



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace 128

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Message of 25 May 1996:

Dear Children, I wish to thank you today for the prayers and sacrifices you have offered in this month consecrated to me. My children, I desire that also all of you be active in this time which through me is tied to Heaven in a special way. Pray to understand that all of you must collaborate with your life and with your example in the work of salvation. Dear children, I desire for men to convert and for them to see me and my Son Jesus in you. I shall intercede for you and help you to become light. Help the others, for it is through helping them that your soul will find salvation. Thank you for responding to my call.

"To See Jesus and I in You to Convert and be Saved"

The messages continue to enhance Mary's role in the work of salvation. God, in fact, gave Her the power for "this time" and She continues to ask for our collaboration. This is the time in which heaven is tied to us in a special way because of Mary's presence here - which has lasted 15 years - and for Her other manifestations all over the world to which She Herself made mention in a message. This is a great gift which we must take advantage of. Above all, with delicacy and motherly indulgence, Mary thanks all those who have helped Her with their prayers and sacrifices during May: the month con-secrated to Her (with the month of Oct. it is said to be Hers).

There has been a return, at least in some parts, to the practice of reciting the Rosary with the family and neighbours at the end of the day during these months. Mary wants to urge us to continue and to make us see how necessary and fruitful our collaboration is, and it is no less gratifying for us to work with such a wonderful and caring mother. Mary also points out how we should collaborate: with your life and your example in the work of salvation of mankind. That means we must be instruments in her hands (5 March 1994). This is not transmitting a doctrine or religious practice or knowing how to programme and organize. Neither is it working in the line of religious propaganda.

True apostolate is your life: you cannot do good if you are not good; you cannot spread peace if you do not have peace. Our Lady desires distracting us from a certain activism and from worldly ways of doing things. It is not through pressuring others with our 'efficiency' that they convert, which could end up

annoying them. If we think we can be materially present everywhere, we are way off the track. I desire for men to convert... Mary, like God, ardently desires for all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1Tim 2:4).

How can their conversion come about? Through seeing me and my Son in you. Mary did not say: be good or be better; She said for us to have 'Jesus and Mary' in us, for it is the power of holiness that moves souls. Mary, in fact, continues to call us to holiness, not to half measures. We are called to a perfect unity with Jesus and among ourselves which will convince others: so the world may believe that You sent me. This is what men want to see; they are not led on by words.

When the pilgrims were asked what they went to see in Ars they replied: "We saw God in a man." Mary also says: I will help you to become light. Light is fullness of the truth in a life which mirrors the Gospel teachings (and thus also mirrors complete joy and true peace) and this is what we must decide for if we desire being Mary's presence and true helpers, or as She said in Her previous message: Her witnesses. This means being salt in the earth and light in the world, for the fruit of Mary's presence in us is light and peace. She is the mother of Wisdom which is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits. (cf. Jas 3:17-18). We will thus manifest Her pureness, goodness and peace, and through us She will draw to Herself many wayward hearts. The salvation of others depends on us and our conversion. If we help others by doing as Mary asks we will save also ourselves. Also the Scriptures tell us: Whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins (Jas 5:20).

Fr. Angelo

Message of 25 June 1996

Dear Children, I thank you today for all the sacrifices you have offered me over these days. I invite you, my children, to open yourselves up to me and decide for conversion. Your hearts, dear children, are not completely open to me and for this I am inviting you again to be open to prayer so that, in prayer, the Holy Spirit may help you and your hearts can become hearts of flesh and not hearts of stone. Dear children, thank you for responding to my call, and for having decided to walk with me towards holiness.

"Open yourselves up to me and decide for conversion"

On this 15th anniversary Mary reminds us why She came, though Her expressions have a new sound to them. In thanking us again for all the sacrifices offered up to Her over these days, perhaps She was considering the difficulties met by the pilgrims to come here, but not only. She thanks each of us for even the smallest token of love we have offered Her, because Mary wants to teach us to be thankful. Being thankful means recognizing people for what they are and for the good they do to others.

This is creating conditions for peace. The same goes for God: to be at peace with God, we must know how to recognize everything that He gave us. We tend to see only the negative things and forget the good things. If we are able to find the reasons to be thankful we will be happy, with ourselves and with others. A therapist with 20 years of experience, who recently became a priest, said to me in Medj.: "Gratitude is the best medicine for preventing depression and aggressiveness. Our Lady teaches people to open their

eyes and be thankful for everything in us which is good." Our Lady also says thank you because She always sees something good in us, even though we are not perfect. To have peace we must open our eyes and see what others give us and what God gives us, in particular through Mary's presence here. With the delicacy of a mother, Mary tells us again to open ourselves to Her and decide for conversion. Being open means listening to what She tells us and obeying Her. Whoever does not listen does not want to obey, so he is not open. The invitation to be open is meant for all. It is with prayer that we can open up our hearts. We must remain in silence and ask ourselves: what it is that closes me to God's will? What is it that impedes me from opening up to the Lord in the presence of Mary and Her invitations? If we do open ourselves, conversion will enter our hearts. This is Her main message. To decide for conversion means to decide to fight evil and grow in good. Mary has been asking us to convert for 15 years. It is the same invitation contained in the Gospel. If we are not open, we are being asked to open ourselves up to Her now with prayer. We should search our consciences now to see how we have so far responded to the message on prayer. We all have something to learn. If you have not yet begun to pray and you believe in the apparitions you should now start praying. If you have already started to pray, ask yourself if your prayer has brought about anything good in you. You can pray out of duty, and you can pray to find God. If you pray only out of duty, then you are either already tired [of it], or you will tire soon. Praying is searching for God so as to be with Him. Opening ourselves up to prayer means also opening ourselves up to the means which help us meet the Lord. Only the Holy Spirit, however, can help us. So your hearts may become hearts of flesh and not hearts of stone. This is a promise from the Scriptures: I will take your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ez 36:26). We are being invited to look into our hearts to see if there are any bad feelings such as jealousy, envy, or pride, which would harden our hearts. It is a heart of flesh which remains open to good. Our Lady is telling us that we need to work our hearts just as a farmer works the land if we want it to be fertile and open. That means a radical fight against evil, to uproot everything that is not good so as to create space for what is good. Our Lady does not forget to thank us, but this time She adds: for having decided to walk with me towards holiness. Her great desire for us to make this decision has prompted Her to suppose it, and perhaps it will be incentive to us to make this decision if we have not already done so. We are, in fact, being invited to consecrate ourselves totally to Her Immaculate Heart.

(Adapted from Fr. Slavko's comment)

Another cold shower for Medjugorje?

Shortly before the 15th anniversary and after a lengthy silence (the duration of the war) the media gave news of a letter which the secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Msgr. Bertone, sent to French Bishop, Msgr. Taverdet who had asked for clarifications on Medjugorje. The letter, dated 6 June 1996, contained nothing new but simply repeated what has been said from the beginning: i.e., that no official pilgrimages can be organized (a pilgrimage organized by a bishop would be an official one) [so other pilgrimages are not excluded. Ed.'s note].

