

Echo of Mary Queen of Peace

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Our Lady's message of 25 July 2005:

“Dear Children, Also today I call you to fill your day with brief and ardent prayers. When you pray, your heart is open and God loves you with a special love and grants you special graces. Therefore, make good use of this time of grace and dedicate it to God more than ever before. Do novenas of fasting and renunciation, that Satan might be far from you and that grace might surround you. I am close to you and I intercede before God for each of you. Thank you for responding to my call.”

As Never Before

Amidst the ruins of a crumbling world, darkened by scenes of brutal death in an almost daily sequence, it seems we don't know how to do anything else but reaffirm the reasons for our way of living, even if it means sacrificing other human beings – and thus giving momentum to the spirals of hatred and violence. Yet, while the powerful of this world fill our days with public announcements and threats of death which we passively accept as words of life, a VOICE indicates the way which alone can lead us to salvation: **“fill your days with brief and ardent prayers.”** Prayers, not threats. Prayers, or in other words: conversation with God where you learn to love God and neighbour, where you find the reasons for peace and reciprocal respect.

To pray is to remain before God with an open heart and to breathe in His Love. **“When you pray, your heart is open and God loves you with a special love and grants you special graces,”** says Gospa. Prayer is the ordinary channel through which His Love reaches us and His graces pour down upon us. Without prayer it is not possible to forgive, let alone love one's enemies, including illnesses and sufferings. And it is not even possible to love our friends or ourselves without prayer. When we pray – with the heart – the reasons for our divisions fall apart and are replaced with mercy. A brother is no longer placed under a microscope to find his qualities and faults, but we are able to accept him in his totality since he too was made in the image of God. The same goes for us. As a sinner I have to stop hiding behind my sins as though they were an excuse not to encounter God. As a sick person I have to stop feeling sorry for myself and instead keep my eyes on the Crucified One. As a young person I have to stop squandering life which impedes me from encountering the Living One. As a man or woman I have to stop using my success or non-success as the reason that impedes me from encountering Him. To miss out on



*“Pray especially before the Cross, which is a fount of great graces.”
(message 12 Sept. 1985)*

the encounter with God means to waste your life. The encounter can change your life, as it did with Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10), and with Mary Magdalene, but it is not always resolute (Mt 19:22). Even those who follow Jesus as disciples can *draw back* (Jn 6:66). Yet, it is necessary and essential that we encounter Him. If we are parents or catechism teachers or in any way responsible for the transmission of the faith, we must promote - particularly through our good example - the sponsal encounter between creature and Creator. **“Make good use of this time of grace and dedicate it to God more than ever before,”** urges Our Lady. To dedicate to Him this time of grace means to spend it for our conversion. Mary says “more than ever before,” and they seem to be the anxious words of a Mother who sees that time is running short and that we need to urgently repent.

“The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast,” it says in Matthew (9:15). Since the beginning of her apparitions at Medjugorje, Mary has been calling us to pray and fast, and today she is asking for **novenas of fasting and renunciation**. We ought to take this appeal of hers most seriously, and commit ourselves **as never before**. Single persons, families, groups and communities: let us all respond to this call! And **Satan**, who feels repulsion for any form of sacrifice of love, **will be kept far from us, and God's grace will surround us**, and all those in our hearts.

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Our Lady's message, 25 August 2005:

“Dear Children! Also today I call you to live my messages. God granted you this time as a time of grace; therefore, my Children, make good use of every moment and pray, pray, pray. I bless you all and intercede before the Most High for each of you. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Live my messages

In the July message Mary urged us to *fill our days with brief and ardent prayers*; with prayers that gush forth from an open heart like sparks from a fire of love, like a spurting fount of living water. Not lengthy talks, not refined and subtle reasoning, but palpitations of the soul contemplating Love. Prayer is thus a melody which expresses communion between the Creator and His creature, and it is a communion reserved not for a few, but for multitudes (Mt 26:28).

How can we be part of this? Mary is with us precisely for this: to help us find the way, to support us, encourage us, and intercede for us. When as a young woman she expressed her *fiat* to God (Lk 1:38), when she accepted John as her son (Jn 19:26) Mary became the channel for the Spirit's presence in human creatures. So now it is easy for every man to be born again (Jn 3:3). Salvation is close at hand, within our reach.

“God granted you this time as a time of grace; therefore, my Children, make good use of every moment and pray, pray, pray,” urges Our Lady. This is the time in which Mary visits us, calls and urges us. It is an extraordinarily lengthy time in preparation of events which are decisive for humanity. Perhaps in the wait some of us may fall asleep, but this doesn't matter so much. The important thing is that we have with us the oil for the lamp because when we wake it will not be the time for making purchases (Mt 25:1-13).

We must not waste this time, but rather, we must **make good use of every moment**. Time is growing short: let us dedicate it to God as never before (cf. July message). Extending our prayer time isn't the answer, as we need to live prayer. *Appearing outwardly righteous before others whilst being full of hypocrisy and iniquity on the inside* (Mt 23:28) can gain us nothing. We must **live out Mary's messages** in our day-to-day lives; or rather, let the messages transform our lives. This is possible and relatively easy if we surrender ourselves to God, as Mary has often requested of us. To surrender oneself to God means to hand oneself over to Him, willingly, joyfully and trustfully.

Is it so difficult to hand oneself over to the Father of goodness, to the God of mercy?

Jesus, Son of God, and God Himself, gave Himself up for the sake of mankind out of love, so why fear to surrender ourselves to the God of Love? Through living Mary's messages we discover that the Word of God is alive in us, and that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rm 8:35-39).

