



# ECHO OF MARY

## Queen of peace

84

July 1991

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Our Blessed Mother's message of 25 June 1991, 10th anniversary of the Apparitions:

**Dear Children, Today on this great day which you have given to me, I wish to bless you all and say that these days of my presence here among you are days of grace. I desire to teach you and help you walk the way of holiness. There are many people who do not want to hear my messages and seriously accept what I say, and that is why I invite you to pray so that with your life and through your day-to-day living you might witness my presence. Pray, and God will help you discover the true reason for my coming. Therefore, my Children, pray and read the Holy Scripture, so that through my coming you might discover the message in Holy Scripture for you. Thank you for responding to my call.**

### **10th ANNIVERSARY TIME OF GRACE CONTINUES - PRAY TO UNDERSTAND WHY OUR LADY APPEARS**

Our Blessed Mother would like us to realize that her presence amongst us is a grace. Just as John prepared the way for the coming of Christ, Mary's presence in the world is required to prepare a people fit for Him. Her lengthy stay amongst us is a grace which God grants so that we might start living according to Jesus' Gospel in a time which is surely linked to the 2000 years since His birth. Mary repeats that Her mission is to lead us to holiness, which is the essence of the Gospel. It is in the Gospel that we find the very reason of our existence, because: "before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence" (Eph 1:4). Accepting the Gospel of light is the starting point for the way to holiness. Christ, when He came, was met with negative surprise despite the fact that the people were expecting a Messiah. The real problem came from the Scribes and Pharisees because their hearts were closed, so that instead of having the truth in their hearts, they had prejudice.

The same thing is happening now with regards to Mary's coming. She complains that Her messages are refused by many, or not taken seriously. So she counts on all those who do pay heed to them, so that in this time of grace, these are her witnesses, and through their witness other sheep might return to Jesus' fold.

We are reminded that it is impossible for us to open our hearts and understand the reason for her coming without prayer. And we mustn't be deceived into thinking that the we can do

without the grace that accompanies her presence in Medjugorje: "I go to Mass and read the Bible every day, I don't need Medjugorje!" No! We are all invited to heed her call. God's gifts are never given without reason. It is only through prayer, that we can discover the true reason for her coming. "Therefore, pray and read the Holy Scripture." May has come to confirm the Scriptures. We are a spiritually ignorant people, and even though we might proclaim the importance of the Word of God, we do not put it into practice. Just like at the wedding feast of Cana, Mary has come to tell us: "Do whatever he tells you." Our Lady adds: "So that through my coming you might discover the message in Holy Scripture for you." Our Lady's call is a personal one; it is addressed to each of us, and we are invited to respond personally, first as individuals, then as families and communities. We are easily distracted, not used to thinking of God as a Father, of us as His beloved children, and the Word of God often goes over our heads, we don't let it touch our hearts. But Mary has come to wake us up, to tell us that God wants to speak to us; He wants to speak to you and to me! Mary has come to tell us that God can be found in the Holy Scripture; that in His Book God has a message for us, for our conversion, for our times.

St. Jerome used to say: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Jesus." The worst thing, however, is that we often think we know the Scriptures without understanding Jesus and His will conveyed to us through them. Fr. Jozo said that Our Lady cried because we hadn't accepted the Scriptures and we are indifferent to what God has revealed to us with such immense love, for the sake of our peace and happiness.

Fr. Angelo

## **Only the poor are evangelized, but it is still time of grace**

by Padre Remo

Earth's reply to heaven, man's reply to God, is always lacking. The Scriptures tell us this many times. The same happens with Mary's words. We are part of that people belonging to God that remain deaf and are slow to hear His Word. Thus: "But I say this to you who are listening" (Lk 6.27). Jesus is addressing the poor and it is the poor who listen to Him; only they know how to listen. There is a close connection between poverty and ability to listen, just as wealth and ability to listen contradict one another. One could say that poverty makes one become a listener, and listening makes one become poor. On the other hand, wealth, self-sufficiency and arrogance make one indifferent, deaf and finally disobedient; and at this point man makes himself lots of idols, and he no longer depends on God.

The little ones and the poor believe and accept the Word of God and it is them who believe in the Virgin Mary. They are called to witness with their lives, and in thus doing their daily bread will become incomprehensions and persecutions for the coming of the Kingdom of God and Mary's Immaculate Heart.

Mary talks about returning to the Scriptures; never before has this need been said so clearly. Our Lady tells us that the Scriptures come before Her messages and remain even after Her messages. Rather, the messages are needed to understand the Scriptures, or in other words, God's plan for us. It is important to note that Mary links the two things: prayer and Scripture to understand the times that we are living and to be faithful to Her call.

