

Echo of Mary Queen of Peace

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Our Lady's message, 25 May 2007:

“Dear Children, Pray with me to the Holy Spirit that He may lead you in the quest for God's will on the way of your holiness. And you, who are far from prayer, convert and in the silence of your heart seek salvation for your soul and nourish it with prayer. I bless each of you, individually, with my motherly blessing. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Seeking His Will

Faithful to the order received by Jesus (Acts 1:4-5) the eleven apostles remained in Jerusalem and awaited the Holy Spirit and with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren (Acts 1:14). Today, as then, Mary accompanies us as we await the Holy Spirit; together with us she awaits the Pentecost. Of course it's not exactly the same as two thousand years ago, but the exterior differences – though very remarkable – are not the ones that make the difference between the two events. The true difference is in the faith with which one awaits the Holy Spirit, and in the surrender to the action of His transforming Fire. We can pray and do novenas, but if we are not disposed to be at least a little transformed by the Fire of the Spirit, what use is there of praying? If I do not truly desire disappearing in the Fire of Love then *I am nothing... I gain nothing* (cf. 1 Co 13).

Dear Children, pray with me to the Holy Spirit, that He may lead you in the quest for God's will in your journey of holiness. With these words of our Blessed Mother she is indicating to us what we need to ask for from the Holy Spirit. Praying together with Mary gives us the certainty that our prayer is sincere. She herself invites us: **“Pray with me.”** Let us pray with Mary; let us pray with her words; let us pray with her Heart. All it takes is our yes, united to her yes, and the Holy Spirit will work for the fulfilment of God's will in us, as He did with Mary.

“Pray to the Holy Spirit, that He may lead you in the quest for God's will,” means to allow the Holy Spirit to fulfil God's will in us, and thus advance on the **journey of holiness**. Our active contribution to this work is in the acceptance of God's will. It is not by virtue of a personal capacity that we can do this, for it is a grace God gives us. This is encouraging, and at the same time it eliminates the possibility of finding excuses to delay pronouncing our “yes.”



“In the embrace of Christ man is born”

(Pasternak - Dr. Zivago)

The second part of the message regards those who are **distant from prayer**: those who don't pray or do it only formally and are careful to keep their heart out of it. **“And you, who are far from prayer, convert and in the silence of your heart seek salvation for your soul and nourish it with prayer,”** says Mary with clarity and resolution.

Her words are not a reproach; they rather trace out precise and fundamental steps. Above all, there is the call to **conversion**, which means to orient one's mind, soul and heart towards God's merciful Love and to dispose oneself to receive it and live it.

The next step is to **seek salvation of the soul and nourish it with prayer**. Conversion moves man's attention onto God, out of the desire to find his true essence. Prayer is not an optional but a necessity of vital importance to the soul; prayer **nourishes** the soul; it nourishes it in the **silence of the heart**, there in the silence of the hidden room so dear to Mary where the sighs of the Holy Spirit are not smothered by worldly noises.

May **Mary's motherly blessing** descend upon us all without exclusion, and help us to convert and to receive the fullness of God's Spirit who is waiting for our “yes” so that the Father's eternal Love can be fulfilled in us.

Nuccio Quattrocchi

Anniversary message, 25 June 2007:

“Dear Children, Also today, with great joy in my heart, I call you to conversion. My Children, do not forget that you are all important in this great plan which God carries out through Medjugorje. God desires to convert the entire world and to call it to salvation and to the way that leads towards Him, who is the beginning and the end of every being. In particular, my Children, I call you all from the depth of my heart to open yourselves to this great grace that God is granting you through my presence here. I desire thanking each of you for your sacrifices and prayers. I am with you and I bless you all. Thank you for responding to my call.”

Thank you, Mother!

Today, the 26th anniversary of Mary's presence at Medjugorje, her message descends on us, her people, as a beneficial rain that irrigates and grants life. Her words are affectionate and powerful; they transmit joy and awareness and hope along with a **call to conversion**. Our Lady reminds us of the importance of Medjugorje and of our own importance in God's plan of salvation. **“My Children, do not forget that you are all important in this great plan which God carries out through Medjugorje.”** God's plan passes through a universal conversion. **“God desires to convert the entire world and to call it to salvation and to the way that leads towards Him, who is the beginning and the end of every being.”**

Conversion is letting God make us new. *“And he who sat on the throne said: Behold, I make all things new. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life.”* (Rev 21:5-6). Conversion is an ongoing process, during our lifetime it never comes to an end. It is our journey towards God; we will thirst along the way, but He will give us without cost the water of life.

This is the *water that gushes forth from the side of Christ* (Jn 19:34) and it will quench our every thirst, except for one, which is our thirst for Christ (Jn 19:28). This is the thirst felt by those who no longer desire living for themselves but for Christ who died and is risen. Our life has value only if it is lived as a mission from God and a journeying towards the Father, together with Christ and our brethren. Our life can no longer be aimless, or closed up in self-pity, or oscillate between the many sources of self-satisfaction and rare acts of generosity. Our life is being able to say with Paul: *It is no longer I who live, but Christ*

POPE, PILGRIM AT ASSISI

Peter goes to Francis

He was young like the young people before the Pope when Francis roamed the streets of a mediaeval Assisi with his friends, making merry. He was genial even then in his capacity to involve everyone with his self-assured charm. Unaware of the social and religious problems, he spent money lavishly, caring only about having the best, including the glory when he chose to depart for battle. But he didn't go far, as in the nearby town of Perugia, Francis was taken prisoner for a year. Humanly speaking a disaster, spiritually, it was his salvation because when he returned to the home of his father, a wealthy merchant of fabrics, Francis felt in his heart a special call which tore him from the mesh of a glittering worldliness and placed him in the abyss of love "that exceeds high mountains." It was a love that took possession of his heart and never left him. It was this new love that compelled the young man of Assisi to leave all else so he could devote himself entirely to God.

It's the story of a **profound conversion**, a radical conversion, not unlike many others really. This one, however, which happened exactly **800 years ago** in a little town in central Italy, was decisive not only for Francis but for a multitude of people who in these eight centuries have followed in the footsteps of the "poverello" of Assisi. This very important event is being celebrated over the period of one year, from October 2006 to October 2007. It is the memory of a personal conversion that has become a common patrimony because it never ceases to produce new fruits, such as conversions of youth, and religious consecrations.

