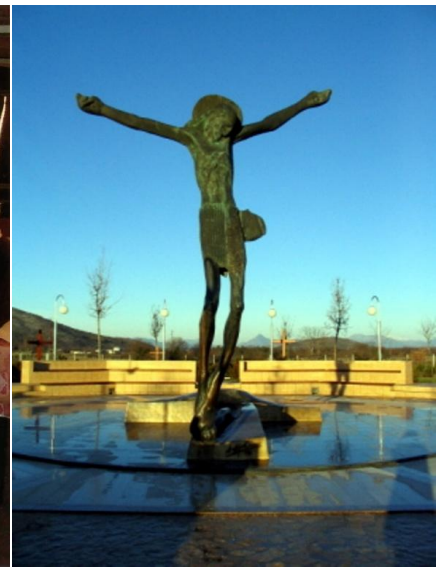


## Sandyford Parish Pilgrimage to Medugorje from 4<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> July 2010



In the context of religion (or faith) a pilgrimage is often seen as a journey or search of important spiritual significance. The outward physical journey carries within it an inward pilgrimage to the heart. When we as people of faith pilgrimage together, we open ourselves up to finding Christ among us. We discover that we are no different to one another as we share our brokenness and our joys together. On July 4<sup>th</sup> 2010 the parish of Sandyford / Kilternan / Glencullen went on pilgrimage to Medugorje for a week. Twenty two people in total travelled together. Here are some of their accounts from the week in pilgrimage.

### Pilgrim 1

Description - Holiday for your head; Thought provoking; Spiritual Awakening;

A place you could come on your own but be looked after.

This was my first trip. There were a number of 1<sup>st</sup> timers. Arrived here late at night travelling up mountains on a bus wondering what brought us here; why were we drawn here? Our first dinner on arrival was at 12.30am!

A very busy week with Mass each morning followed by talks; very thought provoking! Action packed with lots of mind blowing walks on the Hill of Apparitions, through beautiful vineyards with locals trading various souvenirs.

The week had lots of activities. The visits to "Mother's Village" and the "Cenacolo" community were a testament to changes that Medugorje can make to people's lives.

Our group was a mixed one with young and not-so-young; single and married couples.

We all had nothing in common at the beginning of the week but we now return home with the most important thing in our lives together. Our lady has evoked a peace in all of us; bringing me a peace that I have not had in my life. I know I will continue with keeping her and Jesus at the centre of my life because now I know I am loved.

I hope to return one day!

### Pilgrim 2

Why come? Because it is a place of great graces and a witness to what the Catholic Church should be everywhere and especially in Ireland. It is a place to experience reverence, joy and peace.

### Pilgrim 3

Medugorje is a very peaceful and exciting place to me. I am 16 years old and have been coming here for the last 5 years, and I will continue coming.

I don't know what made me come here really. Mam came to Medugorje first so she was telling me a lot about it.

Now that I started coming here I won't stop. When I tell my friends that I come here they either laugh or be like "*Is that not a holy place?*" But here I am telling you, "*Yes, it is a holy place but you can still also have such craic here*".

Such interesting stories to share with you.

Medugorje is such a wonderful place that I would encourage youth to come here because this is a place for all ages and everyone finds something special here, young or old. People that come here always come back so that must mean something!

## Pilgrim 4

When the pilgrimage to Medugorje was first mentioned I had no intention of going. Over the weeks a few people kept asking me if I was going and I was not-committed.

As the weeks went on I began to wonder if going with the parish might be a good thing to do as I felt I would never go otherwise. I had no particular devotion to Our Lady except as part of the overall package of my faith. I had not liked some of the images or the spirituality that seemed to come out of Medugorje. I was not sure what I felt about the visionaries. I was not into that kind of spirituality. In fact some aspects really turned me off, things like weeping statues really made me question whether this bordered perhaps more on the superstitious rather than the spiritual. In the end the idea that it would be a space for prayer and that I was going as part of the parish were the aspects that drew me to agree to go.

The heat and the lack of sleep because of that heat were a real struggle for me in the first days. (In fact this lack of sleep lark became a bit of a joke with me and the others!) Having not slept and getting up at 5.45 a.m. on the morning after we arrived was anything but a joke, that early morning trip to the Blue Cross at the base of the Apparition Hill did nothing for me. The Mass and the evening prayer of adoration that day were prayerful. The next day was mainly uneventful except for the tiredness and heat, but I stuck with everything the group did. On Wednesday morning we got up early to climb the hill of apparition. This was not a difficult climb for me but was for others so I shared a little of their struggle which brought some meaning for me. By Wednesday evening I began to think about making a good confession whilst I was here and had a challenging conversation round this with one or two others. I always find confession difficult and usually fulfil the "letter of the law" by going to a reconciliation service, but not really sharing my struggles. I prayed especially that night (awake again!) and made a decision I would go on Thursday evening. When Thursday evening came after praying the rosary in Church I joined a queue. I stood in the queue for well over an hour, my back ached, my legs ached, exposition was about to start, would I leave the queue and go to exposition? I stayed there (probably by the grace of God) not with any sense of goodwill on my part – would the person ahead of me never finish? I moved from praying for him to almost cursing him as my aches became more acute. I won't go into the confession but suffice it to say that there was more weeping than speaking. I got a very compassionate confessor who was fine with that. Nearly an hour later I was tearfully on my way with the penance of go to exposition and "Let God love you" ringing in my ears. Exposition was packed and nearly over, a companion had kept me a space, but all I could do was weep. Next to my companion was a young woman who seemed to be asking my friend questions about who I was. I could hear this going on but did not lift my weepy face. Then my companion puts a hand on me and says Mary (the girl next to her) says she likes you. I managed a weepy smile and got a beaming smile in return. Mary was a young woman with downs syndrome and had the face of an angel. I immediately knew what this was saying to me. Here was the sweetest most innocent young woman telling me she liked me and beaming at me. God had certainly told me He loved me. I was hoping to greet her after the exposition but just before it ended Mary's aunt who was accompanying her took her away to avoid the crush of the crowd. I was so disappointed and felt that I would not see my angel messenger again.