What Mary has said today, She had already made us understand in past messages: "I keep

on inviting you but you are still far away" (25 Nov. 1989). "For years I have been inviting you .. I urge you to live a more profound spiritual life, but you are so cold" (25-12-89). "I am inviting those of you who have heard my message of peace to seriously and lovingly put it into practice..; many think to have done much just by talking about the messages, but they do not live them" (25.5.91). Nonetheless, Mary still says that we are living in times of grace. Only a few answer, and these have to do the part of many. Our Lady always inspires us with hope, and Her days of grace continue. Further still, She wants the grace of God to be great for each one of us. She repeats this many times. This means that She gives us time to accept this grace at Medjugorje - a grace so big that soon it will not be possible to accept it anymore.

Fr. Remo

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### **PADRE TOMISLAV'S BLESSING:**

With Our Lady's blessing, I bless all the readers of Echo, and in particular I bless the Pope, the Bishops, the priests, and all the representatives of the Faith so that in the Church they may present Our Lady with the way they live; and She will be accepted in the Church, even by the hierarchy.

I bless all the religious and the people called to consecrated life, so that in their hearts, they may live the presence of Our Lady and their life will be a special testimony for the elected people. I bless all the lay people and all the creatures so that the earth may be protected by Our Lady in these times and so every darkness in people's hearts may disappear.

I bless you, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Fr. Tomislav

### **"YOU WILL SEE HEAVEN LAID OPEN"**

#### **The unspiritual man confuses supernatural with magic, activism with growth of God's Kingdom**

Christianity today in the western world is in difficulty because of the naturalistic and rationalistic tendencies in today's Christians. "An unspiritual person is one who does not accept anything of the Spirit of God: he sees it all as nonsense" (1 Co 2:14). Hence, when people lack in supernatural experiences; that is, they have never experienced how the Word of God can work within them, and neither have they experienced the wonderful graces that accompany the Word, it is tremendously easy for them to confuse supernatural with magic. It is clear then, that not having experienced the supernatural a person will deny anything that cannot be explained in human terms.

The Old Testament is full of examples where God communicated directly with man, starting from Abraham, the Patriarchs, Moses, the Judges, and the Prophets. The New Testament is a direct intervention of God, and is full of revelations, apparitions and charisms. But even Jesus' miracles and His very Resurrection are denied by the modern day spirit of naturalism, which attributes them to psychological suggestion or some other natural fact. Of course, all this limits God's intervention in the world and amongst men.

Church history, too, is full of celestial communications. The Acts is full of them, and also

the Epistles of Peter, Paul, Philip and Cornelius. The same can be said for the Fathers of the Church, and the Saints, all the way down Church history, and including today's saints. Indeed, supernatural communications by God have always been a determining and constant part of their lives.

All this surely represents discernment, for the Church and for us. Is it not this that makes history new, that God is with us? But not in the way that the unspiritual man intends - who attributes His presence to a vague and theoretical presence in all man's works. God is with us truly; He guides us and His intervention in the Church and in all His children is continuous, unforeseeable and real, if His children let themselves be guided by the Spirit of God (cf. Rm 8.14).

God wants Jesus and Mary to be present in today's world, to speak in many places, to many people, to complete the number of the elected people and save many from ruin - must He then conform to our standards to do this? Would this not be wanting to put limits to that God who said, "You will see heaven laid open," and to Jesus who placed the proof of His presence in the Church in the many signs and prodigies (which are fruit of the faith)? In fact, He says quite clearly: "These are the signs that will be associated with believers..." (Mk16). Again, "I tell you most solemnly, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, he will perform even greater works" (Jn 14.12). "What I say is said and will come true - it is the Lord who speaks," are the words that the prophet Ezekiel uses in referring to the continuous interventions of mercy by God, that man may not boast about himself. In fact, the Word tells us: "to shame the wise, God chose what is foolish by human reckoning, and to shame what is strong, he chose what is weak by human reckoning; those whom the world thinks common and contemptible are the ones that God has chosen - those who are nothing at all to show up those who are everything... because if anyone wants to boast, let him boast about the Lord" (1 Co 1). Truly, "God traps the wise in their cleverness" (1 Co 3.20).

The prejudices of our poor limited minds stop us from recognizing those loving interventions of God's right hand, which are instead easily recognized by the lowly people. (You hid these things from the learned and clever people, and you revealed them to the little ones.)

We talk about God's actions in history, but in truth, we exclude His activity from our personal history and the world's history when we believe in the power of man instead of the power of the mustard seed; in activism and not in prayer. Jesus says, "He who does not reap with me, disperses." (Note that He says, "he who reaps with me" because He is the one who works; all we do is harvest the fruit: "you reap a harvest you had not worked for" (Jn 4.37), but He wants us to be His helpers.) May all those who believe they work for the Church - but instead are possessed by activism, as if the Kingdom of God were a human business and the supernatural did not exist - be aware of the above, for people in the meantime are still living in sin.

