

Echo of Mary Queen of Peace

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Our Lady's message of 25 May 2005:

"Dear Children! I call you anew to live my messages in humility. In particular, witness them now as we approach the anniversary of my apparitions. My Children, be a sign to those who are far from God and from His love. I am with you and I bless you all with my motherly blessing. Thank you for responding to my call."

Be a Sign

Once again I invite you to live my messages in humility - says Our Blessed Mother. This is a recurring invitation. What other news is important besides the only news truly able to change human history? The good news is that God became man to live in his midst; Jesus Christ Himself is the Good News. All else is vanity: *"What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes"* (Eccles 1-3).

The coming of Jesus changes everything, not only history, but our own reality; not only for man of the last two millennia, but for every person since the beginning of time. Even more so, all of creation is redeemed in Jesus Christ; in fact, St. Paul says: *"the whole creation has been groaning in travail"* (Rm 8:22), that is, it is being born into life.

All creation, especially the human creature, must face this long and painful birth. We are not alone; and I would dare say that no other birth in the world is assisted and guided as lovingly.

Mary is with us to assist and guide us. In John (19:26) we were received as children of God, and from that time on Mary has never for a moment neglected us. Now, in this special time of grace, Mary is close to us as never before to repeat to us what she said the very first days of her presence at Medjugorje. She's not inviting us to add devotions upon devotions, but to **live** that which we profess. This way pointed out by Mary is marked by the Sacraments, Holy Scripture, prayer and fasting. The method is through trustful surrender to God. Not words, but concrete gestures of life are being asked of us.

Today our Blessed Mother calls us to **live her messages in humility**, and especially to **witness them now that her anniversary is drawing near**. She is clearly telling us that to celebrate the 24th



Young people: this is your Summer!

Medjugorje 1-6 August 2005

Cologne 16-21 August 2005

anniversary of her presence at Medjugorje we should authenticate her messages by donning the cloak of humility. It is not for her own glory that Mary asks this: **"My Children, be a sign to those who are far from God and from His love."** This is what Mary is concerned about. Those who are far from God need a **sign** that shows how He seeks and desires to be close to them. Those who are far from His love need a **sign** to show them how great and merciful He is and that His gratuitous love is not given according to one's merits. These people need signs, not words; they need to encounter Christ so they can find the meaning of their own life, and encounter the Love of the Father and receive from Him the fire of His Spirit. We can be that **sign**, despite our own wretchedness, if with faith and trembling we let Christ live in us.

Thank you, Mother, for calling us to such a wonderful task. We know that **to be the sign** you're calling us to be, means to follow in Jesus' steps. This means *to deny ourselves, pick up our crosses and follow Him*, but **you are with us and you bless us with your motherly blessing**, therefore, we are not afraid. With trust we surrender ourselves to you so that the Father's will might be accomplished in us. *Yes, Father: wholly Thine in Jesus and Mary!*

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Our Lady's message, 25 June 2005:

"Dear Children! Today I thank you for every sacrifice that you have offered for my intentions. I call you, my Children, to be my apostles of peace and love in your families and in the world. Pray that the Holy Spirit may enlighten and lead you on the way of holiness. I am with you and I bless you all with my motherly blessing. Thank you for responding to my call."

Apostles of Peace and Love

In a world where sacrifices are considered worthless if not unjust burdens, Mary **thanks us for the sacrifices we offered up for her intentions**. Without making distinctions she thanks us for **every sacrifice**. The important thing was to offer them for **her intentions**, to place them in her hands, for she knows what to do with them, how to unite them to the one true salvific offering made for the man of yesterday, today and tomorrow; that is, Jesus Christ who died and rose again for our sake.

He alone can purify our own sacrifices to *complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church* (Col 1:24). How consoling for us all, especially for the sick! And what a terrible waste of suffering that which is not handed over to Mary! What a waste of graces not received because they are not asked for! Once, Mary said: *"In these days of celebration of the Cross I would like your cross to be a joy for you too. Pray especially, my Children, to be able to accept sickness and suffering with love, as Jesus did. Only then will I be able to give you - with joy - the graces of healing promised by Jesus."* (11 sept. 1986)

Oh, to be aware of the treasure of grace that Jesus constantly offers us! It is not a question of inventing or planning, but rather accepting, desiring and living His life in us! When we receive the Lord in Holy Communion do we not receive His Body and His Blood? But what do we do with Him once out of church? If Jesus is in us, *He must be visible, not us. He must increase and we must decrease* (Jn 3:30). Yet, how large is our own person, and how insignificant the presence of Christ in us!

All the same, Jesus is always there, waiting for us. He loves us and continues to love us despite the offences and betrayals. The Father still allows Mary to visit us, encourage us and guide us on the way to Jesus, and His love is merciful in our regards.

Mary not only thanks us, but she opens the way for us: **“I call you, my Children, to be my apostles of peace and love in your families and in the world.”** Perhaps this is the flower which blossomed from our sacrifices, but the flower can produce fruit only if it remains exposed to the sun-Spirit, which is precisely what Mary urges us to do: **Pray that the Holy Spirit may enlighten and lead you on the way of holiness.** When Jesus took our sins on His own shoulders He opened the way to God. That way is the **way of holiness.** Holiness ought to be the normal condition for *all those who in every place call on the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Co 1:2). All humanity and all creation have a vital need for this revealing of holiness, for the *revealing of the sons of God* (Rm 8:19). We are to be **apostles of peace and love** since it is on peace and love that the family and the world are founded. We are called to be **her apostles** that the peace and love we transmit might be pure; **her apostles** because the *true apostles of the last times* - according to Montfort - *belong to Mary.* N.Q.

Young people's Summer!

Important meetings await them. And from every corner of the earth they will come, ready for moments of grace that will see them united and festive around our Lord Jesus who out of His excess of love wanted to become bread and wine so He could continue to remain with us.

