

THE SPIRIT OF MEDJUGORJE
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www.spiritofmedjugorje.org

SUBSCRIPTION RATE - FREE WILL OFFERING - PLEASE SEE PAGE 8

If this is the first time you have received this newsletter, and you would like a "Beginner's Guide," please contact us for one.



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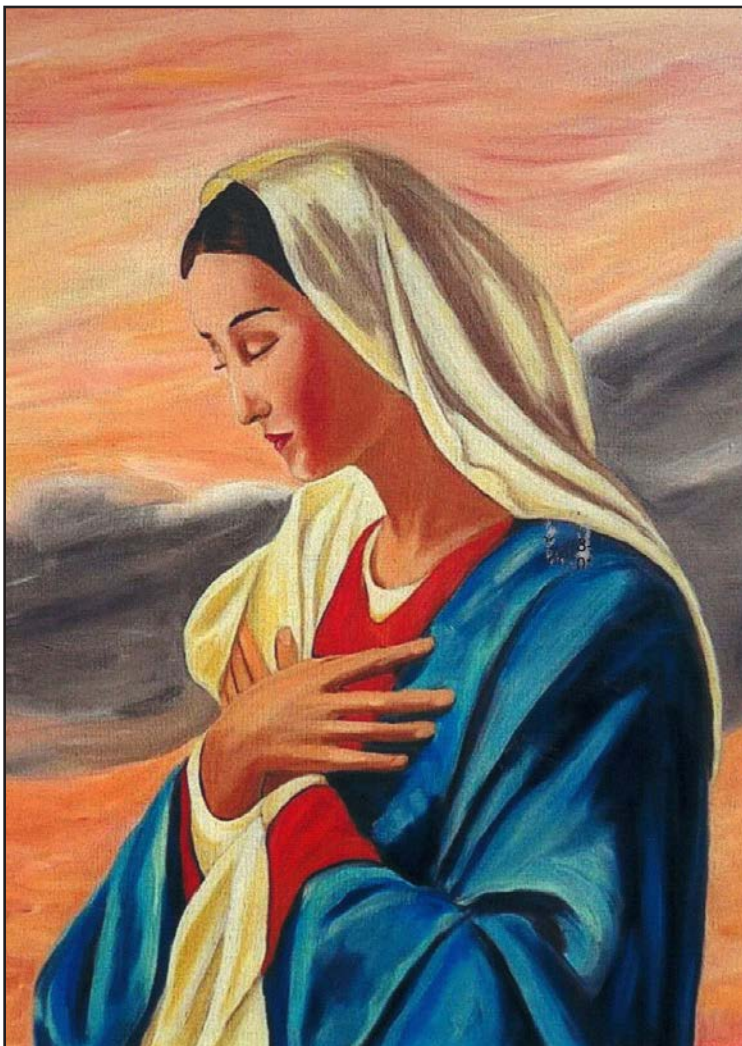
VOL. 30, NO. 9

PUBLISHED MONTHLY

SEPTEMBER 2017

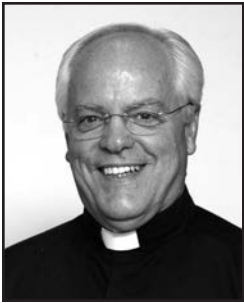
CURRENT MONTHLY MESSAGE OF AUGUST 25, 2017

ON THE 25TH DAY OF EACH MONTH, THE BLESSED VIRGIN GIVES A MESSAGE TO THE VISIONARY, MARIJA, THAT IS TO BE GIVEN TO THE WORLD.



Why not offer your very self, by attending Mass as a gift to Our Blessed Mother on September 8 – the day the Church celebrates Her birthday? She needs you. Remember, also, Our Lady of Sorrows on September 15. The visionaries say if you could only see one tear of Hers, you'd never again want to sin and make Her sad. The painting above, entitled Ave Maria, is the work of Croatian artist, Petar Šibenik, who graciously gave us permission to use it.

“Dear children! Today I am calling you to be people of prayer. Pray until prayer becomes a joy for you and a meeting with the Most High. He will transform your hearts and you will become people of love and peace. Do not forget, little children, that Satan is strong and wants to draw you away from prayer. You, do not forget that prayer is the secret key of meeting with God. That is why I am with you to lead you. Do not give up on prayer. Thank you for having responded to my call.”



Fr. Bill Kiel

To Love is to Forgive

By Fr. Bill Kiel

When you are asked if you love Jesus, you would probably readily say, "Yes, I love Jesus." If you are asked if you have any difficulty forgiving others, how do you respond? Forgiveness for many "faith-filled" people is one of the most difficult acts to live.