The wall of Jericho, or in other words, the kingdom of Satan, was knocked down, but not by the strength of the army. It was knocked down by the war cry and the sounds of the trumpets (Jos 6). In the same way, God cut back the numbers of Gideon's army and chose only 300 men, "so that Israel will not claim the credit for themselves at my expense and say: My own hand has rescued me" (Jg 7). Truly, "when it is not the Lord who constructs the house, the builders will work in vane. Some trust in their war chariots and others in their horses, but we trust in the power of the Lord our God," (Ps 20) till we become omnipotent with prayer that

moves God to intervention on our behalf.

So let us place our trust in Mary Who continues to tell us: "Pray, fast and let God work, and I will pray for you so that you may understand the greatness of God's gift in letting me stay with you" (25 April 1990).

Fr. Angelo

## **THIS IS THE VICTORY OVER THE WORLD: OUR FAITH!**

### **Life is absurd without faith!**

Part two of CARDINAL BIFFI'S meditation follows:

How is Faith victory over the world? I invite everyone to read the first chapter of the Letter to the Romans, for in it we'll see a description of the today's present world. In the end St. Paul summarizes his judgement of a world without Christ in four adjectives. Men without Christ: are senseless, inconsistent, loveless and merciless.

1. Faith is Victory over the world because when a senseless man has faith he finds meaning to life. Faith is, above all, enlightenment. With the revelation of Christ Crucified and Risen, Who alone gives sense and true reason for the existence of the created universe, we are able to see man in his true image, which is image of Christ and a participant in Christ's living Mystery. What are external things, after all? Manifestations of the essential value of man. What is the meaning of our terrestrial existence? A painful prologue, a fleeting existence, but necessary for a definite joyful condition in communion with God.

Man doesn't know who he really is, or what the meaning of life is. Faith saves us from that fatal schizophrenia that strikes those people who are forced to live and act without knowing neither the significance of life nor the final and true aim of their actions. Thus, Creation (according to St. Paul creation is a slave to 'emptiness') anticipates in Faith its final deliverance. Faith therefore, is fullness revenging emptiness, being revenging nothing. And in the same context, the sin of incredulity is an absurd victory of emptiness over fullness, of nothing over being.

The senselessness of the world often takes on a subjective character of falsehood - we live in a state of falsehood. A believer cannot forget that Jesus said: "the world is under Satan's rule, under he who is the father of all lies."

The third observation is important. The charge of madness is perfectly reversible for a person who has faith. A believer is mad for a non-believer: when a believer says that Jesus Christ is alive and present in the consecrated host, a non-believer says he is mad. And he's right! And a believer says a non-believer is someone who doesn't know that Jesus Christ is amongst us, and his life has no core, no heart, no aim, therefore he's mad. How can one live without an aim? The accusation is reversible. All we have to do is see who is objectively right. In other words, since Faith and the world are in contradictory positions, one of them must be right.

Now this brings us to a vision of Faith that saves reason. This idea is particularly alien to our present way of thinking, as for centuries we have been used to seeing Faith and reason as belonging to alternative spiritual and mental categories: either Faith or reason. But in actual fact, it is quite the opposite, for it is in believing that we save our reason.

In fact, the absurd is cried out all over the world - it is sung in songs, proclaimed in theatres and in cinemas: life is absurd, we are told. And it's true, because without faith reason is lost.

In an era like our present one we should remember that mental sanity undoubtedly depends on basic certainties. Mental sanity should be man's normal condition, but we live in a world which mocks a person who is certain of something, because that person possesses the truth. On the other hand, doubting is regarded as a privilege. The fact that someone speaks out is a sign of that person being certain of something, otherwise he/she would remain quiet. Therefore, everything depends on what certainties one believes in.

2. Faith is Victory over the world because man who is unstable, inconstant and unfaithful in the world, receives stability and the ability to be faithful through faith. But we live in a world that has no faith, and as we said, a world that has no sense. The real trouble for those who have abandoned Christianity is not in losing the Faith, but in the fact that these people lose their reasoning. They cannot reason properly any more.

It is not true either that today's world is a world that doesn't believe in anything. It believes in horoscopes, dietary charts, stock exchange forecasts, in lots of things. Our world is a gullible world, because it is unstable, unfaithful, and without constancy. There is not even any constancy in those structures that had always been considered definite, such as marriage. We know that marriage is something definite because it naturally gives origin to definite organs, called human beings.

This faithfulness, however, is not part of our world anymore. The world is totally unstable. It is Faith that gives us faithfulness and stability. By placing ourselves in communion with the eternal God and with the eternalized Risen Christ, Faith gives us a grasp onto a definite reality, and removes us from the tyranny of temporal flow. We live in an era which is obsessed by novelty, in an ever growing search for the latest trend. The anxiety that comes from not wanting history to surpass us, forces man (the worldly man, man left alone) to live in a continuous state of pursuance that ends up in the loss of everything: certainties, moral convictions, ideals in life.