“WE HAVE COME TO ADORE HIM”

This is the theme of two important youth meetings this year. The first is the **youth festival at Medjugorje** (1-6 Aug.) which has never failed to grant young hearts that thirst for God and the truth the grace to return home with renewed hope and healing. Another, more astonishing event will call together an even greater number of youth: the **XX WORLD YOUTH DAY** in Cologne, Germany from **16-21 Aug.**

In groups large and small, by two's and alone, they will all converge at the place appointed by **John Paul II.** “It is a theme that enables young people from every continent to follow in spirit the path taken by the Magi whose relics are venerated in this very city, and to meet, as they did, the Messiah of all nations,” John Paul had said in his *Message* for the occasion.

IMITATE THE MAGI

John Paul's recommendation to the youth was that they be **spiritually prepared**, in order for their hearts to be all the more welcoming for Christ and all the more capacious for the graces He shall want to pour out into them: “It is true to say that the light of Christ had already opened the minds and the hearts of the Magi. *They went their way* (Mt 2:9), says the Evangelist, setting out boldly along unknown paths on a long, and by no means easy, journey. They did not hesitate to leave

everything behind... Through imitating the Magi, you are also making preparations to set out on a *journey* from every region of the world to go to Cologne. It is important for you not only to concern yourselves with the practical arrangements for WYD, but first of all you must carefully prepare yourselves spiritually, in an atmosphere of faith and listening to the Word of God.”

OBSERVING THE SIGNS

How many times God may have called us, yet we weren't able to distinguish His voice amid the confusion and din of our own little world. Thus JPII wrote: “It is important, my dear friends, to learn to *observe the signs* with which God is calling us and guiding us. When we are conscious of being led by Him, our heart experiences *authentic and deep joy* as well as a powerful desire to meet Him and a persevering strength to follow Him obediently.”

ADORE THE LORD

“In the *stable at Bethlehem* He allowed himself to be worshipped under the humble outward appearances of a newborn babe, by Mary, Joseph and the shepherds. In the consecrated Host we adore Him sacramentally present in his body, blood, soul and divinity, and He offers himself to us as the food of eternal life... The *Mass* then becomes a truly loving encounter with the One who gave himself wholly for us.”

WHAT GIFTS SHOULD WE BRING?

“My dear young people, offer to the Lord the gold of your lives, namely, your freedom to follow Him out of love, responding faithfully to His call. Let the incense of your fervent prayer rise up to him, in praise of His glory; offer Him your myrrh, that is, your affection of total gratitude to Him, true Man, who loved us to the point of dying as a criminal on Golgotha. Be worshippers of the only true God. Give Him pride of place in your lives!”

COURAGEOUS CHOICES

“Listening to Christ and worshipping Him leads us to make *courageous choices*, to take what are sometimes heroic decisions. Jesus is demanding, because He wishes our genuine happiness. He calls some to give up everything to follow Him in the priestly or consecrated life. Those who hear this call must not be afraid to say ‘yes’ and to generously set about following Him as His disciples. There is also the specific vocation of all baptised Christians: the ‘high standard’ of ordinary Christian living expressed in holiness.

TIME FOR AUTHENTIC WITNESS

So many of our contemporaries do not yet know the love of God or seek to fill their hearts with trifling substitutes. It is therefore urgently necessary *for us to be witnesses to love contemplated in Christ.*”

JOHN PAUL WILL BE THERE

The Pope who invited the youth to Cologne may not be physically present, but he will be in spirit, together with Mary, and there he will encounter each one

present in the secret of the heart. “My dear young people as you move forward in spirit towards Cologne, the pope will accompany you with his prayers. May Mary, *Eucharistic woman* and Mother of Wisdom, support you along the way, enlighten your decisions, and teach you to love what is true, good and beautiful. May she lead you all to her Son, who alone can satisfy the innermost yearnings of the human mind and heart. Go with my blessing!” (Editor)

Inner quest and freedom: wings for young hearts

When I went to see her it was about 9 in the morning and she was in the vegetable plot, weeding. She greeted me, as usual, with her beautiful smile which reveals her profound happiness. “It's time for you young people to start taking our place,” she said to me as she dusted off her apron and indicated two chairs nearby.

“**Leave everything to follow the Lord,**” she had said to me the day I told her I'd be entering a religious Community. “For me it was a demanding step that required total trust – not that I had much to leave behind me, but I'd do it over and over again!” And I was moved by the conviction of this old nun. Every time I visit Sr. Miriam I come away richer, like the time our conversation fell on religious vows: “Poverty?”, she exclaimed. “You take a vow of poverty out of free choice, just as you do for obedience and chastity – out of free choice!”

Yeah, freedom! **Freedom is fundamental for the young.** Instead, it is the distorted interpretation of freedom that is causing the decline in today's young generations.

There is an “**external**” freedom and no matter how great this might be it can never be total and true. “Doing whatever one likes” can never satisfy the deep desire we each have for life. The more we follow this false freedom the more we see its inconsistency. Then there is an **inner freedom**; it is the freedom God granted us and in a certain way it is the most important part of our being which is “in His image and likeness.” With our will we can choose life or death, good or evil, decide for God's Commandments and His laws that are impressed in our souls, or decide the opposite.

It's true that the great choices of life are a bit scary for young people to face, because choice implies renunciation. And we don't always see that if we are decisive and are willing to renounce, we are led to true freedom, the freedom to be what we really are: that is, God's chosen people, whom He loves.

Fear “paralyzes” many young people, but the alternative is a type of passive expectation that doesn't reflect life as it is meant to be. When I decided to consecrate my life to God I wasn't concerned with what I'd be giving up for I had already experienced that renunciation opens the way to the priceless gift of

freedom. Rather, it was the case of removing the superfluous to make space for the only really important thing.

Entering Community doesn't mean giving up friends, or university, or family affection. And it doesn't mean giving up one's youth. To me it means choosing something much more important, something so great that it supersedes and embraces all the rest.

"Closing myself up in the convent" as I would sometimes say with irony, is to receive the best, the most, all that the Lord will want to grant me. But – some would question - at nineteen years of age, why can't you wait a bit more, to see a bit more of the world, experience something else of the world...?

