

## Mountains and Crosses

I stood in line waiting to check in at the airport for a trip to Medugorje. While in line, I started a conversation with a young married couple. It was their first pilgrimage to Medugorje. Then, I noticed the “bump” in the young woman’s tummy. She began to massage it ever so gently. “Well, it seems that there are more than two of you travelling,” I commented. The young woman just smiled and said, “We’re four months.”

The husband chimed in, “We had a miscarriage a while back and we are keeping our fingers crossed for this one.”

Then, he went on to drop a bombshell saying, “You might remember hearing or reading about a young four year old boy who was tragically killed in a farm accident a year ago, last July. Well, that was our son. We had gone home to my wife’s home parish for a wedding and while we were there, our four year old son was killed when he was run over by the family tractor. My brother-in-law was driving the tractor. He was devastated by the accident as well. “

“How do you deal with something so tragic?” I asked. “Counselling helped us. That, with family and friends, we are still trying to understand it and deal with it.”

I asked if they had read about a young eight year old girl who died a few weeks earlier in a similar farm accident. This time, the driver of the tractor was the little girl’s father.

“Yes, we read about the little girl. In fact, we wrote a letter to the family. We told them about our son and that we would be thinking about them and praying for them.”

I asked them what prompted them to go on pilgrimage to Medugorje. “Something kept telling us that we needed to go,” suggested the wife. “It wasn’t someone we knew like family or friends. It was a kind of inner voice that kept reminding us we should go. We’re not sure why. So here we are. We’ll have to wait and see,” said the husband.

The young couple embraced the pilgrimage program, participating in common meals, daily Masses in English, spending time in Adoration chapel, going to confession, climbing mountains, visiting cemeteries, saying rosaries, visiting with visionaries as well as purchasing some mementoes to take home with them.

Most days, I bumped into them in the church courtyard or on a sidewalk. We stopped and I got an update on how their trip was going. A few days later, the husband told me that he had climbed one of the mountains three times already, performing the Stations of the Cross as he went. Another time, the wife told me that on this pilgrimage, they were amazed to meet so many people who had lost young children or young adults so tragically. Even though these tragedies happened many years ago, the families were still trying to cope with their losses. It gave the young couple hope,

Another encounter with the couple on the street, led them to showing me a precious little four year old boy with a devilish look on his face. This was followed by, “We didn’t want his headstone to be just like everyone else’s. So, we did a lot of research and came up with this one.” She showed me the tombstone. “We also got a rosary beads here with his name inscribed on it to hang on it.”

We invited them to join us for our small group Mass in a local convent on the outskirts of the town. On the way there, in the back of the taxi, she turned to me and asked, “Do you know that prayer/poem called ‘Footprints in the sand,?’” I nodded an affirmation. Without hesitation, she launched into it like a little child who, finally, had memorized her favourite poem. When she was finished, she said, “That’s us. He is the one who is carrying us now and the one set of footprints is his.”

Arriving back at the same airport the next evening, we parted amid hugs and promises. “We will be back next year,” she assured us, “and, this time, we are bringing our eight year old little girl.” Smiling, she looked at her pregnant tummy and said, “We will have to wait and see what happens with this one.”

As I rode home, I thought about how a chance encounter at the airport had unfolded into a journey through tragedy and questioning; through mountains of crosses and resulting energized faith; through redemptive suffering and hope filled callings.

I know that this young couple now have a better idea what and why that “something” is that kept telling them to make that trip to Medugorje.