

SAINT PAUL'S HAREFIELD

A Monthly Miscellany

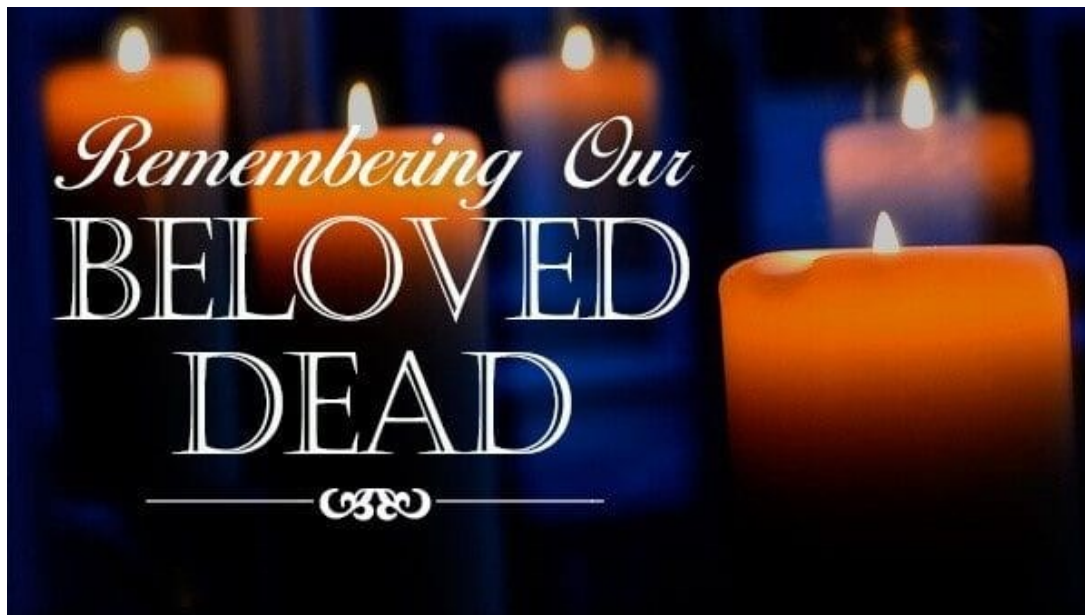
November 2022

We are pleased to introduce a new feature to St Paul's: a monthly magazine provisionally entitled 'A Monthly Miscellany'. We welcome article submissions, on any suitable subjects, from all parishioners.

November: Month of the Souls in Purgatory

The month of November is dedicated to the Holy Souls in Purgatory. The Church commemorates all her faithful children who have departed from this life, but have not yet attained the joys of heaven. St. Paul warns us that we must not be ignorant concerning the dead, nor sorrowful, "even as others who have no hope ... For the Lord Himself shall come down from heaven ... and the dead who are in Christ shall rise. The Church has always taught us to pray for those who have gone into eternity. Even in the Old Testament prayers and alms were offered for the souls of the dead by those who thought "well and religiously concerning the resurrection."

Purgatory is not eternal. Its duration varies according to the sentence pronounced at each particular judgment. It may be prolonged for centuries in the case of the more guilty souls, or of those who, being excluded from the Catholic communion, are deprived of the suffrages of the Church, although by the divine mercy they have escaped hell. But the end of the world, which will be also the end of time, will close for ever the place of temporary expiation. God will know how to reconcile His justice and His goodness in the purification of the last members of the human race, and to supply by the intensity of the expiatory suffering what may be wanting in duration. But, whereas a favourable sentence at the particular judgment admits of eternal beatitude being suspended and postponed, and leaves the bodies of the elect to the same fate as those of the reprobate; at the universal judgment, every sentence, whether for heaven or for hell, will be absolute, and will be executed immediately and completely.



The month of November is when we celebrate Feast of All Saints followed by the Commemoration of All Souls.

Throughout November the Church particularly encourages us to pray for the departed and to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass for them. To assist the faithful in their wish to pray for their deceased relations and friends many parishes invite parishioners to place the names of their deceased loved ones in an envelope so that Mass can be offered for them.

Often it is suggested that an offering also be placed in the envelope. The names in these envelopes constitute what is commonly known as the "November Dead List".

Sometimes these envelopes are labelled as such or referred to as "Holy Souls" envelopes.


MONTH OF THE HOLY SOULS
NOVEMBER DEAD LIST

Place in this envelope the names of your deceased parents,
relatives, friends and all for whom you wish to pray.

Holy Mass will be offered for them during the month of November.

