift.

But that's still not all. Also our mistakes, the burdens that we reluctantly carried, that perhaps distanced us from grace; these too can and must be given up to God's love. It is never too late to offer Him everything and all of our life.

Not only. We are called to bring the worries for our future to the altar, our plans and desires, and this too becomes a gift to be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Yes, because they are part of our life and part of our journey of growth.

And yet there is more. We must give God our sins and the pain that derives from them, these too are a sacrifice to be lifted up to the Lord, so He can redeem and consume these sins, conquer them in us and in all those who experience our same weaknesses.

This brief moment is in the heart of every Mass, and is extremely important. People often end up reducing it to a pause between the homily and the consecration or the collection of money, but that would have no meaning if there were not the offering up of something spiritual.

All of this is gathered in the chalice. How much can the sacrifice of the entire assembly before God's immensity be worth? A drop of water. A drop that is added to the wine and that does not change its flavour, it gets lost, it is blended with it. And yet the wine is united with that drop of water that becomes Christ's Blood. Our little sacrifices, united with the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, acquire an immense value. They become part of His Body. They become part of that Blood that gives life to the entire mystical body.

And everything is multiplied and purified. I give myself and I am given God's life in exchange. God dwells within me. Every gesture, every word, every piece of my life delivered in the Mass is transformed on the altar and concurs for my good, for the good of others, for our good and the good of all His Church.

This good, however, comes later, it comes as a consequence and it is not the primary motive for the offering of ourselves to God. "May the Lord accept the sacrifice from your hands for the praise and glory of His Name." So what we put on the altar is above all for the glory of God, for He is worthy of praise!

So I don't offer myself up for something in exchange, or only to obtain good for my



brother. My offering is for God, to give glory to Him, to respond to His infinite Love with all my being. And I repeat this at every holy Mass, I say it in an explicit manner with my brethren: "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of His Name."

Francesco Cavagna

The Year Ahead

Dense clouds form in a sky that quickly darkens. Distant thunder grows closer and lets its voice be heard, nearby, incumbent, threatening... The wind begins to blow: the leaves tremble, then the branches, and the trunks start to sway when the strength of the north wind increases, bringing confusion to the once immobile field. The storm begins: bucket loads of rain fall to the earth that is incapable of absorbing them all at once.

Man is always unprepared, although the arrival of bad weather is cyclical throughout the seasons. Nature is shaken by the elements that seem to fight each other and agitate man's heart, which was created for peace. Yes, it is true, there is also a profound charm in nature that moves, like the yellowed leaves of the autumn that fall from the branches... But violent storms that break the fragile balance of matter: those no, those only cause damage and disquiet. We see it in many natural disasters, where thousands of people lose their homes and their lives, their goods and their well-being.

But the storm passes, sooner or later. This is the certainty that must accompany our soul when calamities and trials turn our life upside down, bringing anxiety and instability. If we lose control of things when it seems that everything escapes us and overcomes us, the accompanying sense of frustration reminds us how fragile and vulnerable we are. This makes us feel uneasy; and the remedy is to look up at Christ on the cross: sure sign of his love for us.

We live in an era that constantly seems to get stormier, on all levels of human life. All we hear is talk of crisis: in politics, in the economy, in society, in the environment, a crisis of values, a crisis in families, a crisis of nerves! The more instability and discomfort increase, the more experts and technicians of various sectors increase, but so also do followers of strange doctrines, healers and magicians, who trick us into thinking that they can find a cure for our ailments. But they are tricks, and so we go on feeling frightened and insecure.

Rather than trying to understand those

who hold the world in their hands in which we appear merely as pawns to move around in some sort of power game, we can gain benefit if we concentrate more on invoking God's wisdom for discernment. Perhaps we need to understand that our life is becoming more and more virtual because we allow ourselves to be managed by a thick network of systems that make our identity homogenous and subtract our freedom from us in a devious and sophisticated manner: our freedom to think, to act and above all, to hope.

What would it take for God, the Almighty, to solve all the problems that afflict us in an instant? Nothing! He can do everything; yet there is something that ties his hands. It is our freedom, for freedom is God's gift to us, and He greatly respects it since we are heirs to his kingdom.

