

# THE MEDJUGORJE MESSAGE

## ***MOTHER OF EVANGELISATION***

***With the Holy Spirit, Mary is always present in the midst of the people. She joined the disciples in praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14) and thus made possible the missionary outburst which took place at Pentecost. She is the Mother of the Church which evangelises, and without her we could never truly understand the spirit of the new evangelisation.***

*Apostolic Exhortation EVANGELII GAUDIUM of the Holy Father Francis to the bishops, clergy, consecrated persons and the lay faithful of the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world.*



***It is impossible for us to refrain from speaking of what we have seen and heard.***

## PILGRIMAGE DATES

● Planning to make a pilgrimage to Medjugorje in 2014? Here are some more dates received from group leaders.

**Marguerite O'Kane** is organising two groups, both leaving from **Belfast**. The first group leaves on Wednesday June 4, returning June 11. The second group departs on Wednesday October 8 and comes back on October 15. You can contact Marguerite on 02838 326326 or 07843 192431 for further details.

**Reggie Donnelly** and **Jean Reynolds** are also taking groups from **Belfast**. Confirmed dates are: May 28 - June 4, June 22-29, August 17-24, September 7-14, and October 1-8. Contact Reggie on 02890 300980, or Jean on 02844 830979.

**Stephen Griffith** has now taken over the responsibility of organising pilgrimages from his mum and dad, Teresa and Michael. Their next pilgrimage date from **Birmingham** is September 17-24. Contact Teresa or Stephen on 0121 604 4061.

**Kath Gambin** is also taking a group leaving from **Birmingham**: September 10-17. Phone Kath on 0116 234 0103 for all the details.

**Marie Bedingfield** is organising two pilgrimages to Medjugorje leaving from **Newcastle**: June 4-11, and September 3-10. More information from Marie on 01642 530739.

**Anne Molloy's** next pilgrimage from **Manchester** is September 10-17. Telephone Anne on 0161 881 5129.

Finally, **The Medjugorje Calling Foundation** has arranged for its annual pilgrimage to leave from **London Gatwick** on October 4, returning October 11. Email [medjugorjecalling@gmail.com](mailto:medjugorjecalling@gmail.com) for details or go to the Foundation's website: <http://medjugorjecalling.com>

## MISUSE OF MASS OFFERINGS

● Parish Priest of Medjugorje Fr Marinko Sakota, has issued a warning against the misuse of selling Mass intentions on web sites.

He states on the parish website: "We were informed that some people are selling mass intentions from Medjugorje parish office on their web sites. This is huge misuse of the most sacred offering of Holy Mass and major fraud at the same time. Thereby, we would kindly like to ask you to be aware of this matter and not to support it by any means. If you happen to find out about similar activities of some other people involved in this, we would appreciate if you could notify us promptly about that."

## MANCINI RETURNS

● Former Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini made a surprise day-visit to Medjugorje in March before flying back to Istanbul. Mancini is currently in charge of the Turkish team Galatasaray. It was Mancini's third visit to Medjugorje in a year.

## OFFICIAL PLACE OF WORSHIP?

● The Medjugorje phenomenon began making news again last month after comments made by the parish priest Fr Marinko Sakota to journalists in Mostar in Bosnia Herzegovina were reported by German and Austrian news media. The comments were also published by Radio Vatican and by the media department of the Austrian bishops' conference on its website.



Fr Marinko was quoted as saying that he hoped for a decision by Rome to declare Medjugorje as an "official place of worship".

He also said that he was not expecting an official statement by the Vatican about the authenticity of the private revelations at Medjugorje as the apparitions are still ongoing (three of the visionaries still receive daily apparitions) and that the alleged phenomena cannot be 'recognised' – only believed in.

He added that Medjugorje messages bring nothing new to Church teaching but encourage pilgrims to seek peace within and promote peace with others and in the world through prayer, fasting and confession.



## MORE WONDERS...

● There are many signs and wonders to be witnessed at Medjugorje but some which are seldom noticed are the amazing fossils embedded in sections of the paving around St James' church, close to the beautiful statue of Our Lady and the bronze sculpture of the Risen Saviour.



The fossils date from 40 millions years ago and in some cases possibly even as far back as 100 million years!

The embedded creatures include clams, mussels, snails, urchins, bryozoans, brachiopods and other less common forms of marine life, all survivors of the ancient Tethys Ocean, the ancestor of the present-day Mediterranean Sea.

One particular area rich in fossils is the dark section of paving close to Our Lady's statue. During dry weather the fossils are not easy to distinguish, but when the paving is doused with water (from the nearby fountain) the whitish outline of the fossils appear.

According to geologist Goran Glamuzina, this ancient but extinct form of life created by God is a prominent feature in the petrified limestone seen throughout the region, a natural resource used widely for paving construction.

So while the Medjugorje phenomenon and its associated marvels and graces has been ongoing for almost 33 years, it is but a blink of an eye in the timescale of God's creation.

*To Yaweh belong the earth and all it holds,  
the world and all who live in it;  
he himself founded it on the ocean,  
based it firmly on the nether sea.  
Psalm 24*

Dear Children! Today I invite you to go into nature because there you will meet God the Creator. Today I invite you, little children, to thank God for all that he gives you. In thanking him you will discover the Most High and all the goods that surround you. Little children, God is great and his love for every creature is great. Therefore, pray to be able to understand the love and goodness of God. In the goodness and the love of God the Creator, I also am with you as a gift. Thank you for having responded to my call. *Medjugorje message, October 25, 1995*

## THANK YOU

● Thank you for your many greeting cards, well-wishes and prayers during my time in hospital.

**"In nature you will meet God the Creator..."**



## *It has to be this way*

by Bernard Gallagher

● I was looking forward to Ash Wednesday, even though I had an out-patient appointment at my local hospital. It was scheduled for midday and would allow me more than enough time to attend Mass in the evening and receive ashes. That was until the heart consultant said I wasn't going anywhere after my angiogram test had shown up problems.

A bed was immediately found for me on ward D25. But no Mass and no ashes. The start of my Lenten journey had taken the most unexpected twist.

Most days during Lent I pray the Stations of the Cross. Now, it seemed, this wouldn't be possible, certainly for the time I would be spending in hospital. I tried to picture in my mind the Stations displayed at my parish church, even those at Medjugorje, but found them difficult to recall

Whenever I am in hospital I have a routine of praying for other patients around me. It somehow takes my mind off my own problems. So when the evening set in and I started to do this I became suddenly aware that every bed in the ward was indeed an actual Station of the Cross, that the suffering Christ could be found in each person on their sick bed.

These were not pictures or artwork hanging on a wall but real and live situations of people carrying their cross – Jesus in every person, whatever their background, religion or nationality.

Enlightened and encouraged by this truth I focused on each bed and each person every day to pray the Way of the

Cross. I focused on individual scenes in the ward, looked for the Simon's and Simone's, the Mother's and the Veronica's, and in every bed I was able to witness Christ and his Cross.

I was also personally challenged along the Way. At times I found myself full of condemnation and judgement, and on other occasions wanting to show compassion and pity. It seemed as if I was taking the role of every person we associate with the Stations of the Cross.

And I even had my own cross to bear, both as the thief who repented and the other who showed no faith in Jesus.

For certain I understood that we are all made in the image of God and suffer with our cross, be we Muslim, Sikh, Christian or non-believer. Only today I was reminded again of this truth when Pope Francis said:

"We're all brothers and sisters. Believers, non-believers or whether belonging to this or that religious confession, Jews, Moslems... we're all brothers and sisters!

In hospital I met with my brothers and sisters suffering at every station, in each bed, in the image and way of Jesus.

