



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace

148-149

January-February 2000 - Yr.16 #1 - [Info](#)

Mary's message of 25 November 1999:

Dear Children, Also today I invite you to prayer. In this time of grace may the cross be for you a signpost to indicate love and unity through which comes peace. Hence, my Children, pray, particularly in this time, so that the Child Jesus, Creator of peace, may be born in your hearts. It is only through prayer that you can become my apostles of peace in this world without peace. Hence, pray till prayer becomes joy for you. Thank you for responding to my call.

From cross comes love and unity which generate peace

In this context of 'time of grace' underlined by Our Lady there is a strong reminder of the cross; and it is precisely during this time of Advent that prayer should bring us to an acceptance of the cross, which for us must be a sign of love and unity.

The reason is because the man who seeks to assert himself will create separation and aversion; while love and unity demand submission and acceptance of those crosses which God may place on our paths. Our hearts are vessels of peace when we are able to accept people, situations, and relationships of our everyday life even when unpleasant. This means being able to accept deprivation, pain, humiliation, and persecution and bear the cross with Jesus through silently forgiving and offering.

It's not an easy thought to maintain, and it's even more difficult when the cross gets heavy. Indeed, it is impossible without God's help. Jesus, though, doesn't leave us alone; He is God Who sacrificed Himself for man, and at the same time He is Man Who offers Himself to God in a holocaust of love, and He is with us day after day (cf. Mt 28:20b), even more so when man is on the sacrificial altar. This way the cross does not generate hate and division, but becomes a sign of love and unity.

So let's learn to live our little daily crosses in this light; to reply with love in all circumstances even when wrong is done to us, and learn to place our trust in Jesus and Mary.

For peace to come we must be able to renounce something which is profoundly rooted in our ego: If you want to follow me, deny yourself, take up your cross... Peace comes from true prayer; it is born in our hearts when these are open to the prince of peace, the Child Jesus. He is the creator of peace. Then we become bearers of peace.

Become apostles of peace in this peaceless world. Our Lady and the Pope have been calling us to this for some time. Peace is possible for the world, and it can be reached through the work done by the little apostles of the Queen of Peace. She leads us with love and infinite patience.

An uncommon task is asked by Mary in this message: pray till prayer becomes joy for you. To grow in prayer means to grow in the knowledge of God, to become more familiar and intimate with Him, to breathe His love, to be inebriated by His Spirit. It follows naturally that prayer becomes joy, that type of

joy that only God can give and which we are unable to contain in full because of our bodily limits, but it is a pledge of that full and eternal joy which awaits us when we will see Him as He is.

Prayer: Almighty Father, with Mary we thank You in the name of Your Son Jesus for this time of grace. We thank You and we plead You to give us the Spirit of prayer so that in this time of grace we find union in our relationship with You, with ourselves and with the others; that our life may become a cross which indicates heaven and earth, You and our neighbours. Give us the grace of the birth of Your Son Jesus in our heart; that He may bring us peace.

Father, with Mary we pray to You: give us the grace to become true apostles of Your peace in this world, give us joy in prayer. We ask you Father to bless all those who are sick, bless all those who do not prepare themselves to die and all those who are tied only to this earth, to material goods and pleasures; so that this time of grace may give to all the chance to return to You.

Bless us Father and give us peace.

Fr. Slavko

Mary's message of 25 December 1999:

Dear Children, this is a time of grace. My Children, in a special way today, together with the Child Jesus Whom I hold in my arms, I am giving you the opportunity to decide for peace. Through your "yes" for peace and your decision for God, a new opportunity for peace is opened up for you. Only this way, my Children, may the time of this century be for you a time of peace and prosperity. Thus, give the newborn Child Jesus first place in your lives and He will lead you on the way of salvation. Thank you for responding to my call.

To accept peace is to accept Jesus

Our Lady continues to repeat to us that this is a time of grace, that is, a time in which God's help is superabundant. Now time of grace is all the time since Jesus came, it is the year of redemption proclaimed by Isaiah, it is the Messianic time. There are, however, special occasions in which God urges us to accept His grace, offering us at the same time extraordinary help. Such is the time of a Jubilee, and also the time of Mary's presence on the earth.

Together with Child Jesus Whom she holds in her arms, Mary wants to make it possible for us to decide for peace. In fact, it is not possible for man to make this decision without divine help. Man fools himself if he thinks he can make peace on his own. Man can do much, he can direct his choices towards solidarity and justice and hence move along the way of peace, but if it does not lead back to God then he will never reach satisfactory solutions.

It is clear that the way of peace is the way of return to God, of conversion, of surrender to Him, and prayer is the vehicle which enables us to remain on that way. This message is one of the few which does not contain an explicit call to prayer. We are instead, urged to give Jesus first place in our lives. This means communion with Him through a life of prayer. Mary asks us to say yes to peace, to accept the gift of peace which Jesus brings into the world at His birth and which He leaves to the Apostles on the eve of His Passion (Jn 14:27). We can either accept it or refuse it.

Mary is clearly asking us to make a choice; to accept God by accepting the newborn Child Jesus so He can lead us on the way of salvation. This doesn't mean to be momentarily moved, but to make a choice which will transform us profoundly (Ph 3:7-11) and remain till eternity. It is a choice which involves our

soul, mind and heart. The child which Mary presents to us is a newborn child; we should accept Him and let Him grow in us.

Christmas is the time when God comes unto us in the form of man. >> go to page8 >>from page 1 >> This wonderful event astonishes the angels, and confounds the devil. It is the event which brings to fulfilment the history of salvation. It transcends time and space and gives to man the face of the Son. Each child born can be the temple which houses the Presence of God in the world. This is the decision for God which Mary repeatedly calls us to make. We cannot call ourselves Christians if we do not let Jesus live in us according to the Father's will. Jesus truly must have first place in our lives, and we must disappear in Him as John the Baptist did (Jn 3:30), not to become worthless, but to gain full worth and dignity in Him as children of God.

To live God's Presence in us every moment of the day, in everything that we do and think no matter what our background or state of health, or our qualities or failings - that is how to live peace.

To live God's Presence in us when we are gratified and when we are humiliated, when we feel His Life throb in us and when we feel nothing but our own aridity - this is bearing witness to peace.

