

REFLECTIONS ON MY PILGRIMAGE TO MEDJUGORJE

- Martin Pirotta

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Following are my reflections on the pilgrimage to Medjugorje.

This year's pilgrimage was the second time I visited Medjugorje. The first time was in 2019 and a few years before (2016) I had fallen very ill, ending up in St. Vincent's Hospital for 4 weeks followed by three months recovery at home. I spent the first two weeks of my hospital stay in ICU and during the last four ICU days I was on a ventilator. At a point in time, during those four days, I had no "out of jail card" to play except to call upon the intercession of Our Mother, Holy Mary. Pleading with Her to help me get out of my bed. I was in a dark place and my body did not respond to my thoughts to move. I was petrified when, from above, I saw myself lying on the bed with my fingers as fat as a rolling pin. This must be the end I thought to myself. I did eventually open my eyes, to the amazement of the ICU staff. When I came back to the world of the living, I was so happy and grateful to God and Our Lady, for I knew I had a Godly experience and had managed to get another lease of life.

Last year I had to have a major operation and because of my medical condition (developed in 2016) I was a very high-risk patient. Thank God, the operation went better than expected. So, I travelled to Medjugorje with a sense of gratitude and thanks towards Our Lady. The fact that I was in Medjugorje was a sign of thanks to Her and Her Son.

I knew nothing about Medjugorje prior to 2019 and when my wife and I decided to go on the pilgrimage I started to research Medjugorje. I came across the characters of Medjugorje, including Our Lady's apparitions to Ivanka, Vicka, Jakov, Mirjana, Marija and the two Ivans. I stumbled across Fr Leon Pereira, a Dominican, a doctor and an infantry soldier who saw Our Lady three times in Medjugorje. Being an army man myself I was fascinated with his calling. Another prominent character is the Irish foot-baller, David Parkes. I also read about the signs and wonders that take place in Medjugorje.

So, what is Medjugorje all about and what actually happens in this village? Medjugorje is simply Our Lady's school that teaches us how to get closer to the Eucharist. You see this everywhere in Medjugorje and the visit gives you the chance to live such a life. Medjugorje is a way of life. You cannot help feeling the peace and joy around you. After all, Our Lady defined herself as being the Queen of Peace. All the activities in Medjugorje are centered around the church.

On both visits the Godly feeling I experienced in St. Vincent's Hospital in East Melbourne came back with a vengeance. Our Lady said to the visionaries "If you know how much I love you you'd cry for joy" If you want to see this in action, see men and women crying with joy in front of Our Lady, go to Medjugorje. This time round I filled my handkerchief on the coach from Split to the Church of St. James. I also had the opportunity to meet the Medjugorje characters in real life. Last May I talked to Arch-bishop Aldo Cavalli and Ivo Juricic while, last time I spoke to Fr Leon and David. Also attended Our Lady's apparitions to Mirjana. All these people exist in real life, and you can see the way Our Lady transformed them into devoted Catholics. You cannot help noticing the same pattern of transformation that took place in their lives. Most had no cards left to play, except to turn to Our Lady, for they too were on their way out due to their illnesses. This sounded so familiar to me.

Medjugorje promotes the five stones of Mother Mary i.e.

Pray with the heart especially the rosary

Go to mass and receive the Eucharist

Read and reflect on the Holy Bible

Fasting

Go to confession

While on the pilgrimage you see people praying the rosary everywhere at any time. On multiple occasions we visited the Blue Cross and Podbrdo (Apparition Hill) after 9pm and there people are still praying the rosary in front of the statue of Our Lady. Even the hotel cleaners were reciting the rosary while they go about their morning chores. Can you imagine praying the rosary at work, every morning, in Australia?

Mass was celebrated every day and the mass lead by Fr Jerald at St. James church was so special. I was so proud of our group. You can check the mass out on the web on Marytv → English mass → playlist → 4/5/2023. In the afternoon, the outdoor international mass was followed by the adoration of the Eucharist. This event is just out of this world. The music, the setting sun and the gentle breeze added to the wonder of the adoration. I still remember during our first pilgrimage on the apparition day of the 2nd May 2019 the international mass was celebrated by over 200 priests on the altar.