Mary blesses us and intercedes for each of us before the Most High. This means that salvation is a certainty for each of us; compromised only by our own obstinate refusal. We are still in time; perhaps only just in time. *Decide for God*, Our Lady has many times begged us. In each priest that receives our confession it is Jesus Himself who forgives us and embraces us. At each holy Mass it is Jesus who reaches out to us and grants us His Life, Body and Blood. *If he that is the lesser in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11) then the most insignificant amongst men is infinitely more important than all the powerful of the earth if he lets Christ live in him. This is the reality of the Kingdom. Become aware of your regality as a child of God and life will blossom in you and around you. *N.Q.*

Death of Bro. Roger *slain as a lamb*

It happened at **Taizé**, in the big Church of Reconciliation, during the evening prayer, when Bro. Roger, a youthful ninety years and with the heart of a lamb, was stabbed to death. His white habit, witness and companion of infinite moments of peace, was stained in blood as a seal to his "martyrdom." On the 16th August a young Rumanian woman in a moment of folly killed the man known as a man of dialogue, a man loved by all. Surprise, sorrow, and dismay invaded the 2500 people who were in the church praying with him.

Taizé, in the Burgundy region of France, is an international pilgrimage site for young people. In 1940 Bro. Roger, a young Protestant from Switzerland, founded a *small and fragile community with the mad hope of reconciling Christians and all mankind*. With time it grew and today there are over a hundred brothers from **more than 25 different nations**. **The community is a concrete sign of reconciliation** between divided Christians and separated peoples. The brothers earn their living by their work.

"Every week from early spring to late autumn young adults from different continents arrive on the hill of Taizé in search of meaning in their lives, in communion with many others. By going to the wellsprings of trust in God, they set out on an inner pilgrimage that encourages them to build relationships of trust among human beings. By meeting other young people from throughout the world in a climate of openness and listening, they discover that roads to unity can be opened up amidst the diversity of cultures and Christian traditions."

A wonderful intuition that accompanies the present ecumenical commitment of the



Benedict XVI

If it is difficult to believe it is even more difficult to offer life to Christ

The union of Peter with his flock, priestly vocations and Communion for divorced Catholics are some of the questions which the Holy Father addressed at a meeting for priests. "The history of the Church has always been marked, in various different forms, by questions that have truly tormented us... I would like to respond briefly, but I would also like to say that the Pope is not an oracle, he is infallible on the rarest of occasions, as we know. I therefore share with you these questions. I also suffer; but let us suffer all together for these problems, and let us also suffer in transforming the problems; for **suffering itself is the way to transformation, without it nothing is transformed**. It is also the meaning of the Parable of the Wheat Grain that fell into the earth."

Benedict also referred to the **ongoing vocations crisis in the West**, and pointed out that the western world has reached a point "in which there is no longer any evidence of the need for God, still less for Christ... Consequently, it becomes difficult to believe, and if it is difficult to believe it is even more difficult to offer one's life to the Lord, to be His servant... This is certainly a form of suffering which, I would say, fits into our time in history, and in which we generally see that the so-called "great" Churches seem to be dying. On the other hand, the sects that present themselves with the certainty of a minimum of faith are growing, and the human being seeks certainty... We must go on

Church; or perhaps it precedes it if we consider that it is totally detached from forms of superiority and power-holding. "At Taizé each person is invited, after his or her stay, to live out in their own situation what they have understood, with greater awareness of the inner life within them as well as of their bonds with many others who are involved in a similar search for what really matters."

Bro. Roger's Taizé attracts above all young people, and **it was precisely the vigil of the WYD that he died. A grain of wheat, he died so that much fruit could be produced in the world's youth**. Benedict XVI commented: "This news is an especially heavy blow because only yesterday I received a very touching and friendly letter from Bro. Roger. In it, he wrote that in the depths of his heart he was intending to tell me that 'we are in communion with you and with those who have gathered in Cologne.'" Because of his health he had said he could not attend but would be present in spirit. Bro. Roger also said how he intended going to Rome to meet the Holy Father to tell him, 'the Community of Taizé wants to journey on in communion with the Holy Father.'

The hand of God thus sealed the last words of love of this son who for so many years had served Him with docility and determination; a son whose brief and ardent prayers inflamed many hearts; a son who with

through this tunnel patiently, in the certainty that Christ is the answer and that in the end, his light will appear once more."

Priests must live their vocation with joy to attract young people. "It is important to live in the reality of the community of priests who help one another, who are journeying on together with solidarity in their common faith. This seems to me to be important, for if young people see priests who are very lonely, sad and tired, they will think: 'If this is my future, then it is not for me.' A real communion of life that shows young people: 'Yes, this can be a future for me too, it is possible to live like this,' must be created."

On the subject of **Catholics who divorce** and remarry, the pontiff said. "I would say that those who were married in the Church for the sake of tradition but were not truly believers, and who later find themselves in a new and invalid marriage and subsequently convert, discover faith and feel excluded from the Sacrament, are in a particularly painful situation. When I was Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, I invited various Bishops' Conferences and experts to study this problem: a sacrament celebrated without faith... to see whether or not a moment of invalidity could be discovered here because the Sacrament was found to be lacking a fundamental dimension. It is a highly-complex problem which requires further study."

(From Vatican Information Service)

his song taught hearts to look inwards and see Christ. Said Bro. Roger of the thousands of youth who cross human and geographical boundaries to attend the annual end-of-year European meeting: "They come to fix their gaze not on what divides them but on what unites them, not to reinforce their pessimism but to perceive signs of hope." If Europe ponders why this sea of young Christians cross Europe in midwinter to attend a prayer meeting and spend new year's eve in absolute simplicity and Gospel poverty, we know, instead, that they seek truth and beauty; they seek God. They seek hope for their hearts, and they are our hope, for the youth that respond to love – planted by God in each person's heart - offer hope and trust to us all. They are God's gift to Europe, God's gift to mankind. (The annual end-of-year "Pilgrimage of trust on earth" meeting will be held this year in Milan.)

"Bro. Roger is in the hands of eternal goodness, eternal love. His witness urges us to be always faithful workers in the Lord's vineyard, even in sorrowful situations," says the Holy Father. He calls us to reaffirm our faith that sorrow can lead to joy. Bro. Roger, a prophet of peace and non violence, offered up his life and was violently and mortally wounded. In this sacrifice he is now united to Christ, and we are united to him, for it is only in communion with Christ and His free and wounded love that man can find the peace and reconciliation he seeks and needs.