"New" really means that which conforms to God's eternal design and which does not need a future. This is the concept of new. Catechism spoke about the Last Things: they were those things where nothing else came after them. The things that man means when he says new, however, are certainly short-lived, and wilt the day after. What is a two-day old paper worth? Since worldly man does not have any real and long-lasting convictions, he is not constant, and all in all he is rarely faithful to any doctrine, or friendship, or any particular opinion or party, etc. But this is not being a real man... When man is left to himself he tends to be influenced by the strongest movement of the moment. This "giving in" (to trends) is called realism; but it is actually "giving up," that is, not wanting to be protagonists in history and lords of the created universe. When we are in communion with God's silent judgement (a judgement that cannot undergo reformation), Faith saves us from the influence of other trends. Where there is faith, there is freedom!

Faith is victory over the world because a worldly man, who is unable to love, learns through faith to love. There is no social form where men are capable of infusing and preserving love. Dostoevsky and Solovev both taught that without love society becomes an ants' nest where people live together and are brought together by force; either by the brutal force of economic laws, or by political constitution, or psychological conditioning and manipulation of minds. Man left to himself is without doubt a man without love, because his existence is not based on those real motivations that make one love - that is, the existence of one God Who is Father, and of Jesus Christ in Whom we are called to exist as a single living

organism with only one destiny. Substituting this with different motivations does not help to inspire love. I always like to cite another saying by Solov'ev, who used to say that all the forms of socialism during the last century were based on this odd syllogism: "All men come from monkeys, therefore we must love one another as brothers do."

Faith is Victory over the world because it is in faith that a merciless man discovers mercy. The rationalist foundation in all schools of thought that prevail today are unable to conceive the idea of mercy, because they do not believe in sin (in the original sin) and are convinced that man is basically good. Faith recognizes mercy as being a prime necessity for all men, because it knows that all men are bad, egoistic and guilty. Where there is no mercy, it is impossible for people to live together in any type of group or community. Once all the myths and masked humanisms have fallen away, man's only hope is this.

Trying to adapt our faith to make it fit into the modern day cultures and creed, or saying that it is something for certain generous souls, are sins against the Faith and against man himself. So are attempts to sterilize it so that its consequences cannot be felt in the social, political, economical and cultural environments that might otherwise upset the unopposed high-handedness of the major governing systems. These are the temptations of the modern times that we must be very wary of.

(The End)

## **SATAN'S POWERS**

### **The Lord does not prohibit Satan from causing harm.**

In Our Lady's messages, she often mentions Satan. From reading her messages, we learn that Satan is strong, very active, he is always setting traps for us, he fights to destroy Medjugorje, to get the better of us, and he wants to destroy God's plans and ruin Mary's projects. He also wants to occupy first place in our hearts and take away our joy. Our Lady also tells us that God's glory is seen in his failures, that we can defeat him through prayer, the Rosary and fasting, that his plan for Medjugorje has failed...

Our Lady also tells us many other things, but today I want to point out a general principle: God never disowns His creatures, never, ever. He created them free and He lets them act. Then, in the end, each one will receive according to what he has done. In the meantime He waits, as in the parable of the grain and the weed. Thus, He lets Satan act, He lets the angels act, He lets the good and the bad people do what they feel they should do. Why didn't He make Hitler or Stalin have an accident? Why does He let the high-handed oppress the weak? Why does He not defend those who are persecuted? God waits. He, Who wants only good, life, happiness, health.. permits evil which derives from sin. It is also true, however, that He also knows how to draw good from bad: He gives free hand to the persecutors and exalts the martyrs. That is why the Scriptures say the man who stands firm when trials come, is happy (Jm 1.12). It also calls just as happy the person who, "had the power to sin and did not sin, to wrong another and did not do it" (Si 31.11). God's mercy and His justice will triumph in the final judgement. Freedom well used will also triumph, while freedom badly used will be punished.

In the meantime God does not even disown those creatures (of His) known as demons; and

He lets them act. Their ordinary activity is temptation, and we have seen how God can draw good from this. God also draws good from Satan's extraordinary activities and while everyone is tempted, it is a rare case where one has to undergo his extraordinary activities. We saw in Echo 82 that Satan's activities in us can be due to our own fault or otherwise. Now let's see the extraordinary activities that Satan uses to damage us. They can be summarized under 5 different points:

1. External disturbances. The devil can cause serious external sufferings - as in the case of many saints: St. Paul of the Cross; St. John of Ars; Padre Pio, etc... these disturbances can be beatings, whip lashings, blows on any part of the body; at times the victim can be thrown to the ground or against walls, or thrown down stair cases. They are rare, but they don't happen only to Saints, for I have known and know people who have similar attacks, even if to a lesser extent.
2. Diabolic possession. This is the most grave of all disturbances and it occurs when the devil enters a human body and forces that person to say or do things that the person is not responsible for and at times does not even have the ability to do. It is in cases like these that we find the showiest phenomena, like the victim speaking a language completely unknown to him/her, showing a superhuman strength, or knowing past or secret facts. The Gospel gives us a typical example in the possessed person from Gerasenes. The Gospel however, also gives us many other examples. The cases of possession can vary quite a lot, at times with showy symptoms, at times not. It would be an error (and many fall into this error) to try and create standards.
3. Diabolic oppression. Here the disturbances are not as great as those in possession. For example, Job was struck in his health, his affections, in his material wealth, but he was not possessed. And we exorcists come across many more cases of oppression than we do of possession: they are people who are struck in their health (illnesses that cannot be cured by any medicine, where doctors cannot understand what the problem is), in their affections, in their possessions, or in their jobs - with strange phenomena occurring on the persons, or their things, but without diabolic possession.
4. Diabolic obsession. Also in this case the Evil One presents himself in various forms. Prevalent are obsessive and invincible thoughts, so great to take the person to desperation and suicide. In these cases, (especially in these cases, more so than in others), the exorcists must be very careful not to confuse the devil's activity with psychic illnesses or parapsychological phenomena. But on the other hand, psychologists should also use the same attention - something rarely done.
5. Diabolic infestations. Contrary to others, I prefer to use the term of infestation for those cases where the devil does not act on man, but on houses, objects, and animals. These forms of diabolic activity are also possible, they are rare and much experience is needed to diagnose such cases - as it is very easy to fall into confusion, to be lead on by suggestion, to create manias for oneself that are extremely difficult to overcome. I repeat that these cases are rare. The best prevention is to live constantly in God's grace. Also here, however, God knows how to draw good from these satanic manifestations - conversions, return to a life of intense faith and prayer, charitable works, forgiveness of

offences received, reconcilements, humbleness and spiritual progression. It was not by chance that St. John Crisostomo considered the Evil One as an instrument for sanctification; not of course to give any merit to the devil, but to glorify God's wisdom Who knows how to use everything for our own good.

Fr. Gabriel Amorth

Satan has confessed: "She (Mary) is always upsetting my plans. She devastates my kingdom. She doesn't let me carry off a single victory, always ready to defeat me. She's always in the way, always interfering with my plans, rousing the help of those fanatics to rob souls off me. There where my victories are the most sensational, she in a silence that extends everywhere, multiplies hers. "

From "A tu per tu col maligno " (Face to Face with the Devil) by Fr. Mondrone.

## **FR. ANGELO INTERVIEWED "MARY CAME AT RIGHT MOMENT"**

Italian weekly, "Gioia", interviewed Fr. Angelo Mutti at a time when much negative news of Medjugorje is being spread by the mass media.

Preface:

Medjugorje, in the region of Herzegovina in Yugoslavia, where Our Lady has been appearing to six young people since 24 June 1981, draws the attention of people the world round. Many - an uncountable number of people - believe in these apparitions. The Church observes, while some of the clergy are openly hostile. Things were no different for all the "prophetic voices" which has given new life to the Church (eg. Franciscan movements, revelations concerning the Sacred Heart, apparitions of the Blessed Mother). It must be clear to us all that these interventions do not add anything to the faith, but they do, instead, underline certain aspects of it which time, external influence or lack of fidelity have made us forget. God therefore rouses His people from their sleep, to offer them the possibility to convert. The messages from Medjugorje number among these special interventions. At a time when the world was in "a real mess" (wars, the breaking up of its social and family structure, the danger of a new world war) the Queen of Peace came to offer man the remedy. If the chaos was fruit of man's detachment from God, the remedy is man's return to God, i.e., his conversion. Our Lady came to call us to make peace with God. Having made peace with Him, it would then be possible for us to make peace with each other.

Our Lady also gives us the means and the grace to accomplish this. Peace can only be attained through true conversion of the heart. Hence, it is not by calling ourselves "Christians" that indicates conversion; but is the total acceptance of, and surrender to, Jesus our Saviour.

This is done with simple means which I list here below:

- 1) Dedicate a part of the day (every day) to prayer with the heart; this will enable us to find God and listen to Him.
- 2) Fast on bread and water (once or twice a week). Not only bread and water, however, but abstain from the many things that burden our hearts and impede a relationship with the living God.
- 3) Monthly confession - this is now thought to be old fashioned because our modern civilization has reduced the sense of sin to nothing.
- 4) Holy Mass - a spring from which we can draw real communion with God and with our brothers and sisters.
- 5) Daily meditation of the Word of God, to keep us firm in listening to His Will.

We should not wonder if these calls - though they are the same as in the Bible - are not immediately accepted by the Church (perhaps not in substance as much as in source). There is the risk in fact, that a Christian experience like Medjugorje may be looked upon as absolutism, instead of being seen for what it is: a manifestation, a confirmation, a stimulus to make us grow in the real faith that the Church has always confessed, and in the one and only river of grace that gushes from the side of Christ. It is for this reason that the Church is always prudent towards these events in general, to check whether they present dangers of deviating from the real faith, and whether there is anything in them that contrasts with the faith and Christian morals.