Guest of honour in this context of festivity was the Holy Father **Benedict XVI**, pilgrim for a day at Assisi on the 17th June. There were various occasions for the Pope to speak to the faithful, the Poor Clares, the monks, the politicians, etc, but the moment which Benedict himself called the climax of his day was his meeting with the 10,000 young people who had gathered in the square in front of the Portiuncola, the cradle of the Franciscan Order: "St Francis speaks to all, but I know that for you young people he has a special attraction," said the Pope who was happy before the serene young people thirsting for truth and comfort.

"We have a thousand questions," said a young man called Marco, in the name of all, "but we find it difficult to find convincing answers, and we are tempted to think that the truth does not exist, that each has his own truth. While we like to be happy, we are aware that pure diversion does not make one happy. Help us, Holy Father, to understand and to adopt Francis' experience."

The Pontiff was happy to have the opportunity to teach the young, and eloquent as always he spoke of the life of young Francis who didn't hesitate to strip himself of everything so he could robe himself in the only Good that is necessary. "His conversion," he said, "came about when he was in the prime of life, of his experience, of his dreams. He had spent 25 years without coming to terms with the meaning of life.

who lives in me. Conversion is the process of *transubstantiation* of the human creature in Jesus. In Him, we are called to become a living Eucharist. In this process we have a continual, absolutely necessary need of divine grace, without which communion with Jesus Christ would be impossible. It is with infinite mercy that God pours out this grace. Mary's presence at Medjugorje is further grace of exceptional grandeur.

To those within the Church that remain doubtful of the need for her presence, we suggest following Mary's example of keeping in her heart that which she did not comprehend (Lk 2:51). If this is too much, to follow the advice of Gamaliele in Acts 5:34-39. To those, instead, who believe in Mary's presence at Medjugorje, we ask you to transcribe upon your heart Mary's call: **"From the depth of my heart I invite you all to open yourselves to this great grace that God is granting you through my presence here."** The openness of heart that Mary has always asked of us is essential if we wish to live and transmit God's Love which is revealed in Jesus. God holds the righteous in esteem, and loves the sinner. For the sinner, in fact, God sacrificed His Son. It is this Love that we must live and witness, with our life, not with our words, in every circumstance. *N.Q.*

Jesus is Passing

Once a year Jesus passes along the streets and among the houses, in what is merely the exterior manifestation of what happens in an invisible way every day. For Jesus is alive and present in the lives of men, and He walks with them and in their midst, only we do not see Him. Hence, the importance of the day of **Corpus Christi**, when the Eucharistic Bread is carried in procession throughout the town. Jesus' presence in the Eucharistic Bread is absolutely real. The Church desires "carrying the Lord in spirit through all the streets and neighbourhoods of Rome," said **Pope Benedict** to the large crowd, "We will immerse Him in the daily routine of our lives, so that He may walk where we walk, and live where we live."

If we have lived our day without Jesus, in the evening we feel weary and empty. "For every Christian generation," said the Pope, "the **Eucharist is the indispensable nourishment** that sustains them as they cross the desert of this world, parched by the ideological and economic systems that do not promote life but rather humiliate it... a world where the logic of power and possessions prevails... a world where the culture of violence and death is frequently triumphant."

"The Eucharistic Mystery," concluded the Pope, "is the gift that Jesus makes of himself, thus revealing to us God's infinite love for every person. The Apostles received the gift of the Eucharist from the Lord in the intimacy of the Last Supper, but it was destined for all, for the whole world. This is why it should be proclaimed and exposed to view: so that each one may encounter "Jesus who passes" as happened on the roads of Galilee, Samaria and Judea; in order that each one, in receiving it, may be healed and renewed by the power of his love. *Red.*

In that way of living there was the desire for happiness that dwells in every human heart. But could that life bring true joy? Francis certainly did not find it. You yourselves, dear young people, can verify this, starting with your own experience. The truth is that finite things can give only a faint idea of joy, but only the Infinite can fill the heart.

"Just as Christ spoke to the heart of Francis, He also speaks to our heart. We risk spending our whole life deafened by loud but empty voices; we risk not hearing His voice, the only voice that counts because His voice alone can save."

The young people were all very attentive to the fatherly words of papa Benedict, desirous of capturing their young hearts: "I make my own the invitation that my beloved Predecessor, John Paul II, always liked to address especially to youth: 'Open the doors to Christ.' Open them like Francis did, without fear, without calculation, without measure. Be, dear young people, my joy, as you were for John Paul II." The applause and choruses that followed were already a response to this request for affection and sharing that the aged Pontiff launched to this new generation of Christians: "It is time that



you, young people, like Francis, take seriously and know how to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus. It is time to look at the history of this third millennium just begun as a history that needs the Gospel leaven ever more." *Red.*

*Christ our Lord,
Eight centuries ago you asked Francis to
repair your house;
and in this Year of Conversion You call us to
place ourselves in his footprints.*

*Grant that we may be converted to You with
all our heart.*

*Pour out upon us Your Holy Spirit, and grant
us righteous faith, sure hope, and perfect
charity.*

*Just as Francis contemplated You at San
Damiano, may we also contemplate your
living gaze, oh Crucified and Risen Lord.*

*Just as Francis encountered You in the leper,
may we encounter You in the suffering and
poverty of our brethren.*

*May we be the living Church, fervent in the
practice and proclamation of the Gospel, firm
in the unity of her family, rich in love and
generous in serving, in communion with our
Pastors and in dialogue with all.*

*Teach the young the way of true love,
and call many to serve You in the priesthood
and in consecrated life.*

*Illuminate and sustain Pope Benedict XVI,
whom we await with the love of children,
ready to follow his instructions.*

*May Mary, your mother and ours, the "Virgin
made Church", accompany us.
May the Saints, our Patrons, sustain us.*

*All honour and glory to You, who lives and
reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
world without end. Amen.*

Who is the Mother of Good Counsel?

“...Of all the flowers of spring, you are the most beautiful, Our Lady Most Holy...” These are the opening words of the hymn to the Mother of Good Counsel that the people of Genazzano, a small town near Rome, sing to “their Madonna” with all the love of their heart.

Certain words and expressions are so evocative that just the sound of them makes the heart swell. It is the same with the title Mother of Good Counsel, with which the Blessed Virgin of the Augustinian Order, and God’s people in general, is honoured. For it is the word “mother” that evokes other terms such as acknowledgement, affection, sacrifice, gratuity, oblation, and prevention. This is because **being a mother means, mainly, to give life**. The name, then, of “Good Counsel” completes this being mother. As such, Mary brought divine light of counsel in our midst. Christ is the “Counsel” of the Father who wants to save mankind which risks drowning and dying in its sin.

