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The Meaning of Prayer in Mary's Messages of Medjugorje

Pomen molitve v Marijinih sporočilih iz Medžugorja

Abstract: For decades, the apparitions of the Virgin Mary and pilgrimages to Medjugorje have aroused different opinions and positions in the Catholic Church and the public. After an introduction, the authors first outline the broader historical and socio-political context of the Marian apparitions in Medjugorje. Then they present the views of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) on the apparitions in Medjugorje, with an in-depth analysis of the documents *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* (2024) and *The Queen of Peace: Note About the Spiritual Experience Connected with Medjugorje* (2024), paying special attention to the understanding of prayer in the context of Medjugorje and its spiritual fruits in the context of the so-called Medjugorje phenomenon. In the fourth part, they analyse the content of the alleged messages of the Virgin Mary transmitted by the so-called seers, and in the last, fifth part, they focus on the meaning of prayer in Mary's messages of Medjugorje by analysing her calls to prayer through these messages. The article examines the role and importance of prayer as called for and encouraged by the Mother of God as the mediator between God and humanity, with special focus on her messages related to the events of the apparitions in Medjugorje. These invitations to prayer are in accordance with established Catholic doctrine, which considers prayer to be an essential means of communication with God and of receiving divine graces, thus promoting spiritual development. The originality of this scientific research lies in the evaluation of the meaning of prayer in Medjugorje in the context of Our Lady's messages and in the analysis of the position of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, which in its evaluation of the apparitions of Mary officially emphasizes the spiritual (prayerful) fruits of the Medjugorje movement and relies on Our Lady's messages in its assessment. The authors use descriptive and analytical methods. They find it extremely interesting that the Holy See, in its official position, refers to the messages of Our Lady of Medjugorje in its assessment without yet confirming the apparitions of Mary. In a situation in which the Holy See has not (yet) officially confirmed the authenticity of the Marian apparitions, the authors do not deal with the authenticity of the messages and apparitions transmitted by the so-called seers, but underline the thesis that the spiritual fruits are most likely to determine the authenticity of the Medjugorje phenomenon, in which prayer on both personal and collective levels is of decisive importance.

Keywords: prayer, Virgin Mary, Our Lady, Marian apparitions, Medjugorje, Messages of Virgin Mary, spirituality, faith

Izvleček: *Marijina prikazovanja in romanja v Medžugorje že desetletja vzbujajo različna mnenja in stališča v Katoliški cerkvi in javnosti. Po uvodu avtorja najprej orišeta širši*

zgodovinski in družbenopolitični kontekst Marijinih prikazovanj v Medžugorju. Nato predstavi stališča Dikasterija za nauk vere (DDF) o prikazovanjih v Medžugorju s poglobljeno analizo dokumentov Norme za ravnanje pri razločevanju domnevnih nadnaravnih pojavov (2024) in Kraljica miru: Navodilo o duhovni izkušnji, povezani z Medžugorjem (2024), pri čemer je posebna pozornost namenjena razumevanju molitve v kontekstu Medžugorja in njenih duhovnih sadov. V četrtem delu analizirata vsebino domnevnih Marijinih sporočil, ki so jih posredovali t. i. vidci, v zadnjem, petem delu pa se osredotočita na pomen molitve v Marijinih medžugorskih sporočilih z analizo njenih vabil k molitvi preko sporočil. Članek obravnava vlogo in pomen molitve, h kateri poziva in spodbuja Božja Mati kot posrednica med Bogom in človekom, s posebnim poudarkom na njenih sporočilih. Ti pozivi k molitvi so v skladu z uveljavljenim katoliškim naukom, po katerem je molitev bistveno sredstvo za komunikacijo z Bogom in prejemanje božjih milosti ter s tem človekovega duhovnega razvoja. Izvirnost te znanstvene raziskave je v vrednotenju pomena molitve v kontekstu Marijinih sporočil v Medžugorju in v analizi stališča Dikasterija za nauk vere, ki v svoji oceni Marijinih prikazovanj uradno poudarja duhovne (molitvene) sadove medžugorskega gibanja in se opira na Marijina sporočila. Avtorja uporabljata deskriptivno in analitično metodo. Posebej poudarjata, da se Sveti sedež v svojem uradnem stališču v svoji oceni sklicuje na sporočila medžugorske Marije, ne da bi predhodno potrdil tamkajšnja Marijina prikazovanja. V razmerah, ko Sveti sedež (Še) ni uradno potrdil pristnosti Marijinih prikazovanj, se avtorja ne ukvarjata z avtentičnostjo sporočil in prikazovanj, ki so jih posredovali t. i. vidci, temveč zagovarjata tezo, da so za ugotavljanje pristnosti medžugorskega pojava najverjetneje najbolj pomembni duhovni sadovi, pri katerih je odločilnega pomena molitev na osebni in skupni ravni.

