

A Protestant Discovers (or is Discovered by) the Real Mary

“Lord, sanctify us in Your Truth; Your Word is Truth.” Amen.

Thank you, Father Jan, for your kind invitation to offer this Lenten Mission to your parish this year. I am honoured to have the opportunity to serve Our Lord in your midst in this way.

In the briefest way, let me introduce myself to the assembly.

Carolyn and I have been married for almost 46 years. We have 2 children, Bradley and Theresa, both married with families, both also now joyfully Catholic. Brad is a training captain with West-Jet, Theresa is a child care worker/full-time mom. Brad and his wife Cindy have 2 teen-aged children, Daniel who is discerning for the priesthood, and Rebecca. Theresa and Gerald have 2 biological children and 5 children either adopted or in the process of being adopted, plus 2 foster children.

Carolyn and I were both raised in parsonages in the USA, that is, our fathers were Protestant ministers, mine Lutheran and hers “Evangelical”. I was ordained to the Lutheran ministry 2 weeks before our marriage. We have spent our entire married life in Alberta. I have served as pastor of 4 Lutheran parishes, both urban and rural, and as Bishop of the Alberta Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. While I was Bishop I also served as the Lutheran co-chair of the Lutheran-Catholic Theological Dialogue for Canada, mostly with Archbishop Adam Exner as the Catholic co-chair. In 1994 I retired as Bishop for reasons of faith. At Easter Vigil in the year 2000 we entered into full communion with the Catholic Church as members of the wonderful little Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Bashaw (where Fr. Jan served all too briefly soon after his ordination). The Church called me to the

priesthood and ordained me as a priest for the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan on February 2, 2007, where I now serve as Chancellor of the Archdiocese and Parochial Vicar of the Cathedral Parish of St. John the Baptist. Carolyn serves as organist for the cathedral parish and as a data-entry volunteer in the Archives. We are so grateful to have lived long enough to be privileged to serve and die as Catholics!

Now to our theme.

The whole story of how we discovered Mary (or how she discovered us!) is really fascinating but much too long to tell right now. I have time to share with you only the points that directly affect our theme.

As Catholics will find this hard to believe, but you need to know that despite the witness of Scripture, despite the testimony of 2000 years of Mary's personal involvement with the Church, despite even Martin Luther's great and life-long love for Mary and his last sermon which was about her and his last prayer which was to her, most Protestants have no place for Mary in their mental furniture. She's just not there, and they are convinced that she does not belong there. I have come to see this as a tragedy of the highest order, both for their personal life of faith and for their corporate life as a part of God's People. You pay a high price when you ignore the person Jesus Himself is sending us to anchor us to God's truth in the face of Satan's lies. It was the great Hans Urs von Balthasar, who made the point that God has provided His Church with TWO safeguards against the "Gates of Hell": **Peter** and **Mary**. Protestants are sadly deprived of both of them, and what they have as substitutes are not working - substitutes like sola scriptura (the Bible only) which leaves every person as their own Peter, their own pope, with often bizarre results; or like assuming that the will of the majority has to be the will of God so that what is most popular prevails; or like adopting badly distorted forms of feminism not inspired by Mary.

None of these substitutes for what God has given His Church in Peter and Mary can stand up to “the gates of hell” the way they can. Some of us Church leaders tried our best to find ways to preserve the integrity and the apostolic foundations of our own brands of Christianity in a culture that was distancing itself more and more from its Christian roots. It took way too long for me to realize that without Peter and Mary our efforts were doomed to fail. What God has given His Church cannot be duplicated, and certainly cannot be improved upon, by us mortals. I came to see that large doses of both ignorance and arrogance lay behind our efforts to do so.

Let me repeat: **Peter** and **Mary**, the Pope and our Blessed Mother, are God’s way of keeping His Church united to Christ and united in Christ in a world in full rebellion against Him. And they really do work!

By the early and mid-1990’s I was becoming aware that Pope John Paul II was the one leader in Christendom who could be counted on to speak and act on Jesus’ behalf with total reliability and credibility, whatever the cost, whatever the obstacles.

And he was constantly acknowledging his total dependence on Mary to keep him and the Church faithful to Jesus. Remember, my colleagues and I had no concept of Mary’s role in this at all. We didn’t know what he was talking about. It took many years, but gradually it dawned on me that either something was wrong with him or something was wrong with us, with me. But it was obvious that he was staying close to Jesus while we were moving further away from Him every day under pressure from our people who were more influenced by the media than by Our Lord. The conclusion became inevitable: something was wrong with **me** and with all of us who were trying to be the Church outside of communion with the Holy Father, so wrong that out of faithfulness to Christ and to my own call as a shepherd in His flock, I felt compelled to make a clean

break with that part of my past which proudly defied Catholic truth. I lost all faith in our ability as a body to stand with Jesus in times like ours when it finally dawned on me that **it was the thing we were most proud of in our own heritage that was killing us!** We were so committed to being our own Peter, our own Pope, our own Mary. I finally came to see that we were killing ourselves because we were too proud to accept God's way of keeping His Church faithful.

Our entry into the Catholic Church did not happen overnight. In retirement, we spent some 5 years as members of our local Lutheran parish in Bashaw, one of the finest. When we knew we had to become Catholic, we still had many questions, especially about Mary.

The real turning-point in our relationship to Mary came in a most unexpected way. We were in Edmonton to attend to some concerns of my wife. I found myself with several hours of time on my hands. So I took refuge in the Chapters Bookstore on Whyte Avenue and just stumbled upon a copy of the historian Thomas Walsh's engrossing book on Fatima, about which I knew almost nothing. I sat down in one of their comfortable lounges and found myself devouring it. Now, I had had a reputation in Lutheran circles, rightly or wrongly, as a competent theologian. This book showed me that I had not even graduated from Kindergarten. Those three little kids were way beyond me in the sublime "science of God".

Not long afterwards, while browsing in the Universal Church Supplies Store, I happened upon a copy of the book God-Sent by Roy Abraham Varghese, with the sub-title "A History of the Accredited Apparitions of Mary". So there were more than just Fatima? On the back cover was a picture of Pope John Paul II blessing this book. I bought it on the spot, thinking that it couldn't take me too far afield. In fact, it has furnished me with a spiritual adventure which has not showed any signs of abating

even yet. It supplies quantities of engaging data on Mary's apparitions over the centuries, data which all Christians should welcome and love to know, but which most don't. I found it a priceless treasure, spiritual dynamite, a pathway straight into the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a rendezvous with Heaven for earth-bound mortals like me.

But just try to get those who most need a book like this to read it! Many won't even touch it. Why? Because, as we shall see, satan has caused a blindness to come over them. Anything to do with Mary is dismissed at once as "Catholic superstition". I understand. I was once there. It's so sad. They've got it all wrong, upside down really. According to Scripture (*Revelation 12*) Satan has a strong vested interest in keeping people as far away from Mary as possible.

In this crucial chapter Mary is depicted as actively protecting all of her children from satan until the end of time. Many Christians have no idea that John's description of her appearance in this passage is exactly the way she looks in many of her apparitions (Guadalupe, Medjugorje, Cuapa, etc.): **a crown of 12 stars, the sun as her garment, the moon as her footstool**. Coming to us dressed like that, she leaves no doubt in the mind of anyone who knows the Bible as to her identity: she is our mother, Queen of Heaven, sent to protect and help her children. She herself told us in Medjugorje as recently as May, 1984: "**Throughout the centuries, I have given myself completely to you....**" The Bible tells us she's going to protect us. And now she herself tells us she has been protecting us. Shouldn't every child of God know this?