*"Have pity on me, at least you my friends,
for the hand of the Lord has touched me"*

**Return as soon as possible to the Church or Presbytery.
Your offering may be placed in this envelope.**

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NOVEMBER 2022 FEAST DAYS

- **November 1st Solemnity of All Saints**
- **November 2nd The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed**
 - **November 3rd Optional Memorial of St. Martin de Porres**
 - **November 4th Memorial of St. Charles Borromeo, Bishop**
- **November 9th Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica**
 - **November 10th Memorial of St. Leo the Great, Pope**
 - **November 11th Memorial of St. Martin of Tours, Bishop**
- **November 12th Memorial of St. Josaphat, Bishop and Martyr**
 - **November 15th Memorial of St. Albert the Great, Bishop**
- **November 16th Optional Memorials of St. Margaret of Scotland; St. Gertrude**
 - **November 17th Memorial of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, religious**
- **November 18th Optional Memorial of the Dedication of the Basilicas of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles**
- **November 20th Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe**
 - **November 21st Memorial of the Presentation of Mary**
 - **November 22nd Memorial of St. Cecilia, Virgin and Martyr**
- **November 23rd Optional Memorials of St. Clement I, Pope & Martyr; St. Columban, Abbot; Bl. Miguel Pro, Priest and Martyr (USA))**
- **November 24th Memorial of St. Andrew Dung-Lac, Priest, and Companions**
 - **November 25th Optional Memorial of St. Catherine of Alexandria**



Radio Maria launches flagship studio in London

On 29th September 2022 October 2022 Bishop John Sherrington celebrated a thanksgiving Mass for the launch of Radio Maria England's London Studio, based at the Diocesan Rosary Shrine in Haverstock Hill, fittingly on the feast of the Archangels. In his homily, Bishop John spoke of the way the Archangels 'reveal aspects of the love and power of God who desires to save his people.' Gabriel reveals God's plan, Michael reveals his defense of the Church, and Raphael, his healing. Together, they 'are Christ's angels who belong to him and carry through his will and saving plan'. The Mass was accompanied by the Shrine's Schola, directed by Rachael Shipard.

After the Mass, a reception took place in St Dominic's Hall beneath the new studio which brought together Catholic leaders, radio speakers and volunteers, parish friends and representatives of London's diverse Catholic groups and organisations. This diversity echoes the charism of Radio Maria, which exists to provide a microphone to all that is good in the Church so that it can be more widely heard.

Bishop John prayed the first decade of the evening's live rosary on the radio, followed by a number of other guests, after which there were further song and prayer requests from the visitors. Charles Wilson, President of Radio Maria England, said of the location of the Shrine that, 'Our Lady has called us here. We believe that Our Lady has gifted us with Radio Maria, and what better place to be than the Rosary Shrine, in the heart of London?' Also present was Vittorio Viccardi, President of the Radio Maria World Family, who highlighted the importance of an English-speaking Catholic radio for the millions of listeners around the world. Radio Maria is entirely run through the donations of listeners and the work of volunteers, many of whom were present and thanked by the new Priest Director, Fr Toby Lees OP. He spoke about the mission of Radio Maria, that it wants 'to be part of a restoration of our culture by providing something that genuinely nourishes, that genuinely raises hearts and minds to higher things, to the Person we were made for.'

Listen to Radio Maria England via their website, the Radio Maria Play App, or DAB/DAB+ in the London and Cambridge areas. It's also possible to just ask Alexa to 'Play Radio Maria England!'



Laudato Si' Film: *The Letter*

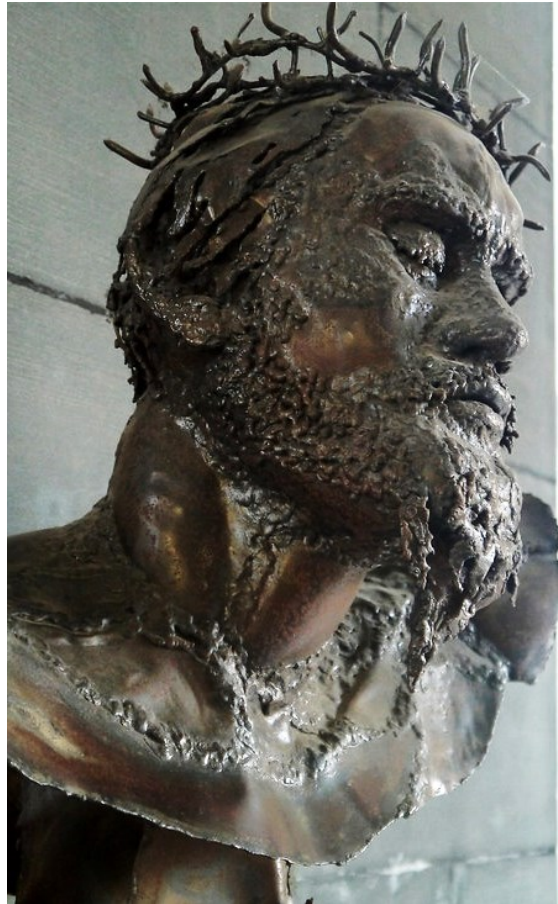
In 2015, Pope Francis wrote *Laudato Si'* an encyclical letter about the environmental crisis to every single person in the world. A few years later, four voices that have gone unheard in global conversations have been invited to an unprecedented dialogue with the Pope.