Do not be amazed therefore if the local authorities were the first to show a certain resistance to the phenomena. The same happened at Lourdes where the local bishop only accepted the cult 4 years after the apparitions had finished, and at Fatima they had to wait 13 years. The cult concerning Merciful Jesus (by Sr. Faustina) was prohibited for 20 years. Padre Pio was placed under interdiction for 30 years and is now close to being canonized. We must remember that at Medjugorje the apparitions are still taking place.

Is it true that there has been some form of disobedience?

Q. The local ecclesiastic hierarchy is decidedly contrary to the manifestations taking place at Medjugorje (pilgrimages, liturgies, etc.) as they do not consider the apparitions to be real. Yet everything continues as before, or nearly, in obvious disobedience. Is this not scandalous?

A. This objection, and others, refer above all to earlier years, because the Yugoslavian Church now looks upon the events with a positive attitude. I would like to answer anyway to the question because the past cannot be cancelled and it will help others understand better and make the present and the future more credible. In fact, Gamaliel said to the Sanhedrin, "if it is of human origin it will break up of its own accord; but if it comes from God, no-one will be able to destroy it" (Ac 5.38). Here too, things have not broken up, but have advanced.

a) The hierarchy is contrary to the pilgrimages.. To which pilgrimages was it contrary however? Only those organized officially, by bishops or parish priests, but not the private ones. As far as liturgies are concerned, the bishop of Mostar, even though contrary to the

manifestations, has never prohibited that they be carried out regularly. Medjugorje is a parish and as such, must have Mass, Eucharistic functions, confession, etc., where the faithful, and hence the pilgrims, could participate.

b) Can we say therefore, that everything continues in obvious disobedience? If everything that a priest did conformed to the regulations set by the Church, then there was no disobedience. Praying on the hills or in private grounds cannot be and never was prohibited. Concerning the Bishop's orders that no priest should celebrate Mass at Medjugorje without being prepared to accept the Church's judgement of the apparitions, it does not appear that any priest who celebrated at Medjugorje had any other intentions.

c) Is this not scandalous? Can Our Lady authorize disobedience? We would like to say above all, that the Gospel itself is a scandal for anyone who does not accept it, to the point that Jesus said: "Happy are those who are not scandalized by me." It's easy to confuse scandal caused by disobedience to the Gospel with scandal for presumed disobeying men. The people could see more clearly than the commissions, and their persistence won in the end. Why be amazed at the difficulties that Medjugorje is going through? The Gospel meets with the same types of contradictions.

Q . Some suspect that the visionaries are involved in commercial interests, and thus the need to keep interest in Medjugorje alive.

A. The visionaries with daily apparitions are now four: Vicka, 27 years old, Ivan and Marija who are a little younger than Vicka, and Jakov who is now 20. Of the other two, Mirjana ceased receiving daily apparitions a little after one year, and Ivanka after five years. The Blessed Virgin appears to them, however, on special occasions (Mirjana's birthday, the anniversary of the first apparition for Ivanka). Mirjana also sees Our Lady on the 2nd of every month.

Of course, there are many commercial interests in Medjugorje: houses have been built, so have eating houses and boarding houses. The thousands of pilgrims have to sleep and eat somewhere don't they? Then there are the souvenir stalls. Pilgrimages are ways of making money, but this is normal. The same happened at Lourdes and Fatima, and on a great scale too.

Q. What does the Vatican think? Some say the Pope is against the local bishop.

A. On different occasions, the Pope has encouraged some bishops and priests to go to Medjugorje.

The Pope has never opposed the bodies that were set up to examine the facts. The Yugoslav Episcopal Conference has now declared that "based on investigations done to date, one cannot affirm that apparitions or supernatural revelations are taking place" (which does not exclude that this may be affirmed in the future!).

It must also be said that indirect confirmation is derived from the fact that there have been no contrasts between what is happening in Medjugorje and the doctrine of the faith and Catholic morality.

This can be seen in the bishops' concern for the parish, who prepare liturgical and pastoral instructions to ensure that everything conforms to the Catholic faith. Therefore, the pilgrimages are now totally free to continue. The Yugoslav Episcopal Conference works in perfect agreement with the Pope.

Q. The number of pilgrims seems to be growing all the time. Who are they?

A. Italians were the first to make pilgrimages to Medjugorje, then the English, German and Spanish speaking peoples in that order. Now there are many pilgrims from the Eastern Bloc countries.

