



# **ECHO OF MARY**

## **Queen of peace**

### **167**

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Our Lady's message 25 Nov. 2002:

**Dear Children, I call you also today to conversion. My Children, open your hearts to God through Holy Confession, and prepare your souls so that little Jesus can be born anew in your hearts. Permit Him to transform you and lead you on the way of peace and joy.**

**My dear Children, decide for prayer. Especially now, in this time of grace, may your hearts yearn for prayer. I am near you and intercede before God for each of you. Thank you for responding to my call.**

### **May Jesus be born in your hearts**

Christmas is a reminder and a celebration of the coming of God amongst men; and here Mary calls us to prepare our souls, that little Jesus might once again be born in our hearts.

The call is tremendous; it transcends all human comprehension of the mystery of incarnation. It isn't a metaphor; it's divine reality: our life is hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). In Christ we are children of the Father; in Him we are given life by the Spirit; in Him we can be born anew in the new life without which we cannot see the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3). In Christ man is reunited with God and to his brethren in perfect unity: 'Even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me' (Jn 17:21), and at verse 23, Jesus continues: 'I in them, and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.'

Assimilation to Christ lifts man to God, making him His true child - but it doesn't happen magically, or automatically! For this to happen we have to accept Christ really; and this is conversion; it means to open our hearts to God, to surrender ourselves to Him just as Mary has so often asked of us.

Conversion is essential. Works of piety do not suffice; and multiplying prayers is useless if our heart remains closed. It is not an easy journey, and most of it depends on divine grace rather than on the fruits of our efforts. Mary suggests how to begin: open your hearts to God through holy confession. "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps 51:17). By exposing our miserable condition as sinners to God, it is redeemed by His merciful love, and our heart is made pure and our spirit is given new strength (Ps 51, 10). Christmas, then, is no longer the memory of an event (and it is the greatest Event of all time) but is the renewal of an event, of an event still underway.

Accept Jesus in us to allow Him to transform us, to conform us to the Father's will, and thus to lead us on the way of peace and joy. Peace and joy are fruits of Christ's presence in us - it is a peace which the world doesn't know and cannot give; a peace which doesn't depend on human events; but it is experienced by all those in love with God.

So let's start afresh on the journey which prepares our souls for the new Advent by going to Holy Confession. We firmly believe that Jesus wants to be alive in us to bear fruits of love, of peace and of joy for others. Nothing, not even our sin, can keep Him away if we truly want Him to live in us. Only if we refuse Him can this impede His action of grace. So rather than worry about our human limits and weaknesses, let us fear our capacity to refuse. And reconciled through the sacrament of Confession, let us live out that new relationship of communion with Him in prayer.

Our prayer, rather than a string of formulas, should be an unceasing succession of heart beats locking onto His heart beats and conforming to them. May our breathing be in His breathing; may His Spirit pervade and gradually replace our spirit, and may our heart yearn for prayer, as our Mother desires.

Fear not then! The journey is not beyond our capabilities; and with Mary at our side every expectation has fulfilment; every hope has certainty.

Peace and joy in Jesus who comes and in Mary our Mother! Nuccio Quattrocchi

Our Lady's message of 25 Dec. 2002:

**Dear Children, this is a time of great graces, but also a time of great trials for all those who wish to follow the way of peace. It is because of this, my little Children that I call you anew to pray, pray, pray! - not with words, however, but with the heart. Live my messages and convert. Be conscious of this gift of God of permitting me to be with you, especially today when in my arms I have little Jesus - the King of Peace. I desire giving you peace; and to you I say: carry it in your hearts and give it to others until God's peace reigns in the world. Thank you for responding to my call.**

## **The way to peace**

Here we are, Christmas 2002, and the gift of peace announced to men by a host of angels (Lk 2:14) seems so distant. The earth is marred by scenes of war - of devastating war - says the Holy Father who doesn't hide his concern and calls unceasingly to cultivate gestures and attitudes of peace. Aware that the world has trouble finding peace, people feel useless and seem resigned; but this wide-spread mistrust or lack of confidence is an indicator that man is lost, that he is no longer in touch with God. "In addition to the sword and hunger, there is a greater tragedy, that of the silence of God who no longer reveals himself and seems to have retreated into his heaven, as if disgusted with humanity's actions" (General Audience 11 Dec. 2002).

Last month Mary invited us to allow Jesus to transform us and to lead us on the way of peace and joy. In this message, too, she calls us with her sweet, yet firm, motherly love to accept our responsibilities. "This is a time of great graces, but also a time of great trials for all those who wish to follow the way of peace." Peace isn't something that can be found, or bought at the store; it doesn't even come as fruit of prayer if our prayer is mere lip service. Peace cannot exist unless we accept God. "My Children, pray, pray, pray - not with your words, but with your heart." Peace is announced by the angels to those loved by God, that is, those who let themselves be touched by His Love. His Love has a name: it is Jesus Christ.

Allowing yourself to be touched by God means to let Him abide in you, and this means conversion. Conversion is true if it produces a radical change in your life. Correcting here and there isn't the same; neither is adopting a different lifestyle; it means to leave behind every human model and take upon self - in body and soul - the only model wanted by

God which is that of His Son. We must be able to say with St. Paul: it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20).

Mary doesn't conceal the difficulties: "this is a time of great trials for all those who wish to follow the way of peace" as though it were an invitation to check our strength, making us think of Jesus' question: will you also go away? (Jn 6:67). We know, however, that our determination to follow the way of peace - the Lord's way - is not founded on our own strength. Rather, it is through acknowledging that we are by nature very weak that our faith and hope is strengthened. For when I am weak then I am strong (2 Co 12:10).

In Him alone can we find life - the true life that isn't broken by time or by worldly events (Jn 6:68). We know that Mary is with us and we know how to proceed along the way. She has told us many times, and also today she repeats: live by my messages. Reading them isn't enough; we must live by them. That is to say, make them become one with you. Live by my messages and convert.

Mary is with us; her presence is a gift of inestimable grace, and she invites us to be aware of this gift. As always at Christmas, she holds in her arms little Jesus, the King of Peace and desires giving him to us. So let's accept Jesus within ourselves and we too will become the way of peace, paths for others so that God's peace might reach out and reign in the world. Fear not the difficulties and the trials, for if Jesus is in us we have nothing to fear (Rom 8:35-39).

Peace and Joy in Jesus and Mary! N.Q.