The letter also confirmed the latest conclusions made by the Yugoslav Episcopal Conference on 10 April 1991. The letter contained no other references. Nothing new then, and no limit to the pilgrimages. Many saw in this episode a fairly obvious attempt by the same old people to hinder Medjugorje now that the number of pilgrims is back on the rise. It was to be expected. The astute enemy knows when to strike, but Mary the Victor will get the better of him and as usual his attacks against Medjugorje will end up favouring people's interest in the Shrine. After the false alarms, however, the declaration in Avvenire by

the Vatican's spokesman, Joaquin Navarro Valls, was providential.

He said: "There is no new fact with regards to Medjugorje. It is dutiful in these cases to respect the competence of the local episcopal body which declared: 'On the basis of investigations conducted to date it is not possible to affirm that it is a case of apparitions or supernatural revelations. None-theless, the presence of the many faithful from various parts [of the world] in Medjugorje demands pastoral attention and care, in particular by the diocesan bishop and by the other bishops to ensure the promotion of a correct devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as wants Church teachings. All the same, when placed before any presumed supernatural phenomena, it is necessary to continue with investigations, reflections and prayer till the time a definitive announcement is made.' "

Had they accepted the Queen of Peace ...

No one expects official approval for Medjugorje; it's not even an easy thing to get these days - but a bit of peace would have been good, especially for those who have found the true life there, or who undergo sacrifices in the quest for it. It is true that trials test our conversion and purify our faith, but it is a grave responsibility, with the general disorientation, to subtract from the people the extraordinary gifts deriving from God's mercy, especially when these arise from such sensational fruits.

In fact, Mary opened a school and a fount of grace so as to bring back lost Christians to faith in Jesus and the supernatural, to check Satan's attacks. However, Mary was hindered by those who possess the gift which should have enabled them to recognize and accept Her. But they rejected the Queen of Peace. She had come ten years before (as in Kibeho) to call us back to God and avoid the war. We know the disastrous effects of this refusal. Just as the Bishop of Split, now Bishop Emeritus, had said: 'If the Bishops of the former Yugoslavia had accepted and welcomed the Queen of Peace and let the people venerate Her, the war could have been avoided' (Echo 107). The war came, and Mary roused in Her children a gigantic movement of charity which saved entire populations.

The aid was received, but care was taken not to acknowledge the Heavenly Benefactress. The sudden withdrawal in Krajina by the powerful Serb army which could have gone on fighting for years, brought a stop to the hostilities in a matter of days (this occurred on the 5th August 1995: feast of Mary's Nativity). Thus, the roads were opened again for the pilgrims. However, those who oppose Medjugorje continue trying to discourage pilgrims. Those with hardened hearts and unseeing eyes will never understand the signs of heaven. To the contrary, they create obstacles for them.

It is for this that we accept the law of the Cross, which is wisdom and power of God for all who believe (cf. 1Co) and why our hearts remain meek and humble all the time keeping watch. Our strength to believe comes from our inner experience which the Holy Spirit granted us in Medjugorje and from Christ's Vicar who has expressed many times his favour, even though in private meetings, and from the positive attitudes of many bishops.

The Pope in central Europe He boldly offers the Truth

This Pope's genius is in saying things that go against the current, but which people immediately recognize as being truthful. In his voyages the Holy Father offers Christ's message in the place of the messages proposed by society. He is animated by an incredible inner energy which allows him to always plan for the future, including plans for the third millennium. In his recent trips to Slovenia and Germany

his concern for Europe was evident. In Slovenia the Pope said that Europe is but a step away from slipping into a precipice lying as it is between the culture of death and the culture of life. He spoke of the void created by the ideologies and the need for Europe to reawaken to the memory of its Christian roots. In his words: "Either man considers himself created by God, from Whom he receives the freedom that opens up immense possibilities to him but at the same time makes specific demands on him, or he is absolutely autonomous, free, unrestrained by law, and abandoned to every sort of impulse, imprisoning himself in hedonism and narcissism. ... With the collapse of the great ideologies man is tempted to abandon himself to a dangerous drift of scepticism marked by fatigue and frustration... and to open himself up to superstition and to sorcery. Many young people and adults let themselves fall into the lures of the occult and look to the stars, to sorcerers and to sects for indications of their destiny and a place to escape from their inner void. When man doesn't believe in God, he doesn't then believe in nothing, but he believes in everything..."

In Germany (21-23 June) the Pope visited PADERBORN and here he spoke on the unity of the continent which, he said, cannot be built on a community whose interests are only material. It must be built on a common belief in the values, the cultural inheritance and the solidarity of spirits and hearts. Without the Christian faith, he continued, Europe would be without a soul. This unity must go beyond national and ideological boundaries, beyond frontiers, so that the wealthy peoples will share their goods with those in need.

In BERLIN he beatified the martyrs Bernhard Lichtenberg and Karl Leisner who died for their faith because they opposed nazism. Though many lay people and priests were opposed to Hitler's regime, there were too few of them, the Pope said. He therefore urged the Church in Germany to go against the current which society sets.

"Today, Christians must put up resistance, within and against this ultra-materialistic society." There is no other way, he pointed out, that they can come back into possession of their basic task which is the new evangelization. For this we must be united, all together: Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants. The Holy Father stressed that evangelization and ecumenism are joined by tight bonds. In 1980 during the Holy Father's first voyage to Germany, he acknowledged the fault of the clergy which caused the unhappy division among Christians. In this voyage he spoke of the need to be more just with regards to Luther (the German reformer) who, it seems, did not desire destroying the unity or creating another Church, but wanted the reform of the one Catholic Church...

At BRANDENBURG GATE the Pope re-evoked historical events and won over the city of Berlin with his words of hope and trust. He reminded them how man is called by God to be free and that freedom cannot be such without truth, solidarity, sacrifice and love.

And he announced Christ to the people: "I announce to all of you who listen to me that the fullness and completeness of this freedom has a name. This name is Jesus Christ. He is the one who said of himself: I am the door. In Him man finds access to the fullness of liberty because He drives away the darkness from the hearts of men, and reveals to them the truth. He became our brother and for our love he gave up his life. In doing so he freed us from sin and death.

Through his sacrifice we learn to see his face in the faces of our brothers and sisters. He shows us the face of the Father and he becomes the bond of love for us all. Christ is our Saviour, our freedom. The day is coming to a close, but in our hearts the light which allowed us to rejoice today still shines. I invite you most warmly to a new encounter in the Eternal City for the great Jubilee of the year 2000.

God bless Berlin. God protect Germany." During the Angelus, the Pope announced a new synod for Europe in preparation of the great Jubilee. He is able to stand up to great fatigue: when in Paderborn he

rose at 5.30, flew to Berlin and departed in the evening after a day's work, arriving in Rome at 11 pm.

Bishop of Assisi on apparitions - Msgr. Sergio Goretti wrote in his pastoral letter for the 150th anniversary of La Salette: "Mary, from beneath the Cross, became the new woman and She brought redemption to the world... Today much is said about apparitions. Some refuse them, saying it is a question of principle. These are people who deny God and therefore deny the existence of supernatural phenomena.

