



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace

132

March-April 1997 - [Info](#)

Our Lady's message 25 January 1997:

Dear Children, I invite you to reflect on your future. You are creating a new world, one without God, and you are doing it with your own strength. This is the reason why you are not satisfied and why your hearts are without joy.

This time is my time and so, little children, I invite you again to pray. When you will find unity with God, you will see that you hunger for the Word of God and your hearts, my children, will brim over with joy, and wherever you are you will bear witness to God's love. I bless you and I repeat to you that I am with you to help you. Thank you for responding to my call.

"You are building a Godless future with your own strength"

The future Mary talks about which we are building ourselves will fall in around us, for it is made according to man's and not God's plans: like the failed world that Adam began to build because he did not trust God, or like the tower of Babel, built by ambitious men who dared to challenge heaven.

To save our human existence God placed a divine existence within us, but man refuses the divine and exalts the human: he thus advances towards ruin. Our Lady sees this and so invites us to seriously reflect on what we are doing, while at the same time asking us to pray: prayer is the only condition which allows us to enter and be part of God's work.

1. You are creating a new world, a Godless world, with your own strength. Jesus said: Without me you can do nothing (Jn 15:5). We think that with our progress we can eliminate the evils of the past; that there is no more need for spiritual principles or God's grace which saves individuals, families and communities. Without God's grace, though, we just become voider. Even though we may have everything we are only "full and desperate" because we do not draw from the fount of good which is God-Love. Thus: you are unsatisfied and have no joy because you see your own expectations and constructions falling down around you.

So, to construct with God's strength means to do everything according to His commands with faith in Him, making our relationship with God the foundation of our very lives and being constantly open to His

Word. Today too, all that we construct must depart and develop from and find fulfilment in His Word. Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved in sleep. (cfr. Ps 127).

2. Likewise for the Church: nothing can be built up - neither souls, nor groups, nor communities - without grace: a little-used word these days. We use up so much energy for problems, works and programmes (Why spend your money for what is not bread; your patrimony for what does not satisfy? cfr. Is 55), but they are purely human works and though we may give them Christian names, they are done without seeking God's love or grace and without considering the battle against sin. They are bound to go up in smoke. They cannot help man recognize God, for they lack the faith for which God does miracles. Thus, the world is cheated of its vital strength and is unable to see its salvation.

3. But Mary adds: "This is my time" as She claims the place that God gave Her for these times, which many in the Church do not give Her, unlike the Pope who announced the Marian times in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* (1.1.87). In His mercy, God entrusts His power to a mother so that it can be dealt out the way a mother knows how; and the Mother has shown us Her weapon: it is prayer, which alone can move God. With prayer, Mary unites us to Him; She can save us from a Godless future destined to fail.

4. Once united to God, we begin to hunger for His Word, because it makes us know His ways and teaches us His paths (Ps 24:4). His Word is exactly what we need. It gives us certainty and light, like a lamp shining in a dark place (2 Pt 1:9). Man's vain constructions have a dazzling effect, but God's Word gives us the strength to come out unharmed and construct God's work. Then, our hearts will brim over with joy and we (in this world fallen into the dust of its idols) will bear witness to God's love wherever we are, even as lone prophets, for Mary stresses as She repeats: I am with you to help you. Do not fear. Fr.A.

Our Lady's message 25 February 1997:

Dear Children, Also today I invite you in a special way to open yourselves up to God the Creator and become active. In this time, my children, I invite you to see who is in need of your help, be it spiritual or material.

Through your example, dear children, you will be God's open hands which humanity seeks. Only this way will you understand that you are called to testify and to become joyful bearers of God's Word and of His Love. Thank you for responding to my call.

"You will be God's open hands which humanity seeks"

Lent and Easter are times of special grace, which is why Mary invites us "in a special way." To do what? To open ourselves up to God the Creator and to renew ourselves, like nature in Spring which awakens and blossoms at the touch of the sun's rays. How should we open ourselves? Certainly through constant and sincere prayer, through being open to God's inspirations and through being ready to accept His grace and tenacity in carrying out His will.

Why should we open ourselves up to the "Creator"? The Holy Spirit is "Creator" (*Veni, Creator Spiritus*) because through conversions He continues to create new hearts to carry out new works which will

transform relations and fulfil God's plan to form a sole body and sole spirit among men. Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, and thou renewest the face of the earth (Ps 104).

How different this is to wanting to build a Godless world with your own strength, as Mary said in Her last message! Far from being lazy or stagnant, hearts which are docile to the action of the Holy Spirit actively carry out all the good which He inspires.

I invite you to see who is in need of your help. What is it that impedes us from seeing the needs of others? Sin, egoism, idols: these close our eyes to God and to our fellow men, and we see only ourselves and we remain closed up in our own little world, unable to see others' needs, as though only we existed. Spiritualism and pietism are also forms of blinding egoism: wanting to adore a god in the clouds instead of wanting to see God in our brothers and sisters where the need for our help is obvious: He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen (1 Jn 4:20).

The first Christians had no need to discuss techniques to attract pagans because these saw Jesus when they saw how the Christians loved one another. So open your eyes to see the spiritual and material needs of your brothers and sisters and do all that is necessary for their spiritual salvation, above all, through prayer, fasts and witness.

In his voyage to South Africa, Fr. Slavko said that in each evening apparition Our Lady asked Vicka to pray for the needs of many: the youth, the families, the unfaithful, the realization of Her plans, etc. and to help those in need of material help: If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "God in peace," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead (Jm 2:14-17).

What good comes from our spiritual and material help? We will be God's open hands which humanity seeks. Through us the others will see God's goodness and learn that He is a Father who provides for His children. People seek these open hands of God: can we say no to them?

When we will do works of love instead of just speaking about love, we will understand the role that God has given us and we will be happy to have been His instruments: when we love in deed and truth and not in word or speech, we reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us (cfr. 1 Jn 18-19). Thus we will proclaim the Word of God which we have lived and we will spread the Love that God has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).

Veni, Creator Spiritus. Fr.A.

L E N T: "Repent, accept the Cross"

A home for the homeless

The Pope on Ash Wednesday (12 Feb.): "Jesus does not ask for formal observances and mere external change, but for conversion of heart and decisive adherence to the will of his and our Father." The way to do this, he said, is: "attentive listening to God's Word, constant prayer, interior and exterior fasting, works of charity that concretely express solidarity with our fellow men... Jesus calls us to follow him on the way that leads to the Cross: a demanding and difficult invitation, but it can unleash the creative power of love in whoever accepts it."

Thus, a Lent with our eyes turned to those in need: share your bread with the hungry; bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh... If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in

the darkness... and you shall call and the Lord will answer: Here I am (Is 58:7,9,10).

In his Lenten message, the Pope invites us to open our eyes on one of man's most urgent needs: housing: "I suggest the following words taken from Matthew's Gospel: Come, o blessed of my Father, for I was homeless and you took me in (cfr. Mt 25:34-35)." The house is the place of family communion. "But how many people there are, unfortunately, who have been uprooted from the atmosphere of human warmth and welcome typical of the home: refugees, victims of wars and natural disasters, and those forced to migrate for economic reasons. Also families evicted from their homes, those unable to find housing, and the many elderly people whose pensions do not enable them to find a decent and affordable place to live. At times these hardships lead to other tragedies such as alcoholism, violence, prostitution and drug addiction."

