

# Echo of Mary Queen of Peace

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Our Lady's message of 25 July 2004:

**“Dear Children, I call you anew to be open to my messages! My Children, I desire drawing you all closer to my Son Jesus. Thus you pray and fast. I call you in particular to pray for my intentions, that I may present you to my Son Jesus, and that He may transform and open your hearts up to love. When you shall have love in your hearts, peace will reign in you. Thank you for responding to my call.”**

## May Jesus transform your hearts

It is with extreme clarity that Mary points out the scope of Her Presence at Medjugorje, to show us her role and our role. Mary renews her invitation: **“be open to my messages.”** It is necessary then that we be receptive to her messages, and the more we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us the more He is able to help us do this. It is not we who reach God; all we can do is desire being reached by Him, but without this desire we only shut ourselves off to His action of love.

Mary's first objective is: **“I desire drawing you all closer to my Son Jesus”,** and our first task is **“pray and fast.”** It's not a question of becoming better, or more honest, or more generous... none of these qualities draw us to Christ; they do not make us become more like Him, but they are the fruits of our being drawn closer to the Lord. So we pray and fast to allow Mary to draw us closer to her Son. The request is not exorbitant, for it is precisely what Jesus did during His earthly existence. If He, Who is God, prayed and fasted so much, all the more we need to pray and fast!

In a world which has rejected these values, Mary has come to re-propose them, and we ought to accept them with docility and humility, and honour them scrupulously (cf. Mt 6:5-18).

Our second task is: **“pray for my intentions”** and the objective is: **“that I may present you to my Son Jesus, and that He may transform and open your hearts up to love.”** The more we are drawn closer to Jesus, the more we assimilate Him. Thus, by the grace of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the will of Jesus (Jn 19:26-27) Mary fully accomplishes her Motherhood. Mary is not only Mother of the Church, but she is my Mother, and your Mother; she is Mother



*“Unless you convert and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3)*

of each and every person who takes her in to his soul and heart. Mary then presents us to Jesus, offering us to Him as the fruit of His Passion and Death, and regenerated by His Blood we are **transformed** and become capable of loving as He loves. This is the conversion we are called to, and it is realized in us in the measure that He lives in us (Gal 2:20).

Lastly: **“When you shall have love in your hearts, peace will reign in you.”** Peace is the consequence of love. While it is a task (a duty to love) it is also a gift already received, and an objective already reached – for it is Jesus Who lives in us. Jesus is Love; Jesus is Peace; and in Him we are reconciled to the Father and to our brothers and sisters. Only God can fill man. There is no gift, charism or action that can fill the void in us; only God can fill it. It is useless and deviant to seek in things that which only God can give. It is useless to worry over the things that can be received solely by an open heart (cf. Lk 10:38-42).

Gather us up, o Father, in Jesus Your Son. May Your will be done in us, as it was accomplished in Jesus, that in Him we might be one with the Son. We ask this through the intercession of Mary our Mother.

*Nuccio Quattrocchi*

Our Lady's message, 25 August 2004:

**“Dear Children, I call you all to conversion of heart. Decide, as in the first days of my coming here, for a complete change of life. In this way, my Children, you will have the strength to kneel and to open your hearts before God. God will hear your prayers and answer them. Before God, I intercede for each of you. Thank you for responding to my call.”**

## Authentic conversion

Men and women are the only creatures made in the image of God (Gen 2:27) whose nature is realized in the amount that His image shines in them. When there is communion between God and man, God's image lives in the soul and shapes man's actions, relations and attitude. In other words, God's image visibly emerges from man's life.

Sin breaks this communion between the creature and his Creator, and causes corruption of the human nature. This already happened on a cosmic level with the first sin, and it continues to happen even today for every sin that man commits.

A Christian is not immune from sin, but rather, his sin is more serious because not only does it harm the *image of God*, but it wounds Christ Who lives in us by virtue of our baptism. With a purely human heart one would say: *“Then who can be saved?”* But the Lord's reply to this question fills our hearts with hope: *“What is impossible with men is possible with God”* (Lk 18:26-27). But that our hope not be in vain we must respond with our own *“fiat,”* and sincerely seek and desire salvation. In other words, **our hearts must convert.** A faith which is limited to mere religious practices obviously can't suffice, but even a certain frequency to the Eucharist doesn't guarantee conversion, for even those who eat and drink in His presence are not necessarily acknowledged by Jesus (Lk 13:26).

Mary calls us to **decide for a complete change in our lives**, which is an invitation to take the way of salvation. If our initial zeal has slackened, if our hope has become dull, then it is because we have once again tried converting with our own strength rather than implore God for conversion.

Mary calls us to begin again: **as in the first days of my coming to Medjugorje, make a decision** to change. If we truly desire being changed, if we desire honouring the image of God in us, and letting Christ grow in us, then our lives will change, and it will be a complete change, and authentic conversion.

**Conversion of the heart** is the profound desire to let God work in us; it is

## The Pope at Lourdes: 150 years of pure grace

**“I have greatly wished to make this pilgrimage to Lourdes** in order to celebrate an event which continues to give glory to the Triune God. Mary’s Immaculate Conception is the sign of the gracious love of the Father, the perfect expression of the redemption accomplished by the Son, and the beginning of a life completely open to the working of the Spirit.”

These are the words with which **John Paul II** greeted the faithful at Lourdes for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the solemn definition of the **dogma of the Immaculate Conception**, last 15 August, day of the Assumption.

“Beneath the maternal gaze of the Blessed Virgin I offer a heartfelt greeting to all of you as we gather before the Grotto of Massabielle to sing the praises of her whom all generations call blessed (cf. Luke 1:48). By her words and her silence the Virgin Mary stands before us as a model for our pilgrim way. *It is not an easy way*: as a result of the fall of our first parents, humanity is marked by the wounds of sin, whose consequences continue to be felt also among the redeemed. But evil and death will not have the last word! Mary confirms this by her whole life, for she is a living witness of the victory of Christ, our Passover.

The faithful have understood this. That is why they throng to this grotto in order to hear the maternal counsels of the Blessed Virgin. In her they acknowledge “the woman clothed in the sun” (Rev 12:1), the Queen resplendent before the throne of God, ever interceding on their behalf.”

