

The pilgrim's guide to Medjugorje



MIR



Collection: **MARY SPEAKS AGAIN**

Look at the star, call upon Mary...

Whoever you are, you who find yourself being dragged along by the current of this world, and who seem to be navigating amidst stormy weather rather than walking on this earth, never take your eyes away from the brightness of this star, if you want to avoid being overwhelmed by difficulties.

When the storms to temptation burst upon you, when you see yourself driven upon the rocks of tribulation, look at the star, call upon Mary...

If troubled on account of the heinousness of your sins, distressed at the filthy state of your conscience, and terrified at the thought of the awful judgment to come, you are beginning to sink into the bottomless gulf of sadness and to be swallowed in the abyss of despair, then think of Mary. In dangers, in doubts, in difficulties, think of Mary, call upon Mary. Let not her name leave thy lips, never suffer it to leave your heart.

While she holds your hand, you cannot fall; under her protection you have nothing to fear; if she walks before you, you shall not grow weary; if she shows you favour, you shall reach the goal.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Texts: **Fr. Jozo Zovko ofm,**
Fr. Slavko Barbaric ofm

Photos: Jacopini – Bonifacio – Jozo Boras – Brùè

Translation from Italian: Helen O’Gorman

© Editrice Mir – 25.06.93 The Blessed Virgin Mary Queen of Peace – First Edition

© Editrice Mir – 25.06.09 The Blessed Virgin Mary Queen of Peace – Latest Edition

© “MIR” Medjugorje Information Centre

To order this book please quote code 8425

For orders please contact:



Izdavac Mir d.o.o.

Medjugorje bb 88260

Bosnia Herzegovina

Tel. 00387 36 65 17 16

Distributor for Italy

Editrice Shalom

via Galvani, 1 (Industrial Estate)

60020 Camerata Picena (An)

Tel. +39 071. 74 50 440 automatic reply

from Monday to Friday

from 9.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m.

Fax +39 071. 74 50 140

on at all times of day and night.

e-mail: ordina@editriceshalom.it

<http://www.editriceshalom.it>

Index

A guide with a capital “G” 7

1

Preparing for the Pilgrimage

The time of pilgrimage	12
Let us follow in Christ’s footsteps! Pilgrims... not tourists! 20	
Going to meet Someone	22
Understanding the location of that meeting... ..	24
The apparitions of the Queen of Peace	38
<i>The visionaries</i>	38
<i>The first day of the apparitions</i>	41
The messages	50
Finding your way around the site of the meeting	57
<i>Father Slavko Barbaric</i>	63
The fruits of Medjugorje: the communities	69
Invitations and advice from Our Lady in Medjugorje	73
Warning to pilgrims	74

2

Experiencing the Pilgrimage

Prayers according to the spirit of Medjugorje.....	78
Lauds, vespers and compline (Divine Office)	109
The Mass of Blessed Virgin Mary Queen of Peace ..	205
Hymns	211
The Parish	243
The Shrine of Saint James	251
<i>The Sacrament of Forgiveness</i>	252
<i>The Rosary</i>	262
<i>International Mass</i>	270
<i>Eucharistic communion</i>	280
<i>Blessing of sacred objects</i>	291
<i>Adoration of the Eucharist at the Shrine</i>	292
<i>Adoration and prayer at the Holy Cross</i>	293
Chapel for silent adoration of the Eucharist	295

<i>Hour of adoration</i>	296
The statue of the Risen Lord; prayers to the Risen Jesus	308
The luminous mysteries	311
Cross mountain (<i>Krizevac</i>): the Via Crucis.....	317
<i>Silent adoration of the Cross</i>	349
Apparition hill: <i>The Holy Rosary</i>	365
<i>Novena to the Queen of Peace</i>	386
Merciful Jesus in Šurmanci.....	405
In the footsteps of Father Jozo	410
<i>Novena to the martyrs of Siroki Brijeg</i>	419

3

Upon returning from the Pilgrimage

When you return home	440
How to approach the messages	443
The Mother of the Heavens	445
Peace	446
<i>Brotherly reconciliation</i>	448
<i>The golden rule: forgiveness</i>	449
Faith	450
Conversion	454
<i>Confession</i>	456
Prayer	460
<i>Start praying again</i>	462
<i>The Rosary</i>	464
<i>Sacred Scripture</i>	466
<i>The peak of prayer: Mass</i>	469
<i>Adoration of the Eucharist</i>	472
Fasting	473
<i>Prayer on the day of fasting</i>	475
The addressees: "Dear children..."	479
<i>The family</i>	480
<i>Young people</i>	483
<i>The ill</i>	486
<i>Priests</i>	488
Experiencing the messages	491

A guide with a capital “G”

This is not a form of conceit, the Guide with the capital “G” is certainly not this book... it is a person...