In Europe alone 2.5 million people are homeless. In Germany, between Christmas and the Epiphany, 40 homeless people died from the cold - this is the rich West! In the underdeveloped countries tens of thousands of poverty-stricken people, refugees, women and children die for similar reasons!

"Many passages in the Bible highlight the duty to help the homeless," the Holy Father said. "It is from the love of God that Christians learn to share with the needy their own material and spiritual goods. Such concern also represents an opportunity for the spiritual growth of the giver, who learns to become detached from worldly goods. But there is a higher motivation which Christ indicated to us by his own example when he said: the Son of man has no where to lay his head. ...Being hindered by the possession of worldly goods always represents a danger that earthly realities will take the place of God in the human heart..."

The Gospel call to be close to Christ who is "homeless" is an invitation to all the baptized to examine their own lives and to treat their brothers and sisters with practical solidarity... Christians can serve Christ present in the poor, and bear witness to the Father's love."

Do we confess to convert? - In January the Pope desired reminding us of the profound meaning of confession which urges us to pass from an infantile to an adult faith, enabling us to evaluate the gravity of sin and misgivings, eg. in recognizing that others' rights are our duties. This is possible when we confront our lives with God's Word.

Consider the disappearance of the sense of sin and individual responsibility: people no longer consider God's unchanging law which helps to distinguish between good and bad. Unfortunately, even in today's families, life's main values and duties are not being impressed in the children.

Furthermore, the sacrament of reconciliation is meant to be a means of advancing on a faith journey and not just an appointment where one's misgivings are confessed. Seeking absolution purely to quieten one's conscience, i.e., the quick solution, is counterproductive because it does not help one to change ways and pass on from confession to conversion. Spiritual guidance, to help one walk in a Christian perspective, is a necessity for a Christian.

Rainbow in the clouds

Pope's reply to apocalyptic sensationalism? - After the flood, God established the first covenant with man: Never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth... and he set a bow in the cloud as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth (cfr. Gen 9:11-13). In his homily at the celebration of Mass on the first Sunday of Lent the Pope commented the above passage from Genesis. "Down the various ages of history men have continued to commit sins, perhaps even greater than those described before the flood. However, from the words of the covenant God made with Noah we realize that now there is no sin that

can bring God to destroy the world he himself created. Today's liturgy... helps us become aware of the world's value in the eyes of God."

We see in this a reply to the spreading of apocalyptic sensationalism in view of the new millennium. Will this suffice to calm the spirits which live in expectation of catastrophic events foreseen in "locutions" and "prophecies"? But is it not that catastrophes are created by man when he tampers with creation, and that he calls chastisements upon himself with his vices, disorderliness and dissolution of the family, and with the wars caused by his hatred and thirst for power?

But God only desires using His mercy by making use of the same destruction caused by man: destruction overflowing with righteousness (Is 10:22-23) Isaiah would say.

Tragedy of Central Africa: missionaries, volunteers remain

The genocide, caused by violent conflicts between tutsis and hutus in the north-east of Zaire where the country borders with Rwanda and Burundi, has turned hundreds of thousands of people into hungry and terrified refugees. Only the missionaries and volunteer workers have remained to help these victims of the "forgotten war" which has involved in one way or another all the countries of central-east Africa. These heroic people have remained to be witnesses to the truth, and authors of charity. The Pope was ;; also thanking these on Sat. 22 Feb. when he spoke to the Federation of Christian organizations involved in volunteer work the world over. He asked them not to feel discouraged, "not even," he said, "when the difficulties grow or worsen and become seemingly impossible to overcome. It is precisely before situations where one feels useless that we must feel sustained by faith in God, for Whom nothing is impossible. Your witness is important," he concluded.

Charity to East is way to unity

"Unchristian West: sin not called sin any more"

Fr. Warendfried van Straaten, commonly known as Father Lardo, is the founder of "Help to the Church in Need." He was in Rome on the 17th January to celebrate the association's 50 years and his 84 years of life which he has spent mostly in helping the persecuted Church of the East. Beginning 1947 he began knocking on doors; he collected and distributed the enormous sum of 4.6 billion lire. Following is an interview.

Q. Have things changed in the East since the fall of the Wall? A. Religious freedom is now allowed, but many problems remain unsolved, like the militant atheism which has left enormous wounds in people's souls. It will take generations for these to heal.

Q. You say that the Church suffers in the west too. Of what? A. For the undoing of Christianity among the faithful who no longer live according to the Gospel. The Church in the west is not persecuted, but is betrayed by her children who do not observe God's commandments.

Q. How can she be re-converted?

A. The Church must preach the Gospel in its completeness, without reductions. There are many truths which are no longer preached, or at least not preached enough for fear of displeasing the faithful.

Q. Which truths? A. The existence of the devil, of mortal sin, of the universal judgement. The notion of sin is lost; people think everything is lawful, and thus no longer confess and participate in the sacraments

which are the means that heal us of our sin.

Q. You say you are the biggest multi-national charity. What does wealth mean to you? A. According to Christ it is a danger, but good things can be done with bad means. See, for example, the servant in the parable of talents.

Russia: the devastation of atheism

Q. Is there a country which worries you more?

A. Africa. Colonialism has done terrible things, here and everywhere else. Perhaps decolonization came about here at a moment when the people were not ready.

Q. What are your next plans?

A. To expand in Latin America, something Pope John asked us to do, and we want to expand our mass-media operations to help spread Christian values. We have had a Christian radio station in Moscow for the last 2 years which is helping to unite Catholics and Orthodox. This is a step towards reconciliation with the Orthodox Church, which is our third aim. There is also reconversion of the West, in particular through support for life.

Q. Why so much help to the Orthodox Church?

A. ..because it has suffered more than any other Church in this century. It was under the dominion of militant atheism for 72 years. In the former Russia everything that was Christian was destroyed over the course of three generations. Today it is the poorest of the Christian Churches: a difficult situation to heal. For this it is necessary to help this Church rise from the ruins.

Q. Is there still a big gap between us and the Orthodox?

A. I am not a theologian, but it is not normal for a Church to be separated from us, just as it is not normal that Christian charity should exclude the Orthodox who have our same faith in Jesus. They are our brothers. The Church of the West must help them, without proselytism, without latinizing them, but she must help them believe in the faith the way they received it.

The Pope said the Church must breathe with two lungs. The structure of the Western Church is not the only possibility. There are other rites and ways to pray, but we have in the past, thought of the Orthodox as second or third-grade Christians. This is not so: they are Christians with their own martyrs and saints just like us.