The **origin of this title** comes from the Augustinian shrine of Genazzano (Rome) where in 1467 a valuable fresco depicting Our Lady tenderly embracing her Son began to be venerated by the faithful. The beginnings of the fresco are somewhat prodigious - or at least it was considered such by the persons of then when a much venerated image of the Virgin Mary began to attract the attention of all. The Provincial of the Augustinian Order, Fr. Ambrogio da Cori, recorded that on the 25th April 1467, during the Vespers, “*The very beautiful image of Mary appeared on the wall without human intervention. So great was the number of healings that a notary was appointed to make a register of the more important cases.*” And in a detailed study, Joao S. Cla Dias writes, “...the fresco has unexplainably remained suspended in the air close to the wall of the chapel in the church of Mother of Good Counsel for over five hundred years.” Cla Dias’ work contains several documents about the **miraculous character of the image** itself, including the amazing fact that the painting is not mounted or attached at the back.

The spectacular tradition that developed from this is convalidated by a people which venerates the Image as its patron and protector: I am talking of the **people of Albania**. However, this same title (Mother of Good Counsel) already belonged to this centuries old church which had been entrusted to the Augustinians a century before the “wonderful apparition” of the Image. The little church was in dire need of reconstruction, and it was the Third Order Augustinian, Blessed Petruccia, that took



upon herself to fund the work, but when her money ran out - and amid the mockery of fellow townspeople - she continued to trust in the Blessed Virgin and in St. Augustine, certain that they would intervene so the work could be terminated. Her prayers were answered and the wait rewarded.

It happened that on the evening of the 25th April 1467, feast day of St. Mark, during Vespers, the Image “appeared”, catching everyone by surprise, and was considered miraculous. It was also said that the painting came from the city of Shkoder in Albania at the time of the Turkish invasion and that the Angels themselves had transported it so the Holy Image could not be profaned. There is more to the story and its possible translation from Albania. The Christian population of Albania have kept the memory of Our Lady of Good Counsel alive for centuries. The people come from all over the country to gather by the thousands before the cathedral where Our Lady of Good Counsel once was. There is an ancient hymn with the refrain: *Mother of Good Counsel, return to us. On the path of peace lead us.* Amongst the many blessed and saints that have visited the shrine, it is noted that Mother Teresa of Calcutta, originally from Albania, visited many times.

The Image is one of an **intense and tender embrace between the Son and the Mother**, where it is obvious that the fount of energy is God made incarnate, from whom the Mother draws strength and light that make her “divinely beautiful.”

Devotion to the Mother of Good Counsel, spread by the Augustinians and favoured by Holy Pontiffs, found great favour and following in the people, and churches, altars, and images dedicated to Her quickly sprung up everywhere. In 1903 Pope Leo XIII proclaimed that the Blessed Virgin would be invoked in the Litany of Loreto with the title *Mater Boni Consilii*. The liturgical feast day, originally on the 25th, is now celebrated on the 26th April.

Let us now turn, as true children, to the most tender of mothers:

“Rejoice Mary, Image of the Church and most tender Mother of Good Counsel. You are our model, a sign of certain hope for our earthly pilgrimage. Our life’s journey is made arid by the devouring forces of violence and power. With our trust in the power of the Gospels we turn to you to learn how to make Christ grow in the hearts of men, and despite everything to learn to sow Good, Truth and Beauty, and to be similar to you, o sweet Mother of Good Counsel. Amen.”

Fr. Ludovico Maria Centra O.S.A.

Song for Jesus

Simple thoughts

by Pietro Squassabia

When you read the Bible – and not just the Gospels – you encounter Jesus many times. You can see Him in many events which speak of Him. More than this, you seem to encounter Him everywhere.

The entire Bible seems to speak to us of God’s plan of love for mankind which was fulfilled by Jesus. It all seems an unveiling of the mystery of God who sacrifices his own Son so He can be given to us, despite our sin and infidelity. It is as if it were a Treasure – hidden and waiting to be discovered. It all **speaks to us of Jesus**.

In Moses you can see Jesus who delivers every man from the slavery of sin. You can see Him in the **manna** that came to nourish every man who hungers after the Truth; and in the **bronze snake** that saves the man who has been bitten by the deadly sting of sin; and in the **grain of wheat** that dies to bring us the fruits of salvation; and in the little ones, because He became little so He could stay close to us and in us. And for every page of the Bible the same can be said. They all speak of Jesus. The Bible seems to have been written for Him; as a song for Him, “*The fairest of the sons of men*” (Ps 44:3) who humbled himself for love of the Father and of men and became, “*As one from whom men hide their faces*” (Is 53:3).

The Bible is like a song: from the Father for His Son, of whom he is well pleased since all eternity; the song of a Mother for her Son whom she continues to contemplate and from whom she draws all her Love; a song of man for Jesus, the Lamb who was slain for the salvation of us all. The Bible is like a song from heaven and earth to the Friend, and reason for jubilation for the entire universe.

Mary invites us to read the Bible and to keep it in a visible place in our homes because she wants to lead us to Jesus. When Mary invites us to read Holy Scripture, she inevitably accompanies us as we undertake this journey towards Jesus to help us find Him. Our blessed Mother’s desire is to lead us all to Him.

We ought, then, to keep the words of this Book in our hearts and contemplate them continually. If we do as Mary did, who kept within her heart and meditated upon all that she heard and saw Jesus do, we would surely encounter Him. Mary desires helping us to do precisely this; so let us ask for her help with great trust. Perhaps then we might experience the joy of walking with Jesus, as we journey along the way that inevitably leads to the *narrow door*. For Jesus, the narrow door was His Passion, and an example for us.

Thank you, Mary, for indicating to us this instrument of salvation. Thank you, Jesus, for being our salvation.