**The example of Mary Assumed into heaven has opened up wider horizons** and new hope for us all: “Today the Church celebrates Mary’s glorious Assumption body and soul into Heaven. The two dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are closely related. Both proclaim the glory of Christ the Redeemer and the holiness of Mary, whose human destiny is even now perfectly and definitively realized in God. “When I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (Jn 14:3). Mary is the pledge of the fulfilment of Christ’s promise. Her Assumption thus becomes for us ‘a sign

the surrender that Mary has been asking of us for the last 23 years; it is allowing God to replace our *heart of stone with a heart of flesh* (Ez 36:26); it is opening up our hearts to receive the *spirit of wisdom and revelation* (Eph 1:17).

If we take this decision seriously we shall have **the strength to kneel and to open our hearts before God**. When the heart is opened up before God it is already a prayer, and it is a prayer pleasing to God; it is our “fiat.” God will not fail to listen to this prayer: **God will hear your prayers and answer them.** “*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*” (Mt 7:11).

N.Q.

## Russian Icon returns home

Almost a hundred years ago the **Icon, Mother of God of Kazan**, left its homeland, and now thanks to the Holy Father it has returned to the Kremlin’s Cathedral of the Dormition in Moscow. After passing through various countries and staying a long time at the Shrine of Fatima in Portugal, it providentially arrived at the Pope’s dwelling more than 10 years ago. “Since then,” says the Pope, “it has found a home with me and has accompanied my daily service to the Church with its motherly gaze.”

“The Bishop of Rome has prayed before this sacred Icon, **asking that the day may come when we will all be united** and able to proclaim to the world, with one voice and invisible communion, the salvation of our one Lord and His triumph over the evil and impious forces which seek to damage our faith and our witness of unity,” said the Pope in very explicit words to the **Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Alexei II**.

“By a mysterious design of Divine Providence, during the long years of her pilgrimage the Mother of God in her sacred Icon known as *Kazanskaya* **has gathered about her the Orthodox faithful and their Catholic brethren** from other parts of the world, who have fervently prayed for the Church and the People whom she has protected down the centuries. More recently, Divine Providence made it possible for the people and the Church in Russia to recover their freedom and for the wall separating Eastern Europe from Western Europe to fall. Despite the division which sadly still persists between Christians, this sacred Icon appears as a symbol of the unity of the followers of the Only-begotten Son of God, the One to whom she herself leads us.”

**Once again Mary has been the mediatrix of peace.** As always, her children find refuge under her mantle. Once again the Holy Father has pointed Her out as the high road to reconciliation. “Russia is a nation which has been Christian for many centuries; it is the Holy Rus’. Let us pray with trust to Mary, for we know that she implores on our behalf and on behalf of all nations for the gift of peace.”

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of sure hope and consolation’ (Lumen Gentium 68). Listen to her, young people who seek an answer capable of giving meaning to your lives. Here you can find that answer. It is a demanding one, yet it is the only answer which is genuinely satisfying. For it contains the secret of true joy and peace.”

We are definitely in a new time, in which Our Lady is ever closer to her children; she traces out the path for us, explains the way, and offers us encouragement and company, but at the same time she precedes us.

Her motherhood is real, her closeness tangible. John Paul II knows this and he has no fears about proclaiming it even though many in the Church still find it difficult to acknowledge the importance of Mary’s role.

Thus, the Holy Father addresses his appeals to women: **“This Grotto also issues a special call to women.** Appearing here, Mary entrusted her message to a young girl, as if to emphasize the *special mission of women in our own time*, tempted as it is by materialism and secularism: to be in today’s society a witness of those essential values which are seen only with the eyes of the heart. **To you, women, falls the task of being sentinels of the Invisible!** I appeal urgently to all of you, dear brother and sisters, to do everything in your power to ensure that life, each and every life, is respected from conception to its natural end. Life is a sacred gift, and no one can presume to be its master.”

How much strength and truth in these words, and how much pain in the knowledge that today’s world all too often denies life, preferring to be enslaved to the logic of death. The Pope’s last appeal thus appears more than appropriate since we are all tied to the powers of evil in some way: “Finally, Our Lady of Lourdes has a *message for everyone. Be men and women of freedom!* But remember: human freedom is a freedom wounded by sin. It is a freedom which itself needs to be set free. Christ is its liberator; he is the one who ‘for freedom has set us free’ (cf. Gal 5:1). Defend that freedom!”

Dear friends, in this we know we can count on Mary, who, since she never yielded to sin, **is the only creature who is perfectly free.** I entrust you to her. Walk beside Mary as you journey towards the complete fulfilment of your humanity!”

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## “Your prayers and your hopes are mine”

On Saturday, 14 August, the Holy Father travelled to the Grotto of Massabielle “to first of all greet the sick who come in ever greater numbers to this Shrine, those who have accompanied them, their caregivers and their families.

I am here with you, dear brothers and sisters, as a pilgrim to Our Lady. I make my own your prayers and your hopes. With you I share a **time of life marked by physical suffering, yet not for that reason any less fruitful in God’s**

**wondrous plan.**

I have always **trusted greatly in the offerings, prayers and sacrifices of the suffering.** Dear brothers and sisters who are sick, how I would like to embrace each and every one of you with affection, to tell you how close I am to you and how much I support you. I now do so in spirit, entrusting you to the maternal love of the Mother of the Lord and entreating her to obtain for all of us the blessings and consolations of Jesus her Son.”

*“Return to your initial zeal”*

## Mother of life for all creation

In her messages the Queen of Peace calls us her “dear Children” as though it were an impassioned appeal directed at our distracted hearts with the aim of involving us more profoundly in the ineffable gift of her **divine maternity**. On many occasions Our Lady has called us with insistence and motherly passion, to a more authentic and conscious mother-child relationship. *“How happy I am when you call me ‘My Mother!’ How lovely it would be if I could be your real mother and you my children!”* (25/10/85). *“Dear Children, I want you to understand that I am your mother and that I desire helping you”* (25/8/93). *“Now, right now, you have to be my children. Not tomorrow or after tomorrow, but now! If you have a problem, give it to me, for I am your mother; I am always here for you and I love you.”* (15/12/85). *“How long it has been since you encountered me as your mother! Meditate on this over the next days and decide to change something.”* (28/7/85).