Dear children, Today, with my motherly heart, I call you gathered around me to love your neighbour. My children, stop. Look in the eyes of your brother and see Jesus, my Son. If you see joy, rejoice with him. If there is pain in the eyes of your brother, with your tenderness and goodness, cast it away, because without love you are lost. Only love is effective; it works miracles. Love will give you unity in my Son and the victory of my heart. Therefore, my children, love. Medjugorje message, September 2, 2008

## *MEETING VERONICA*

● As I lay helpless in the hospital's high dependency unit, a specialist nurse approached me with a basin of warm water and proceeded to wash my body wherever I wasn't covered in surgical dressings and monitor cables.

I can't remember much about it as my body was still filled with anaesthetic and other pain relief medication. But I do recall the tender and gentle way the nurse washed my face and the bliss I experienced during my helplessness.

She was a total stranger and I didn't catch her name. But I shall never forget the experience and will always remember her as Veronica, the woman who wiped the face of Jesus as he carried his cross.

Veronica's pity was rewarded with a permanent impression of the Lord's face on her veil. The nurse's compassion has graced me with an everlasting memory in my heart of the tenderness and goodness of Jesus in the hearts of others.

*Jesus said: "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you."*

John 13 : 12-15

**My children, do not forget that you are not in this world only for yourselves, and that I am not calling you here only for your sake.**

*part message to Mirjana, November 2, 2011*



***Pope Francis: "We're all brothers and sisters!"***

## LATEST MESSAGES OF OUR LADY

### **JANUARY 25, 2014, message to Marija**

Dear children! Pray, pray, pray for the radiance of your prayer to have an influence on those whom you meet. Put the Sacred Scripture in a visible place in your families and read it, so that the words of peace may begin to flow in your hearts. I am praying with you and for you, little children, that from day to day you may become still more open to God's will. Thank you for having responded to my call.

### **FEBRUARY 2, 2014, message to Mirjana**

Dear children, with motherly love I desire to teach you sincerity, because I desire that, in your actions as my apostles, you be exact, resolute, and above all sincere. I desire that, by the grace of God, you be open for a blessing. I desire that by fasting and prayer you obtain from the Heavenly Father the cognition of what is natural and holy – Divine. Filled with cognition, under the shelter of my Son and myself, you will be my apostles who will know how to spread the Word of God to all those who do not know of it; and you will know how to overcome obstacles that will stand in your way. My children, by means of a blessing, God's grace will descend upon you and you will be able to retain it through fasting, prayer, purification and reconciliation. You will have the efficiency which I seek of you. Pray for your shepherds that the ray of God's grace may illuminate their ways. Thank you.

### **FEBRUARY 25, 2014, message to Marija**

Dear children! You see, hear and feel that in the hearts of many people there is no God. They do not want him, because they are far from prayer and do not have peace. You, little children, pray – live God's commandments. You be prayer, you who from the very beginning said 'yes' to my call. Witness God and my presence and do not forget, little children: I am with you and I love you. From day to day I present you all to my Son Jesus. Thank you for having responded to my call.

### **MARCH 2, 2014, message to Mirjana**

Dear children; I am coming to you as a mother and I desire that in me, as in a mother, you may find your abode, consolation and rest. Therefore, my children, apostles of my love, pray. Pray with humble devotion, obedience and complete trust in the Heavenly Father. Trust as I have trusted when it was said to me that I will bring the blessing of the promise. May out of your hearts, from your lips, always come forth "May your will be done!" Therefore, trust and pray so that I can intercede for you before the Lord, for him to give you the Heavenly Blessing and fill you with the Holy Spirit. Then he will be able to help all those who do not know the Lord – you, apostles of my love, will help them to call him "Father" with complete trust. Pray for your shepherds and place your trust in their blessed hands. Thank you.

### **MARCH 18, 2014, message to Mirjana**

Dear children! As a mother, I desire to be of help to you. With my motherly love, I desire to help you to open your heart and to put my Son in the first place in it. Through your love for my Son and through your prayer, I desire for God's light to illuminate you and God's mercy to fill you. In this way, I desire for the darkness, and the shadow of death which wants to encompass and mislead you, to be driven away. I desire for you to feel the joy of the blessing of God's promise. You, children of man, you are

God's children - you are my children. Therefore, my children, set out on the ways on which my love leads you, teaches you humility and wisdom, and finds the way to the Heavenly Father. Pray with me for those who do not accept me and do not follow me - those who, because of hardness of their hearts, cannot feel the joy of humility, devotion, peace and love – the joy of my Son. Pray that your shepherds, with their blessed hands, may always give you the joy of God's blessing. Thank you.

### **MARCH 25, 2014, message to Marija**

Dear children! I am calling you anew: begin the battle against sin as in the first days, go to confession and decide for holiness. The love of God will begin to flow through you into the world, peace will begin to rule in your hearts and God's blessing will fill you. I am with you and intercede for all of you before my Son Jesus. Thank you for having responded to my call.

### **APRIL 2, 2014, message to Mirjana**

Dear children, with a motherly love I desire to help you for your life of prayer and penance to be a sincere attempt of drawing closer to my Son and his divine light – that you may know how to separate yourselves from sin. Every prayer, every Mass and every fasting is an attempt of drawing closer to my Son, a reminder of his glory and a refuge from sin – it is a way to a renewed union of the good Father and his children. Therefore, my dear children, with hearts open and full of love, cry out the name of the Heavenly Father that he may illuminate you with the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit you will become a spring of God's love. All those who do not know my Son, all those thirsting for the love and peace of my Son, will drink from this spring. Thank you. Pray for your shepherds. I pray for them and I desire that they may always feel the blessing of my motherly hands and the support of my motherly heart.

### **APRIL 25, 2014, message to Marija**

Dear children! Open your hearts to the grace which God is giving you through me, as a flower that opens to the warm rays of the sun. Be prayer and love for all those who are far from God and his love. I am with you and I intercede for all of you before my Son Jesus, and I love you with immeasurable love. Thank you for having responded to my call.

### **MAY 2, 2014, message to Mirjana**

Dear children, I, your mother, am with you for the sake of your well-being, for the sake of your needs and for the sake of your personal cognition. The Heavenly Father gave you the freedom to decide on your own and to become cognisant on your own. I desire to help you. I desire to be a mother to you, a teacher of the truth – so that in the simplicity of an open heart, you may become cognisant of the immeasurable purity and of the light which comes from it and shatters darkness, the light which brings hope. I, my children, understand your pain and suffering. Who could understand you better than a mother? And you, my children? Small is the number of those who understand and follow me. Great is the number of those who are lost – of those who have not yet become cognisant of the truth in my Son. Therefore, my apostles, pray and act. Bring the light and do not lose hope. I am with you. In a special way I am with your shepherds. With a motherly heart I love and protect them, because they lead you to Heaven that was promised to you by my Son. Thank you.

**"Who could understand you better than a mother?"**



## *There is a wedding at Medjugorje in Herzegovina. The mother of Jesus is there...*

● The account from John's Gospel of the Cana Wedding is interesting in the way it relates in a sense to the events at Medjugorje, where new wine flows into the hearts of those who accept the invitation to the wedding – to arrive, experience and give witness to a new relationship – and respond to the call of the mother of Jesus when she says: "Do whatever he tells you."

At Medjugorje, through the intercession of the mother of Jesus, hearts become vessels filled with prayer, purified with the waters of repentance, and when filled allow miracles to take place and new wine – the best of wine – to flow and be enjoyed.

To many, the glory seen and witnessed at Medjugorje is a wonderful confirmation of God's love for his people; it is clearly visible and makes pilgrims into new disciples, renewed in faith and belief in Jesus, ready to follow him alongside his mother and the brothers and sisters in Christ.

There is a wedding at Medjugorje in Herzegovina. The mother of Jesus is there; and Jesus and his disciples are also in attendance...