Him for His love, through His forgiveness of our sins, brings a peace beyond understanding to our hearts and souls. If we sincerely love Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we must forgive those who have offended us, which proves our faith life is not just words, but is truly lived. The graces and blessings received through the sacraments and our prayers are what is needed to help us exhibit love and forgiveness toward our neighbors.

Individuals will often comment that to forgive another is being weak and surrendering to the hurt from another person. Yet, *we* are forgiven by God, who loves us and asks us to forgive those who have hurt us in some way, whether it is by their words or actions. *"...many are the acts of love which He has done for you. I am teaching you to see them, to comprehend them and to thank Him by loving Him and always anew forgiving your neighbors. Because to love my Son means to forgive. My Son is not loved if the neighbor cannot be forgiven, if there is not an effort to comprehend the neighbor, if he is judged. ...of what use is your prayer if you do not love and forgive?"*(8/2/17)

Withholding forgiveness from others brings anguish and unrest to our hearts and souls. Those who have offended us may not seek forgiveness from us; they may not feel any remorse for the hurt they caused us. They may be at peace with themselves for what occurred while we, who have been hurt, are the ones suffering with the lack of peace and are holding on to a grudge against them. Why do we not forgive others?

Let us look at our gratitude to God for all the ways in which He manifests love for us. When we are aware of God's blessings on us, do we thank God or take the blessings for granted? Embracing God's love and blessings makes us feel that God is truly our loving and caring Father. Thanking

Ask yourself, "Do I love Jesus?" If yes, then, "Why do I not forgive my neighbor?"

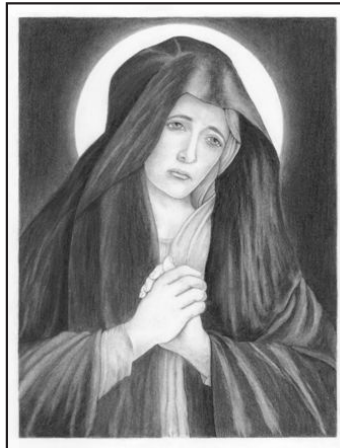
God loves and forgives us, and we receive a great inner peace. When we love and forgive our neighbors, we also receive great inner peace.

Mary Queen of Peace, pray for us.

Editor's Note: For those in the Erie area, Fr. Kiel will be celebrating a mass with healing blessings on September 11 at St. Gregory Church, North East, PA at 7:00 p.m.

Bits and "Peaces"

- As of August 25, 2017, the number of Masses reported for Our Lady's intentions was 20,103.
- Contact Dawn at samcurazzato12@gmail.com to obtain a "Prayer Not Despair" bumper magnet pictured in the August 2017 issue. (We apologize that the email address printed in the August issue was incorrect.)
- We still have Sorrowful Mother cards with Our Lady's words: *"My children, do not waste time posing questions to which you never receive an answer. At the end of your journey on earth, the Heavenly Father will give them to you. Always know that God knows everything; God sees, God loves."* If you would like some cards to distribute (limit 2), please send a self-addressed stamped envelope to P.O. Box 6346, Erie, PA 16512, and mark "Sorrowful Mother" on the envelope.




Our thanks to Sue Taccone, Diane Niebauer, Joanne Warren, Chris Falk, Marge Spase, Barb Cesare, Kathy Wayman, Peggy Chludzinski, Mary Flamini, Pat Berrier, Julie Hansen, Kathy Luschini, Lindsey Klins, Georgia Chludzinski, Vickie DeCoursey, Estrella Igras, and those who want to remain anonymous for their help with the August mailing. We also thank our proofreader, Pat Berrier, and our webmaster, Jason Klins.

Pope Francis: "Go to Medjugorje"

The following is an excerpt from a homily by Cardinal Ernest Simoni-Troshani given at the Youth Festival in Medjugorje on August 3, 2017: "It is a joy for us to participate in the presence of the living Lord Jesus Christ. At the beginning I asked the Pope. As the Church teaches us always, we must be in union with the head of this Church. I greatly desired that I would be here as a priest to celebrate Holy Mass here in Medjugorje. His Holiness, Pope Francesco, I would say another St. Francis, a great heart, a man of the Church – I said to him, 'Holiness, here people come who want to meet Jesus, to encounter Him. I would like to hear your word, the Word of Christ from your lips. Until yesterday, I was an ordinary priest from Albania, but today in this position that you have given to me, Holiness, may I witness before the people of Medjugorje? I ask you, as the Vicar of Christ on earth.' His word, with great joy, he said to me, 'Go to Medjugorje. Spread the Good News!'"