Mary points out the way to us and stresses that it is the only way: only this way can you build a time of peace and prosperity. This is a promise which demands commitment on our part. There is nothing to invent, only something to live, and that is take Mary's messages seriously and live them in humility, with simplicity and in communion with the Church.

God saves the world in Jesus, so let's be part of His plan of salvation; though a sure thing, it is not automatic, for it depends on our acceptance of Jesus. May this humanity which wanders in the darkness (Is 9:1) accept the Light and decide for God while there is still time. Decide to accept to be led on the way of salvation; decide today, not tomorrow, for this is the time of grace.

Nuccio

Pope opens Holy Door and leads Church into third millennium of mercy

Jesus, the Father's gift to mankind Whom we celebrated at Christmas, is the Door through which we must pass if we wish to enter into salvation: I am the Door; anyone who goes through me will be saved (Jn 10). Through Him we find forgiveness, mercy, indulgence; and in Him we are able to see in others our brothers and sisters, as we remit to them their debts and remove their every yoke, and in a single embrace we become the family of God on the earth.

At the solemn opening of the jubilee the Pope was formidable in his weakness. In him the Spirit who gives life was revealed with might. Truly a pontiff - mediator between earth and heaven - he challenged and defeated the limits which human nature fears. A spiritual magnet, he kept everyone tied to the divine mystery being celebrated.

In front of the door he trembled as he gently opened it and walked through. He appeared little and alone as he knelt on the threshold, then got up and dragged his curved body towards the altar. On his shoulders was a gaudy cloak; its many colours represent the many races, but also the many sins, afflictions and poverty of mankind, not forgetting its unfaithfulness throughout the centuries of Christian history. The Pope dragged it all towards forgiveness and mercy.

It was an old man who went from the door to the altar with small unsteady steps; we were concerned that he might not make it, but he wasn't. At times he stopped to trace a blessing on the foreheads of small children. It was Jesus climbing the Calvary!

There is a great need of servants of mercy who bend over the sins and wounds of humanity so that in the end it can be said that they are for the glory of God (Jn 9).

To live the Jubilee is to carry the burdens of others so that they may see God's mercy of which we are instruments.

From the Jubilee a new humanity The Pope's words

Love for life. "We turn our gaze to you, Oh Christ, Door of Life, and we thank you for the wonders with which you have enriched every generation. At times this world neither respects nor loves life. But you never cease to love life; indeed, in the mystery of Christmas, you come to enlighten people's minds, so that legislators and political leaders, men and women of good will, may be committed to welcoming human life as a precious gift."

Love for peace. "We lift our eyes to you, Oh Christ, Door of peace, as, pilgrims in time, we visit all the places of grief and of war, the resting places of the victims of brutal conflicts and cruel slaughter. You, Prince of Peace, invite us to ban the senseless use of arms, and the recourse to violence and hatred which have doomed individuals, peoples and continents."

Love for family. "In order to promote rights, those of the family must be protected since it is from families that a full response can be made to the challenges of the present and the future. The family is a community of love and life, which is created when a man and a woman give themselves to one another without reserve in marriage, open to the gift of children.

'The future of humanity passes by way of the family' (Familiaris consortio, no. 86); and the great family of nations is built from this small but fundamental cell."

Wonderful Jubilee Indulgence!

It is so simple to acquire the Jubilee Indulgence that one can't help but think of what was required of the Syrian General, Naaman, in order to be healed. He was told to walk in and out of the Jordan seven times... it was so simple that he almost didn't do it!

The Holy Father has made gaining this Jubilee Indulgence each day of this Holy Year incredibly simple, too. (Don't be misled by long lists which include many examples).

That we take advantage of this indulgence is much on the mind and heart of the Holy Father. He tells us that during this Jubilee year we are to receive exceptional graces!

In fact, the Church is offering us an incredible opportunity: the possibility of obtaining a plenary indulgence each day!

We can dedicate it to any deceased soul who, if in Purgatory, will be taken straight to heaven! (Should that person not be there Our Lady will use the indulgence for some-one else.) We can also choose to offer our indulgence to Our Lady, and let her decide who should receive it. Note that the Holy Father says "such an offering constitutes an outstanding act of supernatural charity..."

Conditions needed to acquire Jubilee Indulgence

1. Develop in self effective detachment from all sin.
2. Open heart to God's mercy in Sacrament of Penance.

"Each member of the faithful.... can receive or apply the gift of the plenary indulgence during a suitable

period of time, even daily, without needing to go to confession again. It is fitting however that the faithful should frequently receive the grace of the Sacrament of Penance...." (Our Lady's advice, for instance, that her children go to confession once a month would no doubt fulfil this particular requirement in order to receive the indulgence every day during that month...)

3. Participate in Eucharist, the festive banquet prepared by the Father for all who convert.

"Participation in the Eucharist.... should properly take place on the same day as the prescribed works are performed."

4. Pray for intentions of Pope as a sign of communion with the Church. A good thing is to pray one Creed, one Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be to "witness communion with the Church".

5. Fulfil an extraordinary act of charity and penance to express conversion of heart.

For example: Go on pilgrimage to Rome, the Holy Land or the diocesan cathedral or other designated church; dedicate time to those in need; reconcile after a difficult relationship; renounce something lawful in favour of the needy; patiently put up with the trials of life.

(The article includes extracts from Sr. Emmanuel's diary; quotes are from the Apostolic Letter *Incarnationis Mysterium*)

Synod for Europe Recognition of sins

One of the most important synods, it was held from 1-23 October 1999 with 248 participating bishops and experts.

In his homily at the conclusive Mass the Pope said: If we turn our gaze to the past centuries, we can only give thanks to the Lord because in our continent Christianity has been a primary factor of unity among peoples and cultures, and of the integral promotion of man and his rights. Nonetheless, for errors made in the past, he called for an examination of conscience: at the time when we are preparing to pass through the Holy Door of the Great Jubilee we feel the need to humbly recognize our responsibilities.

At the conclusion of the Synod the bishops made a point of what sins were committed by the Church of Europe and of the appeals launched by the Spirit in this time.

1. Our sins as Church of Europe - There is in act a crisis of the faith where numerous Christians abandon the truths of the faith and the Church. This is seen as a social body devoid of the experience of joy in the faith, giving consequence to a weakening in the announcement of the Gospel. Next to this is the scandal of the division among Christians.

