



ECHO OF MARY

Queen of peace

154

November-December 2000 - [Info](#)

Our Lady's message, 25 October 2000

Dear Children, Today I invite you to open yourselves up to prayer, that prayer may become joy for you. Renew prayer in your families and form prayer groups; that way you will experience joy in prayer and in communion. All those who pray and are members of prayer groups are open in their hearts to God's will and give joyful witness to God's love.

I am with you; I carry you all in my heart and I bless you with my motherly blessing. Thank you for responding to my call.

Form Prayer Groups!

In last month's message Our Lady urged us to work more for God and His Kingdom. Today she is inviting us to open ourselves up to prayer. "Open yourself" - because if your heart, mind and soul are not open and willing to accept an encounter with God, then prayer (which is an encounter with Him) is not possible; it doesn't exist. Offering holocaust and sacrifices is not enough if one's heart is distant (Ps 51).

To pray is to be in God's presence and be inundated, permeated and transformed by His Love so we can then work for Him and His Kingdom. To pray is to recognize oneself as a gift of God; and offer oneself as a gift to God, as Jesus and Mary did. It is then that the miracle of welcoming God into the world is fulfilled through prayer. The event which radically changed the history of man was possible because of Mary's fiat: "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me," (Lk 1:38). Now that God is incarnated, and that man's heart is God's temple, we too can and must say our fiat to His will.

Undaunted, we must open ourselves up to God, surrender ourselves to Him, so that rather than lose our lives we shall save them (Lk 9:24). We shall lay the foundations of our house on the rocks (Lk 6:48); we shall fly on eagle's wings (Ex 19:4); we shall not suffer, we shall offer. Persecution or martyrdom cannot stop the heart from rejoicing when we are in God, with God and for God who loves us more than a mother loves her child (Is 49:15). We must refer and orient everything to God so that all comes back from Him blessed and sanctified. Prayer thus becomes an exchange of gifts, a concrete relationship of love: that your prayer

may become joy.

We should not let a relationship of true love die through repetition and automatism, It needs renewing.. Renew prayer in your families and form prayer groups: this is a way of putting Mary's call from last month's message into practice: work more for God's kingdom.

For many years, with infinite patience, Mary has been showing us the way and encouraging us to follow it whilst assuring us of her help. She taught us to pray with the heart, and to appreciate personal prayer; she reminded us of the importance of prayer in the family, of listening to the Word of God, of Holy Mass; and she encouraged us to surrender ourselves to God and to trust Him.

Today, Mary also invites us to form prayer groups, and I believe this is the first time that in any of her messages to the parish of Medjugorje and hence to all of us (see message of 6 February 1986) she explicitly asks for this. And as she often will, Mary adds motivation to her invitation: this way you will experience joy in prayer and in communion. Joy, often indicated as a fruit of prayer, is a special fruit of the communion created at prayer groups. Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them, says Jesus (Mt 18:20), and we must believe with all our strength in this Presence of His, and let ourselves be transformed by It.

Not only, but all those who pray and are members of prayer groups are open in their hearts to God's will and give joyful witness to God's love. One's heart must be open to be able to pray, but at the same time prayer produces an open heart; prayer enables one to experience God and thus to give joyful witness. How wonderful! In the name of Mary, fortified by her motherly blessing, and with the certainty that we are all in her Heart, let us accept her invitation to form prayer groups. The success of them will not depend on our own strength or capacity, but if we are able to make ourselves small and be humble instruments in Mary's hands then we will see the great things she will do for us and we will learn to see and to praise and hence to witness God's Love.

May our hearts be happy, and our hope be strong, for the world is in Mary's hands, and her Immaculate Heart will triumph.

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Our Lady's message of 25 October:

Dear Children, Today I wish to open up my motherly heart to you and I invite you all to pray for my intentions. I desire renewing prayer with you and I invite you to fast, which I wish to offer to my Son Jesus for the coming of a new time, a time of spring. In this Jubilee year many hearts have opened up to me and the Church is being renewed in the Spirit. I rejoice with you and I thank God for this gift. And I invite you, my Children, to pray, pray, pray until prayer becomes joy for you. Thank you for responding to my call.

Mary leads us to springtime

A message of joy and hope, it is a call to collaborate with Mary, knowing that this means commitment and responsibility, in the certainty that her Immaculate Heart will triumph. Today I wish to open up my motherly heart to you and I invite you all to pray for my intentions. In Mary's Immaculate Heart, our contribution - no matter how small - is always significant. Each of us is truly unique, irreplaceable in God's eyes; and our response of love to God is a flower that no one else can cultivate on our behalf.

Mary's call is for everyone; no one should feel excluded; no one should feel unworthy or incapable. So let us all accept her call - big and small, old and young, near and distant, holy and sinful. In Mary's heart there is place for all. We only need to decide; to trust in her.

Mary does not reveal to us her intentions; she simply asks us to help her: I desire renewing prayer with you and I invite you to fast, which I wish to offer to my Son Jesus for the coming of a new time, a time of spring. We are being called to collaborate with Mary for the coming of a new time, a time of radical change in the world. What greater task could there be? Could there be a more important, or more prestigious job than this?

The call is for us all; all of us are capable of contributing, whether we are healthy or sick, learned or ignorant, free or slaves, rich or poor. What is valuable for the world is not necessarily so for God. It often happens instead that the opposite is true (Mt 5:3-12).

Mary needs prayer and fasts. That is what she wants to present to her Son Jesus so she can obtain the coming of a new time, a time of spring. From the fifth day of her apparitions in Medjugorje Mary has asked for prayer at almost each apparition. Prayer is necessary for us so we can reach communion with God; and draw from the fount of salvation which was opened for the world with Christ's sacrifice. From the sixth day Mary has often called for fasting. Prayer and fasting are two lanes on the road we are called to take, but the journey must follow Our Lady's indications; not be reduced to an exterior religious practice.

On the subject of prayer we have given ample comments in recent editions of Echo. With regards to fasting it certainly means abstaining from taking in food (on the suggested days of Wednesdays and Fridays - see message to Ivan of 14 Aug. 1984), but this is not enough (Lk 18:12). Just as with prayer, Mary asks for fasting with the heart (20 Sept. 1984). Fasting is thus abstinence from food, but more than this it is living soberly, abstaining from all types of greed, tyranny, abuse and lust. Fasting is renouncing all that is superfluous; it is sharing with others. Read Isaiah 58: a truly beautiful chapter! Fasting is detachment from your own things and from worries and all that impedes you from being completely open to God and to His action of grace. Prayer and fasts are powerful weapons which defeat evil and the devil (Mt 17:21).

