

COLUMNISTS

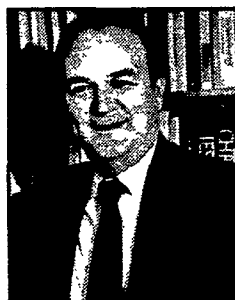
Will 'Queen of Peace' ever speak on Kosovo?

Have you ever wondered why the Blessed Mother, who is reported to have made many appearances in recent years in what used to be greater Yugoslavia, has never bothered to take time out to visit someone in that troubled land who could use a good spiritual "whupping," as they say in the South?

Some background: Mary's first reported apparition in that region was in June 1981, to six young people in Medjugorje, a small village in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The alleged visionaries claimed to have seen, heard and touched the Blessed Mother and to have received from her 10 secret messages related to coming world events, with the admonition that we should work for peace through greater faith, prayer, penance, fasting and personal conversion.

The reports of these Marian apparitions have drawn thousands of pilgrims to Medjugorje. Many have claimed that they saw the sun spinning in the sky, and that their rosaries had turned to gold, or at least to a golden color.

The local bishop of Mostar-Duvno appointed a commission to investigate. In September 1984, it concluded that the apparitions were matters of "collective hallucination" that had been exploited



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

by local Franciscan priests at odds with the bishop over control of their parish.

In January 1987, the bishops of Yugoslavia, voting 19-1, concluded that "on the basis of research conducted so far, one cannot affirm that supernatural apparitions are involved." A few months earlier, however, Pope John Paul II had approved travel to Medjugorje for devotional purposes. The whole matter continues under the Vatican's investigation.

The Catholic Church has a sensible policy toward apparitions. Only those truly convinced that Mary (or another saint or the Lord himself) has appeared to them and has given them special instructions or commands are bound by those instructions. Such commands fall within the category of private revelation. In Catholic teaching, we are bound on-

ly by the public revelation that one finds in sacred Scripture and tradition, and by official church interpretation of both.

No Catholic, therefore, is required to believe that the Blessed Mother actually appeared at Lourdes or Fatima, much less in Medjugorje itself. A Catholic who chooses not to believe in such apparitions is no less faithful and devout.

One of the reasons why many Catholics either disbelieve in Marian apparitions or simply ignore them is that the Mary who is alleged to have appeared usually seems so indifferent to what is actually going on in the world around her. Medjugorje is a case in point.

If Mary were really making appearances there, why is it that she is reported to have said nothing about the situation in Kosovo and, before that, in Bosnia? The Balkans (of which Yugoslavia is a crucial part) have provided the spark that ignited two world wars in this century, and there is a danger now of yet another wider conflagration.

NATO bombs have been dropping for weeks on key military targets in Yugoslavia, with occasional and always tragic collateral damage to civilian lives and property. NATO claims that the bombing was in response to the monstrous ethnic cleansing of Kosovar Albanians car-

ried out on instructions from Belgrade, involving mass deportations, the separation of families, the looting and burning of homes, beatings, rape and murder.

This is not to say that all the fault is on one side. But even if there were blame to be assigned to more than the leaders in Belgrade, there would still be no moral justification whatever for the behavior of the Yugoslav military and paramilitary forces in Kosovo, nor for the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia a few years ago.

But for some inexplicable reason the Blessed Mother, whom many Medjugorje devotees style as the Queen of Peace, has shown no apparent concern about these Holocaust-like outrages. At least not according to the alleged visionaries.

Wouldn't one have expected her at least to have paid a house call at the presidential palace of Slobodan Milosevic literally to scare the hell out of him? What is going on in Kosovo under his authority and at his direction is, after all, a lot more serious than women wearing short skirts to church or priests appearing in public without their Roman collars.

We await the appearance of Our Lady of Belgrade.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Jesus stands behind us in victory

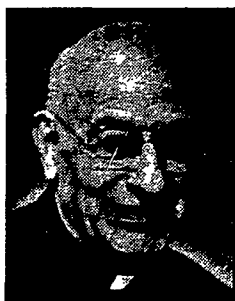
Sixth Sunday of Easter: (R3) John 14:15-21. (R1) Acts 8:5-8, 14-17. (R2) 1 Peter 3:15-18.

"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." When seeking comfort at home to whom do children generally turn — to mom or to dad? In a survey of boys, 23 percent said they would go to their fathers. The remaining 77 percent said they would confide in their mothers. A lot of dads do a splendid job comforting their children, but in the majority of cases, when children seek comfort, we think of mom. God is a father, but like a mother, he comforts his children.

Jesus promised that he would comfort his own by his presence. "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you, he said. "I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to be with you always — the spirit of truth." No greater gift can we give those we love than the gift of presence. It is hard to love someone you never see.

Suzy Parker in *USA Today* noted that according to some studies, 75 percent of us live within minutes of at least one of our parents. Some 23 percent of us are within hours of a parent. Only 2 percent need to drive for days to see a parent.

She asks, "Why do so many of us see



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

our parents so seldom? Nothing says 'I love you' like being there for our parents."

Children need parents who are there for them — if possible, both mother and father. Aging parents need children who come to see them. Jesus didn't leave us orphans, he sent the Holy Spirit.

A second way Jesus comforted his disciples was with his understanding and love. We need not only someone who is there, but someone who understands and forgives, like Jesus.

Time and time again, Jesus resisted the temptation to lecture, to scold, to harass. Rather, he asked caring questions, and he allowed the person an opportunity to discover his or her own solutions.

Jesus not only sends his Spirit to be

with us, Jesus gives us the power to conquer our problems. Because he is with us, we can endure, we can conquer.

A parent who is there is wonderful. A parent who understands is even better. But best of all is the parent who prepares us for life and gives us tools to succeed.

In 1942, hysteria over Japanese involvement in World War II led to the relocation of some 110,000 Japanese Americans to internment camps. In one of these, Carole Doi, a third-generation Japanese-American was born. Years later, Carole married a man who had also spent time in the camps. When she delivered their baby daughter, they noticed that the child's feet turned inward. Carole was determined to do what it would take for her daughter walk normally.

For four years Carole provided the child with corrective shoes. Her daughter was walking normally by age 6, but Carole wasn't satisfied. "I wanted her to do things in which she would use her legs," she said. The girl chose skating.

She was a natural on the ice. Before long, she'd refuse to leave the ice until she got a particular move right. Soon Carole was rising at 4 a.m. to get her daughter to the rink. After 15 years of lessons young Kristi Yamaguchi represented her

country in the Olympics. And in 1992 she received the gold medal. Kristi stood on that victory platform because of a mother who stood behind her and helped her conquer.

"I will not leave you," Jesus said. That's the promise we need most of all. He will not only comfort us with his presence, his understanding, but he will help us to conquer problems like a mother helping her daughter to walk with straight feet.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, May 10

Acts 16:11-15; John 15:26-16:4

Tuesday, May 11

Acts 16:22-34; John 16:5-11

Wednesday, May 12

Acts 17:15, 22-18:1; John 16:12-15

Thursday, May 13

Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23;

Matthew 28:16-20

Friday, May 14

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26; John 15:9-17

Saturday, May 15

Acts 18:23-28; John 16:23-28

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