Hailing from Senegal, the Amazon, India, and Hawai'i, they bring perspective and solutions from the poor, the indigenous, the youth, and wildlife into a conversation with Pope Francis himself.

This documentary follows their journey to Rome and the extraordinary experiences that took place there, and is packed with powerfully moving personal stories alongside the latest information about the planetary crisis and the toll it's taking on nature and people.

The *Laudato Si'* Film: *The Letter* will be shown in St Paul's Church, Harefield at 4.00pm on Sunday 27th November 2022. All welcome.

WHAT CHRIST'S CROWN OF THORNS TEACHES US IN TROUBLED TIMES



Christ Crowned with Thorns ... Coventry Cathedral Helen Huntington Jennings

Good people are worried. It comes up in serious conversations, like those in the confessional. The best of folk now confess to being judgmental and angry about what is happening in our country and world. Often they add, “Father, I’m really frightened about the future!”

Of course, they are right to worry even as they rightly confess to being angry and judgmental. These folks are doing what they should do. They are looking to God in their time of need. They are not demanding answers, only the assurance that the Lord has not abandoned us.

Clement of Alexandria, one of the church’s earliest theologians—so early and so formative for our tradition that we call him a Father of the Church—offers a very simple yet profound image of Christ, one that might help to settle our nerves. God is one. God is truth. God created the world as good. God fashioned us to serve him in the muddle of our minds.

The Greek city of Alexandria was home to the first Christian school of higher education. That alone is significant. Already in the second century of the church’s life, its leaders understood that simply quoting the Gospels, whose ink was barely dry, was not enough to

answer the questions of contemporary men and women. Culture is like childhood. Once it starts to grow, it keeps at it. It asks new questions, jettisons old answers. Sometimes we might want to halt this process, but just as kids must grow up, what passes for knowledge changes and grows. Sometimes it falters and declines. Distinguishing between the two is the great demand of any age. As a Christian, Clement was convinced that what God had revealed in Jesus Christ was the completion and fulfillment of the revelation God gave to Moses. This was God's truth, and it was not to be abandoned, even as Christians were beginning to reason as educated Greeks, dependent upon and enriched by ancient philosophers, poets and playwrights. Clement found solace in a story of two thorn clusters. The first was reddened with the fire of God when he first spoke to Moses in the burning bush. The other was made scarlet with the passion blood of Jesus. Crowned with thorns, he fell silent and would not speak. For Clement, each bundle of thorns testified to God's enduring, faithful presence. They spoke even without words:

For when the Almighty Lord of the universe began to legislate by the Word, and wished His power to be manifested to Moses, a godlike vision of light that had assumed a shape was shown him in the burning bush (the bush is a thorny plant); but when the Word ended the giving of the law and His stay with men, the Lord was again mystically crowned with thorn. On His departure from this world to the place whence He came, He repeated the beginning of His old descent, in order that the Word beheld at first in the bush, and afterwards taken up crowned by the thorn, might show the whole to be the work of one power, He Himself being one, the Son of the Father, who is truly one, the beginning and the end of time (The Instructor 2.8)

Clement began where many Christians, Jews and Muslims remain today. God is one. God is truth. God created the world as good. God fashioned us to serve him in the muddle of our minds. We must reason our way through the rough, never doubting that a place—really a person—of truth and unity awaits us. Our world is meaningful because it comes from God, who is meaning itself. Indeed, the Western religions of revelation define God as that which is most reasonable, whatever that may be, however it still eludes us.

