

Echo of Mary Queen of Peace

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Message of the 25th of July 2011:

“Dear children! May this time be for you a time of prayer and silence. Rest your body and spirit, may they be in God’s love. Permit me, little children, to lead you, open your hearts to the Holy Spirit so that all the good that is in you may blossom and bear fruit one hundred fold. Begin and end the day with prayer with the heart. Thank you for having responded to my call.”

All the good that is in you

We men are unable to conceive a reality that cannot be contained within our cognitive dimensions. We yearn eternally yet we are consumed day after day and hour after hour by the vortex of our empty actions. We make absolute what is relative and we make relative what is absolute and transcendent. We perceive that time is slipping by but we think we can control it, controlling its flow, and so we fall into its crazy race that is all consuming. **May this time for you be a time of prayer and silence**, Mary says to us, and she is certainly referring to the time of summer rest, but also time in general, the temporal dimension of our lives. Let us welcome these words of hers and grasp onto them like a drowning man grasps onto a rope that is thrown out to save him. Let’s stop for a moment: prayer and silence are necessary to grasp the *murmur of the light wind* in which Elijah feels the presence of the Lord and recognises His Voice (1 Kings 19, 11-13). It is not in the *impetuous wind*, or the *earthquake*, or the *fire* of our agitation that we can perceive God’s presence, listen to His Word, speak with Him, but in *prayer and silence*.

Rest your body and spirit, may they be in God’s love. We know well how necessary rest is for our physical lives, but what is infinitely more important for man’s soul and body together, is to rest in God’s Love. It is when Adam is asleep that God creates man, man and woman, in His image and likeness (cfr. Gen 2,21-22; 1,27). It is the dawn of the first day after the Saturday (the sacred day of rest) that brings the annunciation of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Great events are born in silence, they are ignored or marginally welcomed by our media, but they are delivered and handed over to the mouths of children and infants, to the testimony of those whom the world believes to be insignificant. Things could not be otherwise, because nothing of that which exists in the world can contain God if not man’s heart, as long as it is an open heart - that is, not folded back on itself - a pure heart - that is, free from all forms of power, from bias interest, from all compromise and bargaining - a humble heart - that is, that does not admire and adore itself - a simple heart - that is, that knows how to seek God where He awaits it - a heart,



“It is good to await salvation in the hymn of silence, in the quiet certainty that he will come: That poor man who sits waiting, will sit alone and in silence, because the Lord will rise up over him”.

A. M. Canopi

therefore, that is similar to Mary’s.

In Jesus, God came to man; our body and our spirit now can, must, welcome God; they can, they must, be a temple of His Presence. Now you can no longer say that God is far from you, you alone can distance him from yourself; you alone can hunt him out of your heart!

Permit me, dear children, to lead you, Mary says to us, and the permission that She asks for not only expresses the gentleness that characterises her, but it is an essential condition for Her to be able to guide us. Our willingness is necessary for Her action in us, but this willingness of ours cannot be something formal, a “nulla osta” for Her action: there must be the expression of a living and sincere wish, the fruit of a real need.

What Mary asks us for and suggests in this Message is what She experienced in holiness and fullness, but it is not enough to know this, it is not enough to try to put Her advice into practice: we cannot do this alone, we must allow ourselves to be guided by Her: **Permit me, dear children, to lead you, open your hearts to the Holy Spirit so that all the good that is in you may blossom and bear fruit one hundred fold.** These words of Mary’s immediately recall the parable of the sower told in chapter 13 of the Gospel according to Matthew and they seem to underline the awareness, that is more and more widespread today, of Christ’s dwelling within us: Jesus is Good, actually **all the Good that lies within us**; and this is so thanks to the will of the Father, by virtue of the Holy Spirit and through the intercession of Mary. If we accept this and want this, if we ask for this with all our strength, then Jesus will be in us (John 17,23) and we will be in God, Father and Son, one thing, like Them (John 17,21) because this is what Jesus prayed for.

Let us say our *Yes* to the Father as Mary did, let us say it joyfully, with trust, with love: this is the prayer of the heart to which Mary has always invited us from Medjugorje.

Peace and joy in Jesus and Mary.

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Message of the 25th of August 2011:

“Dear children! Today I call you to pray and fast for my intentions, because Satan wants to destroy my plan. Here I began with this parish and invited the entire world. Many have responded, but there is an enormous number of those who do not want to hear or accept my call. Therefore, you who have said ‘yes’, be strong and resolute. Thank you for having responded to my call.”

To those who have said yes

The Message opens with an invitation that Mary extends to everyone, as we are all Her *dear children*, **to pray and fast for Her intentions**. The invitation is motivated by Satan’s attacks, he wants to destroy the plan of salvation for the world that Mary is implementing according to God’s Will. We find ourselves before a situation that is terribly serious because already, the duration of Mary’s presence in Medjugorje alone makes this event unique in the history of humanity, and therefore particularly important for the salvation of the world. Inviting us once more to engage in **prayer and fasting**, Mary implicitly says to us that we still have time.... but....how long more do we have?

She herself sums up the facts **“Here I began with this parish and I invited the whole world”** and she concludes in a manner that is not reassuring in the least **“Many have responded but there is an enormous number of those who do not want to hear or accept my invitation”**. Up to this point, the Message is addressed to everyone, to the whole world, and it is a Message that should shake us from or mortal torpor, it must make us reflect seriously and decide. This is valid for everyone, but in particular, for **those who do not want to hear or accept Her invitation**, and among these, unfortunately there are not only lay people or atheists or non-believers!

Mary is with us so that each of us might recognise our lost dignity, the trick that has led us *out of the Father’s house*, that deceived us into believing that we could be like Him without Him, that caused us to neglect *being* in favour of possessing, that consumed our strength, our energy, our very life, in what is nothing other than negation of life! By now we know all the functions of the human body, but we do not believe that man can be reduced to his functions. Man is always *beyond*, always *further on* than the place in which we seek him, man is a divine creature, made in His image and only in God we can find him, only in Christ can we come to know him!

Mary is with us so that every man might find his true dignity, that makes him similar to Christ, that makes him a son of God in His Son Jesus, and that gives him life through this. Mary is with us so that peace and love

might triumph within the world and so that every man might recognise that Jesus is God.