Ključne besede: *molitev, Devica Marija, Naša Gospa, Medžugorje, Marijina prikazovanja, Marijina sporočila, duhovnost, vera*

Introduction

The Virgin Mary's apparitions in Medjugorje, including her messages, stir the spirits of believers and non-believers alike.¹ For better understanding of the subject, it is necessary to place it in a broader historical and political context. The complex and turbulent socio-political events in Yugoslavia during the 1980s provided an environment ripe for profound spiritual revelations. The significance of Mary's messages therefore transcends merely religious experience; they appear as a crucial and timely response to the profound struggles facing Yugoslavia's nations as they grappled with deep-rooted divisions and conflicts. A central and deeply compelling theme of the messages from Medjugorje is prayer, particularly the Rosary. The Virgin Mary fervently urges her followers to pray the Rosary, portraying it as a powerful and transformative tool for deepening one's personal

1 This paper was written as a result of work within the research programme P6-0269 (Religion, ethics, education, and challenges of modern society) which is financed by the Slovenian Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation (ARIS).

relationship with God. The repetitive and meditative nature of the Rosary not only allows profound contemplation on the mysteries of Christ's life but also serves as a profoundly meaningful means to foster an intimate and mystical connection with the Virgin Mary herself. In the face of immense societal turmoil and upheaval, prayer becomes a vital source of comfort, strength, and peace for the many pilgrims who flock to Medjugorje, enabling them to find a profound sense of inner tranquillity amidst the prevailing chaos, especially when Yugoslavia disintegrated into war during the 1990s. Mary's messages from Medjugorje bring us a rich tapestry of various interrelated themes such as the call for personal conversion, the relentless pursuit of peace, the transformative power of fasting, and the centrality of the Eucharist. Each of these themes serves to underscore not only the essential importance of personal spiritual transformation but also the vital role of collective spiritual renewal among the faithful. The Rosary, as both a communal and deeply personal prayer, powerfully embodies and encapsulates these themes, enhancing the profound sense of unity and community among believers while simultaneously reinforcing the indispensable importance of prayer in daily spiritual life. The messages from Medjugorje and events related to Mary require an in-depth investigation and critical examination by the Catholic Church, which is presented in the documents of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith called *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* and *The Queen of Peace: Note About the Spiritual Experience Connected with Medjugorje* from 2024.

1 Historical context of the apparitions in Medjugorje

The apparitions in Medjugorje are intertwined with the socio-political events of the late 20th century. Nestled in the rolling hills of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the small village of Medjugorje became a global pilgrimage site in former Yugoslavia following the reported apparitions of the Virgin Mary that began in June 1981.² To fully understand the significance of these

2 The first day of the apparition, June 24, 1981, six children on the Podbrdo hill saw a beautiful young woman with a child, who waved to them and called them to come closer to her. Surprised and frightened, they did not dare to approach her but immediately thought that it was the Virgin Mary. This was the first apparition; this time Mary did not give a message yet. (Perićić 2007, 15-16)



events, it is crucial to delve into the intricate tapestry of local history, the dynamics of the Yugoslav state, and the profound spiritual implications of the apparitions, which have left an indelible mark on both the local and global Catholic Church. In the years leading up to the apparitions, Yugoslavia was a state marked by both unity and division. Established after World War I (first as the Kingdom of SHS,³ later Kingdom of Yugoslavia), Yugoslavia was a multi-ethnic federation composed of various nationalities, including Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bosniaks, Macedonians, Montenegrins, and others. Under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, who led the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1945 until his death in 1980, the country maintained a delicate balance between its diverse ethnic groups through a unique form of socialist governance that allowed for some degree of religious practice (Ramet 2005, 255). Tito's regime promoted a secular identity while also recognizing the importance of national identities and religious traditions. However, Tito's death in May 1980 signalled the beginning of a turbulent era for Yugoslavia. The absence of a unifying figure led to a rise in nationalist sentiments and ethnic tensions. Economic instability further exacerbated these divisions, prompting frustrations that simmered beneath the surface. Against this backdrop of uncertainty and unrest, the village of Medjugorje – a predominantly Catholic community in Bosnia and Herzegovina – emerged as a beacon of hope, offering a unique spiritual refuge to those seeking solace amid the turmoil.

The first apparition occurred on June 24, 1981, when six young children – Mirjana and Ivan Dragičević, Ivanka Ivanković, Vicka Ivanković, Marija Pavlović, and Jakov Čolo – claimed to have seen a vision of the Virgin Mary on the hillside of Podbrdo (Rupčić and Nuić 2002, 21–29). This moment marked the beginning of a series of reported encounters that would capture the attention of the world. The Virgin Mary, as described by the seers, conveyed messages of peace, reconciliation, and the importance of prayer. These messages resonated deeply with a population yearning for guidance and reassurance in the face of political instability and social fragmentation. As the apparitions continued over the following days, the children reported receiving further revelations from the Virgin Mary, who urged them to share her messages with the world. The seers

3 Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.



described encounters being filled with love and compassion, and their testimonies quickly attracted attention beyond the borders of Medjugorje. Pilgrims from various backgrounds began to flock to the village, seeking spiritual renewal and a connection with the divine. For many, the experience of witnessing the apparitions or participating in prayer sessions became a transformative journey, instilling a renewed sense of faith and purpose.

The Catholic Church's response to the Medjugorje apparitions has been complex and multifaceted. Initially, local church authorities, including Bishop Pavao Žanić of Mostar-Duvno, expressed scepticism about the authenticity of the apparitions (Udruga Međugorje – MIR, 1995–2025). Bishop Žanić declared the events as unverified, urging caution among the faithful and emphasizing the need for thorough investigation.⁴ Despite the bishop's reservations and clear political opposition from the local government, the phenomenon continued to grow, attracting increasing numbers of pilgrims and media coverage.

