

Bishops in Medjugorje and About Medjugorje in 2003

April 2003

Dr. Franc Rode, the Archbishop of Ljubljana (Slovenia)

Dr. Franc Rode, the Archbishop of Ljubljana (Slovenia), expressed his position towards the phenomenon of the apparitions of Our Lady in Medjugorje on April 26, 2003, in an interview for Radio "Mir" Medjugorje:

"My position towards the events of Medjugorje is identical to the position of Croatian bishops. Medjugorje exists and as such is a fact. People go there, and I see that Medjugorje is a place of grace. Many faithful from Slovenia who went there said that they received great graces! They made their confession, came back to the life of the Church and started to live a Christian life. This is the grace that they received in Medjugorje. Why not allow this? I have nothing against the fact that people go there. However, I wait until the competent and legitimate authorities of the Church pronounce themselves on the question of Medjugorje and I think that, soon, this will happen."

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May 2003

Msgr. Luigi Bommarito, Retired Archbishop of Catania (Italy)

Msgr. Luigi Bommarito, retired Archbishop of Catania (Italy), was on private visit to Medjugorje from May 1 to 4, 2003. Mr. Domenico Volpini, a

political deputy, accompanied him. Msgr. Bommarito participated in the prayer programme of the Shrine, and on Sunday, May 4th, he presided Holy Mass for Italian pilgrims.

June 2003

Mgr. Salvador Pineiro Garcia-Calderon, military bishop in Lima (Peru)

Mgr. Salvador Pineiro Garcia-Calderon, military bishop in Lima/Peru, was in Medjugorje from June 7 to 9, 2003.

This is what he said: *"Faith is alive here, I can feel here how much every person needs God. While climbing Cross Mountain, I saw many young and old, healthy and sick people, praying sincerely. It is evident that God is being praised here, and I thank God for this."*

Msgr. Angelo Massafra, a Franciscan, Archbishop of Skodra (Albania)

Msgr. Angelo Massafra, a Franciscan, Archbishop of Skodra (Albania), came for the first time to Medjugorje on June 23, 2003. He came to Medjugorje from Banja Luka, where he participated in the Eucharistic celebration with the Holy Father and assisted at the beatification of Ivan Merz.

Msgr. Massafra observes the events of Medjugorje from the very beginning. Together with his faithful, he unites himself to Our Lady's call to pray for peace; peace in Albania, peace in Herzegovina and peace in the whole world.

July 2003

Msgr. Gerard Ndlovu, retired bishop of Umzimkulu (South African Republic)

Msgr. Gerard Ndlovu, retired bishop of Umzimkulu/South African Republic, spent in Medjugorje the first two weeks of July 2003. With numerous priests from all over the world, he also participated in the International meeting of priests, and was deeply impressed by it.

This is what he said about Medjugorje:

"Devotion towards Our Lady and faith in her in some areas are very weak, if not absent. For some people to accept the fact that Our Lady has time to appear on daily basis is impossible. I personally find this a deep challenge to our faith, if we believe that in the universal plan of Salvation, there is nothing sudden; that everything was, is and will always be in the plan of Salvation.

Personally, I have no problems in believing that Our Lady could appear in Medjugorje, even on a daily basis. She could even appear on a permanent basis, taking into consideration that she is always with us, all over. We do not see her, but God could make it possible that she is seen on some places.

Therefore, I do believe that she could be seen in Medjugorje on a daily basis.

I find the challenge in Medjugorje absolutely in accordance with the teaching of the Church and with the theological training we have gone through as priests. I find it rather a challenge to put into practice what we have already learned. I want to call Medjugorje "a rumination station". Here, I am challenged to bring up all what I was taught in my heart and in my mind, and question myself concerning my life.

I am deeply impressed by what is going on here in Medjugorje: the spirit of prayer, of dedication that prevails. I have been in the priest's retreat and I was impressed by the brotherhood, the brotherly spirit between priests coming from different countries. There was seriousness in punctuality, in prayer and in alertness. You could see them hungry. Our lecturers were excellent.

My advice will be short: 'Go there and experience it yourself.'"