The amount of people for confession is staggering. I noticed a line of African people waiting for confession in front of an African priest. In front of his confessional, he had the South African Flag and the language sign said Afrikaans. I attended confession after 9:30pm on one night to avoid the queues. They were too long!

The only thing we didn't practice in Medjugorje is fasting for we had so much food. We needed it as we walked and walked, and the evenings were rather nippy. I know I should not tempt my God, but I am only human, and, on both visits, I wished to witness a sign and wonder. Wouldn't it be cool if my rosary beads turned into gold? Or I witnessed the weeping Christ and see the spinning sun. By the way the last time the sun spun in Medjugorje was last weekend 11th June 2023. Look it up on YouTube by typing "Medjugorje apparition 11 June 2023". On both pilgrimages I was given the grace to witness the weeping Christ. This time when I took to the stool, Christ's statue just poured streams of water. Hopefully it is a good sign!

We also went to visit San Giovanni Rotondo, the place where Padre Pio lived. Before attending the pilgrimage, I watched footage of Padre Pio conducting mass in the old church and waving to the people from the front top window of his Santuario. I could not help imaging him at the altar when we visited the same old church. At the Santuario, next to the very window, there is still the bench where he sat but, this time he was not looking out of the window. Instead, with his back to the window, he was waving and smiling at us. That same Godly feeling came over me again!

As one Franciscan, Fr Zvet, said to us, the real pilgrimage starts when you leave Medjugorje and return home. Once I got back to Warrandyte and recovered from the jet lag I realized that Fr Jerald is now a character of Medjugorje, so is Teresina and Winky, Irene and Jack, Nancy and Frank, as well as my wife and I. All those who visited Medjugorje are now characters of Medjugorje. I am certain that all these people wish to bring that way of life, that feeling back to their homes and communities and spread Our Lady's messages such that others too can experience such unique tenderness and love beyond compare.

To Jesus through Mary. So true, for Mother Mary keeps showing us the way even when you leave Medjugorje. On my first visit, during the last evening, somebody handed me two prayer cards with the image of the Divine Mercy. I knew nothing about the Divine Mercy but on looking at the cards I remembered that I had seen this same image on a large, pictured frame that was presented to Fr. Jerald on a Sunday mass at Our Lady of the Pines and is now in the chapel. I also had seen this image in a bible I had bought before I left for Medjugorje in 2019. So, on returning home I found this image in this bible and read the six-page article about the Divine Mercy. By 2020 I knew all about St. Faustina, Pope John Paul II and the devotion to the Divine Mercy. I felt such an idiot that all these events that were associated with the spread of the Divine Mercy and Our Lady's messages actually happened in my time but I only noticed them now. Since then, I got to know about the history of the Rosary and the devo-tion to St. Joseph. I wrote to the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception back in 2019 and Fr Chris Alar responded. I came across Fr Michael Gaitley, Fr Donald Calloway and Fr Seraphim Michalenko who died two years later with Covid. All these people are associated with the diary of St. Faustina and the year of St. Joseph. This time round I spoke to Fr. Chris during his last talk in Melbourne at the shrine of the Divine Mercy off Dandenong bypass in Keysborough. Did you know that that shrine has the relics of St. Faustina and Pope John Paul II? We were shown such relics in our pilgrimage in the little village of Surmanci, just a few kilometers from Medjugorje. That was also a special day!

In conclusion, Medjugorje is an important Marian Shrine as it shows us how to live the life of the Communion of Saints. As we say in the Apostle's Creed, *I believe in the Communion of Saints*. To be part of Christ's Church Militant on this Earth and move to the Church Suffering in Purgatory to the Church Triumphant, my wife would say, "You want to be a saint, that will take some doing!" She would be so right. I guess it also applies to most of us, but with the five stones of Our Lady and with Jesus' Divine Mercy we will keep experiencing that Holy Godly feeling. My friends, take note of what is happening today in relation to the church, go to confession every month, pray the rosary and attend mass. Practice the five stones. No event is coincidental especially if related to Holy Mother Mary.

Thank you.
Martin Pirotta