**Prayer Intention of
Pope Francis for September**

Parishes: That our parishes, animated by a missionary spirit, may be places where faith is communicated and charity is seen.



Our Lady's Message to Mirjana on August 2, 2017

Dear children, according to the will of the Heavenly Father, as the mother of Him who loves you, I am here with you to help you to come to know Him and to follow Him. My Son has left you His foot-prints to make it easier for you to follow Him. Do not be afraid. Do not be uncertain, I am with you. Do not permit yourselves to be discouraged because much prayer and sacrifice are necessary for those who do not pray, do not love and do not know my Son. You help, by seeing your brothers in them. Apostles of my love, hearken to my voice within you, feel my motherly love. Therefore pray, pray by doing, pray by giving, pray with love, pray in work and thoughts, in the name of my Son. All the more love that you give, so much more of it you will also receive. Love which emanates from love illuminates the world. Redemption is love, and love has no end. When my Son comes to the earth anew, He will look for love in your hearts. My children, many are the acts of love which He has done for you. I am teaching you to see them, to comprehend them and to thank Him by loving Him and always anew forgiving your neighbors. Because to love my Son means to forgive. My Son is not loved if the neighbor cannot be forgiven, if there is not an effort to comprehend the neighbor, if he is judged. My children, of what use is your prayer if you do not love and forgive? Thank you.

The Mercy/ Blessing Prayer 2017

By June Klins

The following is an updated version of an article in our September 2002 issue.

"Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me." Who in the world ever made that one up? Have you ever been hurt by something someone said about you? If not, what planet are you from?

Not too long ago, someone I care about hurt me deeply by saying some unkind things about me. After I heard this, I could hardly look this person in the face again. It was eating me alive because it was impossible to avoid this person. I confided in my friend Pat about this, and she gave me some good advice.

Pat said our pastor, Fr. Larry Richards, once taught her a prayer to say when she was deeply hurt and angered by some people. He told her to say this prayer every time she thought of them (which she says was constant at first): **"Father, have mercy on me and bless them."** Pat explained, "If you're like me, you think the words are mixed up, but they're not. You're asking God to forgive YOU and bless THEM! When I started saying it, I was so angry that I said the words but couldn't mean them. All these thoughts raced through my mind (i.e., I don't need forgiven. I didn't do anything wrong, it was them! They don't deserve to be blessed. It should be ME! I'm a victim.) After a day of 'praying' like that, I sat down on my sofa in the middle of the night, exhausted from the day of wrestling with that prayer and my thoughts of those people. I realized I had actually been wrestling with God. I started crying uncontrollably, telling God I was really sorry and that He knew what was best for me and those people. And for once, I said the prayer 'Father, have mercy on me and bless them' and **really** meant it from my heart. I was flooded with peace about the whole situation and it never left me. Within days, God removed those people from my life (they unexpectedly relocated)! I still sometimes pray for them and have no animosity toward them, although I had previously felt I'd never be able to forgive them for putting my family and me through a nightmare."

I took Pat's advice and said the prayer, from the heart as Our Lady tells us, every time I thought of the person who

hurt me. I was soon able to face them and felt perfectly comfortable. I felt like a new woman!

A few weeks later, a lady on my internet prayer line wrote to me for advice on how to handle the pain her brother-in-law and sister-in-law had inflicted on her. I told her about this short but powerful prayer that I have named "The Mercy/ Blessing Prayer." A month later, I wrote to her to see how she was doing and she replied, "I am feeling wonderful. In fact, I no longer have any anger in my heart at all. Yes, I'm still blessing her and I thank you so much for your good advice and prayer. I feel like a heavy weight has been lifted from both my shoulders and my heart."

I posted this prayer again recently and I thought I would share a few responses I received. One woman wrote: "Years ago, when my husband had a 'friendship' with a lady, I had to go past her home every day, as she lived close by. I felt quite hurt and angry, but 'made myself' say a blessing towards her every time I went past. That was hard, but with God's help, I let no resentment or bitterness creep into my heart. That was a grace-filled time and a huge learning curve on my spiritual journey."

Another person wrote, "I find when I pray this way, what happens, over time, is that they might not change, but MY heart changes. What once bothered me about that person no longer bothers me anymore, and I find myself ready to want to live in peace with them. Prayer changes many things, but mainly ME."

Still another woman witnessed, "For years a close member in the family caused a lot of pain. I decided to pray for her. I did it constantly, and the result: Now she is normal to me, we have a relation that is respectful and caring. It does work. It works every time when you pray from your heart! I believe that prayer is a wonderful tool that is available to everyone."