Some, but not all, non-Catholics consider it their duty to wean our Catholic kids away from everything Catholic so that they can become real Christians. According to them, real Christians ignore Mary and the Saints because all they need is Jesus, and real Christians don't worship a piece of bread because they already have Jesus. These Christian brothers

and sisters mean well. They think they are saving our kids by targeting them in this way. My heart bleeds for them. They are trying to destroy in our kids the very things they themselves most need. Someday soon they will understand and deeply regret what they are doing. Once a Catholic Native man, whose kids take in some programs at another church in town and whose family has received good help from that church in their need, told me when he came for Confession: "Father, I can tell you all about what THEY do for us because you love them. But I don't dare tell any of them what YOU do for us because they hate you. I don't get it." I just shook my head in silence. "You've got one thing right," I said. "We do love them."

We Catholics, in our legitimate desire not to offend other Christians unnecessarily, have often avoided mention of Mary outside of our own circles. But in view of recent world events involving Mary, we are duty-bound now go on the offensive out of the same love for all her children that has led her to go on the offensive. Our non-Catholic brothers and sisters need her as much as we do. Satan is the one responsible for blinding them to her. This puts them in very great and immediate danger, and they don't even know it. It's time we Catholics begin to evangelize them, share the Good News with them, without shame or false humility. Our love for them must compel us to introduce them to Mary, who is their mother too. Her mission is too important for them to ignore. She is so different from who they think she is. We have nothing to lose. It's so important. There are so many different and opposing "versions" of Jesus out there. Who knows Jesus better than His mother does? Whose version of Jesus could be more reliable than hers? You can be absolutely sure you are meeting the real Jesus, not someone's lopsided version of Him, when His mother puts your hand in His. We all need Mary if we want to be sure we know the real Jesus.

“I already have Jesus,” we are sometimes told. “I don’t need Mary. I don’t want Mary.”

“You may not think you need her,” we answer gently. “But Jesus knows you do. If you didn’t need her, He wouldn’t be sending her to you. Don’t you think it’s a little risky to claim to love Jesus and then turn your back on the one He is sending to you? Jesus means everything to her. Her only reason for coming to us is Jesus. She’s the best evangelist of all.”

Even though this is hard for many Christians to believe, due to their conditioning, when they do see the point, they melt in awe. Whenever by God’s grace, through prayer and fasting, the Holy Spirit uses us, or anything, to open their eyes long enough to take a look at the facts, the results are a foregone conclusion. It was the Rev. David Duplessis, the “Mr. Pentecostal” of the Twentieth Century, who concluded after visiting Medjugorje that if the Holy Spirit was at work anywhere in the world, He is was work in Medjugorje. He said that Mary was truly appearing there to draw the world to Jesus. Respected as he was, not many in his own circles paid attention to what he was telling them. It broke his heart.

One woman we know well, a life-long devout Christian, after reading Janice Connell’s powerful book, The Visions of the Children, cried out in our hearing, “Why hasn’t anyone ever told me about this?”

You may remember that when the great Baptist Evangelist Dr. Billy Graham was asked who he thought was the most effective evangelist of our time, he shot back without a moment’s hesitation: “John Paul II!” And when Pope John Paul II was asked the same question, his immediate response was: “The Blessed Virgin Mary!” The Holy Father was, of course, objectively correct, going by the sheer statistics. No one has even come close to bringing more people to saving faith in Jesus in

the 20th Century than she has. But many Christians, including Dr. Billy Graham, are quite unaware of this. That has to change!

In the next three evenings we will be dipping into some of Mary's amazing interventions on behalf of her children in the Church "over the centuries". It is truly astonishing how completely she has in fact given herself to us over the years, to us and to all her children, to you and me. I hope you can all join me in this adventure. It is not just a topic of great interest and inspiration. It can be a matter of life and death for many, depending on whether or not we let her lead us to Jesus.

"Praised be Jesus!" Every day when she appears to the Medjugorje visionaries in a flash of heavenly light, these are her first words. In this way she not only focuses us on Jesus right off the mark. She also immediately places herself **alongside us as a mortal human being redeemed from Sin by her Son**. Only the method of her redemption was different from ours so that as the Immaculate Conception (a doctrine taught by both Martin Luther and John Calvin) she could provide for Jesus a fully human body free of Original Sin. She stands beside us, even as our Queen, and her only passion is to draw us to her Son, who is her Saviour, our Saviour, and the Saviour of the world.

Mary Through the Ages – A

Thank you for joining us tonight for a romp through nearly 2000 years of the history of Mary's personal involvement with the Church. Her job has been to keep us faithful to Jesus in the struggle against evil. Her message to us over the years has always been some version of her simple instructions to the servants at the Wedding in Cana: "**Do whatever He tells you.**" (*Jn 2:5*)

Even many otherwise well-informed Catholics have only a vague idea of the extent and importance of her involvements. As mentioned yesterday, what she told us through the children in Medjugorje as recently as May, 1984, is a true and literal description of the facts. "**Throughout the centuries, I have given myself completely to you....**" By the end of this Mission, none of us should have any doubts about that.

May I acknowledge here my happy dependence on the book I referred to yesterday: God-Sent – A History of the Accredited Apparitions of Mary by Roy Abraham Varghese, published in the year 2000 with the specific blessing of His Holiness Pope John Paul II. I have also accumulated a small library of Church-approved books on the same subject.

A brief word on apparitions themselves is in order as we begin. They are nothing new and unusual for the Church. The Bible itself is full of them. For example, when Moses and Elijah **appeared** to Peter, James and John alongside their transfigured Lord Jesus, that was an "apparition". When Jesus confronted and converted Saul from Heaven on the Road to Damascus and set him up for his Baptism as Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, that was an "apparition". For his part, Saul had by that time already been an eyewitness to an "apparition" when he stood there looking on as Jesus, "standing at the right hand of God", **appeared** to St.

Stephen at the moment of his martyr's death. The Annunciation to Mary by the Angel Gabriel was an "apparition". Without apparitions there would be no New Testament, no Christianity. It's as simple as that.

So what is an apparition? An apparition occurs when God draws the veil back and permits someone from Heaven, or from Purgatory, or very occasionally even from hell, to make direct personal contact with one or more or many people on earth. Usually, but not always, both in Scripture and in the Church's experience, the targeted persons enter a state of ecstasy, that is, detachment from their immediate physical environment. Today we have perfected the means of testing the objectivity of such experiences to distinguish them from hallucinations or hysteria. For those receiving a true apparition, whether it is the 70,000 people at Fatima in 1917, the 500,000 at Hrushiv in 1988, the 1,000,000 in Cairo in 1968, or one person only as at Lourdes in 1858, the experience has all the objectivity of any other direct encounter with another person. Though I could do it, I will not waste your time and mine defending scientifically the authenticity of the Marian apparitions we will be considering. The Church's screening process before accrediting an apparition as worthy of belief is brutal - morally, theologically, and scientifically brutal. The Church chooses only those apparitions for scrutiny whose public impact warrants it and accredits only those that pass severe criteria of authenticity. God only knows how many more authentic apparitions He has accorded privately over the centuries to martyrs like Josyp Terelya in the Soviet gulags, genuine apparitions which never receive the benefit of such scrutiny.