She in fact is the only true pilgrim’s guide to Medjugorje: the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace.

It is she who speaks to us, pushes us, urges us, embraces and sustains us...

It is she who, like every mother (and she is the most perfect of all mothers) wants what is good for us and wants us to be saved... it is she who wants to see us happy and peaceful, in a word, it is she who calls us to Medjugorje using every means, perhaps even that which appears to be the furthest away (there are people who actually came to Medjugorje for the first time with the sole aim of proving that the “miracle of Medjugorje” was a fabrication, the fruit of the credulous or ignorant and who returned home as the most convinced supporters, having been transformed by their encounter)...

It is she who guides us towards conversion and she who continues to remain alongside us and to take care of us once we have returned home, calling us with her invitations and messages to yield the fruit of that beneficial encounter in Bosnia, because her infinite mother’s love pushes her to want us to be happy on this earth and blessed in Heaven, in order to be able to enjoy the glories of paradise with her for all eternity.

And so Mary guides us before, during and after the pilgrimage: the aim of this book, a guide with a small “g”, is to be a simple and humble tool by means of which pilgrims can prepare, experience and gain from their pilgrimage: an itinerary of peace and spirituality.

Entering into the specifics of this book, you will notice that it is divided up into three parts:

1. Preparing for the pilgrimage

How Our Lady calls us to Medjugorje, how she prepares the pathway of our pilgrimage, helping us to overcome difficulties and obstacles which sometimes seem insurmountable, the first part of this book introduces the meaning and the value of the pilgrimage, with brief sections on the history and socio-cultural and religious context of Bosnia-Herzegovina, telling the story of the initial days of the apparitions, presenting the visionaries and illustrating the fundamental messages which are then developed in the third section.

2. Experiencing the pilgrimage

Our Lady has called us to Medjugorje, when we get there, she cannot leave us alone! Coming here isn't like a trip to just anywhere, coming here actually means undertaking a true spiritual voyage of conversion and peace and so we don't need a customary tour guide to find our way around, we need a true PRAYER PROGRAMME.

And so the pilgrimage becomes a unique experience, because it means experiencing a meeting that gives a meaning and a flavour to our life, it changes and transforms it, but how does this happen?

By immersing ourselves fully in the intense activity of spiritual "revision and restoration" that characterises every corner of Medjugorje. The second part of the book is therefore a true prayer guide, which outlines the daily programme of the pilgrimage, using the physical sites of Medjugorje as its starting point.

Beginning from prayers throughout the whole day and every day, according to the spirit of Medjugorje and together with the prayers of the Church, the liturgy of the Hours, this is the centrality of the Shrine (mass, confession, communion, adoration of the Eucharist and adoration of the Cross). Two

other significant sites are added to this: Mount Krizevac (Via Crucis and silent adoration of the cross) and Podbrodo (holy Rosary).

Faith is discovered and fuelled by testimonies and so we also have the communities Oasi della Pace, Nuovi Orizzonti and Campo della vita, which are all fruits of the miracle of Medjugorje and essential steps for all pilgrims.

3. Upon returning from the pilgrimage

If the guide was the pilgrim's inseparable tool that helped us to fully savour the experience of peace and conversion that is Medjugorje, then why should we abandon it once we have returned home? It is here in fact that Our Lady accompanies us through the most difficult challenge... that of everyday life. The challenge of remaining faithful, of benefiting from our pilgrimage, putting her messages into practice and persevering in our faith, through assiduous prayer and participation in the sacraments.

It is not enough to recall, that is, leave this experience in our mind like a sort of dusty yet unused archive, to be reopened nostalgically or indeed not even remembered, that is, to keep the pilgrimage in our hearts in a sentimental or soppy kind of way, our pilgrimage should be re-experienced in the sense that if that meeting really changed our lives, it must completely transfigure our everyday existence. We must read and deeply understand the messages of the Virgin in order to put their contents into practice: Mary's love leads us to Jesus.