What the Russian Church suffered between 1917 and 1990

Mr. Jakovlev of the Government commission investigating into the Russian Church, has revealed that not less than 200,000 priests, bishops and religious were shot dead or died in concentration camps. In 1917 the active parishes in the Orthodox Church within the empire's territory numbered 77,700. In 1941 there were only 3,021, three thousand of which were in the newly occupied Catholic territories (Poland, the Baltics and Western Ukraine). In Russia, however, there were only 21 active Churches, and they had been left open for foreign tourists! During the war, Stalin allowed a certain number of churches to be opened up in exchange of the Russian Patriarchate's support, but in the 60's Khrushchev closed them down again.

Entire generations grew up without ever seeing a place of devotion or prayer, or hearing about God except to deride Him, or about Christ: "a mythical character used by the wealthy to exploit the proletarians." A serious person could not believe in God: in fact, the slightest suspicion of cultivating religious ideas was a crime punishable by law. It was compulsory to be atheist.

Despite this, faith was cultivated secretly in many families thanks to the elderly women who continued to transmit what they knew. There were no Bibles; a page or two from prayer books would be copied by

hand. The Russian culture had been destroyed. A re-awakening began in the later years thanks to priests like Fr. Alexandr Men, assassinated in 1990, after which most of the people remained if not completely atheist, at least ignorant of any form of Christian faith.

Understanding the Pope's love for the Russian Church

The Pope has often called the entire world to recall the martyrdom of Christians in Russia and their vocation in the Church. They are Christians, thus, there is no room for division. The Pope has often said that his pilgrimage in the Russian land would begin in the Solovki islands: a land soaked in the blood of bishops and priests. Here, the entire Russian hierarchy was locked up and told to "abjure and collaborate" to which they replied: "we cannot!"

In 1939 there were only 4 Russian bishops left free. How can one judge those who then tried to make pacts for the sole sake of saving the life in their Church? "It was only for the Church," said the Metropolitan of Leningrad, Nikodim, whose whole life was tormented by the dilemma, "never for our own interests."

The Pope has always shown comprehension towards the Orthodox hierarchy, to the point of justifying and saving it. Yet, he has still not been able to make a pilgrimage there. It seems that the hierarchy do not want to irritate the ailing fringes of radicalism or the groups which create political pressure and which live on division and disputes. Despite this, a profound ecumenical movement is being noted within the Russian Orthodox Church, which will prepare for the foundation of a future of unity that no one can stop. (cfr. Avvenire 8-18 Jan.'97)

Our Lady of Fatima pilgrim in Russia: these are Her times

Upon request of the Catholic Bishops of Russia (of Moscow, Siberia and Kazakistan) who were in Fatima with Mons. Antonini and about 40 pilgrims for the anniversary of 13th October, a statue of Our Lady of Fatima is now visiting the East after having visited the Polish dioceses. The statue has already been in Russia for 3 months. On 8th December thousands paid homage to it in the Church of St. Aloyius close to the Red Square. For 3 months, starting mid January, it will remain in Siberia, then it will go to Kazakistan for 3 months where, on 13th July, the pilgrimage will come to a conclusion. The date will mark the 80th anniversary of the apparitions during which Mary spoke to the three shepherd children about Russia and what it would have caused in the world.

Mons. Antonini, rector of the only Catholic seminary in St. Petersburg, said that to Russia Our Lady has donated 4 things: 1. a biblical course in Moscow, open to Catholics, Orthodox and whoever is interested; 2. opening of the seminary upon request by young students of the course so they could consecrate themselves totally (the first priests will be consecrated in two years); 3. the publication of a Catholic weekly in Moscow; 4. the birth of Radio Maria in Moscow thanks to Fr. Andrea d'Ascanio.

(Readers of Echo have also contributed to the purchase of printers for the "House of Mary" in Moscow where 7,000 copies in Russian are printed each issue.)

This is not the first time that Our Lady of Fatima has been a pilgrim in the territories of the former empire. Fr. Andrea, with volunteers from his White Army, triumphantly carried a statue of Our Lady of Fatima with him during visits to Bulgaria in 1990, Romania and the Ukraine in 1991, Russia in 1992, Bielorrussia in 1993 and the Ukraine again in 1994 and 1995. Hundreds and thousands of rosary beads

were distributed, and Our Lady distributed grace upon grace as they made their way along the roads. Other associations have or are organizing similar pilgrimages; it is hoped that the various groups will organize combined pilgrimages to keep expenses down, and most importantly, to offer a sign of unity to the others.

Church is truly active when it makes Jesus work to convert and form disciples

An article in a diocesan weekly reported the indifference with which readers view the various themes, problems and activities proposed to the public by those directly involved, offered as proof of the intense ecclesial activity going on in the diocese. Some of the themes are: formation of God's people; commitment in social and cultural ongoings; migration questions; the church and communication; the church and politics; the church and the economy; the life and problems of women within the church, territorial questions, etc. Indeed a long list..

Perhaps the silence that the paper is being met with is a sign of the readers' perplexity, in that perhaps they don't think the above are the real problems of a community faced with a rapid abandonment of Christianity. Let us leave said problems to those encharged with solving them. On our part, the multiple tasks and proposals with all the problems attached to them only disorientate and frighten us.

The Gospel is far simpler and it tells us that only one thing is necessary: that the yeast - and it has to be yeast- should penetrate and ferment the entire batch of dough... Seek first God's Kingdom, the rest will be given you in abundance... Do not these problems make us forget the unum necessarium [1] [1] labour (sole need), making us void so that we no longer are a sign? If so, the programmes and the structures will remain and they will multiply, but they will be without souls.

Our ministry, like that of the Apostles, must gush forth from prayer and meditation of the Word, to announce it in the power of the Holy Spirit Who will make us see man's needs as they truly are. Thus, we must concentrate on our sanctification and on the conversion and formation of souls, not on works of purely external aggregation which would only lead our communities to a void.

A serious examination of conscience is necessary. What do we want: something eye-catching as if to say that business is flourishing? Or a manual to tell us how to keep up with the world and which justifies our choices? Or do we want to let the Lord do the work while we adore Him and listen to what He has to say to His Church? He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (Jn 15:5). Our works are efficient thanks to grace: only Jesus can draw hearts to Himself. For communion to be true, we must be more than just bearers of the Christian name.

If it is true that whatever is born of God overcomes the world (1Jn 5:4), we need to make a complete turnabout: our actions must be moved by our faith and not by human standards. Nor should we take prayer life for granted: when it lacks, all is rendered lifeless, priests included.

Aperture to Jesus makes everything simpler; aperture to the world makes everything complicated and false. The Gospel talks about Jesus' power and not about our works, and about obedience to God, not to ourselves. Again, it talks about ability coming from God. People need to see that priests and lay people with positions of responsibility seriously believe in the salvation and damnation of souls. They must be seen as examples of what it is to be Jesus' helpers.

We all suffer for the situation of our present-day Church and we are all responsible for it. It is not without reason that Our Lady has been calling us back to the Gospel for 15 years and that She has shed tears of blood in Civitavecchia. When will we truly cast the nets in the name of Jesus, instead of uttering

just words? When will we distinguish between what is precious and what is worthless and be as the mouth of God (Jer 15:19)? When this happens, signs of Jesus' presence will be seen also in our churches. Fr.A.