Mary shares her joy with us: In this Jubilee year many hearts have opened up to me and the Church is being renewed in the Spirit. These are signs of the spiritual springtime - the flowers are finally beginning to blossom; the Church is being renewed in the Spirit. Our Holy Father has spent his own life without reservation so that the Church may live a new Pentecost and so the civilization of love may triumph in the world; and I think that Mary thinks especially of him when she says: "I rejoice with you."

Accept Our Blessed Mother's call and rejoice with her, and thank God with her! It is the hymn of Magnificat that Mary wants to lift up to God with us. May, then, our lives be an unceasing liturgy of praise and thanksgiving; may it be prayer that has become joy for us!

In Christ is our salvation!

"Dominus Jesus" beyond religious relativism

On 5 September the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith presented the "Declaration Dominus Jesus" on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church. The document is a declaration and hence does not contain new doctrines, but reaffirms what has already been said by the Magisterium. Since it is a doctrinal document with express approval by the Pope, it must be accepted "with faith" by all believers.

- Contents -

The declaration reasserts traditional Catholic doctrine to counteract an ever more common relativistic mentality.

"The Church's constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism. As a consequence, it is held that certain truths have been superseded... The roots of the problems are to be found in certain presuppositions which hinder the understanding and acceptance of the revealed truth. On the basis of such presuppositions, certain theological proposals are developed in which Christian revelation and the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Church lose their character of absolute truth and salvific universality, or at least shadows of doubt and uncertainty are cast upon them. (4) It is thus necessary to reassert the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the theory of the limited, incomplete or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, which would be complementary to that found in other religions, is contrary to the Church's faith... The deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is at the same time the mediator and the fullness of all revelation. Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself. (5-6)

The Holy Spirit in the work of salvation. "There are those who say that the Spirit works without Jesus. This is in profound conflict with the Christian faith. The Catholic faith considers the salvific incarnation of the Word as a trinitarian event. The action of the Spirit is not outside or parallel to the action of Christ. There is only one salvific economy of the One and Triune God, realized in the mystery of the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Son of God, actualized with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit." (12)

Unicity and universality of Christ's salvific mystery: "The thesis which denies the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ is also put forward. Such a position has no biblical foundation." Instead, "it must be firmly believed as a truth of Catholic faith that the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished once and for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Son of God." (14)

Unicity and unity of the Church. "The Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church, and many elements

can be found of sanctification and truth in those Churches and ecclesial communities which are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church." However, "they derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church;" and, "the Church of Christ is present and operative also in these Churches." .. Those who are baptized in other communities: "are, by Baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church." (16-17)

The Church and other religions. "For those who are not formally and visibly members of the Church, salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of grace .. which enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. This grace comes from Christ; it is the result of his sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit. This salvific grace of God is bestowed in ways known to Himself." (20-21)

- Reasons for the Document -

"Faced with certain problematic and even erroneous propositions, it has been necessary to reconfirm the Church's faith... The various religious traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God. Indeed, some prayers and rituals of the other religions can be occasions in which the human heart is prompted to be open to God's action - but one cannot contribute to these a divine origin; and it cannot be overlooked that other rituals, insofar as they depend on superstitions or other errors, constitute an obstacle to salvation. The truth of the faith does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time it rules out in a radical way that mental-ity of indifferentism characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that 'one religion is as good as another'.

A dialogue without foundations would degenerate into empty wordiness. Equality, which is a presupposition of interreligious dialogue, refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content. "All the children of the Church should nevertheless remember that their exalted condition results, not from their own merits, but from the grace of Christ. If they fail to respond to that grace, not only shall they not be saved, but they shall be more severely judged." (22)

It must be clear that the document is not saying that the faithful of other religions cannot be saved, but that these religions per se are not salvific.

- Reactions -

Cardinal Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said the Document was meant for the academic world, not for the ecumenical or interreligious world. It has, though, aroused criticism from representatives of other religions and Christian confessions, including some Catholics who have expressed perplexity at the tone of certain expressions in a particularly difficult moment for ecumenical dialogue. For some Anglicans and Protestants it undermines the many successes achieved over the years of dialogue. The Pope, however, responds to these fears by reiterating the Catholic Church's commitment to ecumenical dialogue; and during the Angelus of 1 October the Pope said: "This Declaration, which is close to my heart, expresses the same ecumenical passion that is the basis of my Encyclical *Ut unum sint*."

(Mirco Trabuio)

NEWS OF THE JUBILEE

Dear elderly friends...

"The Jubilee of the Elderly which we are celebrating today has special importance in view of the increasing numbers of elderly people in contemporary society. Celebrating the Jubilee means first of all accepting Christ's message for these people, but at the same time treasuring the message of experience and wisdom which they bring in this particular season of their life. For many of them old-age is the time to reorganize their lives, making the most of the experience and abilities acquired."

A message of hope rang out in St. Peter's on Sunday (17 Sept.) as he asked society to "treasure the message of experience and wisdom passed on by the elderly"; and an appeal, that they be given the opportunity and the help required to live this important stage in life fully and with dignity. "Much can still be done to increase awareness of the elderly's needs, to help them express their abilities as well as possible, to facilitate their active integration in the life of the Church and, especially, to ensure that their personal dignity is respected and valued always and everywhere."

It often happens that when man reaches a mature age, he is unable to accept situations of pain and suffering. The Pope recalled the suffering Servant: "a person who makes himself totally available to God, who accepts the mission entrusted to him even if it is arduous and full of pitfalls: his trust in God gives him the necessary strength and resources to achieve it, remaining firm even in adversity."

"Jesus began to teach the Apostles 'that the Son of man must suffer many things' (Mk 8:31). At first sight, this prospect seems humanly difficult to accept; and how could it be otherwise? Suffering can only create fear! But precisely in the redemptive suffering of Christ lies the true answer to the challenge of pain.

Dear elderly friends, in a world like this which often makes a myth of strength and power, it is your mission (our mission - for I also belong to your group) to witness to the values which truly count. Precisely as senior citizens, we have a specific contribution to make to the development of a genuine 'culture of life' by witnessing that every moment of our existence is a gift of God, and that every season of human life has special treasures to put at the disposal of all!"