## **YEAR of the ROSARY**

### **Mystery of Christ, 'mystery' of man**

We continue with our reflection on the apostolic letter "Rosarium Virginis Mariae" written by the Pope to launch the prayer of the Rosary: an instrument which "marks the rhythm of human life bringing it into harmony with the 'rhythm' of God's own life"(JPII in RVM 25).

A deeper contemplation of Christ through the various stages of his life recounted in the mysteries of the Rosary reveals to us how "the mystery of man is seen in its true light only in the mystery of the Word made flesh." Looking upon Him the faithful discover their own face, the real meaning of life: "Contemplating Christ's birth, they learn the sanctity of life; seeing the household of Nazareth, they learn the

original truth of the family according to God's plan; listening to the Master in the mysteries of his public ministry, they find the light which leads them to enter the Kingdom of God; and following him on the way to Calvary, they learn the meaning of salvific suffering." Finally, "contemplating Christ and his Blessed Mother in glory, they see the goal towards which each of us is called." Each mystery of the Rosary, carefully meditated, sheds light on the mystery of man.

## **HOW TO PRAY THE ROSARY**

Meditation on the mysteries of Christ in the Rosary is by means of a method designed to assist in their assimilation. It is a method based on repetition. If this repetition is considered superficially, one could be tempted to see the Rosary as a dry and boring exercise. "To understand the Rosary, one has to enter into the psychological dynamic proper to love," explains the Pope. When in love a person never tires of saying the same things over and over again: "the expressions are similar in their content but ever fresh in terms of the feeling pervading them." In Christ, God has truly assumed a 'heart of flesh' capable of all the "stirrings of affection." Although the repeated Hail Mary is addressed directly to Mary, it is to Jesus that the act of love is ultimately directed, with her and through her. It is clear then that He will never tire of our repetition or consider it dry and boring if each of our words are said with the heart.

## **A VALID METHOD - WHICH CAN NEVERTHELESS BE IMPROVED**

The renewed demand for meditation being experienced by the West, "at times leads to a keen interest in aspects of other religions," we read in the Letter, but this interest is often due to "a limited knowledge of the Christian contemplative tradition." These oriental methods of prayer, "though they contain many elements which are positive and at times compatible with Christian experience, are often based on ultimately unacceptable premises," warns the Pope. In this perspective, the Rosary is an excellent method of contemplation and: "the fruit of centuries of experience."

## **ANNOUNCING EACH MYSTREY**

It is fundamentally important that each mystery be announced well "to help focus our attention," points out JP II. "In the Church's traditional spirituality, the veneration of icons and the many devotions appealing

to the senses .. and the use of visual and imaginative elements, is judged to be of great help in concentrating the mind on the particular mystery." The methodology "corresponds to the inner logic of the Incarnation of Christ: in Jesus, God wanted to take on human features."

## **LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD**

"In order to supply a biblical foundation and greater depth to our meditation, it is helpful to follow the announcement of the mystery with the proclamation of a related biblical passage," writes the Pope, for "no other words can ever match the efficacy of the inspired word," and as we listen "we are certain that this is the word of God, spoken for today, and spoken 'for me'."

## **SILENCE**

Listening and meditation are nourished by silence. So after having opened up a scenario of the mystery, enriched by the Word of God, it is fitting to pause and allow the mind to focus on the mysteries, and to allow the Holy Spirit to suggest to us God's thought for us.

If we want Him to talk we must remain silent. "A discovery of the importance of silence is one of the secrets of practicing contemplation and meditation. One drawback of a society dominated by technology and the mass media is the fact that silence becomes increasingly difficult to achieve," says the Holy Father.

## **THE "OUR FATHER"**

"After listening to the Word and focusing on the mystery, it is natural for the mind to be lifted up towards the Father." The decade begins with the Lord's Prayer, and it couldn't be any other way; as in each of the mysteries Jesus leads us to the Father. "He wants us to share in his intimacy with the Father, so that we can say with Him: 'Abba, Father' (Rom 8: 15; Gal 4:6)".

## **THE TEN "HAIL MARYS"**

"This is the most substantial element in the Rosary and also the one which makes it a Marian prayer par excellence," the Letter goes on to say. The repetition of the Hail Mary in the Rosary does not overshadow Christ's centrality, "but stresses and exalts it."

The Pope points out how Jesus' name is found at the centre of the

prayer. "The centre of gravity of the Hail Mary, the hinge as it were which joins its two parts, is the name of Jesus. Sometimes, in hurried recitation, this centre of gravity can be overlooked, and with it the connection to the mystery of Christ being contemplated. Yet it is precisely the emphasis given to the name of Jesus and to his mystery that is the sign of a meaningful and fruitful recitation of the Rosary." So repeating the name of Jesus &ndash; in close association with the name of his Blessed Mother &ndash; helps us enter more deeply into the life of Christ.

## **THE "GLORIA"**

"Trinitarian doxology is the goal of all Christian contemplation. " If we travel this way to the end we repeatedly encounter the mystery of the three divine Persons, to whom all praise, worship and thanksgiving are due. It is important that the Gloria, the high-point of contemplation, be given due prominence in the Rosary. In public recitation it could be sung...Glorification of the Trinity at the end of each decade raises the mind as it were to the heights of heaven.

## **ROSARY BEADS**

"...are the traditional aid used for the recitation of the Rosary. At the most superficial level, the beads often become a simple counting mechanism... " Yet the Rosary beads can take on much more meaning.. "for they evoke the unending path of contemplation and of Christian perfection," and just as the beads all converge on the Crucifix, so do the lives and prayers of believers for whom Christ is the beginning and the end.

## **MARY'S WAY**

If prayed in this way, the Rosary truly becomes a spiritual itinerary in which Mary acts as Mother, Teacher and Guide, sustaining the faithful with her powerful intercession. It is the way of the example of the Virgin of Nazareth, a woman of faith, of silence, of attentive listening. The 'mysteries of Christ' are also in some sense the 'mysteries of his Mother' &ndash; and of Our Mother, who will not fail to help us understand, through prayer, the great mystery of our own life.

S.C.

## **St. Bernadette: "All I knew was the Rosary."**

"At the very heart of the apparitions of Lourdes we have "this object of prayer;" which acted as a permanent bond between Mary and Bernadette; the same bond which unites earth to heaven through prayer. Then again, Bernadette knew that very well when she said: "All I knew was the Rosary" - but with the Rosary she knew everything! Fr. M. de Roton

### **Speaking of peace to a divided world**

On the first day of this new year, the Solemnity of the Mother of God, the Holy Father appealed yet again to every man: "We must never cease to pray for peace." He used determined tones as if to shake people's sleepy consciences which one might say have been anaesthetized by the dominant egoism of our society, where life is a battle field and where people fight to defend their own interests. A new seed of peace requires fertile ground where peace is generated in the hearts of individuals, where a new order mirrors God's original plan; where individuals renounce their own for the sake of the common good. "Peace is not essentially about structures but about people," the Pope says. "Gestures of peace are possible when people appreciate fully the community dimension of their lives. Gestures of peace create a tradition and a culture of peace."