In the early 1990s, as Yugoslavia descended into civil war and ethnic conflict, Medjugorje became a symbol of hope and peace. The messages of the Virgin Mary, emphasizing reconciliation and prayer especially for peace, resonated profoundly with those affected by the violence and division surrounding them. Pilgrims sought refuge in the hills of Medjugorje, where they found solace in the simplicity of faith and community. The village became a sanctuary, a place where people could come together in prayer and reflection, transcending the boundaries that divided their communities. The Holy See took a more active interest in the apparitions as their prominence grew. In 1991, the Yugoslav bishops' conference authorized an investigation into the events, leading to a range of opinions among theologians and church leaders (Medjugorje Website 2025). In 2010, under Pope Benedict XVI, a new commission was established to further evaluate the apparitions. The findings of this commission that the apparitions could not be confirmed yet remain a subject of debate within the Church,

4 In the most positive cases of phenomena of supposedly supernatural origin, the Vatican encourages the local bishop to pastorally evaluate such phenomena, taking into account the *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena*. The current *Rules*, dating from 1978, had been revised and, after years of corrections and comments for improvement under the auspices of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, they were presented to the Holy Father on May 4, 2024, who then approved them and set them to enter into force on May 19, 2024. (Fernandez 2024, 9)



reflecting the ongoing tensions between local believers and ecclesiastical authorities (McElwee 2015).

As time has progressed, the Medjugorje apparitions have remained a source of fascination and devotion for many believers. The ongoing nature of the apparitions, with the seers claiming to still receive messages from the Virgin Mary decades later, adds a layer of complexity to the narrative. These messages continue to emphasize themes of love, forgiveness, a call for peace, and a call to prayer, urging the faithful to deepen their spiritual lives. For many pilgrims, visiting Medjugorje has become a life-changing experience, providing them with a renewed sense of purpose and connection to their faith.

The spiritual impact of the apparitions extends beyond individual experiences; it has also led to the establishment of various religious initiatives and organizations dedicated to promoting the messages of Medjugorje. The village has become a vibrant hub for spiritual activities, including Mass services, confessions, prayer groups, and retreats, drawing thousands of visitors each year. Local residents have embraced the influx of pilgrims, recognizing the economic and social benefits that accompany this spiritual (religious) tourism. The village's transformation into a pilgrimage site symbolizes the enduring power of faith and the human desire for connection with the divine. As the Catholic Church continues to grapple with the authenticity and significance of the apparitions, Medjugorje retains its status as a sacred place where the messages of peace and reconciliation continue to inspire spiritual journeys for millions worldwide. The story of Medjugorje is not only an exploration of the divine but also a reflection of the resilience of the human spirit amidst chaos, war, and general uncertainty.

2 Analysis of the statements of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith about supernatural phenomena with focus on Medjugorje

The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) released a statement in 2024 regarding the experiences and reported apparitions in Medjugorje and provides a comprehensive theological reflection on the interplay



between faith, personal experience, and ecclesial authority. This analysis will delve into the key themes presented in the documents *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* (NPDASP) and *The Queen of Peace: Note About the Spiritual Experience Connected with Medjugorje* (QP) (2024), examining their implications for the Church, the broader context of Marian apparitions, and the historical significance of Medjugorje within Catholicism. The document begins by acknowledging that God's presence and activity in history are manifested through the Holy Spirit, who, proceeding from the heart of the risen Christ, operates within the Church with divine freedom, bestowing valuable gifts that support spiritual growth and fidelity to the Gospel. This action may also be expressed through supernatural occurrences, including apparitions or visions of Christ or the Blessed Virgin (Fernandez 2024, 7).

The DDF affirms the experiences of pilgrims who have visited the site since 1981, emphasizing the conversion, prayer, and deepened devotion to Mary and Jesus that many have reported. This recognition of spiritual fruits is essential, as it validates the genuine experiences of many believers while situating these experiences within the broader framework of Catholic doctrine.

The positive fruits are most evident in the promotion of a healthy practice of a life of faith, in accordance with the tradition of the Church. In the context of Medjugorje, this applies both to those who had been previously distant from the faith as well as to those who had practiced the faith only superficially. The uniqueness of the place lies in the large number of such fruits: abundant conversions, a frequent return to the sacraments (particularly, the Eucharist and Reconciliation), many vocations to priestly, religious, and married life, a deepening of the life of faith, a more intense practice of prayer, many reconciliations between spouses, and the renewal of marriage and family life. (QP 3)

The DDF states that the fruitfulness of these experiences cannot be denied, as many faithful testify to a renewed faith. This acknowledgment reflects the Church's pastoral concern and commitment to the spiritual well-being of its members. A central theme of the document NPDASP is the call for discernment. The DDF urges the faithful to approach the experiences



in Medjugorje with both openness and caution. This duality is essential, as the document recognizes the complexities inherent in the Medjugorje phenomenon, which has persisted over several decades. By advocating for a discerning attitude, the DDF reinforces the importance of aligning personal experiences with established Church teachings. The call for discernment is particularly relevant in a contemporary context where subjective experiences can challenge objective truth claims. As noted in the document: »When spiritual experiences are accompanied by physical and psychological phenomena that cannot be immediately explained by reason alone, the Church has the delicate responsibility of carefully studying and discerning these occurrences.« (NPDASP 8)

Moreover, the DDF addresses the ongoing investigations into the Medjugorje apparitions, indicating that the Church is committed to a thorough examination of the reported events. This acknowledgment reflects a broader ecclesial commitment to understanding and validating supernatural claims while safeguarding the integrity of the faith. The DDF states that the process of discernment continues, and the Church remains open to the findings of ongoing studies. This careful wording suggests that while the Church does not yet affirm the apparitions' authenticity, it is open to the possibility pending further investigation. Historically, the Church has taken this approach with other claimed apparitions, as seen with the cases of Lourdes and Fatima, which were eventually recognized as worthy of belief after extensive investigation.

