

**SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF
CHRIST
MEDJUGORJE, 15 - VI - 2006**

Ratko Perić, bishop

Dear brothers and sisters,

Dear candidates for Confirmation, I am happy to be with you and your families here today for the conferring of the sacrament of Confirmation. Through the required instruction and the sacrament of Reconciliation you have prepared yourselves to faithfully receive the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge and counsel, are concerned with our minds, with the enlightening of our use of reason; while the gifts of fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord, regard our hearts and the strengthening of our free will. These are not fleeting gifts that you will joyfully receive today as candidates for Confirmation and which will be gone tomorrow. This is the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Once sealed you always remain sealed with the Holy Spirit! However, each of these gifts requires your efforts in conformity with your growth in knowledge and witnessing through a life of faith.

I. - Gifts of the Spirit. Hence, be not afraid young friends, to be **wise** in God's eyes, even if it means appearing foolish in the eyes of people. God's "foolishness" is wiser and more **prudent** than the wisest of people.

Do not fear to be **strong** in God before people, even though the world may consider you cowards and backward. Christ the Lord, God's Truth, teaches us: "Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven (Mt 10:32).

Do not be ashamed to be **fearful of the Lord and pious**, full of awe towards God and his holiness, even though this passing world may ridicule and mock you. The world has no fear of, nor sense of shame in transgressing God's commandments. We on the other hand, are believers and worshipers of God, who adore him in spirit and truth. The world counsels on how you can most easily lose yourself in fleeting passions, but the Holy Spirit **counsels** us on how we can most easily reach eternal life. Whoever then takes truthful counsel, is lead by the Spirit on the right path.

The world tempts you and invites you to behave according to its perverted fantasies and passions, yet the Holy Spirit lets you learn and discern by acquiring unending **knowledge** that leads to the Father's house. Today, do not allow yourself to just receive the seal on your forehead and then continue living as if you do not possess the Holy Spirit within you.

II. - Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. The Church celebrates today the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. We Catholics believe that the historical event of Jesus' Last Supper, described in each of the four Gospels, is one of the greatest mysteries of our holy faith. During that evening, the Lord Jesus, while he ate with his disciples, took bread, blessed it, broke the bread and gave it to them saying: "Take; this is my body". He then took the cup, gave thanks and gave it to them. And all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Mk 14:22-23).

Eucharistic sacrifice. The mystery of the Lord's Supper is first of all a sign of Jesus' sacrifice through his death on the cross and resurrection to new life, which he offers us as a divine gift. Why is this at the very core of Christian faith? Because this is what God desired and accomplished! If the all-wise God decided on this path of salvation, then his entire divine intervention is nothing else than wisdom and goodness. We become **wise and prudent** when we accept this sacrifice as an expression of God's grace and love. The sacrifice can only be understood and accepted in the context of love. Sacrifice is the most convincing demonstration and evidence of love. God is Love. Therefore, the Eucharistic sacrifice is an expression of God's love towards us. In a specific historical moment on Calvary, Jesus offered the sacrifice of himself to his Father, as a testimony of his complete Love of God and of humanity. We through our own efforts of **piety** of heart and mind, participate in the liturgical celebrations and daily offerings of ourselves to God.

Eucharistic banquet. This mystery of Jesus' love is not only his divine sacrifice for us weak people, but it is also our spiritual food for our journey towards eternal life. There is no health, nor life without bread. Mankind does not know all the ingredients of bread and wine, yet he still eats and drinks of them with joy and moderation. Are we even aware of the process of how wheat and grapevines grow? How does a seed sprout or a grape mature? How is the seed transformed into bread, or the grapes into wine? Do we know how bread and wine are then transformed in our living organisms? Despite our lack of knowledge, this does not lessen the strength of bread nor wine to sustain our lives in good health through their nourishment.

Something similar occurs with our spiritual health. We cannot understand what the Holy Eucharist is, but we accept it with faith and partake of it with the greatest respect of heart for our eternal salvation. Jesus said to us: "Whoever eats of this bread will live forever" (Jn 6:51). While our earthly bread and wine serve for this life, so too Jesus' Body and Blood serve for spiritual and eternal life. None of us are worthy of this for we are all sinners: in our thoughts, words and actions, as well as through our omissions in doing the good that we should do. Whoever unworthily eats and drinks of this Sacrament, that is, while in sin, in disorder, in obstinacy, that person is guilty of sinning against the Body and Blood. However, those who confess and repent for their sins, God grants them forgiveness and feeds them with the Body and Blood of Christ. Let us give thanks to God who first of all sets us free from our sins in the sacrament of Confession and who nourishes us with his Eucharistic Body. The Mass is therefore the center of our personal and communal lives. This is the will of our heavenly Father, established by the Son of God, which happens through the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe in the words of Christ, for his words "are spirit and life" (Jn 6:63).

In memory of him. The Lord Jesus left us a great divine truth and mystery: "This is my Body". "This is my Blood". These words were spoken by Christ himself. From the very beginning, the Church has always literally understood this holy text and message from Jesus' Last Supper. Not even a single letter has ever been changed, nor have they been understood according to other symbolic meanings in order to make them more acceptable to people. Jesus said these words once and forever! He also commanded that this be done in memory of him! In memory of God's great works of salvation. We acknowledge and believe in what has been communicated to us! We celebrate the liturgy in the same fashion as we have received it. Let us give thanks to God for the immeasurable gift of Jesus' Most Holy Body and Blood. This act and mystery contain the past: "Christ has died"; the present of Christ's resurrection: "Christ has risen"; and

the future: “Christ will come again”, when he shall come and prepare a place for us so that we may be where he is (Jn 14:3).