Our Lady of Medjugorje said, *"Pray for your enemies and call the Divine blessing upon them."* (6/16/83)

Maybe we could change the world with this simple prayer. Repeat after me, "Father, have mercy on us, and bless the members of ISIS and Kim Jong-un."



“This is for You”

By Debi Byham

“I am going to Medjugorje for a miracle,” was the last thing I said to my family and friends before boarding the airplane on September 17, 1997. I had no idea, at that time, how God could bring healing or peace into my troubled life. I had suffered from guilt, depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder for 27 years after a tragic car accident that claimed the lives of three people, including my best friend Debbie. I was the driver. I spent years in therapy, talking with psychiatrists and psychologists. I took antidepressants to get through the day and sleeping pills to get through the night. I even went to a nutritionist, thinking that if I ate better, maybe I would feel better. But none of those things helped. I had no peace and no hope for healing in my future. My soul was in a dark, desperate place.

As a last resort, I went to our parish priest and I told him everything about my past. He told me that he knew my friend Debbie’s family and that he was even at her funeral in 1969. He told me, “Debbie’s mother is a faith-filled woman and she would not want you to suffer like this. You have to get in touch with her.” I said there was no way I could meet with her because I did not want to remind her of her daughter who died. He told me he would be remiss in his duty as a priest if he did not intervene in some way.

I met with Debbie’s mother and brother at a restaurant. One of the first things they said to me was, “We have never blamed you for what happened that night.” It felt like they were giving me permission to have a life. I didn’t really believe them, because I did not think that kind of forgiveness was possible; however, I was so grateful for their compassion towards me. Debbie’s mom told me stories about what it was like in the hospital before her daughter died. Those stories were really difficult and painful for me to hear, and I never thought about them again. Until I went to Medjugorje!

One day, my Aunt Eileen called and told me she was going to Medjugorje. “I think you should go with me,” she said. “It is a prayerful place and I think you might find peace there.” I said I would go with her, even though I knew nothing about Medjugorje. When I told my husband I was going, he asked me why I was going. I told him I was “going for a miracle”. I told him that if a miracle did not happen to me, I would not be coming home. And I meant it. In fact, I told him that I needed a sign – a sign so big that it would say, ‘Debi, this is for you.’ Since I knew God could not change the circumstances of my past, I left for Medjugorje with a heavy heart and with a very narrow view of how big and loving our God really is.

As a pilgrim, I visited the holy sites, climbed the mountains, prayed the Rosary, and reflected on the Stations of the Cross. I listened to the sermons of many priests and to the testimonies of the visionaries, who always talked about the importance of forgiveness in attaining peace. I was not sure it was possible for me to forgive myself for all the pain I had caused in so many people’s lives. During one of our walks, my aunt and I looked up in the sky and saw the sun spinning, pulsating, and changing size. It seemed to be leaving the sky and coming right up to my face. Beautiful colors were radiating out from around the spinning sun.

When this incredibly awesome light show was over, my aunt said, “Debi, you have just seen the *miracle of the sun!*” Since I did not know the story of Fatima, I did not know what she meant. I also did not know, then, that this *miracle of the sun* would be a really important sign for me later in my journey.

As we walked up Mt. Krizevac, our priest, in a very prayerful way, would reflect on each Station of the Cross. By the time we got to the Third Station, his reflections were starting to feel like stories from my painful past. It seemed like I was walking up my own Calvary. I wanted to stop. My aunt said, “I know these stories are hard for you.” She wanted me to hang in there. I guess I never really understood the Way of the Cross.

At the top of the mountain, I saw people walking over to the cross and touching it reverently. I, however, walked off by myself. There I was, on the top of this mountain overlooking all of Medjugorje, and I felt like I was in a bottomless pit. I was so far away from peace and I was pretty sure that, within two days time, when our plane left, I would not be on it. That was my worst moment in Medjugorje.

I turned around and saw my aunt and her friend sitting on the ground, quietly praying the Rosary. I went over and sat in front of them, put my face in my hands, and cried my heart out. I was hoping that some of those Hail Marys were for me. My aunt told me later: “When I saw you up there alone, I prayed to the Blessed Mother to come and wrap Her arms around you so you wouldn’t be tormented anymore.” That day was my birthday.

Later that evening, in the lobby of the hotel, I visited with Tom and Jeff, some friends that we met in Medjugorje. With them was Paul, a young man in a wheelchair, who didn’t have any legs. When he told me that he lived in the hotel, I was surprised that I had never seen him before. He confided that he was too depressed to come out of his room. I knew exactly what that was like.

