

SET OUT ON A SPIRITUAL VISITATION...



Persevere with this lengthy transcript of a talk given by Fr Svetozar Kraljevic in Medjugorje. You will be greatly rewarded. Thanks to Angela Callan for writing every word by hand!

- There are a number of things I would like to share with you and I don't know where to start. We are pilgrims, and in this pilgrimage, in this journey of life, everything is 'fast forward'. There are many surprises and many challenges and we always wonder how we are doing in this art of living.

We always address ourselves to finding the best answers, the best solutions, the best avenue to get there; to accomplish things and sometimes be good, to be victorious, to be sensible, to be useful. We answer our calling to be good human beings, to be a good worker, a good mother or father, a good friend,

neighbour, brother or sister. So we always wonder and pray and think 'how can we be the best we can be?' And don't we make some terrible mistakes? Someone said, "God help me to protect my friends from myself." And that is more critical than helping protect myself from others.

WE ARE LIKE SCIENTISTS...

Probably on a pilgrimage like this we want to answer some of those questions. We want to investigate – basically, we are scientists every day. Did you ever think of that? These scientists have the privilege that they know the formulas of physics and mathematics, to make machines.

But how about the mother who is trying to be the best mother possible? She is using everything she has to be the best she can be. Every day she is a scientist investigating her own soul and the soul of her child, and the mysteries of the world, to be the best she can be. And that curiosity that will keep us curious every day to know that the secrets and mysteries have to be part of our living, every day.

We will be the best when we are in the image of God. In this world, unfortunately, our basic mistake is that we create God and others in OUR image. That is where we go wrong – we would like to create God and the world, including every human being around us, in our image. That is where we go wrong and where we are broken. So we are becoming these curious scientists of the soul to investigate the mysteries of life, to become the best we can be, the best we need to be for the well-being of our brothers and sisters and for the glory of God.

What is the best way to do this? We all have to invest our lives to know. When Our Lady comes to speak to mankind with the message of God, with the message of the Holy Spirit, she is addressing precisely that: our human, existential need to be the best we can be.

PILGRIMAGE IS PRAYER...

Basically I would like to reflect on how we can improve our human relationships. Of course, God is very much a part of all this and He would like to help us to be active in these human inter-relationships. There is one message that comes from God the Holy Spirit, (and Our Lady is at the service of this message) and that is prayer. It's as simple as that. She is calling us to prayer.

The purpose for us here today is to see what does it mean to pray. We are all called to enter into the business of prayer. I said earlier that we all create God and those around us in our own image, so we create our own prayer, our own beliefs. So we say, "I'm nice, really, I believe in God." – and we do it all wrong. So in pilgrimage Our Lady would like to actually teach us how to pray. In pilgrimage we are into the business of prayer.

Many people will be speaking to you and people from all over the world are in the same position – we are all pilgrims. You don't come to me or anyone here, you don't come to the visionaries for them to make your pilgrimage – but we all involve ourselves in the business of pilgrimage.

The other word for pilgrimage is prayer. Prayer or pilgrimage is a whole cultural way of living, a whole mentality, a whole approach to life. Prayer is something we need to be and prayer is the way to be. Pilgrimage is the way to be. Pilgrimage is basically when I say to God, "I am ready. I would like to be curious and ready. Whatever surprise you might have for me today, tomorrow... I am ready." That is the mentality the Holy Spirit would like to create in us! Without this 'I am ready for you my Lord' I will do my own thing. But with this 'I am ready' we say those words of Peter: "Speak to me Lord, I am ready to listen."

Those are the words in the Old Testament, the major words in the Old Testament and the New Testament: "Lord, speak to me, I am willing to listen."

WILLING TO LISTEN...

So in pilgrimage you are basically coming to that attitude. "I am willing to listen". There are many things that need to happen in this process of becoming willing to listen. These things will happen in pilgrimage. So pilgrimage is the most profound, the best way of becoming a person of prayer. Actually, without pilgrimage we cannot become a person of prayer. In pilgrimage we are being thrown into a mill and crushed. Our old ways are crushed so that we can receive new ways.

In the book of Revelation we have, "Behold, I am making all things new," so this is Revelation happening to you. So suddenly you are not reading about Peter, but Peter is YOU. You are not far distant and an observer of events, but you become the very centre; this is happening to YOU. You become a biblical person, with biblical things happening to you. God is calling you name and bringing you on this long journey so that you can encounter Him.

This pilgrimage is tailored precisely according to your needs. Whatever your thoughts are in the process of pilgrimage, this is something responding to your situation. Your pilgrimage is the most unique, intimate experience that happened to you that only you and the Lord do know. It has absolutely nothing to do with Medjugorje. Your coming to this

place is to do with the drama in your own life. Medjugorje is just a challenge, a spark from God, that initiates this process in you.