Place of Honour at Jubilee for Mary

Mary's 'primacy' is rooted in her 'humility'. Her privileged relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit did not spare her, in her earthly life, the efforts of the human condition. This profoundly human portrait of the Virgin of Nazareth was painted by John Paul II at the solemn Eucharistic concelebration in St. Peter's Square at the close of the 20th International Mariological-Marian Congress and the World Jubilee of Marian Shrines held from 15 to 24 September at the Shrine of Divine Love in Rome. During the ten days of intense study and

prayer dedicated to Our Lady, reflections on Marian theology and popular piety were offered by 200 speakers from 36 different countries. The theme, 'The Mystery of the Trinity and Mary', helped to reveal the features of the Mother whom Jesus gave to us from the Cross: an extremely humble creature, of whom never enough can be said.

The Pope, who openly declares his love for Mary, thus dedicated an ample chapter of the Jubilee to Mary "who so closely follows Jesus in the lowering of himself. She, who had the mission of divine motherhood and the exceptional privileges which place her above every other creature, feels first and foremost to be 'the handmaid of the Lord' and is totally dedicated to serving the divine Son. With ready availability she also makes herself the 'servant' of the brethren."

Due to this extraordinary closeness between Mary and the Trinity, it is clear that to celebrate Jesus is to celebrate His Mother: "Are we not celebrating the 2,000th anniversary of Christ's birth? It is therefore natural that the Jubilee of the Son should also be the Jubilee of the Mother!

It is thus to be hoped that among the fruits of this year of grace, as well as that of a stronger love for Christ, there should also be that of a renewed Marian devotion. Mary must be deeply loved and honoured, but with a devotion which, to be authentic, must be firmly grounded in Scripture and Tradition; must be expressed in an effort to imitate the All Holy in a way of personal perfection; must be far from every form of superstition and vain credulousness; must always be able to go back to the source of Mary's greatness, becoming a ceaseless Magnificat of praise to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit."

** **René Laurentin**, French theologian and famous expert on Mariology, presided at a round table during the Congress on Mary's presence in the various cultures in the world. Asked to comment the importance of Mary in this Jubilee, Laurentin indicated the Pope's motto "Totus tuus" as an eloquent example of personal surrender to the Mother of God. How can Christ be announced today through Mary? How is the Virgin present in evangelization?

"Mary has a central and universal position in the Gospel, though a very discreet one. She is the sole human cause of the earthly birth of the Son of God. She was present all during Christ's infancy and his adulthood up to the age of 30. She was present at the Crucifixion, and at Pentecost; and with her Assumption became the eschatological figure of the Church." What is Mary's role in ecumenical dialogue?

"A difficult one. The Mother of God is a sign of ecumenical contradiction. Paradoxically, though Catholics and Orthodox share the same faith and fervour, more problems are had with the latter than with Protestants. Here at the Congress I met a Lutheran - a missionary bishop - who founded an order in honour of Mary after seeing the Blessed Virgin in "locution" more than ten years ago in the Church of Jesus in Rome. Let us hope for more surprises by the Holy Spirit and Mary."

(Extract from Avvenire)



* Icon of Mary, Seat of Wisdom on pilgrimage in Russia. The modern mosaic icon, blessed on 10 September in St. Peter's at the conclusion of the Jubilee of University Teachers, was handed over by the Pope to the Archbishop of Athens; and a week later to the delegation from the Church in Russia.

The holy image "went on pilgrimage" to a number of places in Moscow, and on the 24th September at the Cathedral of the Immaculate a solemn concelebration was led by Archbishop Kondrusiewiech who explained that the reason for the pilgrimage was threefold: to obtain greater Marian devotion in the world; a deeper Christian devotion together with a more incisive pastoral ministry for schools and universities

On 1 Oct. St. Petersburg hosted Russia's first international conference on the Rosary. It was a pilgrimage with deep religious and cultural significance for the new Catholic Russia.
Stefania Consoli

1,500 Bishops at Mary's feet

"The sight of so many bishops gathered here from around the world brings to mind the times of the II Vatican Council, when the Presence of the Holy Spirit was strongly felt in the roar of a new Pentecost."

With these words the Pope opened the celebration of the Jubilee of Bishops on the 7th October (day dedicated to the Queen of the Holy Rosary). The prayer service was enhanced by the presence of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima (brought to Rome from Portugal for the occasion). The recitation of the glorious mysteries was led alternately by a bishop, a cardinal and a family from each of the five continents, and the fifth decade was led by Sr. Lucia and the community of the Carmelite Monastery in Coimbra who were linked by radio and television with St. Peter's Square.

At the end of the Rosary the Holy Father commented: "This evening our prayer has spiritually united the human family around Mary. In the context of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, we wanted to express the Church's gratitude for the motherly care that Mary has always shown to her children on their pilgrimage through time. There is no century or people in which she has not made her presence felt, bringing light, hope and comfort to the faithful, especially the lowly and the poor."

"In particular, our prayer this evening takes place in the light of the "message of Fatima" the content of which helps us reflect on the history of the 20th century," and in saying this the Pope anticipated the Act of Entrustment made the following day together with the Bishops at the end of Mass, during which he said: "May the venerable image of Our Lady of Fatima, which we have the joy of hosting in our midst, help us to relive the experience of the first Apostolic College, gathered in prayer in the Upper Room with Mary, the Mother of Jesus." And with this collegial spirit the Bishops entrusted the III Millennium and mankind to Mary: a great ecclesial event placed as a seal to the Jubilee.

"Act of Entrustment"

The Church today, through the voice of the Successor of Peter, in union with the many Pastors assembled here from every corner of the world, seeks refuge in your motherly protection and trustingly begs your intercession as she faces the challenges which lie hidden in the future. (...)

Today we wish to entrust to you the future that awaits us, and we ask you to be with us on our way. We are the men and women of an extraordinary time, exhilarating yet full of

contradictions. Humanity now has instruments of unprecedented power: we can turn this world into a garden, or reduce it to a pile of rubble. We have devised the astounding capacity to intervene in the very wellsprings of life; man can use this power for good, within the bounds of the moral law, or he can succumb to the short-sighted pride of a science which accepts no limits, but tramples on the respect due to every human being. Today as never before in the past, humanity stands at a crossroads. And once again, O Virgin Most Holy, salvation lies fully and uniquely in Jesus, your Son. (...)

Here we stand before you to entrust to your maternal care ourselves, the Church, the entire world. Plead for us with your beloved Son that he may give us in abundance the Holy Spirit. (...)

O Mother, you know the sufferings and hopes of the Church and the world: come to the aid of your children in the daily trials which life brings to each one, and grant that, thanks to the efforts of all, the darkness will not prevail over the light. To you, Dawn of Salvation, we commit our journey through the new millennium, so that with you as guide all people may know Christ, the light of the world and its only Saviour, who reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen."