Apparitions were treated as a perfectly normal part of life in the Early Church, as we can plainly see in the book of the Acts of the Apostles and in the writings of the Church Fathers. In fact, Church history is studded with them, from start to finish, many involving Mary. She has

always been active in carrying out God's will to protect her children, but she herself says that she has never been more active than she is right now. Why? Because our need for her protection has never been so great. Satan knows his days are numbered, she tells us, his power is already weakening, his usurped reign of terror is in its final stages. Therefore his fury is savage (*Revelation 12:12b*). His favorite targets are priests and families, and his favorite means are pornography and drugs, with all their related vices. By these he hopes to ensnare, destroy and drag down to hell with him multitudes of souls in his final desperate attempt to hang onto power. Mary's mandate from God is to flush him out into the open where we can see him, to rob him of the souls of people already caught in his traps, and to provide the means for us, her children, to remain so attached to Jesus that the evil one is helpless to do us harm. Millions of people, young and old, attest to her incredible effectiveness in achieving this in our own time, as we shall see especially tomorrow. She calls herself our John the Baptist, sent by God to prepare the whole human race for purifying events leading to the reign of Christ on earth in the days that lie just ahead of us.

Having said that, let us begin our "tour de force" through 2000 years of Mary's diligent care for her children.

It begins at the foot of the Cross where, as we all know, Jesus entrusts Mary and John to one another as mother and son (*John 19:26-27*). We are all present there in John, the Beloved Disciple, who throughout the Gospel of John represents all the faithful. Jesus gives His mother to us to care for us. He gives us to His mother to receive into our own homes.

In the Book of the Revelation to St. John, Chapters 11 and 12, Mary is depicted as the embodiment of faithful Israel and of the Church, as the new Ark of the Covenant, as the New and Obedient Eve, as the Queen of Heaven and earth, as the Mother of the Messiah, as the Target of Satan's

wrath on earth, and as the Mother of “the rest of her offspring (who) keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus,” **right up to the end of time**. That’s you and me: we’re “the rest of her offspring”. If anyone should doubt that this heavenly Woman clothed with the sun is meant to be understood as Mary, Our Blessed Mother, those doubts are gently laid to rest for those who know the Bible by the fact, as we noted yesterday, that in so many of her apparitions (for example, Guadalupe, Cuapa, Medjugorje, etc.) she comes to us dressed exactly as she is described in this passage: “**clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.**” (*Revelation 12:1*)

So it all begins in Scripture. What happens next? For those interested in pursuing in detail what we know about Mary’s involvement with the Church in its early centuries, Bernard Buby’s book The Marian Heritage of the Early Church (1996) is essential reading. The major apparitions of this period, as recorded, to mention just a few, occurred in Saragossa, Spain to St. James; in Greece to St. John; in Asia Minor to St. Gregory the Wonder-Worker where we see Mary as a skilled catechist anticipating the great catechetical apparitions of our own time; and in Rome to Pope Liberius and simultaneously to the devout land-owner John and also to his wife. All three were told to build a church in her honour where the snow fell. This next morning, August 5 (!), there was a miraculous snowfall which fell only on a hilltop owned by John and which outlined the exact form of the church requested by Mary in all three simultaneous apparitions. She quickly became known as “Our Lady of the Snows”. The basilica of St. Mary Major, completed in 360 AD, still stands resplendent to this day.

Spain, England, and Switzerland experienced important interventions from our Blessed Mother at critical moments over the next centuries. These, of course, are just the ones we know about. Around the year 1000

literacy became more widespread again and from then on we can track Our Lady's interventions more closely.

Walsingham, England, was the site of three loving apparitions of Mary shortly after the turn of the millenium which resulted in many miracles of healing and the renewing of faith. Though destroyed on the orders of King Henry VIII, it has been rebuilt and remains a very active Catholic pilgrimage site administered by the Church of England!

Picking out just a few more of the many well-attested apparitions, we cite Our Lady's intervention with St. Francis of Assisi in 1216, her gift of the Brown Scapular to St. Simon Stock in 1251 to ensure the future of the Carmelites, and her gift of the Rosary to St. Dominic just a little earlier to combat the dreadful Albigensian heresy sweeping across southern Europe. [Incidentally, in the last Fatima apparition on October 13, 1917, Our Lady was holding out to us both the Scapular and the Rosary, showing how important these gifts of long ago still are to help us combat two great dangers of our own time – impurity (the Scapular) and heresy (the Rosary).] We cannot overlook her timeless interventions with St. Mechtilde of Germany, St. Bridget of Sweden, and St. Catherine of Siena in the Fourteenth Century, all well documented. Then came the apparition of Our Lady to Prince Ladislaus in Poland, requesting that he place the ancient icon of the Black Madonna in the monastery of Jasna Gora in Czestochowa (chen-sto-HO-va), resulting in countless miracles of healing and conversion right down to our own time, especially during the Nazi and Communist periods. St. Sergius of Radonezh, St. Ignatius of Loyola (Jesuit founder), and St. Teresa of Avila – all three very credible witnesses – were also favoured with Mary's personal interventions at critical moments in their life and mission.

And that brings us down to the historic apparition in Mexico in 1531 which Our Lady continues to use to convert atheists and skeptics in large

numbers and to draw multitudes of people to Jesus in our own time. I am speaking, of course, of the apparitions of Mary to the Aztec Indian St. Juan Diego and of her **continuing apparition** in plain view of millions of people today. We see her here as the evangelist par excellence. I wish I could share with you the whole series of events that resulted in the conversion of the entire Aztec nation to Jesus Christ and His Church and promoted the reconciliation of conqueror and conquered. I will have to be content with reminding you of some of indisputable facts that make this event a **continuing apparition** in our own time: The apron or “tilma” worn by Juan Diego made of cactus fibres which should have disintegrated centuries ago but which is still as fresh as the day it was made, despite over 100 years of mauling and exposure to candle smoke before it was given a protective glass enclosure, and despite the “assassination attempt” of the Free-Masons in the 1920’s which destroyed everything all around it but left it unscathed; the image on its surface of a pregnant Aztec princess with her eyes lowered in adoration of the Child in her womb; of the sun, the moon, the stars identifying her as the Woman of Revelation 12; of the microscopic images in her eyeballs perfectly refracted and recording forever the scene she was looking at in the very moment Juan Diego emptied the tilma of its roses before the Bishop; of the absence of any source of colouring agent on the tilma – no paint, no dye, nothing. Consider the further fact that the image is not even attached to the tilma but, as laser research has shown, hovers 1/100th of an inch above it without touching it. One researcher found that it has a constant temperature of 98.6 F. Ophthalmologists have noted that her eyes respond to light and dark and one physician said he detected the heartbeat of a baby, 115 beats/minute, when he placed a stethoscope on her womb. There’s much more. But what’s important is her message, conveyed both verbally and visually: **“I am the ever-virgin Mary, Mother of the true God for whom we live, Creator of**

all things, Lord of Heaven and earth.... I am your merciful Mother, the Mother of all who live in unity in this land, the Mother of all mankind, of all who love me, cry to me, and have confidence in me. Here I will see their tears, I will console them, and they will be at peace.... Am I not your mother? Do not be afraid.”

You know she was declared patroness of all the Americas by Pope John Paul II. Why is there an unbeliever left in this hemisphere? It is a mystery to me why all Christians don't joyfully acknowledge her as their strongest ally in proclaiming the Gospel of her Son.

