

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

June 25, 2009 at 11:56am

Medjugorje apparitions mark 28th anniversary

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NCR Today



Thousands of pilgrims from around the world are headed to Medjugorje as the town

marks the 28th anniversary of what is said to be the Virgin Mary's first appearance there. Some years back, in the late 1980s, I traveled to Medjugorje to check it out for myself. I spent some time with the young men and women who were claiming to see Mary and was with three of the youngsters at the very time they said Mary was appearing. We were on a small loft in the rear of the local church.

They knelt down when she appeared. It might not surprise anyone to learn I quickly followed suit. While I did not personally see Mary (That shouldn't surprise anyone either.), I wanted to be respectful.

More truthfully, I remember thinking to myself at the time, "My, if Mary really is here, realing is appearing, I don't want to take a chance." And I certainly didn't want to do anything to offend her.

I wondered. Would Mary understand my journalistic skepticism? Would she know I was *required* to be skeptical? I kept wondering what the youngsters were thinking - or seeing. Was this trickery? Self delusion? Or, conceivably, the real thing?

If you were to have seen me, you'd probably think I had become visibly pious during those moments,

maybe more than you might have expected. Maybe I was covering my tracks. Could I cover my skepticism? Was it well placed? With appropriate piety, could I fool Mary ... just in case she was three feet in front of me? No, she'd see right through me. Right?

The apparition lasted about five minutes and during that time two of those claiming to see her talked to Mary occasionally. Maybe they were explaining who I was or what I was doing there. Would Mary have to be told? Did she know about NCR? Did she care? A lot of thoughts going through my head. Of course, I didn't understand Croatian so I can't tell you what they were saying.

I've never known Mary not to be serious -- at least from what I read. She usually is delivering messages of one kind or another. And these are often said to be warnings.

Here's how Mary is described by those at Medjugorje who say they have seen her, regularly or irregularly.

She has blue eyes, is around 130 pounds, and is between 18 and 20 years old. Her lips are pink and thin and her face and forehead white. When she smiles, they say, she has dimples on her cheeks. She is dressed in a simple blue-grey dress with a white veil. She wears no jewelery, apart from a crown made of stars on her head.

Need I remind you that the Vatican has never officially ruled these apparitions to be authentic. Indeed, despite the hundreds of thousands who have flocked to Medjugorje, substantial skepticism has taken hold within the Catholic episcopal hierarchy.

Pope John Paul II, who had a deep appreciation for Mary, never ventured across the Adriatic to visit Medjugorje. At least I never heard that he did.

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