Visionary's letter to her relatives

An unpublished letter by St. Bernadette has been discovered by Reni Laurentin in Montreal. When she wrote it to her sister Marie-Toniette, Bernadette was 30 years old and at the start of the calvary which took her to her death 5 years later. As the first-born child, Bernadette was expressing her concern that her family in Lourdes was not taking advantage of the apparitions to enrich their faith. This is what the letter says:

- "I.M.I. - Nevers, 28 December 1874

My dear good Marie, I begin by offering both you and Joseph my best wishes for the new year. Normally for the world happiness comes from pleasures and material wealth. This is not what I ask the Lord for you, because true happiness is found in the observance of God's commandments and in the Holy Church. I pray to the Lord and to the Blessed Virgin that you be granted the grace of being able to observe them most exactly as possible. Be certain that true happiness can only be found in this, both for this life and for the next. My firmest wishes are that you be good and fervent Christians. Do not forget that one day we must all be together in heaven. Do not worry about my health for I am very well... "

We cannot imagine which good health she was referring to! The rest of the letter is dedicated to well wishes for the new year for her sister and other relatives, including thanks for the gift of butter and jam sent by her cousins and which she certainly would not have been able to take. To conclude Bernadette says: "Goodbye my good sister; till we meet again in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Sr. Marie Bernard"

* International retreat for priests: prayer, conferences, dialogue, liturgy, in Medjugorje from 1-5 July 1997, organized by Fr. Slavko and Fr. Cosimo Cavalluzzo in response to the many requests by priests. Information: ph. 387-88-651988; fax 387-88-651444. The first 40 will be given accommodation at the Domus Pacis retreat house.

* National Conference on Medjugorje at the University of Notre Dame, May 30, 31, June 1. Contact: Conference Registration, Queen of Peace Ministries, POB 761, Notre Dame, Indiana, 46556, USA

On Vassula Ryden, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has published a further notification, following the one of 6 Oct. to affirm that her messages are to be considered "personal meditation," and that "along with positive aspects, there are also some elements which appear to be negative for the Catholic doctrine." For this reason, all are invited to use spiritual discernment. (See Echo 125, page 8)

News from the blessed land

The Holy Father will visit Sarajevo on 13th April. It will be a sign of blessing and pacification for this war-torn population and it will enable him to fulfil his wish which the war previously impeded. Without a doubt, as he flies over the Shrine of Medjugorje, he will entrust his wishes to the Queen of Peace till

the day he will be able to kneel on the blessed land together with the pilgrims.

The intrepid witness of Mons. Franic: defender of Medjugorje

Last December, Archbishop emeritus of Split, Mons. Frane Franic, celebrated his 60 years of priesthood. Split's cathedral over-flowed with faithful. Also present were Card. Kuharic, other bishops and civil authorities. Many praised his life of courageous witness to the faith during the days of pressure and persecution under the Communist regime. Among others, the vice President of the government, Jure Radic, Fra Ljudevit Rupcic and Fr. Dante underlined the "special merits of Mons. Franic who has been a courageous witness to the events of Medjugorje which he saw as a sign from God and which he has always protected. He has also been attacked for taking this stance, but as always, he has followed the voice of his conscience and stuck to his convictions and in doing so has helped many to accept these events."

Archbishop Franic gave thanks and expressed his faith in the Queen of Peace for having opened the way to conversion to him. He said: "I learnt to pray in Medjugorje and it was there that I was able to understand and develop mystical theology... Each priest must pray at least 3 hours a day, each bishop at least 4 and each bishop emeritus at least 5! I acknowledge the authenticity of the messages of Our Lady in Medjugorje." He was greatly applauded.

Miraculous healings

During these 15 years many pilgrims have claimed miraculous healings - spiritually and/or physically - because of prayer and vows either done personally or by family members or purely as a gift from God. In the parish office of Medjugorje 400 cases have so far been registered. Many doctors, of Croatia and abroad, are examining the cases to determine their authenticity.

Some of these cases have created a lot of sensation, such as that of Rita Klaus. She has returned to Medjugorje every year for the past 10 years to thank the Queen of Peace. In her last visit she said that though she is busy, she still has time for all those who seek her. She guides prayer groups, offering her own witness. "It is important to seek God's will in prayer, rather than ask for that which we desire... I studied theology and philosophy, but when I had to leave the religious community due to my illness I thought: 'My God, what use were all my studies and efforts?' Yet, nothing comes by chance...

Now, my faith gives me the strength to face the difficulties I encounter and to teach many how to pray in a way that brings them closer to the faith. When a person begins to pray, great things happen and this helps them understand that it is possible to find God in their hearts. With our life we can make others understand that God makes man happy by making him a true person, and that Mary is a true mother who takes care of and protects Her children..."

International Prayer Meeting for Youth

The 8th international prayer meeting for youth will be held from Thursday 31st July to Wednesday 6th August. The theme will be: You are My Beloved Son to keep in theme with the first year of preparation for the great jubilee of the Year 2000.

31 July: 6 pm Rosary and Mass; 10 pm presentation of groups and adoration.

Each day will have its own theme.

1 Aug.: My Experience of God (Fr. Joerg Mueller); Prayer-Encounter with God (Fr. Cosimo Cavaluzzo, fra Slavko Barbaric, Ivan Dragicevic)

2 Aug.: You are the Son of the Living God (Br. Efraim from the Beatitudes Community), Baptism (Fr. Cosimo, Mirjana, Marija). Eucharistic Procession after evening Mass.

3 Aug.: Who do you say that I am? (Fr. Sgreva), the Eucharist (Fr. Cosimo), 4 pm Rosary on Podbrdo with testimony by Vicka.

4 Aug.: I Came that you may have life to the full (Sr. Elvira), Confession (fra Slavko, Jakov and youth from Upper Room Community), 10-12 pm Come and See (life of the Upper Room Community).

5 Aug.: Do as He tells you (Fr. Jozo Zovko), Vocation: family and consecrated life (Brother Efraim), 4 pm: the youth sing to Our Lady, Consecration

6 Aug. on Krizevac: He is My Beloved Son, Listen to Him: 3 am: Rosary on the way up the hill followed by Mass at 5 am.

Simultaneous translations will be available. For this reason, bring with you earphones and a small FM radio. Those with classical instruments should contact Agostino who is in charge of the music (fax 387-88-651444): these will be housed at the Domus Pacis prayer centre. Bring a Bible. Eucharistic Adoration will take place all during the meeting.

To all Medjugorje groups: MIR Info Centre official source of information

The MIR Information Centre in Medjugorje, closely linked with the prayer and peace centres around the world, publishes the most important events of the Shrine in the Press Bulletin every second Wednesday. Therefore, all those who spread the messages of the Queen of Peace and publish events of Medjugorje should consider the Medjugorje MIR Information Centre as the only source of official information. This is to avoid the spreading of unapproved things or rumours like those that were recently spread in a sensational way and which caused much confusion and inconvenience.