In the dialogue with the secular world, we have too often been unable to unite love and sympathy for our interlocutors with love for the truth. There is great difficulty in transmitting the faith to the youth who seem to yearn after different lifestyles.

In all this, however, we believe in providence and mercy, where even our sins can be occasion for purification and renewed trust in the Spirit of the Risen One Who constantly makes Himself heard by the Church both amid her failings and her inspirations.

2. Signs of hope. One sign of hope is the many martyrs of all Christian confessions both from the West and the East whose hope was stronger than death.

Another sign of hope is the sheer holiness of so many men and women of our time, who in the simplicity of their daily lives have lived out their fidelity to the Gospel with generous dedication.

Other signs of hope are:

- the rediscovered freedom of the Churches of Eastern Europe;

- the increased focus of the Church on its spiritual mission;
- the presence and the flowering of new movements and communities through which the Spirit awakens a more radical Christian way of life;
- the unleashing of a renewed commitment to the Gospel and of generous readiness to serve;
- the increased awareness of the co-responsibility which belongs to all Christians in the variety and complementariness of their gifts;
- the growing presence and activity of women in the structures and life of the Christian community.

With a deep sense of gratitude to the Lord, we recognize as a sign of hope the steps forward on the ecumenical journey in truth, love and reconciliation. We particularly welcome with satisfaction the "Common Declaration on Justification" which was signed in Augsburg in October 1999 by representatives of our Church and the World Lutheran Federation.

3. Appeals addressed to Europe. The sincere love which we Pastors have for Europe moves us to address some appeals, especially to those at the institutional, political and cultural level:

- do not be silent but raise your voices in the face of the violation of human rights;
- pay very special attention to everything that concerns life from the moment of its conception to natural death, and the family based on marriage;
- pursue with courage and urgency the process of European integration while appreciating with wisdom the historical and cultural differences of the nations;
- respond with justice and equity and with a great sense of solidarity to the growing phenomenon of migration;
- make every effort to guarantee youth a truly human future with work, culture and education in moral and spiritual values;
- keep Europe open to all countries of the world, continuing to realize forms of cooperation which are not only economic but also social and cultural;
- welcome the appeal of the Holy Father to wipe out or at least reduce the International Debt of developing nations.

The Holy Father's conclusive prayer: Church of Europe, do not be afraid! Live out your responsibilities! The time will come - and the signs can already be seen! - in which good will triumph over evil. The God of hope does not abandon you. Believe in His saving love! Hope in His forgiving, renewing and life-giving mercy!

Way of Unity strewn with thorns

The Pope's apostolic courage helps him face difficult situations. He does not seek out human approval; his sole desire is to open the way for the Gospel announce-ment of peace, tolerance and love, especially there where peoples and ethnic groups are at conflict with one another.

India. New Delhi, visited by the Pope for the conclusion of the Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, did not give him a warm welcome. It is known that in many parts of India and Pakistan intolerance and persecution is practised against Catholics and Christians in general.

Georgia. His visit to Georgia was a courageous gesture of closeness with the Orthodox faithful. No common declaration was met; religious authorities prohibited the Orthodox faithful to take part in the Mass celebrated by the Pope for Catholics.

On the other hand, he received a warm welcome by President Shevardnadze who recently converted to Catholicism, and who praised the Pope for his role in the fall of the Berlin wall. The President himself

collaborated in its down-coming when he acted as Gorbachov's Foreign Secretary. The Patriarch later corrected his position imposed by the synod with a declaration of cordiality and aperture.

Pope concerned: "Save the Family"

At the general audience of 1 December the Pope spoke out in favour of the family to counterpoise a spreading mentality which questions its ethical and social value.

"The concept itself of the family, as a community founded on marriage between a man and a woman, is attacked in the name of ethical relativism, which is spreading in wide areas of public opinion. The crisis of the family becomes, in turn, a cause of the crisis in society. Wherever the family falls apart, society loses its connective tissue with disastrous consequences that affect individuals, especially the weakest.

It is therefore necessary to encourage a reflection that will help not only believers, but all people of good will, to rediscover the value of marriage and the family.

Reason itself can rediscover the family by listening to the moral law inscribed in the human heart. Far from closing the family in on itself genuine love opens it to all society, since the little domestic family and the great family of all human beings are not in opposition, but in a close and primordial relationship. God's fatherhood is the transcendent source of all human fatherhood and motherhood ... and a child is a blessing from God, where husband and wife are transformed into father and mother; and where both are brought 'out of themselves'.

Looking at God the Father means understanding the family as a place where life is welcomed and nurtured, a workshop of brotherhood where a new fraternity and solidarity is created among men."

"To my elderly brothers and sisters!"

The "Letter of Pope John Paul II to the Elderly" was published in October 1999; in it he discusses with delicacy and courage the various problems faced by senior citizens.

Above all John Paul II recalls that the elderly are custodians of the collective memory of the XX century, and that numerous eloquent examples of elderly people are found in both the Old and New Testament. He also discusses the social value of old age and the subject of death. The entire Letter is imbued with a note of serenity in the light of faith.

The final chapter caught the attention of people around the world for its personal character. It says: "I feel a spontaneous desire to share fully with you my own feelings at this point of my life, after more than 20 years of ministry on the throne of Peter. Despite the limitations brought on by age, I continue to enjoy life. For this I thank the Lord. It is wonderful to be able to give oneself to the very end for the sake of God's kingdom.

At the same time, I find great peace in thinking of the time when the Lord will call me: from life to life! And so I often find myself saying, with no trace of melancholy, a prayer recited by priests after the celebration of the Eucharist: *In hora mortis meae voca me, et iube me venire ad te* - at the hour of my death, call me and bid me come to you. This is the prayer of Christian hope, which in no way detracts from the joy of the present, while entrusting the future to God's gracious and loving care."

* Pope's 80th birthday next 18 May 2000. Why not have a Mass celebrated in your parish on that day for his intentions?

"Return to primitive fervour"

Mary teaches: Christian forgiveness is compulsory gateway to peace

The facts - "When, on the fourth day, Our Lady led us to confession, She said: 'Before you pray, each of you must forgive your enemies, offer them to the Father and desire for them grace and blessing.' I told my parishioners and they replied 'yes', but this was followed by 20 minutes of utter silence. So I suggested that they ask for the grace to be able to forgive.