Tom suggested to us that we go to the Blue Cross. Paul said, “Why are you going there?” Tom said, “To pray.” Even though it was after midnight, Jeff and his friend, Joe, said they would go to the Blue Cross. Paul said he would go, but he wasn’t going to pray. I said I would go, but I wasn’t going to pray either.

We climbed up Apparition Hill to the Blue Cross. The guys picked Paul up out of his wheelchair and carried him up the hill. All of a sudden, Paul said, “All you rich people come to Medjugorje looking for miracles. There ain’t no miracles here!” That really grabbed at my heart because I went to Medjugorje for a miracle, and I started to cry. Before I knew it, I exploded with the information about that horrible accident, and shared all the details of my past that I had kept hidden for so long. In that moment, Tom put a piece of wood in my hand and said, “This is a relic of the True Cross; hold it.” He squeezed it into my hand and prayed out loud for me. Jeff tried to comfort me and said, “God will take care of you.” I remember yelling, “Yeah, right! Where’s He been all my life?” Paul kept saying: “It was an accident; get over it.”

Paul lost both legs as a soldier when he stepped on



Debi and her Aunt Eileen at the Blue Cross

a landmine. I understood the bitterness and pain Paul experienced being a 27-year-old man who would spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair. But I did not understand him yelling at me to “get over it.”

All of a sudden, I saw a white light over to my right. As I looked at the light, I saw a woman come out of the light and sit down on a rock near us. She was wearing a long white dress and white veil. She was sitting in a listening pose, her head bent towards us. She looked like a statue: the folds in her dress did not move, her head did not turn. She reminded me of Michelangelo’s statue of the Pieta, the Madonna, because she was in that kind of a pose. She seemed to be lit from within – illuminated and glowing. (I am embarrassed to admit that I thought she was rude to sit there and listen to all of the pain in our lives.)

One of the guys, noticing the time, said it was time to leave. Joe and Tom carried Paul right past this ‘lady in white’ and walked to the bottom of Apparition Hill. I did not want to walk by her, because I knew she heard everything I said, and I was ashamed. However, the moment I stood, so did she. She walked right up to me and said, “*This is for you.*” I did not even look to see what she was giving me. I was so overwhelmed by her compassion, that I put my arms around her and hugged her. I laid my head on her shoulder and cried. Jeff, standing behind me, kept saying: “Come on, Debi, it’s time to go,” and he pulled me away from her. When I looked down, I saw that she had given me her white shawl, made of the same fabric as her dress and veil. It was very soft. As I held it, I thought, ‘I will always remember what compassion feels like!’ Then I looked up into her face and said, “Thank you.” She gave me the most wonderful smile, like she loved me.

Later, on our way to Vicka’s to hear her testimony, I asked Joe who he thought the lady in white was who appeared to us at the Blue Cross. “I think it was the Blessed Mother,” he said. When we assembled at Vicka’s house, the interpreter was talking about Mary’s messages to us. The hardest part of the message, for me, was hearing about *forgiveness*, because I believed that I would never be able to forgive myself for causing so much pain in so many people’s lives. I felt like I was light years away from peace.

As Vicka was praying over the group, a conversation that Debbie’s mom had with me that night in the restaurant, that I had blocked out of my mind, came back to me clearly. She had told me that she took a room across from the hospital so that she could go back-and-forth every day to visit her daughter in the burn unit. She always stopped at the chapel to pray to our Blessed Mother. She said that she had a close relationship with Mary because Mary knew what it was like to see Her child suffer and die. (I was really troubled by that story.) One day, while kneeling in the chapel and praying to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, someone tapped Debbie’s mom on the back. She turned around and saw a lady in white standing there. The lady said to her, “*Do you have somebody here in the hospital?*” She said, “Yes, my daughter is here.” This lady in white said to her: “*You don’t need to pray for your daughter. It is God’s Will what happened. You need to pray that you have the grace to accept God’s will for your daughter.*” Then this lady disappeared. She did not walk out of the chapel; she just disappeared.

After Debbie died, her mom said, “I know that God sent that lady to me to let me know that Debbie was going to be in Heaven.” She told me she never had to go to a support group for parents who have lost a child, because she knew God called her daughter to be with Him.

Here I am, standing in front of Vicka, KNOWING that God sent that same lady in white to me. The lady who appeared to my friend’s mom in the hospital chapel in 1969 was now appearing to me in 1997. And I knew, without a doubt, that



Vicka right before she prayed over Debi

THAT was the ‘great big sign’ that had my name on it! That was the moment that I knew God was real and that He loved me. When Vicka reached out and prayed over me, I knew God was confirming that He really did send me help from Heaven. The shawl that I was given was truly a gift from the LORD!