The more I was able to set aside my own will, and the more inner space I gave to God, the more I became convinced that I am losing nothing of what is really important for my own personal formation. How could I wait even a month longer when it is already clear to me that I have to place all my enthusiasm; all that I am and all that I have, at the service of the Queen of Peace?!

It is this inner openness and quest for the truth that so characterizes young people. Being young is not being satisfied with intermediate arrival points. It's being receptive, and always willing to learn. When we are free of prejudice and of the fear of losing our human security it is then that our hearts are open and able to recognize the voice of God even in those who may have less experience than us.

This inner quest and freedom are as two wings which lift you up during life's adventure, into your future which is a gift of Christ; and it can't be faced if not with hope and joy. It takes this "youthfulness of heart" to advance in the spiritual journey. The Most Holy Trinity is youthfulness, newness without end, and at times this novelty can turn everything upside down, but if we let ourselves be continually won over, if we surrender ourselves over and over again to Christ, without clinging to the safety of what we already know, we will advance in grace.

What a pleasant surprise to find this youthful attitude in Sr. Miriam - or in the not-so-young religious. It is both encouraging and consoling for someone like me who has chosen this same path. I had many times heard say that God is the fount of true youthfulness, without really understanding its full meaning, but now it has taken on a lot of meaning, especially when I speak to my "big" brothers and sisters and see how their hearts are like open channels for God's love, and that they have allowed themselves to become His instruments so that God can continue to be present in our midst.

Thanks to the witness of people like these and Sr. Miriam I know that I need not fear that as I grow old I will not lose a part of myself. And with all my inner freedom I bless the Lord and say: To You Lord I give my youthfulness, to You I entrust my future which is unknown to me. All I ask is that my love for You might grow more with every passing day!

Francesco Cavagna

Young Hearts beat for Church!

The human person cannot do without love. People were created by God to live for ever with Him in a communion of love. Man is born for love's sake, he lives and dies for love's sake. He is fruit of a love so great that every moment of his existence he yearns to return to the One who created him and who constantly sustains him. Nonetheless, it often happens that we get to a certain point in our life when we realize we never loved enough, that we always kept something back for ourselves, that we sought out the love of others, but never loved anyone ourselves. But how can I find something that I've never used? Even now, the grace of God sustains us and speaks to our hearts in ways that are completely mysterious.

It was the gaze of a young man that awoke in me the desire to be happy the way he was. I had seen him many times, but that day I found the courage to look at him more attentively. There were no apparent reasons why he should be happy, yet through his gaze and smile one could see that his heart was overflowing with love. **What made this possible?** For what reason was he able to transmit such a desire to live that he could bring dead bodies back to life? I read his story – written by others – and finally I understood why he was a fount of love. It was Love Itself that used him to transmit true life to others. This young man never kept back the love he received, but generously shared it out with all.

Whoever really encounters Him, face to face, has to fall in love with Him. Today you can see the young people who've decided to give meaning to their life; especially those tired of pretending and tired of taking the "crumbs" of life the world offers. They are courageous young people who've decided for God, who've

decided to push wide open the doors without fear of being disappointed or unsatisfied.

All the young people who've fallen in love with Christ have a heart that beats for the Church; it is their young strong heart that is able to pump blood to every part of the body so it can live and work. It is a heart that works day and night, without ever stopping, and it beats all the more stronger when the battle is harder.

What power the heart of the young contains! They have the future of the world in their hands, and that is why the world tries with every means to seize their heart.

What is the deepest need of today's young people? Certainly that of seeing consistency in those who are older, particularly with regards to faith and morals. It is thanks to the example of the numerous saints of our times that many young people have decided for God and have responded to Mary's appeal to become her witnesses.

The family has a very important role in determining the growth and maturity of the faith in the young. The young need to see consistency in those who consider themselves to be real Christians; they need to see demonstrations of this faith, not compromise.

Jesus prayed for the unity of God's children on the vigil of His Passion: "*Even as thou, Father, art in me and I in Thee, may they be one, so that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me*" (cf. Jn 17:21). **In this relationship of love and reciprocal respect** amongst the young and not-so-young the Church may advance courageously, and face the various difficulties of every day, precisely because of this unity. Jesus prayed for this, and we are all called to do the same. So let's *pray, pray, pray!*

Alessandro Macinai

Through the eyes of a Missionary

Missionary countries are so different to our western society with all its consumerism and evolution, that to imagine the life of a missionary and the mission itself is a rather arbitrary task. The humble pages of our Echo are eagerly awaited by many missionaries, one of whom says: "When Echo arrives I make several photocopies and distribute them amongst various remote villages of the Amazon." Many are the courageous men and women who have offered their own lives to bring a reflection of God's love to the peoples who thirst for Him, to those who often don't even have the right to live, just because they live in countries less fortunate than others.

We wish to dedicate these lines to them, God's littlest yet beloved children, and to missionaries the world wide.

Francesco Bazzoli is a lay missionary



who's been working for some years in Congo and Rwanda, two countries ravaged by famine and guerrilla war. He says: "In Congo there are many groups under the control of warlords who work with foreign aid. Here we have the Maji-Maji: something like local partisans. There are no rules, no discipline, no uniform and one doesn't know whether they're bandits or what. Generally, these so-called "soldiers" do what they want: they aren't paid, they're armed with rifles, and they use this "weapon power" to run down others. Everyone is afraid of them and so everyone stays quiet. With the war many missions were closed, but the Bishop wants to open them up again to work at bringing peace, reconciliation and peaceful co-habitation."

Hungry for God

During the important liturgical times of

the year Francesco accompanies priests to remote villages for the celebration of the festivities. "I spent Christmas at a poor mission in the forest. Those Christians hadn't received the Sacraments for nine years, so it was indeed a holy Christmas, and Jesus truly was born into their community. People came from all over the vast parish, some even walked 100 km, bringing just a little food. Like the Magi, they came to adore the King of the world in a long celebration that lasted five hours, with baptisms, first communions, confirmations and weddings!