The background of the page is a landscape photograph. The foreground is dominated by a rough, brown, rocky terrain. In the middle ground, there is a vibrant green field, possibly a meadow or a field of low-lying plants. The sky above is a pale, bright yellow. In the top right corner, there is a solid green circular graphic element.

Preparing for the Pilgrimage

The time of pilgrimage

Deriving from the Latin word *peregrinus* (etymologically from “per ager”, through the field) the word “pilgrim” indicates a journey. The pilgrim is always on a “journey to”, his trip is a trip with an aim, a time that he takes out from the continuity of the ordinary make-up of his life to meet God in a deep and mature experience of faith. For him, travelling means experiencing the metaphor of man’s destiny which “walks” towards salvation: “the pilgrim’s wish” is none other than to enflame the “thirst for the living God” in his heart. In the figure of the pilgrim, the Christian of all times recognises himself fully, because the pilgrimage is the symbolic walk towards the Kingdom of the Heavens.

Every pilgrimage has an essential structure:

- a pilgrim taking a certain road;
- an arrival point in relation to a manifestation of God;
- a motivation within the pilgrim seeking a meeting.

The three components: the road, the place and meeting with the mystery of God provide a precise definition of the phenomenon of the pilgrimage.

By analysing the various elements individually, we highlight the symbolism of the site of the pilgrimage, in particular the presence of the mountain: it is considered to be a meeting place between Heaven and Earth, between God and man. The site of the meeting and the reciprocal agreement of faith and, in a certain sense, love. The mountain has a multiple symbolism: in so far as it is high, vertical, elevated, near the heavens, the mountain participates in the symbolism of transcendence, as it is the centre of all the manifestations and apparitions of the divine, the sacred. It is a meeting point between heaven and earth, the dwelling place of God and the end of human ascension. In the biblical tradition, many mountains are sacred and symbolise a special place for a



meeting between men and a Single God. The establishment of pilgrimage sites is never arbitrary: sacred sites are established where manifestations and interventions of God have come about in history. They are places that God has chosen to pitch his tent among us. In Israel, the theophanies of the God of Abraham, of Issac, of Jacob made Sicheim, Mamre, Bersabea, Betel, Gàlgala, Mount Sinai, Mount Carmel and Mount Oreb into holy pilgrimage sites. During the Era of the Judges, the Arc of the Covenant is in Shilo until such time as it was taken by the Philistines. During the era of the Kings, Jerusalem becomes Israel's centre of faith. Up until the 2nd century, Christians must defend the historicity of Jesus from the attacks of the Pagans: and so the historical sites of his life are identified and evangelical sites are established which will become centres of pilgrimage after the peace of Constantine. Alongside biblical sites, the tombs of the Martyrs will also take their place and a whole sacred Christian geography will take form over the centuries up to the contemporary era, including various Marian shrines (Lourdes, Fatima, Loreto, Medjugorje) and those sites where saints lived (Assisi, San Giovanni Rotondo).

The analysis of the symbols that recur in pilgrimages is also very interesting. First of all, the departure. The pilgrim leaves his homeland, his roots, his home, his family, his friends: it is a detachment, a breakage that implicates a life change, a conversion; those who embark on a journey interrupt their daily routine and change their lifestyle even if only for a short time. It involves a movement, a journey, an exodus to find one's own "homeland", that is, one's own identity. For this reason the pilgrimage has an extraordinary regenerating force: like every return to our origins, the pilgrimage symbolises renewal in the light and force of Grace. Those who embark on it with the due dispositions find themselves renewed.

A very rich symbolism surrounds the pilgrims pathway. The pilgrimage, especially the long distance one, is a

veritable trial: sweat, fatigue, torments of the journey, daily difficulties of accommodation and food, mountain roads, journeys by bus, train or plane. Although people's way of travelling has changed over the centuries, the pilgrim continues to be a man who travels by foot... the world on foot is of greater dimensions, it gives origin to deeper thoughts and more attentive looks... and its support accessories are the pilgrim's staff, a high stick with a metal tip for defence from evil and from the temptations of the journey; the knapsack, a small leather bag which is always open and which recalls the principles of charity and poverty; the flask, which contains water which gives life, purifies and regenerates.