Nicola Bertani

Family: God's gift and blessing to world

The Jubilee of Families was held in Rome from 11 to 15 October to coincide with celebrations for the Third World Meeting of Families (held every three years, the first one was held in Rome in 1994, then in Rio de Janeiro, and the next one will be held in Manila). Certain aspects of this Jubilee brought to mind the unforgettable World Youth Day meeting when thousands and thousands of young people invaded Rome. That same enthusiastic response and sense of involvement puts them on a par; both are living signs of hope for the world and an affirmative response within the culture of life. For it is true that if the future and hope of the world are the young people, it is also true that they are the fruit of a family. And the family is the first school of human development and of faith.

The stress placed on this Jubilee of Families by the Pope and by those involved in pastoral care of families is no doubt due to the worry caused by the harsh attacks it receives from the world and the lay culture.

The concept of family as a single nucleus, and as a place where man's fundamental values are learned, and where the growth of individuals is guaranteed by a climate of security and love, is seen more and more as Utopian, or as a burden to be rid of.

"In many regions, and paradoxically right in the more prosperous countries, bringing children into the world has become a decision taken with great hesitation. It could be said that at times children are seen as more of a threat than a gift. (...)

God's blessing (upon married couples) is at the origin not only of marital communion, but also of a responsible and generous openness to life. It is in children that marriage blossoms: they crown that total partnership of life which makes husband and wife 'one flesh'. This is true both of the children born from the natural relationship of the spouses and those desired through adoption.

Children are not an accessory or option for married life, but its supreme gift."

With these words the Holy Father threw light on a burning topic as he tried to shake the

consciences of adults who shun the responsible love and self-giving required to bring up children. "Human beings were not made for solitude; they bear within themselves a relational vocation, rooted in their spiritual nature. Because of this vocation, they grow to the extent that they enter into relationships with others, fully discovering themselves only in 'a sincere giving of self' " (Gaudium et spes, 24).

"Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh' (Gn 2:24). One flesh! How can we not see the power of this expression? The biblical term 'flesh' calls to mind not only man's bodily nature, but his overall identity as body and spirit. What the spouses achieve is not only a joining of bodies, but a true union of their persons; a union which is so deep that it in some way makes them a reflection of the 'We' of the three divine Persons."

The height of the dignity to which married couples are called lies in the sacramental nature of their union. "By God's will marriage has acquired, in the baptized, the value and power of a sacramental sign, which strengthens its characteristics and prerogatives. For in sacramental marriage the spouses commit themselves to expressing to each other and to bearing witness before the world to the powerful and indissoluble love with which Christ loves the Church." To mothers the Pope says: "always be sources of life, never of death!", and to spouses: "proclaim the value of the family and of life. Without these values, there is no future worthy of man!"

In fact, the altruistic nature of marriage excludes all forms of individualism, and calls, instead, for responsibility and a generous openness to life.

Children are fruit of this openness! The theme of this Jubilee tells us: children are the springtime of families and of society.

Agnese Rubino

Blamed for being Christian

"The Constitution of the People's Republic of China decrees religious liberty, but the government attempts to limit this religious practice to official organizations so that they can study and control all religious groups. More than 180 million people belong to various religious organizations; most of these are oriental religions, however, millions also profess the Christian faith. Since the beginning of the year religious repression has been intensified." The article is from International Report 2000 on religious freedom in the world and the dramatic situation of those who wish to live their faith according to the principles of evangelical freedom.

Only the Churches belonging to the Association of Patriotic Churches are allowed to exist; and these are controlled by the government. The unofficial (underground) Catholic Church which is faithful to the Holy See has many more faithful than the official Church.

The report continues: "China has so far refused to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican. The Bishops of the official Church are not consecrated in Rome; though these are often given unofficial recognition. The growth of nonregistered Churches is looked upon with hostility and suspicion by local authorities; and in some areas religious heads and the faithful are arrested and/or molested by the police. Many religious are in prison, and here they are pressured to join the official Church. "

This is the situation in China, while in St. Peter's, Rome, on the 1st October, 120 martyrs of China were sanctified by John Paul II. Peking looked on the sanctification celebration as an effort to "distort and trample (Chinese) history", and an attempt by the Vatican to exalt colonialism. The majority of the newly sanctified (of whom Peking said had committed "enormous crimes") were killed during the Boxer uprising.

Priests and bishops underwent "indoctrination sessions"; the clergy of the official Church received threats; and stream of articles appeared in major papers in an anti-canonization campaign. Bishops and priests of the official Church (who wish to remain anonymous) were pressured so they would not speak of the canonization "in public" at Masses on Sunday 1 October.

The Holy Father, however, was not intimidated by the false accusation. "Today the Church is grateful to her Lord, who blesses her and bathes her in light with the radiant holiness of these sons and daughters of China. Is not the Holy Year the most appropriate moment to make their heroic witness shine resplendently?"

The Pope also added: "Today's celebration is not the appropriate time to pass judgement on those historical periods ('several centuries: a complex and difficult era of China's history'); this can and should be done elsewhere. Today, with this solemn proclamation of holiness, the Church intends merely to recognize that those martyrs are an example of courage and consistency to us all, and that they honour the noble Chinese people."

The fact that this considerable number of Chinese lay faithful offered their lives for Christ together with the missionaries who had proclaimed the Gospel to them is evidence of the depth of the link that faith in Christ establishes. It gathers into a single family people of various races and cultures: a sign that Christian faith is able to overcome all national and racial boundaries.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus, who is celebrated on 1 October, says with regards to martyrs in "The Story of a Soul" : "I understood that the Church has a heart and that this heart burns with love. I understood that only love makes her members act, and that if love had not continued to burn in their hearts, the Apostles would never have proclaimed the Gospel, and the martyrs would have refused to spill their blood. I understood that love is everything, that it embraces all times and all places, because it is eternal."

Stefania Consoli

Martyrs, salvation for Christians

Christ's victory over death and man's sins continues in the martyrdom of Christians. Today's martyrs bear in themselves Christ's salvation for the sake of their fellow men. A martyr is a new Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world, thereby making salvation possible. Each people; each generation, is saved by its martyrs; and for this reason each people, and each generation, must be proud of its martyrs. Origen wrote: if there were to be no more martyrs I doubt that our sins would be remitted. Anonymous priest

St. Lucy, a pure light

The 13th December is traditionally the shortest day of the year (winter solstice in the northern hemisphere) when dusk quickly extinguishes the sun's rays. On that day the Church venerates Saint Lucy. The name Lucy means "light"; and in Sweden where devotion to her is very popular, young girls wear a crown of lighted candles during celebrations in her honour.