Her presence gives us hope, but we cannot limit ourselves to being simple spectators, as though the future could pass before us like a film. **And so, those of you who have said YES, be strong and decisive**, Mary says to us; is this a premonition of difficult future events? It would seem so; we know that the struggle between Good and Evil is serious and painful, but we know that we will not be left alone in this struggle: the Archangel Michael will support us and Mary will protect us and, looking at Jesus pierced and dead on the Cross we will know, with their help, how to face what the Father allows to happen to us!

N. Q.

*Silence becomes strength
to bear the burden of the trial.
Complaining, discussions,
and talk of difficulty
lessen our strength.
When faced with personal trials,
before rebelling,
before reasoning on the situation,
we must sit in silence,
and humbly wait
for God to show us his plan,
believing that we are always
and more than ever
in his hands.*

(From a hymn for martyrs)

BENEDICT XVI: Saints, everyday men

Who are the saints? Who do we celebrate on the 1st of November with great solemnity and devotion? The saints of the calendar? The great characters whose names we have been given and whom we therefore consider important? Sainthood is a lot more than this.

Pope Benedict reminds us of this in an audience some time ago: "For me – said the Pontiff - not only some great saints that I love and whom I know well are "road signs", but also the simple saints, that is, good people who I see in my lifetime, who will never be canonised...These are normal people, so to speak, without any visible heroism, but in their great everyday goodness I see the truth of the faith. This goodness, which they have matured in faith in the Church, is the surest apology of Christianity and the sign of where the truth lies.

Sainthood is not about fulfilling great deeds, but rather, it is about uniting ourselves with Christ, experiencing his mysteries, making his behaviour, his thoughts and his attitude ours: in a word, it is about loving God and our neighbour.

The measure of sainthood is given by the stature that Christ attains within us, by how much, with the force of the Holy Spirit, we model our whole lives on his.

A holy life is not mainly the fruit of our effort, of our actions, because it is God, three times Holy, who makes us holy although he constantly respects our freedom and asks us to accept this gift, and to experience the needs that it is associated with, he asks us to allow ourselves to be transformed by the action of the Holy Spirit, making our will compliant with God's will".

(General Audience, 13th April 2011).

OUR JOURNEY...

Where Christianity took its first steps

by Giovanni and Elena Saiani



March 2011. The proposal of a trip to **Turkey** comes on a warm Spring Sunday. It's not a typical summer holiday like those you hear about on the news. It's a pilgrimage that will travel the road that Saint Paul travelled, to bring the word of God to His people.

One minute is enough for us to understand that our answer is yes, to feel that the Holy Spirit is inviting us to go, to leave the linearity of our ordinary lives behind and immerse ourselves in the sacredness of the land where Christianity took its first steps into the world.

And so we decide to *answer the call*. We register on the waiting list: there may not be any places left. We wait and pray. We really care about this trip, certain that **Turkey represents a step in our spiritual journey**.

THE INVISIBLE CHURCH

The first city that we visit is Smirne, now called Izmir. We go straight to mass in the church of Saint Polycarpus, a bishop and martyr. We walk along the chaotic streets and **we ask ourselves where the church is**. We don't see the bell tower, we can't make out any building that makes us think that we've arrived. We stop off opposite a yellow coloured block of buildings; we enter via a small doorway. We walk down a short hallway and enter a large room. This is the church, hidden and protected from possible persecutors. We realise for the first time that **in this land Christianity is "the last one, the weak one"**. We question our own ignorance of the great gift that we have of having been born in Italy, where we can be Catholics in the light of day.

The next day we visit the archaeological remains of the ancient city of Izmir. There are many ruins of temples and homes here. There are kilometres of them. Some places enriched us in a special way: the great amphitheatre where Paul evangelised, the first basilica dedicated to Mary, recognised as the Mother of God, the basilica where Saint John the apostle is buried. **A few remaining stones** allow us to imagine the ancient splendour of those buildings, but they make us **jump with joy in our Spirit** due to the profound grace that they emanate.

MARY, EVERYONE'S MOTHER!

We travel extensively by bus, both for short journeys and longer ones and it is a chance to rest, pray, meditate and share. The beauty of nature guides us and stimulates us to immerse ourselves more and more in the spirituality of the places we visit. We are moved when

we think back of **Mary's house in Ephesus**: a small room where our Mother lived with John. We joyfully and with some wonder, notice that **many people come** to this place, **Christians and otherwise, bearing witness to the fact that Mary is a universal example of ardent faith**, of a perfect woman and mother.

THE CRADLE OF THE COMMUNITIES

Our journey continues: we visit simple places and we reach Konya, a city of martyrs and the first city to be evangelised by the Apostles. We proceed into the heart of Turkey, Cappadocia. An enchanted countryside, Lord what marvels you made with nature! Here we **breathe in the essence of the communities** that remained on these rocks of tuff; **the first hermit monks**, interior silence, *the ability to hear only You within ourselves...*

The Spirit of sharing floats around inside these small churches, they are not very spacious but they are full of the Holy Spirit.



HERE MASS IS A PURE GIFT

Nature changes in its countryside while we descend towards Tarso and our thoughts immediately drift to Medjugorje, because it looks very similar. It is Sunday in Paul's land, in his city we celebrate mass in a humble church, dedicated to him. Two nuns welcome us, with a sense of joy in their eyes, **the joy of being able to celebrate a mass**. Tarso now has almost 100 thousand inhabitants and there are not even 10 Catholics, there is no priest and for them every Mass is a grace. We realise how lucky we are, every day we should give thanks for this: The daily Eucharist!

WE NEED TO RETURN TO OUR ORIGINS

We leave Tarso for Antiochia. **Here for the first time Jesus' disciples were called Christians**. It was the first community that felt the need for a mission: the first mission departed from here, Saint Paul's first trip. **Unfortunately there is no sign of all of this**, except for Saint Peter's grotto, a church set into the hill.

Our journey comes to an end in Istanbul, Constantinople. The core of the Roman Empire for some centuries, the Rome of the East. Pompous, imposing, but the simplicity of Christ's love remains in our hearts, we need so little to be in peace and, **returning to our origins, "like children", is the solution**. □



Reflections of light from Mary's land

by Stefania Consoli

A time for harvesting, a time for a mission

There is no lack of mature fruits on the trees this year either. Sometimes, overburdened with their weight, the branches almost touch the earth: scents, colours, flavours that Providence has made available to our joy.