Signed: Fr. Ivan Landeka, parish priest. (From the Press Bulletin)

Mirjana and the apparitions of the 2nd of the month

Sensational rumours were spread, particularly in America, about the secrets being revealed following Our Lady's apparition to Mirjana on 2nd January. Mirjana quickly denied the rumour and said that Our Lady only spoke of Her desire that all believers be spiritually united to the prayer for non-believers on that day. The time 11 am was indicated. Nothing new was revealed about the secrets, neither to Mirjana nor to the other visionaries. Mirjana said that her apparition happens in the same way that it does to Vicka, Ivan, Jakov and Marija.

Ivan continues to receive apparitions on the hill on Tuesdays and Fridays. On the 24th January Our Lady told him that Satan wants to destroy the families, especially through the youth, and that we must therefore pray very much for the families.

"Youth want bread..."

After her visit to the Riunion and Mauritius islands, Sr. Emmanuel wrote: "Thousands of young people came to listen to Our Lady's message, particularly at the schools. What a drama! Most of them only have what the world has instilled into them, yet many of them preferred to sacrifice their recreation and even their lunch to remain and continue the talk on God, on Mary and on life.

They bombarded us with questions, like: What is there after death? and: What does Mary say about abortion? and: How does one achieve inner peace? How we regretted having to interrupt the meetings! So much was the interest: the harvest seemed ready, but humanly speaking it will be difficult for these young people to find pastors to guide them. How necessary it is that the family, at least, be an example!" (Sr. Emmanuel's diary)

* The Archdiocese of New York has begun broadcasting Sr. Emmanuel's new TV program: Medjugorje: Our Mother's Last Call. Broadcast quality tapes of the show can be provided for interested diocesan TV stations. Contact: Children of Medj., POB 1110, Notre Dame, Indiana, 46556 USA

Towards Year 2000 with Mary

From Greece: "We have begun a 3-year Advent in preparation of the Great Jubilee and the triumph of Mary's Immaculate Heart. Here too, the Virgin is silently making way: Her messages are placed with discretion in nearly all the parishes of Athens, Piraeus, Patras and Thessaloniki without the parish priests objecting..." (Sr. Despina, Greek Echo).

>From Japan: "In union with Mary and the Holy Father in this trinitarian preparation! It is not the theoretical knowledge of Jesus that will change the world, but the witness of people who've personally encountered Christ and have been transformed in Him. I also desire discovering Him through the Word and personal prayer: that my life be ever more beneath His lordship. My wish is to testify to what He has done to my life. I hunger and thirst for His second coming, that men see that only He is saviour." (Sr. L. Buti)

The Lord will give Himself to the hearts which seek Him, and to hearts closed up like sepulchres He will give a clear conscience of self and of His victory. This will be His coming.

Fr. Umberto Neri returned to the Father on 17th February, only two months after Fr. Dossetti's death (Echo 131). Besides the many publications on the Scriptures, he left as his testament his work on Origen, one of the great fathers who said about Mary:

"The first fruits of the Scriptures is given by the Gospels, and the first fruits of the Gospels is given by the 'Gospel according to John.' But no one can understand it without having rested on Jesus' heart and without having received Mary as Mother from Jesus."

Civitavecchia at the finishing line? Will it aid Medjugorje?

After nearly two years of work the eleven experts from the theological commission, which investigated into the lachrymations of the statue of Our Lady of Medjugorje in Civitavecchia, have come to a positive conclusion. The results have been sent to the Congregation of the Doctrine for the Faith which will in turn make its own evaluation of the facts.

Reni Laurentin, the member of the commission with the authority to make declarations, has said that "this lachrymation is a very positive phenomenon which is yielding good fruits. It seems to be a good sign from Heaven." Laurentin also denied the news that he was not a member of the commission: "It is false. Mons. Grillo asked me to be part of the commission and I accepted."

Diocesan bishop, Mons. Grillo, who will be historically and theologically responsible for the making of an official pronouncement, was recently interviewed by various papers and TV stations. In one of these he said: "I was rather sceptic and perplexed in the beginning about it all, but Our Lady gave me a sign. In that moment, my parents and the nun who was with me at the time in the chapel said I turned as white as a sheet. You cannot invent blood: it's either there or it isn't. My sister got blood on her finger, but it disappeared straight away. The same happened when the Gregori's dried the statue with a handkerchief: it left no trace of blood. Once the blood is taken from the statue it disappears."

On the blood - At this point it is natural to ask how the Magistracy were able to remove some blood from the statue if it disappears once removed. Bishop Grillo replies: "When people saw the blood and tried to collect some on handkerchiefs they were unable to, but the Magistracy, no one of whom was present during a lachrymation, removed some of the coagulated blood on the statue and this did not disappear."

Mons. Grillo did not fail to add: "the fruits of this event are truly extraordinary, especially with regards to the conversions and return to the faith." Numerous testimonies are given also by the father confessors who "tell of extremely moving episodes of return to the Christian faith. The graces are many." Apart from the spiritual fruits there are also the: "fifty or so presumed miracles to be examined, for which a special scientific commission is required."

Unlike the apparitions in Lourdes, Fatima, La Salette and Medjugorje, Our Lady here has never pronounced a word; She has only wept. "The tears," says Mons. Grillo, "are on their own an eloquent message for the man of today. It is a message of love that each can interpret according to one's conversion."

The relative rapidity with which the happenings have advanced towards official recognition (expected for Easter) lets us hope that it may be a stimulus for the Commission investigating the apparitions of Medjugorje. It must be said, though, as Mons. Grillo has also pointed out, that this case has not involved visionaries and so is less complicated.

Great crowds - People continue to crowd the little church of Pantano. As is the norm, wherever there is an extraordinary manifestation of Mary, the Eucharist is central to the events. In Civitavecchia the daily programme begins at 4.30 pm with the Rosary, followed by Holy Mass and an hour of Eucharistic Adoration. Mirco

Catastrophic secrets in apparitions?

Bill Matthews from Australia writes to say he is confused by Card. Ratzinger's declaration (Echo 130)

where he says that the Virgin does not create sensationalism or fear and that She does not give us apocalyptic visions. Bill says that this doesn't seem to keep with the apparitions of Kibeho.

One must distinguish between the things Mary has said to the visionaries so they are passed onto humanity, from the secrets which have been entrusted to the visionaries but not yet revealed, like the third secret of Fatima. In Kibeho, Mary told the visionaries about the sad events which would have occurred ten years later; likewise in Medjugorje, when Our Lady wept 10 years before the break-out of the war. Also in Fatima, She foresaw the war and the damage that would be caused by Russia. However, of the contents of the various secrets nothing is certain. Therefore, let us accept the Cardinal's interpretation, for catastrophic visions are fruit of conjecture.

S.A. from Messina says that Card. Ratzinger's declaration concerning the secret of Fatima regarding the loss of faith is in contrast with the apocalyptic character that Fr. Gobbi attributes to it.