Then our Mother gave us a wonderful gift: a man called out from the centre of the church: "Lord, I have forgiven, forgive me!", and then started to cry. And we all cried. It was though a tap had been turned on, and in a single voice we were saying: "Lord, I also have forgiven, forgive me!" over and over again. What followed was an unusual spectacle. Families that were once enemies began to invite each other over for dinner, and they exchanged gifts, and then invited neighbours to celebrate with them. It was a triumph of the grace of reconciliation.

(Fr. Jozo)

The theme of forgiveness and reconciliation with God and with our fellow men is very significant in this Jubilee year, and the Church calls us to live it with particular spiritual intensity (cf. Tertio Millennio Adveniente).

Also the Queen of Peace, as if to conclude the cycle of great Marian Apparitions which began in Rue du Bac (Paris) in 1830, continued with Lourdes in 1858 and then Fatima in 1917, has been preparing us for more than 18 years with Her extraordinary presence of grace in Medjugorje. Right on the second day of her apparitions on Podbrdo (26 June 1981) Our Lady revealed the main reason for coming, and the core of her message: "I have come that men be reconciled with God and with each other". Through Marija she later made an impassioned appeal to the world: "Peace! Peace! Be reconciled!"

Mary's call to forgiveness is expressed in three main directions:

1. Purification of hearts through a radical journey of conversion to God, and be able to fully accept the gift of merciful Love which God the Father is offering.
2. Those who have accepted God's Love and Forgiveness (through the outpouring of the Spirit) unconditionally offer it to others in concrete day-to-day situations.
3. The acceptance of others for the sake of God who is in them, no matter what their condition is.

This is the "holy way" indicated by Mary through which the life of the Holy Trinity is poured out onto the earth. Through humble and open hearts which accept the gift of grace, the Holy Trinity pours out His Life in a torrent of spiritual light, peace and salvation upon the entire world.

This is the "great sacrifice" pleasing to God and to which the Queen of Peace calls us without tiring: "Dear Children, I wish to thank you for all your sacrifices, and I invite you to the greater sacrifice, the sacrifice of love... I invite you to begin to live love in your hearts" (message of 27 March 1986). "I invite you to always carry harmony and peace... With love turn into good everything that the devil wants to destroy and make his own" (31 July 1986). "May love get the upper hand in you all; not human, but divine love" (20 Nov. 1986).

Our Lady, however, calls us to do more than simply forgive those who offend us. Together with the Gospel she calls us to "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you" (Lk 6:27-28). "I desire that you love everyone, good and bad, with my love. Only that way will love get the upper hand in the world" (25 May 1988). Our Lady even invites us to implore God to give us the

grace "to love all people as she loved Jesus" (prayer to the Mother of Goodness, Love and Mercy" dictated to Jelena in 1984).

The Queen of Peace also desires that souls be totally healed and freed from the devastating consequences of sin. It is inevitable that sins leave wounds in hearts, making them heavy and incapable of an authentic experience of communion with God and with others.

Mary guides us to profound inner healing. Our Lady wants to guide us on a journey of deep healing to gradually introduce us, through an ever more radical purification of the heart, to the ineffable joy of a burning communion with the Holy Trinity: "I invite you to prepare your hearts for these days during which the Lord particularly desires to purify you of all the sins of your past. My dear Children, you cannot do it alone, so I am here to help you. Pray, my dear Children, and then you will come to know all the evil which is in you, and you can present it to the Lord so the Lord may purify your hearts completely" (4 Dec. 1986)

G. Ferraro (to be continued)

News from the blessed land

Mary's apparition to Jakov

Many probably know that on the 12th September 1998 Jakov received his last daily apparition of Our Lady. Just as she promised to Mirjana to appear to her on her birthday (18 March) and to Ivanka on the anniversary date (25 June), she promised Jakov that she would appear to him each Christmas till the end of his life.

The apparition began at 3 pm and lasted 10 minutes. Jakov said that Our Lady was full of joy, wore a golden dress and carried the Child Jesus in her arms.

During the apparition they spoke of the secrets, but of course, Jakov cannot say anything about that. Our Lady blessed everyone, and gave the following message:

"Dear children! Today on the birthday of my son, when my heart is filled with immeasurable joy and love,

I invite you to a full aperture and a complete surrender to God. Throw out all the darkness from your heart and let God's light and love enter your heart and dwell in it forever. Be carriers of God's light and of His love to all people, so all, in you and through you, can feel and experience the authentic light and love that only God is able to give you. I bless you with my motherly blessing!"

At the end Jakov cried, but it was out of joy, for to see Our Lady is not a common thing; with her departure one is left with emptiness and sadness. The visionary prayed with his wife and three children. I, too, was present and together we recited the Rosary.

(Fr. Slavko)

"Medjugorje is fount of vocations"

Msgr. Lukumwena from Congo said among other things: "The morning I arrived, I went to pray on the Hill of Apparitions. That impressed me very much, because I encountered many people who were concentrated and devoutly praying. An important experience was also the evening prayer program at which there were many people. The many people from different countries and various languages, who

prayed together gave me a profound and inexpressible feeling of joy.

I am here on a private visit, and therefore officially I accept the position of the Church, but a personal experience is still something else. I can personally say that it is clear to me that all that is happening here, and especially the great number of people, cannot be interpreted in any other way than a special intervention of God. So regarding the authenticity of the apparitions - we should leave that judgment to those persons in the Church called to do just that. I personally am praying for the moment of recognition to come quickly.

Our Lady has always told us to pray for peace. The world today is divided. There is neither peace nor love. I recommend everyone to try to pray humbly with all their might that peace come as soon as possible to all people.

I would recommend to all communities that do not have vocations to come here and pray in this spirit that is alive here and they will certainly have vocations.

To all of you who are living here I wish to say that you should continue to work in the spirit of St. Francis. Keep on hoping, because the time of recognition will come and everyone will be happy."

"Mary loves us and cares about us"

Msgr. E.L. Bataclan, bishop from the Philippines, said before he left for Medjugorje: I have no difficulties believing that Our Lady is here because, above all, the "sensus fidelium" [sense of the faithful] says that Mary is here, and also my priestly and pastoral experience through a full 25 years, and now also that of being a bishop helps recognize the special signs that Mary is present here and that she is caring for her children. I would like to say to everyone: Mary is the Mother who loves and truly has to come to this world. She comes and says what we have to do, because she cares for us. I hope that the world will open its heart and soul to this good Mother.