III. - “Apparitions”. *First of all*, the fact that a person makes a humble Confession and receives Holy Communion in this parish church and that this person feels spiritually well due to God's forgiveness, each and every believer will recognize and give due praise to God for this, who is the source of all graces. At the same time, this person will take care not to proceed from this state of grace towards an illogical and inconsistent conclusion: “I made a Confession. I feel good and now I am converted. Therefore the Madonna is appearing in Medjugorje!” This type of believer and penitent is nonetheless obliged to go to confession, receive the other sacraments, observe the Commandments, whether any private apparitions are recognized or not. *Secondly*, I would be an irresponsible minister of the Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ, if today I were not to publicly advise, from this place and on this occasion as well, to all those interested throughout the world, that in this local Church of Mostar-Duvno, there exists something similar to a schism. A number of priests that have been expelled from the Franciscan OFM Order by the Generalate of the Order, due to their disobedience to the Holy Father, for years now have been forcefully keeping a few parish churches and rectories along with church inventory. They have not only been illegally active in these parishes, but they have also administered the sacraments profanely, while others invalidly, such as Confession and Confirmation, or they have assisted at invalid marriages. This type of anti-ecclesial behaviour is shocking to all of us. At the same time, this scandal of sacrilegiously administering the sacraments, especially of the Most Holy Body of Christ, must shock all the faithful as well who invalidly confess their sins to these priests and participate in sacrilegious liturgies. We pray to the Lord that this scandal and schism be uprooted as soon as possible from our midst.

Thirdly, I am truly grateful to the Holy Father the Pope, to John Paul II of blessed memory and to the reigning Benedict XVI, who have always respected the judgements of the bishops of Mostar-Duvno, of the previous as well as the current bishop, regarding the so-called “apparitions” and “messages” of Medjugorje, all the while recognizing the Holy Father's right to give a final decision on these events. The judgements of the bishops, after all the canonical investigations made thus far, can be summarized in these following points:

1 - Medjugorje is a catholic parish in which liturgical and pastoral activities are carried out, just as in all the other parishes of this diocese of Mostar-Duvno. No-one except the official Church authorities is then authorized to attribute the formal title of “shrine” to this place.

2 - On the basis of Church investigations of the events of Medjugorje, it cannot be determined that these events involve supernatural apparitions or revelations. This means that till now the Church has not accepted, neither as supernatural nor as Marian, any of the apparitions.

3 - Priests who canonically administer this parish of Medjugorje or those who come as visitors, are not authorised to express their private views contrary to the official position of the Church on the so-called “apparitions” and “messages”, during celebrations of the sacraments, neither during other common acts of piety, nor in the Catholic media.

4 - The Catholic faithful are not only free from any obligation to believe in the authenticity of the “apparitions” but they must also know that church pilgrimages are not allowed, whether official or private, individual or group, or from other parishes, if

they presuppose the authenticity of the “apparitions” or if by undertaking them attempt to certify these “apparitions”.

5 - As the local Bishop, I maintain that regarding the events of Medjugorje, on the basis of the investigations and experience gained thus far, throughout these last 25 years, the Church has not confirmed a single “apparition” as authentically being the Madonna. The fact that during these 25 years there has been talk of tens of thousands of “apparitions” does not contribute any authenticity to these events, which according to the words of our current Pope, who I encountered during an audience on 24 February this year, commented that at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith they always questioned how all these “apparitions” could be considered authentic for the Catholic faithful. They particularly do not seem to be authentic when it is known beforehand that these so-called “apparitions” will occur:

To one of the “seers” on the 18th of March every year, but along with this she will also receive an “apparition” on the 2nd of each month, with “messages” which you can expect, according to the established procedures;

The second will receive an apparition on every day of the year, and if this were not enough, an added special “apparition” on the 25th of each month along with a type of press release, which once again you can foresee and expect;

The third will receive an “apparition” on the 25th of December, on Christmas day, along with a message similar to the ones already mentioned;

The fourth will receive an “apparition” on the 8th of September every year along with a specific message;

The remaining two will receive the same, every day along with “messages” that can be anticipated since they are variations on the same theme. This fact and the flood of so-called apparitions, messages, secrets and signs, do not strengthen the faith, but rather further convince us that in all of this there is nothing neither authentic nor established as truthful.

Therefore I responsibly call upon those who claim themselves to be “seers”, as well as those persons behind the “messages”, to demonstrate ecclesiastical obedience and to cease with these public manifestations and messages in this parish. In this fashion they shall show their necessary adherence to the Church, by neither placing private “apparitions” nor private sayings before the official position of the Church. Our faith is a serious and responsible matter. The Church is also a serious and responsible institution!

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the greatest possessor of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, who through the same Holy Spirit conceived in her body and gave birth to the Second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, who gives us his Most Holy Body and Blood for eternal life, may He - who is the Way, the Truth and the Life - help us so that the truth of the Blessed Virgin, his Mother and Mother of the Church, Seat of Wisdom and Mirror of Justice, may shine forth in brightness in this parish and diocese, without even a hint of incredibility, yet all in accord with the constant teachings and practice of the Church. Amen.