This brave woman was born in Syracuse (an ancient city of Sicily) at the end of the third century when Christians suffered ferocious persecution under Diocletian. She was instructed in the Faith by her widowed mother who suffered because of a haemorrhage (similar to the woman with a haemorrhage in Luke's Gospel). The physicians were unable to find a cure for her, so, prompted by Lucy, they went to pray on St. Agatha's tomb in Catania (a young martyr who lost her life to protect her virginity).

And it was here that St. Agatha appeared to Lucy and said: "Lucy, sister of mine, and virgin of the Lord; why do you ask me for what you yourself can obtain? Your faith has been the cause of your mother's cure. And just as the city of Catania was filled with grace because of me, so has the city of Syracuse been preserved because our Lord Jesus Christ is pleased with your pledge of virginity." Lucy's mother was cured; and Lucy received new light! She understood the power of virginity and desired remaining a virgin. Lucy's mother allowed her to make a vow of virginity and to distribute a great part of her inheritance to the poor. Upon hearing this, the man to whom she was unwillingly betrothed betrayed her to the governor as a Christian, and the latter ordered her to be taken to the brothel. When the guards came to take her they were unable to move her: the Holy Spirit held her and fastened her as by a great weight. Many attempts to remove her were in vain; she stood firm as a mountain. A legend goes that not even two oxen were able to move her, and when a great pile was lit around her and she was sprinkled with pitch and oil, Lucy told her torturers: "I have obtained from Christ in prayer that this deadly fire will have no power over me, that you will be put to shame, and that through my example believers will see the value of martyrdom, and the veil of pride will fall from unbelievers."

It remains that Lucy died, struck by a sword, rather than lose the incorruptible treasure of her virginity.

She is famous the world over. Loved by artists, she is commonly depicted carrying a tray with two eyes on it. It is said that her eyes were put out by Diocletian. She is, in fact, patroness of blindness - physical blindness, no doubt, but also spiritual blindness, for it is said: happy are the pure of heart because they will see God. Through her virginity she was able to see God already on this earth, and now contemplates Him in eternity. And from here she intercedes for us.

Patroness of Modern Youth, Maria Goretti, also preferred death to giving in to the sexual advances of her neighbour, 20 year old Alessandro Serenelli.

Maria had strength of character and was a mature, charming girl. Her murderer nurtured the dark side of his soul with impious reading and thoughts. He propositioned her on several occasions and harassed her with impure suggestions. On 5 July 1902 he was determined to have his way, but when Maria once again rebuffed his sexual advance, Alessandro lunged upon her, stabbing her 14 times.

She suffered for 20 hours on the hospital bed before dying on 6th July 1902. During that

time she forgave and prayed for Alessandro. On the 24th June 1950, Maria's mother and her murderer attended the canonization ceremony together.

Many recorded miracles, both spiritual and physical, have been worked through Maria Goretti's intercession.

* **Manila** - As time passes the situation worsens. The escalation of violence denounced by the bishops has worsened over the last three months, involving also civilians. "Innocent people continue to die; many are women and children, but no one speaks out, not even the media," says Mons. Romulo Valles, bishop of Kidapazan, Mindanao (in the middle of the conflict) in an interview to Fides. "The situation is far from normal: violence and death are very close; civilians who live in this area are very frightened!" In the meantime, following the army attack on the island of Jolo on the 16th September, the government has denied access to the media and journalists.

* **Indonesia / Moluccas** - The situation in the Molucca Islands continues to be dramatic where Islamic ethnic cleansing is being carried out against the Christian minority far from the eyes of international observers.

Fides Agency reports a new, dramatic appeal by the Christian community of Ambon: "The conflict in the Moluccas is 20 months old by now, and it won't come to an end until the Christian presence on the island has been annihilated.

In the past year the Christian presence on the island has been reduced by 75%. The guerrillas are aided in part by the army, and are well-armed and greatly outnumber the Christians who don't even have boats with which to escape... They have no choice: either deny the faith or be massacred."

The Christian community pleads for UN peacemaking interventions: "Help us; we pray to God day and night that our appeals may touch the hearts of those who have the power to help us. An international force is our only hope to live if we wish to remain on our homeland."

ISRAEL: Holy Land must be "land of peace"

"The Holy Land must be a land of peace and brotherhood. This is what God wants!" said John Paul II in his appeal of 2 October.

The Latin Patriarch, Michel Sabbah, in a letter to the faithful said that the situation can be righted through understanding that the Holy Places cannot be touched or bartered, and that once justice is re-established in the Holy City it must become a city of reconciliation.

The Patriarchs and leaders of the Christian communities in Jerusalem have published a declaration in which they affirm the necessity to ensure freedom of movement, access, devotion and prayer, and that violent acts against the holy places of Jerusalem must be stopped.

(Fides)

"Return to primitive fervour" The "Woman" against the "dragon"

Even in the most authoritative documents of the II Vatican Council, the Church never ceases to remind believers that: "a monumental struggle against the powers of darkness pervades the whole history of man. The battle was joined from the very origins of the world and will continue until the last day (cf. Mt 24:13; 13:24-30; 36-43). Caught in this conflict, man is obliged to wrestle constantly..." (Gaudium et spes, 37). And in the fundamental Council document on the Church we read: "also documents in the Old Testament, as they are read in the Church and understood in the light of a further and full revelation, bring the figure of the woman, Mother of the Redeemer, into a gradually clearer light. When it is looked at in this way, she is already prophetically foreshadowed in the promise of victory over the serpent which was given to our first parents after their fall into sin" (cf. Gn 3:15) (Lumen gentium, 55).

In the very first week of her apparitions, Our Lady revealed that the profound spiritual meaning of her extraordinary presence in Medjugorje was tied to the great apocalyptic battle which today more than ever is being fought by the Light of God's Love against the powers of darkness: "A great battle between my Son and Satan is under way. At stake are the souls of men" (message 2 Aug. 1981). At a later date Mary repeats that there is a relentless spiritual battle between her, "the Woman adorned with the sun," and "the dragon" which "springs in pursuit of the woman who gave birth to the male child" (Rev 12:13): "wherever I appear my Son is with me, and Satan is immediately there too" (message 28 Jan. 1987). Medjugorje is not a place for devotional pietism, but a "space" of grace in which a monumental battle is being fought between the offspring of the Woman and the "old serpent" which relentlessly attempts to "strike its heel" (Gen 3:15). In this "space" the Woman's offspring is asked to make a radical choice for God and against Satan. Our Lady, in fact, calls her children to be united more than ever to her in this decisive battle between the children of the light and the powers of darkness: "Hence, my dear little children, pray and witness with your lives that you are mine, because in these turbulent days Satan wants to seduce as many souls as possible" (message 25 April 1992). That is why Mary asked us to make a complete decision to renew our consecration to Jesus' Merciful Heart through her Immaculate Heart: "I invite all those who have said yes to me to renew their consecration to my Son Jesus, to His Heart and to me, so that we can use you still more effectively as instruments of peace in this world without peace" (idem).