This is why Clement drew parallels between Moses and Plato. God truly revealed himself in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but no teaching can circumscribe God. God is even more than our thoughts, even more

than our valid reflections upon what God himself has revealed. It is that red crown of thorns that matters to us, most of all in this moment. What did it say to Clement of his Christ? What did this theologian want us to take from this visage enveloped by thorns?

First, the God who entered human history in the burning bush committed himself fully to us when he became a man in Jesus Christ. Our history remains hazardous, but it does not stand apart from God in Christ. Second, our story seeks redemption. Human thought cannot step free from human sin: from our prejudices, our passions and our hatreds. In so many ways, the Roman Empire represented a triumph of human reason. Yet the best of what we could do on our own rejected Christ, murdered the savior. And finally, the unique contribution of Christianity—if you're looking at it from outside the faith—is the recognition of sin and suffering as integral to all reflection upon the human experience. This is not something we will grow out of. And from within the faith—in the passion of the Christ—God reveals himself in poverty, sorrow and suffering.

The Journey to Emmaus



The road to Emmaus ... photograph taken in the early 1900s

One of the most treasured gospel passages is Luke's account of the appearance of Jesus (incognito) to two disciples on the road to Emmaus on the evening of that first Easter day. The passage only appears in the Gospel of Luke and Luke identifies one of the disciples by name - *One of them, named Cleopas* (Luke 24:18). We do not know the identity of the companion of Cleopas.

It has always, it seems, been taken for granted that both disciples were men. That is the way it has been depicted in art over the centuries – although Rembrandt's 'Supper at Emmaus' shows only a man and a woman present. When this passage is written about or preached upon it is always assumed that the Emmaus-bound disciples were men. But could they have been man and wife?

In the Gospel of John one of the women at the foot of the cross has a husband named Clopas.

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala (John 19:25).

Furthermore, there is evidence from the dialogue Jesus has with both, that Cleopas' wife may have been the second disciple:

What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these

days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

At this point it seems Cleopas ceases to speak and another voice takes over:

Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.

Mary, the wife of Clopas, is included with the women who were at the foot of the cross. Some of those women went to the tomb. This then may be Mary, the wife of Clopas, relating to Jesus how women from her group found the empty tomb.

The two disciples invited Jesus into their home: *Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them.* (Luke 24:29). This does indeed sound like a married couple inviting Jesus to their home.

Of course it does not really matter whether the disciples were two men or a married couple. What is important is that Jesus revealed himself to them in the ‘breaking of the bread’.



The Supper at Emmaus by Rembrandt

The apparitions of Our Lady at Medjugorje

It is claimed that on June 24, 1981, at about 6pm, six young parishioners from Medjugorje (a village in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the former Republic of Yugoslavia) Ivanka Ivankovic, Mirjana Dragicevic, Vicka Ivankovic, Ivan Dragicevic, Ivan Ivankovic and Milka Pavlovic, saw on the hill Crnica (on the place called Podbrdo) an apparition, a white form with a child in her arms. Surprised and scared, they did not approach.

The next day at the same time, June 25, 1981, four of them, Ivanka Ivankovic, Mirjana Dragicevic, Vicka Ivankovic and Ivan Dragicevic, felt strongly drawn towards the place where, the day before, they saw the One who they had recognised as Our Lady. Marija Pavlovic and Jakov Colo joined them. The group of Medjugorje visionaries was formed. They prayed with Our Lady and talked to Her. From that day onward, they had daily apparitions, together or separately. Milka Pavlovic and Ivan Ivankovic have never seen Our Lady any more.

Mirjana Dragicevic-Soldo was born on March 18th, 1965, in Sarajevo. She had daily apparitions until December 25th, 1982. On that day, entrusting to her the tenth secret, Our Lady told her that for the rest of her life she would have one yearly apparition, on March 18th. Since August 2nd, 1987, on each second day of the month, she hears interiorly Our Lady's voice and prays with her for unbelievers. Sometimes she also sees her. Mirjana is married, she has two children, and she lives with her family in Medjugorje. The prayer intention that Our Lady confided her: for unbelievers, those who have not come to know the love of God.

Ivanka Ivankovic-Elez was born on June 21st, 1966, in Bijakovici, in the parish of Medjugorje. She was the first one who saw Our Lady. She had daily apparitions until May 7th, 1985. On that day, confiding to her the tenth secret, Our Lady told her that for the rest of her life, she would have one yearly apparition on June 25th, the anniversary of the apparitions. Ivanka is married, she has three children, and she lives with her family in Medjugorje. The prayer intention that Our Lady confided her: for families.