The Holy Father re-proposed the epic Letter, *Pacem in Terris*, published 40 years ago by Pope John XXIII who summed up his message of 'peace on earth' in the first sentence of the encyclical: 'Peace on earth can be firmly established and sustained only if the order laid down by God is dutifully observed.'

Only two years before *Pacem in Terris*, in 1961, the Berlin Wall had been erected to divide and set against each other not only two parts of that city, but two ways of understanding and building the earthly city .. and the world had come to the brink of a nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The road to a world of peace, justice and freedom seemed blocked.

Four decades down the road things don't seem very different. In a certain sense things are worse since progress was meant to offer better conditions to the lives of all. But entire populations still live in fear of atomic threat.

## **The four pillars of peace**

Pope John XXIII didn't agree with those who claimed that peace was impossible. With the profound intuition that characterized him, he identified the essential conditions for peace in four precise requirements of the human spirit: truth, justice, love, freedom.

"TRUTH will build peace if every individual sincerely acknowledges not only his rights, but also his own duties towards others.

JUSTICE will build peace if in practice everyone respects the rights of others and actually fulfils his duties towards them.

LOVE will build peace if people feel the needs of others as their own and share what they have with others, especially the values of mind and spirit which they possess.

FREEDOM will build peace and make it thrive if people act according to reason and assume responsibility for their own actions."

Hence the road to peace, according to "good Pope John," lay in the defence and promotion of basic human rights in the "conviction that all men are equal by reason of their natural dignity.. every human being is a person: his nature is endowed with intelligence and free will," and as such "has rights and obligations which are universal and inviolable." To our ears it may sound obvious, yet still today the human rights of billions of people are continually trampled on in a sort of purposeful ignorance.

In 1963 John XXIII looked with hope and expectation to the UNO as a credible instrument for maintaining and strengthening world peace. On the subject JPII says: "Not only is it clear that Pope John XXIII's vision .. has not yet been entirely achieved, but there is still much hesitation in the international community about the obligation to respect and implement human rights." But he adds that a "greater awareness of universal human duties would greatly benefit the cause of peace..."

## **A new international moral order**

The fact that there is a great distance between technologically advanced countries and developing nations, and that it continues to grow, urges a response. "That there is serious disorder in world affairs is obvious. Thus the question to be faced remains: What kind of order can replace

this disorder, so that men and women can live in freedom, justice and security? And another equally urgent question is: On what principles are the new forms of world order unfolding? These questions suggest that the issue of peace cannot be separated from the issue of human dignity and human rights. This is one of the enduring truths taught by 'Pacem in Terris' which we would do well to remember and reflect upon."

## **The bond between peace and truth**

There is an unbreakable bond between the work of peace and respect for truth. Honesty in the supply of information, equity in legal systems, openness in democratic procedures: all these give citizens a sense of security, a readiness to settle controversies by peaceful means, and a desire for genuine and constructive dialogue, all of which constitute the true premises of a lasting peace. "Political summits on the regional and international levels serve the cause of peace only if joint commitments are then honoured by each party," stresses the Holy Father, who then recalled that "failure to keep commitments (such as aid to developing nations) is a serious moral question... because the suffering caused by poverty is compounded by the loss of trust. The end result is total lack of hope."

## **A culture of peace**

Nonetheless, many people continue to hope for the sake of the 'beatitude' which invites us to be 'peacemakers' (Mt 5:9). "Religion has a vital role in fostering gestures of peace and in consolidating conditions for peace," JPII says, adding, however, that religion "exercises this role all the more effectively if it concentrates on what is proper to it; i.e. attention to God, the fostering of universal brotherhood and the spreading of a culture of human solidarity."

On this World Day of Peace 2003, let us all resolve to have John XXIII's same outlook: "trust in the merciful and compassionate God who calls us to brotherhood, and confidence in the men and women of our time because, like those of every other time, they bear the image of God in their souls. It is on this basis that we can hope to build a world of peace on earth." Stefania Consoli

## **Bloodied Christmas in Pakistan**

While a large crowd of faithful were celebrating Christmas in a Presbyterian church in the village of Chuyyanwali (about 200 km SE of

Islamabad) hand bombs were thrown amid the people, killing three and wounding about fifteen.

So far there has been no official vindication of the act; but police suspect it is a terrorist attack by a fundamentalist Islamic group in a protest against Pakistan's involvement in the US-headed international campaign to wipe out terrorism. Over the last few months there have been several anti-Christian and anti-western attacks in the country.

(Fides)

## **Dignity to Woman for her Day in March!**

Admiration, affection, solidarity, comprehension, esteem, respect, gratitude, paternal and fraternal love - all of this John Paul II has offered to the woman in all his various documents and speeches.

Particularly attentive to the female condition, in the many years of his pontificate the Pope has dedicated many words to the woman to give back to her that dignity which has so often been trampled on by a male-dominated society.

John Paul II has wanted to repair the many offences and injustices done to the woman over the course of centuries by bringing to light her real value and thus help her discover and live to the full her vocation. The Pope desired giving thanks to the woman for her feminine genius and for all that she represents in human life with the Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, written in the Marian Year 1988, which acknowledged the errors committed throughout history by the Church against the woman.

The central figure of Mary of Nazareth, a model for all women, and the fulfilment of femininity, is a ray of truth and purity in all the Pope's interventions. Among other things he has said: "Mary is the 'blessed amongst all women', yet within the divine plan every woman shares in her sublime dignity." To take a deeper look into the "mystery of the woman" we offer readers reflections taken liberally from *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

When "the time had fully come God sent forth his Son, born of woman." The Son becomes man, born of a woman. This event leads to the turning point of man's history on earth, understood as salvation history, and constitutes the culminating and definitive point of God's self-revelation to humanity.

A woman is to be found at the centre of this salvific event. The self-revelation of God, who is the inscrutable unity of the Trinity, is outlined in the Annunciation at Nazareth, where Mary attains a union with God that exceeds all expectations of the human spirit. Only by the power of

the Holy Spirit, who "overshadowed" her, was Mary able to accept what is "impossible with men, but not with God" (cf. Mk 10:27).