Abandoned and poor, with not even two fish to offer for Christ to work the miracle! But they are rich in faith, and the miracle will be repeated, because at Easter we will go again, and we have already built a tabernacle for the Risen Christ who every day becomes host and food for us."

Humanity needs Christ: "broken bread"

Like the missionaries the Pope never fails to give voice to the needs of the poor. **John Paul II** in his **Message for the World Day for Missions 2005** which he wrote in February 2005, said: "I invite you to contemplate Jesus in the 'breaking of the bread' offered for the whole of humanity. Following his example we too are called to offer our life for our brothers and sisters, especially those most in need," and: "The Eucharist is not merely an expression of communion in the Church's life; it is also a project of solidarity for all of humanity; it is 'bread from heaven' which gives eternal life (cfr *Jn* 6,33) and opens the human heart to a great hope. Jesus alone can satisfy humanity's hunger for love and thirst for justice; He alone makes it possible for every human person to share in eternal life."

Missionaries, "broken bread" for the life of the world

That Christ might reach the mouths of people there must be those who carry Him. That is why the Holy Father adds: "Still today Christ urges his disciples: '*Give them something to eat yourselves*' (*Mt* 14,16). In his name missionaries all over the world proclaim and witness to the Gospel; they too become '*bread broken*' for their brothers, some even to the point of sacrificing their life."

Interviewed by Francesco, Fr. Simone, a Xaverian missionary who died last year, said: "We try to be present as much as possible. Our presence is a guarantee for the people; it nourishes hope. For a mission to really work you must help the people acquire a new mentality that teaches them to forgive and live in harmony, in a new way, and to nourish a sense of responsibility so that each person – after so many mortal blows - feels he is a part of the work of reconstruction.

That is why we missionaries must be in touch with the people as much as possible, by living even the same life style.

This means giving greater trust to those on the front and accepting that they might make mistakes. A missionary needs to be seen not as a superior, but as a brother; and this might mean putting ourselves more in the background so that the people can become more responsible."

Stolen childhood

Francesco concludes with this sad note: "I feel so sorry for children; you see them holding *kalashnikovs* that are bigger than them. They feel grown up, and when you ask their age they lie – saying they're older. One day I helped one of them to ride a bicycle. I was holding the bike by the seat while he swayed from side to side. The whole scene was so silly, not because he was little but because of the rifle over his shoulder which he can't ever abandon..."

Editor

Why missions?

... a question of love

"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son... For God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (*Jn* 3:16-17).

This is the most beautiful expression to describe the Christian mission. God's love dilates; His love - originally paternal - expands outwards to the Son and to all creation.

Creation contains within itself beauty, strength, grace and grandeur because it is a fruit of love; it is love that wanted it, love that made it. Man is the vertex of this fascinating creation. If it were possible to descend into the heart of reality, thus, into the heart of man, the heart of relations and human events, we would discover this truth: that **the entire creation is in love with its Creator!**

However, this world that God made for love's sake, this world in love with God, suffers – even if it doesn't know it – because love was originally contradicted by man. God, who created the world, loves the world; the world, in turn, is in love with God even if it doesn't know it, and is torn, and cries out and groans because Love has been betrayed (cf. *Rm* 8). And the Holy Spirit purposefully amplifies these groans so that in the fullness of time the fruit of love, the Son, will leave the Father to come and live in our midst.

The Son of God came into the world and found (or rather, prepared in advance) **a heart totally in love with Him: the Immaculate Heart of Mary.** It was then that the love creation had for its Creator became a conscious love in a "subject" full of holiness and grace. That "subject" was Mary, the Virgin Mother, who fell in

love with Christ, just as every mother falls in love with her child; but in this love we have the incarnation of the love of the Creator and of creation. This first love between Mother and Son was a complete love: maternal, sponsal, fraternal, filial, everything!

After Mary, and together with her, is the Church. The little, humble community, the Church, acknowledges God's love for the world and the world's for God. The Church flourishes wherever in the world this loving conscience is present. At the beginning this awareness was in Mary, then in the first disciples, and down the centuries in the Saints.

Saints are the most conscious expression of the Church in love. Then, there's the love of Christ which expands out to people's consciences and into the world even to where it is merely a foreboding, an expectation... till the ends of the earth.

This is the story of salvation: it is one great mission of love which gushes forth from the Father and reaches the whole world, then from the world returns to Him. Christ is the organizer of this mission; the Holy Spirit directs the mission; the Church is the vessel in which it is realized...

What does all the rest matter? The rest is closed up in this certainty: that God can do as He wishes; He can reach souls in the manner He wishes; He can make them fall in love in manners unknown to us. I am convinced that He makes the majority of creatures fall in love before they die to ensure they'll be with Him.

In the meantime, however, behold the missionary work of the Church! The mission of the Church is there where the Church vibrates with this love, is aware of this love, suffers for this love, desires this love and wants to spread it. Love, you see, needs to become flesh: the Gospel which the Church preaches is love embodied; the Sacraments are love embodied; the Eucharist, in particular, is love turned flesh and blood, turned nourishment.

So wherever someone intuits this love and offers himself to become an instrument or vessel through which this living, essential love can flow, there is mission.

So mission means to help others become aware of this love. Every creature has a seed implanted in it. What we need do is make this seed fuller, richer, more real, more total, more sponsal. Missionary duty comes from the right to love, and love wants to be shared, offered up. God and the world, the Creator and creatures, have the right to know and love each other as much as possible.

We are all called to the fullness of love, and thus all of us are both the subject and the object of the mission! May no woman or man say: "A little bit of love is enough for me." He who loves wants all. Thus is man's heart! And thus is the mission.

(Excerpt:

Perché la Missione? by AM Sicari)

Yet another year of Grace!

It's almost become a habit for us, this appointment that recalls the first day the Blessed Virgin began to appear to the six young people at Medjugorje in 1981!

Habits are part of life; they give us a certain sense of security, but we should never become accustomed to them, to the point of taking them for granted.

The anniversary of the 25th June recently celebrated at Medjugorje and at our homes should never be taken for granted. In a way, our hearts are "accustomed" to receiving intense sensations served up by the mass media, but the grace that is offered us through Medjugorje is such that it should provoke amazement in us every moment of the day.