Taste and see. All are invited.

• *There are times in all of our lives when the wine can run out, especially in relationships. Meditating on this passage from John's Gospel and praying the second Mystery of Light is a most powerful prayer for improving and healing relationships, be it with friends, family, marriage, enemies – or even with Jesus himself. Pray the rosary decade and meditate on the mystery every day and see the new wine begin to flow in relationships – be it for yourself or for others!*

### **THE WEDDING AT CANA**

● There was a wedding at Cana, in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited.

When they ran out of wine, since the wine provided for the wedding was all finished, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

Jesus said, "Woman, why turn to me? My hour has not come yet."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

There were six stone water jars standing there, meant for the ablutions that are customary among the Jews: each could hold twenty or thirty gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water", and they filled them to the brim.

"Draw some out now" he told them "and take it to the steward."

They did this; the steward tasted the water, and it had turned into wine.

Having no idea where it came from – only the servants who had drawn the water knew – the steward called the bridegroom and said, "People generally serve the best wine first, and keep the cheaper sort till the guests have had plenty to drink; but you have kept the best wine till now."

This was the first of the signs given by Jesus: it was given at Cana in Galilee. He let his glory be seen, and his disciples believed in him. After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and the brothers, but they stayed there only a few days.

John 2 : 1-12



***"Taste and see. All are invited."***

## All the threes, 33

● June 25, 2014, is the 33rd anniversary of the Medjugorje phenomenon and, not surprisingly, there are some who relate the 33 years to the number of years Jesus lived on earth and are wondering if this year will signal a special time in the history of the apparitions.

All anniversary dates can be regarded as significant, but some years more than others raise pilgrim attendances at Medjugorje, such as those ending in five or zero, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 etc.

Here, **BRENDAN McCANN**, relates how a pilgrimage to Medjugorje re-aligned an obsessive focus he had given to the number 33 for much of his life.

● For years I have been haunted by 33. That is how old my brother was when he died, or so I thought. I could relate everything to 33; when Christ died, going over the speed limit, anything with that number would work its way into my life and I would give it prominence. It is only in the last two or three years that I found out he was actually 32. Clearly the shock of his death had blared some of my reasoning. So I was looking for the wrong thing for the last 20 odd years.

In August I got the call to go to Medjugorje and on the second or third day sitting in Saint James's Church the number raised its head again. The priest claimed the church was built in 1933. This made me reflect on how I looked at the number in the past. I said to myself, instead of looking for the bad I should have been looking for the good, as so much good had clearly come out of this church.

A few days passed and it was the feast of Saint John the Baptist. I was asked to light a candle for a deceased sister of a friend at work who died of cancer about ten years ago. After Mass I had the whole day to myself and had planned to walk up Cross Mountain on my own and barefoot. So before I went I decided to light a candle and say a few prayers for Catherine as promised. I was at the side of the church in an area well laid out for the purpose; there was a large cross with an area underneath for lighting candles and seating for about 100 people. With the exception of a few old ladies in the corner I was on my own.

I started to pray for Catherine and slowly this changed to me saying to Catherine 'I don't think you need my prayers because I think you are in heaven and I think you can do more for me than I can do for you. You knew you had to leave this world and I have no doubt you made your peace with God before you left'. As I said this a dove landed at the foot of the cross, rested for a while and then flew up and landed at the right



hand of Jesus, rested for another while and flew away. Was this a sign or a bird doing its rounds? I took it as a sign and said that I would now focus on my brother as I climbed the mountain.

As I was making my way towards the mountain my mind was clear but I said to myself 'does this work, making a sacrifice for the sins of others?' I was soon to get my answer. On the way towards the mountain I met Martin, someone I had befriended in the last few days. The conversation was short and in one direction. He said 'If you want forgiveness for sins you have to walk up the mountain in your bare feet. See you later'. He didn't say my sins; he said sins.

That was my first sucker punch and I didn't expect any more of these. I was wrong – just like my focus on the number 33 – totally wrong. So I got to the mountain, took my sandals off, packed them in my shoulder bag, took a good drink of water and with my stick away I went.

I really had to focus. The sun was hot, the ground sharp and the mountain steep. A few times I said to myself are you wise in the head. I wasn't going to tell anyone I climbed

the mountain in my bare feet so I slipped on my sandals no one would know the difference. I wouldn't be seen as someone who failed. As far as people were concerned I climbed the mountain. I would only tell them I climbed the mountain in my bare feet if they asked.

As I was going up I never looked right or left as I had to focus on my footing. The stony surface was pointed and uncomfortable. There were Stations of the Cross on the way up but I had other things on my mind, getting to the top. After about 45 minutes I stopped at a station to straighten my back. It could have been any station but it happened to be the 5th. That is where Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus to carry his cross. This was an emotional body blow to me – one person lifting someone else's burden. This was what I was doing; trying to atone for any sin my brother might not have been forgiven for.

Higher and higher I went and it wasn't getting any easier. Soon I started to see a bit more of the sky. I was getting closer to the top. There was a big white cross with steps leading to it. Up I went, adulated. I was near the end of my journey and the ground was now concrete, easy going. I was now at the top and I may as well have been at the top of the world. The view was fantastic. I thought, a couple of quick prayers and I will be on my way down with sandals on this time.

I had accomplished all I had set out to do but before I left I walked quickly around the base of the cross. Looking upwards to see if there were any dates telling when the cross was built etc. one glimpse almost knocked me off my feet. 1933-2013 was etched into the top of the cross. This was now a number that I could only associate with good. A monkey that was for no good reason clinging onto my back was well and truly gone. I skipped down the mountain and when I got to the bottom I could have gone up again.



*"Does this work... making a sacrifice for the sins of others?"*

## AN EASTER EXPERIENCE

● *When the sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices with which to anoint Jesus. And very early in the morning on the first day of the week they went to the tomb, just as the sun was rising. Mark 16 : 1-2*

● Easter Sunday arrived and I have to confess I wasn't exactly in a joyful frame of mind. I hadn't been feeling too well for the past three days and my wife was also struggling with sickness.

Not being able to drive because of recent surgery and knowing my wife was not well enough either, we resigned ourselves to not getting to Mass on Easter Sunday morning.

I have a habit of regularly checking BBC News on my iPad and it so happened today that the news channel was transmitting live coverage of the papal Easter Mass from Rome. I decided to watch it, but first I had to take my medication for the morning. I propped the iPad on a kitchen surface with one eye on the screen and another on sorting my medication.

The Mass had progressed to the time of serving Holy Communion and it went through my mind then how everyone would be receiving healing through the Eucharist while I was having to settle for a handful of tablets. This disturbed me and I felt a longing for the Lord's body and blood.

Later I took to my bed for a couple of hours rest. I recall that one of my prayers before I closed my eyes was to seek consolation and healing in receiving the Word through scripture as I wouldn't be receiving Holy Communion today.

Around mid-afternoon I took it into my head to see how I could make my way to



evening Mass at 5:00pm without having to rely on my wife to drive me – even if it meant walking the long distance. As it happened she was feeling much better and prepared drive us both to church.

Arriving about half-an-hour before the start of Mass, we had sat in the pews for only about five minutes when a priest approached us and asked how I was feeling after my recent operation. I said my recovery was progressing reasonably well. And then he asked when was the last time I had received the Sacrament of the Sick. I answered: "Just over three weeks ago, before my operation." "Come with me" said the priest, and we both followed him to a small room close to the sacristy.

I sat down on a chair as the priest proceeded to administer the Sacrament of the Sick, anointing my hands and head with chrism oil and praying over me. Then he turned to my wife who was standing beside me. He began to pray over her and within a few seconds she had collapsed on the ground, resting in the spirit. The priest then continued to pray over her, anointing her hands and head.