Another significant aspect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith's position is its emphasis on the role of local bishops in the discernment process. The DDF underscores the necessity of ecclesial authority in guiding the faithful and ensuring that any claimed revelations do not detract from the Church's established magisterium. The document asserts that the local bishops play a crucial role in the discernment process, providing guidance and ensuring fidelity to the Church's teachings. Likewise, »The Diocesan Bishop is encouraged to *appreciate* the pastoral value of this spiritual proposal, and even to *promote* its spread (I, par. 17)« (Fernandez 2024, 8). This emphasis on ecclesiastical authority is vital, as it reaffirms the hierarchical structure of the Church and the necessity of submission to that authority. The DDF appears to signal that while personal experiences can be transformative, they must always be aligned with the teachings and authority



of the Church, echoing the sentiments expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which states that »the functions of the magisterium are to interpret and safeguard the deposit of faith« (CCC 890). The DDF's statement also serves as a reminder of the potential for division within the Church regarding private revelations. The phenomenon of Medjugorje has garnered both fervent support and strong scepticism among the faithful and theologians alike. The DDF's call for discernment is an attempt to foster unity among believers. By encouraging a reflective and measured approach, the document seeks to mitigate extreme reactions and promote a spirit of dialogue and understanding. The statement emphasizes that the Church seeks to build bridges of understanding among those who hold differing views on the apparitions, reflecting a pastoral desire for unity that is particularly important in a time of polarization.

The Dicastery also warns against the possibility of abuse of events of alleged supernatural origin.

At the same time, in some events of alleged supernatural origin, there are serious critical issues that are detrimental to the faithful; in these situations, the Church must respond with utmost pastoral solicitude. In particular, I am thinking of the use of such phenomena to gain »profit, power, fame, social recognition, or other personal interest« (II, Art. 15, 4°) – even possibly extending to the commission of gravely immoral acts (cf. II, Art.15, 5°) or the use of these phenomena »as a means of or pretext for exerting control over people or carrying out abuses« (II, Art. 16). (Fernandez 2024, 8)

The Dicastery is very clear when it alerts that when considering such events, one should not overlook the possibility of doctrinal errors, an oversimplification of the Gospel message, or the spread of a sectarian mentality. Finally, there is the possibility of believers being misled by an event that is attributed to a divine initiative but is merely the product of someone's imagination, desire for novelty, tendency to fabricate falsehoods (mythomania), or inclination toward lying (Fernandez 2024, 8).

Furthermore, the DDF highlights the importance of an informed faith (good knowledge of the doctrine of the Catholic Church). It encourages



believers to engage with the teachings of the Church, which have developed over centuries and are rooted in Scripture and Tradition. The DDF says that an informed faith fosters a deeper understanding of God's revelation and enables individuals to navigate their spiritual journeys more authentically. The document states:

The positive fruits are most evident in the promotion of a healthy practice of a life of faith, in accordance with the tradition of the Church. In the context of Medjugorje, this applies both to those who had been previously distant from the faith as well as to those who had practiced the faith only superficially. (QP 3)

This call for an informed faith aligns with the Church's broader mission to educate and enlighten its members, ensuring that personal experiences are contextualized within the larger tapestry of Catholic belief. In conclusion, the statement from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding the experiences in Medjugorje encapsulates a careful balance between acknowledging the spiritual impact of the apparitions and exercising caution in their discernment. Ultimately, the document serves also as a pastoral guide for the faithful, encouraging them to navigate their spiritual journeys with both openness to the divine and fidelity to the Church's authority. The DDF's approach emphasizes that while personal experiences of faith are significant, they must be integrated within the context of the Church's rich tradition and teachings, fostering a deeper and more authentic relationship with God.

The spiritual experience surrounding Medjugorje, often emphasized through the messages attributed to the Virgin Mary, highlights the profound importance of prayer in fostering peace and deepening one's faith. The DDF reflects on the significance of these messages and identifies several core themes that underscore the transformative power of prayer in the lives of believers and the broader community.

3 Analysis of Mary's messages from Medjugorje

Speaking about the phenomenon of Medjugorje, it is necessary to emphasize that the identity of Medjugorje is formed by the following characteristics:



the Virgin Mary, the six seers, and the messages transmitted by Mary through the visionaries (seers). By the nature of the matter itself, it is necessary to add the eventual miracles, especially the miraculous healings and the spiritual fruits of the phenomenon of Medjugorje (Rupčić and Nuić 2002, 49). In our discussion, we focus only on the messages, especially the importance of prayer in them and in the awareness that Mary's apparitions and messages have not yet been confirmed by Church authorities. The messages of the Virgin Mary of Medjugorje, which have captivated millions of believers since the first reported apparitions in June 1981, encompass profound spiritual guidance that resonates with the themes of faith, love, peace, and inner conversion of a human being. Over the years, the messages have sparked both devotion and controversy, prompting a deeper examination of their implications within the contemporary religious landscape.

3.1 The primacy of prayer

One of the most consistent themes in the messages of Medjugorje is the emphasis on prayer as an essential foundation of spiritual life (QP 18). The Virgin Mary frequently urges the faithful to pray daily, asserting that through prayer, individuals can open their hearts to God's grace and experience transformative encounters with the divine. In the message of June 25, 2006, she said, »Dear children, thank you for having responded to my call. Pray, pray, pray!« (Archive of Marian Messages – Medjugorje [n.d.]) This call to prayer aligns with traditional Catholic teachings, where prayer is understood as a vital means of communication with God and essential for nurturing one's faith. Mary emphasizes different forms of prayer, including personal meditation, communal prayer, and especially the Rosary. The Rosary is the Church's traditional prayer as a method of inner prayer which leads us into communion with the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Philippe 2013, 108-109). The Rosary is the Church's prayer to remember the mysteries of Jesus Christ. It originated or developed from the prayers of monks and consecrated persons (Slovenian Bishops' Conference 2023). For many Catholics, the Rosary serves as a powerful tool for contemplation and connection with Mary's maternal love. The repetitive nature of this prayer invites believers to reflect on the mysteries of Christ's life and draw closer to God through Mary's intercession.



