

## Reflections on the message of November 25, 1996

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*"Dear children! Today, again, I invite you to pray, so that through prayer, fasting and small sacrifices you may prepare yourselves for the coming of Jesus. May this time, little children, be a time of grace for you. Use every moment and do good, for only in this way will you feel the birth of Jesus in your hearts. If with your life you give an example and become a sign of God's love, joy will prevail in the hearts of men. Thank you for having responded to my call."*

November 25, 1996

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I greet you again whole-heartedly and, before we start reflecting on this month's message, let us again think back to last month's so that it becomes easier for us to delve into this month's message. As we remember from last month, Our Lady asked us now to open our hearts to God our creator so that He may change us. I want us to think about two questions and they are these. What is it that closes me off from God, and what is it that helps me be open to Him? The negative experiences with ourselves, with other people, especially with family members, but also our egoism, our selfishness, our materialism and our dependencies close us off from God. Our fears and our distrust also help with this process with which we close ourselves. What helps us to open to Him is clear -- prayer, fasting, Confession, attending Holy Mass, and especially becoming witnesses for what God gives us and has already given us. These testimonies will help others because they will give them the trust to themselves to grow in love for God. Mary called us to be closer to Her and that our love for Her Immaculate Heart may grow more fervent. She is the mother who wishes that Her children be closer to Her. Her closeness to us here in Medjugorje has helped so very many people to open themselves to God, and the special presence of Mary is the greatest grace of Medjugorje. She told us that the Heart of Jesus suffers for us and therefore calls us again to renewal and conversion. Renewal must begin in every one of us and only then can we become the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Mary also told us that She loves us, and in a special way implores us to convert! When we think of that message we must again make a firm decision to be near to Mary,

to remove everything and thereby free ourselves of everything that hinders us from being near to Her, to trust in Her and to trust that She will then help us toward being closer to Jesus. And may this also happen.

After two good weeks in the USA, Vicka returned here the first week of November. Jacov is constantly at home now-a-days and speaks regularly with the pilgrims. Mirjana is in Italy with her family, as is Marija. Ivanka remains here in Medjugorje and really lives a secluded life with her family. Ivan still remains in the USA and gives his witness there. Marija was here in Medjugorje in October and is returning again for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

In November there were not so many pilgrims here, so we can say that we were able to take a short rest. But there are always groups here and right now we have them from Poland and Italy, two from Mexico, several from the USA, and a few days ago we also had one from Brazil. Medjugorje attracts people and, of course, always continues helping the renewal of the Church -- which is also Mary's central wish.

Thank God, the political situation is becoming more stable. Some refugees are returning, and we hope that especially next Spring many more will be able to do so, in order to again begin with a normal life. Complete reconciliation is not so easy, yet we still hope that it is possible to heal all wounds and then to live in peace along-side one another.

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This month's message is the message with which Mary wishes to prepare us for Christmas. A good preparation can happen when we again decide to listen to Her when She tells us...

TO PRAY, SO THAT THROUGH PRAYER, FASTING AND SMALL SACRIFICES YOU MAY PREPARE YOURSELVES FOR THE COMING OF JESUS

Regarding prayer we all know that in nearly every message Mary kept urging us to do so. Prayer is the first condition so that anything at all can happen. Here in Medjugorje it is our general experience that people receive a new will to decide to come back to prayer. But we may not forget that when it comes to prayer that there are two levels of conversion. First, when someone who does not pray