The pilgrim in Sacred Scripture: The Old Testament

As long as he is on earth, like Abraham, man is called to believe and therefore to be a pilgrim. Abraham himself is the first pilgrim of the history of Israel. From the time he leaves his home and his town, his entire life is a pilgrimage seeking an ever deeper contact with the God whom he has encountered. In particular he then goes to visit holy Canaanite saints: Sichem (*Gn 12:6-7*), Betel (*Gn 12:8*), Mamre at the sacred oak (*Gn 13:18*), Bersabea (*Gn 21:33*). Isaac also goes to Bersabea as a pilgrim, on that site he has a teophany (*Gn 26:24-25*), while Jacob meets the Lord going to Betel (*Gn 28,10ss*). Moses asks the pharaoh to “go on a three day journey into the desert to celebrate a sacrifice to the Lord” (*Ex 5:3*). This journey is called hag, that is, a pilgrimage to a sacred place for faith in God. The term hag was reserved for the three great Jewish pilgrimage feasts: the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Ingathering, the Feast of Harvest (*ref. Ex 23:14-17*); the root means “to dance” and it alludes to the processions and dances that used to be pilgrimage rites long ago. Even the walk of the people of Israel from Egypt to Canaan is presented as a pilgrimage: in fact (*Ex 15*) the movement begins from Egypt and ends at the “shrine” (*v. 17*) founded by God’s own hands: from the land of slavery the people come out to go into the sphere of freedom given by God through faith, the meeting place with him. We know many shrines from the Era of the Judges, Israelis would go there on pilgrimages, and even Solomon himself went there as soon as he was elected king: “The king went to Gabaon to offer sacrifices, there was the greatest high ground” (*1 Kings 3:4*).

During the era of the monarchy, Elijah goes to mount Carmel on a pilgrimage (*1 Kings 18*) and to mount Oreb (*1 Kings 19:11*) the origin and source of the revelation through Moses.

The prophets Amos and Hosea critically assail pilgrimages, which become an occasion for sterile faith detached from life (*ref Am 5:4-5, Hosea 12:12*). The reformation of Joshua tried to eliminate all the local shrines, concentrating the pilgrimages on the only site of faith, Jerusalem (*ref Dt 12*) where the God of Israel wants to be honoured and in a certain sense, met. At the temple, the eyes of the pilgrim of Israel turn and great is his joy when he reaches the site where God has established his dwelling place: “What joy when they told me: We will go to the Lord’s house. And now our feet rest at your doors, Jerusalem” (*Psalms 121:1-2*).

All biblical pilgrimages are “theo-centric” that is, they presume and aim at a search, a question about God. The journey therefore is an answer to an inner impulse, with the awareness of being “sought by God”. In the shrine which is the destination of the pilgrimage, the believer finally meets the Lord.

The Old Testament continually returns to the metaphors of the “way” and the “pathway” to indicate dynamism, but also the difficulties and dangers of human existence. The pilgrimage is “going to the Lord’s house” (*Psalms 122:1*). The entire journey becomes a symbol of an “inner journey”. Concluding the discourse on the Old Testament, we can say (as we can say about the entire Bible, that it is the mirror of what moves man on his deepest level) it is nothing other than “the diary of a journey” that aims at accompanying the earthly pilgrim towards the true “promised land”, that is, his celestial homeland.



The pilgrim in Sacred Scripture: The New Testament

In the New Testament the first figures of “pilgrims” that we meet (although with “non-classical” motivations) are, after all, Mary in her visit to Elizabeth and on her journey to Bethlehem with Joseph; the Three Wise Kings and the Shepherds at the stable. Mary and Joseph then “bring Jesus to the temple” and the flee Egypt, re-experiencing the Exodus in a certain sense. Jesus is frequently presented behaving like a pilgrim, beginning from the episode in Luke 2:41-52: Jesus goes to Jerusalem with his parents at the age of twelve. Also later on, during his public activity, Jesus sometimes takes part in traditional pilgrimages towards Jerusalem during various festivities. The episode referred to in John 7:1-10 is noteworthy. His “brothers” invite him to go to Jerusalem for the autumn Feast of the Tabernacles and to show himself “to the world”. At first Jesus refuses but then he secretly joins the festival. Half way through the festival he goes up to the temple and begins to teach. On the other hand, his whole life is presented in the Gospel like a great pilgrimage that leads Jesus to “go up to Jerusalem”, where he will fulfil his mission.