Q. Even if an official approvation has not been given, has anything extraordinary happened just recently?

A. About 400 cases of extraordinary healings have been registered in the parish office in Medjugorje. For Italy, the most famous are the healings of Diana Basile, Antonio Piras (healed on the 7th January 1990) and the thirteen-year old boy Nicola Paccini (healed on the 8 December 1990). Many signs in heaven, on the cross and in many other places have also been registered. The medical association Arpa, from Milan have explained many of these cases in their dossier.

Q. What does Medjugorje mean for the actual situation in Yugoslavia?

A. Yugoslavia was the first to benefit from the Medjugorje phenomenon and represents a sign of hope, an urgent call, and a help in creating peace among the different ethnic groups. Perhaps the presence of Mary makes the enemy even more angrier, who keeps the flame of nationalism alight, but Our Lady can win when we least expect.

Q. What do you think Medjugorje represents in our present world - where people are a bit sceptic regarding the supernatural, and interested in things that amaze, in magical things?

A. This is a return to the authentic supernatural, that our secular culture had put aside. In fact, Medjugorje shows us that God does not work by the schemes of man, but by the power of the Gospel. Proof are the many conversions and calls to a life consecrated to God, to the sanctity that can be found there in Medjugorje - like flowers blooming in the desert of our naturalistic and secular world. It doesn't amaze that the materialistic world of today classes this as looking for the magical, or as a product of psychological insecurity. Those who do not believe cannot admit that these are clear interventions by the mercy of God.

Q. At Lourdes, Fatima, Banneux and now at Medjugorje - why are the Lord's messages of mercy accompanied by suspicion, bitter discussions and often great sufferances for the visionaries?

A. Yes, Medjugorje is not exempt from this. Man's sins and man's resistance to grace are always the same. The sufferings of those people who become messengers of God's will (so opposed to that of the unspiritual man) are the same as in the Gospel and end up in bliss.

Q. In your opinion, what is the future for Medjugorje?

A. I think that the Church will end up approving the Marian cult at Medjugorje, because of

the many good fruits. The pilgrimages will continue to grow. The visionaries will go through the normal ups and downs of every believer, or rather more than normal, because the gift of "seeing" is not a guarantee that a seer will remain in God's grace. On the other hand, seeing involves greater trials and is therefore more demanding and requires much vigilance.

## **In Jail: forgiveness transforms his life**

(Extracts from a letter) My name is Claudio and I am in prison at Badia di Sulmona (Italy). During my youth I made many errors (and now I realize) that estranged me from God, to the point that I am now serving a 23 year sentence. I was full of hatred, because of past events and injustice that I underwent, and my heart hardened and I became badder. After 6 years of imprisonment I had lost all hope, or rather, my only hope was vengeance. In September of 1988, however, we were advised that a religious manifestation would take place in the theatre. I went but not out of any particular interest or expectation. There was a group of people who, after a brief presentation, started singing songs of praise to God and Our Lady. I found it curious at first. Between the songs, people told of their own conversions. I listened with great interest to one of them who told how he met the Lord and I was so moved that I started crying. I couldn't stop crying and then I don't know how, but I found myself embracing him. The meetings became regular and I started on my journey towards God. I discovered things that I would never have imagined. God loves me and wants my love, and He gives me joy. But joy comes through forgiving. I would never have thought that I could have received so much joy, peace, security and freedom... through forgiving. I started forgiving all those people who had hurt me, starting from the judge that condemned me to 23 years' imprisonment, and whom I had sworn to hate eternally. I met him, greeted him, shook his hand and offered him a coffee. That doesn't seem such a great deal? For me it was a victory that gave me immense joy. I asked all those people that I had hurt, even if only slightly, to forgive me. My whole life was completely transformed. Now I continually praise the Holy Trinity and Our Lady - I couldn't do otherwise. I've even come to the point where I thank God for having given me these 23 years, otherwise I would never have met Him. Today I live in Him and for Him and I feel that my life must be one of prayer. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the medicine that the Good Lord gave me is forgiveness, and I pray to Him that He may give it to everyone, and in particular to those who are in confinement. I constantly ask Jesus to let all those like me walk on the same path to Him Who is life. I pray to him that those 30 thousand people in prison like me may learn to forgive. Here now, various prison mates give praise to the Lord and I thank Him for using me to make Himself be known. I, Claudio, praise and thank the Lord and I have offered him my life for the good of my brothers here in prison. I appeal to all of you, if you have the opportunity to visit a jail, go and do it for the sake of the many people who are hungry for God: only He can give us salvation, heal us and give us forgiveness, forgiveness,

forgiveness - joy and freedom.

Claudio

## **PRAY THE ROSARY!**

More than a Marian devotion, the Rosary is a Christocentric and Christological devotion.

IN fact, in reciting the Rosary, we meditate on and contemplate Christ, through the eyes and heart of Mary. Mary is, after Christ, the real pontiff between the divine and all which is human. If some of the mysteries are devoted to Mary, it is to present Her as the first fruit of Christ's redeeming activity. If it weren't so, then Our Lady would not have recommended so strongly that we pray the Rosary - at Lourdes, Fatima and many other places. Pope Leo XIII would never have written eleven encyclicals all regarding the Rosary (and with those written by other popes, there are 47 in all).