Stefania Consoli

Pope's young guests

With love and trepidation he greeted the young people who had been invited by another Pope to Germany, the homeland which he was visiting for the first time as Benedict XVI. He met them with a smile and open arms, as if to embrace them all. The more than one million young people from 190 different countries came to Cologne for the World Youth Day meeting and their joy echoed round the whole world. Inevitably, Benedict XVI was being compared to John Paul II, but all were disarmed by Ratzinger's profound fatherly wisdom and deep humility, and he conquered hearts all round.

"Today is my turn to take up this extraordinary spiritual legacy bequeathed to us by JP II. He loved you – you realized that and you returned his love with all your youthful enthusiasm. Now all of us together have to put his teaching into practice... My particular greeting goes to those who, like the Magi, have come from the East. I greet with affection those among you who have not been baptized, and those of you who do not yet know Christ or have not yet found a home in His Church. Pope JP II had invited you in particular to come to this gathering."



generations: "The saints are the true reformers. Only from the saints, only from God does true revolution come, the definitive way to change the world!" and he stresses: "Absolutizing what is not absolute but relative is called totalitarianism. It does not liberate man, but takes away his dignity and enslaves him. Not ideologies save the world; true revolution consists in simply turning to the living God who is the measure of what is right and who is everlasting love."

YOUTH AND THE MAGI

In an intense week with events in over 20 different venues in and around the city of Cologne the young people heard words of truth warning them against illusions of false powers that desire governing the world. As with the Magi: When they entered the house and saw the Child and Mary his mother, they fell to the ground and adored him (Mt 2:11). "Dear friends, this is not a story of long ago. It is with us now. Here in the Sacred Host the same Child is present before us and in our midst. As then, also now He is mysteriously veiled in a sacred silence; as then, it is here that the true face of God is revealed. For us He became a grain of wheat that falls on the ground and dies and bears fruit until the end of the world (Jn 12.24). He is present now as He was in Bethlehem; He invites us to that inner pilgrimage which is called adoration. Let us set off on this pilgrimage of the spirit and let us ask Him to be our guide."

YOUTH AND THE LIVING BREAD

This year is dedicated to the Eucharist, and on Sunday, the Holy Father explained the profound meaning of this gift of the Lord. "The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we also are transformed. We are to become the Body of Christ, his own Flesh and Blood. Thus, **adoration becomes union**. God no longer simply stands before us as the One who is totally Other. **He is within us and we are in Him**. His dynamic enters into us and then seeks to spread outwards to others until it fills the world..." Through the Eucharist, "the Lord draws us into Himself. This must be evident in our lives, our capacity to forgive, our sensitivity to others' needs, our willingness to share, our commitment to our neighbours." The Pope spoke of an 'intimate explosion of good conquering evil which can trigger off the series of transformations that little by little will change the world... The Eucharist is the *secret for worldly renewal*, which all peoples desire. The Eucharist must become the centre of our lives... Do not be deterred from taking part in Sunday Mass. The Eucharist releases the joy that we need; we must learn to grasp it ever more deeply, we must learn to love it...

Freedom is not simply about enjoying life in total autonomy, but rather about living by the measure of truth and goodness, so that we ourselves can become true and good. Let us go forward with Christ and let us live our lives as true worshippers of God!" Ed.

Pope's words on Church: I will keep in my heart!

Agostino, a young Italian, came back from WYD richer in knowledge and love of the Church.

"**The Marienfeld esplanade**, named in honour of Our Lady (*Mary's field*) was the venue for the more than one million people who attended the Saturday Vigil and Sunday Mass. The Pontiff spoke about the Church, saying 'there is much that could be criticized in her,' but he compared her to a net which contains both good and bad fish, or a field where darnel grows together with the wheat.

He recalled how JP II asked pardon for the wrong that was done in the course of history through the words and deeds of members of the Church, to show us – he said – our own true image. 'It is actually consoling to realize that there is darnel in the Church. In this way, despite all our failings, we can still hope to be counted among the disciples of Jesus, who came to call sinners.'

Benedict XVI said the Church is like a human family, and at the same time the great family of God through which He establishes communion and unity that embraces the whole world. 'So we are glad to belong to this great family that we see here; we are glad to have brothers and friends all over the world. Here in Cologne we discover the joy of belonging to a family as vast as the world, including Heaven and earth, the past, the present, the future and every part of the earth.'

The Holy Father stressed the importance of following the path undertaken by the Magi. They followed after the real God whom they found in Bethlehem. They perhaps expected the new King to be in a palace, but they found themselves adoring the child of poor people. 'This way they learnt that God is not as we usually imagine Him to be.' They expected to find a King that would establish order in the world, a King with power, but they discovered that the power of God is different to that of men. God exercises power through love.

God's ways are not as we imagine them or as we might wish them to be. 'He does not enter into competition with earthly powers in this world... He contrasts the noisy and ostentatious power of this world with the defenceless power of love, which **succumbs to death on the Cross** and dies ever anew throughout history; yet it is this same love which constitutes the new divine intervention that opposes injustice and ushers in the Kingdom of God.'

When the Magi come to realize that God is different they understand that they must become different, **and must learn God's ways**. 'Now they have to learn to give themselves... to become men of truth, of justice, of goodness, of forgiveness, of mercy...' We are called to become instruments of God's presence in the world, and to do this we need 'to lose ourselves in order to find ourselves' in Him."

"Many speak of God; some even perpetrate violence in His Name. **It's important to discover God's true face**. Jesus, who allowed his heart to be pierced for us, is manifested to us by the Sacred Scriptures;

YOUTH AND JESUS

Benedict XVI charts the same course: his gaze reaches out to all, to "recapitulate" - like his predecessor - all mankind in Christ whom he represents in a visible manner. And it is to Jesus Christ that he continually directs the attention of all: "Dear young people, the happiness you are seeking, the happiness you have a right to enjoy has a name and a face: it is **Jesus of Nazareth, hidden in the Eucharist**. Only He gives the fullness of life to humanity! With Mary, say your own 'yes' to God, for he wishes to give himself to you. I repeat today what I said at the beginning of my Pontificate: '**If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing** of what makes life free, beautiful and great.'" The Holy Father is urging the young people to see more deeply into the "good vibrations" of the event, and to make a decisive and courageous response to God. "I encourage you to commit yourselves without reserve to serving Christ, whatever the cost. The encounter with Jesus Christ will allow you to experience in your hearts the joy of his living and life-giving presence and enable you to bear witness to it before others."