Mary unmask's enemy's deceitful plots

This is how Mary warned members of the prayer group which she formed: "Beware. The moment is dangerous for you. The devil is trying to distract you from your journey. Those who give themselves to God will undergo attacks" (message to Jelena 26 July 1983); and a few weeks later: "Satan is angry with those who fast and convert" (15 Aug. 1983). The Blessed Virgin also reminds us that the devil tries to weaken souls by trying to erode the spiritual joy they experience when in full communion with God: "In these days you have tasted God's sweetness through the spiritual renewal that took place in the Parish. Satan attacks you with violence to remove this joy from you. With prayer you can completely

disarm him and thus ensure your happiness" (24 Jan. 1985).

The "prince of this world" does not limit himself to seducing individual souls, but also hurls himself with violence at the spiritual communities where the glory of the Trinity is made more visible thanks to the special presence of the Queen of Peace. Hence, he multiplies his attacks also against the Parish of Medjugorje: "Satan is furiously mad with the Parish. Do not slacken your prayer" (17 Jan. 1985). "Satan is particularly active in the Parish at the moment. Pray ... so that Satan's every attack is transformed into the glory of God" (7 Feb; 1985).

The enemy's ire also rages especially against the family, that "small domestic Church" where life blossoms and where the seal of the trinitarian love shines the most. Mary unveils the enemy's occult plans and ensures her special protection to those who take refuge in her Immaculate Heart: "Satan wants to create disorder in your hearts and in your families. Do not give in my Children. You must not allow him to rule you and your lives. I love you and I intercede for you before God. Pray, my Children!" (25 Jan. 1994).

Our Lady also helps us understand when Satan is present: "All perturbation comes from Satan" (Jelena 15 Aug. 1983). "Satan is angry with you; he especially tries to throw you into confusion" and warns particularly against certain closures of heart which facilitate Satan's disuniting action: "... do not allow Satan to work in your life through misunderstandings, incompre-hension and lack of acceptance of one another" (25 Jan. 1990).

Before the ravaging work with which the Enemy is destroying souls, Mary seems to launch a heart-rending cry. It rises from the abyss of love of her wounded Heart and wants to tear down the veil of spiritual torpor which has settled on the hearts of many of those chosen for this great plan of salvation: "I invite you all in a special way to prayer and renunciation, because now more than ever Satan wants to show the world his abominable face and allure as many people as possible onto the way of death and sin. Therefore my dear Children, help my Immaculate Heart to triumph in a world of sin". (25.09.91) (To be continued)

Giuseppe Ferraro

Exorcism and Discernment

Fr. Gabriele **Amorth**, well-known Vatican exorcist at a conference spoke about the importance of "exorcism and discernment" which we have synthesised under three headings.

1. The devil's existence. That the devil exists is queried by quite a number of rationalistic theologians who interpret his existence as a mere myth or symbol of evil in general. We remind these learned persons that teachings in the Catechism of the Catholic Church are clear: "when we recite the Lord's Prayer and say 'deliver us from evil', evil is not an abstraction, but refers to a person, Satan, the Evil One, the angel who opposes God" (CCC 2851).

Pope Paul VI said with regards to the devil: Satan is perverse and he perverts... he is not just a devil, but a dreadful plurality. Hence Satan is a person, or rather, a plurality of persons which includes all those angels which having refused to obey God became devils. In support of this Church doctrine it would be opportune to seek in the Bible all those passages which mention Satan's existence. Furthermore, it can be understood that speaking of the devil

means to speak indirectly of Christ, because the Bible teaches that Jesus is the Saviour in that He came to deliver us from the powers of the Evil One. "Satan is free, intelligent and endowed with spirit of initiative."

2. The devil's action. His main activity, which we can call ordinary, is to tempt man to commit evil, to make him turn away from God. Believing in God doesn't mean sure salvation, as 90% of the Italians would like to think. "I have never, in my 45,000 exorcisms, come across a devil who does not believe in God. Believing doesn't mean anything; instead, it is necessary to do what Jesus has told us to do" (cf. Jm 2:14-20; Mt 7:21).

We are all tempted by the devil, and will be for as long as we live, just as Jesus and Mary were. That is why we must keep watch, and avoid all sinful occasions, and above all, pray, for we cannot defeat Satan on our own. We can defeat him though if we are united to Christ through prayer.

Then there is the devil's extraordinary action which is disturbing people in particular or exceptional ways. At times the fault can be our own; at times it is caused by others. This type of action can be classified under 4 different names (even though a list of common terms has yet to be defined by exorcists).

* possession: the devil enters the human body and manifests himself through gestures and words. It must be clear that in this case Satan cannot take possession of the soul.

* vexation: the devil strikes at a person through sufferings and black magic; effecting the person's health, emotional life, or work. It is a very difficult to discern in these cases because often these troubles come from Satan in indirect ways which aren't evident and can appear to have natural causes. It often happens that persons who suffer from vexation and aren't understood by priests and bishops (who don't know much about the subject) end up turning to clairvoyants for help. This only complicates things further because with all forms of magic the powers of darkness are invoked.

It is silly to think that white magic can bring benefit to people and eliminate troubles. Magic, no matter what its name, is the invocation of the powers of the Evil One; hence magic is always black; and always evil!

* obsession: this type of disturbance strikes a person in his inner serenity, his psycho-emotive balance. Satan causes perturbation, anxiety, inner torment.

* infestation: a curse against things and animals. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that both persons and objects can be exorcised (no. 1673). It can happen to have to exorcise houses or places.

The above types of satanic disturbance (where, it must be said, the devil has no power over the soul) can be received for 4 different reasons:

a) the devil's liberal initiative. By virtue of the freedom granted to creatures, God tolerates Satan's activity. It is not a case of God allowing evil doings, but is rather delayed intervention. The reasons for this divine will are not completely understood, however, we know that God has the power to transform evil into good. Many saints suffered possession, vexation, or obsession, and were sanctified through these trials (such as Padre Pio, St. John Vianney, St. Gemma and others). And let us not forget the value of the cross. Satanic disturbance, when offered to God in sacrifice, takes on enormous redeeming power.

b) through attending dangerous places: fortune tellers, mediums, clairvoyants, satanic groups, séances, etc.

c) persistence in grave sins. With time, the person is "hardened" to sin and evil takes root.

d) curses: the most common cause; it regards 90% of cases and does not depend on the person who receives them. A curse is an appeal to the devil for harm to come to someone/thing. Done by "mediums" who are in contact with the devil, both the person who orders a curse and the "medium" are guilty of this sin.