The daily visit that the Mother of God has been paying us for the last 24 years is so exceptional and extraordinary that the word habit is definitely out of place. Yet many will be aware of how exceptional this event was only when the apparitions are finished; and we'll be feeling orphaned, as with John Paul when he died.

In times of want we should understand how well-off we were before. The older generations – that lived through the World Wars – would have a lot to say on the subject. But we, children of consumerism, grew up with different parameters and in this world of "disposables" we feel uneasy with things that last, preferring perhaps a sweet that is quickly finished to the food of "every day" which though bland is the one that gives us nourishment.

Yet, the apparitions at Medjugorje do have an every-day quality despite the years; an ordinariness despite their exceptionality; a normality even though it is the Queen of Heaven who comes to us. And they are marked by simplicity and naturalness and it is for this that they provoke the complicated minds of men, spoil by technology that continues to make new findings.

Mary's presence at Medjugorje is a solid food that lasts and makes us grow. Mary, as mother, hasn't rushed to teach us with her messages. Every mother knows best how to educate her children. Mary is the pure gift of the Father for a world where everything must be paid for; at times even the right to live must be paid for.

So let us open our eyes, as a child would before something beautiful, and let amazement once again flood our senses, and purify them. Thus we can celebrate the Queen of Peace who every day "wrings" permission from the Father to come and visit us - she, our advocate; she, the mother of us all.

How many words, smiles, concerns, and embraces in these 24 years! Do we

really believe it was all for us? But yes, we must! And this alone would be enough to express our gratitude and to respond generously to her calls, and to surrender ourselves entirely into her hands; without keeping back anything for ourselves.

The grace that gushes forth from Mary's Immaculate Heart is too powerful to let it lie inactive. Now is the time for a decisive *fiat*, like that of Mary at Nazareth. Her "yes" brought on the beginning of salvation. Our own positive response cannot be limited to a few devotional practices or the recitation of some prayers.

Mary needs our life, offered up with hers and the Lord's. If we offer up our life to God through Her hands, we will become vessels of grace and instruments of peace in our own environments; true apostles and witnesses of Mary who made her home in Medjugorje, and who calls us "her dear children."

Stefania Consoli



RISEN CHRIST, you take us with our hearts just as they are.

Why think we must wait for our hearts to be changed before we go to you?

You transfigure them!

With our thorns you light a fire.

The open wound in us is the place through which your love comes streaming.

And within the very hurts themselves, you bring to fruition a communion with You.

Your voice comes to rend our night, and the gateways of praise open up within us.

Brother Roger of Taizé

Immaculate with Mary

It is a fundamental truth of Catholic doctrine that the immaculate life represents the full realization of our baptismal grace, and is therefore the compulsory finish line for an authentic life of faith. Nonetheless, even in our recent past, many "good Catholics," under the influence of worldly reasoning, were persuaded to banish the idea of spiritual immaculacy to the ranks of a pious and noble utopia, good for a gaunt troop of souls cut off from reality.

But also during the time of St. Francis quite a number of representatives of the ecclesial establishment considered evangelical poverty a mere ideal that could never be realized, but would have weakened the Church through compromise and ruin.

Generally, this is the unexpected hour of Him who: "loves the Church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). At the end of the last millennium, in a disconcerting off-hand manner people were talking about a post-Christian era (paradoxically, even in some ecclesial environments). Instead, a mysterious power of grace gushed forth unexpectedly from the Heart of the Father; a grace – if accepted – capable not only of saving His Bride from the ill-omened prognoses of some, but capable of generating in her an indescribable splendour of unknown beauty; a new face of light "without spot or stain;" a new immaculacy which alone can make her entirely "ready for the betrothal with Her Lord." That is why the Father sent in the midst of mankind Mary, the Mother of the Immaculate Life, to regenerate the members of the mystical Body of her beloved Son in the world.

In her message to Mirjana last April, Mary asked her "dear Children" – whom she has chosen for this time – "to renew the Church." The visionary objected: "This is too difficult for me. Am I able to do this? Are we able to do this?" Our Lady responded: "My Children, I shall be with you! My apostles, I shall be with you and I shall help you! First renew yourselves and your families, and it will be easier."

But what does it mean to "renew"? It means to receive in ourselves, and to donate to the world the immaculate Life of the Most High which is present in Mary in a perfect way; that same current of God's pure love that through Mary is offered to us with fullness today; which alone can "make all things new."

Mary is the true sign of God's extraordinary intervention in our history. Her presence represents an incredible response of love by God to the multiple spirals of darkness that today, as never before, appear to be definitely suffocating the Truth and the Life of the world. Hence Mary is present today in such a special way, and calls us to consecrate our lives to Her Immaculate Heart: "I call you to consecrate yourselves to my Immaculate Heart... that all might belong to God through my hands" (Message 25 October 1988) so we can become in Her and with Her a living and spotless offering to the Father, intimately united to the offering of the Lamb; He is the Heart of light in the new Creation.

To communicate the fullness of grace to us and the entire universe Mary asks only for our “yes,” a “yes” said with all the strength of a free heart that burns with desire for the Kingdom, a heart vitally united to Her own. Today, more than ever, this is the sole key able to open the Heart of the Father and bring down on us, and through us upon all creation, oceans of the same new Life that endlessly gushes forth from the open side of Christ and from all the “yes’s” we say to crucified Love.

But why does Mary call us with such impassioned insistence to come closer to Her Immaculate Heart? On 25 November 1994 Mary, in fact, said: *“I am your mother and I want your hearts be similar to my Heart... therefore, my Children, come closer to my Immaculate Heart and you will find God”*; and on 25 July 1999 she said: *“I desire that my Heart, the Heart of Jesus, and your hearts be fused into a single heart of love and peace.”* The reason is that it is only through accepting the gift of her own immaculate life that today, through Mary, we are offered the extraordinary grace of being - like her - lifted up and assumed into the embrace of perfect communion with the Father: which is Christ’s salvific work accomplished in full.