So we are not investigating the mountain. The mountains are helping us to investigate our own soul. We are not investigating the Church's stand on Medjugorje, we are investigating where we stand with the Lord. We are not investigating whether the children are telling the truth or not because, after everything is said and done, there is only you and the Lord, face to face, to speak to. We cannot avoid that reality – in pilgrimage there is that intimate process, you and the Lord. I walk my walk, you walk your walk. I deal with my own stupidity and troubles, you with your own. We will answer to the Lord for these and we will be glorified or punished, but this something intimate that each of us have to do.

MAKING SPACE IN OUR LIVES...

In pilgrimage we create space in our lives for God. That is the basic. Suddenly, you leave your family, your brothers and sisters, your work, your friends, your power, your comforts. In the New Testament Jesus spoke about leaving brothers and sisters for His sake. In pilgrimage you do precisely that.

You register these moments when you are packing your suitcase. You cannot take your car, you cannot put your kitchen into your suitcase, your friends, your jobs. You have to leave the props that support the whole system of your life. You have to leave your comfort and security zones and suddenly learn to live without all that, to learn a new art of living.

Suddenly you learn in pilgrimage that you can survive the mountain, and that you are able to climb the mountain. That's prayer. That's the process of surrender.

We all have a kingdom of our own. Sometimes it's not large – it's as large, maybe, as your own kitchen. But we do have that kingdom, and suddenly that little we have is gone and lost. We don't have it anymore. It is surrendered. That's pilgrimage. That's prayer.

WALKING IN PRAYER...

Through pilgrimage, prayer is something that is happening to your body and your soul. It's a total experience of your life. That is the way God likes us to pray. We usually pray in our ordinary life with portions of our being.

So we say a few prayers, even spend one hour in prayer every day, but then all the rest of the time we live in this secular world where God is not present that much any longer. We attend church on Sunday, but then we have our business as usual where God doesn't have much to say.

In pilgrimage God would like to change that. Suddenly, God enters into all corners of your life. That is the way he would like to teach us to walk in prayer, to live in prayer by becoming pilgrims, to enter into this amazing journey of pilgrimage which is the business of God.

It wasn't wise in Peter's eyes that Jesus went to Jerusalem. He allowed himself to be crushed, and that is part of the pilgrimage. So basically, pilgrimage is a stupid thing to do, not wise, not sensible. Don't expect others to approve it, to confirm it, or to praise you for

it, or to understand you. On the contrary, you can be judged harshly, condemned by your own family and friends, and by many you thought would affirm you, encourage you. Pilgrimage is a daring journey, but that is all in the school of prayer.

WHEN HEARTS ARE CRUSHED...

I am going to share something with you. I am the Rector of *Mother's Village* and 83 people are employed there. Today there are 350 there for lunch. You get into a situation of human relationships when someone is in charge of a portion of the work there and takes it very seriously. I am sharing my frustrations with you.

This person in charge, he suddenly sees that someone is doing something wrong. Wrong, period! The mistake that people make is that with the justice of God and their righteousness, they go charging in and in a rage crush the heart of another person. If someone then reprimands them for the tension that is suddenly in the workplace, they will say, "Don't you know I'm right?" So with vengeance and justice they walk around 'right'. They are able to crush their fellow co-workers and make tension in the whole place and create situations that are not desirable.

This happens because we are not willing to suffer. We are so often so willing to condemn, judge and be righteous. The most damage we do to ourselves and others is by being righteous, by being right. That is why Christ goes to be crushed on the Cross. He didn't say a word to the person who was crucifying him. He allowed that person to learn himself, in his own time. At that moment he didn't know what he was doing. He allowed him to learn, to grow, to find out in his own way.

That is the way we will be brothers and sisters and pilgrims: allowing the person next to you to be stupid, to be wrong, and you remain silent again and again and again, and be calm and then the situation will be resolved by itself.

Pray to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God will teach you, but only after you have suffered and prayed. Then you become a redeemer yourself, a co-redeemer with Jesus Christ for your family, for your children for your friend, for your neighbour, in such a way that we stand not as judges but as brothers and sisters who will bring blessings to others, not condemnation. This person might be wrong, but the damage that is coming to this person in this harsh way is far greater damage than the initial wrong that this person was doing. Then we inflict greater sufferings with greater consequences than the initial damage that was there, that we thought we needed to address.

WOUNDS TO ATTEND...

In pilgrimage, we actually learn to walk, willing to suffer, to experience injustices, willing to be misunderstood. We walk with the shortcomings, wrongs, injustices done against us. The time will come, but only after we have suffered a bit, when we will be able to address the situation, to dress the wound and clean it and let it grow better. Then these people around will realise that they were seen doing wrong, and they were not rejected or crushed – and they will appreciate that and they will grow. This is the area where we need to investigate the mysteries and secrets and wisdom of life.