YOUTH AND THE SAINTS

God gives us examples to help us shape our lives according to God's nature which is different to our own. "The saints and blessed did not doggedly seek their own happiness, but simply wanted to offer themselves, because the light of Christ had shone upon them. They show us how to be truly human and happy." Words of a father and teacher who desires authentic freedom for the new

Take Flight young people, run to Christ!

He reveals Himself to be alive in the great procession of the faithful called the Church.

This means we are not constructing a private God, a private Jesus, but that we believe and worship the Jesus who is manifested to us by the Sacred Scriptures, and who reveals himself to be alive in the great procession of the faithful called the Church, always alongside and before us."

Medjugorje Youth Festival

"We Came to Worship Him" (Mt 2:2) was the title of the **16th International Youth Prayer Festival** (or *Mladifest* as it is known in Croatian) which took place in Medjugorje from 1-6 August. This encounter, which intentionally had the same title as WYD that united young people around the Holy Father in Cologne, was one of the forms of spiritual preparation for the meeting with the Pope.

The *Mladifest* began with words of welcome pronounced in about 20 different languages just before the evening Mass presided over by Fr. Branko Rados, pastor of Medjugorje (recently transferred to Switzerland, he will be replaced by Fr. Ivan Sesar who was parish priest here some years ago). This year's *Mladifest* brought together about **30,000 young people** from the **five continents**, including young people from China, Korea and parts of Africa. The encounter, at the outside altar, was simultaneously translated from Croatian into 15 languages.

The programme began with Morning Prayer at 9, followed by conferences, witness, presentation of communities and movements in the Church. This year almost 500 priests attended (and who spent the days hearing confessions). On private pilgrimage there were also several bishops. The whole festival was accompanied by an international choir and orchestra with 90 musicians from 20 different countries. Rosary and Prayer of the faithful were said in 24 languages. About 90,000 Holy Communion were distributed.

Minister General of the Franciscans, Fr. José Rodríguez Carballo, spoke to the youth on Friday 5 August. He gave a talk about the meaning of life with Jesus Christ in the Church. In the evening, he presided over Holy Mass and gave the homily, in concelebration with 325 priests.

On Wednesday evening, in spite of the rain, a 2km long procession with the crucifix wound its way through the parish. The procession concluded with half an hour of Adoration at the outside altar. On Thursday evening, the "Cenacolo" community gave a musical show called "Bread of Life" which showed details from the life of Jesus, culminating with the crucifixion and the Resurrection. On Friday evening, the last evening of the Festival, after Mass and Adoration, there was a musical farewell, after which young people, while praying the Rosary, climbed the Cross Mountain where they waited for the dawn and assisted at Holy Mass for the Solemnity of the Transfiguration, presided over by Fr. Ljubo Kurtovic. *(Press Bulletin)*

We came from all corners of the earth, we travelled far and wide, we renounced the commodities of the world... we came to worship Him! Two thousand years have passed since the Magi from the East saw the Child with Mary his Mother, and the heart of every man still seeks truth and justice. In particular, the heart of the young thirsts for true life.

We came to the Festival of Medjugorje still wearing our masks; the masks that make us appear more perfect. Our external journey had ended, but our inner pilgrimage was about to begin. Before the Eucharist we let go of whatever was impeding us from flying. We felt free to be ourselves, we experienced the joy of discovering that God loves us the way we are and the amazing grace of being forgiven, loved and taken up in His embrace. These were the incomparable joys that God granted us during the Festival which linger still today.

In the esplanade of Medjugorje the words of Jesus rang out: "I am with you always!" and this cry reached into every corner of the heart and mind as though it wanted to pick us up in our misery which tends to stop hoping in the most difficult of trials. Young people need not fear, for Jesus is not a ghost, He is alive! The disciples were able to recognize Jesus especially when He worked miracles, but during the storm it was more difficult to see that it was still Him. Then, everything was against them: the wind, the rain, the sea, and they thought Jesus was far away, that perhaps He was angry, or had forgotten them. No one else on the boat instilled courage in them. Yet Jesus suffered to see them so agitated, and He *awoke* when their faith had reached its limit. We have all experienced something similar; we have all been in that boat and have tried to save ourselves with our own strength, having forgotten about God. But here at Medjugorje we heard His voice

calling us not to be afraid of life or of Him. Ivan told us during his witness: "*You are the strength of Medjugorje! You have learnt to pray, but now you must pray at home, be an example for others... then there will be no difference between a Christian and an atheist!*"

Every day of the Festival provided further nourishment for our faith; even the littlest thing like hands clapping to the rhythm of the music made our hearts proclaim: "You are the Risen One! You are Christ!" Everything there was for us, like a ripe fruit waiting to be picked and eaten so that our faith could grow, and that we could grow in love and hope.

At Mary's feet, and within the embrace of the Church thousands of young people knelt before her Son; grace enabled them to see and to rejoice in His presence.

These same young people, who came from all round the world, who spent the days of the festival in adoration, prayer and singing, **on the last day came together at the feet of the white cross on Krizevac, round the Eucharistic sacrifice**, as though all mankind saw itself in the apostle John and was gathered together for a sole purpose: that of bringing salvation to the ends of the world.

As we climbed Krizevac, sometimes falling, sometimes running into the thorn bushes, we awaited the new dawn to receive the Eucharist. Two young people embraced an icon representing St. Peter (Western Church) and St. Andrew (Eastern Church) and I imagined them both running the same difficult path till they met at the foot of the cross and in the light of the Risen Christ, they recognized and embraced each other.

Mary, we thank you for calling us to this place of grace and mercy; help us to keep our faith during the trials of life, and teach us to call out as St. Francis did: "You are my Lord, my God, my everything."

Alessandro Macinai

Testimonies from Mladifest ...

Medjugorje, 5 August 2005

A lesson!