Thus, the fullness of time manifests the extraordinary dignity of the woman.

The event at Nazareth highlights a form of union with the living God which can only belong to the "woman" Mary: the union between mother and son. The Virgin of Nazareth truly becomes the Mother of God, for motherhood concerns the whole person, not just the body, nor even just human 'nature'. The particular union between Mary and God is a pure grace and, as such, a gift of the Spirit. At the same time, however, through her response of faith Mary exercises her free will and thus fully shares with her personal and feminine 'I' in the event of the Incarnation.

Grace never casts nature aside or cancels it, but perfects and ennobles it. Therefore, the 'fullness of grace' that was granted to the Virgin of Nazareth, with a view to the fact that she would become 'Theotokos' (Mother of God) also signifies the fullness of the perfection of 'what is characteristic of woman', of 'what is feminine'; and this is the culminating point of woman's personal dignity.

The dignity of woman is measured by the order of love, which is essentially the order of justice and charity. The person must be loved, since love alone corresponds to what the person is. Unless we refer to the primacy of love we cannot give a complete and adequate answer to the question about women's dignity and vocation.

Woman cannot find herself unless through giving love to others. Her dignity is closely connected with the love which she receives by the very reason of her femininity; it is likewise connected with the love she gives in return.

God entrusts the human being to the woman in a special way. Of course, God entrusts every human being to each and every other human being, but this entrusting concerns women in a special way - precisely by reason of their femininity - and this in a particular way determines their vocation. A woman is strong because of her awareness .. that God 'entrusts the human being to her' always and in every way even in situations of social discrimination in which she may find herself.

The Church desires giving thanks to the Most Holy Trinity for the 'mystery of woman'.. and for each and every woman, for all women as they have come forth from the heart of God in all the beauty and richness of their femininity; as they have been embraced by his eternal love; as, together with men, they are pilgrims on this earth, as they assume, together with men, a common responsibility for the destiny of humanity.

The Church gives thanks... for all the manifestations of the feminine 'genius' which have appeared in the course of history.. and for all the charisms which the Holy Spirit distributes to women, for all the fruits of feminine holiness.

The Church asks... at the same time that these invaluable 'manifestations of the Spirit' be attentively recognized and appreciated so that they may return for the common good of the Church and of humanity.

The Church prays... that in this mystery all women may discover themselves and their 'supreme vocation.'

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## **Woman revealed in MARY with Joseph at her side**

Mary is "woman" par excellence, having lived her femininity to the full in total appreciation of all that she received from God.

### **Natural Mother and spiritual Mother**

If we take a closer look at the Mysteries of the Annunciation and the Visitation (dedicated to Mary and Elizabeth) we see how woman is particularly sensitive to the acceptance of life, not only on a physical plane, but also on a spiritual one. After having opened herself up to life, the woman experiences a profound bond with the new life, and immediately desires sharing it with others. Such was the case with Mary who carried Jesus in her womb so He could be generated physically; while transmitting also his spiritual life to her cousin whom she had gone to visit.

### **Mary was both mother and virgin**

Of course, this was a special condition reserved only for her, but studies in psychology show how maternity and virginity converge in a woman's mind and soul. Prior to conceiving a child physically, a woman conceives him in her spirit; and it is precisely in this inner dimension that a woman lives her virginity. Just as she is open to life physically, she is also open to the spiritual world and becomes mother thanks to the Spirit.

### **Mother of silence and sorrow**

After Jesus' childhood, Mary disappears from the evangelical scene and slips into total silence, re-appearing at the wedding of Cana, and when she and Joseph go looking for their lost son, and at the foot of the Cross. This silence, besides its theological value, is stressed in

psychology as being the inner capacity of a woman to accept the values and events of life. Mary who generates Jesus in her womb, and who takes his dead body into her arms reaches the apex of maternity. In this we see the essence of the spiritual mother and the capacity of a woman to accept the mystery of sorrow, of suffering and of death.

### **She is Mother because she is bride**

With the expression from the Magnificat, "My soul magnifies the Lord," Mary reveals that the incarnation of God is fruit of her nuptial union with God Himself. With the incarnation of God the divine life enters into Mary: She is the bride in complete union with the Bridegroom. This is why the Virgin is free to chant her song of praise. In Mary is the full realization of the woman. In Mary's chant we see the bride in her fulfilment, figure of the Church at her peak, figure of humanity which should be redeemed. Everything blossoms in this relationship with God. These brief mentions of Mary's femininity help us see some of the characteristics typical of the woman: profoundly sensitive, a bearer of both spiritual and physical motherhood, in her is present both states of maternity and virginity, in her silence she is able to accept God's message and the events which come from Him, and finally, she has the gift of knowing how to magnify God totally.

### **MAN GIVES AND TRANSMITS LIFE**

Not just a biological act, fatherhood is also expressed on a spiritual level, as in the case of St. Joseph. It is man's role to act as a guide for the woman - not according to his own criteria, but according to the will of God. St. Joseph's guidance, both physical and spiritual, was fruit of his constant contact with the Holy Spirit who suggested to him which steps to take in order to lead his family to safety. At night he would accept the message from heaven and then he would carry out the will of God who was free to talk through Joseph. This type of guidance depends on discernment of the Spirit, and at the same time it helps us see how men differ to women. In women sentiments are dominant, whilst in men reason is dominant.

In the course of history women were considered as being of little value. It wasn't long ago that they didn't even enjoy the same rights as men. Incredible as it may seem, in the medieval, philosophers and theologians discussed the event that women may have been without souls! Offended and wounded, women bear within themselves feelings

of inferiority with the risk that these feelings turn into feelings of superiority. To make herself heard, a woman will fight and at times can become overbearing. This arrogance reveals the incredible energy that she has within herself; that same energy that impels her to give of herself so generously.

God calls us to foster communion through the integration of what is different. Man and woman naturally turn to each other, both on a physical plane and on a spiritual one. In the Magnificat, Mary manifests all her love and emotions in an eloquent expression of the relationship between her body and soul with God. Also our emotions must be rooted in God if we wish to attain that inner freedom which allows us to freely relate with each other.

A purely emotional relationship which excludes the spiritual sphere indicates infantilism and a concept of the world based solely on one's feelings. St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary, St. Francis and St. Clare are eloquent examples of how a man and a woman can live their love to the full on a spiritual plane; and here the dynamics are much deeper than in a physical relationship between two people. Pure love must know both vicinity and distance.