Jakov Colo was born on March 6th, 1971, in Sarajevo. He had daily apparitions from June 25th, 1981 to September 12th, 1998. On that day, entrusting to him the tenth secret, Our Lady told him that for the rest of his life he would have one yearly apparition, on Christmas Day. Jakov is married, he has three children, and he lives with his family in Medjugorje. The prayer intention that Our Lady confided him: for the sick.

Ivan Dragicevic was born on May 25th, 1965 in Bijakovici, in the parish of Medjugorje. He still has daily apparitions. Our Lady entrusted nine secrets to him. Ivan is married and he has three children. With his family, he lives in the USA and in Medjugorje. The prayer intention that Our Lady confided him: for young people and for priests.

Vicka Ivankovic-Mijatovic was born on September 9th, 1964, in Bijakovici, in the parish of Medjugorje. She still has daily apparitions. Our Lady entrusted nine secrets to her. Vicka is married, has one child and lives in Krehin Gradac near Medjugorje. The prayer intention that Our Lady confided her: for the sick.

Marija Pavlovic-Lunetti was born on April 1st, 1965, in Bijakovici, in the parish of Medjugorje. She still has daily apparitions. Through her, Our Lady gives her message to the parish and the world. From March 1st, 1984, to January 8th, 1987, the message was given every Thursday, and since January 1987, on every 25th of the month. Our Lady entrusted nine secrets to her. Marija is married and she has four children. With her family, she lives in Italy and in Medjugorje. The prayer intention that Our Lady confided her: for the souls in purgatory.

An excerpt from the The Ruini report, named after the chair of the commission, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, of the investigation into the Medjugorje phenomenon

This study group was launched under Pope Benedict XVI in 2010 and led by Camillo Cardinal Ruini, the former head of the vicariate of Rome. It spent four years gathering information on the case and forwarded its result, a thirty-page document, to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It has not as yet been officially published, but its contents have been widely leaked with no contradiction issued by the Vatican.

‘Having identified the formal object and specific material capable of offering and outlining the physiognomy of a religious event of specific interest, from the point of view of its possible supernatural origin, this can then be recognized, in a sufficient and reasonable way, in the first seven alleged (days of) apparitions, which are attested to have taken place from June 24th to June 30th 1981 (inclusive) to Ivanka Ivanković, Mirjana Dragičević, Vicka Ivanković, Ivan Ivanković, Milka Pavlović and Ivan Dragičević. The seers Marija Pavlović and Jakov Čolo, now part of the six seers, were added on June 25, 1981, while Milka Pavlović and Ivan Ivanković ‘left’ the group of the seers. The investigation concludes:

“The hypothesis of a demonic origin from the beginnings of the phenomenon appears gratuitous and unfounded... by the positive fruits derived from the phenomenon itself”

“On the basis of these data, the International Commission considers that it can affirm with reasonable certainty that the first seven (days of) apparitions prove to be intrinsically credible, as they were capable of fostering in those who saw them an awakening of faith, a conversion in their way of life, and a renewed sense of belonging to the Church.”



The Medjugorje visionaries:

Left to right:

Mirjana Dragičević,

Vicka Ivanković,

Ivanka Ivanković,

Ivan Dragičević,

Marija Pavlović

Front:

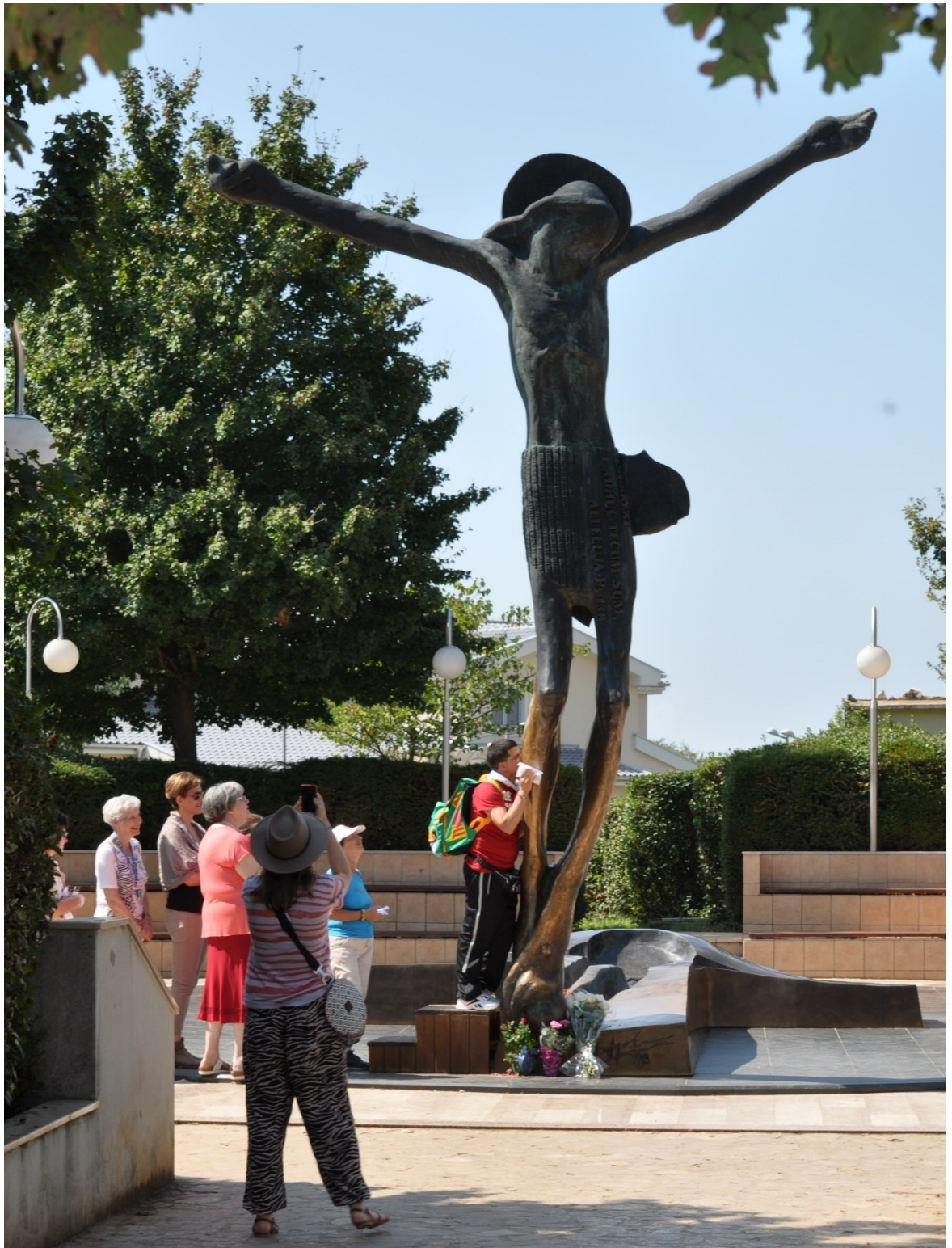
Jakov Čolo



The first photo of the Medjugorje visionaries. Photo taken on the hillside of Podbrdo, Medjugorje on 28th June 1981.



The six visionaries during an apparition



The Risen Saviour Sculpture in Medjugorje

WHY OUR LADY OF FÁTIMA STATUES ARE SOMETIMES DEPICTED WITH THREE DOVES

The story of how images of Our Lady of Fátima, in particular the statues, come to be frequently depicted with three doves at her feet relates to a procession of the original statue sculpted by José Ferreira Thedim.

In 1946, Portugal celebrated its 300th anniversary of her consecration to the Immaculate Conception. In order to manifest their great love for Our Lady of Fátima, the people wished to celebrate it with great pomp and grandeur. A great procession with the statue of Our Lady of Fátima was organized which began in Fátima at the Cova de Iria where She appeared to the three children and ended at the Church of Our Lady of Fátima in Lisbon, 70 miles away. Men carried the statue on a platform the entire way on foot, with the changing of the “guard” in each city along the way. In every city, massive crowds came to show their devotion with different festivities including all night adoration and concluding with Holy Mass in the morning before She began her journey again.

As a mark of honour and thanksgiving, six white doves were released into the air on December 1st, 1946. Three of them flew down to Our Lady’s feet and remained at her feet during the whole journey to Lisbon. They refused to eat or drink and they ignored all the commotion and noise which attended the Statue as she passed through the villages. Rose petals were tossed at Our Lady and brushed against the doves, lights and thunderous fireworks blazed in the night skies, crowds pressed all along the path of Our Lady. Once in a while the doves would drift up a little off the statue, as to prove that they were not tied there.

This remarkable event became such a sensation that the local newspapers recorded all the details and aroused the interest of all of Portugal. With the white doves still perched at Our Lady’s feet and still having refused to eat, the statue finally arrived in Lisbon at Our Lady of Fátima Church on December 5th, in time for the great Feast on the Immaculate Conception on December 8th. It seems as if all of Portugal was wondering what the doves would now do, since they had reached the destination of great import. On December 7th at 3:00 p.m., thousands of children were consecrated to the Blessed Mother. There was an enormous evening candlelight procession at 9:30 p.m. Masses were then offered throughout the night and the solemn High Mass was held in the morning. While this Mass was progressing, there was a sudden fluttering of wings.