Others, instead, chase after signs in an exaggerated and superficial manner, going as far as accusing those who choose to remain prudent of having little faith. The Church knows that God is above everything and everyone and that no limit can be placed on His omnipotent action. He can intervene directly or indirectly through His messengers and in particular through Mary Who is Mother of man." ... "The pages of the Holy Scripture are full of extraordinary interventions by God.

When God intervenes, the Church rejoices because she sees in [His intervention] yet a further manifestation of the love and attention that He has for man. Therefore, the Church is not against apparitions, even though before she will pronounce herself on their reliability she will examine them carefully with the help of theology and human sciences..."

Eucharist, Mary, Mission for Christian reawakening

The Pope does not let an occasion slip by to call back to the essential God's people who are often lured away from the evangelical way. It was for the Pope's Eucharistic piety that emphasis was placed on the 750th anniversary of the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi which took place in Liège, Belgium, in 1246. In 1264 it was extended to the universal Church following the miracle of Bolsen: a host began bleeding as a priest who doubted was consecrating it.

The Pope's discourse reflected the way he lives his ministry through continual union with Jesus in the Eucharist, and how this union can bring each Christian to a full and fruitful life.

Adore body of Christ to be transformed in Him

He called the Eucharist the greatest of Jesus' miracles and incomparable comfort for the disciples in His absence. In it Jesus continues to offer Himself for and with us. The Holy Father called the Eucharistic Presence the spiritual centre of the Church. "Through contemplating it communion with the Lord is prolonged and we are able to encounter Christ, true God and true Man; we let ourselves be looked at by Him and we experience His presence.

When we contemplate Him in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar, Christ draws closer to us and becomes intimately part of us, more so than ourselves; He makes us participate in His divine life through a transforming union which, through the Holy Spirit, opens the door which leads to the Father... Just as the Scripture tells us, Jesus spent whole nights in prayer, especially when He had important decisions to make. In prayer, through an act of filial trust, and in the imitation of his Teacher and Lord, a Christian opens his heart and his hands to receive God's gift and thanks Him for His favours.

It is wonderful to remain with Christ, and with our heads leaning on Christ's breast like the beloved disciple, be touched by the infinite love of His heart. We must learn to know Jesus better, Who gave Himself totally, through the various mysteries of His divine and human life, so we may become disciples and even part of the wonderful impetus of self-giving for the glory of God and the salvation of the world...

We are invited to follow His teachings; to be shaped in Him; to allow the Spirit to act in us so we can fulfil the mission He entrusted us with. In particular, Christ's love urges us to work unceasingly for the unity of the Church and for the announcement of the Gospel to the ends of the earth, at the service of our fellow men. Divine intimacy with Christ, in the silence of contemplation, does not withdraw us from our fellow men, but to the contrary, it makes us more attentive and open to their joys and anxieties and opens the heart up to worldly dimensions.

It makes us feel more responsible for our fellow men, especially the littlest of these who are particularly dear to the Lord. Through adoration the Christian mysteriously contributes to the radical transformation of the world and to the spreading of the Gospel. Each person who prays to the Lord drags behind himself all the world and raises it up to God. Those who encounter the Lord therefore do a noteworthy service. They present to Christ all those who do not know Him or who are far from Him and keep watch before Him in their name... I therefore exhort Christians to pay regular visits to Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar because we are all called to remain in God's presence...

May the faithful strengthen their hope through the discovery that suffering and despair can be transfigured with Christ, for "with Him we have already passed from death to life."

To conclude, the Holy Father invited priests and guides to "intensify their efforts to teach the young generations the sense and value of adoration and Eucharistic devotion.

How can young people know the Lord if they are not introduced to the mystery of His presence? [Through adoration] He will be able to accompany them in their spiritual and physical growth and in the testimony that they will have to give Him" - and they will perceive the radical call to follow Him.

Mary's Tears: boundless mercy

Neither did the Holy Father let the 150th anniversary of the apparitions in La Salette go unnoticed. It was his desire to remind the Christian peoples of Our Lady's impassioned calls and of the message of Mercy.

In a letter to the Bishop of Grenoble he wrote: "I desire associating myself to the pilgrims who venerate 'Our Lady, Reconciler of sinners.' Here in La Salette, the Mother of our Saviour and of men, Mother full of love, who accompanies each of us on our pilgrimage of life, revealed to the world through the two children, Melania and Maximino, Her sadness for the moral evil of humanity.

Her tears help us to better understand the gravity of sin, for the refusal of God, but also the great and faithful love Her Son has for men.

The heart of Jesus the Redeemer bleeds for those who refuse His love... The Virgin, Who appeared with Her Crucified Son, makes us understand that She wants to help Her children who are immersed in trials, and She suffers to see that they walk away from Christ's Church, and neglect or even refuse God's presence in their lives. Mary's message goes beyond the manifestation of Her sorrow with Her tears. The Virgin, with the fondness of a mother, calls us to Her, inviting us to do penance, to persevere in prayer and, in particular, to respect and sanctify Sundays.

She also expressed Her hope that the message would be spread to all people through the witness of the two children. And so it was. Pilgrims will come and many will convert.

Mary appeared in a light that recalls the splendour of the transfigured humanity of the Risen Jesus. La Salette is a message of hope, founded on the intercession of Mary, Mother of all men. The wounds and the evil in the world, though great, and not irreparable.

The night of sin is overcome by the luminous power of the divine mercy. Human suffering, when accepted and offered, can become a means of purification and salvation.

For those who walk humbly in the Lord's way, the arm of Mary's Son will not condemn but will grasp the

hand reaching up to Him in a request for pity and will make those sinners reconciled by the grace of the Cross enter into the new life...

A true missionary is he who lives a saintly life

In perfect harmony with the message of the 25th May in which Mary asked for our collaboration, that men may convert by seeing Her and Her Son in us, the Pope prepares us for the 70th Missionary Day by asking us to "be testimonies, to radiate the living Christ, through the intercession and protection of Mary who is the star of evangelization.

Christ says to today's baptised: are you my testimonies? Each person is invited to look into his heart and ask himself sincerely: do I give testimony to the Lord as He is asking of me? Is my faith strong, serene and joyful, or is my witness one of a weak Christian deformed by compromises and adjustments? What is a Christian? A Christian is a person who has been 'conquered' by Christ and who desires that everyone come to know and love Him. ... How many times during my apostolic voyages have I seen the crops ready to harvest and have had to listen to the words: there are not enough workers! The mission is a precise indicator of our faith in Christ. Faith and mission go hand in hand.

The more our faith is strong and deep, the more one feels the need to communicate it to others. If, on the other hand, our faith is weak, also the missionary impetus weakens and it loses vigour and the capacity to testify.

History speaks for itself! The loss of vitality in the missionary impetus has always been the symptom of a faith crisis. The true missionary is he who lives a saintly life... Every missionary is truly such only if commits himself to becoming holy...