Let us pray for all people to open their hearts. Let us pray for each other. May God bless you all."

New Year's Eve in Medjugorje

To keep with the custom, a prayer vigil was held for the new year also this year. It began with prayer at 10 pm and ended with midnight Mass. About 5000 faithful were present. The parishioners and the pilgrims together saw the old year out and ushered in the new year singing and praying for the peace so much needed for modern man in today's world.

Just how profound this experience is for those who spend new year's eve in Medjugorje in prayer, is shown by the fact that the number of pilgrims increases with each year. In this uncertain and peaceless world youth are still deciding to entrust their future to God.

* The feast of the Immaculate Conception was celebrated by pilgrims in a characteristic atmosphere of prayer, peace and communion. Local pilgrims came from all parts of the country, while the most numerous foreign pilgrims came from France, Italy, the United States, the Czech Republic, Britain, Brazil, Austria and Korea.

For the occasion the Rosary was recited on the Hill of Apparitions; and several thousand faithful were present at the evening Mass. (Press Bulletin)

Vicka says: "It is in this life that one chooses to go to heaven or hell"

On the feast of All Saints Vicka said:

"Just as Our Blessed Mother has told us, here on this earth we make the choice of going to heaven, purgatory, or hell. After death we continue to live that which we chose to live on the earth. In fact, we all know how we live. Personally, I try with all my heart to go to heaven. I have a great desire to go to paradise.

On the earth, though, many choose to go to purgatory; that means that they are not totally decided for God. Other people choose to do everything against God and against His will; these people choose to live in hell and after their death they continue to live the hell which they lived on the earth.

That which we will live after our death depends on us because God gave each of us the freedom to choose. Our Lady has told us that many live only for the earth because they believe that all ends with death, but this is an enormous error because life is only a passage which leads us to eternity."

We should pray so that these words help us to remember how precious is the time that we live on the earth.

"Prayer truly can save!"

Corinne, a young pilgrim in Medjugorje tells: "After my first pilgrimage I understood the importance of prayer; but one day, while praying in my room, I asked Jesus to explain to me how my poor prayer could have an invisible force which could change things or save people. It just didn't seem real.

Then, with the eyes of the soul, (I was praying with closed eyes) I saw an abyss in front of me. From it I could here the most frightful screams. Jesus told me: "This is hell. If only you knew how many souls are lost into it every day!" Then I saw a woman fall into it; she was screaming because she didn't want to go, but I had the impression that someone from inside was pulling her.

Upon seeing the woman's state of despair I screamed and begged Jesus to help her not to fall in, but He didn't do anything and the woman kept falling deeper into the abyss. I began to cry and I continued to beg Jesus Who said to me: 'Go over to the hole and take her hand,' so I grasped the woman's hand and she began to re-emerge; and Jesus said: 'Can you see now what prayer can do?' When I opened my eyes I thanked God for the experience because it made me understand that prayer truly does save."

* A home for handicapped children, desired by Fr. Slavko, has been opened in the "Children's Village" near Medjugorje. About 20 children from the area go to the home each day.

* Each Sunday of Advent, after the 11 am Mass in Croatian, the faithful were invited to remain for an extra half hour for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. We know how important it is to pray before and after Holy Mass. Our Blessed Mother said: "Dear Children, after having received Holy Communion speak to my Son Jesus."

A new and bigger "blue cross" has been erected on the hill of apparitions in an area which will more easily accommodate the many pilgrims who attend the evening apparitions to Ivan and his prayer group. (From Sr. Emmanuel's diary)

Chinese government continues repression of Catholics

The Church of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan are concerned by the document which the Communist Party of China issued following an aperture in the diplomatic relations between China and the Vatican. The document expresses the Chinese government's intention to reinforce its control of the official Church and to proceed with the dispersion of the under-ground Church should it not subject itself to government control.

With regards to relations with the Vatican, the document states that it (the Vatican) should not interfere with the country's internal affairs under the pretence of religious interests.

If on one side we see an aperture for dialogue, on the other side it is clear that China intends to increase its control of the more than ten million Chinese Catholics.

Laos. The Fides agency informs that the sixty thousand Christians in the country are harshly repressed, At least 40 Christians have been imprisoned simply because they believe in Jesus Christ. According to Amnesty International, the regime is an extremely oppressive one.

Africa still land of martyrs

Uganda - Fourteen of the nineteen seminarians kidnapped by guerrillas have been killed. The Adf alliance counts Islamic fundamentalists and soldiers from other rebel movements in Uganda in its numbers; they broke into the St. John Seminarian of Kisinga in August 1997.

The seminarians were all young teenagers; of these two managed to escape while the others were made to fight with the rebels against regular soldiers from the Uganda army.

Congo - Fr. Georges Kakuja was shot dead in his parish of South Kivu by a group of local fundamentalists because he refused to collaborate with them. Another priest from the same parish managed to escape.

The situation in Central Africa is also tense since a group of armed men took control of two towns not far from the capital Bangui.

The Cathedral of Mary Immaculate in Moscow which had been closed for decades by the Communists was solemnly re-consecrated by Cardinal Sodano (the Pope's delegate) on 12 December 1999. With him were Cardinal Makarski of Cracow, Archbishop Kondruziewicz of Moscow and other bishops. Patriarch Alexei of Moscow told Cardinal Sodano that there would be common celebrations in the Cathedral during the Jubilee year. The silent work of Mary, there where dialogue had apparently been interrupted?

The Jubilee and fraternal relations

This was the theme of the meeting which the Brotherhood of Offered Souls organized in Numana (south Italy) Oct. last.

The speaker, Fr. Tomislav, reflected on the problems which arise in community life, and uncovered various forms of tension and obstacles which must be overcome.

The family-like atmosphere helped to create a tangible sense of communion amongst the participants, and these shared in each other's burdens. This was particularly noticeable during the vigil of resurrection on Saturday evening during which everyone renewed their baptismal promises and the offering of themselves to God through the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

1. Impediment to sincere relations

Fear is always a risk. Fear falsifies our relations; it generates closure, defence, aggressiveness, and it leads to death of virtues. When fear prevails, love, faith and hope are unable to grow. I don't mean psychological fear, but an attitude of the soul which closes people up in individualism and egocentrism. Fear not only kills virtue, but it falsifies relations. Some people, in fact, act in a domineering manner though they are not truly like that, and other people appear meek even though they are not docile by nature; but they act like that for fear of losing esteem or love.