Msgr. Franjo Komarica, Bishop of Banja Luka (Bosnia and Herzegovina) gave an award to Radio "Mir" Medjugorje

On July 14, an official reception was held in the diocesan house in Banja Luka, at the occasion of the conclusion of all the work linked to Holy Father's visit, which took place on June 22.

Msgr. Komarica gave an award and an acknowledgment to Radio "Mir" Medjugorje, whose broadcasting accompanied the preparation for Holy Father's visit, and the visit itself, to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mgr. Irynei Bilyk, bishop of the diocese of Buchach (Ukraine)

Mgr. Irynei Bilyk, bishop of the diocese of Buchach/Ukraine, came on his fifth pilgrimage to Medjugorje from July 24 to 26. 2003.

He told us:

"For my personal life, as a bishop and as a believer, Medjugorje is a power and a grace. On each step, it is visible that Our Lady is present in a very special way here. People pray here and feel God's presence. In my country, people know about these events and they always ask for rosaries from Medjugorje. In Medjugorje, I see many young people praying and seeking God through Our Lady, which is a sign of a new opening for God's message. I will surely come again to this place of prayer, because here, we are all closer to Jesus through Our Lady. And where there is Jesus, there is also Our Lady."

September 2003

Msgr. Dr. Ludwig Schwarz, Auxiliary Bishop of Vienna (Austria)

Msgr. Dr. Ludwig Schwarz, auxiliary bishop of Vienna (Austria), came on a private visit to Medjugorje in the beginning of September 2003.

He told us:

"Many Austrians came to Medjugorje during these years, many speak about it positively and with enthusiasm, because they experience a personal change. In this place of grace of Our Lady, they made a deep

experience of Jesus Christ in the sacraments, especially in confession and the Eucharist. This atmosphere of liberation impresses them. They speak about peace, about harmony between God and men and between men: Harmony brings peace, and the most beautiful fruit of peace is joy. Many come back home filled with joy. There are also some sceptical opinions about Medjugorje. Many say: let us wait for the judgment of the Church.

From the first moment, I was impressed by the pilgrims here, as well as by the atmosphere of prayer, of inner-joy and peace that radiate everywhere. As Christ himself says, I believe that a good tree can be recognised by good fruits.

Dying on the cross, Jesus Christ gave us in heritage His own Mother. Mary, Mother of God, is our heavenly Mother who loves us as she loved her divine Son. The Second Vatican Council says that the Blessed Virgin Mary, after her Assumption, remains close to her children, helps them and leads them. This is why there is the possibility of apparitions of the Mother of God. We know that the Church has recognised the apparitions in La Salette, in Lourdes and in Fatima. The Mother of God is the model of the Church, she loves us, she loves her children and she leads us towards Salvation, towards Jesus Christ. "Per Mariam ad Jesum". Her most important themes in Lourdes and in Fatima, which we find also here in Medjugorje, are prayer, Eucharist, penance, conversion, the sacrament of reconciliation, involvement in favour of peace. These are the intentions that we find also in the Gospel, Jesus' own intentions."

Msgr. Hermann Raich, Bishop of Wabag (Papua New Guinea)

Msgr. Hermann Raich, Bishop of Wabag/Papua New Guinea, came on a private visit to Medjugorje in the beginning of September 2003.

He told us:

"This is my second coming to Medjugorje. I was here two years ago, I promised to come back and I am glad that I could really do it!

In Medjugorje, people plunge into an atmosphere of prayer and silence. This is very positive. They pray a lot, go for confession; the Eucharistic celebration is beautiful and alive, which is not the case everywhere.

I would say: look at the fruits! The fruits show the quality of the tree. The fruits that I see and experience, that I hear about, are so positive and so convincing that I am personally convinced that Our Lady is at work here, that she appears. The visionaries are so authentic; I even admire them how they managed to keep up with all this for such a long time. The atmosphere that reigns here impresses me. I had the occasion to speak once with the visionary Marija in Vienna. We understood each other very well. I told her that in New Guinea we begin to know Our Lady's messages, and that we want to follow and to live them.