There is need of new zeal for holiness among the missionaries and in all Christian communities, and in particular among those who work closely with the missionaries.

It must be added, though, that there is no mission without Cross; without cross there is no authentic witness.

The Cross cannot be removed from the mission; the cross qualifies the mission." The slaying of the seven Trappist monks in Algeria is still vivid in our minds.

With regards to this, the Pope said; "each year we are offered the heroic witness of new martyrs who shed their blood for their faith to the Lord and to their fellow men..." (Ed. team)

* **The Pope on Mary's Immaculate Conception.** Mary's sinless life, explained with biblical and dogmatic definitions, has been the subject of the Holy Father's latest catecheses at the General Audiences in the Vatican. "It is the offspring of the woman who will defeat evil," the Pope untirelessly repeats.

* **UBI PETRUS** (... ibi Ecclesia) is a movement of fidelity to the Vicar of Christ (inspired by fidelity to Mary) and comes with good timing given the actual confusion and disbanding by the faithful. It has been promoted by the publishers of Medj. bulletins in Milan and Genoa, to spread and promote faithfulness to the Pope's magisterium and to defend the Catholic faith.

* **"Offer pardon, receive peace"** is the theme which the Pope has chosen for the 30th World Peace Day (1 Jan. 1997).

* **1,200 priests on pilgrimage to Fatima** for a spiritual retreat (18-20 June). The priests came from various parts of the world. This was the first international meeting in the history of the clergy and also the first stop-over in a great priestly pilgrimage. It was promoted to respond to the Pope's appeal to prepare for the great Jubilee. After Fatima the pilgrimage will go to the Ivory Coast in 1997, Guadalupe

in 1998 and Jerusalem in 1999, to conclude in Rome in the year 2000.

* **"You will be persecuted."** In many of the Chinese provinces, including a large zone around and south of Beijing, the unofficial, or clandestine Church is still being persecuted. Bishops and priests are arrested and the faithful pressured or stopped from practising their faith, and their buildings are destroyed or confiscated. In a recent article in *Avvenire* a long list is given with the various forms of suppression. The regime is worried for the continued increase in the number of believers, who are not only Catholic. Also the official patriotic Church, though an instrument used to control the clandestine Church, is on the list of suspected betrayers. Let us not forget our brothers and sisters who are put on the cross for their faith.

* **Pilgrim Madonna in France** - Since the 8th September 1995, 108 statues and icons of the Virgin Mary, with a model of Christ's face from the Holy Shroud and the Gospel opened on the page of the wedding feast in Cana, have criss-crossed France in a pilgrimage of prayer. During this time the Marian devotion has been reawakened in all of France. Every day more than 100 prayer vigils are held around the Virgin, in churches, communities, families and even in county halls and the such, that Mary may prepare hearts for Jesus' 2000th birthday. At each vigil the faithful consecrate the Church and themselves to Jesus through Mary's Immaculate Heart (Mary's request at Fatima) and the Rosary and other liturgical prayers are recited. Testimonies of reconciliations and conversions are countless. The pilgrimage will depart Rome on the 7th October 1996 and will criss-cross Europe and the world till its planned arrival in Bethlehem for Christmas of the year 2000. For information contact the organizers: La Vierge Pélerine (NDF), O. Bonnassies 71, rue du Village, F-91530 Le-Val-St-Germain, France.

News from the blessed land

Medjugorje miracle is within you, not outside of you

It is a great thing to be in Medjugorje and every day see miracles in people's hearts. This week Fr. Jozo told a group: "In Medjugorje the miracle is not so much in Our Lady's apparitions, nor in the words which She speaks to us, but in the pilgrim's reply who accepts to change his heart and life. That is the great miracle! Take St. Francis: the miracle was not in the fact that Jesus spoke to him, but in the fact that he gave up everything to become poor in everything. In the Gospel we read of the rich young man who was called by Jesus. The miracle wasn't that he saw Christ and heard His call; it would have been in his response, had he responded. But he preferred his riches to Jesus. That is a miracle which did not occur. In Medjugorje a pilgrim can decide to see a miracle or not. It is not a miracle for God to talk; it is normal. In Medjugorje it is the pilgrim who decides if a miracle will occur or not. All he has to do is open his heart to respond to the call.

* Mirjana miscarried her third child which would have been due at Christmas. Now she is left with the sorrow to offer to God, which she knows is not vain. Also this will help Mary's plans to come about. [Jakov and his wife Annalisa are expecting their second child, due in September. Jakov said: "My wife has settled down well in Medjugorje (she attends the Italian Mass daily) and when we are in Italy she asks when we will be returning home to Medjugorje."]

* Most important people in Medjugorje - The Municipality of Citluk invited important people to Medjugorje for the Music Festival. These included President Tudjman, the King of Spain and others. For

the Blessed Virgin, however, each of us are very important. One evening a Croatian pilgrim told me: "There were important politicians here today. My mother was also here. She came on foot from a village which lies 10 km away. She's 80 years old and she did it to honour Our Lady." These are the real VIP's in Medjugorje.

* Anna, who received the grace of her conversion and physical healing at Easter, returned for ten days to help the pilgrims. She told how her doctor did not believe she was healed until he had examined her, saying that it was the effect of positive thinking. However, upon examining her he exclaimed: "I cannot explain this!" More than her physical healing, it is her conversion and her joy to belong to Mary that surprises everyone.

* Together again after 20 years - An Italian divorcee had not seen her husband for 20 years. It happened that they were both in Medjugorje at the same time, without knowing it. The two separate groups climbed Krizevac the same day. At the top, ex-husband and wife saw each other and began to talk. They also prayed together ... and they decided to return together. It is one of the victories of Our Lady who works tirelessly for the unity of the families.

* Vicka to a journalist - Vicka was in Split. When a journalist in her presence found out who she was, he openly declared that he did not believe in God. "My grandmother," he said, "believed in eternal life, but for me it's all a fable." Perhaps he was expecting some type of reproval, but Vicka replied: "You are free to go your own way. I can't say anything but the truth. God exists. There is eternal life. Reincarnation does not exist. But you are free not to believe. Your grandmother was right to believe in eternal life, but if you decide differently, that is your choice. I have told you the truth." The journalist was so struck by Vicka that he said: "Oh, I'll come to Medjugorje soon." This episode reminds me of Bernadette from Lourdes who used to say: "It is not my duty to make you believe, but to tell you the truth." (Sr. Emmanuel's diary)

* After the seminars of prayer and fasting held at Easter and at the end of May in the Domus Pacis retreat house, the organization named HELP, which takes care of abandoned children in Split, began a course of spiritual exercises in Medjugorje for the children. The Franciscan nuns also organized ten courses for approximately 400 children from the parishes in Herzegovina.

* The annual pilgrimage for Croatian military to the Shrine of Medj. took place on the first Saturday of June to thank Mary for Her love and attention during the past events. Many soldiers from other countries present in Bosnia joined them this year.