3.2 Conversion and personal transformation

Another significant message from Mary is her call to conversion. She implores individuals to turn away from sin and toward a more profound commitment to their faith. For instance, she proclaims, »Dear children, today I invite you to conversion. You cannot be a Christian if you do not pray« (Medjugorje Website 2025). This message emphasizes that conversion is not merely a one-time event but an ongoing process that requires self-reflection and a willingness to embrace change. »Conversion seems to be the focus of Mary's message: 'Dear children! Today I call you to conversion. This is the most important message I have given you here.' (25 February 1996)« (QP 15) The concept of conversion is deeply rooted in Christian theology, where it signifies a transformative turning toward God and a rejection of sin. Mary's call invites believers to examine their lives and consider how they can align their actions with their faith. Many followers of Medjugorje report that these messages have inspired them to embark on journeys of personal transformation, leading to renewed faith and greater commitment to their spiritual lives.

3.3 Peace and reconciliation

The theme of peace is central to the messages of Medjugorje, reflecting Mary's identity as the »Queen of Peace«. She frequently speaks on the importance of peace within oneself, in relationships, and in the world at large. In one of her messages, Mary states, »I am the Queen of Peace. I have come to tell you that peace must reign in your hearts« (Medjugorje Website 2025). These words underline peace and resonate powerfully in a world often marked by conflict and division. Mary's messages encourage believers to cultivate inner peace through spiritual practices such as prayer and fasting, which can then be extended to their interactions with others. The call for reconciliation underscores the need for forgiveness and understanding, reflecting the Christian belief in the transformative power of love. In this context, Mary becomes an advocate for dialogue and harmony among individuals, God, and communities, urging followers to work toward resolving conflicts peacefully.



3.4 Fasting and penance

Fasting emerges as a vital component of Mary's messages, often presented as a practice that enhances prayer and fosters spiritual growth. She encourages the faithful to incorporate fasting into their lives as a means of purification and self-discipline. In her words, »Do not give in! [...] I do not want to reproach you further; instead, I want to call you once again to prayer, fasting, and penance (28 January 1987).« (QP 16) This call to fasting can be viewed as a return to traditional spiritual disciplines that have been somewhat overlooked in modern religious practice. Fasting is understood not only as a physical act of abstaining from food but also as a spiritual exercise that invites believers to focus on their relationship with God. It serves as a reminder of the need for humility and dependence on divine grace. Many followers of Medjugorje report experiencing profound spiritual benefits from fasting, including increased clarity, deeper prayer experiences, a tool against sin, and a greater sense of community with fellow believers.

3.5 The mass and Eucharistic adoration

Mary underlines the importance of the sacrament of Eucharist and adoration as the source of spiritual nourishment for believers. She emphasizes the significance of the Mass and encourages the faithful to partake in the Eucharist regularly. In her messages, she states, »The Eucharist is the strength of your life. Adore Him.« (Medjugorje Website 2025) This emphasis on the Eucharist aligns with Catholic doctrine, which teaches that the Eucharist is the true body and blood of Christ, offering believers the opportunity to encounter the divine in a tangible way. The Eucharist is the focal point of the worship of the community, uniting the faithful in a common experience of grace in the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation). By advocating for a deeper appreciation of the Eucharist, Mary invites believers to recognize the profound mystery of Christ's presence and the transformative power of the sacrament in their lives.

The messages of the Virgin Mary of Medjugorje have generated significant theological discourse, particularly concerning their authenticity and implications for Church teachings. The Vatican has approached the



Medjugorje apparitions with caution, conducting investigations into the claims and scrutinizing the messages for alignment with Catholic doctrine. While some local bishops have expressed support for the messages, the Vatican has not officially approved them, leading to division among Catholics (especially among the faithful and clergy). The theological implications of these messages raise questions about the nature of private revelations and their role within the Church. According to Catholic teaching, private revelations do not add to the public revelation of Christ but may serve to deepen the understanding of that revelation. Furthermore, the messages have sparked discussions regarding the role of Marian devotion in contemporary spirituality. While some view the Medjugorje apparitions as an authentic manifestation of Mary's presence, others express concern about the potential for sensationalism or misinterpretation. The tension between personal experience and ecclesiastical authority creates an environment in which believers must navigate their faith delicately. The messages of the Virgin Mary of Medjugorje provide a rich exploration of fundamental Christian themes, including prayer, conversion, peace, fasting, and the Eucharist. They invite believers to deepen their faith and engage in a transformative journey toward God. While the authenticity of these messages remains a topic of debate within the Church, their impact on the lives of countless individuals is undeniable. The Medjugorje phenomenon challenges believers to reflect on their spiritual journeys and consider how they can embody the messages of love, peace, and reconciliation in a world that yearns for healing. Ultimately, the messages serve as a reminder of Mary's maternal care and her desire for humanity to embrace a life rooted in faith and love.