Mary’s Assumption was the sublime fruit of her perfect immaculacy; that is, of her unreserved openness of heart which enabled her to accept and donate God’s pure love in all circumstances, even the most crucial ones. By the grace of God, this is the gift that Mary is sent to communicate to her children and to the entire universe, for the accomplishment of the final recapitulation of everything in Christ. In Him all will be assumed into the Father’s embrace, in the unspeakable and glorious vortex of Trinitarian Love.

Mary’s motherly calls of our times are thus better understood. Hers are not pious exhortations to become better people, but impassioned appeals *not* to miss this extraordinary treasure of grace being offered to us by the Father. By accepting this gift of grace we are immersed with immediate naturalness into the fullness of divine Life, to make us vessels and instruments of communication of this Life for the entire creation. It is thus time for us to make our decisive response to the call that the Most High is addressing us through Mary. Our response ought to be such as to immerse us permanently in the ocean of ineffable light and life that gushes from Her Immaculate Heart. What a responsibility the postponement of our long-awaited and decisive response to God! Multitudes of souls await that response!

Love is repaid only with Love! May every heart yield to the untiring love of the Mother! Still today she awaits our “yes” to offer it to Jesus and thereby fill us with the gift of Her own immaculate life which alone can satiate our thirst for the truth and life, and open us up to full communion with the Heart of God. Only He is the fount of resurrection and light, of the new heavens and new earth that the world awaits.

Giuseppe Ferraro



Medjugorje blossoming in Sicily

I was recently invited to a parish in Sicily (Italy) to hold a Triduum in preparation for the feast of their

patron, St. Blaise. It was my first time in this very characteristic land where Etna stands out by day with its mantle of white snow, and by night with its river of red lava that appears to descend from heaven. The deep blue sea dotted with little islands is a spectacular sight, but the Lord gave me to experience something even more beautiful: the spiritual wealth of its people.

My experience in a parish goes back to my four years as vice to a parish priest. During that time I often reflected on how to make the life of a parish community more alive. Even though parish life can be very intense, I felt profoundly unsatisfied because of a general superficiality of people’s faith and because it appeared to me that we - as God’s people - didn’t do enough to discover the wealth and beauty of the faith.

Then the Lord asked me to take some new steps in a different direction. From a diocesan priest I joined a religious community. Nonetheless I still carry in my heart the dream of a renewed parish that truly can serve as an oasis for souls thirsting for God and for the truth. I discovered that the small Sicilian parish I visited, with its small, simply adorned church is rich with a wealth that doesn’t belong to this world.

At Medjugorje, Our Lady began to renew the parish by gathering her children around the Eucharist; and we learnt that Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament leads you deeply into the life of faith like nothing else. At the parish of St. Blaise I was delighted to find that Mass is celebrated with dignity and with calm. No one was annoyed during the liturgical celebrations enhanced by songs (suited to the Liturgy) and various symbolic expressions even if this meant they lasted longer, but rather, participation was intense and real. The faithful lived the Mass as a part of their own lives, and as though their lives were part of the Mass. The parish has even organized perpetual adoration with the participation of 200 parishioners so that all the hours of the week are covered.

All these signs of the faith are a confirmation of what I already knew. **Fr. Carmelo Barbera**, the parish priest, did his schooling at Medjugorje under the tutelage of Mary, for the Lord had granted him the grace to live in Medjugorje for 2 years. The following interview of Fr. Carmelo helps us better understand the fruits of Our Lady’s apparitions at Medjugorje; fruits which bring the grace of God to many other souls so that they too can be bearers of the fruits of conversion and salvation.

Padre Arpad Csapai

Fr. Carmelo interviewed

“A Eucharistic Parish”

Fr. Carmelo, you spent two years in Medjugorje. How did you get this opportunity, and what does it mean for you now?

It was definitely a call by Our Lady, and it **was through a small article precisely in the Echo of Mary** which said there wasn’t an Italian priest in Medjugorje to look after the Italian pilgrims. I took this as a personal call, and I asked Our Lady to provide a ticket to get there and a place to stay as a sign that it really was for me. Not long after this, whilst having dinner with friends, one of them said he had an extra ticket to go to Medjugorje and that he wanted to give it to someone... Then, at Medjugorje I asked Fr. Slavko about it and he confirmed that Our Lady had called me to stay there so I could better comprehend God’s plans.

I spent nearly two years in Medjugorje (1995-97), dedicating my time to the Italian and French-speaking pilgrims, celebrating the Eucharist and especially confessing which took up more time. I would confess up to 8 and 10 hours a day, and it was here that I witnessed the grace of God most powerfully, most visibly and most incredibly. I was in the middle of this grace; it seemed so normal, yet it wasn’t normal. Only the grace of God can make impossible things possible.

After this experience, is Our Lady’s guidance important for you?

When I left Medjugorje I particularly asked Our Lady to accompany me, reminding her that she had said: “I shall always be with you.” I consecrated myself to her, but more than a formula it was as though I had passed through her motherly womb at Medjugorje and was reborn. I was given a new style of life, a new way of thinking, and especially a new way of being: of being a man, a Christian and a priest.

That’s why I consecrated to her my every step, my every work, my every deed and pastoral activity and everything that the Lord would have prepared for me in the future. I am sure that Mary walks ahead of me, preparing everything, because everything belongs to her. Nothing that I have is mine; it is all hers: everything that I am and that I have. This state of regeneration has led me to a new life which wasn’t always understood by those who should have understood.

I began to live the “five pebbles” that Our Lady recommends, and they have fortified my priesthood. When I came back the Bishop entrusted me with a little mountain parish at Vigliatore (province of Messina) which didn’t have a resident priest. The people were used to seeing a priest only for Sunday celebrations. I continued to celebrate the Eucharist, to do adoration, to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours, as though it were a cathedral. My thought was this: “Lord, I’m a priest for You, for Your glory and for the salvation

of souls, whether they are present or not. I can't reduce my time spent with You or my love for You only because there aren't many people here present!" Gradually, the people began to come and to share this way of living the faith. I was letting myself be guided by Our Lady in living out the Gospel within the embrace of the Church. It is elementary that the parish should breathe with the lungs of the universal Church, with the Pope and the Bishops through obedience.