**Why should Mary press us so urgently to accept her living presence as Mother of our life**, as though it were a seal so as to forever mark our true identity and spiritual mission? The answer, we feel, touches on the true meaning of Mary’s presence in the world in our times, for it is part of the Father’s great plan of salvation to re-generate the members of Christ’s Mystical Body, the Church His Spouse, and in it each one of us. More so than ever, the Mystical Body is today called to become *“immaculate, without spot or wrinkle”* (Eph 5:27), and be finally ready for the eternal marriage with her Lord. This is necessarily accomplished through the same Mother of the Divine Son, which she, true and only *“Theotokos,”* bore into the world. And today this same Mother is being called to re-generate Her Son in the souls of men and all creation: *“This maternity of Mary in the order of grace lasts until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect.”* Lumen Gentium, 62

**Mary’s “new, spiritual motherhood” is her most precious gift which gushed forth from God’s Heart.** It is inseparably associated to the sublimely regal and salvific mission which She ardently desires sharing with her children, particularly those whom she herself calls at the service of the plans of salvation entrusted to her by the Most High for these times. This gift, indeed, is *“born from the heart of the Paschal Mystery of the Redeemer of the world”* (Redemptoris Mater, 44), and it must pass through the unlimited surrender and unreserved offering of life to God. It was in His will that Mary alone amongst all creatures would accomplish this.

**That is why Mary is forever the only immaculate way.** The Queen of Peace communicates the ineffable gift of her divine maternity to her children precisely through her immaculacy. Thus, she never ceases to invite us to accept her as our real mother. She has a special place in her Heart for us: *“Allow me to be your link with God and eternal life”* (2 Feb. 1990).

This Mother-child relationship, lifted up and transfigured by grace, allows us to be joined in a total union of hearts. We can become her true children if we hand over our hearts to her without conditions: *“Allow me to do this. I tell you anew: open your hearts. Allow me to guide you. My way leads to God”* (18 March ’94). *“As a Mother I plead with you: open your heart; offer it to me!”* (18/3/94). *“I am your mother, and I desire that your hearts be similar to mine”* (25.11.94).

When our hearts are handed over to our Blessed Mother she can shape them according to the image of her own Immaculate Heart, and we partake of Her Immaculacy and burning love which, in union with Jesus Christ, works to restore the supernatural life in souls. (cf. RM 39)

This is the only way that God’s pure love can freely flow through those who have responded to Mary’s call and thereby regenerate the life of the Risen Lord in the multitudes of brothers and sisters throughout the universe according to the inscrutable plans of the Most High.

**Mary’s divine motherhood, accomplished throughout time, reached its crowning moment only at the foot of the Cross.** It was here that the total fusion of her Immaculate Heart to the Father’s Heart was fulfilled. It was here that with the same immolated love of the Son she embraced all mankind, suffering and wounded by the sins of all times. It was here that Mary received from the lips of the dying Saviour the definitive gift of universal motherhood. The Church never fails to proclaim: *“This “new motherhood of Mary,” generated by faith, is the fruit of the “new” love which came to definitive maturity in her at the foot of the Cross, through her sharing in the redemptive love of her Son.”* (RM 23)

**We thus intuit the concreteness of the spiritual way** that the Queen of Peace desires leading us into, to allow us to partake more fully in the gift of her divine motherhood and glorious regality: *“My Children, I desire giving you my love, that you might make it known and pour it out onto others. I, your Mother, will help you.”* (17.9.88). The way to total union of our hearts with the Immaculate Heart of Mary is the same as the way to Her Son Jesus. *“For this I am with you, to draw you closer to my Heart and to the Heart of my Son Jesus.”* (25/8/93); *“I lead you to eternal life. My Son is eternal life. Accept Him and you will have love.”* (18/3/95)

Mary’s is a great call; it deeply expresses all previous apparitions in the world and the present ones in Medjugorje. In a certain sense these recapitulate them all. It is the great spiritual way which launches us into the salvific ray of Christ’s Heart, making of us true vessels of new life and salvation for all souls, both living and deceased, that God mysteriously links to the response of love we give to Mary’s call.

**Hers is the call to become true mothers and fathers in the order of grace** of multitudes of brothers and sisters in the entire universe, to birth them into the new and immortal life, into the light of the new creation which Mary is unveiling ever more clearly before the eyes and hearts of each of us and of the Bride, Who with the Spirit, is saying to the Lord: *“Come!”* (Rev 22:17).

*Giuseppe Ferraro*

## Praying the complete Rosary

*by Fr. Slavko Barbaric*

On the eve of the **Assumption** (14 Aug. 1984) Our Lady appeared to Ivan, and gave an important message: *“I would like everybody to pray with me as much as they can at this time. To fast strictly on Wednesdays and Fridays and to recite the rosary every day, meditating on the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries.”*

At the beginning Mary asked for the Creed and seven Our Father’s, and we knew this request was only the start. We say these prayers every evening, but this is only the ABC to help us learn to read. It is necessary to read in order to learn to read. This means that when we start to pray we must continue to do so and to increase our prayer.

**I realize that Mary wants from us a permanent prayer.** I will explain this. When Mary asks for the complete rosary every day, this doesn’t mean finding half an hour to recite the Hail Mary’s as quickly as possible and then tell ourselves we’ve fulfilled the message. No. The sense of this prayer is another. To recite the entire rosary is to be closer to the mysteries of the life of Jesus, of Redemption and of Mary. It requires a different attitude. For example, if you have no time for prayer in the morning, meditate on a mystery, such as a joyful one. Our Lady said: *“I am ready to do your will. I understand what you want from me. I am ready and allow myself to be guided by you.”* This is the first joyful mystery.

If we want to deepen our prayer, we must keep the Word in our heart, so that a readiness to look for and to do the Will of our Lord every day may grow in us. After we have allowed the Word of God to enter our heart and, by grace, our heart becomes ready to seek and do the Will of God, then we may pray ten hail Mary’s for ourselves, our family, the people we work or study with. **So our first impulse each day must be: “I want to seek your Will, and put it into practice.”**

This is the way to meditate each mystery. When we do this for five or ten minutes each day, we have a new stimulus to live our life with the Lord. This is the most important factor in the message.