Over the next three centuries Our Lady was active world-wide, squaring off against satan and bringing people to faith in her Son: in Russia, Lithuania, Ecuador, France, Brazil, Vietnam, India, all faith-creating events of the highest order. And miracles continue at these pilgrimage sites in testimony to her message of truth! A much heralded and well documented miracle took place when the tsunami hit the beach at Vailankanni, India, a few years ago, totally engulfing the beautiful Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health which marks an almost 500-year-old Marian apparition site right on the coast. It hit during Sunday Mass. The church was packed with 2000 worshipers. Everyone outside, some 800 people, was swept out to sea, along with buildings that were blocks inland from the basilica. Worshipers in the basilica were not even aware that anything unusual had happened until Mass was over and they went outside and stepped into a scene from hell. Not a drop of water had entered the basilica whereas the water level was over the windows. Testimonies taken from many eye-witnesses have resulted in the Indian Bishops Conference declaring it an authentic miracle of divine intervention through the intercession of Our Lady of Good Health.

Now let's stand and sing before the Second Part.

Mary Through the Ages – B

And now we enter into the series of interventions from Our Blessed Mother that lead up to and embrace the modern age, our own time.

We are looking at no fewer than 32 accredited or likely soon-to-be accredited apparition sites since 1830, some involving a single apparition, some a great many encounters over a period of years, some accorded to one visionary alone, some to several, and some to vast multitudes. In addition, the Church has identified many more events of this kind that are deemed tentatively credible; a certain number that have failed to meet the stringent standards of authenticity imposed by the Church and are of questionable authenticity; and also some alleged apparitions that have been declared inauthentic and detrimental to faith.

Mary herself, to Mirjana of Medjugorje, has asked that we pray for false visionaries, some of whom are direct tools of satan who stops at nothing to discredit the saving work of Jesus and Mary. Both Jesus and Paul warn us that satan will do “mighty works to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (*Matthew 24:24; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12*). Mary herself has helped us in so many ways to discern the difference between those supernatural events that come from God and those imitations that come from the other side. She tells us that wherever she is at work, satan is never far away, undermining the work of the Holy Spirit in the faithful and preying on people of weak faith.

A pattern emerges from the numerous approved apparitions. Most often Mary chooses as visionaries people who would have absolutely no other access to the messages she is giving: small children, the illiterate, simple religious, even pagan unbelievers. She picks the ingenuous; people incapable of deception, normal people with no signs of psychic disorder, the more transparent the better. Thus, like her Son before her, she uses

the weak to disarm the strong, the simple to make foolish the wise. As she told Ivan of Medjugorje with a smile when he asked why she had chosen such an ordinary person as him to transmit her messages: “I do not always choose the best.”

The modern Marian era is deemed to have begun with Mary’s apparition to the novice who became St. Catherine Laboure at the monastery of St. Vincent de Paul’s Sisters of Charity on the Rue du Bac in Paris in 1830. Only her confessor knew that she was the source of the revelation of the Miraculous Medal that has blessed the world ever since. St. Maximilian Kolbe called these medals his “silver bullets”. St. Catherine also received several precise and detailed revelations about what was in store for France in the immediate future – including the violent deaths of two archbishops – all of it accurate. Her mortal remains have the freshness of youth and are incorrupt, on display for prayer and veneration in the very chapel where she received the apparitions from our Blessed Mother.

In 1846 two illiterate unchurched children, tending sheep on a mountain side near La Salette in France, encountered a weeping lady, the details of whose messages, with both short-term and long-term implications, coming from such an improbable source, immediately rang true, proved to be authentic over time, and resulted in many conversions. Today a stunning basilica marks the site high in the mountains of eastern France.

Just a few years later, and still in France, we encounter Our Lady’s 18 apparitions to tiny asthmatic Bernadette Soubirous, one of my favourite persons, saint or otherwise. Who could ever forget her story, or disbelieve her account of what happened to her? When finally on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1858, the “Lady” identified herself to her as “the Immaculate Conception”, a term totally foreign to Bernadette, she confirmed the Church’s decision just four years earlier to declare her Immaculate Conception as essential dogma for the faith of

all Catholics, thus safeguarding the full divinity and humanity of Jesus. Already on February 25 of that year the “Lady” had had Bernadette scratch around in the dirt to open up a Spring of Healing which today flows at the rate of nearly 27,000 gallons per day. Over 5000 probable healings have occurred there over the years, of which the Church has investigated and declared 69 to be miraculous beyond a reasonable doubt. The blessings are still flowing here at Lourdes more than ever, in spite of, and perhaps on account of, the paganizing and Islamizing of modern day France. God loves all people!

To bring us up to date in the briefest way, we recall Our Blessed Mother’s intervention high in the heavens over the devout hamlet of Pontmain, France, in 1871 at the approach of the Prussian army. The people had been praying that their village would be spared and for an end to the war. Our Lady was holding a cross with a white scroll under it on which these words appeared in sequence: **“Pray, my children. God will soon grant your request. My Son allows Himself to be moved.”** This intervention of our Blessed Mother was credited by both the praying French populace and the general of the advancing Prussian army with halting that army dead in its tracks and ending the war.

We recall the outdoor tableau of the striking silent apparition of Mary, Joseph, John and Jesus as the Lamb of God, life-size, viewed by 18 people for 2 hours near the gable of the church in Knock, Ireland, in 1879. Large numbers of pilgrims are drawn to Knock to this day.

In 1900 Our Lady intervened in the sky again to prevent a bloodbath of 1000 Catholics in Dong Lu, China, sending the attacking army of 10,000 soldiers scattering in panic, and did it again in the same place in 1995.

We all know about Fatima in 1917, and what a different place the world would be today if we had heeded the messages Our Lady brought to us

then, through the three children: Lucia, Jacinta, and Francisco. In the six apparitions of Our Lady to them from May 13 through October 13, plus the three of the Guardian Angel of Portugal that preceded it, **the whole world** was presented with a call to repentance, an experience of the reality of God and of Heaven, hell, and purgatory and the truth of the Church's faith, and a direction for the future with a warning about what to expect if it is ignored. Our Blessed Mother has now told us that she will complete in Medjugorje what she began at Fatima. We are living in awesome times that will see us move through whatever chastisements are made necessary by our continuing defiance of God into an Era of Peace in which, she assured us already at Fatima, "my Immaculate Heart will triumph". The Miracle of the Sun which arrived as promised on October 13, 1917, and engulfed all 70,000 drenched and terrified on-lookers – intellectual skeptics, mocking Freemasons, and faithful alike – made believers of all but those few who, like Lucifer before them, shook their fist at God and said, "I will never submit." Any honest doubters have only to consider the brief subsequent lives of Francisco and Jacinta and the long life of Lucia to have all their reasonable doubts dispelled.

Then come Our Lady's appearances in Hrushiv, Ukraine, twice, 1914 and 1987, the latter on the first anniversary of the nearby Chernobyl nuclear disaster and lasting for nearly 4 months. She appeared in a column of light estimated by Soviet authorities as rising nearly 10,000 feet (3000 metres) in the air directly over the little church, in the plain sight and sound of over 500,000 people. Here she announced the imminent collapse of the Soviet Union (which nobody foresaw at the time), thanked the Ukrainian (Catholic) people for their faithfulness in their 70 years of persecution, and sternly ordered them to repay their Russian oppressors only with kindness when the new Ukraine threw off the Russian yoke and achieved its independence in short time.