2. The remedy

The scope of fraternity life is to give the living God to others. For this to happen we must sacrifice in ourselves everything that produces bitterness and war. When we do this, communion in the fraternity becomes a sacrifice which is pleasing to God.

God acts perfectly in a person who has given him/herself, and His action frees a soul from the fear of risk and opens it up to those around us.

3. Reap fruits of eternal life

God's fruits are reaped by the fraternity if it remains in God. One important thing to remember is that when our relations with others are founded on God, these relations will always generate, save and sanctify, for God the Father generates, God the Son saves, and God the Holy Spirit sanctifies.

This is the only way that we can truly understand if we are in communion with each other and if that communion is in God, or whether the fraternity lives its call only on a superficial level. If we are immersed in God the Father it is not possible not to generate; if Jesus is free (to act) in us - if He offers, prays and forgives in us - then it is not possible not to save others. If the members of the fraternity live this reality, they heal themselves and others.

4. What are fraternities?

A fraternity is not an open group, but a community journey for lay people who feel the call to be "offered souls". This means an intimate journey with God, and in God with others. Members of a fraternity are "pilgrims" on the way to God who decide for this way to advance in the spiritual life. Communion is important in this call for it is only in it that one can experience the life of the Holy Trinity. It is impossible to live this communion without God.

5. Some elements with which to verify true communion:

To be able to live communion, no matter what our state of life may be, we must practise purity, obedience and poverty. God's power cannot be expressed in us unless our arrogant ego withdraws.

The death of our ego, and the acceptance of God and communion among us, are the three fundamental steps required to put into practice our self-offering.

In the religious life there are rules which protect against errors. One of these is frequent transfers so that the quality of religious life is protected. It is known, in fact, that when people remain in the same place they become the centre of attention and it is easy for them to give importance to their own qualities. It is also known that where human qualities are pre-eminent, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are lost. It is thus important that this rule is applied also in the fraternities.

6. What is the call for "offered souls"?

The greatest gift of Jesus Christ is the Church, and that means being in God to live communion among men. It is, however, difficult to build - I should say, impossible to build - without God's grace. Life for "offered souls" must blossom in the communion of love, to love all creatures, without exception. When

we have this love in us miracles become fact and it is not difficult to discover that everything can be found in God, as it was for St. Francis.

Where does our mission begin? Inside us and around us. If at times we feel crushed, oppressed and in an abyss, rather than escape we offer ourselves in whatever situation we are in at the time. Escaping is not a solution!

If we make this offering of ourselves, then we have to allow the Lord to take us where He wants. We do not need to go to Africa to be missionaries; you only need to stay there where you live and spread God's love there. In God we can reach out to the whole world, because there are no barriers of time or space in the Holy Spirit!

Communion regenerates the Church.

7. The Jubilee is being in the Holy Trinity with the Church.

One cannot find fulfilment unless he/she enters into communion with God, Triune and One. The Trinitarian dynamics of diversity are merged by Love into One; and this makes us able to fully realize communion with others.

Many weep and complain because they feel dead inside, or can't express love, or can't hear God in the others, or haven't the patience to accept others. The remedy is to enter the Trinitarian dynamics by following Mary's example.

Our mission is not a theory; it is to concretely accept God's love and spread it to the world. Outside of the moving forces of the Holy Trinity nothing good can be realized.

The Church calls us to manifest the life of the Holy Trinity. Pray, that this may be fulfilled in us, and through our offering, also in the life of each Christian.

Nicola

Our Lady's message of 25 September 1999

Dear Children, today I invite you again to become bearers of my peace, particularly now that it is said that God is distant. In truth He has never been so close to you.

I invite you to renew prayer in your families through reading the Holy Scripture and through experiencing the joy which comes from encountering God Who loves His creatures infinitely.

Thank you for responding to my call.

Yet God has never been so close to us

We are invited to become bearers of peace. It is natural that when you love your own life you also love that of the others, and you love God as your Creator; and it comes naturally that your heart will have peace and inner strength to help you carry on.

Since the beginning of the apparitions, on 26 June 1981, a great call has been addressed to us; that of praying and fasting for peace, to become bearers of peace. It is only when you have peace in your heart that you can bring it to others in the family, the community and the world. But to bring peace, you must know how to love, to forgive, and to be generous, good and patient; from all this is born peace. For this reason we must continue to pray so that Our Lady's call is fulfilled in us.

Mary asks us to become bearers of Her peace particularly now that it is said God is far, though in truth, He has never been closer. We know that many don't believe, that many speak of a distant, uncaring God, but for us it is important to ask ourselves what we think when times are hard, or when we ask for a grace

which is not immediately granted. What do we think then, that God is distant, that He doesn't listen to or love us? This is surely wrong, for it is precisely during hard times that God is closest to us.

The Bible uses numerous expressions for God. The word "Jahvé" means "God with us," "God for us," "God knows our history and wants to save us." Jesus is also called "Emmanuel" which means "God with us." After His Resurrection Jesus often repeated: "I am with you," and He is with us particularly in the Eucharist. So let us pray for the Lord to grant us the grace of being aware of His constant presence, and of an open heart able to accept His love.

I invite you to renew prayer in your families. Our Lady insists on prayer in the family and the reading of the Bible. To pray with the Rosary is already to pray in a biblical manner.

During the month of October we hope that all those who have forgotten prayer in the family, and those who do not pray, will do their best to renew prayer thanks to this call by their Mother. May this prayer not only be the Rosary, but also reading and meditation of the Bible as we pray to the Lord to send His Spirit to help us understand it. Only this way will we be able to experience the joy of encountering God Who loves His creatures - and each of us - infinitely.

Fr. Slavko

Our Lady's message of 25 October 1999:

Dear Children, do not forget: this is a time of grace. Hence, pray, pray, pray. Thank you for responding to my call. Do not forget: this is a time of grace

Our Lady stresses: do not forget, thus pointing out to us the danger we run when we forget the good. Also the Bible, especially in the psalms, invites us not to forget the wonders of the Lord.

