

MY JOURNEY TO MEDJUGORJE

- TERESINA YUNG

Throughout my Catholic life, I attended Sunday mass and all the major feasts out of my religious obligation and many times, my mind was elsewhere during the mass. I fast only on the obligated days, also out of obligation. I stopped going for confession when I was in grade 6 and never picked up the bible since I finished my compulsory Religious Knowledge exams in high school. I believe in God but only have limited knowledge of His teachings, the order and the meaning of the Holy mass. I refused to go to bible studies because I don't need to know too much about God, I love Him for who He is, not what He has done. Pray the rosary? No way! Too long and boring, I haven't got time.... I love to travel but going on a pilgrimage never crossed my mind and hence never on my travel plans.

In 2016, I received a photo with an image of Mother Mary in the sky during her apparition, which was taken by one of the parishioners in my friend's church in Toronto. With my skeptical nature, I usually assume it was just a photoshop trick and ignored it. However, that photo, for some reason, aroused my curiosity and I felt an urge to go to Medjugorje.

Days later I shared the photo with Fr Jerald and one day after mass, I told him I planned to go on the Medjugorje pilgrimage with a group from Toronto. Out of the blue, he said "why don't you organize one for the parish?" Being just a lukewarm Catholic, never been on a pilgrimage, never heard of Medjugorje, had no idea where this place is in the world and not a travel agent, I stupidly and bravely said "yes", without knowing what I had let myself in for, let alone it was my mission from Our Lady.

My impression on arrival in Medjugorje is... heaven on earth. The place is so peaceful and spiritual that we can easily forget all troubles in our life while we were there. Other than the churches, the statues of Mary can be seen everywhere... in hotels, restaurants, front gardens, backyards, street corners, shops, etc. Material things are not important. People there live a simple life, no one cares about what you wear as long as you look decent in church. People always smile, nothing is too hard, no nasty words or rolling eyes when you walk away from a shop without buying anything.



Although public Marian apparition is no longer held and significantly less pilgrims arrived in Medjugorje after covid, each mass (morning in various languages and twilight in Croatian) still co-celebrated by over a dozen priests from both locally and internationally, pews were all filled and long queues outside the confessionals during the designated times. St James Church door is opened all day for people to pray, no fear of robbery.

We can hear people praying with rosary in their hands not only where Mary's statues are but while walking on the streets. Pilgrims can be seen climbing the Cross Mountain at dawn or walking to the Blue Cross at night with babies and children in the group reciting the rosary and chanting as they processed. The shift in priorities when we were in Medjugorje certainly allowed us to embrace our spirituality in a more intense way.

During my first visit, I learned about the five stones of Medjugorje which Fr. Jozo (parish priest of St James at the time when the Marian apparition first took place in 1981) identified as praying the rosary, fasting, receiving daily communion, reading the Bible and monthly confession. Our Lady gave us these five stones as weapons to defeat Satan and help with our conversion - these are exactly what I failed to do as a catholic!! I often heard in homilies that Jesus did not always choose the learned and best people to carry out His mission. Surely, I fit in Jesus' criteria for Our Lady to choose me for this mission!

When I met with the Toronto organiser of the Medjugorje pilgrimage in 2016, he said to me “consecrate yourself to Our Lady before you go and have an open mind when you are there”. I had no idea what consecration means but I did the 33 days morning glory and fasted 2 days a week during that period anyway, as instructed.

Between 2017 and 2023, I consecrated three times to Our Lady. Before I did my first consecration, I researched about it and learned that my act is to allow Her to inspire and work through me to take up fruitful services within the church. My consecration definitely works!! Other than organizing the pilgrimages, I was inspired to run the youth group in 2018 and take on the altar server ministry in 2022. I truly enjoyed all the ministries as I could always feel Our Lady’s presence and Her helping hand whenever I got stuck - She made me look like Wonder Woman in the eyes of my friends!!

Since the apparition began in 1981, over 40 million people of all faiths from all over the world have visited Medjugorje. It is easy to find many testimonies from people whose lives have changed after their Medjugorje pilgrimage, and many return home feeling spiritually strengthened and renewed. This is really true for me and I have definitely changed in the way I live my spiritual life. So what have I changed?

On my return from Toronto in October 2016, I walked into church and saw a large rosary made up of unlit candles in the centre aisle. Not sure why, I began to say the rosary daily (I tried....) and started the rosary group in 2019 to pray after every weekday and Sunday masses. Since 2017, I also started attending weekday masses and returned to the confessional. I am more interested in learning more about the scriptures and the saints. The best thing I got out of the two years lockdown in 2020 was being able to listen to homilies delivered by priests around the world. These had helped me to better understand the scriptures from various perspectives. Despite these changes, I am still a long way to be truly converted to the standards of Our Lady.