“A genuine prayer experience will transform you completely. True, you have learned nothing new, you have made no definite resolutions, you still have problems in yourself and with others, and your outward life hasn’t changed - but your heart has been changed by the presence of God... Your renewal is not on the intellectual or moral level, but in the depths of your heart, penetrated by the love of God. This is why you do not feel this immediately but, as your life unfolds, you will see the benefits of your prayer experience.” (Jean Lafrance in *Pray to the Father in Secret*, xxvii)

Vacation, Give Time to God

At a prayer meeting some days ago the young people were asked to meditate on time of **vacation as a time for God**, as a favourable time to seek Him and dedicate oneself to Him. Amongst these one 24 year old young man told me how he plans to spend the month of August at a Salesian mission in Kenya together with 20 other young people from our diocese (Macerata in Italy). I was moved by his testimony. It's great, and comforting to hear of young people who are able to discern the Voice from amongst so many voices; to discern amongst many values the most valuable.

This is not something everyone would opt for as a way of spending one's free time, yet there are some willing to take the risk. I know, not all of us have the possibility to do this same thing, and the Lord doesn't ask the same thing of us all. However, one thing is certain, and that is that we are all called to **know how to live our time as His time**: a time during which He came to live and to redeem. St. Luke says: "The time is fulfilled..." The time in which we live is God's time; it is a full time, a fulfilled time. Today we can perceive this fulfilment and fullness in the Word of God who became flesh.

I would like readers to stop a moment and consider their holidays as a time that Providence is offering them to encounter God. For it is **only in encountering Him that we find true rest, true peace**. We all know that beautiful expression of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel at chapter 18, verse 22: "Come to me all you who are tired and oppressed and I will restore you, and it goes on to say: "And learn from me..." **Resting with God is always constructive**. When we remain with the Lord we always learn something. Being with Him in whatever situation of our life can only make us grow, mature and enter the "true life" according to an expression our Holy Pontiff likes to repeat.

Christians, it is true, are those who must learn to appreciate life's every instant, including **our holidays, as a time God uses to show Himself**, and to call us, heal us, and to instil in us His Spirit which renews all things. For those who will be enjoying holidays, my recommendation is to live them while remaining at the school of the Father which is a school of love, and always remember that God does not go on vacation, and that we cannot go on vacation far from Him!

Fr. Gabriele Pedicino O.S.A.

Fresh, Clean Water

by Stefania Consoli

What is more refreshing than cool water when the heat has parched your throat or burnt your skin! How it relieves the body, and gladdens the heart! Water, besides being cool, needs also to be pure. Its clarity is a sign that it is not contaminated, and we feel safe when the transparency of water allows us to see the "bottom." When we touch it, immerse ourselves in it or when we drink it, it is as if its qualities enter us and make us similar. Well, why not, given that we are made up of mostly water!

But all this talk of cool, clean water summons to mind our Blessed Mother! She is like pure, fresh water; she is always ready to flow within us to cleanse away the residue of our sin. When we are immersed in her we become aware of a lightness, leaving our being free to surrender due to the lack of gravity - like when our bodies float in the sea. But my reference is not to the force of gravity, but to the gravity of sin and blame (ours and of others), of the burden of the world which oppresses us with its material needs, so pressing and invasive.

Gushing forth from the heart of the Father, fount of grace which is always open, Mary comes to us with the gentleness of a lively brook. This brook is able to overcome every obstacle that might be within us, to step over the stones of our obstinacy, to enter the fissures of our soul, to encourage us and refresh us. Her every touch is beneficial; every drop brings relief. She proceeds surely and calmly, as a torrent flowing from eternity that enters time, filling the channels of barren life, irrigating the fields

of the poor made arid by the avidity of the wealthy, filling the void of sudden deaths, of unexpected mourning. Entire populations suffer for the drought of faith, and Mary, as beneficial rain, pours forth calmly and continually, to soften hearts which like clods of the wilderness had hardened because no one had proclaimed the Truth to them.

There's more, however. If you remain silent, water becomes like music, bringing calm to the cluttered mind... like listening to the sound of waves crashing onto the shore, or the running water of a fountain, filling you with peace, quietening the soul.

So it is if you remain silent while you pray, and hear the voice of Mary; you become aware of her song, the melody that continues to flow out from her heart to speak to us, assure us, console us... as a child is comforted by its mother's voice.

Between the hills of a stony region, a **pure fountain began to gush 26 years ago**, and continues to give us water - every day - to quench the thirst for God that each of us perceives within his heart. **At Medjugorje, Mary is this fresh, clean water**, and she's there for everyone. Millions of pilgrims of every race have drawn from this water, and have then gone home with their water bottles full: of conversion, renewed prayer, a new understanding of the importance of living the sacraments. This water (Mary) has been there for a long time but it is not stagnant; it is always in movement because the water table from which it gushes is dynamic. The water table is the bosom of the Holy Trinity.

It is easy to receive this water. You need only to stretch out your hands. Preferably, your hands should be empty, or rather, your hearts should be empty. Then, she will not leave you again. **

At the Service of Testimony

The number of pilgrims which continue to arrive in this blessed land is still considerable. Many of them have come for the first time. They all thirst for something more; to know God a bit more, to hear another voice that might give them some advice on how to pray, how to come closer to God. It is a joy to see this desire in souls, and I think Our Lady desires that every pilgrim might begin a personal journey of conversion.

Only the Holy Spirit can communicate the love of God; only Mary knows the right way to touch a person's heart. **As I fulfil the service of giving testimony** I realize ever more clearly how people "absorb" a grace which is already present - over and above whatever words I may say. It is the grace granted by Mary, and is protected and communicated by means of our self-offering and the prayer of my community. Many are the things you can read about Medjugorje, but **pilgrims seek, above all, the direct witness of one who "lives" Medjugorje and its message.**

Often, when I prepare myself to meet pilgrims, I feel the important thing is not what I'll say. It is rather my desire to communicate God to them, together with their desire to participate inwardly in this profound exchange. After every meeting I feel the need and the responsibility to pray so I can hand over to God all the people I have come into contact with and their intentions they entrusted me with, and I pray that the light they received from God will not be dispersed at the first gust of wind, but may have the strength to profoundly transform their lives.

There are many here at Medjugorje that fulfil this service, and it's not always easy as it demands the donation of self. When a person is truly called to place his life at the disposal of Mary's message that person has something original to give to the others. Communities and charismas may differ, but **the message we are called to transmit is one** and the same because the message of Mary is one, just as the goal we must all reach, though we travel along different roads, is the same.

I have noticed that when the **visionaries** witness, their words are simple and always "the same" in substance, yet how many hearts are touched by their words, and how many people remain convinced by their simple words which can be understood by all. The reason is that their persons express and transmit hope and joy, and communicate to souls the life of God.