Although without any specific reference to the pilgrimages, in the New Testament there is a lot of talk of that behaviour which consists of “following” Christ. The analogy of the movement between the two realities is undeniable, that is, that of abandoning one’s own place to go towards a destination that is considered to be of great value. The quotations in this regard are to be found in the collection and are quite numerous, beginning from Mt 4:20; Mk 1:20; Lk 5:11: “left... they followed him”.

After the Resurrection there are no longer the conditions for a physical following of Jesus in his movements. Therefore the concept of “succession” evolves in that of apprenticeship which consists of believing in him, obeying his teachings,

welcoming his example... going with Christ implicates taking his pathway, uniting ourselves with him, tending towards and adopting his same sentiments. Therefore the succession always keeps an aspect of ancient pilgrimages: in it the tendency towards a destination continues, the movement of those who are orientated in a precise direction with the hope and certainty of reaching a meeting that may change their life.

The fundamental difference lies in the fact that orientation is now no longer geographical: Christ is the **way**, according to the sculptural young testimony, the **destination** is not given by a place but by a Person: Christ is now the new “temple” (*ref. John 2:21*), in which the “fullness of divinity” lives (*Col 2:9*). With his coming, faith is destined to radically overcome material temples, to make itself faith in “spirit and truth” (*John 4:24*). In Christ then the Church is also considered in the New Testament as “a temple” (*ref 1 Cor 3:17*), and even each disciple of Christ is it in so far as they are inhabited by the Holy Spirit (*ref Cor 6:19; Rm 8:11*).

All of this obviously does not exclude the fact that Christians, as the history of the Church proves, can have places of worship and pilgrimage; we must not forget however their nature of being the functional roof of cultural and fraternal life of the community, in the awareness that the presence of God due to its very nature may not be enclosed in any place, as it permeates all places, having the fullness of its expression and radiation in Christ.

We can conclude that for the New Testament they are not abolished, but they possess value in the measure in which they may be a way of going towards Christ. The Christian is aware of embarking on a pathway following in the footsteps of Christ but above all, that his life is Christ and that only in him and with him can he proceed towards his ultimate destination. The Church too, God’s new people, is a pilgrim, as liturgy constantly repeats to us. And in the pilgrimages there is a



pathway of detachment from the previous life regarding the Lord, in a “sensitive way”, a visible step of the “holy journey” towards the Kingdom, that is, a pathway of conversion, which can become real if upheld by a suitable sacramental life.

The Christian conception of life is that of a trip towards salvation, constellated by insidiousness and difficulties destined to purify the faithful and put him in the necessary condition for the meeting with God. Man therefore feels like a “pilgrim” on this earth, and he often really becomes a pilgrim, travelling towards the main sites of Christian faith. Going with a spirit of prayer to places that are particularly distinguished by God’s intervention in the history of his people, not only helps people to experience our life as a journey, but gives us the idea of a God who has anticipated and preceded us, who has Himself undertaken a journey on the pathways of man, a God who does not look at us from above, but who has made himself our travelling companion.

This is therefore an excellent thing that we distribute the practice of “becoming a pilgrim” to address our existence in the pathway towards the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

Let us follow in Christ's footsteps! Pilgrims...not tourists!

What counts is not how we go to Medjugorje, but how we come back from Medjugorje, that is, with an open heart, ready to put God first and to choose him as our rock throughout all situations of our life.

It is Our Lady herself who tells us that Medjugorje is a river of grace and it is she who, by calling us "*Dear Children...*", invites us to answer her messages. Starting this pilgrimage, let us answer her as she would like us to, that is, as her children, saying to her: "*Dear Mother, we have come to you, what can we do to answer your invitation?*"

We are privileged then because we live in this time of grace: but how can we answer this privilege? The secret is simple: **prayer!** This is the first thing to experience, it doesn't matter if we don't know how to pray, if we have never prayed or if we can't remember how to do so because it's been so long, too long since we prayed, Mary has called us to Medjugorje and she thanks us each time that we begin to pray or at least try to.

In all these years Medjugorje has become one of the most visited Marian centres of the world, with tens of millions of pilgrims and thousands of priests who have gone there from all over the world. Here Our Lady is alive and present in a wholly special way and the people who go there experience her maternal proximity in the extraordinary graces of conversion and consolation that they receive there.