* "It is a special place" - Princess Ingrid Frankopan Subic was recently in Medj. She is a descendent of the historical Croatian family, a distinguished person in the Church and a lettered woman who has taught in various European universities. She is also a mother of five children who attend Mass daily. During her visit she said: "This is truly a prophetic place. Fifteen years ago Our Lady asked us to pray for peace and 13 years ago the Holy Father asked me to write a book on the rights of war. At the time I thought it was strange, but not anymore. It is a miracle that Croatia gained its independence. Without a doubt it is fruit of Mary's intercession, and of Card. Stepinac and of course the many young men who gave their lives to free their homeland from atheism. Our Lady saved us and it is a great honour to have Her among us. After visiting Croatia the Holy Father said: "I desire returning to your holy places..." I egoistically thought of Trsat where the Holy House of Nazareth rested on its journey to Loreto, on the land which belongs to my family, but now I understand that he had meant above all Medjugorje." Press Bulletin

LATEST NEWS: Our Lady appeared to Ivanka for the Anniversary, as She had promised. Ivanka was in her home and it lasted 7 minutes. Ivanka said it was the most wonderful and joyful apparition that she has ever had. Our Lady thanked us for the prayer and love with which we have responded to Her call and said She desires that each of our days be lived in the same prayer and love. Above all, Mary invited us to pray for those whom Satan keeps in his clutch.

Praised be Jesus and Mary! Today and always! was St. Alphonsus' greeting, whom we wish to recall on the 300th anniversary of his birth.

Medjugorje, one big house of prayer

Among the various communities born from the spirit of Medjugorje there is also a special call for Total Offering Souls which the Blessed Virgin entrusted to the guidance of Fr. Tomislav Vlastic in 1986. The call to offer one's life to Jesus through the Immaculate Heart of Mary is a fruit of the Medjugorje prayer group which Our Lady guided through the visionary Jelena Vlastic.

This fruit assumed a concrete form with the birth of the community Kraljice Mira, potpuno tvoji - po Mariji k Isusu (Queen of Peace, all yours, to Jesus through Mary) with 50 members including postulants, novices and professed religious. In Medjugorje the white house behind the church provides a home for aspiring vocations of various nationalities where they are introduced to the rhythms of community life. The community has three other houses in Italy. Lay people who desire making a similar offering gather in groups to pray, and the community provides spiritual nourishment for these through prayer meetings, conferences, audiocassettes, leaflets and periodicals.

Aid to Medjugorje by river

The Association entitled "Queen of Peace, All Yours," is made up of lay members who are spiritually united to Fr. Tomislav's community. Their work committee to organize aid for the community house in Medjugorje thought up the idea of transporting material by river. They load at the port in Cremona; the ship goes down the river Po into the Adriatic sea, then up the river Neretva as far as Metkovic which is only 30 km from Medjugorje. The advantages are that a ship can carry about 30 lorries at a much lower cost, plus the long lines and waits at customs, etc. is avoided.

Vicka in Rome - Vicka accompanied Sr. Cornelia to Rome for a delicate eye operation (which was successful). During the week they spent in Rome, Vicka visited the parish of SS. Redentore where a prayer meeting was organized during which Our Lady appeared to Vicka. Our Lady was joyful, Vicka said, and She greeted the people with: "Praised be Jesus Christ." Vicka continued: "During Our Lady's presence I offered up prayers for all of you and gave Her the list of participants in Adoration organized by Centro Maria. Our Lady said: 'Dear children, there is much I would like to tell you, but I cannot say anything else now because you are still far from living my messages. I desire that you put the messages I have given you so far into practice, then I will be able to give you new ones.' She prayed over us saying: 'I bless you with a special motherly blessing for you to take to your families.' " (Centro Maria, Rome)

* Travelling to Medjugorje - With things back to normal, the number of pilgrims continues to grow. They come from all over the world by air to the Split airport and by sea on the Ancona - Split ferry (ph. 071-202217; fax: 071-202618). A bus takes them from Split to Medjugorje. By land they can take the coast as far as Makarska and then turn inland, or go through Krajina. The daily bus from Trieste leaves

regularly at 6 pm from the bus station (next to the train station) and arrives in Medjugorje at 8 am. Departure from Medj. is at 6 pm each evening (ph. 040-425001 - cost: Itl. 120,000).

* Youth Festival From 31 July - 6 Aug. Theme: From the Darkness to the Light. The programme is: Wed. 31 July: All together at evening Mass. 1 August: The darkness in and around us. 2 August: The light presents itself, procession with Blessed Sacrament in the evening. 3 August: Encounter with the Light, confessions, theatrical performance by the youth from Sr. Elvira's community: "From the Darkness to the Light." 4 August: May there be light in the world, festival of Marian songs. 5 August: Mary Mother of Light, 6 August at dawn on Krizevac: The sun is born into the world through me. Speakers and testimonies by: Sr. Elvira, Jean Plivar, Fr. Cosimo, Fra Jozo Zovko, Sr. Briege McKenna, the visionaries, Gen. Philip Morillon and others. Participants are asked to bring head/earphones and an FM radio for simultaneous translations, and a Bible. Anyone wishing to participate with classical instruments contact Agostino at fax no. 387-88-642339 (these will be lodged in the Domus Pacis retreat house).

Signs of Mary's presence in Civitavecchia

Pilgrims continue to arrive. About forty to fifty busloads arrive each Sunday, and during the week many pilgrims come with various means. As a token of acknowledgement of the fruits of Confession, a monument dedicated to Padre Pio will be erected in the church square. The monument was offered by the Padre Pio prayer groups who visit the shrine.

The giant tent erected in front of the church was inaugurated on the 31st May before four thousand people who had come on pilgrimage by foot from the city of Rome and suburbs.

On the 16th June, the week after Corpus Christi, they celebrated the arrival of the statue of Our Lady of Medjugorje to the church.

The youth from the Casa di Maria community of the Academy of the Immaculate in Rome, who visit the shrine often, animated the celebrations. At the conclusion of the Eucharistic procession Bishop Grillo gave a moving homily.

The following are extracts from it. "I had told Our Lady that I wouldn't do a thing unless She gave us an explicit sign and above all unless She started building a shrine of souls.

Now the priests who give service here, in particular the confessors, inform me continuously of the level of spirituality and of the wonderful things that the Virgin is doing in the hearts of those who turn to Her. They tell me of the infinite spiritual and material graces that Mary distributes so abundantly, of the continued conversions and the broken families who have returned together.

They tell me of those who have found the peace to accept their conditions and the young people who are able to free themselves from the clutch of the evil one.

Here we have truly experienced that Mary is our Mother, that She is the Mother of all, and that She is directing us with all Her strength toward peace and universal solidarity. Here in Civitavecchia we have always tried to develop the true nature and scope of Marian devotion as a means to orient people to Christ, and thus to the Eucharist and the mystery of the Cross, to be united with the Father.

We also tell this to our Protestant brothers and sisters.

Man needs Mary to get to Jesus, but he cannot love Mary unless he totally accepts Jesus through listening often and attentively to the Word of God and through participating frequently in the Eucharist and the Sacraments...