We went back to the Blue Cross that evening, and this time it was me that wanted to pray. Tom said, “I have to tell you a story”. Five years earlier, his uncle, a priest, took a group of pilgrims to Medjugorje. As they climbed Mount Krizevac, they saw a lady in white effortlessly walking above the rocks while everyone else was struggling to climb over the

rocks. The pilgrims wanted to talk to her, but they could not catch up to her. The priest told the pilgrims that he would ask Vicka who the ‘lady in white’ was that everyone saw. Vicka said it was the Blessed Mother, who climbs the mountain every day, praying for peace. That was the moment I knew I would never spend another moment hating myself. I figured that if God loved me that much – that He would send this special lady to me – I needed to forgive myself, and allow God to heal me.

One week after I got home, on the night before the anniversary of the car accident, my husband and I drove to a nearby town to pick up his car. I confided to him that I was nervous about going to work the next day, as that anniversary date was always so painful to me. I was afraid my memories would crash over me and I would lose my composure at work. As I pulled out of the parking lot of the car dealer, I could not see out my windshield. Even though it wasn’t dark yet, I couldn’t see the road. I stopped my car, put my window down, and looked out to see what the problem could be. I saw the sun spinning; it was pulsating and the colors were radiating out from it. The sun was leaving the sky and coming right up to my face. I thought, ‘Wow! The *miracle of the sun* at home! I thought Mary lived in Medjugorje!’

That night I consecrated myself and my family to God and to the Blessed Mother. I knew She was saying that I was going to be all right tomorrow, the anniversary date of the accident, and through all of my tomorrows, because She would be with me.

When I woke up the next day, instead of thinking about the car accident, I thought about the beauty and awesomeness of seeing the *miracle of the sun* in my hometown. That image got me through the whole day. When I got home from work, I went upstairs to my room and got all of the medication out of my drawer and I threw it away. I then called the psychiatrist and said, “I need to come down one more time. I want to say goodbye.” Even though this doctor was not Catholic, he believed every word I shared and was moved by my story. He said, “I am so happy for you, but I am so sad that it took

27 years for you to experience peace.” I happily reminded him that indeed, 27 years is a long time to suffer. But in God’s time, 27 years is a blink of the eye!

I have learned through this experience that “Better is one day in His court than a thousand elsewhere” (Psalm 84:10). I now have a much clearer picture of the value of suffering. For me, pain and healing have brought me closer to God, hence the joy and peace in my life today.

Mary’s messages to the world came alive for me after my return home. I bought my first Bible because I was filled with a desire to read, know and live the Word of God. Even though I had been going to daily Mass for over 25 years, I went because I was desperate for a healing word from the priest. Now I go to daily Mass to celebrate God’s goodness and to thank Him for His presence in my life.

Now, as I celebrate the 20th anniversary of that first pilgrimage to Medjugorje, I can say that ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH THE LORD! One important lesson I have learned through this experience is that love, forgiveness, and reconciliation are not just gifts from the LORD to us. They are to be gifts we give to each other.

Note: All five of us at the Blue Cross that night saw the ‘lady in white.’ Her appearing to us changed all of us in a myriad of ways. But that’s another story.

Debi with her shawl in 1997



A Lesson from Two Rocks

By June Klins

This past summer my grandchildren participated in something called “Rock Out Erie.” The idea is simple. People would find a rock, paint it, and hide it in a public place. When the rock is found, the person would post the picture of it to a Facebook group that was created for this purpose. Then they could re-hide the rock or keep it.

In early August, when my husband and I took our grandson, Oliver, to spend some time in nature at a park that is miles away from the city limits, we were surprised when Oliver found a large painted rock. He was very excited to find it and I took a picture of him holding it. It looked like it



just had a design on it, no particular picture. Soon Oliver found a second painted rock, which had a picture of a rainbow on it.

Later I noticed, in a picture where Oliver was holding both rocks, that there actually was a picture on the first rock – that he had not been holding it right side up the first time. On the rock were two crosses – and they both looked like the Cross on Cross Mountain. It dawned on me that the fact that Oliver found this rock first and then the one with the rainbow fit in so perfectly with a theme I had planned for this issue, the “Triumph of the Cross.” I think a little lesson here is that sometimes we do not recognize that our trouble is a cross, but once we do, we can ask Jesus to help us through it and a rainbow will follow!

Act of Contrition and Prayer Asking for Conversion

My Lord, I am heartily sorry for my sins; purify my heart with Your Holy Blood. I pray for Your Mercy; grant me the grace of a new conversion. My Lord, by the power of Your Cross, I wish to forgive every person who has hurt me. Shortly before Your death You prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Merciful Lord, teach me mercy even when that seems to be impossible.