In the Zeitun district of Cairo in 1968 she appeared luminous and larger than life above St. Mary's Coptic Church almost nightly for over a year, viewed by at least a million people, Christian and Muslim alike. This apparition was pronounced authentic by both the Coptic and the Catholic churches, as well as by the government of Egypt. Often she would hold her Son out for all to adore. Sometimes she knelt before the Cross. Larger-than-life luminous doves often flew around in formation above her. There were many conversions from Islam at that time, despite the risks. It is worth anyone's while to visit the Zeitun Internet Sites to learn the whole story and view all the photos.

How can we pass over her tender appearances to the children at Beauraing, Belgium in 1932, and at Banneux in 1933, similar in so many ways to her appeal and outpouring of love at Lourdes 75 years before?

Then came her series of great catechetical and prophetic apparitions in Amsterdam as Our Lady of All Nations beginning in 1945 and continuing until 1984. Their rediscovery by Holland's youth today is a big factor in drawing them back in large numbers into the Church which their parents and grandparents have abandoned. It was an obscure spinster, Ida Peerdeman, the very soul of discretion and balanced sanity, whom the Blessed Mother chose as her vehicle for transmitting a rich catechesis designed "to ensure that the will of the Son is obeyed in these times." This is accompanied by a vivid prophecy of the Second Vatican Council 10 years before it was called and of an appeal to Pope Paul VI towards the end of the Council to stay the course and reject "false theories about the Eucharist, sacraments, doctrine, priesthood, marriage and family planning.... Divine teaching and laws are valid for all time and newly applicable to every period," she taught (*May 31, 1965*). She also warned at length about the impending downward slide of Western Civilization into a secular hell and that the exercise of freely chosen

obedience to God is essential for our survival. She asked us all to pray this prayer daily before a Cross: **“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Father: Send now Your Spirit over the earth. Let the Holy Spirit live in the hearts of all nations, that they may be preserved from degeneration, disasters, and war. And may the Lady of All Nations, whom we may also call Mary, be our Advocate. Amen.”**

A deaf recently converted Japanese novice at a little convent near Akita in northern Japan was our Lord and our Lady’s choice between 1973 and 1981 for a series of messages that closely parallel the ones given at Amsterdam. The truth and urgency of these messages were reinforced for all to see by the voluminous flows of blood and then of tears from the statue of Mary in the chapel, carefully analyzed as human blood and tears but not of the type found in any of the residents of the convent. It is no coincidence that this statue is modeled on Our Lady of All Nations of Amsterdam. The messages are a strong call to turn to God before it is too late, to believe strongly in the Eucharist as the true presence of Jesus Himself in our midst, and to remain united to the Holy Father in the turmoil soon to beset the Church.

We should also be aware of the woman who has been called the Padre Pio of South America because of her close life-long role as a “chosen soul”. I am referring to Maria Esperanza, whose pilgrimage site Betania, Venezuela, has been honoured by numerous private and public apparitions of the Blessed Virgin, to the point of converting atheists and intellectuals on the spot. So much more could be said about her if time permitted. She, like Padre Pio, was a light in the darkness to many.

Our Blessed Mother’s appearances in 1980 in Cuapa, Nicaragua, mainly to Bernardo Martinez (later Fr. Martinez), were incredibly beautiful, urgent about our call to be peace-makers, exactly what the faithful in Nicaragua needed at the time, and are still vigorously faith-inspiring.

In Kibeho, Rwanda, our Blessed Mother did everything possible for 8 years (1981-1989) to avert the genocide that engulfed that nation, and for it she used 7 kids, some of whom saw and received messages from both Jesus and Mary publically in long states of ecstasy. Not all of them were even Christian at first. Mary and Jesus gave graphic warnings in front of great crowds of people of the blood bath that lay in store for Rwanda. In the end Mary left in tears, seeing no change in their hearts. Less than two years later her warnings were fulfilled to the letter. Today there is a great pilgrimage site on the spot where she tried so hard to get her children to love one another and overcome their deep-seated tribal hatreds.

Our Lady's initiatives in Damascus from 1982 to 1990, and through the stigmatic visionary Myrna Nazour down to the present day, warrant a whole lecture series, not just a passing comment. Hers is a mission of peace in the Middle East, above all of peace among the divided Christians there. The confirming sign that has followed Myrna from the first day is the exuding of copious quantities of pure olive oil from her simple icon of Mary holding the Child Jesus, and from many other icons wherever she goes, even in the United States. This olive oil has strong healing qualities, to reinforce the message of Jesus as consummate peace-maker and healer. Myrna is also a victim soul. Her redemptive suffering of the stigmata, along with Mary's plea for peace, has markedly improved the spiritual climate among the ancient Christian churches in Syria and the Middle East.

“Julia Kim of Naju in South Korea is one of today's most famous visionaries: she has been privileged to witness or participate in a broad spectrum of supernatural phenomena ranging from bleeding statues and messages from the Virgin to the stigmata and numerous Eucharistic miracles.” (*God-Sent*) As a young mother she was healed of terminal

cancer on her deathbed through the prayers of a Catholic priest. This resulted in her conversion and opened her soul to an intense life of prayer and availability to God. Her testimony is ongoing, calling millions to repentance, to faith in Jesus, and to love of the Eucharist.

There have been many other initiatives on Mary's part in our own time which have been drawn to the Church's attention. Many have received the support and recognition of local bishops and commissions. She is very active to combat Satan world-wide. We cannot begin to cite them all.

But we still have before us the two most significant and powerful evangelizing initiatives of all on the part of our Blessed Mother: her achievements of grace in San Nicolas, Argentina, especially with young people, and above all in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the former Yugoslavia. But we'll save them until tomorrow when our theme will be: **“Mary, the Best Evangelist in the World Today.”**

Mary, Best Evangelist in the World Today

Dear Friends,

Let me begin this evening by sharing a marvel with you. God is so gracious. He gives us so many chances to “get it right”. We could have got along with one Gospel in the New Testament, but He gave us four! We could have got along with just Medjugorje, or just Damascus, or just Kibeho, or just San Nicolas, or just Amsterdam, or just Naju, or just Hrushiv, or just Akita, or just Betania, or just Cuapa, not to mention Fatima and Lourdes; but He has given us all of them, and more besides!

In particular, He confirmed Amsterdam for us by Akita, half-a-world away in a totally different culture. And He compels us to take Our

Lady's mission in Medjugorje seriously by substantially duplicating it in San Nicolas, Argentina, simultaneously, half-a-world away. This is such a grace because, although there has been controversy around Medjugorje from the beginning due to the local politics – both church and civil – there has been no controversy at all around San Nicolas. The settings are so different, the visionaries are so different (six children in Medjugorje, one grandmother in San Nicolas), the manner of experiencing the apparitions is so different, even the confirming signs are different. But the mission and the contents of the messages are largely the same. The non-controversial one serves to substantiate the controversial one. If you have trouble with Medjugorje, you can ignore it and still end up in the same place spiritually because you have San Nicolas. What a grace!

Because the messages at San Nicolas were all finished by February 11, 1990, the Church was able to follow its usual guidelines and accredit their validity **after the fact**. They were published in Spanish with the Bishop's "Imprimatur" on November 14, 1990. The visionary, Gladys Quiroga de Motta, is still alive, a quiet stigmatic today whose subsequent life has adorned the beauty and power of the messages she received. But because the messages at Medjugorje are still on-going after nearly thirty years, the Church has not been able to apply its normal procedures of accreditation. We are still in the thick of it. But there are signs that the Church will soon say what it is able to say about Medjugorje at this stage. The Holy Father has appointed a high level commission of Cardinals, Bishops, and theologians for that purpose.