I would give a general recommendation: be open for what the messages announce and for what the Holy Scripture says. The messages are completely oriented towards the Holy Scripture; they do not say anything new. They maintain an underlining of what is already written in Holy Scripture. In her messages, Our Lady spoke often about holiness. "Decide yourselves for holiness." It is not so easy, but it is the call of Christ Himself. He says: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". The apostle Paul says: your sanctification is the will of God. The urge for holiness is a call for each one of us."

Msgr. Donal McKeown, auxiliary bishop of Down and Connor (Ireland)

Msgr. Donal Mc Keown, auxiliary bishop of Down and Connor (Ireland) came on private visit to Medjugorje in the beginning of September 2003. During ten years he has been director of his diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes, and to the Irish Marian shrine at Knock.

He told us:

"Everywhere in the Church there are such manifestations of God's surprising grace. However, many of them can be difficult to understand and the Church is always cautious how it responds to them. There is always a need for discernment by the whole Church family."

"One of the striking features of the groups of Irish pilgrims, is that there are numerous men, younger and older, and that this is precisely the population that the Church in Ireland finds difficulty in bringing to Church. Many of them tell of taking drugs, alcohol, or being addicted to gambling, or having been away from the Church for long periods of time. Through God's grace they are convinced that they have been healed here from these vices. Sometimes one has to leave his home and his homeland to receive a special grace."

"In some countries, the Church seems to be becoming smaller in our times and the temptation of the priests is sometimes only to look after the "small flock", after those who remain. The Gospel, however, calls us to reach out to those who are at the edges and outside. That outreach has grown in very striking ways around Medjugorje. Such outreach seems to be very much in tune with the spirit of the New Testament. The offer of forgiveness and new beginnings in Jesus is a core part of the Good news."

Furthermore, those who know forgiveness and healing will be best able to forgive and offer healing in God's name."

"However, conversions such as those that happen in Medjugorje are only the first step after which the faithful must receive catechesis and support when they return home to everyday life. The challenge of the local church is to incorporate the experiences lived here back into the local context."

Msgr. Abilio Ribas, Bishop of Sao Tome and Principe

Msgr. Abilio Ribas, Bishop of the islands Sao Tome and Principe in Africa, came for the first time to Medjugorje in September 2003.

He said:

"I came to know Medjugorje mostly through books. From the very beginning, I followed these events with much interest. I always wanted to come here.

I do not want to discuss the question of the authenticity of the apparitions. I have my idea about it, but what I see, what impresses me, are people who come and pray. You can really feel that they have been touched by the Spirit. They pray a lot, everywhere, all the time, and this is excellent. This is really interesting, this is what attracts people and change their behaviour. I heard many witnesses from different people. Speaking about Medjugorje, they say: "We have really changed!"

I know that the local bishop is reserved towards the apparitions and I do not want to contradict my colleague. I do not ask myself this question. I see what is happening, what is done, for me this is a sign, a big sign, but I do not want to discuss the positions of my colleague from this diocese.

I can see that people here make big sacrifices. I have experienced it as a pilgrim. If these apparitions had taken place in a rich country, I am sure that there would already be a stairway to the place of the apparitions, in order to facilitate climbing! I see that you leave places as they have been originally and I implore you to leave it this way: let the mountains in themselves be an occasion for a big sacrifice. I have seen people climbing barefoot and this is exceptional.

Here, people share the same ideas and make sacrifices for the Church. Such behaviour can help the Church a lot to walk in the spirit of self-giving, and the consequence may be the unity of the world. I admit that personally I feel richer and stronger in my faith.

At out times, there are more apparitions than in the past. I think that this is a sign, a sign given by a Mother seeking her children. The apparitions are a sign that people went astray from God's path. This is why the Mother comes with love and warns us, she tells us that we really have to turn to God."

October 2003

Msgr. Jesus a Cabrera, Bishop of Alaminos (Philippines)

Msgr. Jesus a Cabrera, Bishop of Alaminos (Philippines) was in Medjugorje from October 15 to 17, 2003.