Francesco Cavagna

*Your Heart surrounds mine, oh Mary.
May your purity penetrate me
And your obedience guide me
Oh Mother dear,*

*So that when you pray, I pray with you,
And when you smile I smile with you.*

Isabel

What's Happening at Medjugorje . . .

"A people from afar"

At the beginning of the month of May which is consecrated to the Mother of God, an unusual wave of pilgrims came upon Medjugorje. It was the presence of a people which is very faithful to Marian devotion; a people very attached to my own heart: *"a people from afar, far but always close, strong in its faith and Christian tradition."* Yes, I am talking of the Polish pilgrims, who came so numerously in the first week of May. They came to thank God for the gift of the Virgin Mary, and to lift up to God their song of praise.

Down the centuries they have experienced on several occasions the special help of the Mother of God. The power and splendour of this *"motherly hand resting on their land"* have been seen in various occasions, the most noted of which is the miraculous protection of Our Lady during the Swedish invasion. For centuries it has been possible for all of Poland's population to see close up this special protection of the Virgin over their country, and various Polish kings declared her *"Queen of Poland."* Pope Pius XI instituted the feast day of the Virgin Mary, Queen of Poland, on the 3rd May, and Pope John XXIII proclaimed Mary as the main patron saint of Poland after the saints, Stanislaw and Wojciech.

So, here we had this invasion of Polish pilgrims upon Medjugorje, and the Polish language could be heard ringing out in songs of praise and thanks upon the hills that surround this blessed land. Here then: a wave of pilgrims *come from afar*...

I think that whoever has been to Medjugorje would have noticed that every period brings a wave of pilgrims from various countries. When you live here one gradually learns to recognize the typical features of the various nationalities, so that it becomes easy for you to recognize a group of pilgrims simply by their behaviour, their aspect, their way of dressing, or even by their countenance.

Medjugorje truly is dynamic, and the differences in the various peoples makes it even more dynamic.

May, time of preparation

The tradition of devotion to the Mother of God during the month of May goes back to the fifth century. It is the month during which blossoms and blooms abound, and the faithful of all generations have loved to deposit flowers at the feet of Marian images in churches, chapels and street shrines. True devotion to the Blessed Virgin always leads to Jesus – the Fathers teach us. In this sense, May precedes the month of June which is dedicated to the Divine Heart of Jesus, from which gushed forth blood and water for our salvation. Mary, the *"humble maidservant"*, is *"Queen of Heaven and Earth"* precisely because her only concern about herself is



that she be a signpost for us, the sole scope of which is to guide our steps towards God.

The beauty of the children

What a joy to see the children dressed most solemnly for the first holy communion. They have come to receive the Lord present in the Eucharist, and are loaded with the innocence typical of their age, with a sprinkling of seriousness and a dusting of impatience. *"If you do not become as children, you cannot enter heaven's door."*

Their little hearts are more easily struck with amazement than *"grown up"* hearts before the mystery of our God who is *"so great that the world cannot contain Him, yet He makes Himself so little and humble as to enter into our hearts."*

The sight of the little ones who receive holy communion for the first time is really quite moving and ought to incite us to approach with greater faith and love this Sacrament, source of life and every grace.

Mary visits us daily

I wonder if we are aware of this truth: that the Mother of God, the Full of Grace, visits us every day just as she visited St. Elizabeth?

Fr. Ljubo often says to the pilgrims: *"I've been here in Medjugorje already for seven years, but I'm afraid to say that I know Medjugorje, because one can only know Medjugorje if he gets down on his knees and prays."*

This expression of his came to mind one evening on Podbrdo when I saw a group of young people - it was the day of the Visitation - who were at the feet of Our Lady. My heart leapt with joy when I saw them and heard them praying in very colloquial terms typical of youth. In the light of the full moon they

had come to receive the Mother of God's visit. As I looked I couldn't help thinking of the many other young people lost perhaps amid city night lights, and I offered them up in prayer to their Blessed Mother.

Feast of His Body

Our Lord in person is passing along the streets of Medjugorje: Jesus' Eucharistic body, true body! And with His blessing He reaches out to every corner of our abodes and our hearts.

I couldn't help noticing, with disappointment, how quite a few of those taking part in the Corpus Domini procession seemed to think they were merely taking a walk through the town... here in this place where Our Lady has been appearing to call us to conversion for the past 26 years!

I'm sorry about the criticism, but it is inevitable: inevitable because our God is so good, patient and merciful, and we men barely ever notice Him, not even when He's so close to us!

There were, however, many sincere hearts which showed true love towards the meek Lamb who, *"as good as bread"*, remains with us in the little wafer for ever, as He promised.

(from notes by Sr. Halina)

It is Love that Sends Me to You

The messages that the Queen of Peace entrusts to the visionary **Mirjana** on the **2nd of the month** when they pray together for non-believers, are always intense. On the **2nd June** Mary said:

"Dear Children, also during this difficult time the Love of God sends me to you. My Children, do not be afraid; I am with you. With complete trust give me your hearts so I can help you to recognize the signs of the times in which you live. I shall help you to come to know the love of my Son. Through you, I shall triumph. Thank you!"

As usual Our Lady invited all to **pray for priests** and she underlined the importance of the priestly blessing, saying: *"When priests bless you, it is my Son who blesses you."*

The Anniversary!

Also this year the **Anniversary of the apparitions** was rich in grace. On the 25th June Medjugorje was literally crowded with pilgrims who had come from the world round to thank Mary, who for 26 years has come every day to visit us and lead us to her Son Jesus.

Hearts were festive and joyous, as they rested in the certainty that they would go back home with new spiritual gifts enabling them to journey more quickly and with greater decision along the way indicated by the Queen of Peace. Through Medjugorje God is carrying out a great plan, and whoever goes there cannot but feel important!

At Conclusion of Jubilee Year

Mystery of a Grace: can still be discovered

by Giuseppe Ferraro

There is a message that Mary leaves us; a message without words, that is expressed with extraordinary intensity at **MEDJUGORJE**. The most precious, it gives meaning and fertility to every other message. I am speaking of the current of grace, that through her living presence, is communicated to souls with the unspeakable power of love.

This grace began to be manifest with the start of an event that though collocated in space and time, it gushes forth from the mystery of God's Heart. During the second vespers, on the solemnity of John the Baptist 26 years ago the Mother of God appeared to six young people on a hill in an unknown village of Herzegovina, and presented herself to the world: "I am the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of Peace" (message, 26 June 1981). With this unexpected irruption of mystery in a poor farming village in a remote corner of Christian Europe, amidst the absolute indifference of the world's great, including the powerful mass media of our hyper civilized world, the Heavens opened up and gave way to the beginning of a mysterious spiritual dynamic that is transforming hearts of a multitude of God's children.