If we can assume that Our Blessed Mother's mission at Medjugorje is authentic, we might well ask why she would choose a place for it where conflict was inevitable, under a hostile Communist regime for 10 years which fed the world a whole string of lies about what was actually happening there, and also in a terribly divided Church community in

which neither side was prepared to acknowledge anything good about the other side at first. Doubtless she had her reasons, among which was the quality of the faith of the people there – strong though far from perfect. But even more to the point, Medjugorje is ideally located to serve as the launching pad for revitalizing the Church in Europe and for reconciling Christians of all kinds – Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant, as well as Christians and Muslims.

This latter fact has already proved crucial in Europe. Cardinal Schoenborn, the Archbishop of Vienna and the chief architect of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, who spent several days in Medjugorje at Christmas and hosted visionaries Marija and Ivan in a great celebration for a packed congregation and hundreds of priests at his cathedral in Vienna, has said that seminaries in Austria would be empty without Medjugorje, but because of Medjugorje they have the finest crop of seminarians he has yet seen. So while the controversy goes on, the Church reaps the benefits worldwide and people, like our own kids and their kids, are irrevocably converted to the Catholic Faith. Medjugorje is rightly called “the Confessional of the World”. Every priest who hears confessions there is overwhelmed by the sheer number and variety of people whose lives are invaded and forever changed by their encounter with Heaven there. Since God has given me the grace to hear confessions in four languages, you can ask Carolyn what state of awe, exhilaration, and exhaustion I am in after serving Jesus there in a confessional for hours on end.

For the sake of all these people, in a location at once remote and accessible, it has been worth all the predictable controversy hands down, in my view. You can ask some of our local pilgrims for their opinion.

And it stretches around the world. Our suffragan diocese to the north of us, Mackenzie-Fort Smith, thanks to hundreds of pilgrims who followed

their Bishop to Medjugorje, has been remarkably revitalized. In the words of Bishop Denis Croteau, “Medjugorje is all it is claimed to be.... I’ve tried all sorts of things in my diocese to transform my faithful, because we live in a dysfunctional society, and I have spent thousands and thousands of dollars on sessions and workshops. But after having spent all that money, I did not accomplish 10% of what is accomplished here in one pilgrimage.” I can tell you as one who knew that diocese well 20 years ago and who spent a week there last year, the Bishop is not exaggerating. They have experienced a resurrection from the dead up there. That’s all you can call it.

I’ll have to skim on the fascinating details in order to compress the rest of this into the allotted time. But let me once again advise you that you can find those details reliably set out in very user-friendly fashion in God-Sent, both for San Nicolas and for Medjugorje. The Internet is also a valuable resource for both of them.

So what can we say briefly about San Nicolas, Argentina?

On September 25, 1983, Gladys Quiroga de Motta, a grandmother with no formal education and no knowledge of the Bible or theology, told friends that she had seen the Virgin Mary that day. Thus began a series of almost daily apparitions numbering almost 1900 in all that lasted until February, 1990, most of them involving messages from Mary, but seventy-eight of them involving messages directly from Jesus. During this period, the local Bishop had three audiences with the Pope, initiated a Commission of Inquiry in accordance with Church law – including an extensive investigation and a report of the results by the great Mariologist Fr. Rene Laurentin – and provided pastoral oversight and support to Gladys. The beautiful sanctuary requested by Our Blessed Mother and dedicated to her under the title of Our Lady of the Rosary was built on the riverside location she had indicated to Gladys, to be

accessible to all people. And the simple fearless messages, most of them brief and to the point, spoke and still speak from the heart of the Mother straight into the heart of her children, by the thousands, drawing them back to Jesus out of a life of bondage to alcohol, drugs, satanic music, easy sex, violence, all the ingredients of hell-on-earth.

It's fascinating to read how Fr. Laurentin applied the various measures of authenticity to Gladys to determine her reliability. She passed them all with flying colours, including hand-writing analysis by European experts who had no idea whose hand-writing they were analyzing. But as often happens, God supplied an additional confirming sign tailored especially for this situation. At the end of many of her messages, Our Blessed Mother appended a passage from Sacred Scripture which throws additional light on the message and draws people deeply into the Bible. These passages come from all parts of the Bible. Their astounding variety and aptness, coming through biblically illiterate Gladys, on top of all the other evidence, make it all but impossible for any of us, including theologians and church leaders, to dismiss her messages.

A few years ago I went through the messages in detail, arranged them by subject, and shared them with our Bible study group in Bashaw over one winter. It was fascinating. That's how I learned that all the basic messages of Our Mother received by the visionaries in Medjugorje were also being given by her at the same time to Gladys de Motta in faraway San Nicolas in southern South America! So it doesn't really matter which one you quote: you'll be getting the same message in two different contexts, with parallel results in the lives of people.

As far as the actual contents of the messages are concerned, they are a mixture of tender and urgent appeals and of basic teachings of the truths of the Faith. The appeals are from a mother's aching heart aimed at her wandering children, calling them to return through her to Jesus who alone can protect them from satan's determined efforts to deceive and

destroy them. She can be very graphic and specific in spelling this out: Referring to a notorious nearby discotheque, she warned in essence: “Do you realize that the places where you now are hanging out are the very gateway to hell? You have no business being anywhere near such places. Satan is there using drugs, easy sex and diabolical music to cut you off from God and take you captive. Jesus is not in those places. There is nothing there for you but death. Come to your Mother while you still can and let her lead you back to Jesus, back to your life.”

As for her teaching, it is possible to say that the catechesis offered by our Blessed Mother in both places, San Nicolas and Medjugorje, is a feminine version of the Catechism of the Catholic Church which is essentially and rightly a masculine work. They dovetail beautifully, complementing each other like husband and wife. This is far from the first time that the teachings of the Church have been commended to the faithful by the teachings of the Church’s Mother.

If you were to ask me now who my favourite theologian is, I would have to tell you that it is Mary. I find it impossible to compare her teachings and insights to those of anyone else, as if you could set them side by side on an equal footing. Hers is not just one opinion among others, any more than Jesus’ teaching was. Because she perfectly mirrors the teaching of her Son, she, like Him, teaches as one having authority, and not like even our best contemporary theologians. For some, she is a breath of fresh air. For others she is a stone of stumbling. How can that be? Well, if I am heavily invested in a point of view at odds with Church teaching (on subjects like the role of women, the authority of the Pope, the priesthood, the meaning of the Mass, etc.) and I discover that she supports Church teaching, I will find it easy to think of reasons for ignoring her. I have a few friends whose **stated** reason for paying no

attention to Medjugorje is that it has not yet been accredited by the Church. But their **real** reason is that she is so obviously not “pro-choice” and is so obviously in favour of “traditional marriage”.

Back to Argentina, the messages given through Gladys were simple, varied and rich in content. Let me share a few of them with you now.