In the vineyards, the summer and then the autumn mark harvest time, but also a time for contemplation of the generosity of nature, which should never be taken for granted, although it is cyclical in its seasons. Every grain of wheat, every grape is wanted by God and given to us gratuitously, as the expression of a love that is continuously renewed.

The Lord wants to make us happy. He takes care of us. He makes us *want for nothing*, as the psalm reminds us (23).

If only we were truly aware of this! We would spend the entire day giving thanks... But like spoiled children, because we are "accustomed" to the good that is given to us each day, we not only take for granted the right to receive, but if we do not obtain what we claim, we close our hearts off to God, as they are hardened in rebellion.

A time for harvesting, a time for gratitude: "*Dear children, give thanks to the Most High with me for my presence with you...*", said Mary on the day of the thirtieth anniversary of the apparitions in Medjugorje. Give thanks to the Most High, as if to say: don't take it for granted, it's not obvious, it's not normal! Mary's presence among us, in fact, is such an extraordinary gift, that it should always fill us with wonder. A wonder that should then be transformed into gratitude, for the privilege that we have of living in an era when the Mother of God allows us to personally touch the intimate secrets of her Heart. This never ever occurred before in history. Let us not forget this.

It is also a time for harvesting for Her too, for the Queen of Peace, over the last few years she has sown seeds in our souls of the calling to be *new creatures* and the desire for eternal life, together with the awareness that everything begins in Christ and must return to Him. This caused the desire to participate in the great plan of salvation to germinate in us, this involves the entire universe, through our unconditional "yes", as She herself pronounced it in Nazareth. A "yes" that allows her to pick from the *plant* of our life, the willingness to follow her on the pathway of trustful and humble abandonment, obedient to divine will.

Lastly, it is a time for harvest for those who have answered, but only if they are willing to move, to seek out "*all the hearts that have fallen asleep, to awaken from the sleep of unbelief*" - as the Mother invited them to do in the message of the 25th of June last. "*Many of you have responded but I wait for and seek...*".

She is waiting for her children to gather together, she is seeking them everywhere: in the most unthinkable places and situations, even those that appear disdainful to our eyes,

because they are steeped in sin, stained by perversion and evil. Here too Mary seeks out her children, to call them to the harvest, like fruits of authentic and sincere conversion, to be offered to the Father. But not alone, she calls us and she needs us.

A voice amid the stones

"Dear children, today I invite you...",
"...this is a time of grace, my children...",
"pray, do not tire...I am with you...",
"thank you for answering...".

I silently descend the slopes of what they call "Apparition Hill", Podbrdo. I have just left a group of pilgrims at the summit, enjoying the silent company of Mary. We climbed up together. With a sense of calm and recollection we spontaneously reflected on the Joyful Mysteries. Now we are each on our own. In Medjugorje the meeting with the Mother is a heart to heart.

I descend and enjoy the silence that springs up within the soul, the fruit of intense prayer, shared with others. A prayer moved by the Spirit, that always shines new light on the realities that are contemplated.

With my head bowed, looking only at the next stone where I should place my foot, constantly balancing myself, I almost lose contact with all the rest: I am no longer aware of what is happening around me. I want to keep the intimate dialogue with the Mother within myself for as long as possible. And so, while my gaze is focused on a single point, my hearing is ample, open to listening, receptive...

*"...I bring you love, dear children...
bring love to others"*

"...allow me, my children, to show you the true way, the way that leads to life: to my Son";

"God wants to save you and he is sending you messages through men, through nature...".

Like little rags scattered here and there, the words of the Messages that the Queen has delivered to her children distinctly reach my ears: the guides of the groups introduce the mystery in front of the panels of the Rosary. I hear nothing else, only Mary's words that mark out a rhythm to my descent.

Different voices and different messages that almost "bounce" between one stone and another and are reconnected with others, forming a single discourse, a single voice. *Her* voice. From one side to the other, low down and up high. Like the tolling of a bell, that with an almost disarming simplicity, it is able to draw hearts to God, to elevate them.

Many, many times over the years, Mary has pronounced her words here. And the hill, a humble land, a *humble servant*, absorbed them as though it were a sponge. And as soon as it is touched by a foot, it sends them back again, resounding, like a perennial echo of immense wisdom, that comes from eternity and that is almost imprinted among these stones. Amidst this land, made of nothing. Like us, *vases of clay*, capable of containing Infinity.

The world on a screen

People, so many people. Different faces and features. Languages and dialects of all kinds. Specific customs and habits, that immediately emerge in their way of walking or gesturing. Children, even infants, with women and men, and then the elderly, and young people, priests and nuns in habits that speak of their Communities, and also many priests at the confessionals, all on the altar.

Sitting on a bench behind the church of Saint James, where a large courtyard welcomes an enormous quantity of people for prayer or Mass, for the adoration or to listen to testimonies, I feel like I am before a large screen, while the world passes by before me with its thousands of faces. I look on enchanted, almost awe struck, at every face because it is the unique expression of God's creativity and because that man or that woman, came to give thanks to God in Medjugorje...

Why are they here? What urged them to come? What lies behind the curtain of their life?

I try to imagine; I hypothesise almost instinctively. I mentally create ideal kinships and I form couples with a gaze. I diagnose illnesses that force some to sit in a wheel-chair and from the style of people's clothes, I decide what nation the wearer belongs to.

All suppositions, absolutely unfounded and arbitrary. But guileless and so harmless. In reality I feel a profound respect within my heart for all those who wanted to be with the Queen of Peace during this time of grace; a time that is more and more urgent because "*Satan wants to destroy my plan*", Mary says in the last message.

And her plan is to re-establish a population with faith in God, a population that knows how to trust Him, a population that might allow itself to be guided gently to become in turn capable of guiding others towards Life, towards fullness: "*I started here with this parish and I invited the whole world. Many answered but an enormous number of people do not want to hear or accept my invitation*".