Those who go to Medjugorje do not go because they are attracted by the beauty of the countryside, or to admire monuments or works of art, but because they are "called" and nobody leaves Medjugorje without bringing a special



souvenir with them: their conversion. Our Lady in fact came and continues to come here to reawaken our drowsy faith and to strengthen a tired and paining Church. Those who go to Medjugorje do not do so to see something, but to meet someone, they feel welcomed, loved, consoled and healed by the maternal presence of Mary.

For this reason we can say that Medjugorje is not a movement of the Church, but the “Church in movement”, because coming to this village of Bosnia-Herzegovina, every pilgrim rediscovers the truest and most authentic dimension of the pilgrimage, life as a continuous pilgrimage, as a continuous return to the Father’s house.

In this way Father Slavko (see page 63) used to address pilgrims, let us make his invitation our own: *“Dear pilgrim, seeker of God! When you come on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, you are invited to pray in the Church, to participate in the Holy Mass, to go to confession, to adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to climb up to Krizevac (the mountain that calls to mind the passion of Christ, our suffering and our cross) and to pray on Podbrdo, Apparition hill. I believe that you have done all of this, that you have renewed your faith, your love and your hope, and that you are convinced of how near God is to you. This is the reason for your trip to Medjugorje”.*

The pilgrimage to Medjugorje will be a veritable itinerary of peace with the following steps:

- **Confession**
- **Mass**
- **Adoration of the Eucharist**
- **Via crucis and adoration of the cross**
- **Holy rosary**

ENJOY YOUR PILGRIMAGE TO MEDJUGORJE!

Going to meet Someone, rather than to see something

Medjugorje is not only a place where miraculous events have occurred and continue to occur, it itself has become a great marvel. Numerous significant and disturbing experiences, along with more or less significant signs of the active presence of God, make Medjugorje a true miracle. It was literally created from nothing and with such human, cultural and religious elements that only the omnipotence of God could transform it into what it currently is. Medjugorje had nothing that could attract visitors...

Yet millions of people flock there each year.

What is it that they seek (and evidently find) here that enriches them so much when everything that is here is poorer than what they themselves are?

What gratifies them, when not even the inhabitants of the place have enough bread to eat? What do visitors to museums find here when there isn't even one single work of art? What do the most wide-ranging lovers of enjoyment seek and find here, when here there is no enjoyment?

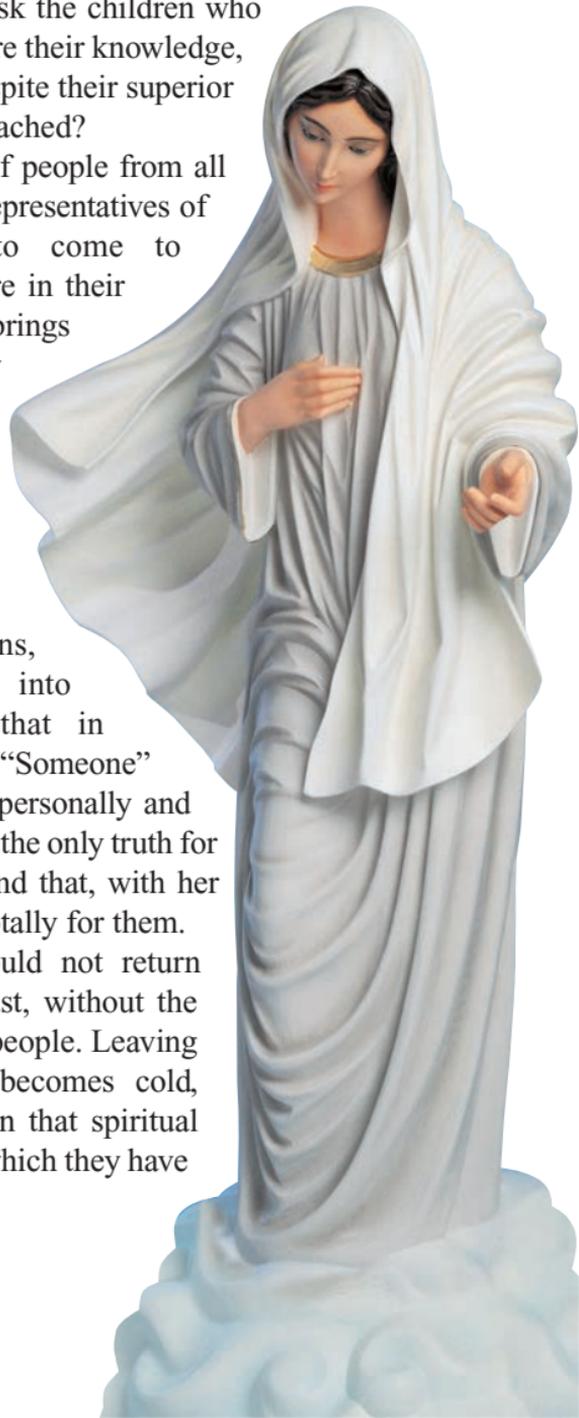
Why do the visitors to the most famous European cathedrals, to the pearls of art, want to go to the naked mountain of Medjugorje rather than elsewhere? And if someone is really interested in going to Church to pray to God for some grace that they need or indeed to sincerely thank him for everything that they have, why not do it in some Church nearby, perhaps less crowded, rather than seeking out the Church of Medjugorje, which is hundreds or thousands of kilometres away, which can only be reached with enormous effort and even some risk, spending hundreds or thousands of dollars for the journey?