She spoke much about the special dangers facing the young. Here is an example: **“My dear daughter, how sadly lost youth is! Drug addiction and the easy life – that’s the ideal the evil one has set before the young. Sin, committed in so many different ways, makes them stray further and further from God. If only they will turn their eyes toward the Mother of God, the Mother will make them find God again. If only they will enter deeply into the Mother’s heart they will be able to hear the Lord’s voice.”**

(September 21, 1987)

Early on she announced the purpose of her coming and her messages: **“My daughter, because of a few good people, many bad people will be saved. I mean that with prayer, the constant prayer of true Christians, many will reach salvation. This explains why I am coming to you and what I am telling you, which, in the final analysis, is the Lord’s Word. A soul cannot be saved without being converted.”**

(December 15, 1986)

On February 18, 1983, she had lamented: **“In all the places of the world where my messages have been given, they would seem to have been preached in cemeteries. (Think of France!) People did not**

respond as the Lord wished. That is why your people were chosen...to respond to the call of the Lord. Read Ps. 107B:35-42.”

So many of her messages from Medjugorje are echoed here. She says, for example, that the frequency and length of her visits on earth in our day are the direct result of the faithless times in which we live and the fact that the eternal Father has sent her to us because the world, having rejected the Son, will find it harder to reject the Mother. She spoke often of the importance of our Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of the Rosary as our weapon against satan, of the need to meet Jesus as often as possible in Mass and Adoration, and of her own place in our life and devotions as our heavenly companion. She often unmasked evil for us in her messages and gave us many pointed prayers. She asked all of us, but especially priests, to be faithful to the Holy Father, whom she called “Christ’s humble servant”; and she gave Gladys many fascinating flashbacks on what it was like to be Jesus’ mother at various points during His earthly life.

If you google “Our Lady of the Rosary, San Nicolas” you can have a virtual tour of her lovely sanctuary there, and you can participate in the joy of the young people from all over South America whom she has drawn back to Jesus and to the lively celebration of our Catholic Faith.

With this brief taste of San Nicolas, we move to Medjugorje for another brief taste that I hope will give you an appetite for even more.

We are going to end this evening by asking Mirjana in her own words to give us the basic Medjugorje account of the coming and message of Mary there as Queen of Peace. But first I want to recommend to you, besides God-Sent, the books by Wayne Weible (especially The

Message), by Fr. Svet Kraljevic (especially The Apparitions of Our Lady at Medjugorje and Pilgrimage), by Janice T. Connell (especially The Visions of the Children) and others by Sister Emmanuel, Fr. Rene Laurentin, Denis Nolan, and many more. She has come, she tells us, to show the world that God is real, and that Heaven, hell, and purgatory are real. She asks priests to believe strongly, to be men of prayer, and to be available to the people. She is our John the Baptist, she says, calling the world to repentance and openness to God's future. She says that by seeking to build a civilization without God we are instead building a hell on earth. We are not to forget that life on earth is short and eternity is forever, that all religions are to be respected although they are not all equal, and that God loves all people equally. And she warns that the woes of the Western Church can be healed only by a return to the confessional. Medjugorje itself is the model for this. We'll hear more about this tomorrow night at our Lenten Penitential.

And now I will cede the last words to Mirjana. These are excerpts from a talk she gave in Chicago on September 12, 1998. The pilgrims I accompanied last November heard her give a similar talk in her front yard in Medjugorje.

[Excerpts from Mirjana's Saturday Talk, Chicago, September 12, 1998]

You know that His Holiness John Paul II loved Medjugorje and paid a lot of attention to Our Lady's messages, as we have learned from his private correspondence with friends in Poland, published after his death. You may not know that when he visited Argentina in 1987 he made a special trip to Rosario, the cathedral city for San Nicolas, and granted an audience to the local Bishop to encourage him to study Our Blessed

Mother's messages through Gladys and to promote them in every way he could.

Why? Because by this time there was no question in his mind as to who is the most effective evangelist in the world today, who is our John the Baptist.

Our Father
Hail Mary
Glory Be
Hymn
Blessing

Mirjana's Saturday Talk

Sept. 12, 1998

Mirjana's Question and Answer Session

In the beginning I would like to greet you all very warmly, and I would like to thank you for a beautiful welcome. We are all here to thank our heavenly Mother and to thank her for everything she is doing for us, to greet her and thank her for everything she does for us.

I will attempt to convey to you everything she wishes to say because her desire is that we do only those things that will bring us to her Son.

I will begin from the very beginning. The apparitions in Medjugorje began June 24, 1981. We were children at that time. And Medjugorje is a small village and in this village God was always in the first place in peoples' lives and [in] every home people prayed together in the evenings. And so we children grew up in the faith, but we never had the opportunity to hear about previous apparitions of Our Lady like at Lourdes or Fatima because we were raised in a different system than you were raised in; we were raised in communism. For us it was possible only to pray in our homes and only once a week to go to church. But about Lourdes and Fatima or apparitions of Our Lady, we couldn't speak about these things because of the fear.

And that day, June 24, 1981, I went out for a walk with Ivanka. It was the Feast of St. John the Baptist, and so that day no one was working. The two of us went for a walk below the hill that is now called the Hill of Apparitions, and we talked about ordinary things, the kinds of things young girls talk about. And in one moment Ivanka said to me, "I think Our Lady is on the hill." She said that very matter-of-factly. I said, "Well, she has nothing better to do than come to the two of us." Because I thought that was [an] impossible thing. And I returned home and left Ivanka there. And when I came to the first houses of the village, I felt a need to return to the place. I needed to see what she was doing. And when I returned, I saw Ivanka in the same place. And she said to me, "Look, please, I am begging you." And I looked and I saw a woman with a long grey dress and she was holding a child in her arms. It was very strange because on that hill nobody ever went up there, especially with a child in their arms. The two of us just stared because all of our emotions were all confused within us.

And in that moment, Ivan, one of the other visionaries, came also because that was the way he would normally walk to get to his home. I remember it like it was today. He was carrying apples in his arms and when he saw what the two of us were looking at, like every brave man, he dropped everything and ran. And then I said to Ivanka, "Who knows what this is; maybe it is better we leave also."

We returned home right away, and we told everyone that we have seen Our Lady but nobody believed us. My grandmother said, "Take a rosary and pray and leave Our Lady alone." I had the desire within me to be alone to pray. And so that entire night we spent in prayer, so that God could help us understand what was happening to us.

And the next day Jakov and Marija were the only ones who said, "How lucky you are, we wish we could have seen Our Lady also." And the next day we all found ourselves at the Hill of Apparitions without having called one another there. And with us came our parents or our uncles. I could say to you that it was probably the entire village gathered there because

everyone wanted to see what was happening to the children. And we saw Our Lady in the same place, but this time she didn't have a child in her arms. And that second day, June 25, 1981, is the first time we went to Our Lady, and that day many people from the village saw many signs from Our Lady, so they believed us because without them we could not have endured some of the stuff we endured later. I think that might have been Our Lady's plan, to help them understand that it was true. And in the former Yugoslavia it was not easy to be a believer but especially not easy to be a visionary.

After a few days, the army immediately encircled the hill, and they said if anyone would go up on the hill, they would go to jail immediately. And so, we had to have the apparitions in secret places, and many of the people in our village helped with this. And so, I think it was Our Lady who truly helped them to understand and believe we were speaking the truth because we needed their help. My parents at that time were in Sarajevo. My aunt felt a responsibility, and she called my parents. My aunt said, "Something is happening to her." And my mother got very scared and she said, "Well, what is it?" And my aunt said, "Well, she is saying she is seeing Our Lady." And my mother asked, "Is she normal?" And my aunt said, "Well, she looks the same as she looked before." And then my mom said, "Well, then she is speaking the truth."