After he completed the anointing, he left the room and the two of us together, man and wife, in the presence of the Lord. Afterwards my wife said: "I needed the Lord to hold me in that way." She was blessed – we both were – but especially my wife who had cared for me during my illness which had run through the whole of Lent, and then had to endure her own sickness.

When she was ready, I helped my wife to her feet and we returned into the church for Mass.

Reading back through the gospel passages describing the Resurrection experiences of those who followed Jesus, I can't help feeling that the experience my wife and I were blessed with today was a

role reversal of a kind... Jesus came looking for us... came to anoint us... and when my wife fell at his feet, he clung to her, not wanting to let her go... it was his day of resurrection and he wanted us both to be resurrected in this way as well, even though it was late in the day.

How great is our God of Surprises when he comes to meet us in the most unexpected ways, especially after his resurrection, when he comes to anoint and heal us with his merciful love, when he rolls away the stones and the sins that entomb us, when he fulfills his promise and empowers us with his Holy Spirit and makes us all witnesses to his saving love.

And the Resurrection is not the end of the story... there is always more to come... there is no end to God's love.

**After the sabbath, and towards dawn on the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary went to visit the sepulchre... And there, coming to meet them, was Jesus. "Greetings" he said. And the women came up to him and falling down before him, clasped his feet. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid..." Matthew 28 : 9-10**

**Jesus said to Mary, "Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." John 20 : 17**

**The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour. Luke 4 : 18**



***"There is always more to come..."***

## The call to the worldwide Church for 'Pastoral Conversion'... a journalist's notes on Pope Francis and his testimony.

● This is a transcript of the speech given by the Italian journalist **ANDREA TORNIELLI** to participants at the *New World Pope Conference* held in Chicago earlier this year and published by the Italian journal *La Stampa*.

● There's something unmistakable, that everyone has realised since the evening of the March 23, 2013, when the conclave elected a Pope coming 'from the end of the earth'. The



gestures, the words, the testimony of Francis have touched and continue to move many people throughout the world.

It is worth remembering for a moment the evening of the election, when the new Pope, appearing from the central window of St Peter's, asked the whole square to pray the our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be. Before giving his blessing to the men and women of his new dioceses and of the whole world, the Pope asked the crowd – God's people – to pray for him.

The election was incredibly speedy, as it was for his predecessor, and this was a surprise. Another surprise was the historical announcement of Pope Benedict XVI's abdication, which had taken place the previous month. Pope Benedict was indeed the first Pope in two thousand years of Church history who abdicated because of old age.

In my opinion, there are two elements which stand out and can help explain the attention and fondness aroused by Pope Francis, even in ideologically distant groups.

This attention and fondness does not appear to be diminishing, despite the predictions of an end of the 'honeymoon' with the media, which were advanced by those who sometime seem to regret the recent times, when the Church was 'under attack'.

The first of these two elements is his personal testimony of the message of the Gospels, namely big and small gestures, as well as small or big daily choices that he makes; and his ability to meet and speak to everyone, by simply being himself. All of this has made him not only believable but,

above all, approachable. The Pope is now perceived by many people all over the world as being one of them.

We need only think of the embrace with the sick, the suffering and the children. We need only think of the time he spends among people before and after Wednesday's general audiences: the Pope spends almost an hour and a half each Wednesday greeting people. And we could all see the images of the hundreds of sick people who were received in the Vatican last November. Francis spent more than two hours greeting them, one by one. Some might say: "Does the Pope have nothing better to do?" I think the answer to that is that for the Pope there IS nothing better to do!

The Pope also shows this through the visitation of all the Roman parishes, namely his dioceses. Instead of relegating the visits to Sunday mornings, when the Pope has limited time due to the midday Angelus, forcing him to leave the parish in a hurry after celebrating mass, Francis solves the problem by paying the visit on a Sunday afternoon, so he can take the time he needs. It so happened, therefore, that Francis spent over three hours in a parish, meeting every last one of the people there, including a delegation of people demonstrating for a council house.

The shepherd must have 'the smell of the sheep', he must be in front of the people to guide them, among the people to know them and share with them hopes and fears; and behind the people, to prevent some from losing their way. It is the image, or better yet the testimony, of a Church which

is really close to the people and lays its cheek on the cheek of those who suffer and live in pain, and those who are in material, physical or spiritual difficulties.

It is the testimony of a Church that is not afraid of tenderness, the silent tenderness whose role model is St Joseph. "We must not be afraid of tenderness!" repeated Francis since the beginning of his new appointment as Bishop of Rome. And he reiterated this in my interview with him, which I published in *La Stampa* and *Vatican Insider* on December 15, 2013:

*"When Christians forget about hope and tenderness they become a cold Church, that loses its sense of direction and is held back by ideologies and worldly attitudes, whereas God's simplicity tells you: go forward, I am a Father who caresses you. I become fearful when Christians lose hope and the ability to embrace and extend a loving caress to others. Maybe this is why, looking towards the future, I often speak about children and the elderly, about the most defenceless that is. Throughout my life as a priest, going to the parish, I have always sought to transmit this tenderness, particularly to children and the elderly. It does me good and it makes me think of the tenderness God has towards us".*

The second element that explains the Pope's attractiveness, are his teachings, which take place during the homilies of the mass celebrated daily in the *Casa Santa Marta*. They are short comments on the readings of the day, expected every morning. A short and simple style of preaching, reminiscent of Albino Luciani

**"The shepherd must have the smell of the sheep..."**



(Pope John Paul II), which are at the same time deep and able to reach people's hearts. These teachings accompany many believers each and every day, more than big encyclicals or intellectual cultural debates could ever hope to do.

The message that Francis considers most important, as he himself proclaimed in his homily at the Vatican parish of St Anna on March 17, is that of divine mercy.

The Pope told the Brazilian bishops during his trip to Rio de Janeiro in July 2013:

*«Concerning pastoral conversion, I would like to recall that "pastoral care" is nothing other than the exercise of the Church's motherhood. She gives birth, suckles, gives growth, corrects, nourishes and leads by the hand... So we need a Church capable of rediscovering the maternal womb of mercy. Without mercy we have little chance nowadays of becoming part of a world of "wounded" persons in need of understanding, forgiveness, love».*

*«We need a Church capable of walking alongside people, of doing more than simply listening to them; a Church which accompanies them on their journey; a Church able to make sense of the "night" contained in the flight of so many of our brothers and sisters»*

Francis also said in the course of the interview with the editor-in-chief of *La Civiltà Cattolica*:

*«I dream of a church that is a mother and shepherdess. The church's ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbour. This is pure Gospel. God is greater than sin».*

*«The structural and organisational reforms are secondary – that is, they come afterward. The first reform must be the attitude. The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people's night, into the darkness, but without getting lost. The people of God want pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials. The bishops, particularly, must be able to support the movements of God among their people with patience, so that no one is left behind. But they must also be able to accompany the flock that has a flair for finding new paths».*

*«Instead of being just a church that welcomes and receives by keeping the doors open, let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent. The*

*ones who quit sometimes do it for reasons that, if properly understood and assessed, can lead to a return. But that takes audacity and courage».*

Something obvious to anyone who attempts to observe reality – and is not influenced by nostalgic prejudices, tastes in ecclesiastical clothing, or even by the self-referential debate of some intellectual circles who have often reduced the deep teachings of Pope Ratzinger to the model of a 'Law and Order' church – is that these first eleven months have been a breath of fresh air for many.

It is exactly in Francis' attitude of 'humility and closeness' and his going back to the essentials of Christian faith and the radicalism of the Gospel that we can find the distinctive trait of this first year. A closeness which can 'warm hearts' and was manifested in all its force during the first papal trip outside of Rome, in July 2013, when the Pope went to the Italian island of Lampedusa, to visit the immigrants that arrive on the old unsafe boats, which too often become coffins drowned in the abyss. A closeness which has also emerged during the trip to Brazil, culminating in a visit of the Pope to a favela in Rio de Janeiro.