Our Lady is not asking for so much prayer just to take up our time, but to lead us to the Lord. It is an indirect invitation to read the Scriptures because the rosary is a meditative, biblical prayer and it isn’t possible to meditate the rosary well without knowing the Bible.

If someone asked me: *‘How can I find so much time for prayer, for the whole rosary, or for prayer to contemplate the mysteries?’*, I would reply: *‘I have realized we do have the time, but, as we often do not see the value of prayer, we say we have no time.’*

If we want peace, I believe we must find time for prayer.

(15 Sept. 1984)



*“The Rosary is my favourite prayer.”*

John Paul II

## Divine paternity and maternity in us

by Fr. Tomislav Vlasic



The title of this reflection makes one immediately think of marriage or preparation for marriage, but we know that marriage isn't the only condition for becoming mothers and fathers.

For instance, there is the paternity and maternity of man which begins with his conception; and that of the young people who must reflect on the ways that lie before them when choosing either consecrated life or marriage. So, in this same perspective, we see how divine paternity and maternity

is proper to priests and the consecrated according to the model of Joseph and Mary who didn't generate in the flesh, but were in a perfect manner, father and mother. And we also see in this perspective God's creativity which is present in each soul. His creativity is a power that desires being manifested and freed so it can find the space within us to be more fully expressed.

**It is every being's nature to generate. If he cannot generate he feels frustrated.** A Christian who does not generate life in God is a maimed Christian. If a spirituality does not generate God it is ill. Openness to the gift of divine paternity and maternity is thus the readiness to generate the life of God in others.

In this perspective, we find ourselves before two choices: to generate life or to generate death. To generate life one must necessarily be united to God and be in harmony with Him. Since God is the source of life, He is our life; and it is His life which must be generated in us. To the contrary, Satan generates death, even spiritual death.

**To generate life means to allow** God's life to flow out like a river, according to St. John's account in the book of Revelation. In his apostolic vision John saw that from God's temple – *the new Jerusalem* – life flowed out (symbolized by a river), and that life in the world was not polluted by it, but rather was healed and purified by it.

So that divine paternity and maternity is lived correctly, it is fundamental that our life generate and make known God's grace. We can see how thoughts and desires flow continually through us, both on a conscious and sub-conscious level; well, in being united to God - day and night - it is divine life that flows out from us. Though we are probably unaware of it, God's action covers the entire environment, and even nature feels His grace being sent forth.

Mary and Joseph are our models; Jesus Christ chose these two people who had put aside all their plans and desires, and it was in them that He became incarnate. If we, too, surrender ourselves and all we have to God, without reserve, and without allowing our ego to dominate, then the river of God's grace will pass through us.

**To receive the gift of divine paternity and maternity** the most important thing is that the grace of God envelop us and change us. Unless we are regenerated, we cannot be fathers and mothers of divine life, for we ourselves would lack it. Perhaps we can accomplish great works on religious or humanitarian levels, or preach refined catecheses or theological lessons, but unless we are transformed in the life of God we cannot possibly transmit His life. If, on the other hand, we allow God's grace to envelop us and lift us up, nothing can impede divine life from using us as its vessels. There is no power that can stop it, no one that can oppose it, not even death or hell.

**With baptism we become God's children, but that's not enough, for we are called to be fathers and mothers, parents. This is adult faith.** This is where our mission begins. But who is willing to accept this gift from God? Not many. Those who unite themselves completely to God and desire entering into mystical communion with Him are able to fulfil the call of a Christian. The Church has neither hesitated, nor delayed in raising to the altar the great saints who've been *fathers* and *mothers* for humanity, such as Mother Teresa and Padre Pio: bearers of life.

**Where and how can mothers and fathers express themselves?** We know from the mass media that mankind risks grave dangers. Creation was entrusted to us so that God could govern it through us. Therefore, our fervent prayer in favour of all creation – prayer which is fruit of our paternity and maternity - ought to be a prayer through which God works His grace with power. If the gift of divine paternity and maternity in us were alive, we would easily recognize how we are all priests, and mediators. This is the spark that we received with our baptism and that makes us a priestly people. **The gift is within us.**

History has its course, with periods of crisis, others of triumph. Many things suggest to us that the time of the triumph of Mary Most Holy, of her maternity, is at hand. Her apparitions will shine out; the times are mature. The visits to Medjugorje will be powerfully affirmed; but there is need for fathers and mothers: men and women to generate new life, so that the Holy Spirit can act through them, the way He did with the Apostles.

What do we desire? apparitions, or visions, or do we want God's creativity within us? Some receive apparitions; it is a sign God grants to the world – a special grace. However, all of us can and must be creative, each according to his individual gifts. Even those who think they are last are called to be filled!

So what do we prefer? The tales, the visions, the words; or the living God Who generates His Son – the living Word – in us? The difference is abyssal! If we opt for the unending prayer and devotion which annoy God, which are heard but not heeded, we will not receive life, and we will not know how it should flow through us. We must, instead, choose to belong to God, and He will transmit life to us. Then, we will not say: "Where is God?", for we will all see Him. We will no longer ask: "What is God like?", because we will understand. All history tends towards the apex: *God-with-us* and *us-with-God*.

**Sacred Scripture, from the beginning, proclaims the Woman who will crush the head of the enemy.** In the light of what we have said, we can add that it will be the fathers and mothers – united to Mary – that will crush the head of the *old serpent*. Those who generate life will also cast out death and he who generated death. It is a beautiful call. This is what God is calling us to.

## Motherhood transfigured

I first became a mother a couple of months before I turned 20. Maternity was for me both a **gift and a grace**, much greater than I ever imagined. The Lord called me to be a mother nine other times. Each child has been for me an ever deeper encounter with the Lord and greater joy.

Each conception was an experience of welcoming Jesus; each birth and nursing period was an explosion of prayer, praise and contemplation of the mystery of life. For each child that was born I discovered the presence of God ever more deeply.

My life has not been without suffering, but God our Father led me to **the way and peace of Medjugorje**, and I have experienced being received by the heart of Mary so that all the evil in me is purified and transformed. But at Medjugorje **Mary** has shown me that there is also **spiritual motherhood**. I've learnt that my soul can take upon itself the suffering, difficulty and problems of many others to then bring them to Jesus at Adoration and daily Mass so that He through His Spirit can visit them and bring healing and new life. It is all very profound, but also very simple. It can all happen whilst I carry on with my duties as wife and mother.