3. Authority conferred by Christ on Church to drive out Satan. Jesus first gave this power to the 12 Apostles, then to the 72 disciples, and then to all believers: "these are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils.." (Mk 16:17). Today, however, an exorcism can only be done by a priest with the Bishop's authorization. Nonetheless, each faithful can freely recite prayers of liberation for others and for self (there is no need of a Bishop's authorization; at the most he could prohibit such prayers being said publicly or in certain places).

A prayer of liberation is said with the same intent as exorcism, that is, to cast out Satan. Exorcism is the official, public prayer of the Church (and hence more effective), while a prayer of liberation is a private prayer. In some cases, however, these can be greatly effective. St. Catherine, for example, though she was neither priest nor exorcist was able to deliver people because of her great faith, and in fact, the most difficult cases were taken to her. Likewise, St. Francis, St. Leopold Mandic, and many other saints, though they were not exorcists, were able to deliver many possessed people. The power to cast out devils depends on faith and prayer.

Massimiliano Curletti

"Ninety-nine percent of bishops do not believe in extraordinary action of devil," said Fr. Amorth in an interview for "30 Giorni."

Q. (Satanism) is widespread today; what does the Church do about it?

A. Nothing! Exorcisms haven't been done in the Latin Church for 300 years (not so in the Orthodox Church and in some Protestant Churches). So it is not surprising that priests and bishops don't believe, as they've never seen an exorcism, or heard speak about it, and in the seminaries the devil's existence is ignored. I would say that 99% of bishops do not believe in the extraordinary action of the devil.

Just look at the new ritual for exorcisms prepared by the Holy See. It was done by incompetent people who are afraid of exorcisms. It says: "If the devil's presence is uncertain, do not do an exorcism." But this is absurd; Satan hides and disguises himself in a thousand ways. The old Roman ritual taught prudence, so that psychic illnesses were not confounded with diabolic infestations, but it also taught the ways used by the devil to disguise his presence.

The new ritual also prohibits exorcisms against curses; but more than 90% of diabolic infestation originates in a curse. So, according to the new ritual, we should never do exorcisms! These liturgical reforms are incredible; because contrary to what the Church has believed for centuries, the devil is everywhere, and works undisturbed; and precisely those who disturb him less are the priests!

"I am with you..."

Mary's presence in the life of a Christian is very important, particularly for consecrated people.

Mary's presence is silent and very discreet; it can be perceived by the heart. Mary is, in fact, Queen of All Hearts. In Montfort's treatise (37-48) we read that "Mary has received from God a great domination over the souls of the elect. As the kingdom of Jesus Christ consists principally in the heart of the interior of man, in like manner the kingdom of our Blessed Lady is principally in the interior of man, that is to say, his soul.

Devotion to the Virgin Mary is even more necessary for those who are called to any special perfection. And I do not think anyone can acquire an intimate union with the Lord and a perfect fidelity to the Spirit without a very great union with the Virgin and a great dependence on her assistance.

And it is especially necessary for the great saints of the latter times. These great souls, full of grace and zeal, shall be chosen to match themselves against the enemies of God, who shall rage on all sides; and they shall be singularly devout to our Blessed Lady, illuminated by her light, strengthened with her nourishment, led by her spirit, supported by her arm and sheltered under her protection, so that they shall fight with one hand and build with the other. By their words and their example they shall draw the whole world to true devotion to Mary." <>

News from the blessed land

Mary with us at foot of cross

Solemn celebrations were held for the feast day of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin on 8 September. Evening Mass was celebrated by Medjugorje's new pastor, Fr. Ivan Sesar, along with 70 concelebrants.

This feast day of the Exaltation of the Cross was solemnly observed on the first Sunday after the Nativity of Mary (Sept. 10) on Krizevac. Thousands of pilgrims were present. Many came hundreds of kilometres on foot, some barefooted.

Not everyone knows the history of the cross. The pastor and people of Medjugorje erected a reinforced concrete cross (8.56 m high) on Krizevac (520 m. above sea level) in 1934 in commemoration of the 1900th anniversary of Jesus' Passion, and engraved on it: "To Jesus Christ, Redeemer of the human race, as a sign of their faith, love and hope, the pastor Bernadine Smoljan and the parish of Medjugorje erected this cross. From every evil deliver us, O Jesus."

It became a custom to celebrate Mass at the base of the cross on the first Sunday after Our Lady's birthday in commemoration of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

Pilgrims are attracted to the cross mountain because ever since the apparitions began they have come to understand that the way to peace leads inevitably through the cross. As they made their way up the difficult path to the cross, pilgrims prayed the Stations; hence at a

later date the fifteen bronze reliefs were placed along the path which winds its way up. Pilgrims will note that the image of Our Lady is in each of the stations, for Our Lady accompanies both Jesus and us on the way of the cross in our daily lives.

Fr. Slavko's missionary voyage to England

A Medjugorje convert from Judaism and a great benefactor of the Croatian people during the war, Mr. Bernard Ellis first organized an annual prayer meeting in England ten years ago. It is now held on the last Monday of August.

"Eight times we met for prayer with the Carmelites in their well known place of pilgrimage at Aylesford, then we transferred to Walsingham, the oldest Marian shrine in England. So it was also in this Great Jubilee Year. Many came to pray the rosary and listen to a lecture before celebrating Holy Mass. Twenty priests concelebrated with the director of the shrine. Adoration and healing prayers followed the Mass.

On August 26 I also attended a meeting at the parish of St. Margaret of Scotland where pastor, Fr. Sherbrooke, and Medjugorje pilgrims have organized daily adoration at the church from 10 am to 10 pm.

Besides the annual prayer meeting for Medjugorje pilgrims, a Youth 2000 meeting is also held annually. About 1,500 young people came from England and Scotland for this year's meeting which was the ninth of its kind. These meetings are inspired by the Medjugorje youth prayer festivals, and their leaders are Medjugorje pilgrims. It began on Thursday August 24 and finished the following Monday. On the Sunday afternoon I met with the young people, gave a talk and led adoration. The theme was the same as that at the Medjugorje youth festival and the meeting in Rome: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us!"