In my opinion, the loss of faith is the greatest of catastrophes. In the Echo I published the opinion of one who has read the secret. Fr. Gobbi has not read it; he refers to other sources. All prophecies are conditioned by man's response to God's request, and who, if not God Himself, can give value to this response? Let us rather admit that these wide-spread apocalyptic "revelations" do not bring about a change in life style, but fear and curiosity instead. So let us seek conversion and in doing so we will console the Father's Heart and disarm the devil.

Another reader, Paul Wavuri, refers to an article in Echo 119 and asks about a food list being "recommended and blessed by Our Lord" for the 3 days of darkness.

The Word of God has told us everything we need to know to be saved and we are obliged to follow only that. Our Lady, too, confirms the Word alone in Her apparitions.

ECHO IS FREE - It lives on readers' donations. Forgive us if we remind you to consider the burdensome postal expenses when making a donation. Thank you for all you can do.

To facilitate our British readers, we now have a bank account in Scotland under the name: "Echo of Medjugorje" (c/o Calum & Mary Anne McFarlane-Barrow, Craig Lodge) at the Royal Bank of Scotland, 26 George St., Oban, Argyll, PA34 5SA.

Acc. no. 8326 0400 154351.

The Year of "Jesus, the Father's Gift"

This was the theme for a conference held from 2-6 Jan. in Ancona for "total-offering" souls whose vocation is in a fraternity.

"The desire of those in the fraternities is to live the mystery of the Church. The most that God can give to the earth is the Church, for it is communion with God. Our entire journey (being born from God and returning to God as free creatures who live communion with God) is to serve the Church." This is what Fr. Tomislav stressed was the function of these little spiritual families which are present all over Italy, the number of which nearly doubled in 1996: from 50 to 97.

Participants at the conference numbered 500. It was held in a family atmosphere of sharing and listening. The general meetings during which Fr. Tomislav held talks were alternated by smaller gatherings for

Community guides and members from the same zones, and the priests who offer ecclesial assistance to the fraternities.

The days were very intense. Morning meditations, psalms, the Rosary and personal Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (exposed day and night) helped create that inner communion which was fully expressed at Mass. The conference, based on the Easter Triduum liturgy, culminated in a Resurrection Vigil during which the baptismal promises were renewed and the act of offering self to Jesus through Mary was repeated.

With his first two talks ("Jesus Christ: the Centre of History," and "The Call of Total-offering Souls") Fr. Tomislav indicated Christ's vision of the Church, of history and of this jubilee year, telling how those who make this total offering could live out this reality. We have synthesised the fundamental parts of these talks.

1. The year of Christ: "Jesus Christ is within us. Jesus Christ came into us and from within us He acts today. He forgives, frees and reconciles with God, to make the person full. These years of preparation are an event for each of us, so we must be open to this inner movement. We must express Jesus' presence in us, or risk living these years as atheists. It is the inner participation which counts: we must develop it, and this is the reason why we are here.

To what are we called this year? We are called to manifest Jesus' presence in us. Each of us should manifest Jesus Christ, manifest man's dignity, bring God's liberation to the world. Why is there so much fear of the future? Why is there so much pietism, sadness and superficiality at Christmas and Easter time? [Man's] dignity can be expressed in responsibility. Jesus makes Himself totally available for us but He cannot force Himself on us. Opening ourselves up to Him means allowing Him to act. We are responsible for ourselves, for others and for the Church...

2. How to realize this call. The Church celebrates Jesus Christ sole Mediator. The entire Church is called to do this, but few are those who do. The Blessed Virgin was able to. To do it means defeating all the other mediators, or idols, which have taken the place of Jesus Christ Crucified in our lives. These can be: theories, habits, human powers, logic, our ideas... and wherever these idols exist Jesus Christ is not the sole Mediator. If we do not believe in this truth, we are just full of words. We must allow Jesus to act in us and remove the other mediators, without denying human values, but through leaving space for Him. Step 1: leave aside all reasoning and rest... I give you an example. A young woman told me about her desire to belong to Jesus. I listened to her and then said: 'Your reasoning is valid; you know everything, however, there is one thing missing. As I listened to you I know that the Lord was giving you His love through me, but you did not feel anything; the door to your soul is closed; you are tense and sad.' Then we prayed together and She said to me: 'I feel tired.' I replied: 'Go and rest for three days in the tomb with Jesus to find strength in Him.' After only a few hours the young woman was transformed. I told her: 'All your reasoning was valid, but it can only count when you are open to God's love.'

So, choose unconditioned rest in God! Valid reasons which obstruct love cause tension: when you receive God's love you cannot be tense or worried. You must leave aside all reasoning, even the most valid, because Satan could be lying in wait also behind this. To enter into the repose of the Risen One, the Apostles had to leave all their reasoning behind

... and die to themselves and be born into the new life. 2 Co 4:7-12 - But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed... 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. So death is at work in us, but life in you. Our arguments must be like earthen vessels, so that I will then accept death (humiliation, negation)

because of Christ, and this gives life to another and bears fruit also in our bodies at the same time. Such is the meaning when we say during Mass: we proclaim your death Lord... This aperture to Christ's death is a step towards the real resurrection in us. If we do not die to all our reasoning to be open to love, this over-whelming power cannot blossom. When it does blossom, I become a witness to Jesus sole Saviour-Mediator. This opens us up to:

Step 2: opened to His coming. Be serenely open; may your horizons be serene - the Holy Spirit is able to do everything in the soul which tends towards Eternity where all things are fulfilled. With an attitude like this a soul flourishes and is fruitful.

Step 3: practical steps. What I have said so far is theory; in reality, only grace and virtue can help us. In moments of trial: you have been tested and you have experienced ways of defence: aggressiveness or depression for example in cases of slander. While in the family, at home, or with your children you react by being humanly worried. If, to the contrary, you set off the mechanisms of unconditioned aperture to God's love, then though you still cry and suffer, you remain open and come out victorious. Inevitably, this affects also the others.

In prayer: It takes total sacrifice so that the space for God's love within you remains free. This doesn't come from participating in a fraternity, but from a continual inner decision - and continuous exercise - which opens you, making you belong to God. Thus, you cannot be content with reciting prayers.

Community life is real when it involves a state of aperture. Each member must do and experience these steps, otherwise communion among souls in the community is not had. It means reaching the point of existential prayer: just as we need to breathe, our souls need to breathe God's love. In our offering, this means being in a continual relationship with God and living according to unconditioned love.

In abandonment: Here is where we see the importance of suffering. If we are not thankful for our sufferings we are unable to experience God's love. My experience tells me that God at times is forced to tie down a soul which has promised Him total surrender so that He can attract him towards love. Happy is he who finds this door of abandonment open in himself. Being able to die to oneself comes from abandonment. Refusing this, or defending oneself from it, brings bitterness and sadness; being able to abandon oneself brings joy and peace.

The mission.

Why do we have to suffer? Why does God permit it? When I do not belong to myself anymore, but to God, He can send me to the world as a sacrifice. Thus, it is not I being sacrificed, but God the Father, because I have given myself to Him and I belong to Him. When we respond: Here I am Lord! we are like the Angels waiting for a mission. When we are ready to be offered in peace, the Father sends us amid trials. In all cases, Jesus wins inside of us because all idols collapse: God the Father has within us His Son Who gives Himself for the world.