When we forget the good that the Lord does for us and the graces He gives us then we lose the joy to pray, we lose the spirit of gratitude and we can even lose faith, love and trust.

Our Lady teaches us not to forget. St. Luke says that Mary treasured all these things (her Sons' words) and pondered them in her heart (Lk 2:19). To forget what the Lord is doing in Medjugorje through Mary would mean to stop being grateful and we would lose the desire to follow her; and then should a cross or a problem arise we would more easily forget the good days and the graces the Lord has given us.

So "do not forget" means to believe, to be thankful, and to remain with the Lord. Think how easy it is to forget the good, yet to remember the bad done to us.

Our Lady also says that this is a time of grace. Of course for us here in Medjugorje it is a very special time because many people come here and experience God's mercy. The great miracle of Medjugorje is this time of grace which has lasted for so many years and which so many people experience.

At the end of this brief message Our Lady says, "pray, pray, pray." This is not the first time that she has made this triple request, and in fact, in one way or another she has asked us to pray in each of her messages. Let us say that the request is repeated to stress its importance, just as a mother would repeat an important piece of advice to her children. Hence, it is important for us not to forget the need to pray!

Fr. Slavko

* Fifth international Meeting for Priests will take place from June 30 to July 6, 2000.

The theme is, "Priest - A Man of the Holy Trinity and a Servant of the Body of Christ". Speakers will be Frs. Daniel Ange, James Manjackal, Rufus Pereira, Martin Ramoser, Cosimo Cavaluzzo, Jozo Zovko and Slavko Barbaric, and Sr. Elvira Petrozzi.

The parish will offer priests who attend the meeting free lodging during their stay. They should present

themselves at the parish office in Medjugorje upon arrival

Register for the meeting via Fax: 00387-88-651-888 or phone 00387-88-651-988

* Eleventh International Prayer Meeting for Youth will be held from July 31 - August 6, 2000. The theme is: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us"

Speakers will be: Primo Martinuzzi, Wayne Weible, Fr. Francesco Carlino, Fr. Selwaine, Sr. Elvira Petrozzi, Fr. Cosimo Cavaluzzo, Fr. Jozo Zovko, the visionaries, Fr. Slavko Barbaric and other witnesses.

Pray without ceasing

Continuous prayer is the greatest grace we could receive, or at least, it is the gate of heaven which opens up onto all other graces, both material and spiritual. When you find the key to permanent petition, you also possess the secret to happiness. This doesn't mean you become exempt from daily concerns and problems; but you receive the grace of "seeing beyond" and of living joyfully and peacefully - as Jesus did - beneath the Father's loving glance. The grace of this secret could not come from anyone but the Virgin Mary, for her life was a permanent prayer and our model.

In her apparitions Mary insists on the importance of persevering in prayer: "Pray, pray... much," as though it were a consignment of the secret of her life: "Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19-51). Mary was able to live a state of total obedience in her faith because she was united to the Father's will through unceasing prayer.

It is Mary's motherly love that makes her attentive to her Son's brethren who undergo the trials and battles of the faith during their earthly pilgrimage; she intercedes for them. Hence, her motherly love is made concrete through her presence by our side, and in particular through her powerful intercession. On our part, our filial love is expressed by being watchful so as not to lose that presence. We are watchful through actions and prayer, but above all through an untiring intercession which keeps us anchored to our Blessed Mom.

This attitude of recourse to the Virgin can be expressed in many ways, but the simplest and quickest way is definitely with the prayer of the Rosary. It is through it that we enter into her intercession, for Mary is present through her action and intercession. The greatest grace a person could receive here on the earth is to have the permanent presence of Mary.

The prayer of the Rosary is the humble and poor way necessary for us to reach the point of absorption of unceasing prayer. This simple prayer repeated over and over again serves to stop our ideas and thoughts from filtering into our heart and thereby hindering the Holy Spirit who wants to pray in us. Many say multiple Rosaries yet are not people of prayer if their heart does not burn with desire to petition and intercede. They pray but do not cry out; they bow down but do not go down on their knees; they dedicate time to prayer and meditation but do not petition. The door to prayer remains closed for them. Others pray a quarter of a second per hour, yet in the depths of their heart they are in a continuous state of petition; and these are real people of prayer.

The repetitiveness of the Rosary may seem senseless when it remains oral recitation; but it is, instead, wonderful in its simplicity when the Rosary helps you to widen your eyes to see Christ arriving on the horizon. In this sense, after the Rosary you do not remain the same person, but become more humble and poorer where your old self gradually dies, allowing the Lord to grow in you.

Has great chastisement of humanity already begun?

Fr. Amorth, we see that catastrophes are happening around the world almost one after the other. There have been earthquakes in Turkey and Greece, typhoons and floods in Mexico and India where millions were left without homes, the slaughtering of thousands of innocent people in Chechnya and Central Africa, atomic disasters, and frequent air and train crashes. Could all this be pointing to the sad forecasts of the end of the millennium?

That's not an easy question; it is, though, easier to observe things with the eyes of the faith. There are many things to be seen, such as the great corruption in today's society with the tremendous massacre of children in their mothers' wombs (far worse than any war or natural disaster), sexual and professional immorality on a public level which has destroyed families and wiped out the most sacred of values. I see the frightening decline in the faith which has greatly lowered the number of priests, including the level of quality and apostolic influence; and I see recourse to the occult (clairvoyants, satanic sects, spiritism...) We need to remember that the third secret of Fatima has not been published (all current versions being spread around are false), and then there is the prophecy of Fatima: "In the end my Immaculate Heart will triumph, Russia will convert and a time of peace will be given to the world." This is a prophecy of hope! Rather than God punishing the world, it is a case of humanity destroying itself. If sorrowful events are expected for the end of the millennium, then it is true that we are living them in full. The atomic disasters, deadly pills and genetic manipulation go to show that man can destroy man when all reference to God is lost.

However, we should not lose sight of the signs of hope. One of these outshines all others and is the "heroic march" by the Pope who continues to bring seeds of hope to peoples around the world, and despite his age and health, he has lost none of his charism. These are rays of light which announce a sunny day. Fr. G. Amorth

Pope asks: work together in media!