Every now and again I feel drawn to Medjugorje, both as a geographical location and the place of spiritual communion amongst the brothers and sisters who wish to follow Jesus in company with Mary, and who are willing to put into practice the messages of the Queen of Peace for our times. And when I make a journey to Medjugorje (whether real or spiritual) I realize how our Blessed Mother very discreetly and humbly gives me trust and strength; she takes me by the hand and leads me on one more step, inviting me to collaborate in this **new way of transmitting life**.

Elena Ricci

## News from the blessed land

### “We wish to see Jesus”

For many it is an appointment which can't be missed, while others come out of curiosity; but to all is served up a generous portion of grace during the yearly **Medjugorje Youth Festival**. Even organizers were surprised by the numbers attending this year: 30,000 people at the Shrine of the Queen of Peace from the **1-6 August**, each of them with the desire to encounter Our Lady and her Son.

“We wish to see Jesus” was the theme of the meeting, which was also the Pope's most recent theme for World Youth Day, while the next one in the summer of 2005 at Cologne in Germany is “We have come to worship him.” The encounter between a soul and its Creator is written in the depths of the human heart: “The greatest dignity of man consists in his call to enter into relationship with God in an exchange of gazes that transform his life,” said the Pope in his message for WYD 2005.

That is why the young people are so drawn to Medjugorje, and why obstacles are joyfully hurdled: “I travelled 60 hours from Australia to come here. I'm exhausted, but I couldn't miss it,” said **Joshua**, visibly suffering from jet lag.

No matter what their story, the hearts of all were steeped in hope, waiting to be filled with certainty. They know only too well that Jesus alone can loosen the knots that condition their lives, that He alone can offer new light and fulfilment, that He alone can fill their deepest desires, those which were impressed in their souls at conception.

The programme of the Festival led the young people down a path which prepared them for the encounter with Jesus: first as a friend, then as brother, then as Lord. “Prayer, music and reflections will offer the help necessary to let Jesus look at us (theme of

day 1), because it is only through experiencing His loving gaze upon us that we come to desire meeting Him,” explained the parish priest, Fra Branko, in his introductory homily.

“Then we will discover that the encounter with Jesus gives a fuller meaning to our lives (theme day 2), and that this encounter is realized in the Eucharist (theme, day 3) and in Eucharistic Love, which is the giving of oneself without egoism, and sacrificing oneself for the others. The Pope says that to love isn't a question of just feelings, but that it is an act of will; so that to love is to prefer the good of others above the good for self.

On the fourth day, participants were called to become witnesses of the Lord, as the world seeks true witnesses of the One Who alone can grant life. Young people desire seeing Jesus because **they want to know the truth about their own lives**. “I am the way, the truth and the life” assures the Teacher (cf. Jn 14:6). They believed and they came to Medjugorje to listen to Him.

The voice of Christ spoke in the various **testimonies** throughout the Festival and it became clear that whatever the call may be, it is able to fully realize God's will when there is a sincere decision to comprehend it and follow it. “I remember, in particular, the words by **Sr. Elvira** who urged us not to delay in choosing,” said **Loredana** from Pompei, “and she was referring to the common practice of our days of reaching your 40's without knowing your calling.”

Young married couples, expectant



mothers, consecrated and religious, priests and representatives of new communities which the Holy Spirit continues to inspire and create, visionaries and others again all took their turn at tracing out for the young people a vision to pursue, a goal to tend to which would lead them to happiness. “You have heard the testimony of only a few of those who heard a voice they couldn't resist, and who left everything to serve the Lord,” said **Fr. Jozo Zovko** in paternal tones, “but there are thousands in Medjugorje who have made the decision to serve God as religious, as priests, as parents, or simply as good Christians. This is the meaning of experiencing grace; of seeing Jesus.”

However, there is not an encounter with the Lord without there being an encounter with Mary. She alone knows how to “form a contemplative heart and how to teach us to reach Jesus” (Holy Father's message for WYD). This isn't a novelty for those who've been listening to Our Lady's messages at Medjugorje, for she often repeats: “I desire leading you all to Jesus because He is your salvation” (Message 26/6/94). Mary is generous; she doesn't hold back her treasure for herself, and neither does she desire drawing us to herself out of self-interest. All she asks is that we enter into her Immaculate Heart because she knows that it is the shortest way to Jesus.

**Christ is the scope of our pilgrimage.**

Our Lady teaches this when we pray the Rosary to contemplate His birth, death and resurrection, that the same mysteries might impress deeply on our own lives.

The days of prayer, adoration and joy concluded at dawn on the 6<sup>th</sup> August (Solemnity of the Transfiguration) with the celebration of the Eucharist. As the giant host was elevated up to the Father, the still sleepy countenances broke into smiles, in an expression of joy and serenity. The young people of Medjugorje were ready to return home; their expectations had been fulfilled; they had seen His Face. S.C.

## I was there!

**I was one of the 30,000 young people at Medjugorje** for the Festival, and still today I have before me the sight of us all on our knees in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. What did we do there under the sun? Why leave the comfort of our homes and spend money at a place like that? The beautiful beaches of Croatia weren't far away; yet – like everyone else – I was there for a precise reason: **I wanted to see Jesus!**

Our Lady had called us one by one with her infinite patience. Each of us had a story to tell: life's experiences, the way which led us there, but together we were there with our hands uplifted to praise the Lord. We were **all touched by divine grace**, in the amount each of us needed, and the more we opened ourselves up to God the more we were transformed into vessels of grace for others.

I can still hear the words of Fr. Ljubo, Sr. Elvira, the visionaries and Fr. Jozo, and all those who witnessed to their experience of conversion. Above all I can still hear the Word of God. Yes! the **Word of God accompanied us in every moment**, from the morning prayer to evening adoration, and we heard it in all the languages so that all of us could

admire its beauty and relish its flavour.

We all came to Medjugorje full of unanswered questions, desirous of knowing what to do with our lives. Many of us were seeking out a vocation. All of us understood that **the important thing to do was first seek the Kingdom of God**, and the rest would be given us. At that point our every choice would have been dictated by the Holy Spirit and blessed by the Lord. Whether it be marriage or consecrated life, our aim ought to be holiness of the soul; so that whatever our choice in life, we would be accompanied by the cross which would allow us to be raised up to God.