He said:

"The official thinking of the Church in the Philippines is the same as the position of Rome. Medjugorje is not officially recognised by Rome. We

think that in this place, many people are inspired to a better life, the Church does not forbid to anybody to come here, and many Philipinos come here. We can see the good fruits, the effects on those who come here. There is not an official position. As long as our devotion is in reasonable limits... I am very happy when I see my people pray more. They receive more Holy Communion, they go for Mass, they go for confession, they become better... I think, this is the work of the Blessed Mother. This is what counts a lot. We have to wait maybe for a spectacular miracle to happen that the Church recognises Medjugorje! There are already many, many miracles of grace that happen. They happen in the lives of people. The fact that they come closer to God, I think, that this is the sign.

The messages are very, very timely and they are meant for all of us. I always see the Blessed Mother as a special messenger of Jesus. She wants all of us, all, to be a saint. This is why she makes extra efforts to reach us, to help us to remind us what to do and how to reach the Kingdom. This is a sign of a great love of the Blessed Mother of all of us. It is also the proof that the Blessed Mother is actively concerned and active for our well-being. She wants all of us to be really happy and to have real peace. All we have to do is to listen to the messages, to read them, to put them into practice. I remember what is written in the Psalm of today: "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts!" Make sure that your heart is receptive of the messages and put them into practice!

I am acting as an instrument of the Blessed Mother. She had appeared several times in several places. The message she had been giving is coming from God himself. She tells us to pray and pray. We should place God as the first and foremost in our life. That is why we have to be converted and make sure that our heart, our mind and our whole life are turned to God. Often, our heart is fixed on material things like money, power, and similar things. The Blessed Mother tells us to pay more attention to what her Son

is telling us. Holy Mass, Holy Communion, Confession... To be more concerned about other people, making sacrifices, doing works of love for other people.

I believe that if we listen more to the message of the Blessed Mother, and if we are one in loving God and one another, we shall experience real peace among ourselves, no matter what country we come from, because our hearts will be disposed to accept one another and to help one another. That is how we realise that, after all, we are all one family, one big family, brothers and sisters. We are one family and we have only one Father. How wonderful it is when we pray in all sincerity: "Our Father"! We realise that every person is a brother and sister whom we love. This is what the Blessed Mother wants... The fruit of the mission of the Blessed Mother is all of us, that we become one family, one Church."

Msgr. Thomas L. Dupre, Bishop of Springfield (Massachusetts, USA)

Msgr. Thomas L. Dupre, Bishop of Springfield (Massachusetts, USA) came to Medjugorje at the end of October 2003.

He said:

"I have heard about Medjugorje from people who have come here over the years. This is the first time I come to Medjugorje. I am coming with a friend, Fr. Henry Dorsch, who has been here five times over the last 15 years. This is his sixth time. He has spoken many times about Medjugorje and he is certainly a very committed, very good and devout priest. He speaks always very highly about his experience here in Medjugorje. So,

needles to say, I have been influenced by him, as well as by a number of other people who have spoken about their coming to Medjugorje. It has interested me and I had the opportunity to come this year. I am coming here to see with my own eyes and hear with my own ears, and then to formulate my own impressions.

I have always been very strongly attached to the apparitions of Our Lady in Fatima ever since I was a little boy. When I was eleven-twelve years old, I already had a very strong devotion to Our Lady of Fatima. I still do and I really believe in that apparition. Lourdes also. When I was ten years old, I saw a movie, "The song of Bernadette". It told the story of Bernadette and Lourdes. I was very moved by that, it was very important to me. Those two apparitions have been a very important part of my life. Medjugorje is a little different, because it has not yet received a full approval of the Church, and like many others, I await the final decision of the Church. But there is a part of me that wants to believe in these apparitions. I have come to see with my own eyes... I believe that many wonderful spiritual fruits have been produced here. People obviously are very religious, very devout, very fervent, they receive the sacraments, they pray a good deal. I think that we can only be impressed by what we see.

I do believe that this is a place where people gather from all over the world. They come to pray and they have very good experiences. Many are converted, many come back to the practice of their religion, some are converted to the Catholic faith. I have heard about healings, I do not have the evidence myself but I have heard about that. I see much good fruit, much good things, and that is the work of God, the work of the Holy Spirit. There is no question about that. Whether Our Lady is actually appearing here, I am not in the position to say, I do not know that... I am open to that, my mind is open, my heart is open. I do not have a personal

conviction to that but I certainly am open for the decision of the Church. I am looking for that answer!