Many people have in this way learnt what true veneration of the Mother of God is. She does not lead us

away from Christ, but to Him." The bishop concluded with: "There is a notable return to the faith among the population of Civitavecchia and this makes me very happy.

I have also noticed a constant increase in the number of faithful who attend Mass on Sundays and feastdays.

Who could have thought that this year nearly five thousand people would have followed Christ in the Corpus Christi procession along the streets of Rome? These are Our Lady's greatest miracles."

* Complete withdrawal by the Serbs from eastern Slavonia (Vukovar) which has now been returned to Croatia was signed precisely on the 25th June 1996.

On the 10th anniversary of the apparitions the war began and on the 15th it finished, thanks to the Queen of Peace.

* Festival of Music Medjugorje '96 was held on the 21st June with Flavio Colusso's Mass: "De tempore in aevum." Tenor Josè Carreras, soprano Cecilia Gasdia and 144 choirs from 12 different countries participated, and 5,000 people were present. President Tudjman and the Diplomatic Corps of Croatia and Bosnia were also present. (JP)

(Secret of Sanctity) Prayer to the Holy Spirit Oh, Holy Spirit, beloved of my soul... I adore You. Enlighten me, guide me, strengthen me, console me. Tell me what I should do... give me Your orders. I promise to submit myself to all that You desire of me and to accept all that You permit to happen to me. Let me only know Your will.

The Medjugorje Story:

Mary renews the Church with support of spontaneous movements

Extracts from a conversation with Fr. Slavko: his profound reflections after many years of personal experience with Medjugorje.

"... Here there have been blessed men and women who have spread the messages through their witness of faith, though they were not called by the Church to do so and though they were practically impeded by her.

God could have chosen a way that would have been more acceptable to the ecclesial hierarchy, but He decided for this way; He decided to start from the bottom, without imposing faith on anyone.

God touches the hearts of men and they become His witnesses. Forces are developed, upon which limits cannot be imposed, neither by the action of the state, nor by that of the Church.

God is patient, while man lost his patience some time ago... Here in Medjugorje certain arguments have been touched which the Church, for decades, has feared to mention; for example, fasting.

Here many people have found the way which leads to the Gospel. There is a convent of Poor Clares in Italy where 12 young women entered after they had experienced Medjugorje.

The Bishop of Ancona asked each one of them how they would react should the Church not recognize Medjugorje and they replied, singularly: "That is not a problem because I have decided to follow Jesus Christ, not Medjugorje." Medjugorje represents a moment or a point in which a change comes about.

In Medjugorje individuals start on the right way and communities recognize the direction in which this way must develop. Our Lady calls and then guides people. There are men and women - not part of the clergy - with a great potential; they suddenly receive courage, develop the qualities needed to organize

and begin to generate initiatives which would have once been considered impossible." Fr. Slavko refers in particular to the conference in Miami [which is only one of many] where the speakers were mostly lay people. "These people changed after their Medjugorje experience and felt responsible [for the spreading of the message].

They were supported by priests, but it was left to them to do the organizing. What's more is that the clergy [involved in the conference] discovered their true task: they were not just guides, but were there to serve the people.

Lay people strengthened foundations of Medjugorje. Fr. Jozo simply had to acknowledge Mary's apparitions and She was accepted immediately by the parish. The police arrested the parish personnel and closed the Church, but the lay people, the witnesses and the visionaries continued to fight and these were joined by the priests.

The messages were protected in the beginning and then spread. The priests were eventually joined by bishops; one day these will be followed by the Pope. (...) 'Europe is moving towards paganism,' Card. Ratzinger said in 1992, 'and the Church risks remaining behind.' For her revival, for which many are working, movements are needed and the help of many. 'In this, the Church's most critical of times, during which her rusted mechanisms were unable to resist the vortex of decadence, these movements [and we add charismas] have been the starting point of her revival and rebirth.' Past desires for rebirth were characterized by the Marian Spirit; so are present ones, as will future ones. [The great founders of orders and restorers of Christian life - e.g. Sts. Francis and Dominic - always attributed the spirit that inspired and guided them to Our Lady. Consider also the fact that Our Lady, through Her apparitions, gave immense impulse to Christian life in those times and places where it was dying. Ed. note] For future developments to be comprehended we must return to the role of Mary in the first years of Christianity. On the first Good Friday, when the Son of God gave up His spirit, the disciples felt that the world had fallen in. They all abandoned Him, the Scriptures tell us, except for the Woman beneath the Cross. Only this Woman continued to grasp resolutely to the Faith. How could we otherwise explain that Jesus entrusted His disciples (and thus all mankind) to His Mother as He was dying? So Mary kept everything together.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, Mary gathered all the disciples in the Upper Room to pray, as She does today through Her apparitions: Pray, pray very much.

Contrary to the theory now known to be wrong, which placed Mary's last years with John in Ephesus, everything makes us think that after Jesus' Ascension, Mary lived in Jerusalem where She was able to follow the development of the persecuted Christian community till Her death (ca. 50 A.D.), and though withdrawn She stood up to the psychological assailment by priests and scribes who saw in Her a cause of scandal, like Her Son.

After the departure of Peter and the other disciples, Mary remained in the new community to give testimony and be a sign of hope for all. It is for this that She is so loved by us all.

It is hard to imagine that Mary, who worked for 20 years at the construction of the young Church, would have no role to play in today's Church.

In the difficult times She is there to give courage to the disciples the way She did two thousand years ago, and when She says: I am with you, and: You are not alone, in Her messages (which She says often) Mary is particularly close to the persecuted Church and to the men and women who despair.

God sent me among you to help you (25 Jan. 1996). All of Mary's apparitions have given a strong impulse to the Church. So, all ahead with Mary today too!

(Text reduced and adapted by Glas Mira)

Great artist captured by Mary's beauty

"I would like the priests to be the first to come to the school of the Queen of Peace"

Fr. Slavko often praises the work of Carmelo Puzzolo, great artist and friend of Medjugorje, born in San Piero, Foggia (Sth Italy) 62 years ago. When the war in Bosnia had ended and Carmelo had recovered from a grave illness, he returned to Medjugorje as a pilgrim and a specialist, remaining one week to work and teach a group of twenty young people the technique of painting. Fr. Slavko interviewed him lengthily, which lack of space will permit us to publish only partially, beginning with Carmelo telling of his early years when he was "taken by force to the Academy of Arts in Florence" and of his meeting with great artist Piero Annigoni "from whom I learnt what is otherwise impossible to learn alone: how to paint frescoes.

After that I began working alone, and now I'm on a pension, looking after my soul." Carmelo paints mostly nature studies and landscapes.

He has frescoed many churches in Italy, Florida, Vienna and in Lichtenstein. "Art is a talent that comes from God," he said. "It is up to the artist to live the beauty of creation first hand, to fall in love with reality and help others to discover and love it...

I always tell the youth to look at reality with sharp eyes and then to translate it. Sacred art is particularly demanding.