What strong, sorrowful and painful words! Many are here, I see them walking by, I see them immersed in prayer. This is the population that, over the years, has formed thanks to Medjugorje... But this is not enough, because, according to Mary, there is an *enormous* number of people who are deaf to her maternal call, who oppose the proposal for salvation and so end up inflicting the condemnation of unhappiness upon themselves.

Two fish and a bit of bread



There is so much hunger and thirst in man today. Hunger for truth, hunger for love... And thirst, so much thirst. There is a deep need for a fullness that might fill the abyssal emptiness created within us by a hedonist, selfish, excessively materialistic world that is devoid of substance. There is an existential need for true nourishment, that might prove to be a form of support for the weakness of a humanity that is constantly on the run, a humanity that is pursuing false goals: unreal images of a virtual life that man has built for himself. Without God. And we know, weakness makes us fragile, vulnerable...

There is only one food that is capable of giving man strength, that inner energy necessary to face into the challenges posed by each day, to fight the evil that threatens us, to remain firmly standing when the winds blowing against us attempt to knock us or at least slow down our walk through life. Jesus knows well where to find it: "You give them something to eat" (Luke 9, 11), he says to the disciples; and therefore to us.

But how? What can man have before a multitude of men needing to be fed? Almost nothing. Only *two fish and a bit of bread*. Only a small fruit of his own daily commitment, of sacrifice. Nothing else. Could it ever suffice?

But Jesus continues: "Bring them here!" And as though it were the most normal thing, he takes what little we can give him and he multiplies it enormously so that the crowds might have something to eat; so that everyone might get the strength necessary to remain in life.

Christ is our food... but it is also true to say that to give himself to everyone, He needs us to do our part, as we bring the bread and wine to him on the altar, that God then transforms into the *food of eternal life*.

This is what the Virgin Mary asks us to do in Medjugorje. To make our life, which is *made of very little*, but that is precious, available to her, so that She may give it to her Son: in his hands our *little* will be multiplied to a quantity that is sufficient to feed the multitude of souls that are awaiting the good food of faith and hope in the universe, to live in charity - "...I want you to comprehend that God has chosen each one of you, in order to use you in His great plan for the salvation of mankind. You are not able to comprehend how great your role is in God's design..." (Message of 25th January 1987).

These considerations should put a question in our hearts to which we should answer sincerely: **when we go to Medjugorje do we only want to ask, receive...** or do we feel called to also give something of what we have? Are we those who open our hands only to obtain something, or are we ourselves those *outstretched hands* that Mary often asks us to be in her messages? Hands outstretched not to donate some loose change, but to offer our very life... Only in this way can God's plan truly come about, the plan that God entrusted to the Queen of Peace. Only in this way can hungry humanity receive the good bread that might preserve it in life. Only in this way can God make a living Eucharist of us. □

I called you friends

by Francesco Cavagna

What is the Church? Or better *who is the Church?*

Coming to Medjugorje you can see and understand this: people of every "language, population and nation" united around a single altar. Jesus is the centre.

And Mary is she who wanted and prepared all of this, who personally invited each of us.

It is by now commonplace to think of the clergy and the high-ranking hierarchy when we speak about the Church. But it is above all made up of people who share hope in the Risen one and experience a profound communion of love in breaking the bread, the bread of the Eucharist.

So much talk is wasted and so many times I have heard people say to me "God yes, but not the Church!" ... Now I understand that I too am the Church.

The Church includes all those who walk towards God. To us God entrusts the mission of continuing to make Him present on earth! The Most Blessed Trinity trusts us to such an extent that we have been given this important duty: to be His symbol, His instrument, His people, His limbs, and in this trust there is the utmost expression of his love.

This is the great miracle that is repeated silently here in Medjugorje. Given the extent of what Medjugorje is, nobody can say that they have fully understood this continuous novelty. Coming to this place, everyone takes home a precious and personal memory, everyone is struck by something different. We shouldn't be surprised that impressions are sometimes different.

For years I lived in this blessed land, touching so much hidden beauty and so many contradictions, that when I return to Medjugorje after a lengthy period of absence, I am struck by the details that I failed to notice before.

And more than ever before I am struck by the peaceful and relaxed faces of the people, their active and committed participation in the Mass, and the light in the eyes of those who go to receive the Eucharist. I am struck by the simple communion that is formed between people from different countries, sometimes from the most far flung places on Earth.

Medjugorje is alive, it is not a museum, it is not a place, it is not a mountain, it is not the story of six adolescents who are growing with Our Lady. Medjugorje is a life that is lived, it is the miracle of so many people who have renewed their hearts and changed their lives and who continue to do so.

Medjugorje is Mary's children, her pilgrims, Medjugorje is this living Church that is the most beautiful and most authentic testimony of the Risen Christ. This Church that continues to draw new members close to it, because love is a language that is universally understood. Because every soul needs the profound peace that is handed out abundantly here. Because the peaceful faces of people who are happy to live as they love, is a wonderful testimony that has an irresistible force of attraction. □

MESSAGE TO MIRJANA of the 2nd of August 2011

"Dear children; Today I call you to be born anew in prayer and through the Holy Spirit, to become a new people with my Son; a people who knows that if they have lost God, they have lost themselves; a people who knows that, with God, despite all sufferings and trials, they are secure and saved. I call you to gather into God's family and to be strengthened with the Father's strength. As individuals, my children, you cannot stop the evil that wants to begin to rule in this world and to destroy it. But, according to God's will, all together, with my Son, you can change everything and heal the world. I call you to pray with all your heart for your shepherds, because my Son chose them. Thank you."



The opportunity of a lifetime!

I've just returned from Medjugorje and I already feel the need to go back to that place of peace. I went to meet with the *Gospa* for the first time, without even imagining what she had in store for me. I allowed myself to be "taken", conquered. I allowed her to examine every corner of my heart, so that she might read and come to know my thoughts, my fears, my suffering...

We met, for the first time, on Podbrdo:

She was there waiting for me, her arms outstretched, ready to welcome me and there, I felt that I had arrived and had been accepted, for the first time....And so the tears of freedom and happiness began to flow, due to the feeling of having arrived at the right port, that port that you had always sought out and that in the end, you find on a small mountain in Bosnia-Herzegovina!