4 The meaning of prayer in the messages of the Virgin Mary of Medjugorje

To better understand why Mary emphasizes the importance of prayer so much, we need to explain what prayer actually is and what its goal and purposes are. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines Catholic



prayer as a living relationship with God⁵, as a gift of God (CCC 2559–2561), as a covenant (CCC 2562–2564), as communion (CCC 2565). God is the one who first seeks humanity, calls them into existence through creation, and invites them to a mysterious encounter in prayer (CCC 2566–2567). Prayer is the drama of the covenant between God and humanity. God tirelessly calls every person to a spiritual encounter in prayer. »This step of love on the part of the faithful God is always the first step in prayer; humanity's step is always a response. When God reveals himself, he reveals himself to humanity, and prayer becomes a mutual calling, a drama of commitment. In words and deeds, this drama touches the heart. It is revealed throughout the history of salvation.« (CCC 2567)

Prayer, as seen in the context of Mary's messages from Medjugorje, is first understood as a conversation and as a relationship with the living God (Pevce Rozman 2025, 12). God invites believers to enter an interpersonal relationship with him. When a person enters an interpersonal relationship, they are transformed, and it is to this »conversion« that Mary invites in her messages. Furthermore, prayer is understood as the »means« by which the relationship with God is kept alive; the aliveness of the relationship implies a more or less constant effort to communicate, which includes conversation as dialogue, reflection, presence in the vicinity, meditation, silence, listening, observing and recognizing the signs of God's nearness and presence through people, through events and experiences, through nature, in fact, in the whole of Creation. In this context, prayer is simply a connection or a conversation with God. A conversation that does not exclude silence, distance, doubt, abandonment, absence, and sometimes overflowing joy and overflowing love that has the power to transform hearts. Prayer is not, in fact, easy to define, for, as the wisdom of the Church Fathers on prayer sums it up, »great is the mystery of prayer« (Kocijančič 1993, 7).

Prayer plays a key role in Mary's messages, but it goes beyond the boundaries of personal spiritual practice and is intertwined with the religious

5 In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, prayer is defined as a relationship with the living God: »Great is the mystery of the faith! The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles' Creed (Part One) and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy (Part Two), so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father (Part Three). This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer.« (CCC 2558)



life of the community. The emphasis on the importance of prayer is often perceived in the context of deepening the spiritual connection between the individual and God, which is reflected in the messages through the call to a daily prayer life. The messages from Medjugorje recommend various forms of prayer, including the Rosary, meditative practices, and devotions, which are in line with the basic teachings of the Catholic Church and awaken a desire for inner peace and spiritual growth.

4.1 Prayer as communication with God

At the heart of the Medjugorje messages is the notion of prayer as a profound communication with God. Mary emphasizes that prayer is not merely a ritual but an intimate dialogue with the divine. This understanding is echoed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which states, »Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God« (CCC 2559). This definition highlights the relational aspect of prayer, which invites believers to express their innermost thoughts and feelings. Mary's messages often encourage individuals to engage in prayer during times of distress and uncertainty. For example, she states, »Pray, pray, pray! Pray for those who do not know the love of God« (Medjugorje Message, April 25, 1988 [Archive of Our Lady Messages (n.d.)]). This call to prayer reflects the belief that through prayer, individuals can find solace, guidance, and strength, reinforcing the idea that prayer serves as a lifeline to God in challenging times. Mary's invitations to prayer are often accompanied by an invitation to fast:

If you are in distress or in need, come to me. If you do not have the strength to fast on bread and water, you can give up other things. Besides food, it would be good to give up television because after watching television programs, you are distracted and cannot pray. You could also give up alcohol, cigarettes, and other pleasures. You yourselves know what you must do (8 December 1981). (QP 19)

4.2 Prayer as a pathway to peace

In the messages, Mary often identifies herself as the »Queen of Peace,« inviting individuals to seek a deeper understanding of peace that transcends mere absence of conflict. This peace is multifaceted, encompassing



spiritual, familial, and social dimensions. As stated in the document *The Queen of Peace*, »This peace is achieved primarily through prayer, but it is also spread through missionary efforts« (QP 6). Through prayer, individuals can cultivate a profound sense of inner tranquility that allows them to become instruments of peace in their families and communities. The Virgin Mary said in one of her apparitions, »I call upon you all to pray responsibly for peace. Pray, dear children, for peace to reign in the world, for peace to reign in the hearts of men and in the hearts of my children. Therefore, be my bearers of peace in this restless world. Be my living sign: a sign of peace (5 August 2013).« (QP 6) The call for personal and collective prayer for peace has special meaning because the war in the former Yugoslavia (1991) began almost exactly ten years after the first apparition of Our Lady in Medjugorje.

4.3 The role of prayer in personal conversion

The transformative power of prayer is another recurring theme in the Medjugorje messages. Mary calls her followers to return to prayer as a means of purification and spiritual renewal. She often encourages believers to seek conversion, stating, »Convert, convert, convert« (Medjugorje Website 2025). This emphasis on transformation aligns with the biblical understanding of repentance and renewal, as expressed in Romans: »Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.« (Romans 12:2) Through consistent prayer, believers are invited to develop virtues such as love, patience, and forgiveness, essential for their spiritual journeys. This transformative aspect is echoed in the writings of many saints, including St. Teresa of Avila: »In the prayer of quiet, the soul is so united to God that it is not aware of itself or of anything else; it is a loving union in which the soul is so completely absorbed that it is as if it were in a state of ecstasy, and the soul's love is so great that words are no longer necessary to express it.« (Saint Teresa of Ávila 1958, 290–291) Many testimonies from pilgrims to Medjugorje reveal that prayer plays a crucial role in personal transformation. As individuals engage in daily prayer practices – such as the Rosary, Eucharistic adoration, and confession – they often report significant changes in their lives. The document notes, »For many people, life changed after they accepted the spirituality of Medjugorje (messages, prayer, fasting, adoration, Holy Mass, confession, etc.) in their daily lives, leading them to pursue a call to the priesthood



or religious life« (QP 5). These personal transformations frequently lead to a greater willingness to serve others, embodying the peace and love that prayer nurtures (Platovnjak and Svetelj 2025, 132–139).