One of the doves flew to the Epistle side of the altar and the other to the gospel side. As the bishop straightened to elevate the Consecrated Host, they alighted and folded their wings, one on each side, as if they were adoring the Host. The third dove was still at Our Lady’s feet. Then all of a sudden, at the moment of Holy Communion, the third dove flew up to the top of the crown of the statue. As the bishop turned and held up Our Lord saying “Ecce Agnus Dei” (“Behold the Lamb of God”), astoundingly, the dove spread its white wings and held them open. It seems Our Lady held the doves at Her Feet, on this special occasion, so that they could give glory to God at Holy Mass Who, in turn, confirmed the glory that He has given to Our Lady – Our Lady of Fátima.

A Father Oliveira who witnessed the event wrote this account:

'... let me tell the incident of the doves, about which the newspapers here in Portugal have spoken so much and which is on the lips of every person in the nation. It began in a town called Bombazral, a short time after the statue had left Fátima. As part of the ceremony in that particular town, with the streets filled, people were singing hymns to Our Lady and pressing to be near the statue, someone freed four white doves. The greater part of the crowd hardly noticed it. After flying off into the air, three of the doves... instead of flying from the great crowd to some roof-top...made several evolutions over the statue and then suddenly, to the amazement of all who saw them, plummeted downwards, and alighted at Our Lady's feet!

This was only the beginning. During the days that followed, midst ever-changing crowds, moving from one town to another night and day for almost two whole weeks, the doves did not leave the statue. They remained there at the very base of the statue, as though vying one with the other actually to stand on Our Lady's feet. Yet bands played, people shouted, the bier on which the statue was mounted moved and swayed, rockets exploded at night and cascaded fire, while giant searchlights burned at them. They were constantly buffeted by flowers tossed to the statue from the surging crowds. But they did not fly. They blinked, shook off flowers that hit them, occasionally stretched their wings to keep balance. But they remained there at her feet during the entire two-week journey. They refused food or drink. When the statue was carried into Lisbon, I had the honour of walking at its side as Carmelite Tertiaries bore it triumphantly into the city. I was so close to it, and to the doves, that I could reach out and touch either. Cordons of militia and police were holding back the crowds of many thousands of people who had gone far out of the city to meet this most famous representation of the Virgin, coming for their greatest Marian centennial.

All during the night of December 5th, in the Church of Our Lady of Fátima of Lisbon, the doves remained standing at the feet of the statue. By now they were more the object of comment than the beautiful statue or the glory in which it was enthroned. The newspapers had been filled with the story of their perseverance, their utter fearlessness, the strangeness of their position. Many must have wondered what would happen... now that they had actually accompanied the statue into the church that had been prepared for its reception, refusing to be brushed off or frightened away. The next morning, at Mass, they had their answer. The next morning, the doves flew...

From midnight, Masses were constantly recited at the altar near the statue. The church was crowded to the doors with Lisbonites keeping vigil. In the morning, after the many Masses of the night, came the solemn High Mass, which was to be followed by a general Communion. During the Solemn Mass, most of the people in the great church had undoubtedly stopped watching the doves, to which they were not accustomed, to concentrate on the Mass. This was especially true in the solemn moment when the bell sounded, and a great hush fell over the crowd just before the elevation.

In that moment of hush, there was a sudden fluttering of wings. To the utter amazement of all, two of the doves suddenly flew... after two weeks of refusing food or drink and of remaining at the feet of the statue...one sped straight to the gospel side of the altar, and the other to the epistle side! There, as the bishop straightened to raise the Consecrated Host, they

alighted and folded their wings... one on each side... as though in adoration! As the Mass progressed, the two doves remained there to the bewilderment of the celebrants and servers and the stupefied congregation. But this was still not the climax. The third dove had not left the statue. Suddenly, at the moment of communion, the third dove flew up and perched on top of the statue's golden crown... placed there by the cardinal Legate who personally represented the Holy Father the previous May 13th at Fátima ... and as the celebrant turned and held up Our Lord, saying "Ecce Agnus Dei" ("Behold the Lamb of God") it spread its white wings and held them open! The fabled procession arrived back in Fátima on Christmas Eve. Was the phenomenon of the doves an authentic miracle in terms of how we describe miracles? Fruitless speculation – but no-one will deny that it was an extraordinary event.