When I was invited to the XVI *Mladifest* I barely knew anything about Medjugorje. I had imagined a tiring pilgrimage with lengthy formulae repeated over and over again, totally void of real devotion. Well, let me say that I've never been so happy to be mistaken!

To my delight I discovered that the peace and joy that I so desired is tangible here in Medjugorje. I left my anxiety and fear for the future behind me, and tried to live in fullness God's gift of faith. I learnt to kneel down, to bow my head, I rediscovered the joy of God's forgiveness and the strength that comes from prayer. The true presence of God and the Gospa here in Medjugorje is a great fount of energy for me and I believe for all. I learnt to praise the Lord not with empty words but with

songs of joy.

In this journey, one step at a time, I'll leave behind my expectations and ambitions, because I know that the Father has planned for me a life much more beautiful than what I could manage on my own. I am so grateful that at Medjugorje Mary calls us so we can encounter her Son.

Elisa

I want to say "yes"

When I set out on this pilgrimage I was going through a rough moment, and I was glad to get away from a situation that was draining me of all my energy. So I came to ask for the help to be able to offer up to God my "yes" which is often so difficult to say. I needed new oxygen for my faith and help to open my heart to God's love and accept His plan for me.

I didn't expect to find so much at Medjugorje; even the air, the sun and the rain were caressing me and speaking to me of the profound love of this Life, Jesus, who loves me without bounds. "Ask and it shall be given you" says the Gospel. This is what I ask Mary: that I may transmit this joy and hope for a better life to others, and that I may never forget the time I spent here.



Anna

I need not fear the storm

Medjugorje warmed my heart with the sun, dried my tears with the wind, washed my soul with the rain. Next to Mary the things that were important became little, and the unimportant things were all that mattered. The wind of my restlessness has calmed, and now I know that on the Lord's boat I need not fear the storm.

Stefano

Risen God is here!

I hadn't planned to come to Medjugorje. It was just one of those things, and actually, I came to please a dear friend. I thought the atmosphere here was strange, with all that silence – just not used to that sort of thing in Milan. I had to speak at least to Him, despite the doubts and a thousand other things I heard others saying that I didn't agree with.

It was a feast, a wonderful feast, and the love I could perceive here was sincere. I had never assisted at a Mass like the one here. Seeing all those people coming and going, and climbing hills, I observed that they were all serene. God is Risen here. He isn't dead like us. We are full of egoism and intolerance; we're exasperated and nervous and unsatisfied. I believe in love, which is the foundation of everything. I hope this peace never changes here at Medjugorje... I hope it will be exported.

Francesca (Milan)

Do not fear

When you leave for Medjugorje you're unsettled, not well, sad and you don't even feel like going. When you arrive close to that blessed village your heart leaps as it begins to perceive the peace that it imparts. However, you begin to understand how special this place is after a few days. The more you speak with Our Lady, the more she speaks with you. Everything that made you anxious before you came gradually disappears; a solution is found; it becomes joy. You become aware that you create your own fears, and that all it takes is faith and let Our Lady take you by the hand, and your life takes on new light, you acquire serenity. "Someone" speaks to you personally and says: "I love you and I'm always with you. Do not fear."

This is what happened to me at the Festival. It's nice to change life, change heart and feel loved. And it's nice that this

change should happen together with other young people. The Festival gave me infinite love. God exists and even though you knew it you didn't understand just how much.

Lidia

I wanted to see

At the beginning, perhaps because I was tired, I was a little disappointed by the atmosphere I found when I arrived; perhaps because I was expecting sensational things to happen. Now I realize that there were a lot of sensational things going on! Our Blessed Mother, in her loving and sweet silence made my heart overflow with love. I wanted to see and touch, but love and joy can't be touched; they must be felt!

The desire to adore Jesus in the consecrated Bread grew stronger in me with each passing day. Even the others' smiling faces, the starry sky, the joyous singing of the young people united to Jesus at adoration spoke to my heart. This is the true miracle, the true apparition, for if Our Lady were not truly present, how could all this be possible? How could one feel all this love in the air here if it weren't true?

The wonder of Medjugorje is that even if there are thousands of people from many different parts of the world it is as though there were only one heart beating, and it seems to beat faster with each passing day till it explodes with joy.

Loredana

Faith is all that counts

Where I live appearances count a lot. Here at Medjugorje I learnt that the only thing that counts is the faith; from faith comes strength, the vital lymph that enables you to go on. I learnt that whatever costs sacrifice gives happiness. I learnt that you need to open your heart to the world and transmit your feelings and emotions, and not be arid or accept a routine, meaningless life. If we let our lives run around work and superficial things an enormous desert is created within us.

At Medjugorje I heard a lot of talks about love, friendship, sincerity and goodness, and about not centring your life around idols because they remove you from the faith. I want to cherish it and try my best to put it all into practice, hoping that I shall never abandon this journey.

Natalia

YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST World needs people willing to atone

We vividly recommend those who suffer to assist at Holy Mass with attention and fervour and to commune frequently... The world needs people willing to offer up their sufferings as atonement; and there can be no adoration more beautiful or more precious than that of sufferers who embrace their heavy crosses with love and joy.

L'Osservatore Romano, 2 Sept. 2005

Style and manner of going on pilgrimage

Fr. Enzo Berlingieri

Our Lady often asks humility of us. We should stop and ask every now and again: where am I going? How am I going? With whom am I going? It takes humility to engage reverse gear and turn back to the right path. It takes humility to give God every merit and victory, and recognize one's own limits, human weaknesses and the need to be continually renewed.

I've been meditating on this for some time, particularly after Our Lady asked us to prepare for the 24th anniversary of her apparitions, and I'd like to share these reflections with all those - priests, religious and lay people - who have been called by Our Lady to take part in that **special adventure called Medjugorje**.

The Gospa, who sees, listens, observes and seeks to help us respond to her call in the best of ways, has been calling us to "renewal" for some time. Even in the area of sacred things there is the **risk of habit forming**, of not experiencing the same initial joy, or of suiting everything to our own rhythm, habits, weakness, devotionism or puerile religiosity...