There exists between man and woman the greatest tension of all. If the image of man, created male and female, is not reconciled, there will never be peace and harmony on earth. This tension is present in the depths of us all: strained feelings for our mother, or father, or fiancé/fiancée, for example, and they are expressed with our entire being. Maturity doesn't mean that we have cast aside this tension, for in reality it remains anyway both on a spiritual and a physical level. Maturity is, instead, knowing how to open ourselves to the Kingdom of Heaven and to transform this tension, these strained feelings, into something positive which is expressed in spiritual love. It is thus very important that the man and the woman mature through gradual purification and enter into a living relationship with Jesus Christ who alone is able to make them completed persons who are free to love and be loved.

Tommaso di Francesco

## **SAINT JOSEPH silent spouse of Mary**

by Giuseppe Ferraro

In the beautiful Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* the Pope

says: "We see that at the beginning of the New Testament, as at the beginning of the Old, there is a married couple... it is Joseph and Mary who are the summit from which holiness spreads all over the earth" (RC 7) and further on: "Inserted directly in the mystery of the Incarnation, the Family of Nazareth has its own special mystery... In this family, Joseph is the father" (ibid. 21).

The Word of God, in fact, wanted to be born in a human family formed by the divine mystery. In this family the seal of Trinitarian communion shines with all its brightness because of the total offering of self to God by Joseph and Mary. Their 'fiat' was pronounced in different ways but both were said with the same depth and conviction in response to the angelic invitation to give their lives over totally for the salvation of mankind.

Together with the "assumption" of mankind in Christ, the human fatherhood of Joseph was definitely "assumed" and transfigured in the light of the Word. His was a fatherhood which from that moment on would become for ever more a sign and a presence in the world of the love which comes from the Father, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph 3: 15).

After Mary, Joseph served God (in the mystery of Incarnation) with unequalled fidelity; giving to the Word not only the Name indicated by the Angel (it means God saves), but also the concrete roots of human existence - given within the realm of a real human family. This places Joseph firmly at the centre of human history, from the first progenitors all the way down to the definite fulfilment of the work of salvation. Through the mystery of nuptial communion present in the family of Nazareth, Joseph's fatherhood is "expressed concretely in his having made his life a service, a sacrifice to the mystery of the Incarnation and to the redemptive mission connected with it" (RC 8).

Furthermore, Joseph continues to serve with ineffable fidelity that same mystery of grace, by continuing to exercise his spiritual fatherhood over the members of the mystical Body of Christ, and particularly upon those called by Mary to participate in the work of regeneration of the Son within souls; a work which she is going about in the most admirable of manners in our present time.

It is not by chance that on the 13th October 1917 at Fatima the apparitions of the "Woman dressed in the sun" should be sealed by none other than St. Joseph with the Child Jesus in his arms, and that together they should be blessing the world. Such is Sr. Lucy's testimony in her Diary: "Our Lady disappeared... then we saw, close to the sun, St. Joseph with the Holy Child, and Our Lady dressed in white with a light blue mantel. St. Joseph and the Holy Child, it appeared, were

blessing the world (they were moving their hands in the form of a cross)." (Memoirs 4, which Lucy gave to Msgr. Da Silva, at Fatima, on 8.12.41.)

Many other signs lead us to intuit St. Joseph's silent presence (but not less active or efficacious) next to the Queen of Peace who at Medjugorje continues to manifest the Father's merciful and faithful love to all mankind. This fundamental and silent service for the work of redemption is "Joseph's way" who at the time of the "Annunciation" said nothing; but simply "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him" (Mt 1:24).

In her messages Our Lady doesn't speak explicitly of her earthly spouse, which can be seen as a sign of fidelity to her Divine Spouse who had mysteriously overshadowed her at the moment of the Annunciation. Nonetheless, Joseph's silent presence seems a constant deep in the message of the Queen of Peace, where one is able to recognize a distinctly paternal aspect of its spirituality besides its more typical motherly aspect. This becomes all the more evident in the numerous messages for the family, and in those which speak of work or other concrete human activities, and in the many calls to maintain a manly inner stability before the disturbing strategies of Satan, who continually tries to stir souls as though they were "boughs in the wind" (mess. 25-05-88).

Mary and Joseph are "expert at suffering" but extremely faithful in their unconditional service to God's Pure Love. The nuptial mystery present in the Holy Family (which began in the Holy Spirit) is destined for eternity as a definite sign of cosmic reconciliation of the male-female image which is implanted deep in God's very essence, and through the first progenitors, is indelibly fixed in the heart of creation.

The original image of Himself, which the Father had impressed in man and woman in the beginning was broken by original sin, but wonderfully recreated in the family of Nazareth. Through the harmony which comes from the recomposed image, the Queen of Peace and her spouse want the glory of the Trinitarian perfection to shine in the hearts of people, in natural and in spiritual families, in the Church and in the entire universe: "... I desire creating a beautiful mosaic within your hearts, so that I might be able to offer each of you as an original image of God" (message 25 Nov. 1989).

Through full acceptance of this mystery of the nuptial covenant, and through giving it life and fertility by virtue of the offering of self by those whom Mary has called to be "instruments in her hands to save the world," the light of the "new heavens and the new earth" will radiate over the entire creation, and everything will finally be

recapitulated in Christ to be eternally embraced by the Father in the vortex of burning love of the Holy Spirit.

## **News from the blessed land**

### **Sr. Emmanuel: "Medjugorje? An oasis in the desert"**

What is Medjugorje for all those who visit or live here? is what we asked SR. EMMANUEL who has lived in Medjugorje for several years and is well known for keeping us all up to date on events of this blessed land.

"I would change that a little and say: what should Medjugorje become so it can satisfy the needs of all the pilgrims who come here from around the world? Our Lady said in this regard: "I want to make this place an oasis of peace." So now we ask: what is an oasis?

An oasis is a place in the middle of a desert; in an oasis there is water. This underground water gushes to the surface, irrigates the land and produces an incredible variety of trees which produce a variety of fruits; it also produces fields with a variety of beautiful flowers. In an oasis whatever has a seed is able to develop and grow.

An oasis is a place of profound harmony because its flowers and trees were created by God. He grants not only harmony, but also abundance! Men can live there in all tranquillity because there they can eat and drink. Also desert animals find drink and nourishment at an oasis, and they even supply milk and eggs, etc. for the people of the desert. It is a place of life! At Medjugorje - the oasis which Our Lady herself created - all types of people find food just right for them, but each of these can become in turn a tree and bear fruit for others.