We pilgrims pray in such a way because all this is common sense. we don't need to wait for

a child to do something stupid to warn them, gently, with the love of God, and not with vengeance and poison of our own, fears and selfishness. Pilgrimage is something we allow to happen. As we go with pilgrimage we go with God, and we meet other people because this is where we are meant to be, where we are created to be. We will be allowed to have the cup to drink, but also where we will bless abundantly so many we will encounter on the journey of our life.

We are so quick with this judgement against others that with the same mentality we accuse God, where we even see him doing something wrong to us.

When Christ walked towards the Cross, to embrace it, to lift it on his shoulders, he questioned God for letting be in such a position. If Christ was able to come to such a position then we too will be in a similar position where God will allow us to walk into this encounter with the Cross; then in our justice we will condemn even God for being wrong. This is the same mentality we use in our relationships with the people around us. In this mill, in the prayer, in this pilgrimage we are crushed in those selfish attitudes. Our selfish ways are crushed.

Often we are like an angry dog who has experienced beatings and thinks that everyone wants to harm him. So before he is hit, he bites. In pilgrimage we need to allow ourselves be crushed, to become a new person, so that we become blessed ourselves, like Our Lady, and not only blessed ourselves but medicine for the wounds of others. So God will be able to bring you to where he is expecting you to be, there to bless. There is somewhere a wound for you to attend to and heal, just by being there, present. So in this pilgrimage we allow a similar process to Christ allowing himself to be crushed. "God count on me."

SACRAMENTS...

There is an area of major crisis in the Church where we decide what our faith needs to be, what we need to believe, especially in the area of morality. Sometimes people realise that they are wrong. They realise that they are broken and they know that sometime they will change that. Others refuse to change and they say, "If I am wrong, God will forgive me," without realising that they need to receive forgiveness from people. How do we find true faith, true life, true prayer, not made in my image but in the image of God? That is something we are searching for. That is the whole problem of faith today, where Christians stand or fall.

In pilgrimage our ways are crushed and the ways of God discovered – and this is in Sacraments. So the ultimate objective of our pilgrimage is Sacraments. We find God in Sacraments. So all the questions that you have in this area of morality, dogmas, human relationships, prayers – all the answers are in the Sacraments. There is the solution to every problem and every question there could be, or would ever be – in the Sacraments.

So in pilgrimage our ultimate goal is to encounter God in the Sacraments. In Sacraments we will see his face. Outside the Sacraments we will not be able to find him and he will not be able to find us. This means something very, very important, like Sunday Mass. The Eucharist is THE Sacrament of our faith. All the other Sacraments lead us towards the Eucharist, the Holy Communion with God and with each other. The fulfilment of this Sacrament will be in Heaven, the Holy Communion with God.

NOT TO BE THERE...

When we return home, the pilgrimage begins. We don't really realise the consequence of our physical appearance. The world has led us to believe that the power of opinion is crucial – and that's as wrong as it could be.

It's not feelings – we say, "I didn't feel right, so I didn't go to church. I didn't feel I wanted to go." The ultimate act against God is not to be there. That's all one could do, not to be there. That's the sin of every sin and the source of every other sin – not to be there. That's as far as we can go in sin, not to be there. If you are not there you are absolutely not there. We don't realise that. If you are not there you are somewhere else, so you are or you are not.

It's more than a soldier who has to be in his own place and nowhere else. When a soldier is not in his own place at the time he needs to be, that's treason. In war, that's as far as you can go. When I am not at church on Sunday, every church in the world is empty and broken, annihilated because I am not there. We don't realise this.

When you come, it's the most you can do. So pilgrimage is when I come. So when you come to church you might be crushed, you might have doubts, you don't like the priest, you don't like this or that, BUT you are there. The problems of the Church arise when we decide not to be there, to be anywhere, to do anything.

ABORTION MENTALITY...

This attitude begins with the mentality of abortion. This may be challenging for you. Not to be in church on Sunday is the touch of abortion, to be pulled out of the Body of Christ and to be thrown into the garbage of the world. When we are not in the Body of Christ we are thrown into the garbage. That's when the mentality of abortion comes.

With prayer, Our Lady would like us to be in the right place at the right time. When you are there, in the right place at the right time, then the world can count on you. Otherwise the world will lead you anywhere, the world will decide where you go. The things of the world, the attitudes of the world, the values of the world, will take over – and who cares? In pilgrimage we go on a journey for God, that we are able to say, "God, count on me. I will go wherever you call me." When we create a mentality of pilgrimage and prayer then we will be there when God calls us.

A prayer we should say every day is, "God, please protect other people from me." When we want to squeeze someone's neck and not feel sorry for it, we have to postpone our JUST reaction (and God will give us a hint). That's when we suffer most, when we postpone our just reaction.

• *Fr Svetozar Kraljevic OFM*