**How could we not see Our Lady's embrace in this beautiful adventure:** Mary who presses us up to her Heart and to the Heart of her Son? We wanted to see Jesus; Our Lady lost no time. She showed Him to us in all His splendour, and we were like a beautiful bouquet of flowers which she offered up to her Son. Not only did we see Jesus, but – like Thomas – we touched Him, and now we know that He is alive in our midst and that He will never tire of loving us. If our hearts are now overflowing with

love, what will it be like in heaven!?

In a world where young people are a sign of perversion, where they die off in road accidents on Saturday nights, and they symbolize the scourge of society, and while the others limit themselves to praising the “old times,” **Mary has come to build up a new world with us**. From today we have become her witnesses; now it is our turn to show Jesus to the others, to those who thirst for truth and life.

The last night was spent atop Krizevac. With rosary beads in our hands we awoke the dawn as we celebrated Holy Mass and entered the light. However, the Festival didn't finish at Medjugorje, for it continues on in our heart and day-to-day life. Mary didn't leave us alone and defenceless, but she robed us in weapons of light. We are now armed with the Rosary, the Bible, with fasting, confession and Holy Mass. We can no longer fear on the sad and difficult days. The way isn't easy, I know, but **Our Lady trusts us**. On our part we have to open ourselves up to God and allow Him to shape our lives.

## Portion of Heaven

Nothing could better describe the grace experienced by **collaborators of the *Echo of Mary*** at their **annual international retreat** in Medjugorje from 25-29 August 2004. Grace was so dense that it was tangible, and joy flowed over from hearts, creating a climate of profound spiritual communion.

Various were the reasons that brought us together, including the desire to respond ever more radically to Mary's call and to make a total donation of self to Jesus through Mary; the awareness of being at the service of a precious instrument that brings the Mother's message to her children the world round; the need to share a common spirituality to bring union and harmony to *Echo*; the need to know each other better to be able to love each other as brothers and sisters of the same family.

**Each of us was gifted by the presence of every other person;** a presence made all the more beautiful by the fact that we came from many parts of the world (15 different countries), and various states of life (married couples, families, children, lay consecrated, religious, priests). But thanks to the grace of open hearts, the Holy Spirit was able to do great works in each of us, opening up new horizons, illuminating the way to take and confirming that already taken.

The atmosphere of silence and prayerful concentration helped us listen with the heart and reflect on the meditations by Fr. Tomislav Vlasic who led the retreat. Morning prayer on *Podbrdo* and *Krizevac* knitted us together even more closely; and night-long Eucharistic adoration during three of the nights (taking turns) allowed for each of us to personally encounter Jesus, heart to heart. With the celebration of Holy Mass, the celebrant recapitulated every intention in Christ, he consecrated the peoples present, and he gathered up the offerings presented by each person and raised them to the Father.

We also celebrated *Echo's twentieth year* to give thanks to God for having allowed us to continue the work begun by Fr. Angelo, in the certainty that the Lord will continue to multiply the fruits that *Echo* sows around the world. As a memento, a gold *miraculous medal* was donated to each collaborator of *Echo*: a powerful protection for the work which awaits us.

All of you, dear readers, were in our hearts and prayers.

Following are some testimonies by some of the participants who wrote about the "portion of paradise" that we all experienced.

*Sr. Stefania Consoli* (Editor)

### **Robert Prendushi,** **Translator, Albanian *Echo***

My impressions on the Third International Retreat for translators? Many; but the most memorable one is praying the *Our Father* and *Hail Mary* in so many different languages but feeling that it was one. **Prayer has no boundaries, rather,**



**it unites them.** There is only one prayer: and it is that which raises the hearts of the peoples up to the Lord. The themes developed by Fr. Tomislav will be of great help in our humble work. As I translate I shall pray, knowing that there are many of us praying together.

### **Beverley Drabsch** **Translator, English *Echo*;** **Secretary, Echo Assoc.**

"Lord, surprise me!" I had started saying several months ago, without anything particular in mind; and it was only on the last day of the retreat that it dawned on me that I was living my "surprise." And what a surprise! Our days at the Kraljice Mira House were steeped in love.

Words cannot express the **inner joy and peace and the deep inner sense of having come to Our Lady's very own home where Mary herself opened the door and welcomed us in.** The love she poured into our hearts was tangible. **It was a feeling of walking in the garden of Eden:** a little girl being led by the hand with God, my Father, on one side and my Mother on the other.

But the surprise also had a very concrete aspect to it, in the form of a brother and sister from Australia, and together we delighted in the garden, and we offered up to God our country and the English-speaking world.

The Lord's generosity can't be met; nobody's better at making surprises than Jesus! So with each passing day I've come to realize how the surprise is still unfolding, little by little, and the grace of Medjugorje, particularly intense at "Mary's own garden," has continued on in time, revealing new aspects and new details. I sense that this is only the beginning, as though I were still removing the wrapping, and that the real surprise is yet to come, though each wrapper removed is already a surprise in itself. We know, of course, that ultimately we will be ravished in the sweet embrace between Soul and Creator, and that between now and then there can only be a build-up of this inscrutable love of His, and that He delights in letting us feel this love also through our corporal senses. "*Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely,*" (Song 1:16).

But back to earth, for we are earthen creatures yet. At the Kraljice Mira Community, Our Lady gathered us together, sheep in the Lord's flock, and gave us a shepherd to lead the way. That shepherd was **Fr. Tomislav Vlasic**, whose fatherly guidance helped me immensely, shedding further light on the wonderful reality of the communion of saints and on the encounter between Christ and the Church with the celebration of the sacraments and in particular of the Eucharist, as well as on the great need for intercessory prayers for abandoned souls. It is here that we are called to be mothers and fathers in a spiritual sense to generate souls into Life.

Truly, words cannot express! May our tongues and our entire beings give praise and unending thanks to God, One and Triune, for His goodness and mercy, and for giving us such a beautiful, sweet and pure Mother!

*"My soul thirsts for thee, o God, my flesh faints for thee... Because thy steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise thee"* (Ps 63).