During the Vigil of Pentecost, in May 2013, Francis said:

*«If we step outside ourselves we find poverty. Today – it sickens the heart to say so – the discovery of a tramp who has died of the cold is not news... Today, the thought that a great many children do not have food to eat is not news. This is serious, this is serious! We cannot put up with this! Yet that is how things are. We cannot become starchy Christians, those over-educated Christians who speak of theological matters as they calmly sip their tea. No! We must become courageous Christians and go in search of the people who are the very flesh of Christ, those who are the flesh of Christ!»*

Last November 29, in a dialogue with the superiors of religious orders, Francis said:

*«It is not a good strategy to be at the centre of a sphere. To understand we ought to move around, to see reality from various viewpoints. We ought to get used to thinking. I often refer to a letter of Father Pedro Arrupe, who had been General of the Society of Jesus. It was a letter directed to the Centros de Investigación y Acción Social (CIAS). In this letter Father Arrupe spoke of poverty and said that some time of real contact with the poor is necessary. This is really very important to me: the need to become acquainted with reality by experience, to spend time walking on the periphery in order really to become acquainted with the reality and life-experiences of people. If this does not*

*happen we then run the risk of being abstract ideologists or fundamentalists, which is not healthy.»*

The 'pastoral conversion' the Pope asks the whole Church has therefore much to do with moving outside of ourselves and outside of the self-referential internal debates that the world does not understand, in order to reach what Francis calls the 'existential and geographical periphery', meaning both the actual, physical suburbs, and the mental periphery of desperation and lack of meaning, which can be found among the most expensive housing of the city.

From this point of view, I think it is wrong to claim that Pope Bergoglio speaks and acts in this way because he comes from 'the end of the world', from Argentina. Better yet, this is true if we truly know what a capital city like Buenos Aires is really like. The Pope comes from 'the end of the world' but at the same time he comes from the heart of the modern world, with its challenges and contradictions. It is true that Bergoglio did not travel much, because as a bishop, whenever he was on a trip he wished to go back 'da mi esposa', to his bride, meaning his dioceses (and even for this reason he criticized the attitude of those 'airport bishops', always travelling). He did not travel much but he had the world in his home: the relationships to other Christian denominations, to other religions, the challenge of secularization, the results of a certain kind of capitalism, the inequalities, the poverty...

And as far as poverty is concerned, it is striking to see how the Church teachings on social doctrine, proclaimed by the Popes of the 1900's, has become in today's world dangerously leftist, so much so that it is wrongly labeled as 'Marxist' from those that do not know either Marxism or the Social doctrine of the Church.

The exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the real programmatic document of the pontificate says:

*«An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others».* An evangelizing community *«stand[s] by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. It is familiar with patient expectation and apostolic endurance... It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds.»*

The main criterion for renewal is not any specific theological thought or ecclesiastical line of thinking but *«a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that*

***"I dream of a Church that is a mother and shepherdess..."***



*the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self preservation».*

Pope Francis believes changes need to be made to the way in which the Gospel is announced. For example the way in which certain issues which are part of the Church's moral teaching are represented in the media is called into question.

The *«occasionally biased media coverage»* of the Church's teaching means its message *«runs a greater risk of being distorted or reduced to some of its secondary aspects».* This happens when *«certain issues which are part of the Church's moral teaching are taken out of the context which gives them their meaning».*

According to Francis, moral action must be the fruit of a life enlightened by the Gospel.

*«Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary».*

The Pope quoted St Thomas to stress that *«as far as external works are concerned, mercy is the greatest of all the virtues»* for a human intelligence illuminated by faith.

The mission of announcing the joy of the Gospel takes into account human limitations and the condition in which humans live, marked by original sin and the external

influences we are subject to.

I believe that in order to fully comprehend the 'pastoral conversion' that Pope Francis asks of the whole Church, it is necessary to reread the pages of the Gospel, those pages which should be the constant point of reference in the life of every Christian. Well, if we look at the dynamics of the Gospel tales, we realise that Jesus attracted the sinners, he did not push them away or repel them. He gave testimony of a boundless love, and always embraced before he judged: let us think of the consolation of the adulterous woman, who, instead of being damned, is forgiven. The heart of the Christian message is the embrace of a God who loves us for who we are, and always welcomes and forgives us. It is in that embrace that we recognize ourselves: small, sinful and in need of mercy.

In this sense, the testimony and the words of the Pope are as traditional – in the true Christian tradition – as they can be. And if his words, his insistence upon divine mercy also bother some people within the Church, we should ask how and why Christianity has lost this fundamental and attractive connotation.

In response to what is happening, various attitudes are possible. There are those in the Church who claim to already be doing what the Pope wishes, there are those who feel entrenched in their own schemes and try and to reduce his testimony and teachings to their own thoughts on the Church. There are those who criticize and obstruct in the name of an alleged tradition: it is the problem of the collectors of vestments and those who crystallize liturgy and the church message

with timeless nostalgia for the 'ancient regime' of the past. There are those who pick and choose among the Pope's speeches in order to feel justified. There are those who are waiting for this pontificate to end too.

But the 'pastoral conversion' that Francis asked the whole church will only be realised if the bishops, the priests and every ecclesiastical entity, as well as every faithful man and woman, will allow the example and the words of the Pope to personally question themselves. Everyone, none excluded.

*«We need to invoke the Spirit constantly. He can heal whatever causes us to flag in the missionary endeavour. It is true that this trust in the unseen can cause us to feel disoriented: it is like being plunged into the deep and not knowing what we will find. I myself have frequently experienced this».* «Yet» Francis assured, *«there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills»* (Evangelii Gaudium).

I would like to conclude with this quotation by the Pope, who explains very well what it means to evangelize:

*«In fact, when, in the view of many people, the Catholic faith is no longer the common patrimony of society and, often, seen as seed threatened and obscured by the "gods" and masters of this world, only with great difficulty can the faith touch the hearts of people by means simple speeches or moral appeals, and even less by a general appeal to Christian values... simply proclaiming the message does not penetrate to the depths of people's hearts, it does not touch their freedom, it does not change their lives. What attracts is, above all, the encounter with believing persons who, through their faith, draw others to the grace of Christ by bearing witness to him».*

The Pope who said this was not Francis, but Benedict XVI, that Benedict the sixteenth who was often forgotten and pushed in the conservative *«Ratzingerian»* cliché (I personally believe that Ratzinger was not *«Ratzingerian»*): it was May 2010 and Benedict XVI was addressing the bishops of Portugal. These words help us understand how Bergoglio and Ratzinger's outlook on the church and the world are in tune, even with the different inflections and different personality, character and training. But this is and always will be the richness of the Church: if there had been absolute continuity throughout all of time, the Pope would now be a fisherman in Galilee...

***“The heart of the Christian message is the embrace of a God who loves us...”***

# How can one be well-prepared for a pilgrimage?

by **SISTER EMMANUEL**

● The season of great pilgrimages is at its height since Easter and I wish to share with you some suggestions to help you get the most out of your pilgrimage. It is so easy to miss the grace! My 25 years spent in Medjugorje have taught me that the essentials can be summarized in two points: open up your heart, and expect the unexpected. In this way we are able to pay attention to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and to be ready to live the messages to their fullest. Of course this can be applied to any pilgrimage, not only the one in Medjugorje!

Jesus, Mary and Joseph went on pilgrimage three times a year in order to celebrate the Living God of Israel. It was a major event for the Jewish people and a mitzva (commandment). From Nazareth, they had to walk about 100 miles to reach Jerusalem. They had to give up their habits, their rhythm of prayer, their work, and their acquaintanceship and accept to be uprooted for several days.