It is an experience of the Christian faith lived entirely. People here are believers and they live faith. You can see. It is in their heart and in their soul. We are all part of the same family; we are all brothers and sisters. That is obvious here: you meet people from all over the world. Many people from Europe, but also people from America, people of different races, white and brown and black... and everyone is a brother and sister here, everyone gets along well together and everyone has the same faith. We all share in the Eucharist together; we share in our belief in God and Jesus Christ and our love for the Blessed Mother. It is an expression of the universal Church, of the faith that we all share together. That is marvelous.

In my diocese, I will say what I told you. I will say that it is a wonderful experience, a good thing for people to come here and to pray, to open their minds and hearts, to see if God is calling them. They will certainly gain much spiritually from being here. I think they will be blessed from coming here.

The important thing about coming in any place of pilgrimage, Medjugorje, Lourdes or Fatima, is the good that it does for our soul, for our heart. It brings us closer to God, closer to the Blessed Mother, it deepens our faith. That is the important thing about it. There are people who come here for personal reasons. They have their personal intentions. Some of them are blessed; they got the answers to their prayers. Sometimes God does not answer our prayers the way we want him to answer, but that is a part of being a Christian too: learning to carry the cross. Every one of us has a cross to carry. Maybe it is God's will that we carry our cross. We have to be willing to accept that. That is all a part of

the will of God. What we need to do and to know when we come to places like this is that we come and surrender to God; we accept His will whatever it may be. Even if our own personal requests are not granted in the way that we expect, nevertheless we are blessed if our faith is deepened, if we grow in our love for God and for his Mother. Then our prayers are answered, because we leave here as better people, as better Christians. That is the whole reason for coming here."

November 2003

Msgr. Tarcisio Ziyaye, Archbishop of Blantyre (Malawi, Africa)

Msgr. Tarcisio Ziyaye, Archbishop of Blantyre (Malawi, Africa), was in Medjugorje during the first week November 2003. He came with Fr. Enoch Kanjira - his secretary, Fr. Montfort Sitima - the Pastoral secretary of the Diocese (those who will be mainly responsible for the Medjugorje-Shrine in Malawi) and 27 most committed members of the Shrine-project in the archdiocese of Blantyre, so that – through their stay in Rome and Medjugorje - they can soak up the full spirituality that is going to be promoted at the shrine in Malawi.

He said:

"I am here for the first time. I came with a group with five priests and a religious sister and lay faithful. I am very happy to be here.

I have heard about Medjugorje in 1989, when one of us came here with my own bishop at that time. I am more involved now than before, because in

the archdiocese of Blantyre, where I am now, we have built a replica of the cross that you have here on Cross Mountain.

I see that this is really a place of prayer. Indeed, we are very grateful to the visionaries who inspire us. One of them said that the idea of the coming to Medjugorje should not be to see them, but to pray and to deepen our spiritual life, to deepen our devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

I am also very grateful to the Parish. I think that they organize the programme very well. They really help people to pray, to come before God individually, to be free, to be in touch with one's inner self. It is really good to be here!

We are taking home many, many rosaries! In Malawi, there are over 3 millions of Catholics out of about 11 millions of inhabitants. We want to share, because sharing is influencing our faith and the faith of others. I believe that if we put God first, if we fight against spiritual poverty, God will intervene for the material poverty. Sometimes we think that we can do it alone, but this is wrong. The spirit of sharing enriches everybody.

All of us – in Europe and in Africa – should preach without preaching. We should preach with our life.”

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December 2003

Cardinal Vinko Puljic, Archbishop of Vrhbosna (Sarajevo, (Bosnia and Herzegovina) gave an award to the Parish Medjugorje and Radio “Mir” Medjugorje

During a ceremony that took place on December 11, 2003, at the Catholic Theology of the Diocese of Vrhbosna in Sarajevo, Cardinal Vinko Puljic, archbishop of Vrhbosna, gave the awards the parish Medjugorje and Radio "Mir" Medjugorje for the spreading of the "Catholic Weekly".