### **OUR WORLD IS A DESERT**

Our world today is a desert and in this desert young people in particular suffer, because every day they swallow poison through the mass media and the bad example of grown ups. Already as little babes they assimilate things able to destroy their souls.

Satan walks in this desert. Just as the Bible repeatedly says, the desert is also the place where the devil is found - and we need to fight him if we wish to stay with God. So God creates a place in the middle of the desert where one can live in grace and by means of grace; and, of course, we know that water is also symbolic for grace.

How does Our Lady see Medjugorje? A place where a fount of grace gushes forth; she herself called it an "oasis" in a message; it is a place

where her children can come and drink the pure water which gushes forth from the side of her Son: it is blessed, holy water.

Each time I pray in the wood next to my house with a group of pilgrims I inevitably notice how they are gradually transformed. I could take a photo of them before and another after praying the Rosary and show you the difference - as if they were different people!

Here at Medjugorje there is this incredible grace of prayer. Our Lady desires giving it to us, and she wants us (inhabitants and pilgrims) to become fruits - fruits good for eating - so she can give us to others who are still in the desert and hunger and thirst.

## **ENEMY OF MEDJUGORJE**

This oasis must be protected because the devil is very active; he creeps in amongst those who want to fight together, so as to destroy harmony and unity. He would also like to remove the water, but he can't because it comes from God, and God is God! But he can make the water dirty, he can disturb and impede pilgrims from immersing themselves in prayer, so that they remain on a superficial level and get distracted. Satan wants to transform pilgrims into curious people.

Then there are people who come to Medjugorje in search of fun. They come from the nearby towns of Citluk, Ljubuski, Mostar, Sarajevo, Split... attracted by the enormous influx of people from so many parts of the world. Of course there are those who desire receiving something from their pilgrimage, but this depends a lot on how their guide prepares them. I have seen many groups go back home without really knowing what is going on here. Since they did not pray well and were too busy tripping around they weren't able to receive the true message of Medjugorje or be touched by the grace. These are more concerned about photographing everyone and everything, but this impedes them from being immersed in prayer!

In any case, it all depends on the ability and spiritual depth of their guide. How lovely it is when their only aim is to lead souls to conversion and to the true peace of the heart!

## **PLACE OF ENCOUNTER**

Some ask why vocational retreats or Bible Study groups aren't organized at Medjugorje since they are things which Our Lady herself encourages. I think that Medjugorje is a place where one simply encounters Our Lady and learns to pray. Once home, after having experienced this wonderful encounter, Mary will inspire (in prayer) how to continue. In the world there is everything, and one only needs to seek to find the place where one's newfound faith and prayer life can be deepened. Perhaps in the future there will be other initiatives, but so

far, Our Lady has simply wanted that there be this encounter. People need their mother; they feel the need to stay where they can find inner and physical healing. People come here as orphans and become Our Lady's children.

I would say to people: come to Medjugorje, go to the mountains and ask Our Lady to visit you; because this is the place of daily visitation. She will do it, and even if your five senses aren't aware of it, she will visit you and perhaps you will realize it once you are home and you see yourself changed.

Mary wants us to experience the encounter with her motherly Heart, with her tender love, and her love of Jesus. Come here and throw yourselves into Mary's embrace; there will be no more solitude, no more despair, for we have a Mother who is also Queen, and who is wonderfully beautiful and powerful. Here you will feel different because here is our Mother; here you can take hold of her hand and never let it go.

### **MOTHER TERESA HELD MARY BY THE HAND**

Mother Teresa of Calcutta had always wanted to visit Medjugorje. One day, when Bishop Hnilica (Rome) had asked her what she attributed her success to, she said to him: "When I was 5 I was walking with my mother across the fields towards a village close by. I was holding my mother's hand and I felt happy. At a certain point she stopped and said to me: 'You're holding my hand and you feel safe because I know the way. In the same way you must always see your own hand in that of Our Lady's, and she will lead you down the right path for your life. Never let go of her hand!' And that's precisely what I did! My mother's invitation was impressed in my heart and memory, and in my life I have always held Our Lady's hand. Today I am not sorry for having done that!"

Medjugorje is the right place to take hold of Mary's hand - the rest will come later. The encounter is so profound that it's nearly a shock - both psychological and spiritual - for in a world where mothers sit in front of computers or are out of the house, the family is breaking up or risks breaking up. People need their Heavenly Mother ever more.

### **MORE GRACE THAN THE SEERS**

So let's organize this encounter with our Mother; and read her messages, and at the moment of her apparition let's open our hearts to her. Our Lady said to Vicka: "When I come I give you gifts as never before given to anyone else; but I want to give these same graces to all my children who open their hearts to my coming."

You know, we can't be envious of the visionaries, for when Our Lady

comes and we open our hearts to her we are receiving the same graces, or rather, we receive one extra grace because we have the blessing of believing without seeing!

### **A BOUQUET, A MOSAIC, IN UNITY**

Each time we open our heart to Our Lady she sets about her maternal work of purification, instilling in us encouragement and her tender love, and this casts out evil. If all those who visit or live in Medjugorje lived according to this we would all become an oasis, a bouquet of flowers of every possible colour, and a mosaic. When each little piece of a mosaic is in the right place, it makes something wonderful; but if the pieces are in the wrong place the picture is ugly. So we must all work for the sake of unity, but this unity must be centred on the Lord and His Gospel!

When someone tries to create a unity around himself then that unity is false, it is totally human and cannot last.

Unity is had only with Jesus, and not by chance. Mary said: "Adore my Son in the Blessed Sacrament; fall in love with the Blessed Sacrament, for when you adore my Son you are united with the entire world" (25.9.95). She could have said something different, but Our Lady said this because to adore is what unites us in truth and it unites us divinely. This is the true key to ecumenism!

If we live by the Eucharist in all its aspects, with all our heart, and if we make Holy Mass the centre of our lives, then we will create in Medjugorje that oasis of peace which Our Lady dreams of, and not only for us Catholics, but for everyone! Then our young people who thirst, and the world which groans with anguish as it experiences a profound crisis for all that it lacks, would no more be in need of water or food or beauty or divine grace.