The statue of Our Lady of Fátima photographed in 1946 with three doves at her feet

How Padre Pio changed my life

Fr Alan Robinson



Pope Francis prays before the body of Saint Padre Pio de Pietrelcina at San Giovanni Rotondo on March 17, 2018

On September 23 we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of St Pio of Pietrelcina, better known as Padre Pio. Just three days earlier, September 20, it was the 100th anniversary of Padre Pio receiving the stigmata. There are millions of people, living and departed, who owe a great deal to the advice, intercession and example of this great saint; and I am one of them.

My first encounter with St Pio was round a meal table in 1990, where one of the guests had regularly served Mass for the saint. He regaled us with stories of his many encounters with this extraordinary Capuchin Franciscan friar. At the end of the evening, the guest slipped into my hand a small plastic pouch containing a third-class relic, which I placed into my cassock pocket. At that time, I was an Anglican minister who had been struggling with the “call to Rome” since before my diaconal ordination. Hearing those tales and putting that small piece of cloth into my pocket took my life along the right path. In those days, unlike now, I had the gift of sleep. When I went to bed I fell straight to sleep and woke the next morning. Some months after receiving the relic, I began waking in the early hours. The first time it happened I realised there was “someone” in the room. I wasn’t anxious about it. In fact, I felt completely at peace. But this continued night after night, at the same time, and eventually I realised that it was Padre Pio. In his presence, and in the forefront of my mind, in this atmosphere of peace, was only one thought: “I must convert to the Catholic faith.” Once I made that decision, my normal pattern of sleep returned and the visits ceased. And so, in due course, I left the Church of England, and in 1997 was ordained to the sacred priesthood by Cardinal Basil Hume.

While visiting family in New York, I met a wonderful Catholic family, the Realis. Michael, the husband, is alive and well today because of the prayers and the direct intervention of Padre Pio. It is an incredible and moving story, told in full in Diane Allen’s book, *Pray, Hope, and Don’t Worry*. But in short, Padre Pio guided the surgeon’s hand when Michael was born via a tricky caesarean. Through the Realis, I grew to know St Pio even more and developed a greater awareness of the devotion there was to him, as well as an inkling of just how many lives he has affected in such wonderful ways.

While I was parish priest in Bayswater, and still carrying that tattered relic in my cassock pocket, it was announced that Padre Pio would be canonised on June 16, 2002. I knew I just had to go to Rome and thank Padre Pio for giving me the courage and push I needed that led me into the priesthood.

One morning after Mass, a frequent visitor to the parish came up to me and said: “I know you have a great devotion to Padre Pio.” How did she know? I’d never spoken to her about it. She told me that it was so important I made this pilgrimage that she wanted to make it financially possible for me. And so, off I went, full of gratitude to this generous benefactor.

The canonisation was a most wonderful experience, with around a million pilgrims gathered in a roasting hot St Peter’s Square, the overflow of people filling the Via della Conciliazione as far as one could see. When Pope John Paul II made the proclamation of sainthood, a huge roar broke out from the pilgrims, as the relics of the saint were brought forth.

The next day, after the Mass of thanksgiving, I returned to my hotel and was told that someone had tried to contact me, and had the number for me to call back. When I did, I spoke to a Sister in the papal household. She said: “Can you please be here at 7am tomorrow, bring your celebret [permission to celebrate Mass], and don’t forget to kiss the Holy Father’s ring.” I had been invited to celebrate Mass with the Holy Father in his private chapel the next morning.

I’m sure you can imagine what a wonderful experience it was, offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass with someone who is now a saint of the Church. In spite of his advancing Parkinson’s, his gaze filled me with great joy and love for him and the Church. Through all this, I could feel Padre Pio’s encouragement to strive to be a better priest.

Padre Pio gave me the final push I needed to leave the Church of England and become a Catholic. He drew me towards Catholic priesthood. He led me deeper into his own life through my continuing relationship with the Realis family. And he brought me fully home, through the Mass with the Holy Father.

There is only one thing left for me to do now; and that is to visit him in Pietrelcina, so that I can kneel before his earthly relics and thank him for all he has brought about in my priestly life.



Saint Padre Pio

You should rather humble yourself before God than be distressed if he reserves for you the sufferings of his Son, and makes you experience your weakness. You should offer up to him the prayer of resignation and hope, even when you fall through frailty, and thank him for all the benefits with which he continually enriches you.

Padre Pio

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