But total freedom came, when, during a second trip to Medjugorje, we began to climb up Krizevac, on the

slopes of which you experience your own personal Via Crucis; where you leave a part of the burden that you are carrying in the rucksack on your back at each station. You feel lighter after each station: you've left another stone or giant mass in Jesus' hands, a burden that you had been carrying around, and you become aware of the fact that you are being guided by something greater than you and that you cannot explain, but that gives you a great sense of inner peace...

You arrive at the summit, at the great White Cross, and there you discover that your Christ is waiting for you. With your load lightened, once again new tears of freedom begin to flow, that freedom that you got to know on Podbrdo; you become united in prayer with your travelling companions, while *Gospa* speaks to you and gives you immense graces that you are unable to explain, but that make you almost one and the same with the heavens and you cannot but ask yourself: *why me?*

You descend from that mountain with the awareness that you have been reborn and you look at your world with another light in your eyes; you see things from another angle and you know that there is Someone, above you, who will not let you fall, even when it seems that you have no more strength. That feeling of being upheld, just when you were about to let yourself go, is what gives you the strength to look beyond and overcome all further obstacles.

Medjugorje is all of this and more. It is your personal meeting with God. It is the meeting of a lifetime, the one that will change your journey completely; the one that will forge you for the rest of your days....And every evening, you cannot but say thank you to the *Gospa* for giving you the opportunity of a lifetime!

Rosa Mandato Giaccone



God among us

Sometimes certain events make us think that God is knowledgeably directing things, always attentive towards his children.

This is what came to mind when I heard the story of what the daughter of a friend of mine, G., experienced.

A few months ago, G., together with her husband and daughter, decided to go to Kvar – a small island off the coast of Croatia, for a seaside holiday. They both work as gynaecologists at a hospital in Rome, they were coming from a period of intense work and they were thinking with a sense of relief about their holiday on that island that everyone was talking about as a fantastic location.

They take the ferry in Ancona: the ferry is called... "Regina della pace" (Queen of Peace). And so *Gospa*'s plan begins to unfold! Looking through some photos, the couple thinks back to the birth of their daughter: it had been a difficult pregnancy, and now they feel the need to enter the ship's chapel and give thanks. They are both non-practising Catholics.

On their way out they bump into a group of pilgrims headed to Medjugorje. The name of this pilgrimage site says nothing to them, they had never heard it mentioned before, they didn't know

anything about it. Their curiosity is aroused and they start asking some questions, and then someone begins to tell them something about it. The priest who is travelling with the group then intervenes and furthers the discussion..., and without knowing how, without having not only not planned, but not even suspected it, this little family finds itself in Medjugorje, sacrificing their holiday on the dream island and overcoming the hurdle of having no suitable equipment with them (they were packed for a seaside holiday!), they didn't even have any accommodation booked (but they easily found somewhere to stay near the church).

Before their departure he had attended to a woman in hospital who was six months pregnant and having serious problems: she was suffering from extremely high blood pressure that they couldn't get down and the child had stopped growing. They had decided to perform a Caesarean section to save at least the mother: there was very little hope for the baby...

He carried his daughter and she carried the stroller and they climbed up Apparition Hill ("I was someone who was tired after taking the stroller out of the car!"). Here he finds himself praying not for his own intentions, but for that patient of his.

And his prayers are soon answered. That very evening, upon returning to the hotel, they receive a phone call from the hospital: the patient is unexplainably better; her blood pressure, which had not reacted to any treatment up to then, had gone down! The operation is suspended. The baby slowly starts to grow again. After nine months, a perfectly healthy baby boy is born: he is called Emanuele, *God among us...*

Nilde Totti

Flying home, with just one wing..

I nostalgically recall my catechist, the elderly Sister Santina. She used to say to us little ones how great and merciful God was, but above all that God was the Father and she used to explain to us how immense his love for us children was.

I recall my mother when we were still young children, she used to read the children's bible to us in the evening after dinner, to remind us of the great things that God had done for his people.

The days and months became years. We were brought up and educated in faith. I was lucky because I had a lovely family alongside me. There were happy days and, as is the case for everyone, difficult days and, as strange and all as it may seem, it is in times of difficulty that God shows us his love.

About two years ago I got sick, it wasn't a life threatening illness, but a painful and in certain ways invalidating one.

The brain surgery I endured that lasted a few hours wasn't much use, all the therapy and medication I used didn't benefit me much either, I was still limited, weak and had frequent episodes of significant pain.

It is not at all easy to live with all of this, "it is like flying with just one wing" – I thought of this during my journey on the 25th of May last to Medjugorje for a "quick" pilgrimage which I embarked on with my dad, my sister and a dear family friend. Almost twelve hours, in spite of those who worriedly told me that it would tire me too much.

Having arrived at my destination, I came to understand that tiredness didn't matter. In the house of **Kraljice Mira**, the Blessed Virgin herself welcomed me into her maternal embrace; the air was dense with peace and joy. I had not come to the hotel to rest, it seemed to me that I had "returned home", after a long time.

The more than nine hundred kilometres that separated me from home didn't count, it was as though I had found a new home that was familiar to me both in terms of the atmosphere and the people there.

This state of inner peace accompanied me to Podbrdo, in front of the statue of the Blessed Mother and in that blessed place, my prayer was to give thanks for everything that our Mother and our Merciful Father gave to me:

- I had woken up after a highly risky operation,
- I can walk, laugh, speak, think and pray;
- I have a part-time job,
- I have a fantastic family, and dear friends;
- I encountered doctors illuminated by God and among these, a special lady doctor, undoubtedly sent by heaven, who later became a treasured friend.

I am unable to do many things, but as my dad said to me: "think about what you can do". Very true!

Above all I think, as I was taught as a young girl, that God is a loving Father and that therefore he wants good for all of us. Let's entrust ourselves fearlessly to him and he'll

know what to do. Although it is sometimes difficult to say “thy will be done”, we will never be alone.

This is my testimony, this is my little miracle, faith makes you “fly”, even with just one wing, my flight brought me to Medjugorje, to that holy land touched by Mary. I flew to the Kraljice Mira community, my other home, where I left a piece of my heart and where I will soon return. Thank you for this umpteenth gift.