Do not manifest Jesus with theories; do not try to convince anyone, but do [things] and live in simplicity. You could even be hidden. In fact, I strongly recommend all those who desire living this 'sacrificial love' to remain humble and hidden. The process that God operates in you is all you need; manifest it with simplicity.

Step 4: Mary is active within you. Why does Mary ask for consecration? Why does She appear in so many places? The reason is that Mary is active! She wants to prepare and accompany us towards the great Jubilee. Today, God One and Trine is especially present in souls. Do not be blind, deaf or insensitive. I repeat: He is present and desires acting in and through us. Do not live these years in a folkloric way! It would be a waste of time. The only thing that counts is inner aperture to feel Jesus' presence in you."

In his last talk, Fr. Tomislav indicated numerous ways of realizing communion in a fraternity with the Holy Spirit and Jesus Who takes us to the Father. He concluded: "The encounter with the Father comes when we are able to experience universal love. With this attitude a community cannot be closed within itself, but will be aware of its mission to love everyone. This aperture towards the universe makes us generate, and God's love is able to nourish all humanity."

Nicola

St. Louis M. de Montfort will be given a well-earned place in the official Calender of the Church following the Holy Father's visit to France. Holy Mass will be celebrated in his honour on the 28th April.

The chaste love of two young spouses "We never gave up prayer"

Marija Matiaca Dugandzic, in an interveiw to the Youth of Sr. Elvira's Upper Room Community, tells how God's grace was active in her marriage. Marija is in charge of the information office in Medj. and she is happy that also the readers of Echo can contemplate the greatness of God's love.

"I was born in Split 33 years ago. I also studied there and graduated in Economics. In 1984 I started coming to Medjugorje as a pilgrim; I later began accompanying pilgrims as a job, but it soon became a mission. I understood that it was not by chance that people called me to be their guide, but that I had to learn from my faith walk to be able to better serve them and put my intellectual, physical and spiritual capacities at their disposal. In the meantime, I was praying to understand whether I should marry or become a nun. I chose to marry and form a family. I met my husband in 1987, the day before Mary's Nativity, and he died at war the day before the Assumption in 1995.

I do not feel angry about the war taking him, but I am at peace because when the war began we both decided to stay on and defend our home. We knew the risks: in fact, it meant constant danger for my husband in uniform. When the war began we had a little two-year old girl and I used to think: "if my husband dies what will I do?" I was so obsessed by this thought that I had diffilculty having other children. Another girl was finally born in 1993.

I am aware of my husband's closeness, more than before, and it grows each day. It is not a memory of a man whom I loved, but the same closeness we sense with the Angels and the Saints, with the Lord. This is the type of relationship I experience with my husband! I am aware that my family is not the classical type of family any longer, but that it is a community made up of five people: the three of us, my husband and God. My husband now accepts me the way I am because he is free [of earthly burdens] and I feel that he accompanies us in our steps and that he will help me bring up the girls better. I am sorry that he died and I miss him, but I am happy for him because he is in heaven. Once, while I was looking at his photo, I had to be hard on myself: "Afterall," I said: "what can be better than Eternity, than Paradise?"

The girls know that their father is in heaven and for them heaven is not a fable. They were born when Our Lady was appearing here in Medjugorje and for them Our Lady is a person, a reality and they know that their father is part of this reality. They are happy because also for them it's as though he were here. The other day we were at the seaside and my eldest was walking with another girl who said: "I'm going for a swim with my father." My daughter replied: "I have a mother and a father too. My mother's here and my father's in heaven." It shook those who were with us.

This feeling of communion which I live with my husband and my daughters, with all of heaven and

Eternity would not be possible had our relationship not been crystal clear while he was alive. He and I always respected one another; he was "clean," pure. We believed that a fruitful love had to depart from the heart: it must be the Spirit to unite a couple, not the physical aspect. We lived in total chastity for two years, when I was expecting the children and during the period following their births. It wasn't easy, but all that time I felt my husband's love and respect. It was like a dwelling that contained life and he understood that it was a gift to renounce something external to encourage the growth of a true, affectionate love.

I think that many couples have problems because of this lack of respect and because people tend to say: "I think.. I have the right..." This is the error because the other person is not considered a gift. I have understood that for a marriage to be happy, for the love to be true and fruitful which will reflect on the children, both the husband and wife must think: "I am not important; you and your growth are important." Had we not experienced this type of relationship before, then today we would not be able to experience the union that we do. I do not consider myself to be a widow: a woman without a husband! I have a husband, it's just that he's in another life and I have to wait a while to get there too. It was the Lord's will that things go the way they did; He knows what is best for us and He loves us. I am deeply convinced of this. None of us know what life holds in store for us: neither the good things nor the difficult things. We must be open in every moment to His immense love, so He can prepare

Q. You spoke about respect. What type of respect do you mean?

A. Respect in all senses! He was a gift for me; I did not deserve him. Realizing that he has his good qualities and gifts and that you did not choose him, but that you felt pushed to unite yourself to him, makes you see him as a gift, like when something special is given to you and you feel you can't but respect it. For example, for me making love was a gift. In his freedom he gave himself to me and I in mine gave myself to him. We never united out of passion. I asked myself many times why I fell in love with that man. The ability to fall in love with someone you don't know is a gift from God. You have to admit this, for you can't say that love is yours. Love belongs to God; He puts it in our hearts and we have to use it as something holy, like something put in our hands for us to handle.

Q. Were there ever any moments of tension or tiredness?

A. Of course there were difficult moments, but you can't forget that we are responsible for the gift we receive and that we must defeat our human weaknesses. My husband played the guitar; he loved it, but all during the war he didn't touch it, he didn't sing. He was very tense and it was more difficult to communicate with him, but we never gave up prayer. Difficult moments can be overcome by talking them over. It's important to talk; it's human pride that doesn't want us to clarify things, that makes us say: "he has to give in..." It is evil tempting us, that wants to destroy the gift.

Q. You spoke of marital chastity. Can you say more about this?

A. It's a difficult question. Before you make love you need to be prepared to accept children. Otherwise, you can't do it. This is my basic idea of life. It's not that I was ready to have children each time; I mean to be open to this possibility, otherwise making love is just a physical thing. You can't be a slave to the fear of having or not having children. For me avoiding intercourse during the fertile days is the same as using contraceptives. I think that each of us can find the answer in our own conscience. When you begin to use other contraceptives your body becomes an object of passion and then there is no longer that love that wants to multiply itself through this union. In this case, a mother's womb becomes a tomb.

Q. Would you marry again?

A. No! My husband is alive! I accept that the Church leaves you free to remarry and I do not condemn those who do. We are all different. For me marriage is only once, because the union remains. As I have said, my husband is alive. If I did not believe this, I would be lacking in faith because I believe that Jesus

and Mary are alive, that Jesus is real, so how can I say that my husband is not? What difference is there - he is in heaven, in Eternity, just like Mary and Jesus are.

Q. Have you ever experienced aridity in your prayer? A. Yes, many times. When it happens, you have to carry on, for they are passing moments from which you always come out stronger.