They never knew in advance what awaited them on the road but they faced with joy the lack of comfort and the tiredness. They were stimulated by an exalting goal: to go pray in the Temple, be "seen" by God and respond to His call! Each pilgrimage allowed them to reach a new height in their spiritual life.

What should be done before leaving home?

- 1) Tell the Blessed Mother how grateful you are for being invited by her and thank her in advance for all the gifts that await you. Since you are her guest, these gifts are plenty!
- 2) Start reading some of the messages and testimonies in order to prepare your spirit; learn about the apparitions in order to discover the main facts of the shrine.
- 3) Make the firm decision to be happy with everything, not to complain and to take up whatever happens with a positive attitude. This will attract upon you, and upon all those you carry in your heart, tremendous graces! Your bed isn't as comfortable as the one at home? Remember that in 1981 the villagers didn't even imagine having a bed! The food is different? At that time, the villagers didn't have enough to eat and the



men had to work in Germany to feed their families!

The pansion doesn't have air conditioning? Remember that Jesus never had any during those torrid summers in Israel. Your guide is like this or like that? Your roommate is this or that? Perfect! Try to love that person divinely and to master your emotions! Ask him to tell you about his childhood and welcome the child that is hidden within him! A pilgrimage allows us to take some distance from our usual habits, and it offers so many reasons to give thanks to God when we are tempted to grumble. Then, when we don't grumble, a shower of graces falls down on us. Our Lady gathers up all these little sacrifices and obtains countless graces for us!

4) Always keep in mind the true goal of your pilgrimage and what Our Lady desires: to change your heart and the direction of your life. She loves you so much and she wants your total conversion! Prepare yourself for making a good confession; it's the most important step of your time in Medjugorje, for it cleans up all that prevents you from being open to God.

5) Be sober when you fill up your suitcase. Some pilgrims arrive in Medjugorje so laden down with material things that they are also heavy in their hearts. A pilgrimage is the opportunity to live detachment and embrace a bit of poverty so beneficial to the soul! Detachment helps the soul to be fully open to God's grace. Think of the Holy Family going by foot to Jerusalem! They were content with little and thus enjoyed a great interior freedom.

6) "Open your hearts!" is the message that Mary always gives to the pilgrims. Be generous toward God! Let Him change what he has to change in you without restrictions

because a pilgrimage is a privileged time, an opportunity to let Him work in your soul. But He will do it according to the openness that you offer Him in your freedom.

7) Avoid absolutely seeking for wonders. Those who search for them are going the wrong way. They run the risk of being disappointed because in Medjugorje miracles occur in the hearts of people! Those who seek outward signs run the risk of missing the grace that Our Lady has in store for them and then leave with an empty heart.

8) Enjoy making new friends among your group, new brothers and sisters in the Lord! These new relationships that the Lord creates during a pilgrimage are often important in the future. When you return home, your new friends will help you live the messages and you will have a new spiritual support! Many small prayer groups and charities are formed as a result of a pilgrimage. And some marriages too!

9) Avoid shopping, keep only one day for your purchase, lest you fall into distraction and then your prayer will suffer from that. "Satan wants to change the pilgrims into bystanders", Our Lady tells us. And yet these traps are more and more numerous in the shrines! Don't focus too much on taking photos and don't take any during mass and adoration in order not to "lose the graces that Jesus and myself want to give you" tells Our Lady.

There it is. Living these simple suggestions while you are on pilgrimage, you will show God your sincere good will, and then He will fulfill your heart beyond your expectations!

• Sr Emmanuel's monthly newsletter is available online at [childrenofmedjugorje.org](http://childrenofmedjugorje.org)

**"Open your hearts!" is the message Mary always gives to pilgrims...**



**Many of those who had listened to their message became believers... Acts 4 : 4**

by Fr SLAVKO BARBARIC ofm

● *Mary is showing us her wish and her assignment, and all that she does for us always has its purpose – to meet God, to experience his love and to witness his love for us along with her.*

*And what the whole world needs today is exactly this – people who have experienced God's love and who, through this experience, have been given the strength to joyfully witness God's love to those many others who have yet to experience it.*

*Only in this way can the world be saved in that a new light and a new life enter it.*

*So all of us who have met Mary here through Medjugorje are in a way especially privileged and graced and from this we get our assignment to show the rest of the world that a loving Father exists, one who knows and loves each of us, and who also wishes to save every one of us.*

## Declaring for the Kingdom of God

● In 1991 the Episcopal bishops of Yugoslavia, after a three-year study, made a declaration at Zadar (now in Croatia) on the Medjugorje phenomenon.

It is this declaration which the Catholic Church still adheres to on questions about the Medjugorje phenomenon.

But now that the work of the latest International Commission set up by Pope Benedict XVI almost four years ago is completed, a new declaration by the Church is eagerly expected by many of the faithful.

Recently, the parish priest of Medjugorje, Fr Marinko Šakota, expressed hope that the sanctuary could soon be declared a place of prayer and worship for the faithful.

The keyword is declaration – an explicit, formal announcement, either oral or written.

If such a declaration is forthcoming from the Holy See it will erase any doubt or ambiguity as to where the Church stands on the Medjugorje phenomenon. Since 1991 when the Zadar declaration was pronounced much confusion has existed amongst the faithful, even though the Catholic Church has always been clear on its position.

To declare is to give witness. In Luke's Gospel Jesus speaks about declaration, declaring oneself for God, for the truth.

I tell you, if anyone openly declares himself for me in the presence of men, the Son of Man will declare himself for him in the presence of God's angels. *Luke 12 : 8*

Isaiah also declared for the Lord and all his marvellous things *12 : 1-6*:

*This day, you will say:*

*Give thanks to the Lord, call his name aloud.*

*Proclaim his deeds to the people, declare his name sublime.*

*Sing of the Lord, for he has done marvellous things, let them be made known to the whole world.*

*Cry out with joy and gladness, you dwellers in Zion, for great in the midst of you is the Holy One of Israel.*

But perhaps the most beautiful declaration of all is the Magnificat, proclaimed by Mary on her visit to her cousin Elizabeth (*Luke 1 : 46-56*).

Mary has never stopped declaring ever since. Her messages from Medjugorje declare the greatness of her Son Jesus and the love of God for all his children. Every message she gives is an explicit announcement, a declaration.

It is hoped, as Fr Marinko has expressed, that the Holy See will conclude and formally declare that Medjugorje is a place of prayer and worship, will recognise the marvellous things, the good things seen to manifest at Medjugorje through the power of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of the Blessed Mother, for many are the pilgrims who have declared "the Almighty has done great things for me, mindful of his promise and mercy to Abraham and his descendants for ever. Holy is his name!"



**MEDJUGORJE 25th JUBILEE YOUTH FESTIVAL starts a day earlier than previous years. July 31 to August 6, 2014. Book early for places!**

**"Proclaim his deeds to the people, declare his name sublime..."**



## DO YOU WANT TO BE WELL AGAIN?

by Bernard Gallagher

● Four weeks after entering hospital on Ash Wednesday for open-heart surgery, I was discharged into the care of my family and returned home on Tuesday, April 1.

The Gospel reading for that day (John 5: 1-3) was particularly relevant to my situation and recovery:

*There was a Jewish festival, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now at the Sheep Pool in Jerusalem there is a building, called Bethzatha in Hebrew, consisting of five porticos; and under these were crowds of sick people – blind, lame, paralysed. One man there had an illness which had lasted thirty-eight years, and when Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had been in this condition for a long time, he said, “Do you want to be well again?” “Sir,” replied the sick man “I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed; and while I am still on the way, someone else gets there before me.” Jesus said “Get up, pick up your sleeping-mat and walk.” The man was cured at once, and he picked up his mat and walked away.*

On four occasions I was prepared for theatre. Three times the surgery was cancelled at the last moment because someone else was prioritised before me. And yes, I wanted to be healed, but I never realised how I had restricted myself to the merciful love of God in so many ways before I entered hospital.