I renounce every temptation to harden my heart; I want to find no anger in my heart, no bitterness, no self-pity. I renounce every desire to get even and to condemn; I desire to bless everyone who in any way has harmed me. I pray to be forgiven for everything I ever did to harm someone else, even those I harmed without knowing it.

My Lord, remove my heart of stone and give me a new heart, a heart of flesh. Fill it with your humility and meekness; soften it with your mercy. I fervently implore You, give me the Holy Spirit, so that I might know how to love You and my neighbor, so that I might fight the good fight and always choose to do what is truly good. Grant that I not trust in my own strength alone and that I not let disappointment quench my hope, that hope that is anchored in Your strength and Your love. Amen.

(Used with permission from *Novena to Mary, Untier of Knots*, by Vojtech Kodet, O.Carm. © Catholic Book Publishing Corp., catholicbookpublishing.com)

Vicka Talks About the Sick

The following question was asked of visionary Vicka in the book, A Time of Grace, (1996) by the late Kresimir Sego.

Q: You are often with the sick. What are your experiences?

A: There are sick people. But those sick in spirit are more seriously ill than the physically sick. People need a word of consolation; they only ask for strength. It is hard to say today that sickness is a great gift of God. It’s unimaginable telling a sick person who suffers from cancer, for example, or of any other disease, that it is a gift of God. Everybody tries to get rid of a disease...

But indeed, Our Lady says that sickness is a gift of God, for God knows why He has given this gift to me, to you, to anybody, and He knows when He will take it back, and He demands our patience. Nothing has been given without a reason; everything has its why, and so, She says, when it is given to you, say, “Thank you, O God, for this gift. If you have another such gift, I am ready to accept it. But give me also the strength that I may do this for You with the heart and with love.” Our Lady once pointed out that we are not able even to imagine what an importance our suffering has in the eyes of God.

The Triumph of Our Cross

The following is excerpted from a homily in St. James in Medjugorje on September 14, 2016, the feast of the Triumph of the Cross. You can listen to the entire homily at www.marytv.tv.

Unfortunately, perhaps, the reality of the cross touches every one of us. The cross finds a way of coming into the lives of every single one of us without exception. And I suppose a good question we could ask on a day like this, when we celebrate the Exaltation of the Cross, the Triumph of the Cross of Jesus, is, "What is God's response to the presence of the cross in your life and mine? What is God's response?"

I think it was spelled out very, very beautifully in some of the most, perhaps, wonderful words ever written, and they're in today's gospel: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that we who believe in Him may not perish, but may have eternal life. God sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him." (Jn 3:16-17)...

I suppose that is the core of the gospel – God's solution to all of the crosses that we experience – Jesus. Jesus is the Heavenly Father's antidote to all the crosses and all of the problems that affect us here in this world. He came among us as a man, and He comes still... He came not to condemn; He comes not to condemn. He came and He comes to rescue us, to lift us up, to heal us, and to save us – save us now and save us for eternity. He offered His life on the Cross. He was executed as a common criminal, but He overcame the worst that humanity and hell could throw at Him, because Good Friday... evil, sin, the worst that the world could give – was thrown at Jesus. So it seemed like the utmost failure. But Easter Sunday morning is a morning of light. Jesus doesn't stay down, and stay in the grave. He rises triumphant from the tomb.

And of course, if we're weighed down under a very heavy cross, we might well be wondering, "What does that got to do with me? Where does my cross come in all of this? How can I be helped with my cross?" (And we put it like this.) If I, if we, try to carry it alone – if we try to carry our cross alone – we run a very high risk of becoming bitter people. If we invite Christ to walk with us, to accompany us on that difficult journey, we will become better people, better human beings. So the choice is to become *bitter* or to become *better*. That's the choice.

Over the years, people from all corners of the world gathering here in Medjugorje have found the following recipe always works. It never fails. And there's a few parts to it. First one is very, very important: go away on your own for some part of every day. Now it's easy for me. I don't have a wife pulling at my tail, but maybe you have a husband who wants to be with you all of the time because he loves you so much, or vice versa. But if he or she complains, blame that priest who said Mass this morning! Go away on your own. These days are too precious... Time on your own – that's number one.