Morena Gelsomino

Young people, like buds in the summer



They're on holidays from school. They're free to choose how to spend the time that the summer months offer them, to give their mind, their bodies and their spirit a rest. For this reason, over the last few years, young people,

who are sensitive towards everything that is *true*, are choosing more and more to dedicate some time to God, allowing themselves to be filled with the only truth that *makes you free*.

A need for truth, a need for freedom, a profound need to share with other young people who chose to leave the easy and immediate mundane gratifications (which are often devoid of meaning and lifeless), to be united with others who, like them, do not intend to make compromises with the spirit of the world, which is false and a liar. For this reason they go in droves to the gathering that each year, at the beginning of August, sees tens of thousands of young people from all over the world gathering in Medjugorje, full of joy and of wishes. It started twenty-two years ago in a shy and spontaneous manner, the **Youth Festival** is now an appointment for many and a new calling for those who feel the need for comfort, advice and the courage with which to face life with the thrust of a new young bud that cannot wait to bloom. Let's listen to them...

Daniele, aged 20:

It's everything.

I came to Medjugorje for the first time when I was sixteen years old. Before then I used to only go to mass at Christmas and Easter and I used to pray only when I needed something. I was drifting further and further away from the faith, I used to curse and I certainly didn't want to participate in a pilgrimage! The only reason I agreed to come was because I thought that it would be a chance to have a holiday in the Balkans. I had no idea that the trip would radically change my life.

During the last pilgrimage, one year ago, I experienced a special physical healing. I

had broken my ankle and after the operation I was no longer able to walk properly. It was during the adoration that I felt the need to look upwards towards the Heavens and for a few seconds I saw Our Lady, opening her cloak and smiling at me, from that moment my foot was healed and already the next day I went to both Krizevac and Podbrdo.

Medjugorje is everything for me, it was my departure point, my beginning. The festival is a meeting place for young people from all over the world: during these days you can really feel the presence of Mary among us. It is great to be able to express praise for our God with our bodies, with our hands raised and with dancing, a moment in which I feel an indescribable sense of joy within. As Saint Augustine used to say, *he who sings prays twice*, I too feel that our dancing is a form of prayer.

This year a dream that I have held within for a long time has come true: I will remain in Medjugorje for longer, after the festival I will stay here for a month to dwell on everything that I have experienced through prayer.

Bernadette, aged 27:

An explosion of graces

What is Medjugorje? Medjugorje is heaven on earth. Yes, for me it is heaven on earth. Here the Lord gave me everything that I was missing. I was brought here as a young girl by my father, but it was one of these many trips that changed my life when I was a teenager. I came here imploring help from heaven because I felt discouraged, I felt a lack of affection from my mother, and I had experienced many disappointments in my friendships. Those few days were an explosion of graces, I had also asked God to show me what my vocation might be and it was during that pilgrimage that I got to know the boy who has shared my journey with me for years.



I always try to be here for the festival because you can feel how Mary and Jesus are present and pour so much joy and so much hope into the hearts of all of us. The youth festival is a very significant experience for those who have yet to discover God's love.

Francesco, aged 15:

I'll say that God exists...

This is my first time here and in coming here I would never have expected to meet so many people, **so many young people who believe and who are praying**. I am very struck by the amount of faith that seems to be so strong in everyone and upon returning home, I want to tell everyone that God exists and that in this place of grace it is possible to deepen your faith. I felt welcomed by all these people who are praying in an atmosphere of openness, respect, and friendship: through them I felt welcomed by Mary. □

“I will not die, I will remain in life and announce the works of the Lord”!

A single little verse, yet it manages to enclose all the wonders that the Lord fulfilled and that he continues to renew in my life, that “miracle of Life” and so I cannot fail to sing his praises, give him thanks and sing together to our mother Mary my “Magnificat”!

I was eleven years old when my life was turned upside down by the death of my father and I began to become convinced of the fact that the abandonment I had always feared, had come about: my father was no longer alongside me, I was nothing for God, otherwise he would not have left me alone. Gradually, I began to lose sight of the meaning of my life: I blocked out all emotions, good or bad, I closed myself inside my house, and distanced myself from everyone. At sixteen I stopped going to school for several weeks and I hid every morning in a park, feeling alone and invisible, beginning to think that my life was useless and that I should kill myself. Then, for more than a year, psychotropic drugs, followed by eating disorders; but there was just one cause: like so many young people today, I am unable to feel loved and therefore, to love myself and to love.

But what I didn't know and what I want to spend my life announcing today is, that **Life is one Person, Love has a Name: Jesus!** He who gave his life for us and who only has one wish: to make our life a masterpiece, His plan of love! And in May of 2010, at the age of 22, I discovered him, and I experienced him, allowing him to enter my life: when I met the young men and women from the Scuola di Evangelizzazione delle Sentinelle del Mattino di Pasqua, young people aged between eighteen and thirty, who decide to leave everything, to give one year of their life to God and to evangelisation, having reached my city for a mission: to announce to young people that “Jesus is alive!”

And so I was awe struck by the light that illuminates their faces and their gaze and by the simple words with which, during their sacred representation, entitled “The wounded Shepherd”, the Lord answered every one of my questions about meaning: “You are loved, even though you don't know it!”. Loved always with an eternal love: new horizons opened up and with them came the desire to follow the Lord, also entering this school.

But the return to my daily routine isn't easy and in August I find myself leaving again, for the **Youth Festival in Medjugorje**, once again I'm breathless, screaming at God to save my life: and it is none other than here, in this place of grace, tight in Mary's embrace, that He comes to take me, He answers me through the words of Father Gianni, the priest of the School of Evangelisation. With him I find myself confessing that I am incapable of living, receiving the answer that I would never have expected: “The School of Evangelisation is made for you! Come and see!” How could he know that desire that I had buried in my heart? God alone could know it: And so I had to believe it, the Lord was speaking to me and I had to trust him! And follow him!

And so my resurrection began in Medjugorje, the most beautiful year of my life, experienced in that School, a year that God gave to me, allowing me to be reborn with the

Notes from Medjugorje

love of a community of young people who, like me, with their gifts but also with their weaknesses, are committed to experiencing the Gospel in a concrete manner, founding their lives on prayer, training themselves, so as to then go out among young people and bring Hope to this world of death: Jesus has already conquered death...And so there is nothing to be afraid of!