To a girl: learn to say no for love's sake

A girl who says she loves Jesus expresses her sorrow at having given in to her boyfriend, saying she has gone through hell and is no longer able to face going to Mass. She says she is happy to have "wisened up", but that she can't turn back because she loves him.

Dear R., Thank you for your sincerity. It gives me the chance to illumine many girls in your same situation. It is impossible to defeat such an alluring evil if we do not have God's grace in us. Without it we are not even able to consider our own true good or our true destiny or God's love; we are unable to appreciate the gift and value of purity.

Like objects which fall because of gravity, we too tend to always fall, but only the Holy Spirit can lift us back up and help us see things the way God sees them. It is He Who gives us the strength to resist evil. If you do not pray anymore it will be impossible for you to act differently, because you will just not understand the other "life." Like Eve, you were attracted by the fruit and you ate it, but it left you feeling "naked." Despite this you think that these experiences are necessary for one to mature, but I tell you that the Word of God is eternal and stable and that it says: "sin's salary is death." Sin marks the end of growth and dialogue and that is why these unions do not last.

Yet, you say you love him hopelessly! You've placed your trust in your feelings. With regards to marriage, what newness could there be when everything has already been tried and consumed? The Word of God does not deceive; Satan instead does deceive those who fall into his trap. The Word says: "the body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body [i.e. He uses all His divine power to protect our body which is His through Baptism]... Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shun immorality! Do you not know that your body is temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price" [the Blood of Christ Who gave us back divine dignity, like gods] (cfr. 1 Co 6:13, 15, 17-20).

That is why, like Eve, you hid from God: you did not go to Mass so that you would not meet Jesus eye to eye. It is Satan, however, who after having thrown you down onto the road to Jericho, now wants to stop you from being picked up and cured by the Good Samaritan. Jesus is waiting for you with open arms. You have to place yourself in His hands because there is nothing that He cannot fix up. He is the "Lord of every-thing" and He can even make a queen out of a Magdalena. I have met many young people who after having made mistakes had the strength to make amends.

In this particular case, you do not want to leave your boy friend, so you must pray for him if you love him. You cannot love him, though, by playing along with decept. You must pull also him out of the trap, and if he accepts to follow you then you will grow together. If he does not want to, the best thing would be to leave him. Jesus says that if your eye is the cause of your sin [in this case a person as dear to you as your eye] you should rip it out and enter into the life with only one eye rather than be thrown into the fire with both eyes... Take courage: God is stronger, but you must give Him a hand.

Catholic morality impracticable? - The Archbishop of Munich, Card. Wetter, removed one of his

diocesan priests from his position of guide among the youth because he had affirmed that Catholic morality was "impracticable." The Cardinal pointed out that his concern was for the youth, who are victims of sexual permissiveness, because they need stimulus and strength instilled into them to follow instead the way of the Gospel.

* All the various language editions of Echo of Mary are available in the souvenir shop next to St. James church in Medjugorje and in the MIR information centre close to the bridge.

Protestant actress finds hidden pearl in Church Sacraments

German actress from Westrwald, Inge Brueck, recently declared:

"I, a Catholic run wild, had told myself that experience with non-Catholics wasn't enough. Was there any sense in starting up an association of Catholic artists? Yes, and in the Catholic Church I discovered and understood the Sacraments. These cannot be found anywhere else.

To criticize the Church is to abandon her. It happens because you either don't know or don't care to look for the hidden pearl, or perhaps because no one points it out to you. You can point it out, but not impose it. Also among the 'Artists for Christ' I need to wait for the right moment to testify.

Who of us can say that they do not have something particular about them, a charisma? I began composing, writing poetry, and I published it. A difference in my writings before and after my conversion is noticeable. This I wrote: "You were always here, but I could not see You. You were close to me, but I did not come near You. Sweet and strong was Your Word, but I could not hear it. Now that I know You exist, I see You everywhere. Now that I know You exist, I find You wherever I go. Now that I know You exist, the world seems so different to me. From the time I learnt that You are Love, I feel at home with You." It was from then that words and music 'for the unborn child' starting gushing forth. I came to Medjugorje on invitation. I'm an actress and I studied the visionaries but I could only see clarity and spontaneity, no tricks or lies. Coming here was like coming home. I like to talk to the people, especially the young people. They are idealists but they are also exposed to many traps. Let them see the pearl of the Gospel. Celebrate the Sacraments: it is the way to become salt of the earth and light of the world. (From Glas Mira, Dec.'96)

Echoes from the Echo

Friends of Echo in France have prepared a lovely monthly edition of Echo in audio cassette for the blind. It includes the message and our comment with background music, and articles by Fr. Tomislav and Fr. Slavko.

When writing to us:

1. Please write your name and address clearly.
2. If you receive direct from us, include an address label, or say that you receive it from someone else.
3. If you write to advise of change of address, include your old address.
4. We are sorry that we cannot satisfy requests for other material or publications: we are a small parish and have no selling point.
5. If it is possible for you, help those with poor sight by giving them an enlarged photocopy of the Echo.

6. We no longer accept donations for other causes, but only donations for the Echo.

Why a bi-monthly, 8 page Echo?

"I can't understand why the Echo continues to remain a bi-monthly, 8-page publication when it is so popular." (MS, Messina)

Dear Maria, the Echo is so popular because of its lightness and poverty. The Lord blesses that which reflects His poverty and essentiality. To be truthful, I too had always desired a more attractive publication, but so far Our Lady has made me understand through many signs that the Echo has to remain the way it is: She keeps me restrained with various means.

1. It is now bi-monthly because it has become impossible for me to keep it up as a monthly commitment. My first duty is the parish. Yes, I have a lot of competent helpers, but as the editor I have the job of putting it together and of overseeing everything.

2. Echo is free; it has no income from publicity. This is in keeping with the Gospel (you received it free, give it free). Donations received from readers' generosity are enough to cover the expenses involved in producing a bi-monthly, 8-page, economical-type publication. Nonetheless, the 5 editions cost 85 million lire per issue (about US\$57,000).

It hurts us too to have to reduce the many articles to the essential, however, this too is typical of the Gospel. We like to recall Sr. Dominique's letter:

"The Echo responds to precisely what we expect: a sobre, bare presentation and dense-ness of print like in the Bible. The Word of God has no need for accessories or miniatures. It's easy to read, light to carry and fits easily into one's pocket. It's easily passed on to others and ends up 'wearing out,' so much is it read. We like you, we are thankful for you and we pray for you."

Many readers have expressed similar feelings. The Echo is very dense and needs to be digested a little at a time. The Lord blesses this poverty of ours: doesn't it mean anything to you that we have long exceeded the 800,000 copies? We are grateful to Mary, to whom the merit goes, and we will continue to serve Her for as long as She desires.

I also thank and bless all those who, drawing nourishment from this little echo of Her messages, also serve Her. To you all I wish peace and good, and blessing upon blessing for this Holy Easter.

Villanova, 26 Feb. 1997

Work more, and with love, clean every part of your hearts.