It has been both a life and soul-changing experience, and since leaving hospital the words of Jesus from the same passage of John’s Gospel constantly echo in my reconstructed heart: “Now that you are well again, be sure not to sin any more, or

something worse may happen to you.”

*Dear children! Today also I give thanks to the Lord for all that he is doing for me, especially for this gift that I am able to be with you also today. Dear children, these are the days in which the Father grants special graces to all who open their hearts. I bless you and I desire that you too, dear children, become alive to the graces and place everything at God’s disposal so that he may be glorified through you. My heart carefully follows your progress. Thank you for having responded to my call.*

Medjugorje message, December 25, 1986

Sometimes it requires a severe setback in life to make us want to leave our stubborn ways and accept the reality and seriousness of Our Lady’s call to reconcile with God and each other.



**Jesus said, “Get up, pick up your sleeping mat and walk.”**

## BE PRAYER AND LOVE FOR OTHERS...

Comment on Our Lady’s message of April 25, 2014

● Just who are the people ‘*who are far from God and his love*’, who place themselves at such a distance and choose not to communicate with him, who put little faith in him, even to the point of not believing or wanting to accept the witness of others that he lives?

In Mark’s Gospel (16 : 9-15) we read that after his resurrection Jesus eventually shows himself to the Eleven apostles while they are at table. Earlier they had refused to accept the witness of Mary of Magdala and the two disciples who had travelled to Emmaus.

Jesus reproaches the Eleven for their incredulity and obstinacy, because they had refused to believe those who had encountered him after he had risen.

At Medjugorje we witness many risen lives after encountering Jesus on their pilgrimage.

Often when these pilgrims return home, their testimony of this encounter can be met with incredulity and even obstinacy by family and friends. The Good News is not always welcomed – nor, sometimes, are the messengers. They can find themselves being kept at a distance.

But in her April message Our Lady reveals the way we should respond to this reaction: She sets the example herself. She intercedes with prayer before her Son Jesus. This is why she says to us: ‘*Be prayer and love for others...*’ particularly for those who are closest to our heart – our families and friends.

It is good to pray in a way that calls on Jesus to show and place himself in all situations, especially among those who have locked the door because of their fears, doubts and uncertainties.

By opening our own hearts in this way our prayer – our love – becomes a key for Jesus to use and open the hearts for those who place themselves at a distance. When we be prayer and love for all those who are far from God we continue to open our own heart to the grace of God to become witnesses to the Resurrection and be able to “go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation.”



## Encountering Jesus through prayer

● Some will say: "I do not need to go to Medjugorje to meet with Jesus Christ... I've no need to heed the messages given at Medjugorje to be able to pray." And that is true. But there is also the truth that at Medjugorje we are able to meet with and reconcile with Christ in a way that we probably have never done so before in our lives.

For many, a pilgrimage to Medjugorje can bring them to this encounter with Jesus for the first time after a number of years away from the Church, and even for those who practise their faith, Medjugorje can provide a new experience of prayer, reconciliation and the Eucharist, a new opportunity to re-examine our existing relationship and where we stand with the Lord.

My own faith was renewed at Medjugorje. It came through prayer – not that I was ever willing to open my heart and recognise that this was indeed the route back to God. The prayers of others brought me to a moment when I uttered a decade of the rosary under the cover of darkness – and that's when tears of repentance poured from my heart. The tears were in reality my true prayer. This was my encounter with Jesus Christ, a meeting where my soul was filled with joy and every assurance by God that he loved me. This is the encounter I hold onto in times of difficulty and trial.

Recently, Pope Francis reminded me of this humbling encounter at the Blue Cross, one day in September 2000. He said in a morning homily:

"We should ask: When was my encounter with Jesus Christ, that meeting that filled me with joy? And [we should] return again to that first encounter, return to the Galilee of

our first meeting. We all have one! We must go back there! Meet again with the Lord and go forward on this path that is so beautiful, in which he must grow and we become less." (February 7, 2014)

A day later Pope Francis Tweeted: "The Sacraments, especially Confession and the Eucharist, are privileged places of encountering Christ."

Our Lady teaches us in her Medjugorje messages that we encounter her Son when we pray with the heart. She never stops inviting us to pray, pray, pray! She wants so much for all of us to encounter God in this way. If we check back on her messages given to the visionary Marija last year, practically every message focuses on the need and importance of prayer in our life.

The late Fr Slavko Barbaric OFM explains: "Prayer is the most abundant Marian message. We know that because this specific call has been given us time and time again. It is important to say here that the one who decides for God and for Mary with love, and decides to give them time in prayer is the one who prays with the heart. This is the definition of praying with the heart – to create the conditions for prayer no matter what one feels at the moment, whether one is sad, tired, distracted, wounded, angry or whatever, one still goes to pray because Mary is the one who has asked us to pray a lot. This person will be praying with the heart. And when one has developed perseverance in prayer, when one prays every day, then one really also grows in prayer.

"I do not get tired of repeating that we may never judge our prayer. We may not use the mentality of results or successes as

we do in school or at work in our experiences with prayer, because then we will soon begin to measure our prayer according to what we have received. God does not distribute graces because we might have expressed a pretty sentence at some time or because we were intensively concentrated, but he gives us graces because he loves us. When we simply pray the way we are, then our prayer is quite all right. We should really call prayer the encounter, because prayers of petition are merely one dimension of the many ways of encountering God. So, please, let us all again renew our very conscious decision for prayer, and that because Mary calls us to do so and that then will be the beginning of praying with the heart.

On another occasion Fr Slavko preached: "Someone once said, 'Prayer does not change the world, but prayer changes the person and then the person can change the world.' Dear friends, I invite you in the name of Mary here in Medjugorje, decide for prayer, decide to be close to God and in him to seek the purpose of your life. Our encounter with God will change our life, and we will be capable of improving, step by step, the relationships in our families, in our Church, and then finally in the whole world."

***Dear children! Today also I am inviting you to prayer. I am always inviting you, but you are still far away. Therefore, from today, decide seriously to dedicate time to God. I am with you and I wish to teach you to pray with the heart. In prayer with the heart you shall encounter God. Therefore, little children, pray, pray, pray! Thank you for having responded to my call.***

*Medjugorje message, October 25, 1989*

***"Prayer is the most abundant Marian message..."***

# Struck by the Holy Spirit!

**SISTER EMMANUEL reports on the very special conversion experience of an Italian pilgrim at Medjugorje...**

● **Battistina is definitely an Italian woman of our time. She is a 47-year old internet-based accountant. When her partner invited her to go to Medjugorje, she was not very interested. Then, one morning, on her car radio, she heard the song, often played by Radio Maria that had irritated her so much for years when she was looking for a programme. Unexpectedly that song moved her deeply; her tears flowed continuously, without any apparent reason. She understood that the Blessed Mother was calling her. But I will let her tell her own story...**

"Since a pilgrimage to Medjugorje in July 2012, everything has changed in my life, nothing is like before! My conversion happened during the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. There were thousands of us outside around the Rotunda. Suddenly I found myself on my knees and I had the feeling that I was holding my living heart in my hands. I saw my entire life scroll down before my eyes. I clearly saw the good and the bad, and everything that seemed good at the time was becoming bad. I started to feel a great pain about my divorce.