"Public opinion has been shocked at how easily the advanced communication technologies can be exploited by those whose intentions are evil. At the same time, can we not observe a relative slowness on the part of those who wish to do good to use the same opportunities?...

It would be a significant [...] achievement if Christians could cooperate more closely with one another in the media as they prepare to celebrate the forthcoming Great Jubilee!" (Pope John Paul II, 11 May 1997)

And from Medjugorje Our Mother calls: "Dear Children, without you I am not able to help the world. Help me! ... Spread my messages which I have received from my Son here in Medjugorje. I am anxious for people to know what is happening in Medjugorje..."

Denis Nolan, founder of Children of Medjugorje in Notre Dame (USA) together with Sr. Emmanuel, joins the Holy Father in making an appeal for greater cooperation, as he points out the need to get the Medjugorje message to those who cannot make it to the shrine.

The 'Children of Medjugorje' produces tapes for radio and television transmission, besides books by Sr. Emmanuel. They have proved extremely successful. Says Denis, "Sr. Emmanuel indeed has a charism 'to give the gift to others with love'."

Denis suggests, among other things, to use tapes and books on Medjugorje to supply city libraries, High School Religion departments, Diocesan Resource Centres, etc. He also strongly suggests to have shows aired by local radio stations, and broadcasted by local television stations.

For more information on how to do that, and on Sr. Emmanuel's tapes and books, contact: Children of Medjugorje, Box 1110, Notre Dame, IN 46556, USA.

email: dnolan@childrenofmedjugorje.com

* 8th Annual Youth Festival (under the auspices of Youth 2000) will take place in Scotland at Craig Lodge, Dalmally: June 29 to July 2; while the Easter Youth Retreat is from April 20 to 23.

The annual Marian Conference is on 12-14 May (speakers will include one of the visionaries from Medjugorje).

The Krizevac Youth Community, which is part of the greater community at Craig Lodge, celebrates its 10th anniversary on Sept.14 (Exaltation of the Cross). To date there have been 32 members in this mixed community and four of them have gone on to join the Greyfriars (Franciscans of the Renewal) in New York. The members of the Community, apart from helping in the Lodge pray for 3-4 hours per day and have Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament each day from 8am - 5pm. They are a great witness as they meet the needs of the retreatants and visitors, many of whom have described Craig Lodge as an 'oasis of peace'.

For information contact Calum, Mary Ann or Maureen. Ph. 01838 200 216, fax 01838 200 622, www.craiglodge.org

Request for plastic rosaries for poor children in Brazil: send to Marino Bacaicoa, Rua Roberto Augusto Colin 38, CEP 03814-11- Ermelino Matarazzo, Sao Paulo, S.P. Brazil. Please write "No Commercial Value / Donations only" on outside of parcel to avoid taxes being charged.

Fr. Slavko writes to Fr. Angelo

On the 22nd October 1999 Fr. Slavko wrote: "My dear Fr. Angelo, ...I am writing after hearing of your state of health.

I wanted you to know that I care for you, and that I know that the Eco di Maria which you created with so much love is a great thing. I know that it is produced in 17 different languages with about 900,000 copies per issue. It truly is one of the great works by Our Lady who uses us, her useless servants. I also want you to know that we are praying for you and for all Our Lady's intentions. God bless you, and Our Lady protect you and intercede for you before the Lord..."

* Alberto Bonifacio, aid carrier, writes: "I wish to assure Fr. Angelo of my prayers; he has been in my heart for many years and I cannot forget him. To all of you who will carry on the Echo I wish all the best. May the Holy Spirit enlighten you, and the Blessed Virgin guide you."

* From Madagascar: "To all at Echo the best wishes for the Jubilee year 2000. Keep up the great work; our prayers are with you!" (The Corrao Family)

* From the USA: May our loving Lord bless you, Fr. Mutti, this Jubilee year. May he deliver you from evil and shine upon you his love as you walk towards his Kingdom. (Denis and Cathy Nolan)

Fr. Angelo to the readers

In December Fr. Angelo left his parish and moved into a home run by the Benedictine Sisters of Charity where he will receive all the medical care and attention he needs. He wrote to his parishioners and readers.

Dear brothers and sisters, helpers and readers:

Peace and good upon you all from the house of Solferino (in Mantua). The muscular dystrophy (progressive and irreversible) has greatly worsened over the last few months, making me completely inactive.

I fill my days by praying and offering to God my sacrifice, for you all. I am ever more convinced that God is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works (Ps 144), and that each tomorrow is in His hands. That is why I am not worried, for each day has enough trouble of its own (Mt 6:34). I know that soon I will enter the real life where there are things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him (1 Co 2:9). But if I am still necessary I will not refuse the fatigue, I say with St. Martin.

I bless the work of the volunteers who will continue to echo Mary's voice, with the wish that these pages serve to prepare hearts for the Great Jubilee. We must not forget the three essential goals to which the Holy Father calls us:

1. Personal conversion with a return to Confession;
2. Total faithfulness to the Lord's day;
3. The spirit of solidarity which becomes concrete in works of charity towards all those in need.

I thank you all in advance for the donations you will make, without which this little instrument cannot continue.

Thank you all again for your moving expressions of concern and for your prayers. Let us continue, also with the help of this little instrument, to remain one big united family which follows the messages of Mary to bring her work to fulfilment.

In December, upon leaving the parish where he served for 24 years, he wrote the following to his parishioners. It was 8 December 1999.

Though I can no longer move, speak, or write, I will be with you this Christmas in spirit. "The Lord has given, the Lord has taken back. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job). In my prayers I shall remember you all one by one.

Now is the time to live that which I taught. Jesus is calling; and to Him I offer my powerlessness. Now I understand that the cross is the highest level of communion with Jesus and the most useful thing for souls. For this reason I am always happy and I do not think of the future (though I know it won't be easy), for "each day has enough trouble of its own" (Mt 6:34).

I thank the Father for the spiritual consolations I receive, and for the loving care I receive from those looking after me.

I wish for you all to be able to accept the cross when God sends it, just as Jesus accepted His right from Christmas when He humiliated Himself in the form of man.

I bless you all, particularly the sick, the aged, the lonely, and young people, children, families, helpers and benefactors.

A good Jubilee year to you all. And upon you all I invoke our Mother's blessing, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Don Angelo Mutti

8 December 1999 (my 74th birthday)

Thank you for your response to my call.