People began to go to Medjugorje, first from the closer regions, then gradually from every continent, bringing thousands of men and women to the place which Mary herself calls the fount of grace. "*Dear Children, You are responsible for the messages I give. Here one finds the fountain of grace, and you my Children, are the vessels upon which these gifts are conveyed. Hence, my Children, I call you to carry out this service with responsibility. Each one in the measure of his ability. I call you to distribute the gifts to others with love. Do not keep them for yourselves. Thank you for responding to my call.*" (Mess. 8.05.1986).

Very Special Plan

These accounts are familiar to anyone who has even superficially come into contact with the grace of Medjugorje. It is clear, however, that if this was all there was it would be an event which fascinates, but which lacks the founding element of every authentic spiritual grace, which is to involve souls in Christ's great work of saving the world. Yet many (even illustrious) workers seem to have reduced Medjugorje to the simple label of "Marian Shrine," to little more than a devotion towards a Madonna whose main task is to satisfy the requests of pilgrims to make their life in this "valley of tears" more bearable. If it is true that special graces at Medjugorje have been copious and absolutely extraordinary, it is also ever more evident that it is all part of an incredible plan of grace of cosmic dimensions which goes way beyond the narrow spiritual schemes some try to confine it to.

Three focal points

Careful consideration of the three im-

portant focal points chosen at the beginning by Mary in Medjugorje (Podbrdo, Krizevac and the Parish Church) helps us to intuit the depth of this special grace which God is offering to the world through the presence of the Queen of Peace. It is a dynamic grace bearing the seal of the Trinitarian mystery being communicated to souls to help them advance spiritually. The graces may vary, but together they form an inseparable unity, somewhat like the petals of a rose.

In particular, on **Podbordo** Mary makes her presence almost tangible to involve us in the mystery of her Immaculacy and allow us to enjoy its fulfilment in us. On **Krizevac** Mary communicates to us her total offering which is perfectly united to the offering of the Lamb, in the sign of the glorious Cross. And from the pierced Heart of the Son is born the mystery of the **Church**, the perennial fount of His Love that moulds together souls so as to form the one Eucharistic Body of Christ. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the new creation for the entire universe and is symbolically represented by the church, home for the Parish Community.

It is not by chance that Mary has appeared for such a long time and in such a special way at these three places of grace, as if to lead us on a spiritual journey that brings us to progressively participate in her mission as co-redemptrix.

Places of Communion

However, what is becoming ever more evident is that Medjugorje seems to be the "mustard seed" of a far greater plan of grace destined to involve all the souls of all creation. Many concordant signs and the clear prophetic announcement by the Queen of Peace seem to illumine the skies with the definitive fulfilment of that "mystery of His will" (Eph. 1:9) announced by Scripture, "that is, the plan to recapitulate all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10).

The same current of grace communicated to souls in these places chosen by Mary at Medjugorje is being made manifest with similar, if not greater intensity in new places of spirituality, to favour vital communion with Her Immaculate Heart; places chosen by her to personally guide her children even with special gifts and charismas. These are destined to spread and multiply all over the world according to an unfathomable design of grace written in the Heart of God, to completely regenerate the members of the Mystical Body of the Son, in the light of the nuptial mystery of the Lamb that was slain (Rev 19:7), "that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle... that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27).

New Spiritual Families

For this reason, starting from the founding grace of Medjugorje, which had already made the seed germinate through Jelena's prayer group, Mary has been generating new spiritual families. Through these she multiplies her special presence in the world, though in different ways, with the same intensity and reality with which she began appearing to the (Medju) visionaries. These new communities are at times called "fruits" of the grace of Medjugorje. They share the

same spiritual seal of the great fires of grace found at Medjugorje. She brings together chosen souls called to live out the mystery of her Immaculacy and her total offering - in union with the sacrificial offering of the Immolated Lamb, and with the fire of the Trinitarian love.

Through the unreserved yes of souls chosen and called by Mary, she desires communicating this same call to all creation: "*Dear Children, today I rejoice with you and I call you to open yourselves to me and to become instruments in my hands for the salvation of the world... I desire that you bring holiness to this world which hungers for God and His love*" (Mess. 25.03.1994). It is only this way that death, in all its expressions, will be definitely consumed by Love, and the entire universe can be fully recapitulated in Christ, and be offered up to the Father: "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death... that God may be everything to everyone" (1Cor 15: 25-26.28). **

Transforming Power of Prayer

It will seize you if you allow it; almost invisibly, if you immerse yourself in the state where humanity gives way to divinity - in a state of prayer. You can feel His touch slipping into your soul and filling your being as your prayer proceeds. It is the Holy Spirit praying in you, exclaiming *Abba Father* with inexpressible moans. To know this is one thing; to experience it is another.

When you pray you **need to be honest** and set aside everything else and dedicate yourself to prayer. Prayer is an instrument that can change the destinies of peoples, even from afar, thanks to its innate omnipotence, if said from the heart.

When you pray, you **need to be humble** and let Him do everything; allow Him to bring rise from the soul pleas, intercessions and blessings according to the real needs of people, and not according to our previsions. It **takes littleness** to diminish ever more while God invades you to make you become a vessel.

If you really let yourself be transported, as a boat going with the current, you will gradually feel your being undergoing change and transformation. Gradually, reality with its disguises will become more distant as it is replaced by the reality of heaven with its inhabitants and lights. The mind is quieted and the members find repose. Within the heart the walls behind which you usually barricade yourself (as a defence) are felled. Grace envelops the heart, softening and moulding it, and opening it so other life - the life of God - can enter, and dormant thoughts come out.

Your inner gaze is widened; and semi-darkness will help you catch invisible images that communicate Heaven. Eyelids lower spontaneously. The voice, an instrument for the prayer we have chosen, softens and slows down, while the silences become abysses. Everything in you changes when you are transformed by prayer.

S.C.

“Offer Your Lives!”