And Satan knows that if he can put our conscience to sleep with powers of persuasion, or worry it with excessive alarmism, then he can influence our freedom of choice and push us to delegate the course of our fate to "others." And so he detaches us from God, which is his true objective.

There is a year ahead. It is opening up before us. What will it consist of? That depends on us and on our desires and hopes. On the inside we all have the possibility of determining the course of things if we allow the Holy Spirit to use us according to his plans of peace and harmony.

God will act through our hearts even when we feel small and incapable; God will use our willingness to allow ourselves to be guided by his love that creates and regenerates the fragile balance generated by sin.

Even if it encounters obstacles, a river that flows will always find its way to the sea. This is how grace leads us to God. And this is how the year ahead will be, if we want it. And it will be more radiant.

Stefania Consoli

The Mail

Caterina Iazzari, Australia: "I am a 75 year old woman who is faithful to the Church. I happened to come across a copy of the Echo of Mary and I really liked it, since the year 2000 I've been organising a prayer group called "Mary, Queen of Peace" at my home, and I think that this little magazine would be very useful for me. I would kindly ask you to send it to me regularly. I send you a contribution..."

Paula Kuemper, Canada: "I am always happy to receive the Echo of Mary. I read it all in a very short time, I like to know what is happening in Medjugorje. I am sending a contribution to support you."

Joseph Freeman, Australia: "Thank you for the Echo, it is a great publication and I love receiving it because it elevates my spirit".

E.F. O' Sullivan, Australia: "Thank you for the Echo, it is good for my heart to read

what Our Lady is trying to say to us. In this confused, materialistic world full of self-satisfaction, we have lost common sense. Thank you once again, God bless you and continue with your work because we need you".

Linda Bellistrivia Calabria, Italy: "I casually came across a copy of the Echo and I read it all. I find it educational and informative. I would like to receive it. Thank you!"

Alfredo Martusciello, Pozzuoli (Italy): "At a hospital in Naples I happened to read an older edition of the Echo, and found it very interesting. I would kindly ask you to send me the subsequent issues. Thank you."

Jacques Montaner, Montèlimar (France): "Thank you for the Echo, for the testimonies and teachings contained in your magazine..."

Claire Cros, Valgodemar (France): "Dear friends, thank you very much for continuing to send us the Echo. Please know that this magazine is a form of moral support for us and a great aid in our spiritual life. May Our Lady bless you and fill you with grace."

Anna Marie Bernard, Louhans (France): "Thank you for sending me the Echo. It has been a great form of support for me. I am a ninety year old grandmother, I can't walk but I have time to pray and read..."

Simone Cheynet, Roiffieux (France): "Thank you very much for the magazine. I always receive it with great joy. It helps me in everything I do and in reading it I find myself back in Medjugorje. I am sending you a small contribution so that you might continue to distribute it throughout the world."

Mary O'Toole, Dublin (Ireland): "Thank you very much for your marvellous Echo. I am sending you a contribution for the postal expenses."

Sr M. Franca, Kakamas (South Africa): "Thank you so much for sending me the Echo, may Mary reward you for all the good that you do and may you experience much joy. I am certain that with the Echo you will lead souls to Jesus. We pass it on to our friends after we've finished reading it! In my poor prayers you are present every day with much affection and gratitude."

Romana Christe, Lethbridge (Canada): "Please accept a small contribution for the dear Echo which I take great pleasure in reading: the articles are so wonderful! I distribute it in our churches and I see that the copies go fast! Thanks."

Latest News from the Vatican

Christianity outdoes secularism in building good societies

Vatican City, 18 Dec 2011 - **Pope Benedict XVI** told the bishops of New Zealand and the South Pacific that the **Christian faith provides the best foundation for society**, and that promoting the New Evangelization is the best way to build a Christian culture.

"We know that, ultimately, Christian faith provides a surer basis for life than the secular vision; for it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of humanity truly becomes clear," he told the bishops, who were gathered at the Vatican for their "ad limina" visit to Rome.

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Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.
(St. Paul - 2 Cor 5:17)



Merry Christmas and happy new year!

Echo fully relies on readers' donations.

Our prayers and heartfelt thanks to all who are instruments of providence for Echo, enabling us to continue to help Mary reach her children.

If you desire a written response for your donation, please kindly request it. May God reward you and your loved ones onehundredfold!

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