I noticed parishioners live the Mass intensely. It's what Our Lady said at Medjugorje: that a parish community can be renewed around the Eucharist. How did parishioners first respond?

We began with preparation for consecration to Mary. Gradually, the parish became more sensitive to the mysteries of God. After the consecration we received a great gift. In fact, we have had perpetual adoration for more than a year, day and night, week after week, month after month. It has been organized around turns of 1 hour per week. So Jesus remains exposed 24 hours a day with the certainty that someone will be present for adoration. Obviously, perpetual adoration came as a fruit of the celebration of the Eucharist; a Eucharist celebrated with attention, without looking at the time, but rather at the encounter with Jesus Who speaks in the Liturgy of the Word, Who gives Himself in the Eucharist... and in the need to continue the loving conversation with Him in adoration. It's a miracle! as there are only 2000 people in this parish, and I'm alone, without a minister of any kind.

You don't have a minister, but there are many people who help animate the Mass and moments of prayer...

A lot of help comes from the laypeople... for adoration, for the celebration of the Eucharist. But we also have a fraternity called "Little Flock of the Immaculate Mother of the Divine Mercy" the members of which are five sisters who decided to share a communal life; there are also some brothers and some families. These have decided to dedicate their lives totally to the Lord, and as such they are the yeast to the prayer of the parish community.

How was this born?

This fraternity came as a response, partly to God Who placed this call in my heart, and partly to those who desired living the Gospel in a more radical, evangelical way. When I came back to Italy people asked about my experience at Medjugorje, but I didn't know what to say as it was an experience that needed to be put into practice. Instead, I witnessed that I had entrusted myself wholly to the Blessed Mother, that I had returned to her womb and was born again. I proposed (to the parish) a 33-day preparation of consecration to the Most Holy Trinity through Mary. It is Mary who can help us discover that we are children of God, help us live in the heart of the Trinity, and thus, to offer up our lives to the Father for the

salvation of the world.

A vast movement called "Behold your Mother" was born. Many from all over Sicily have wanted to adhere to it. At the moment six thousand have consecrated themselves. Each lives his consecration in a different way; there are those for whom it is a mere act of devotion, and those who've made it a life-journey. Within this movement, "Behold your Mother," was born the "Little Flock" fraternity.

You mentioned the offering of self to the Father for the salvation of souls. What is your experience of this?

We feel that the Lord calls us to offer ourselves to Divine Mercy as a holocaust, a victim; not in a negative sense of suffering, but as a gift - the way Jesus offered Himself - and as a joyous, conscious gift, the way Mary did. It means to be a victim of love for the salvation of souls, and this can be realized in the celebration of the Eucharist, because we unite ourselves to Jesus Who is altar, victim and priest. As a priest I am powerfully aware that in the Eucharist I can reach out to the ends of the earth through uniting my self-offering to that of Jesus. But it is the same for each of us, for we are all called to offer ourselves as "*a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This is our spiritual worship,*" says St. Paul. It is to continually offer up to the Father the gift of Jesus' life, and the gift of our own life united to His. Then, in day-to-day living, it means to accept everything that the Lord will give us to live, without asking why, but knowing that everything comes from the Lord and that we are to give everything to Him under the action of grace, as a gift, precisely to implore Mercy and the second coming of Jesus.

Can you tell us a little about your priestly life, and this grace that is blossoming in and around you?

Through my priesthood I am truly united to the priesthood of Jesus, and it has a universal bearing. To be a priest means to bring men to God and God to men, and not just someone who officiates at the altar or in the confessional; but a service of thanksgiving and offering is rendered to God through the priesthood on behalf of mankind. Through the ministry of confession I take to God all the sufferings and problems of all mankind, of all times.

At Medjugorje Our Lady gave me to understand the greatness of the priestly ministry, especially in the sacrament of reconciliation. I had been worried because in the ministry of confession I hadn't noticed that people were being touched by the grace of forgiveness, but at Medjugorje I was given to see great miracles. People arrived, burdened by their sins; and even their faces were sad, stressed and harsh. During confession I saw their souls being revived, and their faces became more luminous. After one year I read that Our Lady had promised she would renew priests in the ministry of confession!

In spiritual direction it is important that a priest be father; that he be the image of God's fatherhood and motherhood

together, so that this father/mother dimension of the priest can bring healing to souls wounded by a human motherhood and fatherhood that don't reflect the divine fatherhood and motherhood. I strongly feel that these are the times in which God desires giving Himself to souls through Mary, the Church and the priestly ministry.

As a shepherd, what does your heart feel?

On one part I feel all the suffering of souls who live a life of sin, but I also see how many feel hurt by the Church, or rather, by men of the Church who may have refused them because of their sins. Jesus says that this is not a time for judging, but for mercy. Confessionals have become court houses instead of being places of mercy, forgiveness and healing. Not only at Medjugorje, but also here the Lord has placed me in touch with wounded souls who've distanced themselves from God because they felt judged by God and by the Church because of their irregular states of life, such as divorce and remarriage, or the deviated forms of sexuality of a lot of young people.

I strongly perceive this suffering. People come, let's say "by chance," but the Lord makes use of many things to make souls come into contact with the priestly ministry, and especially during celebrations and evangelization souls are given to experience the attraction of love.

I know because I went through it all myself. I experienced refusal; I thought I wasn't good enough for God's love. Then, the Lord made me touch my own nothingness and I felt I wasn't being judged but that He loved me the way I was. Then I understood that only divine love could give me new life if I surrendered myself to Him with complete trust. In those years my prayer was: *I give my life over to You...*

That was the beginning of my climb back out of the abyss of sin and wounds. It was the Lord who pulled me out. I am aware of my own wretchedness and that despite this I am loved. God uses me to bring His mercy to others. I thank the Lord for my negative experiences of sin, and for my wounds, for through these I came to know God's love, and I am able to understand souls and they feel understood. It is not a human thing, but rather, it is the heart of Jesus in my own heart that comprehends them; it is Jesus Himself that listens to them.