decides to start, then one can say that it is a conversion toward prayer, but the second conversion ought then to occur in prayer, and this means that we slowly change the reason for praying. People pray easily when there are problems to face and when they themselves need something, and this too is good. We are always allowed to turn toward God in every situation to ask Him for His grace, BUT one day it must also happen that we begin to pray out of our love for God. Then prayer will always be possible, and prayer will become free of any conditions that we may have within us. Then people, whether young or old, whether healthy or sick, whether rich or poor, will all be praying because they are doing so out of love for God. I also believe that in prayer one must ask that one may receive a real spirit of prayer. In respect to fasting one can say that Mary called for it from the very beginning and one should also not forget that the combination of fasting with prayer, according also to Jesus' own words, has a special power and, when we are aware of this, we will also most certainly have an easier time with it. From my own experience I must also add that always more people are deciding for our week-long fasting retreats. We are giving ten such retreats in our house, Domus Pacis, and so far we have had two German, two French, and one English group, and the remaining in December will be mixed. During these week-long fasts we have constantly the same experience that people have inner healings, but there have also been physical ones. Especially during this time we should again decide for prayer and fasting, because in this way our hearts are opened and thereby given many gifts. What does it mean when Mary says, "small sacrifices"? While speaking with one group, someone said how happy they had been that She had said "small sacrifices". This gave the person courage to start with something, because we all know that with big decisions and sacrifices many would fail. So deciding on something small will give many the right start and then they will succeed. Small sacrifices can be watching less television, fasting a bit more, giving up something that is dear to one so that we protect our inner freedom and avoid becoming dependent on anything. Prayer, fasting and the small sacrifices will then clean our hearts, will strengthen us in our battle with all evil and will make it easier for us to decide for the good, but not only that, for also will we have an easier time telling where we can do something. Then Mary tells us...

MAY THIS TIME ... BE A TIME OF GRACE FOR YOU

From God's point of view, all times are a time of grace for us. God is always ready to give us His graces; but when it comes to us, one can say that the time of grace begins whenever we make our decisions to pray, to fast, to confess, to go to Holy Mass, and to offer up small sacrifices. For God it will never be too late, whereas for us it may become a bit late because the harder our hearts become, the more difficult it becomes to receive graces. This month's message is truly a Christmas message because in the next line Mary makes us aware of specific actions. She wishes us to...

### USE EVERY MOMENT AND DO GOOD

This certainly means to pray, to fast and to make small sacrifices, but these in themselves do not contain the final purpose. The final purpose of prayer, fasting and small sacrifices is to open ourselves to God and by opening ourselves to Him we are also always opening ourselves to the other people. This message was given to us the day after the Feast of Christ the King, and the Gospel on that day spoke to us precisely about making use of every moment to do good. Jesus tells us that we can meet Him in every other person, and so every other person is an opportunity for us to meet Jesus. And when the heart is clean and, through prayer and fasting, open to God, then it will also become a heart that will never overlook another person. This in actuality is also the final criterion for all our spiritual growth. When we want to know whether we are growing, all we must ask ourselves is how do we react when we meet others. When we can be joyful with those who are joyful and suffer with those who suffer, when we see the poor and can relieve their plight a little bit, then we can say that our prayer and our fasts have brought us onto the good path. The last criterion, at the end of the story, will not be prayer and fasting, but rather our specific actions and reactions toward others. Here we should also be aware that we should not behave toward people the way they behave toward us, and this happens so very easily. It happens so often that our pride, our selfishness, our bad habits, or a situation comes upon us in which we cannot forgive, cannot love, and then we allow ourselves to be this way toward others. When we are good to the good, Jesus already told us that we are then like the heathens who also do the same. We must overcome this human logic and behave toward people in every situation as Jesus would behave toward them. So our measuring stick for our behavior

toward others should be Jesus' love toward us and toward others, and we may not allow ourselves to expect that the measuring stick for our behavior will become the measuring stick for others. A person who lied to us or did another evil to us, to these also should we show our love and speak the truth. This then would be the true behavior according to the Gospel, and therefore Mary also teaches us this. So our entire life's assignment should be to take every moment to do good for others. Then Mary continues...

FOR ONLY IN THIS WAY WILL YOU FEEL THE BIRTH OF JESUS IN YOUR HEARTS

What should we understand with this? Of course, when we are in a state of grace, then Jesus is already in our hearts, yet it can also happen that He is already there but that we do not feel it. When we live love toward others at all times, then too will we come to feel the love in our hearts and therefore realize that Jesus has been born in them. At the end of the message, and again in very much a Christmas sense, Mary says that...