I would suggest to those who lead pilgrimages to set aside their programming and planning to take the time to sit quietly in a secluded spot to contemplate and make an act of faith. In the Eucharistic style the first thing to do is ask forgiveness of the Lord for our failings and any obstacles we have placed before Our Lady's work, even if done in good faith.

Our Lady says: "Help me to help you." Have we always helped Our Lady? Or have we perhaps placed our own selfishness and needs first?

We all hope that Medjugorje **will not become a shrine where the commercial side of tourism prevails**. Medjugorje is an oasis to which we make a pilgrimage in order to find the necessary rest and replenishment. The voyage part of this pilgrimage is not so much to Medjugorje, as to the Eucharist and a return to the family.

Some other points of reflection include: how must our behaviour differ from say a simple tour operator or "manager of the Sacred"? What care is being taken of pilgrims who've sincerely been touched by grace, between one pilgrimage and another? What is the role of the priest? Do organizers of pilgrimages, guides and accompanying priests get together to pray? Do these accept each other as Mary's helpers, or rather as rivals? Where are we going, how are we going, with whom are we going?

Personally, I thank and bless all those pioneers who still today continue to work to take people to the fount of grace of Medjugorje. May the Lord reward them for their efforts and zeal. And may they start always anew, seeking to overcome fatigue and beat routine with the weapons of the Rosary, forgiveness and renewal in God.

Fr. Jozo :

“Live the messages with humbleness!”

Living the messages of the Queen of Peace with humbleness is a fundamental condition for producing fruits. The messages are like seeds: seeds need to be sowed, but before they are sowed the land must be tilled, nourished and cultivated. The seed that we do not sow will not bud, grow or produce fruit.

The messages of the Queen of Peace do not represent a new theory on the Church or faith in God; but a call that requires a response. The messages have purpose and meaning only in the life of a believer and a pilgrim. If we refuse to live them they become useless words and a call without a response. We would not be paying back our debt to the Queen of Peace by just spreading the messages, as this would be mere propaganda, something like the tons of publicity in our consumer and political world. Mary places her messages in our hearts so they can be lived in humbleness.

Humility is the condition and the climate which provides for growth and a rich harvest. Humility is a virtue of the Virgin of Nazareth. The way she humbly served the Lord and neighbour is an invitation to us all to do the same. Our Lady's plans crash against our arrogance, like waves against a cliff. Humility is the only secure path showed to us by Jesus with His life. The Saints kept this constantly in mind as their ultimate goal.

Many have undertaken the wide and easy path, and have accepted the messages to talk about them, and even to judge others as disobedient Christians. Our Lady does not permit us to argue about them. She calls us to live them in humility and to witness them in our day-to-day lives.

The fruits of the messages depend on how good the tree is. With our life we become a sign for those who are far from God and His love! When you find yourself on a road without signs you begin to wonder if you've taken the right road. A sign on the way, illuminated by holiness and framed in humility is important; it represents security.

The briefest way to God is through humble service. Everyone needs us. When we listen to Mary, we are similar to Jesus at Nazareth who was obedient to His Mother and increased in wisdom and grace before God and men!

So let us listen to our Mother and decide to live the messages in humility; and we will respond to the great call of Medjugorje.

Fr. Jozo Zovko (from a registration)

BELONGING TO MARY

Each time I receive the Echo I find in it support and joy, and I am lead each time on pilgrimage to Medjugorje.

Mary isn't at all distant; she is not the little statue on my bedside table. Rather, through her words she becomes real, and truly present. When we cling to her and to her messages the journey towards the Groom becomes a beautiful adventure, a dance, where our sighs (of suffering) become the rhythm that accompanies the music. When I look at the difficulties in my heart through the light of the word they no longer appear dark, but they become the lobby one passes through to deposit one's luggage; for indeed, one does not dance with his hands full!

With her messages Mary urges us to become more aware of God's presence in our lives; we are called to have an open heart and to offer up ourselves to the Word. It is a mystery of total and unreserved acceptance of His gifts of love, of every single gift. All should be handed over to the hands of God, as He understands us and accepts us how we are, but it is beautiful to be able to do this through the hands of Mary.

Our Lady speaks of "daily conversion," and this implies placing in her outstretched hands also past "spectres" such as old ties and traumas, complexes, wounds and obsessions. By giving it all over to God through Mary we are called to joyfully yield to Him – even though it will not be without effort – the most intimate and dark corners of our inner life so that He can make stable abode in the most secret rooms of the soul and bring us healing.

Mary, who for years has been coming to us, speaking to us, and is in expectation of our response, helps us cultivate patience. She, the Blessed Virgin, was in expectation at the beginning, and as Mother in expectation at the end: nine months expecting the infant Jesus; in expectation of His "hour" which with impatience she anticipated at Cana; in expectation of His last breath on the cross; in expectation of the third day.

Waiting can be painful if we concentrate on ourselves, but not if we push aside our own thoughts and make space for the thoughts of God, and allow Him to lead. It means to die to self, but Mary remains by our side to support us as she leads us into the love of the Creator for His creature; where human love becomes divine, and divine love becomes human. Though we may fall many times, Mary, blessed Mother, will always be there to help us back up.

She invites us to be ever trustful in God, for He would never abandon us. God may shut doors when our plans lead us up the wrong path; He may disturb our sleep, but not remove His peace from our heart. And then when we finally accept Him into our heart our entire being will shine with light, and we will understand that our life – suspended between the winter of good Friday and the sun of the day of Resurrection – is similar to Saturday, the day

set aside for washing the linens wet with tears and blood and drying them in the spring sun so they can become altar cloths.

So let's stretch out our hands to Mary, in the certainty that whatever we place in her hands will be for her like another little Jesus, for in her hands everything is transformed into Him.

One last thing: what can we ask of Mary? We can ask her to plead our cause, so that when we come face to face with God our Creator, she shall take us by the hand, cover us with her mantle, and with the light of mercy in her gaze shall anticipate God's verdict of grace. And we shall be pardoned. God's greatest happiness is in confirming Mary's decisions.

Sr. M. Luisa, Dominican

A new start to life!