What do important international scholars come to seek in Medjugorje if here there is only a primary school? and what urges them to ask the children who are almost illiterate to share their knowledge, a knowledge that they, despite their superior education, have not yet reached?

What urges millions of people from all social segments and the representatives of almost all religions to come to Medjugorje? What is there in their hearts and their souls that brings them here? What do they find here and what do they bring back to their homes and their daily lives? Summing up their declarations, admissions and above all, taking their newly acquired opinions, positions and decisions into account, we discover that in Medjugorje they have met “Someone” who has spoken to them personally and convinced them that she is the only truth for them and for the world and that, with her all-powerful love, she is totally for them.

This is why they could not return home the same, or at least, without the decision to try to be new people. Leaving Medjugorje, no person becomes cold, dead or loses their way in that spiritual atmosphere of prayer by which they have been captured.



Understanding the location of that meeting....

A great variety of populations

The Peninsula of the Balkans has always been the object of extensive migratory flows of people, especially from east to west. For this reason the ethnical structure of the region is quite complex, due to intertwined historical events that have unfolded up to recent times. Originally this area was inhabited by Illyrian populations of Indo-European descent; following this it was subject to invasions by Visigoths, Bulgarians, Avars, Slavs, Unnis etc...

After a series of attempts to create a state system, which were affirmed for a short time, like the great Bulgaria, Croatia, the great Serbia, between 1353 and 1521 the peninsula of the Balkans was conquered by the Turks and they remained there until 1878. In reality the south-eastern part of the peninsula, European Turkey, is still inhabited by them, and so Italians, Romanians, Greeks, Albanians, Hungarians, Turks and Slavs live together within the Balkan peninsula, the latter being divided up into various groups: Serbs, Croatians, Slovenians and Bulgarians. Originally, the Bulgarians were a Mongolian population, which emigrated into southern Russia; a branch moved to the Balkan Peninsula between the 7th and 9th centuries and was then absorbed by Slavs who took their name, Herzegovinians, Montenegrins, Macedonian slavs. After the barbaric invasions, in the 5th and 6th century after Christ, Macedonia was colonised by the Slavs. Numerous languages and languages of different origins were spoken: neo-Latin, such as Italian and Romanian, Slavic languages such as Serb-Croat, Bulgarian, Macedonian (which should not be confused with Greek Macedonian), Greek, Albanian and Turkish.

During the last century, the Balkan Peninsula was at the



centre of struggles between Austria and Turkey, Turkey and Russia, Austria and Russia and of the various nationalisms who fought so much against Austria and against Turkey, only to then end up with the so-called “*Balkan wars*” and the various alliances of the First World War, until such time as the birth of Yugoslavia (December 1918).

Having gained independence from Turkey in 1878, the Balkan wars were fought during the years prior to the First World War (1912-1913). They were wars of settlement and balance between the various Balkan states. The first one was fought by Serbia, Montenegro, Greece and Bulgaria to take Albania, Macedonia and Thrace from Turkey.

The second one was fought by Romania, Serbia, Montenegro and Greece and Turkey then joined in against Bulgaria.

When the Second World War broke out, the Balkan peninsula was made up of Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece, Bulgaria, European Turkey and Romania. The latter, although neo-Latin, has always been culturally and historically linked to the other Balkan populations.

In the past, the Balkan economy was based on agriculture, the exportation of wood, cattle breeding and sheep farming. Industrialisation has now brought about noteworthy progress everywhere.