The daily apparitions lasted for me through Christmas Day 1982 and on Christmas Day 1982, I received the tenth and last secret. And Our Lady told me then that I would no longer have daily apparitions with her. She told me that I would have an apparition of her on the 18th of March every year of my life. And she also told me that I would also have some extraordinary apparitions also. And that is what happened to Ivanka also when she received the tenth secret; her daily apparitions ended. And now she has apparitions once a year on the Anniversary of Medjugorje for the rest of her life.

And now I need to tell you something that happened last night. I was with Jakov last night during the apparition. When the apparition ended, he asked me to go and talk with him alone. He said, "I need you." Because he knows I have passed through this, and he said, "Our Lady tomorrow will tell me the tenth secret." And she told Jakov to prepare himself. And so we prayed a lot last night that the Lord would help him to understand that that is the way it must be. And when he receives the tenth secret, then his daily apparitions will cease.

I needed to choose a priest to whom I would tell the ten secrets. And I chose Fr. Petar Ljubicic, and I need to tell him what will happen and when it will happen. And he is to announce it to everyone. He cannot choose whether he will or will not tell the secret, he must tell the secret. Our Lady always says, "Do not talk about the secrets, pray," because the one who experiences me as their mother and God as their father, should have fear of nothing. Those who do not believe are the only ones who have fear. I always say to people, we don't need to be like Fr. Petar, this priest to whom I will reveal the secrets. He always says to me, "Come to confession to me and at least tell me one of them right now."

I can tell you this, that Our Lady's heart will conquer. I want to tell you that I have heard about lots of different apparitions, some here in America, where reportedly Our Lady is talking about some horrible times to come where there is going to be floods and all kinds of disasters. And I always say, with a full heart, that that's not truly Our Lady speaking because Our Lady is our mother and she loves her children, and it is not her desire that people love her because they fear. That is not true faith. She changes us with her smile and with love. And so we don't need to fear anything, but we need to place our lives in her hands and we must not think about what will happen tomorrow. Our Lady desires that we think about what is going to happen now, in this moment, because who amongst us here can say in ten minutes we will still be alive. Our Lady desires that every second of our lives we're prepared to return to God.

As I already said, Our Lady told me that I would also have some extraordinary apparitions as well. And those apparitions began on August 2, 1987, and they still continue today. And I don't know how long these apparitions will last. In those apparitions, we pray for nonbelievers, but Our Lady never says "nonbelievers", she always says "those who have not yet experienced the love of God." And she asks for our help also, and when I say "our help", I don't mean just the six of us visionaries. I mean the help of all those people who experience Our Lady as their mother because she says we are able to change nonbelievers, but only with our prayers and only with our example. She asks in our daily prayers that we place as a priority prayers for unbelievers because she says most of the evil things that happen in the world, like drugs, war, abortion, divorces, that these things stem from unbelievers. So Our Lady says, "My dear children, when you pray for them, you really pray for yourselves and for your future."

And in addition to our prayers, she is also asking for our example. She is not asking that we give lectures and talks; I don't mean to imply that priests are not allowed to give lectures and talks. Our Lady desires that we speak through our lives, that unbelievers can see God and the love of God in our lives. I would like to ask you most sincerely that you understand this with your whole hearts. Because if only once you saw the tears that Our Lady cries because of unbelievers, I think you would pray immediately. And her only desire that she told us in an apparition is that she present us all to her Son as a bouquet of flowers. She will not be happy as long as there is even one unbeliever. And so I always say that we don't need to tell Our Lady about the things that we desire because she is our mother and can read our hearts. Let us pray so we can help her, so that we can change our brothers and sisters who have not been as lucky as we have to have encountered the love of God.

Each one of us six visionaries has a special mission in these apparitions. Our Lady chose me to pray for unbelievers, Vicka and Jakov pray for the sick, Ivanka prays for families, Marija prays for sisters and souls in purgatory, Ivan prays for young people and priests.

The most important message that Our Lady constantly repeats is the Holy Mass, which shouldn't be something we just do on Sundays. Our Lady once said that if you have to choose between having visions of me and going to the Holy Mass, always choose the Holy Mass because during the time of the Holy Mass my Son is with you.

Because Our Lady has never said in these 17 years of apparitions, she has never said, "Pray, and I will give you your answer." She always says, "Pray, so that I can intercede to my Son for you." Jesus is always in the first place.

Our Lady desires that we return the rosary into the family. She said that nothing can unite a family like family prayer. When parents pray with their children, children are never too young to understand what their parents are doing. I want to tell you an example that I typically tell to pilgrims. This example touched me. When my older daughter was only 2 1/2 years old, I had never spoken to her to that point about the apparitions because I thought, "What could she understand at her age?" Then one day, she was playing with a friend of hers and I went in to check on them, and I heard that this friend of my daughter said to my daughter, "Well, my mom drives a car," and my Marija said to her, "Well, what is that? My mom talked to Our Lady every day." And then I understood that she understood, even without me having told her. Because Our Lady always places a great responsibility on parents, we are the ones who need to place the roots of faith in our children.

And Our Lady also asks that we fast on bread and water on Wednesdays and Fridays. She didn't explain why. And I want to tell you that when Our Lady gives a message, she gives it to you as much as she gives it to me. And she never says why and how come because for Our Lady we are all the same. We visionaries are no more privileged than any of you, for Our Lady

we are all the same. She chose us so that through us she can send the messages, but she has also chosen all of you. Because to whom would we give these messages if she hadn't called you also? Because we are all her apostles. So when Our Lady asks that we fast on Wednesdays and Fridays on bread and water, she says that to me and you, together the same. Americans, whenever they come to Medjugorje, always ask, "Well, can we at least take some coffee in the morning?" And I always say, "Sure, why not, just do it before Our Lady wakes up." Because each one of us is going to choose what we can do and how we can respond. Our Lady doesn't ask those that are sick to fast on bread and water, those who are truly sick and not those who just have a headache or stomach ache. I remember an old grandmother, an old woman who lived near me. She fasted a lot, and I said to her, "Don't do this because you are old and live alone. What if something happens to you?" She gave me an answer that to this day still remains in my mind. She said to me, very seriously, "Mirjana, as long as you can go to the bathroom by yourself, you can fast."

Our Lady asks that we go to confession, that we go to confession monthly. Our Lady says there isn't a man on this earth that doesn't need monthly confession. She didn't mention women; Our Lady knows that women have enough crosses to bear!

Our Lady asks that we return the Bible into our families. She didn't say how much we need to read. She said the important thing is to return the Word of God into the family. If Jakov were here right now when I said this thing about confession, his reply would have been, "Yes, it is true that men need to go to confession monthly, but women need to go every day!"

Today, I want to conclude, asking you to pray for unbelievers. Every one of the prayers that we pray for unbelievers wipes the tears off the face of Our Lady. Our Lady asks, first of all, that we love unbelievers, that we experience them as our brothers and sisters, and that we do not judge them because God will judge all of us. And when we can experience this love for them, then we should pray for them because that is the only way we can change them. I am sure each one of us has an unbeliever close in our vicinity, and that unbeliever is our responsibility. And so let us pray, and let's place the lives of those unbelievers in the hands of Our Lady because only with Our Lady can they be converted and brought to Jesus.

I'd like to greet you most warmly again, and I hope that I was able to bring Medjugorje a little closer to you. But I always say it is not always the same thing to talk about Medjugorje as it is to experience it. It's different when you come to that hill yourself, and it's different when you enter into the church yourself, but I hope that I at least somewhat succeeded in bringing it closer to you. And tomorrow morning we will be together again.