I came to Medjugorje because a friend invited me. She had already asked me two or three times; and I was curious to see the place. **I teach Catholic Religion** at schools and my students often ask me about Our Lady's apparitions and other phenomena. I also had a long list of prayer requests and graces to ask for: for myself and my family and others. When **I departed I considered the pilgrimage more of a religious tour**, and I was bringing with me a long list of things to ask for and see for which I expected rational answers. However, **I arrived in a place that was totally different.**

At Medjugorje one doesn't talk, one listens! One doesn't give, one receives! Medjugorje is PEACE, only peace. Here silence speaks; it transforms you, and teaches you to look into yourself. **Silence takes you back to the beginning**, where you can start again.

My life has completely changed; my plans too. Here I was, with myself, my deepest self, laid open before me, and on the other hand there were radical proposals that were questioning me. I realized that my life so far wasn't real life (caring about having a comfortable life, with a nice car and nice home...). At Medjugorje I heard the call to start again; to start anew. I felt regenerated. At first I almost panicked – at 47 with three almost-grown up children, and a certain position in life, re-chartering one's course isn't that easy. But I understood that God was with me and that with His help everything is possible. So from the depths of my heart I whispered: *fiat voluntas tua!*

I thank Our Lady who called me despite of my weaknesses (ambitious and superficial at times), and for drawing me to her so she can take me to Jesus. Now, **like a child starting grade school, I start off on this journey**, one step at a time, being careful to stay tuned in with the right frequency.

Francesca (Padua)

Act of Love (Justine Klotz)

Jesus and Mary I love you!

Save priestly souls, save souls!

We beseech you: grant that we may repeat this act of love a thousand times with our every breath and our every heartbeat.

“Remember always the words of Jesus: ‘Abide in my love’ (Jn 15:9)... Have recourse to Mary, often and with confidence.” (Benedict XVI, at WYD)

St. Nicholas of Tolentino

A star shining bright

The **10th September** is the liturgical feast day of St. Nicholas of Tolentino, a well known and much venerated saint in the Augustinian order. This year, being the **700th anniversary** of his death (1305), numerous celebrations are underway, particularly in the basilica where his body is encrypted (Tolentino, Macerata (Marches), Italy).

St. Nicholas is commonly invoked for the **special protection of souls in Purgatory**. There is also Church approval for the blessing of little bread buns, which are given to the faithful for the salvation of the soul and health for the body. These, however, are merely some aspects of the great figure of St. Nicholas being part of a much wider panorama of holiness in a soul which responded to the grace and love of God the Father, responded yes with all his strength and followed in the footsteps of Christ crucified Who offered up His life for love's sake.

AS CHILD, HE SAW JESUS IN HOST

Nicholas was born in response to prayer. His mother, who was unable to have children, prayed to St. Nicholas; he appeared in a dream to confirm that she would have a son whom she should call Nicholas and that he would become a holy priest.

The child was given a Christian education and grew up in the parish community. He loved reciting the divine office and listening to the Word of God. Once at Mass, at the elevation of the consecrated Host, Nicholas saw a beautiful child, His face radiant with joy.

PRIEST AT SERVICE OF MERCY

Nicholas ardently desired placing himself totally at the service of God and the Church, and as a young man became an Augustinian monk. After his ordination he preached with wonderful success, notably at Tolentino, where he spent his last thirty years. He urged the people to repent and forgive through his sermons and his many hours in the confessional, and the people quickly came to appreciate his human and Christian virtues.

TRANSFIGURED AT ALTAR

Nicholas celebrated Mass every day with great devotion after first confessing so that he could be worthy to take the Lord in his hands and heart, and offer up his own life together with Jesus in His Passion for the salvation of souls. Those who participated noticed how he was transfigured, how Christ was truly alive in his hands. When he went to visit and comfort the poor and the sick of the city Christ went with him and converted hearts.

EUCHARIST, FOUNT OF PURITY AND FREEDOM

Nicholas possessed an angelic meekness, a guileless simplicity, and a

tender love of virginity which he guarded by prayer and extraordinary mortifications. It was the Eucharist that taught him to be meek and humble of heart, to fight pride and the desires of the world, and gave him the strength to offer himself up completely for the sake of his brethren.

PROTECTOR OF PURGATORY

Nicholas strongly felt the union with Christ's mystical body the Church: the militant Church which continues to journey



on the earth, the triumphant Church in heaven, and in particular the suffering Church in Purgatory. The name of St. Nicholas of Tolentino is particularly tied to the latter following a vision in which he saw a brother friar suffering the flames of Purgatory. Brother Pellegrino said he would be freed, together with a multitude of other souls in need, if he would celebrate a Requiem Mass for them. He did, and immediately lifted up fervent prayers to the Saviour for all those souls. A week later Br. Pellegrino appeared to him again in a dream to thank him. After that episode Nicholas continued to pray very much for the deceased. To this day a special practice known as the "septenary of St. Nicholas" is dedicated to the deceased with a requiem Mass and special prayers being celebrated each day for a week; and at Tolentino plenary indulgence is granted to those who participate in the concluding Solemn Liturgy on the following Sunday, known as the Sunday of Forgiveness.

Through his union with the Communion of Saints, Nicholas worked for the unity of the Church, for just as a sin disturbs the harmony of the universe, likewise, every good work transmits God's life to every soul on the earth and in Purgatory.

THE LOAF THAT HEALED HIM

The origin of the blessed loaves is another episode. During a grave illness Nicholas invoked the help of Mary and St. Augustine who appeared to him in a dream in which Our Lady suggested that he eat a piece of blessed bread, dipped in water. He did and was healed. He and his brothers thus began to offer blessed bread to the sick that they visited, and down the centuries God has granted many graces through this practice.

These and other miraculous healings attributed to his intercession are a

confirmation of his holiness. The love that burned in his heart flowed out on to others, and he gave of it generously. A miracle comes from an act of faith and total surrender to the Lord to Whom all glory is due.

LIKE THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

Celestial signs foretold Nicholas of his imminent death, particularly the star he saw in a dream that stopped over his home town and then on the oratory of St. Augustine. A brother friar helped him interpret this recurring dream. The star stood for the holiness of Nicholas; by stopping over his home town it was indicating that his tomb would be blessed by the entire world as a fount of prodigies, graces and heavenly favours for all Christianity. The star then preceded him to the altar where he celebrated Mass.