One must fall in love with God the Creator and have a good knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures and the lives of the saints. It is only then that an artist should begin producing.

Many marvel at the patience I put into my work. For me it is normal because I am in love with the Creator and with all of creation; when you are in love it's easy to be patient.

When I paint a still nature I do it for the glory of God, the same as when I paint a cross or anything else."

Q. You also made this place richer with your art, in particular with the stations of the Way of the Cross on Krizevac, the mysteries of the Rosary on Podbrdo, the statue of St Leopold near the confessionals and the statues of Our Lady and St. Elijah in Tihaljina. Is all this the effect of Medjugorje or of something else? A. Medjugorje was the beginning of a new life for me.

I know that I have changed, but I also know that I must keep on changing. I believe in Our Lady's apparitions, but I am always in a state of crisis and when I realize this I see how I have not changed enough.

Medjugorje gave me security, it made me see that God guides me, it made me see His mercy and forgiveness.

It was here that I saw Mary's presence in my life and work. I wanted Our Lady to be present in each of the stations of the Way of the Cross. She had to be present everywhere, except in the garden of sorrows. Had She been there Jesus would not have felt completely alone, and She certainly would not have slept or escaped. Here Our Lady helps us to find Jesus immediately.

This is very important because through Her one discovers true, tender love, and goodness. Prior to Medjugorje Our Lady was far away [in my life]. It seems to me that many priests and faithful fall into an odd sort of mortal drowsiness because they are unable to feel Mary's live presence.

Thus, they remain far away from Jesus. Q. You spent a week with our youth to teach them how to paint. How was it? A. I'm happy to have founded this school and I'm prepared to come back again to work with them. I found that they had talent and a lot can be done.

This morning I went to see them again, to see what they had done, and to be honest it's good stuff (but I

didn't like the way they smoke so much).

It is my wish and will to help you discover, develop and accompany young talents. I feel it my duty and I will do it gladly, because I do love Croatia.

During the course I asked them to be resolute and humble, for them to see the reality beneath the aspect of the picture. You see, reality abounds in richness. On modern art... Q. What do you think about modern art? A. I was once told that I swim against the current. I replied that only dead fish swim with the current. I am alive and I could not do anything differently.

No one will ever be able to convince me that certain things done today are truly art. ... Once the critics spoke badly about expressionism, and today they are ready to talk well about everything. I have my doubts - there is too much concern for the money in it.

When Picasso died they found about 3,000 pieces of his which were unknown. These were not put on the market straight away so as not to lower prices.

Every year they release a painting, to get more money. This is not worthy of art. It is common knowledge that when someone told Picasso his drawings were beautiful he pulled a face, then smiled and pointed at a classic portrait saying: "That is art," and that he did the rest for fun.

He added that he laughs at those who can't understand anything about it. So what would you say? At the time when Prof. Tovarelli retired, and I was his assistant, I was top (of the list) and I could have gone to Milan, but I chose to go to Urbino because it was closer. After two years, though, I left everything because I couldn't tune in with modern art - it's so senseless - and so I chose to teach young people how to draw.

It's easy to draw a few lines, add a bit of colour and then say that you've got to understand art. Art is something quite different. Q. Do you have a message for the pilgrims? A. If only the priests would come to Medjugorje and learn from Mary's school and then return to teach the people! The Bishops should urge the priests to come to this school.

The priests should be the first witnesses. My recommendation is that everyone accept the messages and try to live them.

In fact, Our Lady teaches us everything that is best. Q. To conclude, what does Medjugorje mean to you?

A. It is sublime, beautiful, good and harmonious; it is full of beauty and goodness.

It is a gift of God. It is the reflection of His splendour.

(From Glas Mira, Feb. 1996)

Young Austrian's vocation was born in Medjugorje

Georg Mayr Meinhof, of noble family, renounced his million-dollar inheritance and surprised all of Austria.

Twenty seven years old, the ninth of ten children and a graduate from Vienna university, he took over the family business in 1995, but last September announced his decision to become a priest.

In the following interview he explains how it all happened. "I'd been to Medjugorje numerous times since I first went in 1982, but it wasn't till 1987 that I truly converted.

I'd been sick for many months, which gave me time to reflect on the messages. Though I was afraid to stay with others, I'd been called to guide a group of young people to Medjugorje - it was Easter 1987.

For me it was like leaping over a cliff, but it was then that my new life began. On the morning of the 6th September of that same year - I was back in Medjugorje - I was particularly struck by a passage from the Bible: Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple (Lk 14:33), and during

(the German language) Mass a voice was telling me to follow that call.

Back home I told my mother of my desire to become a priest and she suggested that we pray for one year before making a decision. My vocation fell by the way and I continued to live in the same old way for another six years.

During that time I studied economics, which I don't regret doing. In July of this year, however, I understood that back in 1989, while in Medjugorje, I had truly been called.

My vocation was born there, in Medjugorje. How did your family react? My mother was not surprised because she was sure of my vocation. It was my decision to take over the business last year that surprised her, however, she did not tell me this till later.

She had accepted my decision, while all the time silently praying for me - and her prayers were answered. It was more difficult for my father, especially because I was the only son in a position to take over the family business.

I feel that he understands and is able to perceive ever more the blessing that comes from my decision, for he truly wants his children to be happy.

How do you find life in the seminary? I'm very happy about the atmosphere in the seminary of Salzburg. Some of the young seminarians know Medjugorje very well ... and for us it is natural to recite the Rosary and take part in Eucharistic Adoration.

We try to live Mary's messages. There is no need for me to defend Medjugorje in the seminary! For example, at the end of this year we're going there to celebrate the new year, so I put out notices to invite the other seminarians to come on pilgrimage with us.

No one that I know made remarks about it. Some of them are even enthusiastic about going there. I've noticed that people recognize the positive fruits that have come from [the Medjugorje experience] and which have entered the seminary.

Unfortunately, not all seminaries in Austria are the same. What plans do you have for the future? ...finish my studies as soon as possible, but also satisfy God's will and do much more.

Many people who are tied to Medjugorje ask me to animate and participate in prayer evenings...

There are not many priests who fully support the Medjugorje messages. There is still fear and many are waiting for the Church to give her approval. One thing is certain for me: that Medjugorje changes people...

Do you think that Marian priests are important today? Mary says that priests are Her beloved sons. Now I understand why Mary begs everyone to pray for priests, because they are heavily attacked every day.

Many priests have difficulty in relating with Our Lady, but what is a priest without Mary, without a deep bond with Her? For me, a life which requests celibacy will be much easier thanks to my profound bond with Mary.

How do you see the future of the Church? I nourish great hope for her. The most difficult times in Church history have always been the times of greater glory and blessing. We can see this if we open our eyes upon the good, and we see that the Lord intervenes in the difficult times in a wonderful way - see Medjugorje and the charismatic move-ments, and the new communities in France.

There is reason for immense joy and that is why I nourish great hope for the future of the Church because she is built on the rock and the Word of God lasts in eternity.