Defeating one's Egoism

Some numbers ago, together with readers, we began a journey to understand the meaning of the call to offer one's life as a sacrifice to God for the salvation of the world. We also called it “Love sacrificed in peace” because this way helps us to be generous in giving out the love that God has impressed in us and to remain at peace particularly when trials inevitably come our way. It is then, in fact, that the authenticity of our response is proved: when circumstances are adverse and contrary to our expectations, when we don't see the fruits of our sacrifice and when everything around us seems to be falling in. At times, trials come in succession and the end is not in sight, and our ego rebels, and we question God as to the reasons for such unwanted difficulty. Many before us have experienced the same thing; it is the Bible that bears witness to this. There is the righteous Job who was very wealthy, then became poor and sick. Yet despite it all, he never ceased to praise his Lord.

Many have asked us to specify some of the concepts expressed (in the previous editions), which though simple, need further consideration to be lived with greater awareness. Following then, we attempt to respond to these questions, in the hope of clarifying the basic elements of this journey.

What ought we sacrifice?

To respond to this call one must fundamentally make an inner sacrifice. What we are called to sacrifice is our ego and all its disguises. In other words, that wealth of humanity that acts as a shield to our egoism, allowing it to act undisturbed.

Let me say it this way: some people, though they desire undertaking a journey of self-offering, seek refuge in their own capacities and live a type of exasperated activism whilst thinking that with their own work they are able to resolve any type of problem. Generally they presume they know everything and act according to their own logic and take pride in praises received for their work. All the time they overlook the most important thing, which is to sacrifice their ego and allow God to act through their person.

How can we put our own talents to use then?

This is to be done with simplicity and above all in the knowledge that we are all subject to error. If we patiently put up with our own limits without trying to camouflage them so as to appear clever or good, God will use them and we will obtain the virtue of humility which is certainly far better than any exterior success.

Perfectionism, whether human or spiritual, is a damaging product of our ego. Wanting to be perfect at everything makes us want everything to correspond to our expectations; we thus make great efforts not to make any mistakes. Since this is impossible, we become anxious about hiding them so as not to cut a poor figure. But this is to live in fear and slavery as we try to keep everyone

happy, and want everything in place, and we only end up becoming a victim to ourselves and make life impossible even for those around us. Thus, we can see how wanting to be perfect makes us put on many disguises, behind which we are unhappy, unreal and insincere.

What other disguises ought we fear?

In the spiritual life there is another subtle disguise to beware of: it is the divinization of our ego. This is a very strong form of pride present within the soul, particularly in sensitive souls which are open to spiritual gifts. This type of pride pushes the soul to identify itself with God.

A spiritual experience, even if the most perfect, is never God. It is merely a ray, a little ray of divinity. As soon as we say that what we experience is God we fall into the error of pride. All that is asked of us is to be little, and sacrificed, so that God can manifest Himself in us as the Lord, and draw us into His divinity. We must never divinize our own ego.

Why is a trial considered a grace?

Normally, man either fights against the difficulties of life, or he shuns them. However, if we want our ego to be purified, we must accept that it needs to undergo trials. It is God who allows trials. No one can wilfully choose a trial because our instinct of survival protects us. What is asked of us is to transform a trial into an occasion of grace by allowing God Himself to protect us.

When we recognize God as our Lord during times of sorrow or pain, and when, with serenity and faith, we allow offences to pierce our heart, and we enter the wounds of Jesus, there we will find total protection. Our wounds shall become one with the wounds of Christ and from the open side of the heart will flow merciful Love.

Why is it so difficult to enter into ourselves?

It is so difficult because our ego is so strong. Our ego is the place where we keep many interests, rights, and ideas, etc. That is why it is opportune to enter our inner poverty where we accept to die to ourselves. The Church teaches that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the worship of God. In us this must become life and reality. It is the donation (of ourself) that makes us real. Man becomes real when he loves and gives; it doesn't matter that he has spiritual gifts or not. It is important that this donation be responsible, lively and enthusiastic. We must be the expression of God's living and tender love, not for the satisfaction of others – as this would be a form of slavery – but for the nourishment of God's love present in our brethren.

How can we manage the gifts God has entrusted to us?

Every gift present in a soul comes from God and has the purpose of activating gifts present in others. It's like an organism where every organ depends on the others. Spiritual

gifts are never an end to themselves, meant for the person's own need. This would already be egoism. When we offer our lives, and sacrifice our own interests, we give life to our brethren.

We no longer belong to ourselves, but we live for others. It is here that our egoism definitely dies. Many do not want to question themselves, let alone die to themselves, but then they cannot rise either!

What is the difference between exaltation and elevation?

Exaltation means elevation of self. We can find in the world many exalted souls, but few “elevated” souls. The only person who truly is elevated is Mary, and she in body and soul. Exalted people live up in the clouds. The people whom God elevates are instead humble, little, simple and in every situation God is made manifest through them. For this Jesus glorifies the Father in the little ones, because He makes Himself present in them. If you want to be elevated by the Father, you must become the least of all, like Jesus and like Mary, because it is God that draws the soul to Himself; God that lifts it up. All we do is give God the chance to do it. Nobody can be elevated if he does not first sacrifice everything, and surrender himself totally to the action of God. God draws the soul to Himself, but not only that soul. Through this soul, He will draw to Himself also many other souls.

At this point, Jesus' words become reality: “When I shall be lifted up, I will draw everyone to myself.” If we live this with all our heart, we too shall enter the regal priesthood of Christ for the salvation of souls.

Fr. Tomislav Vlasic

(end part 5; to be continued)

Pope: bring lost friends to WYD

“World Youth Day is much more than an event,” Pope Benedict said. “It is a time of deep spiritual renewal, the fruits of which benefit the whole of society. (...) Some of you have **friends with little real purpose** in their lives, perhaps caught up in a futile search for endless new experiences. **Bring them to World Youth Day too!** In fact, I have noticed that against the tide of secularism many young people are rediscovering the satisfying quest for authentic beauty, goodness and truth. Through your witness, you help them in their search for the Spirit of God. Be courageous in that witness! Strive to spread Christ's guiding light, which gives purpose to all life, making lasting joy and happiness possible for everyone.”

Receive the Power

*Receive the power, from the Holy Spirit!
Receive the power to be a light unto the world.*

*As Your Spirit calls to rise
we will answer and do Your will.
We'll forever testify
of Your mercy and unfailing love.*

*Lamb of God, we worship you.
Holy one, we worship you.
Bread of Life, we worship you.
Emmanuel, we worship you.*

(From the theme song, WYD Sydney 2008)

Our Readers Write...