4.4 Community and collective prayer

The community aspect of prayer is another crucial element emphasized in the messages. The parish of Medjugorje has become a beacon of spiritual activity, where collective prayer is a vital part of the community's life. Millions of people flock to this special place from virtually all over the world, seeking solace, encouragement, and meaning in life through personal or communal prayer. The document *Queen of Peace* describes the parish's vibrant spiritual environment: »In that parish, we can observe the daily recitation of various parts of the Rosary, the celebration of the Holy Mass... adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and numerous confessions.« (QP 4) Events such as Youth Festivals and annual retreats not only draw individuals closer to God but also strengthen communal bonds. In this shared spiritual experience, participants find encouragement and support from one another, reinforcing the notion that prayer is most powerful when shared. The Virgin Mary frequently calls for groups to gather and pray together, emphasizing the importance of fellowship and shared faith. For instance, she states, »When you pray together, you are stronger« (Medjugorje Message, December 25, 1991 [Archive of Our Lady Messages (n.d.)]). This communal aspect reinforces the idea that faith is not merely a personal endeavor but a collective journey. The importance of community in prayer is supported by Scripture, particularly in Matthew: »For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.« (Matthew 18:20) This verse underscores the belief that communal prayer fosters a sense of belonging and support among believers, strengthening the unity of the Church.

4.5 The fruits of prayer: vocations and service

The transformative power of prayer extends beyond individual experiences to the broader community. The messages from Medjugorje have inspired many to discover their vocations, whether in priesthood, religious life, or lay ministry. The document states, »Many people have discovered their vocation to the priesthood or consecrated life in the context of the



‘Medjugorje phenomenon’« (QP 5). Pilgrims often return home with a renewed sense of purpose, ready to engage in charitable works and support those in need. The emergence of numerous prayer groups and charitable initiatives worldwide, inspired by the spirituality of Medjugorje, attests to the far-reaching impact of prayer. According to the document, the messages from Medjugorje serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of prayer in our lives. Through prayer, individuals can experience a profound sense of peace, undergo personal transformation, foster community, and respond to the call of service. As the document concludes, »In the midst of this phenomenon, the Holy Spirit is carrying out many beautiful and positive things« (QP 5). As we embrace the call to prayer, we join in a collective effort to spread peace and love in a world often marked by division and strife. The journey of faith, illuminated by these messages, invites us to trust in God and seek His presence through the gift of prayer.

In this journey, prayer is fundamental. The exhortation to pray is both constant and insistent in the messages: »I call on you once again to decide for prayer because, with prayer, you will be able to experience conversion. Each of you will become, in simplicity, similar to a child who is open to the Father's love (25 July 1996). [...] I call on you to fill your day with short, ardent prayers. When you pray, your heart is open, and God loves you with a special love and gives you special graces. Therefore, make good use of this time of grace and dedicate it to God as never before (25 July 2005).« (QP 18)

4.6 Intercession and divine will

In the Medjugorje messages, prayer is portrayed as a means of intercession. Mary invites her followers to pray not only for their own intentions but also for the needs of others, the Church, and the world. This call to intercessory prayer reflects a belief in the interconnectedness of humanity and the importance of selflessness. As St. Paul writes: »I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.« (1 Timothy 2:1-2) Additionally, Mary's messages suggest that through prayer, believers can align themselves more closely with God's will. She emphasizes the need for discernment and openness to divine guidance,



encouraging her followers to seek understanding and fulfilment of their purpose.

Dear children! Also, today I call you to pray for peace. Pray with the heart, little children, and do not lose hope because God loves His creatures. He desires to save you, one by one, through my coming here. I call you to the way of holiness. Pray, and in prayer you are open to God's will; in this way, in everything you do, you realize God's plan in you and through you. Thank you for having responded to my call (March 25, 2003). (Medjugorje Website 2025)

4.7 Prayer as resistance to evil

Another significant theme in Mary's messages is the role of prayer as a defence against evil. She warns of the spiritual battles individuals face and emphasizes that prayer is a powerful weapon against negativity and division. For instance, she states, »The Devil is trying to conquer us. Do not permit him. Keep the faith, fast and pray. I will be with you at every step (November 16, 1981).« (Medjugorje Website 2025) This perspective instils a sense of urgency and responsibility among believers to engage in prayer as a means to combat spiritual darkness. This understanding is supported by Ephesians, which urges believers to »[p]ut on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes« (Ephesians 6:11-12). The call to prayer as a form of resistance underscores the belief that spiritual warfare is an integral part of the Christian life, emphasizing the necessity of prayer for protection and strength.

4.8 Cultivating a prayer life

The Virgin Mary through the seers encourages the faithful to cultivate a consistent prayer life, suggesting that regularity and discipline in prayer can lead to deeper spiritual insights and experiences. She advises, »I desire each one of you to dedicate more time to God. Satan is strong and wants to destroy and deceive you in many ways. Therefore, dear children, pray every day that your life will be good for yourselves and for all those you meet (September 25, 1990).« (Medjugorje Website 2025) This practical guidance aims to make prayer accessible and integral to the daily lives of believers. Incorporating prayer into daily routines fosters a sense



of mindfulness and spiritual awareness. The practice of daily prayer aligns with the biblical exhortation in 1 Thessalonians: »Pray without ceasing.« (1 Thessalonians 5:17) This encouragement to maintain an ongoing conversation with God reflects the understanding that prayer is not confined to specific moments but should permeate every aspect of life.

