

SHARING MY 2023 MEDJUGORJE PILGRIMAGE - Vince Taranto



It had been four years since my last parish pilgrimage to Medjugorje as the global interruption of COVID stopped the possibility of one in 2021. And yet even now there was some trepidation on my part in heading to the other side of the world while the pandemic still existed - although in a diminished way. Regardless I prayed for guidance and the answer came back to "go". As in 2019 I took with me the many intentions and prayers of those who had asked me personally to bring them to Our Lady - this was a great privilege for me to be entrusted with this duty; and of course I also held my own personal things in my heart. From The Pines Shopping Centre to our hotel in Medjugorje took over 30 hours. The three leg-ged flights to Split in Croatia via Doha and Munich were so tiring but we eventually made it to the ever-present peace of this holy place.



With the most time consuming planning over many, many months of our amazing leader Teresina and her co-ordination with our marvelous guide Ivan, we celebrated Mass each day, either privately or publicly, at various places from intimate chapels, quaint village churches, the grandiose church of St Peter and Paul in Mostar, and of course St James in Medjugorje. Masses were sometimes celebrated with hundreds and sometimes thousands (in the stadium) of like-minded pilgrims - we might not have shared the same language and not even customs, but spiritually we were "one". At St James, our group was privileged (thanks to Teresina for organising this and all the other masses and activities) to prepare one of the English speaking masses with Fr Jerald as celebrant and co-celebrated with over a dozen priests from around the world. We organised and read the Prayers of The Faithful, read the Epistle and even organised the collection. It was an honour for all of us to celebrate this Mass together with our beloved Parish Priest Fr Jerald and with the hundreds and hundreds of pilgrims who a ended and over filled the pews (this mass was televised globally on MARY TV).

Adoration was also a highlight each evening as thousands and thousands gathered in utmost devoutness in the stadium behind St James. Mostly in Croatian, we had the opportunity to hear translations via a mini radio but the one hour of devotion could be celebrated regardless of language as the masses of pilgrims gazed upon the Blessed Sacrament on the altar and streamed onto a big screen. The "deafening" silences during Adoration were broken periodically with mesmerizing chants and prayer.





Our daily Rosary was of course paramount as we prayed where it was convenient and suitable for that particular day, starting right from the bus transportation to Tullamarine airport, to the coach trips to Mostar and beyond, at chapels and churches everywhere. We were also certainly physically challenged with the climbs to Apparition Hill as we prayed the Rosary or the steep rock-strewn ascent to Cross Mountain as we meditated on The Stations of The Cross. The personal highlight for me was atop Apparition Hill at the exact site of Our Lady's first apparition in 1981. It was there at her statue that I knelt on the hard limestone rocks, polished smooth with the millions of pilgrims' knees over the 40+ years, and gave my prayers and intentions to Our Lady.

We visited and gave donations to "Mother's Village", an Orphanage started in 1993 by Fr Slavko Barbaric to care for children left in shock and without care during the Yugoslav war in the 90s, and to the Cenacolo Community, an organization to help young people whose lives had taken a wrong turn.

The camaraderie of our group was a most special part of our pilgrimage as we shared our own life stories over dinner each evening. There was so much laughter (helped no doubt with healthy doses of red wine!) and sometimes some tears as some of us revealed our personal reasons for being here in this holy place, whether it was to share, to search, to ask or to thank. During one of our dinners we were even blessed with meeting Archbishop Aldo Cavalli, Pope Francis' appointed special Apostolic Visitor for the Parish of Medjugorje.



After eight spiritually lifting days, we left Medjugorje and headed to Split airport for the second part of our pilgrimage - San Giovanni Rotondo in Italy where we visited the churches and sites of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, known more widely Padre Pio. This part of our most special 2023 pilgrimage was also a highlight which I may share at a later time.

God Bless

Vince Taranto