After 700 years this star still shines as bright as ever, and Nicholas continues to intercede for us to lead us to the fount of Love in which everything has its beginning and to which everything returns.

Chiara Piccinotti

Our readers write...

G. Della Vedova, Australia: "Thanks for the Echo. My daughters and I like it very much. I am nearly 95 and so I don't think I'll be here for much longer; please pray for me. Perhaps you might find it of interest to know that I found my first copy of Echo many years ago in a church in Milan.

Fr. A. Sainaghi, Ecuador: Best greetings and thanks for faithfully sending me the Echo of Mary. I send it to each of the Salesian missions in the Amazon. I thank Our Lady for being with us to teach us all these years.

Francesca Panau, PNGuinea: I enjoy very much the Echo of Mary. I read and pray with it, and I see what Our Lady wants from us, and this helps me and my family. May the Lord Jesus lead and guide you always!

Sr. M. Michael, Pomeroy RSA: The joy of the beneficiaries is so big; the faces of one of our nurses blossomed when she saw me bringing her a copy of the Echo, saying: "It lifts me up so much!"

Fr. Lino Gallina, Kenya: Many thanks for the gift of Echo which we receive as a blessing. Through it, many people have had the chance to know Mary's love, and God's plan for each of us. Also patients at the Wamba hospital have asked me for copies of the Echo, as they have seen the fruits that come from reading it. Mary is at work! If at all possible, we need to receive more copies ... God bless you and your apostolate.

Silvana, Argentina: Echo always arrives at the right moment. Our Lady's messages are soothing, just the right medicine to heal the wounds of the soul. The news it contains and the hope it carries reaches this far-away land in the deep south of Argentina. In our difficult times Echo brings the peace of Medjugorje. May the Most High grant His best gifts to all of you who work to produce the Echo. Thank you for your constancy and faithfulness.

ECHO of MARY, ANNUAL MEETING Transforming Grace



Grace gets under your skin and gradually changes you. It brings you out of a limited condition and inserts you into a "space" which is ample, gentle, abundant and vigorous.

This may sound like the ecstasy of who-knows which "chosen soul," but instead it is what was experienced by those present at the annual retreat for translators and collaborators of the Echo at Medjugorje, enclosed within Mary's embrace.

It is from Mary's heart that this pure grace is granted; it is able to transform you in a matter of days, changing your way of thinking, acting and relating, your way of considering the past, and your way of looking into the future. Grace brings you out of the narrow boundaries of human reasoning and opens up the boundless life of the Spirit. But only if you allow it.

It is important that we understand the value of our own consent, because what we have so far said may seem like fruit of an illusion in an effort to escape from life's burdens, or the effects of a drug to dull the sting of suffering. It is important to understand that only the action of the Holy Spirit can guarantee an authentic experience of grace, and that these experiences aren't momentary illusions, but that they penetrate the deepest layers of our being. They penetrate, and they change. They sanctify and they lift us up. But they require our own free will and adhesion, because grace leaves us free to accept or to refuse. Hence, we are not spectators, nor passive subjects, but protagonists of an active and transforming grace, collaborators of the Spirit.



This year there were 100 of us. We came to Medjugorje from 15 different countries, each of us highly motivated to take a further step forward, as individuals and as a family. Ours is a family which Mary formed in a mysterious way around this little paper that reaches out to every corner of the earth. The paper itself lives by grace, thanks to Providence. It is providential the way it reaches so many, providential the way it reunites us all in the same Spirit, and providential the means which keep it alive.

It is with this amazement that we meet each year to admire the work God continues to produce in us (in a material sense, but especially in a spiritual sense), as we are

called to live with ever greater responsibility our state of belonging to Mary's Heart, and our active participation in Christ's sacrifice. This is what makes this paper run.

Last year we reflected on spiritual motherhood and fatherhood, and this year with great joy we welcomed a newborn edition of Echo in Latvian, to add to the other 16 language editions. How can we not see in this a concrete fruit of spiritual generation born from communion? How can we not see that the union of souls in God creates the space for grace to be incarnated?

This year's theme was "Contemplating the face of the Father," and He was generous in revealing the features of His face so that we could become familiar with Him and



love Him even more.

Fr. Tomislav's reflections, in between prayer on the hills, amid an atmosphere of attentive listening and silence, and animated by group work were offered up to God on the altar together with our own lives, during the celebration of the Eucharist.

They were days of profound grace, and capable, therefore, of changing the simplest things into portions of Heaven - to contemplate, enjoy and share; but above all, to knit into the lines of this paper so that all those who read it may also be visited by the streams of grace that gushes forth from Mary's Immaculate Heart. This grace is able to make us into new, fulfilled creatures.

Stefania Consoli

Beyond all expectations

Hearts open, and fear disappears. One doesn't really understand why, but the fruits are easily seen: peace, joy, trust, surrender, and acceptance of others, starting from those closest to you. The feeling of fraternity is tangible.

It seems to me that here at Medjugorje Mary wants to repeat the miracles Jesus worked in Palestine. Even the miraculous catch - humanly unexplainable - is repeated beyond all one's expectations.

I would invite everyone to draw constantly from this abundance of grace, particularly those who aren't new to it.

Pietro Squassabia



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Message to Ivan, 15 Aug. 2005:

Dear Children, Also today I call you with joy. My Children, in these days pray for my intentions. Pray for my plans that I have for the world. Pray for peace. Peace, peace, peace! Dear Children, pray together with your Mother for peace in the world and in families. Thank you, my dear Children, for having accepted my messages.

Message to Mirjana 2 Sept. 2005:

Dear Children, I come to you as Mother to show you how much God, your Father, loves you. Where, my Children, are you? What has first place in your heart? What is impeding you from putting my Son in first place? My Children, allow God's blessing to descend upon you! May God's peace penetrate you: peace that my Son gives, that only He (can give)!

May God the Almighty bless us, in the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

don Alberto

Year of the Eucharist, 12 Sept. 2005