Next morning after mass, Mary obviously spotted me coming out and she came up to me and gave me the tightest hug I ever had in my life. I was again reduced to tears. I don't know what Mary thought but she just continued to hug me. That was a real experience of healing for me. I saw Mary only once again after Mass on the last morning before I left. We hugged and said our goodbyes and I thought about this special young woman who would probably never really know how God had used her and the gift of God she had been to me. It reminded me that if I am open God can use me too!

Two further times in Medugorje were very special experiences for me. One evening we went as a group to do a torchlight procession and the rosary mysteries of light. At the end we finished with a time at the statue of the resurrection. There were a number of Italian pilgrims at the statue who were rubbing the knee of the statue with cloths saying it was weeping. I was really turned off by this and came away feeling I couldn't do with this kind of spirituality. Next morning a companion and I decided to go down early to the statue of the resurrection and just pray by it when none of these antics were going on. It was quiet with only a few people. As we stood there and with no one wiping the statue water flowed from the back of the knee. Something touched my heart to say I do not understand what is happening here, but that nothing is impossible to God, so I was moved to put my hand on the liquid and blessed myself. I felt at that moment a real letting go and surrendering of myself to God.

Another evening one of the group gave me a statue of Our Lady of Medugorje, I think probably because I had earlier shared with this person that I had not real devotion to Our Lady or the rosary. I was on the way to exposition and made to return it to my room but was encouraged to bring it with me to exposition. As it was given in love it somehow seemed wrong to leave it on the ground, so I held it on my lap near to my womb and throughout that hour was prompted to pray "that Christ might be born again in me" and despite the lateness of the hour and tiredness, as we had a 4.30 a.m. start that morning climbing Cross mountain, the hour seemed to pass in a moment and with a tremendous sense of inner peace.

I saw no visions and am still not sure what I think about the visionaries or some other aspects of Medjugorje. I did see the vision of 5,000 + people praying before the Blessed Sacrament each evening and before the Adoration of the Cross one evening. Many of these were young and some not so young, who knelt in the gravel for the whole hour. Whatever is happening there I can only believe that God is in it.

## Pilgrim 5

My first trip to Medjugorje – A piece of heaven on earth.

I was travelling home from my sister's one Sunday and I felt that I should go to the 6pm mass in Sandyford Church. There in the newsletter was the notice about the trip to Medjugorje. I felt it was the right time for me. For my mum's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday the family sent her here and my sister came as well.

The first talk given by Philip (a guide) on the Monday told us that we were not there by chance but Our lady had invited us which stunned us. Therefore my attendance at 6pm mass was not accidental.

I have been completely overwhelmed by Medjugorje. The strength of people's faith, and I have found my own strengthening and would like to be able to put this into a bottle and bring it back to Ireland. I found Medjugorje to be a place of peace, serenity, beauty and tranquillity.

On the Friday evening at 10pm, as pilgrims we were invited by Ivan (one of the visionaries) to attend the apparition of Our Lady on apparition hill. I felt a great sense of peace at this time.

The experience has changed my outlook on life. It is the start of my physical and spiritual journey to God. As John Paul II said *"You can always count on Mary, she won't let you down."*

It is a place like no other on earth and the peace, serenity and beauty should be seen to be believed. Through the sacraments and prayer you will find your own path. I would like to thank everyone who supported me and made this first trip a very special one.

## Pilgrim 6

Going to Medjugorje I wasn't sure what to expect as I hadn't heard much about it. My friend had told me a bit about it and told me that it was a bit like our holy hour where you get to think and reflect a lot. She knew I'd love it and she was right. I was a bit nervous about going as I thought it might all be focused on prayer. However this was not true. Medjugorje focuses on prayer in a different way by meeting new people, thinking and reflecting. Visiting people who have it worse than ourselves makes us appreciate how lucky we are. I think the young people's attitude towards Medjugorje is very bad. I think younger people especially feel they do not need prayer in their lives however this is far from true.

Although this is my first time here, Medjugorje has made an impact on my life. I understand the place better and the importance it has for the pilgrims who come here. Medjugorje has taught me that prayer can be fun. It is a great place to come and think about your own life. I now feel I have become closer to the Blessed Mother through the use of prayer. I have found her messages inspirational along with other talks throughout the week.

I would definitely encourage more young people to come. I would definitely return. Medjugorje is a place that connects people through prayer and the life of the Blessed Mother. Medjugorje is far more than a "boring prayer holiday". It can do brilliant things for people. If you don't believe, you should come see it for yourself.

## Pilgrim 7

A week to reflect on your life, a time of spiritual healing and yet a week to meet new people and deepen your relationship with people you already knew. Overall – "a wonderful experience!"

## Pilgrim 8

A peace you will find nowhere else. Many blessings received over many years.