IF WITH YOUR LIFE YOU GIVE AN EXAMPLE AND BECOME A SIGN OF GOD'S LOVE, JOY WILL PREVAIL IN THE HEARTS OF MEN

Examples are very important! Back in the message of August, Mary spoke to us also about the example -- to be good examples for the children so that they may be protected from atheism. To give a good example with your life is much more than merely a good word without an example. If we, during this time, think more often about the poor, the refugees, and the orphans, then we will be responding specifically to the message to us. When we do good, when we love and forgive; then we will also become signs of God's love toward us -- the love that did everything for us. These following words are well-known: God did not even spare His own Son, but rather gave Him out of His love of us; and Jesus was born as a poor child in a stable, born to poor parents so that he would be the same as all of us, except in sin. The love of God is great, and therefore too is our assignment for inner growth also great, and that is to grow in love, in hope, in faith and in peace. When we make progress here, then we will all become signs of His love, and it is this love that will then become the joy in people's hearts. Joy will be victorious, and so it is easy to understand Mary here. When we meet someone who really lives and exudes God's love, then it awakens in our hearts a

deep joy. Every one of us is joyful when we meet someone who is loving, truthful, forgiving and merciful, just as we also become fearful when we meet or have to live with someone of whom we know that they do not love, are not truthful, are not forgiving, and are not merciful. Sin from the very beginning was the cause of all fear. Adam in Paradise, once he had sinned and thus become fearful, could no longer tolerate the presence of God. So, someone who is in sin cannot be joyful and trusting, but rather there he will find himself in sorrow, distrust and fear of one another. The love that God gives us should really make us decide for His love, and then also to create it. But to understand all that really means that we should, most especially during this time of Advent, look upon Mary -- Mary who, when She rushed to visit Elizabeth, was for us all the very best example for how to trust in God and for how to think of others. In doing so for Elizabeth and Zacharius, Mary therefore became a sign of God's love for them and thereby filled both their hearts with great joy. Only for this reason could Elizabeth call out from the depths of her heart, "From where do I get the grace that the Mother of the Lord visits me?!" Mary gives birth to Jesus, She brings Him to the Temple, She looks for Him, and through all this Mary, the humble servant of God, gave us all good examples and thereby Herself became a sign for God's love for us. When we pray the Rosary we stay with Her and watch how She behaved, and in doing so we will certainly also learn how to be this way.

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Dear Reader,

With all my heart I wish that this Advent may become a grace-filled time for all of us, and that we prepare ourselves well for the Coming of Jesus. When we prepare ourselves well then we will become joyful and able to be people of peace. I wish for every one an inner time of Advent with more time for prayer, for fasting, and more courage for small sacrifices, so that we may then celebrate Jesus' Birth in His Joy and His Peace. If we do this, then we will certainly also be able to enter the New Year with His heart having been born in ours. For this let us now pray:

God, our Father, we thank You that Mary, Your humble servant, became the mother of Your Son. We thank You that You through Her are calling us to pray, to fast and to making small sacrifices. Give us the grace that we may in our lives

respond to Her messages in specific ways. Give us the spirit of prayer and fasting, and the spirit in which to bring You small sacrifices. Free us from all that hinders us from preparing ourselves for the Coming of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Give us all sensitive hearts so that every one of us may at every moment be ready to do something good. Give us the grace to be good examples for the others, especially for all parents, for all teachers, and for all adults so that they too may become signs for Your love for us. Father, bring joy to all those who are now sad, bring hope to all those who are now without hope, and heal the hearts of all who seek love, but are unable to find it. Father, heal all those who, during this time of Advent, are awaiting the Coming of Your Son with love. Heal also all those who are unable to open themselves to You because they are distrustful and fearful of You. Father, bless and convert all those who are baptized yet who only at Christmas come to Church. Bless us through Your Son, Jesus Christ, who comes to us as Prince of Peace. Bless us all with Your peace and especially bless all the families who are in conflict with one another. Bless the Church and all those countries that suffer either from wars or from natural disasters. During this Christmas, turn the sorrow of all people into a deep joy, and lead all people who are looking for You at this moment onto the path to Jesus. Lord, make of us all signs of Your love, so that people may through our example find their way to You. Mary, You who gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem, help us to take You and Your son, Jesus, into our hearts. Pray for us that we may, like You, open ourselves so completely to the Holy Spirit that we may, during this Christmas as well during the beginning of the New Year, be always ready to say like You did, "Lord, Thy will be done!". Through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Fr. Slavko, Medjugorje

November 27, 1996