The messages of the Virgin Mary in Medjugorje present prayer as a multifaceted practice that is essential for spiritual development, community building, and resistance against evil. By urging believers to embrace prayer in various forms, Mary invites them to deepen their relationship with God, transform their lives, and engage actively with the world around them. This emphasis on prayer not only reinforces traditional Christian values but also resonates with the contemporary need for spiritual connection and community amidst the challenges of modern life. The ongoing relevance of these messages highlights the enduring power of prayer as a fundamental aspect of the Christian faith, encouraging believers to recognize prayer as a transformative and communal practice that strengthens their relationship with God and one another. Through prayer, the faithful are called to embody the love and grace of God in their lives, fostering a deeper understanding of their faith and its implications for the world.

Conclusion

The messages of Our Lady of Medjugorje conveyed in this context have been met with both fervent devotion and cautious scepticism. Proponents argue that the messages emphasize the importance of prayer as a transformative power in personal and communal faith life, urging believers to deepen their relationship with God through devotion to Mary, while also advocating for peace, reconciliation, and intercessory prayer. These themes resonate deeply within the Catholic tradition, highlighting the significant role of prayer as a means of sanctification and spiritual growth. Conversely, the Dicastery's stance reflects a nuanced understanding of the nature of private revelations, which, while not essential to the faith, can still possess value when aligned with Church teachings. The ongoing investigation into the events in Medjugorje illustrates the delicate balance between pastoral care and doctrinal integrity. The Dicastery has approached the reported apparitions with a desire for discernment, considering



the need for a thorough evaluation of the experiences shared by believers. In this light, the emphasis on prayer, as articulated in the messages from Medjugorje, is seen not as an endorsement of the apparitions but rather as an encouragement toward genuine spiritual practices that foster a deeper faith and community engagement. It should be noted that the apparitions of Mary and the transmission of her messages are not yet complete, which means that the Holy See cannot yet make a definitive statement on these apparitions and messages.

As the Church continues to navigate the complexities surrounding Medjugorje, the significance of prayer as a foundational element of the Christian life remains unchallenged. The messages from Medjugorje serve as a reminder of the Church's enduring call to seek holiness through prayerful reflection and participation in the sacraments. By reaffirming these core tenets, the Church not only upholds its commitment to guide the faithful but also acknowledges the diverse pathways through which believers may encounter God's grace. Ultimately, the dialogue between personal experiences of faith and the authoritative guidance of the Church illustrates the dynamic interplay that defines the spiritual journey of the faithful, particularly in contexts marked by contested visions and apparitions. In this context, it is crucial to emphasize that the messages conveyed through these profound spiritual experiences often highlight the fundamental need for prayer as a powerful means of personal and collective transformation. Prayer, understood in a broad and contemplative sense, serves as a sacred bridge that connects the individual soul with the transcendent divine, enabling spiritual reevaluation and a profound focusing of attention on the eternal spiritual values that bring profound peace, stability, and purpose into people's lives (Platovnjak and Svetelj 2022, 634–635).

The visionary experiences encountered by the faithful pilgrims often convey powerful messages of hope, unconditional love, and a catalysing call for personal and societal renewal. Such transformative messages encourage individuals to engage in regular, heartfelt prayer, meditation, and contemplative practices, which have become pivotal points in the spiritual development and awakening of many. This is not merely a personal spiritual experience; many insightful observers report a profound collective effect that the Medjugorje phenomenon has on the wider community. The profound spiritual breakthroughs that arise from the individual's connection



with the divine have, even before being shared with others who have had similar transcendent experiences, further strengthened the tangible sense of belonging and created a sacred space for shared sincerity, empathy, and solidarity (Platovnjak and Svetelj 2024, 170–182).

The entire Medjugorje phenomenon also enables a remarkably positive and inspiring shift in the collective perception of peace – not only at the level of individual inner peace and harmony, but also in a broader, more holistic social context. The Medjugorje experiences encourage and empower grassroots efforts for peace that stem directly from personal transformations, as the attainment of inner peace and profound personal change within the individual directly and positively impact the quality of relationships in society. When individuals find enduring inner peace, this leads to more harmonious, compassionate, and mutually supportive interpersonal relationships, which can effectively reduce conflicts and foster a collective, community-wide pursuit of peace, unity, and the common good. By consistently encouraging prayer, contemplation, and the sincere opening of souls to deep spiritual renewal, Medjugorje serves as a vital and benevolent catalyst, offering a timely and eternally relevant response to the complex challenges of the present era. Therefore, it is to be expected that theologians and others will continue to study the Medjugorje phenomenon and analyse Our Lady's messages. It is likewise a task for further inquiry – as the article itself encourages – to undertake a focused treatment and analysis of the concepts of private revelation in Catholic theology and the discernment of the authenticity of apparitions within this context, which constitutes both a scientific endeavour and a complex theological and pastoral challenge.

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No new data were created or analysed in support of this research.
Za podporo tej raziskavi niso bili ustvarjeni ali analizirani nobeni novi podatki.



Abbreviations

CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> 1997
DDF	Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith
NPDASP	Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith 2024a [<i>Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena</i>]
QP	Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith 2024b [<i>The Queen of Peace: Note About the Spiritual Experience Connected with Medjugorje</i>]

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