(Sr. Emmanuel to Stefania Consoli)

## **Medjugorje: Impressions of two bishops**

Msgr. Pearse Lacey, retired bishop of Toronto, Canada, made a private visit to Medjugorje from 12-19 October 2002 with a group of Canadian pilgrims. He said:

"I first came to Medjugorje in 1987 .. the Spirit is still here and the presence of Our Lady is all around. The marvellous grace of God affecting the lives of people can be felt everywhere. I've met people who are here because they're on drugs or alcohol; people with tragic situations in their lives, and I've seen the miraculous way in which God

is manifesting Himself. A priest told me that he had been hearing confessions, but that when he stopped, he felt drawn back by them! The magnitude of the Confessions is enough if you want to be satisfied that God is present here. For me, that's Medjugorje.

The basic message of Medjugorje is absolutely solid. We live in 2002, but men and women are still made of body and soul. We all have traces of the original sin. Our needs are the same as in the times of the Apostles and in any generation. Basically, we are the children of God and our cries are as huge as of any generation.

Medjugorje is an oasis of God, this is the Church as it should be. Tradition is not a dirty word: the life of a priest consists in bringing people back to God, people who have wandered away because they thought religion was irrelevant. Thank God that He provides places like this. I've been to other places, but Medjugorje is the shining light today of our society."

Msgr. George Pearce, retired Archbishop of the Fiji Islands, came in September 2002 on a private visit. He said: "I have no doubt about the authenticity of Medjugorje. This is my third visit, and I say to any priest who asks: just go and sit in the confessional, and you will see miracle after miracle .. through Mary's intercession and the power of God. We were told: "By their fruits you will know them:" Certainly, the heart and soul of the Medjugorje message is the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I have no doubts whatsoever that this is the work of God. As I said: you cannot but believe when you spend a little time in the confessional. Signs and wonders are merciful gifts of God too - but this is the greatest of all miracles for a priest to see the people around the Altar of the Lord.

I have spent quite a bit of time at other Shrines - Guadalupe, Fatima, and Lourdes - and it is the same Mary, the same message, but here at Medjugorje this is the "current" word of Our Lady for the world. There is so much anguish and suffering. Our Lady has been with us all the way through, and in a special way in Medjugorje. Come with an open mind, in prayer, and entrust your journey to Our Lady. The Lord will do the rest."

\* **Blessing of New Dispensary** - On 12 Nov. 2002, the newly constructed "Donum Dei Dispensary" in Medjugorje was blessed by Fr. Branko Rados.

Joseph Canizaro, American business-man and founder of the "Donum Dei Foundation," and Danny Abramowicz, its President, together with

the Medjugorje seer Ivan Dragicevic (who also helped in the project) all came to Medjugorje for the celebration of the blessing. The Dispensary is expected to open in Spring.

\* **Eighth International Meeting for Priests** - Medjugorje 30 June - 5 July 2003. The theme: Servant of the Eucharist. Reservations by e-mail: medjugorje-mir@medjugorje.hr , personally at the Information Office, or by phone/fax: +387-36-651-988 (Att. Marija Dugandzic) All priests who have arranged their own accommodation with a family in Medjugorje are asked to notify of same in their application (supply name and phone number of the family). We will arrange accommodation for all priests who have no direct contacts and haven't arranged their own accommodation. (Please advise if you wish us to arrange for this.) Instead of a monetary payment, we ask you to kindly celebrate five Mass intentions.

Please bring with you: your celebret by your superior, an alb and stole, a Bible, a small FM radio with earphones (for simultaneous translation).

### **Next Youth Festival under sign of the Rosary**

JPII's Apostolic Letter, Rosarium Virginis Mariae, on the Holy Rosary, and the Year of the Rosary which he proclaimed, have inspired organizers of the next Medjugorje Youth Festival to place it under the sign of the Rosary, with the theme: "Through the Rosary Open Your Heart To Me."

Our Lady has spoken of the Rosary in many of her messages. As usual, a great crowd of young people is expected for the Festival. To them Our Lady says: "If you wish, grasp hold of the Rosary; by now only the Rosary can do miracles in the world and in your lives" (25.1.91); and: "My Children, prayer works miracles. When you are tired and ill and you don't know the meaning of life, take hold of the Rosary and pray. Pray till your prayer becomes a joyous meeting with your Saviour" (25.4.2001).

See you in Medjugorje, then, from 31 July - 6 August 2003! (Press Bulletin)

**Seer, Jakov, says to young people: "Hand over your lives to Mary!"**

"Many young people are afraid to open themselves to God and Our Lady, and wonder: 'how will my life be if I convert?'. All you need do is think of all the peace and joy that gushes forth from the hearts of youth when they gather to pray, and this should be enough to convince them that these are gifts that only God can give.

Many ask why Our Lady appears for such a lengthy time. There is only one reason: she comes because she loves us, she is our Mother and as such she wants us to receive good. Our Lady comes because she desires leading us to our destination which is Jesus Christ. She has been showing us the way to her Son for 21 years. It is the way of prayer, of conversion, of peace, of fasting, of Holy Mass. To accept all this doesn't mean to busy oneself, but to simply open oneself up to Mary. In a message she says: 'All you need do is open yourself to me; I will do the rest.' We have to begin to pray seriously, with the heart, and we'll feel peace and joy gradually budding within us.

To come to Medjugorje makes sense if we also accept to convert, to begin a new life with God and to take this new life back home with us. We are all called to become witnesses of the 'Gospa' and when you go back from a pilgrimage to Medjugorje it doesn't count to say that you've been here, but it does count if others are able to recognize Medjugorje in us, if they can see God in us and are able to understand that He works through us. This is the witness that Our Lady asks of us.

I think that we still haven't understood the greatness of Our Lady's love for us! Just think how she has been coming to us for such a long time; just for us! What grace! How can we not recall her words in this message: 'Dear Children, if you knew how much I loved you, you'd cry for joy!' .. and just think how often she has said to us in her messages: 'Thank you for responding to my call' .. and we must ask ourselves if we have truly responded to her call.

For 17 years, for every single day of those 17 years, I saw Our Lady, I saw her beautiful face, I experienced her goodness, in a mother-son relationship, and when she told me that she wouldn't come anymore except on Christmas day, I thought: 'How will my life be now? How will I live without being able to see her every day?' But then I understood that it isn't that important to see her with the eyes; and that it is important, instead, to have her in your heart. Our Lady wants to be in us, in the hearts of each of us, and all we need do is open ourselves to her and place our lives completely in her hands."

(From a registration)

**Annual Christmas apparition** - At Jakov's last daily apparition (12.9.1998) Our Lady promised to appear to him each Christmas. This year too Our Lady came with the Child Jesus in her arms; she remained

for 7 minutes, and gave the following message:

"Dear Children, today, on the day of love and peace, with Jesus in my arms, I call you to pray for peace. My little Children, without God and prayer you cannot have peace. Therefore, my Children, open your hearts so that the King of Peace may be born in them. Only in this way can you witness and carry God's peace to this peaceless world. I am with you and bless you with my motherly blessing."