** From 15-18 September Fr. **Slavko** held several prayer meetings in **Belgium and Germany**. On the 16th the annual prayer meeting was held at Belgium's national shrine of Beauraing where Our Lady appeared in the early 1930's asking for prayer for the conversion of sinners. Then in Fulda, in Germany, the deep, intense prayer touched all those present. Truly, the spirit of Medjugorje has touched many in this part of the world, bringing the fruits of conversion and helping them find the way to Jesus together with Mary.

** Representatives of nearly 20 countries from Latin America were in Medjugorje from 20-26 September for the XII international meeting for peace centres. The theme was: "Celebrate the Great Jubilee with Mary." The peace centres are meeting places for Medjugorje pilgrims which spread Our Lady's messages and organize prayer groups and pilgrimages.

(Press Bulletin)

** During a meeting in Medjugorje **Marija** referred the following important, but little-known words of Our Lady: "Many come here to ask God for physical healing, but some of these people live in a state of sin, and do not understand that they must first seek the wellbeing of the soul, which is more important, and purify themselves. The first thing they must do is confess and renounce sin."

Marija pointed out that God would grant many more healings if people did things in the proper order; which is:

- confess and sincerely renounce sin
- then beg to be healed

In Medjugorje where profound reconciliation with God is experienced, many illnesses have been cured after the wellbeing of the soul is recovered.

** On the 3rd September we celebrated Vicka's 35th birthday. She was radiant and extremely happy, for it is on their birthdays that Our Lady embraces and kisses the visionaries. Vicka said it is "an experience beyond description."

It is meaningful that Our Lady enjoys celebrating birthdays; in particular she thanks God for having created the person, and expresses her admiration for the beauty and grandeur of the gift of life.

Sr. Emmanuel

PASSPORTS/VISAS required to enter Bosnia & Hercegovina!

Passports are now required by all citizens other than Croatian citizens to enter Bosnia & Hercegovina. No entry VISA is required by citizens from the following countries: Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Borneo, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Qatar, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malaysia, Norway, Oman, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, USA, Vatican, and Yugoslavia.

For citizens of all other countries a VISA is necessary.

(Press Bulletin)

* Request for rosary beads (and other devotional items/pictures) from: Br. Ephraim M. Chimutu, Box 80089, Maselema, BT 8, Malawi, Central Africa. Thank you in advance!

* Main language editions of Echo of Mary available in Medjugorje at MIR-Shalom shop opposite St. James church and the Ain Karim shop, in arcade under the International Hotel.

Echo on the NET www.eclipse.it/medjugorje

The Mail

Mrs. M. Taljaard, South Africa - Thank you very much for the copies of Echo. Not only do we have access to Our Lady's messages, but also to the Pope's teachings. We were able to prepare for the Millennium Consecration and be spiritually present in Rome on 6-8 October.

Donatella, Sicily: "I was given a copy of your newsletter and I read it with great interest. The truth shone out from each article, and touched me deeply, particularly Fr. Angelo's letter. Thank you."

Fr. Carlo, Buenos Aires: "Echo for me is a great source of extraordinary wealth, and brings me Our Lady's messages and news of the Medjugorje events. My deepest thanks! Fr. Angelo's loss is felt by us all... May he bless and protect us from above!"

From Albania: "We followed with trepidation Fr. Angelo's last earthly steps. What an example! It wasn't difficult to see where he got his strength from! He was a dear son and "warrior of love" of our heavenly Mother. (Teresa)

"We prayed for him; now he prays for us. We initially feared that the loss of Fr. Angelo might have meant difficult times for "Echo", but now we're sure that he and Our Lady are directing it from above." (Gjoni D.)

"We photocopy and spread the Echo around; we do not want to make your burden heavier by asking for extra copies. A big thank you from the poor Albanian people to you at Echo and your benefactors." (Matia)

Mrs. De Margerie, Winnipeg: "Thank you for such a wonderful publication. I always anxiously wait for the news and spiritual contents contained in it."

Mrs. Pintabona, Ohio: "Thank you for the copies of Echo; I enjoy the articles and reports and find them to be a source of spiritual nourishment."

Agnes, Kampala, Uganda: "A friend lent me her copy of Echo, and I was very touched by what I read. Also Fr. Angelo's message touched me deeply."

Nita, Alaska: "I think of Fr. Angelo and his holy wisdom often. The spiritual help we gain here in this remote part of the world (where most of us can only dream of a pilgrimage to Rome and Medjugorje!) is a blessing from Mary. Thank you Echo staff!

* Second Census of Prayer Groups in Italy and abroad. Group leaders are kindly asked to advise Gianni Romolotti by email (real@tin.it) or fax (Italy 02.581059797) of name of group leader, address, phone, fax, email address; and number of participants.

Jesus in the crèche and the heart

It was Christmas day 1223 when Francis of Assisi fulfilled an ardent desire by: "recreating the scene of the birth of the Child Jesus in Bethlehem, so as to vision with one's bodily eyes the discomfort he had to undergo for the lack of those things a new born babe requires; such as having to lie on the prickly hay in a manger between an ox and a donkey." (Fonti Francescane 468)

Christmas is almost upon us, and it brings to mind Our Lady's message of 20 Dec.1984: "... bring a flower before the day of joy (Christmas) as a sign of surrender to Jesus. I wish for every member of the family to place a flower beside His Crib so that Jesus will come and see your surrender to Him."

This brings us back to St. Francis, a master in surrender, and to another Franciscan, Fr. Tomislav, who wrote: "It is generally thought that St. Francis was the recipient of a special grace, but this is not true. All flowers are different, but each is complete. We too are called to a particular transformation. Francis chose the full life in God; it was an uphill journey, in which he had to continually decide for God. Francis, to learn from God, would withdraw to contemplate and find God in silence.

We all need silence, where we withdraw from the world and let ourselves be nourished by God. Silence is the realm of the Holy Spirit. "Be surrendered to God," Our Lady tells us;

and hope, love and trust will be born in our hearts. Yes, because the Holy Spirit heals. Not only, but we will become more sensitive to His presence, and our communion with God and His people will grow deeper."

Said Our Blessed Lady on 21 Dec. 1984 through Jelena: "I want you to be like a flower that blossoms at Christmas time for Jesus, a flower which will not cease blossoming when Christmas is over."

So let's surrender ourselves to God, and blossom like a flower for Him, and take the joy of Christmas to all!

May our desire for prayer grow as we wait for the Lord who comes without delay.

May the joy we experience from the encounter with Christ shine in our eyes for others to see.

With this Christmas wish, we also thank all those who, in silence and often with personal sacrifice, help with the making of Echo.

God bless us all.

Don Alberto

Villanova, 1 November 2000