This year Mary not only gave me the great grace of returning here to the Youth Festival in Medjugorje to give thanks to her, I who, last year, was hidden and full of fear, I found myself on the stage, along with other young people who, like me, had give up another year to the service of the School of Evangelisation, with my heart bursting with joy, to announce to the young people present there, that there is nothing more beautiful than giving your life to God! **The fullness of our lives is doing what Jesus did: giving all of ourselves** for those who are alongside us, freely, out of love! And so thank you to mother Mary who led me to her Son Jesus!

Iaria Convalle

I saw



A peaceful and smiling face. An open and friendly gaze; by now he's at home in Medjugorje. You'll quite easily meet him there, among the pilgrims, at the service of confessions or in the celebration of the Eucharist. Father Pietro

Zorza is, like many others besides, a direct witness to these many years of grace.

To mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the apparitions of the Virgin, he published a book that contains numerous testimonies; a little journey through time and memories that span the sequence of images that fill the pages of the book: "Over the years, Medjugorje has silently but inexorably invaded the whole world", writes the Italian priest. "Over the last few years, I was able to be present, every two months, even during the war, to experience the grace that takes over everyone who goes there. I have seen bishops crying tears of joy, priests changing their lifestyle, taking an interest in a vocation that was almost quenched, console crying sinners. I have seen atheists and non-believers find God, men and women of other religions embracing our faith, even political murderers offering themselves to life; I have seen entire families leave behind a pagan lifestyle and become domestic churches, full of joy, faith, prayer and thanksgiving to Providence and the Virgin; I have seen the ill be healed, businessmen from all social classes be overturned by grace and choose a life of prayer; I have seen ill people who were condemned to death reacquire physical and moral health.

I have seen young people resume their walk towards holiness, prayer, penance, coming from all cities and towns in the world...An immense formation of pilgrims to follow Our Lady's appeals, accompanied by their priests, to allow themselves to be converted, overturned, sanctified by the gentle breeze that blows from the mountains of Medjugorje".

(from: *Dear Mother, thanks for calling us*, by Pietro Zorza).

Medjugorje is bright, like always. The light that it diffuses is quite surprising, to illuminate things, people, hearts, even in the most hidden parts; to brighten up the night, so that it might not instil fear.

Here Mary shows Jesus, as she did in Cana of Galilee, where she pointed Him out to the servants, to change that water into wine: "our water" can also be changed into good wine. Here Mary shows the Son, who is the Good News beyond our imagination.

After a long journey, Jesus seems to welcome us into the parish church of Medjugorje, to the evening mass, to unexpectedly say: "Courage, do not be afraid, because I do not look at your faults, but rather, at your willingness to welcome my love. Forget yourself and look at Me, I am Life, and you will live".

You feel a new found friendship with Jesus and it seems to whisper: "I am near you, I love you, I am your aid; mine is not a form of human help, but aid that comes from God almighty, who always lovingly provides, without ever forgetting his creatures...and the soul is filled with hope and gratitude".

Here everything is dressed in newness, even prayer. In the "Our Father" the word *today* strikes us in a new way, when we ask the Father: Give us this day *our daily bread*, and in the "Hail Mary" the word *now* is striking, when we ask the Mother: *pray for us sinners, now...* And so present actions acquire a new importance, even the most humble ones, even the smallest ones, for which we ask the Father and the Mother for help, to joyfully experience them at every moment, as Mary asks us to do in her messages.

Daily life also becomes dressed in new things, it acquires the look of a "game of love" arranged from the Heavens, in which we are all invited to joyfully play, where the Heavens and the earth play with us, to everyone's delight. We come to understand that everything is a gift, not a personal conquest: when we see and experience that everything we possess is all gratuitousness. And we are surprised by the great Gift: Jesus. Here you can see your poverty dressed in light, and you feel happy.

Now my journey in this blessed land is about to come to an end and as I get ready to return to my country, I feel a profound sense of gratitude to Mary, who has been distributing boundless graces from this land for thirty years, much to our joy and the joy of the Heavens, the earth and the entire universe. Medjugorje appears like an immense gift from God, given through Mary, for the salvation of the whole of humanity.

Learn from Me

On one occasion Jesus saw that his friends were worried about the trials they had to face continuously, such as misunderstandings on the part of people, difficulties in relationships, poverty, and uncertainty as regards the future. He noticed that they were very sad, to the extent that they no longer even noticed His presence, He who is the Lord of life, whom nothing escapes, who owns joy.

And so He thought about helping them, unveiling the secret of happiness to them, and he said to them: "Learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls" (Mt 11,29). He did not say that they had to fulfil great deeds *to find rest for their souls*, that is, to be happy, things that they would not have been able to fulfil, but that they had to be humble like Him, learning from Him. And he also led by example, loving continuously, in humility, to the point of the cross. He also taught them that His love is humble like that of the Father, otherwise it is not love, it is something else.

In the Bible we read that the people near God are the humble ones. In chapter 12 of the Book of Numbers, we read: "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all the men on the face of the earth". Moses "spoke to God" face to face "and he saw his face, not like the other prophets, to whom God spoke only in dreams or visions" perhaps because he was the most humble of all of them.

It seems almost as though humility is essential for Love, that one cannot do without the other; it seems as though humility is capable of attracting Love, unlike pride, that fears it and pushes it away. This is why a humble heart is protected against attacks from the evil one. And so the humble "shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday" (Psalm 90).

And as I contemplate God's almighty humility, my mind wanders to the humble Mary, who was so pleasing to God that He made her the Mother of His Creature. *How great this "smallness" of yours made You, oh Mary, to the extent of containing Your Lord, to the extent of embracing all of us.*

Now, Jesus, we know that You ask us to learn from You, but you know well that we are not so capable of doing so. And so, take us by the hand and help us to become like You, who are the Humble one, who are Love, who are Joy, and thus we will be able to find rest in our lives, like You promised us, and with us, perhaps many others.

Like a rose

"I consider the Rosary that we recite as though we were fingering a rose, petal after petal, to be admirable. The Rosary is within the reach of the rich and the poor, the wise and the ignorant. The lullaby of the Hail Marys, like the waves of the sea, allow everyone to access sublime moments of contemplation.