Before I went on the pilgrimage, I wouldn’t and couldn’t say I had any connection with Our Lady. I even doubt she knows about my existence. Now I know she certainly does know me but it was my stone heart which had deprived me from getting any signal from Her. My three consecrations and visits to Medjugorje had undoubtedly helped me to establish a connection and deepened my relationship with Our Lady. I have learnt messages from Her can be received through various means. I will give some examples of my personal experiences below:

Through an object

During my first visit to Medjugorje, unlike many pilgrims who felt very emotional when they were at Our Lady’s statue in St James Square or Apparition Hill, I felt nothing. Again, I saw or felt nothing during the apparition. Naturally, I doubted if the apparition actually happened, but I only kept it to myself. However, when I returned home and looked through my photos, I saw two human images on one of the photos which I took of the sky while waiting for the apparition. I quickly identified one as Fr Slavko Barbarić, a Franciscan priest in Medjugorje, who died in year 2000 while taking a group of pilgrims up the Cross Mountain, and my friend helped me identify the other image as St Padre Pio who I had no knowledge of him back then. Upon research, I learned that both priests had a deep devotion to Our Lady. I then realised Our Lady, through this photo, was telling me not to doubt the apparition, because these two priests won’t be there during that time if She wasn’t there.

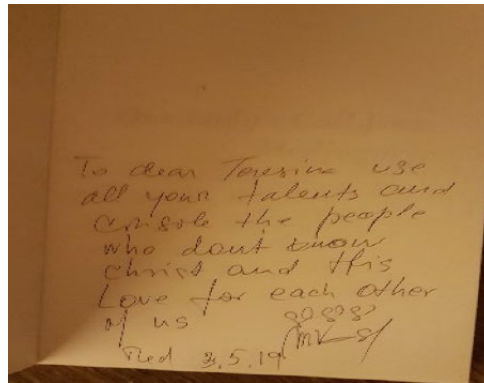


Through people

During my first mass attendance in Medjugorje in 2017, I asked Our Lady why she wanted me there, but I received no answer. I definitely didn’t know how to communicate with Her that I can’t ask an open-ended question!! A few days later, I heard in one of the homilies that we all went on a pilgrimage for a mission, so I asked Our Lady again but changed my question to if my mission is to take more pilgrims to Medjugorje, let Fr Jerald tell me. The next day during our chats over coffee, Fr Jerald asked me to lead the pilgrimage every year!

In 2019, when we visited Fr Slavko’s tomb, one of my fellow pilgrims gifted me a book about Medjugorje. While Marjana Stanislava (the author) was autographing my book, I told her about my photo with Fr Slavko in the sky. She immediately identified him and asked if I could share my photo with Fr Slavko’s family. Of course, I would gladly do so!! She told me Fr Slavko was still giving her and her sister instructions to do work for him (even though he died 19 years ago in 2000).

She then told me to look at her message in my book and said it was Fr Slavko's message to me.



I later confirmed with my fellow pilgrims that my message was totally different from the simple autograph message in their books. In hindsight, I believe this message was a hint for me to take on the altar server ministry in 2022 and maybe more to follow.....

Through inspiration

During my third trip, I indicated to my fellow pilgrims that this would be my last time organizing the pilgrimage but they all disagreed. Feeling their disappointment which led me to think if my decision is an inspiration from Our Lady, I asked Her for confirmation. I said to Her that if she wants me to continue this mission, stop me from announcing it during my talk at the reflection last Sunday. However, while I was drafting my speech, I had an inspiration to look for the meaning of number '3' in the Christian faith, and the phrase "symbolize completeness of a task" popped up on my google search. Hence, I was confident to announce "mission accomplished" last Sunday!

To be able to serve Our Lady and complete my mission, I have to thank my archangel, Fr Jerald for announcing my mission in 2016, continuously being my pilgrimage advocate and providing full support for all my three pilgrimages. I also thank all my fellow pilgrims for your support, cooperation, trust, love and friendship. I congratulate everyone who had responded to Our Lady's invitation to Medjugorje and have taken home all the wonders She has given you.

I feel so blessed and privileged that Our Lady picked me for this meaningful mission. The abundance of joy and love I have experienced since accepting my mission is immeasurable. Although I won't be organizing the pilgrimage in future, Medjugorje will always hold a special place in my heart. This is a place where I could find inner peace, realise we don't need to pray for miracles anywhere as we can see miracles everywhere if we have faith. However, the most important message I got from Our Lady is "I still got hope!!" So, if you haven't had a chance to visit Medjugorje, I urge you to take notice of Our Lady's invitation to go there to rekindle your relationship with Her and have a taste of the heavenly peace on earth.

Peace be with you all!

Teresina Yung

"Medjugorje, where heaven touches earth"