### **Piero Gottardi** **Webmaster**

That's right, the gold medal! The afternoon after I got back home I unpacked, but I was so tired and in need of sleep that I didn't take much notice of the little jewel-case. Today I opened it and understood. Given by Pietro, Fr. Angelo and Our Lady were just as present in the giving of it! Athletes rejoice over a gold medal for a passing glory, and to think that I almost didn't understand! Receiving a "gold medal" from the Blessed Virgin isn't an everyday feat! It is clear that on her scales merits and love weighed in more than error and misery.

What else can I say? I could write for hours. In that House, vital branch of the great tree of Medjugorje, there is an explosive force; against the kingdom of darkness, it is an atomic bomb!

I was inspired by the way relationships among participants were reinforced and renewed and how they grew in God. Now I believe in the advent of a new time, not only because the Blessed Virgin has announced it, but because I've seen its first lights. It won't burst in, for in God and in His Creation, everything is gradation and harmony. Between the day and the night there is twilight and dawn. The new dawn in Medjugorje can already be seen!



**Christina Agnani**  
Translator, Swedish *Echo*



It was a great grace and immense joy for me to participate in the annual retreat for collaborators of the *Echo*. During the year we live a long way apart, so it is very comforting and encouraging to meet the people behind this work, most of whom received no formal preparation for the making of a newspaper. We came from Albania, Australia, Spain, Germany, Italy, Poland, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Catalonia, Switzerland, Hungary, Austria, and Croatia, while friends from other countries were unable to make it.

The “*Kraljice Mira*” Community offered us hospitality and true friendship. What joy it was to share meals, to eat the exquisitely prepared food in meditative silence or in happy conversation. Each time was a festive banquet!

A couple of work meetings were held to discuss what had been done and what needed doing for the future, but, above all, we received spiritual encouragement by Fr. Tomislav. Through his homilies and talks we were helped to offer ourselves up to God the Father in union with Jesus and Mary. He urged us to offer up to God in the Eucharist the countries we represented. So I offered the problems, sins, and sufferings of Sweden, but also of Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. Without doubt, all of us extended their intentions to the rest of the world, to ask for God’s blessing on all mankind.

We translators and collaborators are ordinary people, but we know we’ve been touched by the hand of Mary here in Medjugorje. We all felt her call in our hearts, and her presence, and we desire helping to spread to the world her message. She says to all: God exists, God loves us and wants us in Heaven with Him.

We were immersed in love and friendship, and surrounded by the beauty of nature. Our senses were nourished on the sweet smelling herbs and flowers, on the summer song of chirping cicadas and crowing roosters. It wasn’t difficult to renew our choice to live as authentic Christians. We are certain of the help of the brothers and sisters, of Fr. Tomislav, and above all of Mary. The Queen of Peace told us again in her message of 25 August that she intercedes on our behalf. **Mary prays also for you who read these lines.** You can be sure of that, for we are all her children! Thank you Mary, Mother dear!

**Barbara Squassabia**  
Honorary member, *Echo* Assoc.

Each person arrives at Medjugorje after travelling along his own path. I came here out of conjugal obedience. It was my choice; it wasn’t imposed, but I am convinced that in marriage there should be no exclusive or private spaces which aren’t shared by the other.

It was in the conviction that private spaces bring about separation that I came, determined to accompany my husband along this way. I came here and found a



place where Grace is made concrete in the offering, and the elevation, and in the communion of souls. Here, one’s soul is able to breathe, and be the Lord’s Sanctuary where other souls find restoration.

**Fr David Tremble, mgl**  
Missionaries of God’s Love  
Australia

Just as Mary was surprised by the Angel Gabriel’s greeting in the mystery of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26), so too was I pleasantly surprised with the greeting I received during a visit to the *Kraljice Mira* Community while in Medjugorje with thirty other pilgrims from Australia for this year’s Youth Festival.

During this quick visit I was invited to return for the upcoming retreat with Fr Tomislav - like Mary at the Annunciation I was unsure how this could be possible but my ‘Yes’ bore fruit and I soon found myself back in Medjugorje.

During the retreat I was deeply blessed with all those who gathered from various countries in company with Fr Tomislav and his Community – we were blessed by their welcome, their word, their song, their prayer, their love, and their lives given joyfully to Jesus through Mary.

It was a significant time for my first visit to Europe. Fourteen years ago I was consecrated to the wounded heart of Jesus (which is opened in love for the world) and offered under Mary’s mantle of protection. For the last seven years I have been ordained a priest – these years have held their many blessings together with their burdens and my own weakness and sin. During the retreat, especially the Eucharist, I experienced Jesus invite me to release these burdens into his care. As I yielded to Him, I saw Jesus take in hand the weight of these years along with my sin; and lest I be yoked to them again I saw His wounded hand guarding these burdens as one clutches at a bag of belongings. Each time I was tempted to identify again with the burdens my eyes were drawn instead to Jesus’ wounded hands, one of which was extended toward me in invitation to continue our journey.

I thank God that the retreat culminated in a renewal of my self offering to Jesus, a renewal of my consecration and priesthood, a renewal accompanied by Mary and pressed to her heart. Just as the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary in the mystery of the Annunciation and, through her, generated New Life, I also through Mary have been renewed in order to bring forth new life to the glory of God.



**Elena Lehocka**  
Translator, Slovak *Echo*

This was our third time here. As soon as we arrived I felt as though I was in a garden for children. Little gestures made me realize how we are still little. Yet, at the end of the retreat, I noticed how all of us had gained greater awareness and maturity.

**Radek Starostik**  
Czech Rep.

Last year was my first time here for the retreat for *Echo* collaborators and all those who wish to undertake this particular call proposed by the *Kraljice Mira* Community. That meeting was very significant: it represented my departure along a way which is neither wide nor comfortable, yet after my first few steps I came to realize that it leads one out of fear into joy, out of darkness into light. I now understand the immense gift of Mary’s words: “*May it be done unto me according to thy word*” (Lk 1:38).

This year I again experienced profound joy in meeting the others, some of whom I met for

the first time, and yet it was as though we were all family.

Oddly, it wasn’t that difficult to leave the joyous atmosphere of the convent to go back to my place in life; for the retreat allowed me to breathe in deeply and find inner strength to go onwards.

A friend, new to Medjugorje, came too, and I think he also came to realize that he was “finally back home.”



**The Word**

You said it!

God lives, and so do I!