There is much to do, many wonderful things, and that is why it is shameful to think only of the ugly things. We should talk day and night of the miracles which exist in the Church today and which are as great as ever..." (From Medjugorje "Un Invito alla Preghiera")

THE MAIL

Many readers write to express their dissatisfaction with the "modern" changes in the Church, saying that they notice a growing lack of respect towards the Eucharist and God's Commandments, the denial of hell, etc.

We respond: Jesus said: 'Scandals are necessary.' Well, there are plenty of them.

We, however, must be armoured with faith and love for God and our brothers and sisters and pray to the Father: Forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. The Scriptures warn us that times will come when people will not endure sound teaching, but will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths (2Tim 4:3). This means the loss of the sense of the Mystery of God, of His transcendence, of His Revelation and the power that Jesus left to the Church. He said: Whoever listens to you listens to Me! But they only listen to themselves.

We must remain subjected to the rules of the Church: she is inspired and equilibrated even when there are these exterior and marginal modifications to better suit the changing times.

In all of this, however, she has remained faithful to her call in the Spirit; the basics of our faith and Christian tradition which cannot be changed, have not been changed.

Of course the Mass is not a sociable meal, but the mystery of Jesus' presence and the sacrifice which He left to the Church.

By the way Mass is celebrated it is said that one can measure the faith and the faith life of the priest and the community. Before these unpleasant situations we must suffer: "like Lot who was vexed in his righteous soul with their lawless deeds" (2Pt 2:7-10) and remain attached to the "Deposit of Faith" without showing compliance.

For example, avoid participating in these "Masses" which offend our consciences, but if it is not possible to go elsewhere, make a virtue of necessity.

We must remain united to the Church. She is a pillar of the faith.

* From Altstätten, Switzerland: "I thank you for the wonderful newsletter which I read all in one breath. It is great comfort to me." (Consolatrice Fraefel)

* "Medjugorje, Curtain of Light": new edition updated for the 15th anniversary with more than 250 photos and news - in Italian and English. Available from: Ediz. Martini, Via Don Minzoni 23, I-12011 Borgo S. Dalmazzo, Italy.

* "My First History of the Church" by Sons of Holy Mary Immaculate: illustrated booklet on the history of the Church for young Catholics. Available from: Quality Catholic Publications, De Rosis St., Multinational Village, 1700 Parañaque, M. Manila, Philippines

Mary's lessons for the first prayer group

Continued from Echo 127: 6. Marian prayer groups - These are easily recognized because of their presence in the parish. It is clear that prayer groups are not supervisors of the liturgical and pastoral activities in the parish.

Often communication problems exist with those who work in the parish and with priests who, quite frequently, are adverse to prayer groups, especially Medjugorje prayer groups.

A first dangerous situation to be aware of is this: if care is not taken, a negative spirit can develop whereby all that the parish priest does is criticized, causing a gap, and the group risks being excluded from the parish.

I don't intend to discuss these problems here, but I do wish to stress that a Marian prayer group must not let itself be provoked by anything and it must not let itself be pushed to the outskirts of the parish where it would risk losing its identity or become similar to a sect, in which case it would be harmful both to the parochial community and to itself.

A second dangerous situation which at times reigns in groups is an apocalyptic and catastrophic atmosphere.

In such groups there's always someone who knows all about future events, catastrophes and cataclisms, and thus spreads a spirit of fear and anguish.

This so-called "knowledge" is fed by anxiously pursuing those who spread this kind of message. It often happens that these groups know more than what Jesus says in His Gospel about future events. Sick fantasies often transform the news of "secrets" into sure facts, which strengthens the apocalyptic spirit already present among these groups.

Neither the first, nor the second case described above are fit for the Marian spirit. Mary is our Mother and a mother never spreads fear and anxiety among her children. To the contrary, she teaches them peace and trust.

The prayer group, besides its bond with the parish priest and other parish operators, must be the heart and soul of the parish community.

Marian groups develop maternal activities within the parish. Their fervour generates new convinced faithful, it renews families who will protect their children, it educates the youth, it cultivates spiritual vocations, and greater develops the liturgical and pastoral activities within a parish, be these assistance to the elderly, the disabled, minority groups or brothers and sisters serving time in prison.

A maternal spirit and heart is able to recognize the needs of others and will work tirelessly to see that this help, in one way or another, is given. Without a doubt, these groups will bring to the Church of today a true revival of Christian life and will show up the real face of the Church which risks being disfigured! 7. Our Lady's requests to prayer groups can be summarized as thus: it is most important to make a radical decision for daily prayer, for participation in Holy Mass, for monthly confession, to give true witness and be active in the parish.

One Christmas the youth here helped the elderly, they visited the sick and the disable, they helped repair the homes of the poor families, they chopped up wood for winter, etc.

On a spiritual level, besides the prayer meetings during the week, Our Lady asked them to organize spiritual exercises for one or more days and observe the nature to thus develop spiritual themes. These are the rules for Medjugorje prayer groups which can be read in the messages:

1. Renouce everything and surrender self totally to God, and believe that all that happens is turned into good.
2. Invite the young people to participate in the groups.
3. Renounce all fears and anxieties, for being surrendered to God leaves no space for fear.
4. Love one's enemies and discard all feelings of hate, bitterness and judgement.
5. Fast twice weekly.
6. Partecipate in the group at least one a week.
7. Decide to pray 3 hours a day (including morning and evening prayer), participate in Mass, receive Holy Communion, go to Eucharistic adoration and maintain a spirit of prayer during one's daily tasks.
8. Pray for the bishops and all those with positions of responsibility in the Church.
9. Decide to remain in the prayer group for four years and use this time for one's personal maturation and

do not make any new or fundamental decisions for one's personal life.

10. Each group must have a priest. Through Jelena, Our Lady said on the 25th April 1983: "Tell my children that my heart is aflame for them. All I ask for is conversion, nothing but conversion..."

* All of the various language editions of Echo of Mary Queen of Peace are available in the souvenir shop next to St James church in Medj.; also in the MIR Info. Centre close to the bridge.

15th Anniversary

It was a great feast with the presence of three bishops (two from Uganda and one from Australia). Two hundred priests concelebrated on the eve of the anniversary and 250 on the feast day.

There were groups of pilgrims from many parts of the world, including New Zealand, Canada, Réunion Islands, Madagascar and Brazil.

There were 40 buses from the Czech Republic and 5 or 6 from Romania and Hungary. It was calculated that about 20,000 people were present on the eve, and from 30 to 35 thousand on the feast day.

Fifteen years ago no one could have imagined how big Medjugorje would have become, with so much prayer and confessions! It is impossible to describe in words what we experienced there [for the anniversary celebrations].

During the night a stream of people climbed Podbrdo to attend the prayer with Ivan.

Let us also respond to Mary's appeal by opening ourselves to Her and deciding for prayer and conversion so that the Spirit may take away our hearts of stone and give us a heart of flesh. Receive then, Her motherly blessing which will accompany us during the summer months. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Villanova 30 June 1996

God gave everyone free will and it is up to you to be disposed.