At the beginning of this new year, and in answer to the Pope's call to pray without ceasing for peace, we would like to offer to our readers this prayer which Our Lady dictated to Jelena on 22 June 1985. It is a PLEA TO GOD to invoke integrity of spirit, so that only Good should abide in our hearts.

"Oh GOD,  
our heart is in profound darkness;  
all the same, it is tied to your heart.  
Our heart grapples over You and satan: don't let this be!  
And each time it is divided over good and evil, enlighten us with Your light, that our heart might be integral!  
Never permit that in us there should be two loves, or two faiths, or that within us there should be both falsehood and sincerity, both love and hatred, both honesty and dishonesty, both humility and arrogance;  
but help us, so that our heart might lift up to You as would a child to its father.  
May our heart carry within it peace, and may it always feel nostalgia.  
May Your holy will and Your love find abode within us; that at least sometimes we might truly desire being Your children!"

## **Readers write...**

Paul Scurri, Malta: Thanks for this wonderful publication; it gives such great spiritual relief.

Frances Cinelli, Canada: I so look forward to receiving the Echo, so encouraging and it fills me with hope .. its message is always so timely. Thank you for your write up on the Pope's visit to Toronto. His visit really helped to deepen our faith, and it had such a positive and rippling

effect.

Esther Menon, Buenos Aires, Argentina: I have been receiving the Echo for several years, and I wish to thank you so for all the work you put into it.

Loretta, Ravenna, Italy: I always read your publication with such great pleasure, and each time there is always something new and interesting. I hope to go to Medjugorje on pilgrimage next summer. My regards to all who work for the Echo!

Magdalena, Moinesti, Romania: My conversion came about thanks to the Blessed Virgin's messages; and through the Echo, my life has changed for the better. My heart lifts up to the Lord full of gratitude for Our Lady!

Georgeta, Arges, Romania: Despite my difficult economical situation, I ask you to please continue sending me your publication. For me the Echo of Mary is life, consolation and encouragement...

Fr. Henry, Parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico: A fraternal greeting in Christ! I had the opportunity of reading the last two issues of the Echo of Mary, and I enjoyed very much reading Our Lady's messages with relative comments. Our parish is consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, and many faithful come every day at 4.30 am to pray the Holy Rosary, for we know that it is through her powerful intercession that God grants all the graces we need.

Fr. Marcello, Italy: Dear friends of Echo, I am a parish priest who has been following you for many years, and I congratulate you on the articles and reflections it contains.

Emma, Saronno, Italy: Thanks for your precious publication; I await it so anxiously. It helps me carry my cross, to meditate and to pray with the heart, and encourages me to count on Our Blessed Mother's help.

Fr. Joseph, Uganda: I wish to thank you for the prayers that you offer every first Saturday; and we'd like you to know that we also pray and offer Holy Mass on the same day for the intentions of readers. We highly appreciate your publication.

## **Echo: ecumenical publication**

"One day I went into the church in the little town where I live and I found a copy of Echo. I read it and I was very happy with it. I live in Italy but I'm not Italian; and I belong to the Orthodox faith. At first I thought there was a lot of difference between my religion and the Catholic religion, but then I understood that we both belong to Christ and to the same Father.

My husband and I want to bring up our child in the Catholic faith. I can't see the difference anymore. I often go to Holy Mass and I feel my life has changed, thanks also to our pastor. I was feeling a little down when I came across your Echo (Sept./Oct. 2002), and it filled me with joy. It gave me counsel and the strength to go on. Thanks for everything. Thanks to the Blessed Mother and to your work which is so important, as there are many people in need of spiritual support to help them find the right way which is the way of faith and of the love of God and of Mary. May Our Lady bless you for all the words which are enclosed within my heart and which will help me reflect." Katerina Tokar

**NOTICE!** Individual Passports are required for entry into Bosnia-Herzegovina; and passport holders from some countries require visas.

\* ECHO IS A FREE PUBLICATION. Donations are gratefully accepted; without them we cannot continue to spread the Message to Mary's little children throughout the world.

Ways of donating:

\* Make personal cheques (in your local currency) payable to "Echo of Mary Association" and mail to same at: Casella Postale 27, I-31030 Bessica Treviso, Italy (or if convenient, pay into one of our bank accounts, specifying payment for "Echo of Mary Association"):

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

\* In the USA, cheques payable to "Echo of Mary Association" can be mailed to same at: P.O. Box 646, Pacifica, CA 94044.

**!! Readers in Australia / Oceania. Echo is now posted from Italy. Please write to us to keep your subscriptions up to date, to submit your**

donations (personal cheques in local currency are accepted), and for any other correspondence.

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I-31030 Bessica Treviso, Italy

(Ph/fax: Italy 0423-470331)

email: echomarybk@tiscali.it

**Our Prayers for you!** - Please join in our prayers which we offer up to God on the first Saturday of each month. On this day we shall pray for the intentions of readers (these may be expressed within the silence of your hearts and offered up in prayer; it is not necessary that they be written down and forwarded to us). Once a month Fr. Alberto will also celebrate a Holy Mass for the same intention.

**Our Lady's message to Mirjana, 2 Jan. 2003:** "Dear Children, as a mother invites her children, I invited you and you responded to me. Allow me to fill your heart with love, so that it becomes a heart of love that you will be giving to others without reserve. In that way, you will best help me in my mission of converting those of my children who have not yet experienced the love of God and the love of my Son. Thank you!"

### **JP II'S BLESSING FOR 2003:**

"The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Num 6:24-26).

This is the blessing which the priests - in the Old Testament - used when they prayed over the chosen people during the important religious festivities. The ecclesial Community listens to it again today as it asks the Lord to bless this new year which has just begun.

"The Lord bless you and keep you." Before the events which perturb the Planet, it becomes ever more evident that only God can touch the human soul in its profundity; and only His peace can give back hope to mankind. It is necessary that He turn His face to us, and bless us, and protect us, and grant us His peace.

It is thus opportune to begin this new year by invoking from Him this precious gift; and we do it through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the "Prince of Peace." May She sustain us and accompany us

throughout this new year; and obtain for us and for the entire world the much desired gift of peace. Amen!"

May the Lord bless us and keep us all!

Villanova M. - 6 January 2003