Like a cool breeze on a hot day,  
or rain falling softly of an evening,  
the Spirit of God comes upon us,  
upon us the King descends.

There is nothing I lack;  
love and peace are always with me.  
One day all men will do as I do:  
they will play in the garden of  
Mary’s Immaculate Heart.

*Isabelle* (Swedish violinist)

## Our Readers Write...

**Maria Luptakova, Slovakia:** Dear friends of Echo, I send my heartfelt greetings, and I thank you for sending me your publication regularly. It is full of blessings and the love of our Mother and her Son our Lord. I always so look forward to receiving Echo.

**Maria Cristina Pereyra, Argentina:** I wish to thank you for our first copies of Echo. Our little prayer group was overjoyed. It is difficult for us to get to Medjugorje, Echo brings our Blessed Mother closer to us. Thank you!

**Judy Chlebowicz, Australia:** May God bless you abundantly for spreading devotion to Our Lady and for inspiring and encouraging me in my spiritual life.

**Marie-Aude Claveau, France:** Thank you for sending me the Echo of Mary.

**Sr. Klaretta Griebel, Germania:** Thank you for your good publication. May God bless your apostolate.

**Mrs. Marion Thiesen, Canada:** Enclosed is my donation for your publication which I find very interesting and spiritually uplifting.

**Georgette Egue Cheveko, Benin:** We thank you for the immense joy we feel each time Echo arrives. For us it is a Christian guide to our spiritual and Marian lives. We highly appreciate your work.

**Francesco Bazzoli, Burundi:** Thank you for the Echo of Mary. I cherish my copy in Italian, while I distribute the French copies. These are well received, especially amongst the local clergy. I admire your work.

**Mutuna Chiwele, Zambia:** I am a medical student who for the past five years has been seeking new forms of spirituality to fill in a self-created vacuum due to tepidity.

I came across Echo accidentally, and through it I've found that the spirituality is already there within our hearts. We do not realise its presence. Thank you for bringing this message to the world.

**Fr. Cirillo Tescaroli, Ecuador:** I have been receiving Echo of Mary for some time now. It is very useful to me for my radio programmes on the National Catholic Radio of Quito.

**Mr Connolly, England:** I distribute copies to people and prayer groups around England. We are all grateful for your Echo. God bless.

**Teresa Griffith, Birmingham** Medjugorje Centre, England: Thank you for the Echos; the many who receive it through us all look forward to it! Every September we take a plane load of pilgrims to Medjugorje, and we always include about 10 free places for priests. This year we have nine to take. The priests (we have taken) all think of Medjugorje very positively; and they pass this on to other priests in the diocese. I am very grateful to Our Lady as in 1985 I was healed after a pilgrimage to Lourdes (I was nearly blind in one eye), but it was my belief in the Medjugorje apparitions that boosted my faith.

**F. Malik, England:** May God bless you for the work you do, and Our Lady Queen of Peace always protect you.

**Fr. Sean Ryle, Japan:** I appreciate very much the Echo which you regularly send to me in Japan where I work. Thank you, in union with Jesus and in the company of Mary.

**Beryl de Margerie, USA:** Thanks for making the voice of Our Lady echoed throughout the world. I hope my small contribution will help you to continue your good work.

**Fr. Joseph Buffoni, Comboni Missionary, Malawi:** Thank you for the Echo! On my part I shall celebrate Holy Mass according to your intentions. The prayer group will intensify their prayers for you. I bless you all and offer you a big "thank you."

**Philip Tiko Nwankwo, Cameroon:** I am writing to say thanks to God, to our Blessed Mother, and to you for the Echo we receive regularly. It teaches us spiritually and morally, and is very inspiring.

### Dear Friends of the Echo,

On the 10th May last I was in Medjugorje, and after having prayed the Way of the Cross up Krizevac in the morning and filled the afternoon with prayers for friends near Fr. Slavko's tomb, I heard in my heart: 'Now pray for your enemies.' I did, though it cost me enormous effort, because that day was exactly 5 years and 5 months since **my parents had been assassinated** (my mother had first been tortured). They had been very difficult years for the entire family!

The only thing certain in my mind was that one day I'd go to Medjugorje. Once there I was completely freed of my many sufferings. If prior to Medjugorje I occasionally prayed for my enemies, it seems that now the Lord has given me the grace to not forget them in my prayers.

Thank you for your publication which you generously send to me. Over the past five years it has truly renewed me. And a big thanks to Medjugorje and to the entire team at the Echo of Mary. (A reader from France)

**Monica Chin, Christmas Island, Australia:** Thank you for your prayers and copies of Echo. I am very pleased to inform you that due to your prayers we have started a Marian Prayer Group. The first Cenacle was held on 16 July, feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Praise God!

**Giovanna Ellis, USA:** I thank you for the Echo. Numerous priests have told me how happy they are to receive it; and apart from them I also send copies to various prisoners.

In the USA Our Lady has established a little place where her children can make a pilgrimage and hear the message of Medjugorje. It is in a beautiful mountain woodland in Birmingham in the state of Alabama. The visionary Marija from Medjugorje went there at the end of 1988 for medical care. The Blessed Virgin appeared to Marija every day and gave beautiful messages. On Thanksgiving Day (24 Nov. 1988) Our Lady appeared in a nearby field in which stands a single pine tree. It was close to this pine that Marija saw Our Lady who gave the following message: "Dear Children, I invite you to live my messages. I am here to help you. I will intercede before God for you and all your intentions." After that first stay,

Marija has since returned to Birmingham in 1994, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003 and in May of 2004. It is a place where one experiences profound peace, silence and prayer.

**Disciples of Jesus Covenant Community - AUSTRALIA** - organizes **week-long retreats** for people aged between **16 and 35**. Summer Schools of Evangelization provide a chance to retreat for a week into the **powerful experience of the Holy Spirit of God**.

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1. Br. Ephraim M. Chimutu, Box 275, Tembisa 1628, R.S.Africa

2. Theresia A. Missanga, Au-Olme Mission, P.O.Box 5858, Asmara, Eritrea.

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*God bless you  
with every blessing from heaven,  
may He make you pure and holy before  
His eyes;  
pour on you the wealth of His glory,  
teach you with words of truth,  
enlighten you with the gospel of salvation.*

*don Alberto*

Villanova, 15 September 2004