Number two – climb one of the mountains, perhaps Podbrdo or Krizevac, or go to some other quiet place here. There aren't too many; you'll find one – maybe the Adoration Chapel, maybe even your room. But the hills are ideal for those who can. And this – if you're carrying a heavy cross and you're weighed down, and maybe you came here as a last resort to find peace – this then is not the time for fancy prayers, or "tried and tested and guaranteed to work" novenas. It is time instead to open your heart as widely as you can and to pour it all out to Jesus and His Mother. It's a "plea from the heart," as Father, who was our main celebrant yesterday, spoke

about – tears being very often the most powerful prayer that we can pray, and maybe the only one. Pour it out, a plea from the heart, from the very gut – a time to pour out all of our struggles, our pain, our frustration, maybe our anger. There can be a lot of stuff in there when you're carrying a heavy cross, and that's normal, it's natural, it's understandable. We could be full of rebellion with God, but pour it out to Him.

Remember in the Old Testament there were great holy men. One in particular cursed the day he was born. "Why didn't I die in the womb...?" But he went on to become a saint of the Old Testament. And I'm sure part of the reason was because he had the honesty to tell God what God knew already, but to say it out loud what was going on inside. When we do that, sometimes, you know, great miracles can happen. Miracles happen here and they can happen everywhere. And they certainly happen here and you could be cured. But remember this, that can happen, and it is good to pray for it, but it seems that **God is more interested in maturing us than curing us**. We might wish it was different. He's more interested in we maturing than in He curing us. He might cure you, too.

And then gradually ... as we walk with Him, and He walks with us under His cross, we begin to realize our very radical deep need of God's support every single day and the support of others. We lose our prideful independence. We grow into a deeper, maybe more beautiful, intimate personal relationship with Jesus. We grow in compassion for others, because now we know what it's like to suffer. We come a bit closer to becoming the best possible version of ourselves. ... And then others – not necessarily yourself – others will notice that the cross has triumphed in your life and has borne great fruit. You won't be the first to see it.

And then... what if the cross that we're carrying is the result of our own sin? That happens, too... Like every priest here this morning in the sanctuary, I have met many, many people who feel that their sins are so great they cannot be forgiven, lots of people. Just one example of that is many people who have had an abortion. Commonly, most often perhaps, they are convinced that God cannot forgive, because for them it's the unforgivable sin, the unrightable wrong – they cannot be forgiven. That's what they believe. And so they – and, indeed, all of us at times – easily forget that God's mercy is like an ocean. Picture an ocean – large enough, wide enough, deep enough to drown our greatest sin.

And so, if you or someone you love has been hurt by the experience of an abortion, I've wonderful news for you... There is an extraordinary movement that is in many, many, many countries all around the world, and remember the name of it – **Rachel's Vineyard** – which runs healing weekends for such people (women and, indeed, sometimes men) and the results – they are AMAZING, and I'm not exaggerating. They are amazing... We literally see miracles of healing and transformation on every single weekend.

So in conclusion, whatever your cross is, pour it out to Jesus. Invite him to walk with you on the road. Don't do it alone entirely. Go to the "intensive care unit" here in Medjugorje. You're not sure where it is? The confessional. You will then be on the road to celebrating the Triumph of the Cross, not only in the life of Jesus, but in your own life, too, because the cross need not be wasted.

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MARY IS CALLING YOU

On June 24, 1981 in Medjugorje, Our Lady appeared to six children. She identified Herself as the Blessed Virgin, Queen of Peace, and has continued to appear daily. Her message is PEACE, peace with God and man. Her words to the visionaries, "I have come to tell the world that God exists. He is the fullness of life, and to enjoy this fullness and obtain peace, you must return to God."

Today, all but three of the visionaries have daily apparitions of the Blessed Mother. During the apparitions, the visionaries do not react to light, don't hear any sound or react to being touched. They feel that they are outside of time and space. All the visionaries declare to see the Blessed Virgin as they see other people - in three dimension. They pray and speak with Her.

The Blessed Mother is confiding ten secrets to each visionary (some are chastisements for the world) and promises to leave a visible sign at the place of the apparitions in Medjugorje for all humanity. This time, this period of grace, is for CONVERSION

and a DEEPENING OF FAITH. After the visible sign, those still living will have little time for conversion.

Father Jozo Zovko, who was the pastor of St. James when the apparitions began, has spoken about what he calls "the weapons" or the "the five stones" of Our Lady. They are: prayer with the heart, especially the Rosary; Eucharist; Holy Bible; monthly Confession; and fasting.

The publisher recognizes and accepts that the final authority regarding the apparitions at Medjugorje rest with the Holy See in Rome.

To borrow an original prayer cloth from Medjugorje for a week, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the address below. You must include your phone number. If you want a prayer cloth we made to keep, send a self-addressed stamped business size (4 1/8" x 9 1/2") envelope with \$.71 postage on it.



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