John Paul II defines the Rosary as: "My favourite prayer. A wonderful prayer both for its simplicity and its profundity." Padre Pio said of the Rosary: "The Rosary is a wonderful gift given by Our Lady to all humanity. This prayer is the summary of our faith; a support for our hope; the explosion of our charity (love). The rosary beads are a powerful weapon that will make the devil escape, it helps us overcome temptations, win God's Heart, and obtain graces from Our Lady. Love Our Lady, make others love Her. Always recite the Rosary! " "So let's start saying the Rosary again, and Christ will come back to us, especially in these days where the world seems to have lost Him." (From *Se Vuoi Riflettere* (Reflections) by Giovanni Pini.) Promises made by Our Lady to Blessed Alano della Rupe:

1. My special protection to all those who will recite the Rosary.
2. The Rosary will be a powerful weapon in the fight against hell. It will destroy vices, disperse sin and defeat heresies.
3. The soul that recommends itself to me by the recitation of the Rosary, shall not perish.
4. Whoever shall recite the Rosary devoutly, and meditate upon the mysteries, shall be converted if a sinner, if just he shall remain in the grace of God, and become worthy of eternal life.
5. Every day I deliver from purgatory those who were devoted to the Rosary.
6. The faithful children of the Rosary shall merit a high degree of glory in heaven.
7. You shall obtain all you ask of me by the recitation of the Rosary.
8. All those who propagate the holy Rosary shall be aided by me in their necessities.
9. Devotion to my Rosary is a great sign of predestination.

## **Even real prophesies do not always come true**

In answer to a brother concerned about the many messages containing threats:

Dear Romano,

Keep in mind that the Word of God is worth much more than all the private revelations put together! Furthermore, spreading messages of misfortune is not productive, because:

1. People do not convert when threatened by chastisements (look at the Israelites), but through the internal force of love.
2. We can never be certain when or if the threatened event will happen, because God can still change things (He is immutable - it means that the changes were foreseen because of penance and prayers done by men). The Bible is full of threats, but God had pity and withdrew His word. For example, Jonah announced: "Only 40 more days and Nineveh is goint to be destroyed," but it wasn't. According to Isaiah, Ezekiel should have died, but the sentence was put off and he survived a further 15 years. Josiah was not chastised as announced, but the chastisement was shifted onto his successor. And the same with Akab. (see 2 K 20 and 22)
3. Do not spread news of tests done by extravagant specialists.. We have the Old and New Testaments.. If they will not believe in Moses and the prophets, then they will not believe either even if a person rises from the dead.

Fr. A.

## **THE MAIL**

Medjugorje will come to an end, but Mary's wish is that it will continue in our hearts. From Zagabria: ... All of us in the group that are consecrated feel a special call for Medjugorje, but that doesn't mean that we have to be at Medjugorje. The apparitions will finish, but the Spirit of our Mother must continue living in the souls of the consecrated people all over the world. (Rozo P.)

From Vietnam: ... I don't know why some priests find it difficult to believe and are waiting for the Church to recognize the events at Medjugorje as being authentic. Aren't the number of conversions enough to attest to this? (Fr. Ngujen Van Chau, HuÈ, 14 March 1991) (The wonderful simplicity of the Vietnamese priests.)

From France: ... I am very interested in Echo. Mary has marked my heart with an indelible sign of love. I serve Her constantly. She gave me peace and places many brothers and sisters in my arms who are in need of comfort, help and prayers. I would never again wish to disappoint Her and I will always try to wipe the tears that fall from Her eyes because of my

sins. I will do it in all humbleness, with the poor means of a powerless, incapable man, but instrument of grace. I thank God for having made me find Echo... (Ternet - Vezac, 2 May 1991)

From Romania: A young man who works with orphans writes to say: I teach religion to children. Some of them will soon be taking their First Communion, others will be baptized. It is the month of May and we are reciting the Rosary, but the children are asking for rosary beads.. then on the same day I received a telephone call from Fr. Andrea who was in Bucharest with the White Army. A woman from their group sent me many rosary beads for the orphans, plus the prayer of Our Lady of Fatima...

(Anca Dragos, 29 May 1991)

Many thanks to all those who help us, and to those who write to us. Unfortunately, we cannot thank everyone, or reply to everyone. We cannot guarantee that we can continue publishing Echo due to too many other commitments (looking after the parish is already a full time job on its own).

We wish you all Happy Vacations. May they be prayerful ones and spiritually fruitful, by participating in retreats, holy meetings, in doing good deeds; so that the days of grace that God still grants us will not have been spent in vain. Our vacations will therefore become a sign of Mary for all.

May the Blood of Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, Assumed into heaven, sanctify you; and God bless you all.