Lucio Niero, Italy: "I'm writing to you from the Prison of Montorio Veronese to thank the numerous persons who wrote to me to say they'd pray for me and my family. I see in the numerous prayer groups and individuals who wrote to me - even from abroad (readers of the English edition of Echo, editor's note) the love of the Blessed Virgin, giving me a clearer understanding of the immensity of God's mercy. From within here I can't do much for the others, but there is one thing that I do every day; and that is to pray to the Virgin Mary to cover us with her mantle and make us become brothers in her love..."

Sr. Stefania Bassan, Sudan: I have been receiving the ECHO for several years and I thank the Lord for the good it has done me and many other people, especially in the mission of Won where I used to work. For the past year I have been in Khartoum. There is always plenty of work to do, both with the poor, and especially in our house. I am in charge of the kitchen of our maternity ward, with an average of 20-30 women giving birth every day. We help everyone, Christians and Muslims alike, so that "inter-religious dialogue" is a daily event. I admire the African women; they are so strong and courageous, with their many children: they will be the ones to save this people. Thanks for always having sent me the Echo. Please continue to do so! As I greet you, I ask for a prayer for the Sudanese people.

Sr. Maria del Rosario, Spain: Dear Family of all those people who make ECHO possible, and which gives me much consolation. I am an infirm nun and I can no longer work as the others do. I look out every day for my ECHO hoping it will arrive in the mail .. it does me so much good! I read it carefully and photocopy some of the pages so I can read them again; then I give these to others who also gain profit from reading it. I give the copy of Echo that you send me to a lady who has been to Medjugorje; she reads it then passes it on: like a chain. I have no money, but I offer you my constant prayer, and my pains and limits, that God might provide you with what you need to keep on spreading the Gospa's message to all.

Sr. M. Rosa, Chile: It is with great joy that we await your ECHO, so rich in spiritual reflections, and for which we sincerely thank God in prayer every day. May God reward you! May every word you write be transformed by our beloved Mother into many pearls for heaven where we shall live in eternity. We entrust you all to Merciful Jesus.

Br. Kraler, Austria: Thank you for your wonderful paper. It makes me happy each time it arrives!

Maria, Germany: ECHO is one of the best religious papers I know! Thanks, and God bless!

Fr. Giorgio, Jerusalem: Amid the many publications that I receive here in Jerusalem I am always happy to receive yours. I read it willingly and I ask that you please continue to send it. Thank you, and keep up the good work!

Sergio Grisenti, Italy: I am sorry that I came to know this publication so late. It helps so much in the formation of Marian spirituality. Out of the many books on spirituality that I read for my formation, this publication helps me a great deal to assimilate the desires of our blessed Mother as I read the comments of priests and the testimonies of many pilgrims and devoted, helping my faith and trust to grow. I thank God for the gift of ECHO which holds - as though in a ciborium - the messages of Mary, from which we can draw at any moment for our reading and meditation. I see it as a gift of benevolence and mercy on the part of God for this troubled humanity.

Our Lady is in there!

The Echo arrived today (I had been anxiously awaiting it). It was such a joy. I still remember how I came to know of its existence. I had been to the old hospital to pick up the replies to some tests I'd done. As I was about to leave I noticed that the **chapel of OUR LADY OF THE BED** (in the old hospital of Pistoia) was open - unexpectedly, as it was still early. The lovely little baroque church was built **over the bed of a little room in the hospital**. The bed (from the 1400's) was of a 12 year old girl called Maria. She was sick with tbc and was dying, but one night was healed by Our Lady. As a sign of her "visit" she left an image of herself with her Son in the end of the bed. The monks built a chapel around the bed with the image that had appeared mysteriously. The bed is enclosed, as though in an altar or little crypt and is closed off by a gate.

It was here that I prayed that morning and it was then that I found **copies of the ECHO**. I took one, I read it; and a whole new dimension opened up before me. I immediately wrote to subscribe, and it is as if Mary has not left me since.

One morning, back at the hospital, I found the door to the chapel closed, though it was only 8.30. I complained with some other women who were there and had wanted to go in. "I bet you were disappointed to find it closed," they said in their Tuscan inflection, "there's Our Lady inside there!"

Rossella Castagnini

Message of 2 July 2007 to Mirjana:

"Dear Children, In the immense love of God I come to you today to lead you on the way of humbleness and meekness. The first station on this way, my Children, is **Confession**. Give up your pride and go down on your knees before my Son. Comprehend, my Children, that you have nothing and that you can (do) nothing. The only thing that is yours; that you own, is your sin. Purify yourselves and accept meekness and humbleness. My Son could have won with power but he chose meekness, humbleness and love. Follow my Son and give me your hands so that together we can climb the mountain and win. Thank you."

Our Lady spoke once again of the importance of Priests and of the Priestly Blessing.

Christians in Iraq Dying

This is the alarming cry that was raised after the killing of Chaldean priest, Fr. Ragheed Aziz Ganni on Sunday 3 June at Mosul in Iraq, at the end of the celebration of Holy Mass. Together with him, three deacons were also killed.

Father Philip Najim, the procurator for the Chaldean Church to the Holy See, lamented the situation of Christians in Iraq. "Closed churches, car bombs, forced conversions ... in Iraq Christians are dying. The Church is disappearing under the strike of persecution, threats, violence on the part of extremists that won't leave any option but conversion or fleeing," said Fr. Najim.

Fr. Ganni and three deacons were shot in what Benedict XVI called a "senseless killing." Fr. Najim said, "Christians have become the scapegoat to be taken advantage of or eliminate. They can't profess their faith freely. Women are forced to wear the veil and crosses are torn from the churches." He added that today in Iraq: "the kidnapping of priests is more frequent each day. Christians are forced to pay taxes if they want to keep their homes and faith. The only alternative is to renounce one's own roots, leave one's country, intensifying the emigration wave. "May Fr. Ganni's sacrifice be an injection of vitality for his community, his Church in Iraq, and for the universal Church."

(Zenit)

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Quotation: Ceasing to be 'in love' need not mean ceasing to love. Love, as distinct from 'being in love,' is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit; reinforced by grace from God. They can have this love for each other even at those moments when they do not like each other.. 'Being in love' first moved them to promise fidelity: this quieter love enables them to keep the promise. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run: being in love was the explosion that started it. (C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*)

The Lord bless thee and keep thee!
He show His face to thee, and have mercy
on thee! And may He give thee peace!

don Alberto

Italy, 9 July 2007