"How could I have broken a promise made in front of God? These words echoed in my mind, *'let no one split apart what God has joined together'*. I then understood that my serenity was only in my mind because my heart was ice-cold. I had always felt I was on the side of the "righteous" and that I was a victim. Suddenly I saw how hard my heart was, I saw the suffering of my four children, what my father and my in-laws had endured, and I especially saw that I was not at all a victim.

"Actually I had never forgiven anyone. When my oldest daughter, nine years old and in 4th grade, had insisted on doing her first Holy Communion, I had told her it made no sense; and my last child had not even been baptised! I saw all the New Age books that I had bought over the past 20 years. How could I have spent all that time reading and taking courses on self-development, things that only ended up pushing me away from God and my family?

"The pain was getting stronger and stronger and little by little I found myself

with my face to the ground. I told myself, *'Lord, let me die here, because I am not worthy of even lifting my head from the ground'*. At that moment I felt something like a huge hug filled with love, and a joy that is not of this world. And I told myself, *'During 18 years I thought I had given my children everything, but actually I had not given them anything because I had not given them this. So if I stay here to pray for them for the rest of my life, would that not be better than anything that I could do if I went back home? If I, as a mother, the soul of the household, had cultivated prayer instead of cultivating useless things, my children would still have a united family today!'*

I understood that when you make the decision to shrug off the cross of marriage, you are actually putting it on your children's shoulders.

Then I felt that I had to keep the promise of faithfulness in marriage, so I decided to make a vow of chastity. I offered this to God so that a thousand families would not separate. My life partner felt the same way. He also told me that we should consecrate ourselves completely. Some priests told me that the vow of chastity was not necessary, others that it was just something we had made up, but I was quite certain and determined because it seemed so little in comparison with the infinite mercy that I had received.

"My children thought I had become crazy because I was going to church and hung up a crucifix in the living-room. My eldest daughter was very irritated by my enthusiasm, and she told me, *'So what about all the things you've been telling us for the past 18 years?'* I told her, *'I am sorry, I was mistaken!'*

"In November I went back to Medjugorje with my four children so that they too would have an understanding and wisdom. I was very hopeful that they would meet the Lord. I was watching them from a distance, and waiting I thought, *'But if I, their mother, with the little love I am capable of, am so happy to see my children pray, how much happier must our Heavenly Mother be? And how unhappy will she be for her children who get lost!'*

"During the pilgrimage all of my children's hearts were touched. We started studying the Catechism together. Nine months later, the youngest, 10 years old, was baptised, and all my children received Holy Communion during the same celebration. This was the most beautiful day of my life! It was as if I could see them all being reborn at the same time. My partner and I stayed together for a year, living like brother and sister. But every day I was asking God to be able to understand what

His will was, whether we should stay close to support one another, or be separated completely. I kept that doubt in my heart for a long time but little by little the Lord led our paths to grow apart because of work.

"After my conversion, I contacted my ex-husband again. For nine years every telephone call had ended with yelling on both sides; so for a year we did not talk to each other, and he would communicate with me through the children.

"When I recognised my mistakes, I looked at his faults as the consequences of my own, and then my resentment disappeared. I was the one who should ask for forgiveness! Little by little I started to feel the deep bond of marriage, sealed by God, and to feel once again a spouse. Yet I did not understand it. I asked a priest if it was all right to feel that I was a spouse, even though my husband was bonded to another person and had a son. The priest answered that the sacrament of marriage was indissoluble before God.

"Now the love that I thought had been cancelled or even had never existed, I found it once again intact in the depths of my heart. I keep it in its purity and I pray every day for the conversion of my ex-husband and for all the families.

"I thank Jesus and Mary for the infinite grace that my family receives every day and I continue onward on this path of conversion."

**What Battistina experienced, in concentrated form and in consecutive steps, is what frequently happens for Medjugorje pilgrims: invited by Our Lady without knowing why, Battistina came; and by a special grace, she saw her whole life in the light of the Holy Spirit.**

**She understood with her heart the mercy of God for her, she regretted her sins (that she did not see before), and she cried over them, renounced them, and confessed them. She could see herself being thoroughly transformed and she took action, making changes in her life according to what pleases God, with the help of a good priest, faithful to the Magisterium of the Church. What a powerful example!**

**Many people just stop at the graces they received, but it is a good thing to take concrete action once you get back home!**

**This testimony will help us enter fully, together with Jesus, into this time of mercy that is offered to us now as never before!**

• Sr Emmanuel's monthly newsletter is available online at [childrenofmedjugorje.org](http://childrenofmedjugorje.org)

**"During the pilgrimage all of my children's hearts were touched..."**



***If you pray with the heart, dear children, the ice of your brothers will melt and every barrier shall disappear... Medjugorje message, January 23, 1986***

## ***I INVITE YOU...***

● In her many messages over the 33 years that Our Lady has been appearing at Medjugorje, she often uses the phrase “I INVITE YOU...”.

In fact, since March 1984 when the Medjugorje parish information centre began to disseminate Our Lady’s messages to the world, the phrase has been included in seventy-seven of her messages! (cf. Matthew 18 : 21-22)

On May 25, and a day when Our Lady gave another message to the world through the seer Marija Pavlovic-Lunetti, Pope Francis also extended a very special invitation to the Presidents of Palestine and Israel on his visit to Bethlehem. He said:

**“I wish to invite you, President Mahmoud Abbas, together with President Shimon Peres, to join me in heartfelt prayer to God for the gift of peace. I offer my home in the Vatican as a place for this encounter of prayer.”**

It is interesting to view this invitation in the light of a message given by Our Lady on Christmas Day, December 25, 1990, in which: she invites us in a special way to pray for peace... makes mention of the birth of Jesus... and the protection of the Lord’s mantle (the Pope)... is with us as an intercessor... and calls us to reconcile with one another.

No doubt Pope Francis will also thank the two presidents for accepting his invitation and responding to his call.

**Dear children! Today I invite you in a special way to pray for peace. Dear children, without peace you cannot experience the birth of the little Jesus neither today nor in your daily lives. Therefore, pray the Lord of Peace that he may protect you with his mantle and that he may help you to comprehend the greatness and the importance of peace in your heart. In this way you shall be able to spread peace from your heart throughout the whole world. I am with you and I intercede for you before God. Pray, because Satan wants to destroy my plans of peace. Be reconciled with one another and by means of your lives help peace reign in the whole earth. Thank you for having responded to my call.**

*Medjugorje message, December 25, 1990*

## ***FLOODS RELIEF***

● Most of the world has reported on the terrible floods and loss of life and property in the Balkans recently. The crisis is far from over and many international agencies and governments are supporting the relief effort.

The parish of Medjugorje is also serving as a collection station (at Radio Mir) to forward basic, essential necessities to the devastated areas in Bosnia, and parishioners and even visiting pilgrims are donating supplies, particularly drinking water, canned foods, hygiene items and medicines, diapers and clothes.

**The floods have not affected the Hercegovina region where Medjugorje is situated.**

## ***LATEST MESSAGE***

**OF OUR LADY GIVEN TO MARIJA PAVLOVIC-LUNETTI, MAY 25, 2014**

***Dear children!***

***Pray and be aware that without God you are dust.***

***Therefore, turn your thoughts and heart to God and to prayer.***

***Trust in his love.***

***In God’s spirit, little children, you are all called to be witnesses.***

***You are precious and I call you, little children, to holiness, to eternal life.***

***Therefore, be aware that this life is passing.***

***I love you and call you to a new life of conversion.***

***Thank you for having responded to my call.***

**PRAYERS REQUESTS...** *Michael & Teresa Griffith, Marie & Barry Authers, Mary & Derek Rowley, Kay & family, Harkin family, Hill family, Gordon & Betty Chidlow, Janet Dennis, Fiona Myrlees, Colleen D, Josie Edwards, Tina, Trevor, Pat Loughrey, Wards D5 and 306*

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