I love the Angelus. In Islamic countries, the Muezzin invites the faithful to recall the Most High. The same thing occurs in the French countryside, after Saint Louis, three times a day, the bells chime to call the peasant, the labourer, the intellectual to stop for a few moments, standing above business and mundane things, to recall the great Affair of history: the Incarnation, God made man. And the origin of this marvel is Mary's YES".

(Jean Guilton)

Called to a new life

On our journey, we often perceive the desire for **inner renewal** and we frequently embark on rocky roads to reach new destinations that might warm the heart and give a fuller meaning to our existence. Sometimes we tend to seek out what is already dwelling in our spirit in faraway places, forgetting that the Lord, first and foremost, loves us for what we are and that he draws us close to Him.

With Baptism we received a sacred unction and God gave us the gift of the royalty that is imprinted on us like a seal. Often however, we fail to perceive this gratuitous privilege because we are caught up in the mundane and we forget that God's loving face is constantly watching over us and accompanying us. With her presence, Mary helps us to constantly rediscover the beauty of our lives and the potential of love that lies within us.

If we are aware of being loved, we also become aware of the fact that we are a **"people of priests, called to renew, transform the world"**. In us there are donated buds that can renew the whole of humanity; and the Holy Spirit guides us and sustains us when we walk weakly and insecure on the roads of renewal.

We cannot hide the fact that we are living in a difficult world, in which there is no lack of obstacles. Man is often disorientated because he doesn't have any reference points and today, in particular, we are witnesses to **an epochal change**, political and economic instability. And so then we put everything before God: the life of others and our own,

tiredness, daily uncertainty, our interiority... **He alone can make us new creatures** that are not afraid and are not discouraged.

It is so lovely to be able to say every day that everything begins in God, without running the risk of allowing ourselves to be overcome by superficial emotions, that are as strong as they are transient. **We are specifically called to be united**, to walk and rejoice together, to make an effort together, to share and pray together. Our life experiences show us that it is not evangelical to say that we are happy by ourselves. When we throw a stone into some water we see that ripples form in the shape of concentric circles; this can become the symbol of our lives as we are invited, through Jesus Christ, to create good that expands and that can redeem humanity.

It is important to die to ourselves so that others might have life; rooted in God, we can be tangible signs of His presence in the world. Love sweeps us away so that we might always ensure that the Spirit of God passes through the meeting with the people who share our journey: we are invited to put our family members, all those who are dear to us and those who are far away into the hands of the Father.

If our life becomes an offering to God, that is renewed every day, we will be capable of loving without judging: it is He who speaks to our hearts, who invites us to be silent, to listen and to be discerning.

In this time we are asked to invoke Mary so that she might help us to confirm and experience our desires to be a new humanity that walks with fraternal love, sustained by the Lord.

Lidio Piardi

Dear readers

of The Echo of Mary,

I am an elderly Carthusian monk (81 years old) and with great pleasure I would like to share with you some of my impressions following a recent trip to Medjugorje. And there are lots of them!

It was the afternoon of the 25th of June, the day of the thirtieth anniversary of the apparitions of Mary and I was in front of the church, in the square, opposite the white statue of Our Lady. There were so many people there that it was like Pentecost! I was delighted by the thought that the Virgin too was happy upon seeing that on the occasion of that celebration, her divine Son was giving her what He had promised: **many** converted children from all over the world, **many** who never believed in God before, **many** who had never thought of God, **many** who had never gone to confession, **many** who didn't know how to pray, **many** who had never held a set of Rosary beads in their hands, **many** who had never entered a church to adore God in the Holy Eucharist, **many** who before, when someone spoke to them about Medjugorje, were indifferent or laughed...

Before my eyes, many people seemed to have turned their lives around and had converted to the Lord, adoring, praying, crying, now they were opening themselves up to faith in Jesus Christ through the Queen of Peace. She was happy about this, with all the angels and all of us.

Let's think about the parable of mercy: the lost sheep who was found, the woman who loses a coin and then finds it again... What joy! "And so I say to you – says Jesus – there will be more joy in Heaven for a converted sinner, than for ninety-nine righteous men who do not need conversion". Yes, upon seeing that all of this was happening around me, together with the Queen of Peace, I too was truly **so** happy!

*Fr. Fernando M. – Carthusian
(from Jerez - Cádiz – Spain)*

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Dearest Readers,

After the summer break, we are once again with you to continue, through the pages of the Echo, to listen to Mary's voice, that is resounding in Medjugorje and that wants to re-echo throughout the entire universe. For this reason, with a sense of humility and good will, we get to work so that our little magazine might reach you, wherever you are.

Once again we thank those who have showed signs of concrete solidarity and providence and who have allowed us to put together this latest issue of the Echo.

You know well that the postal expenses are still very high and therefore the life of this magazine depends exclusively on you and your generosity. We never ask for a fixed amount for the subscription, because we believe in the power of God's gratuitousness, which is always rewarded one hundred fold. And so it is our fraternal duty to make you aware of our financial needs, so that support might not be lacking for us, forcing us to interrupt the publication of the Echo.

We are confident that you will understand and we remain united with your prayer and offer ourselves to the Lord so that He might listen to your intentions and fulfil them, according to His will.

Together we are going towards a horizon of grace that is ever greater, in the secure hope that God is preparing a future of glory for his children, **a new time** that will bring all things back to Christ. This is the message that Medjugorje came to bring into our lives: **the coming of a time of spring** (Message of 25th October 2000) which will come and not delay.

During the year we will try together to identify its signs, so as to seek to courageously and firmly answer Mary's invitation to be collaborators in her plan of salvation, giving her Immaculate Heart our life, remaining open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who knows how to fulfil the things that He himself stirs up in us. **Saying our Yes to the Lord will lead us to be a new people**, capable of putting our potential together, so that our communion might be a reflection, here on earth, of what the Most Blessed Trinity experiences: perfect unity in diversity. And so we will be, finally and once and for all, a "new creation", as Mary asks of us in Medjugorje.

God bless you!

The Editorial Staff of the Echo of Mary

Echo fully relies on readers' donations.

To all who have been instruments of Providence for Echo, enabling us to continue to help Mary reach her children, goes our heartfelt thanks, whom we remember especially in prayer and at Holy Mass.

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

Villanova M., 29 september 2011

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