Priesthood thus reaches out to everyone; those you see and those you don't see. There is a universal dimension to priesthood that touches also the souls in Purgatory.

You have clearly been formed at the school of Mary...

I owe everything to her and I am ever more aware of the fact. Through Mary I discovered the true identity of Jesus, and the powerful action of the Holy Spirit in us. God entrusted Himself entirely to Mary to come into the world, so it is only normal that we should entrust ourselves to Mary to reach God. There is no other way.

(Interviewed by P. Arpad C.)

Life for sale

Life, procreation, maternity, free choice... The one-time sacredness of these themes has been branded by a sense of banality; so often are they brought up, treated with disdain and debased that people have lost their fear of treading on sacred ground. God, life's Source and greatest Advocate, has been removed from any debate or discussion on the matter. But life is a mystery and the fact that our Creator has granted us to be transmitters of life is an even greater mystery, worthy of our amazement and admiration, of our gratitude and joy.

Man, however, is not happy to just receive, for he also wants to possess; to hold power over the divine principle that characterizes every living creature. Aided by science that too often concentrates on its discoveries rather than on the common good, man wants to be master over life for love of self.

"Life cannot be trusted to the vote"

Mid June in Italy a referendum was held in an attempt to reverse laws that restrict "medically assisted procreation," or IVF; and all of a sudden everyone became experts: politicians, sociologist, journalists, even entertainers. Some were in favour, and some against a law that limits excessive production of embryos to be implanted in the wombs of women who want children at all costs.

The mass media teemed with medical and biological expressions, and smacked with the arrogance of people who think they know more than anybody else. No doubt, all were motivated by good faith in what they believed to be the truth. But that's the point: where was the truth? or rather: what deceiving ploys were being used to impede people from seeing the true Good? Definitely many, and not easy to enumerate. On the other hand it doesn't take much to understand who was behind this manoeuvre to gain control of the mystery of life. There is only one who hates life more than anything else because life is the highest expression of God: Satan, God's eternal enemy. Satan detests life because one day when he arrogantly tried to possess the keys he automatically shut the doors on himself, dragging many others with him into the abyss of perennial death. Since then he wants to destroy life, in all its forms, no matter the age.

At present it is the turn of embryos who are being exterminated by the billions. Once conceived they are denied the right of a loving womb where they can grow, develop and be born into the world. Instead they are eliminated, or transformed into guinea pigs for experiments, or imprisoned in a cell of ice!

What about their souls? Each embryo receives a soul at conception – but who's thinking about their souls? Are we aware that once created the soul is immortal? What's happening to all these souls made to undergo selective procedures in totally artificial environments? How do they feel? But does anyone

really care how they feel, or do we care only about the unrestrained desire of couples who sadly can't have children and are disposed to undergo even humiliating therapy for the sake of experiencing the joy of becoming parents?

Of course, **it's a fundamental right** – that of wanting to become parents – even vital. It certainly isn't the holy yearning for motherhood that is being questioned here, but the pretence to "order" life according to tastes and whims, and the indifference that is dished out to defenceless souls who can't speak for themselves. And to think that their destiny was entrusted to a majority vote in a referendum!

The Church spoke out; she didn't keep silent, but urged Italians not even to go and vote, since abstention was to say no one has the right to manipulate the life of someone else!

The slogan launched by the Catholic majority prior to the vote was: "*La Vita non si Vota*" (which runs something like: Life cannot be trusted to the vote). Life is a gift of God, not something that depends on the outcome of a referendum after months and months of subtle and not so subtle propaganda which intended confusing and bending minds to accept the concept that death is life!

Pope Benedict XVI said recently at a Diocesan Convention in Rome: "Even in the begetting of children marriage reflects its divine model, God's love for man. In man and woman, fatherhood and motherhood, like the body and like love, cannot be limited to the biological: life is entirely given only when, by birth, love and meaning are also given, which make it possible to say yes to this life. From this point it becomes clear how contrary to human love, to the profound vocation of the man and the woman, are the systematic closure of a union to the gift of life and even more, the suppression or manipulation of newborn life."

Thanks to scientific contribution the lives of us all have been bettered, particularly sufferers of certain penalizing sicknesses. It is our duty to support scientific research with prayer, so it may be illuminated by God's wisdom. After all, He is the maker of our bodies, and who better than Him is able to help us?

Stefania Consoli

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Benedict XVI "Mary, a living tabernacle"

"In this special Year of the Eucharist Mary helps us appreciate more and more the great sacrament of the Eucharist." Meditating the mystery of the Visitation, the Pope said: "In a way we can say - and all the more in this Year of the Eucharist - **that her journey was the first ever 'Eucharistic procession.'** The living tabernacle of God made man, Mary is the Ark of the Covenant in which the Lord visited and redeemed his people. The presence of Jesus fills her with the Holy Spirit. Dear brothers and sisters let us follow and imitate Mary, a profoundly Eucharistic soul and our whole life will be a Magnificat."

FROM THE MAIL

+ **Theresia A. Missanga, Eritrea:** "On behalf of the Parish Priest and the Children's Rosary group I thank you for the Echo of Mary which is a sweet smelling fragrance to our hearts and community. Thanks also because we have received donations of rosary beads, etc., which we see as an answer from our Blessed Mother." (Cathedral BVM Rosary, POB 1263, Asmara, Eritrea, Africa)

+ **Donaldson Andemario, Ghana:** Our sincere thanks and gratitude for the gifts and prayers for our Medjugorje prayer group. During our meetings we pray for peace. Thanks to your appeal we received Rosary beads from donors in Ireland and China. We are grateful to them and ask you to thank God for them on our behalf. By God's grace on June 18 I shall take my vows in the Religious life... I beg your prayers.

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May the Lord, God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
bless us. Amen.

don Alberto

3 July 2005 - St. Thomas the Apostle