

## Prayer as the life environment

31st October, 2006. Prayer as the life environment My name is Father Svetozar. I am one of the local priests here and I am a pilgrim. I am a pilgrim together with all other pilgrims. I must admit I am a little bit of a "privileged pilgrim" because of this opportunity to be with you today and to share some of my thoughts. I am not here as a professor to teach you. I offer these thoughts for your reflection and gentle consideration. I pretend nothing. I do want to emphasize that this is a word spoken by a pilgrim to a pilgrim. The main word in pilgrimage, beside the Word of God, is the word that your heart hears. That is the word that you feel in your heart and that you let your heart be touched by. This that you have in your heart will decide your destiny. That word counts because it will shape your life. We even don't realize how we shape the lives of so many, regardless of what we feel about ourselves; confident, not confident; able, not able; positive or not positive. From our position in life we always influence others. We often say: "But what can I say? Who listens to me? I am not important. I have nothing to contribute." That becomes your message and that will shape the lives of others. So we cannot be insignificant, we can't be not involved, we cannot be standing on the side of the road, playing no role. Our role is always a major one. We could give a positive, substantial, decisive contribution for building a positive life or we will just shape others by inflicting our own fears and doubts upon them. With our existence we always influence others. We cannot pretend not to influence others, not to be involved. Whatever words you say they will shape others. Confidence will radiate confidence. The one who lacks confidence will powerfully spread insecurity. The message of Our Lady is the one that would like to shape you and me. She would like to change us for the better. She would like to give us a real common sense that will build the world in her wonderful, positive way. Her message is prayer. Prayer is her central message. She is calling her people to pray. Prayer is an existential question of man. As long as we are alive we have that important question: "how to pray?" Prayer is always far more than we can ever imagine. We really need to be very careful what do we see in prayer. Most often we understand prayer very wrongly. So our prayer has become an area of major misunderstanding with the world and also with God. We fail to understand the meaning and the impact of prayer in our life. Unfortunately prayer has become something that the world "teaches" us to suppress and control. Imagine that. Prayer that the world teaches is prayer without Sacraments. Basically we pray and believe in God in the way of the secular world. Wolves are teaching shepherds how to shepherd. That is the most devastating, absurd reality of our faith. Then our prayer becomes useless and meaningless. We pray and our prayer misses the point and makes no difference. Our prayer becomes ineffective, superficial and stands very much on the side of life. The culture of the world today is being shaped by someone else. So on one side we have these people who are believers, who say they believe in God and they say they pray. On the other side we have forces in the secular world that are shaping the individuals and the communities including those who think of themselves as believers. This way people who think of themselves as Christians become insignificant. This way Christians are not influencing the world. They shaped by the world become a part of the world and unable to shape the world. They are exposed to the process of secularization. This happens to the Christians because their prayer is ineffective, misses the point, does not touch nor change the life. So what do we need to do? Our Lady would like to teach us to pray in a meaningful way, where the whole life will be affected by prayer. She is teaching us the prayer that will change and shape life. So how do we pray in the way of Our Lady? I just would like to share these thoughts for your gentle consideration. Now for a few years I have been working with alcoholics, drug addicts, and women in trouble. Also as you could imagine priests meet people in spiritual counseling, in confession and in other life situations. So after awhile you get some impressions, experiences and understandings of things of life. Now with the program of Mother's Village we have men who are in the community of Merciful Father, organized by Father Slavko Barbaric who died in 2000. This community is like a monastery with people there who live a holy way of life. Some times those who do not know will say: "Those people in the community, poor man. They ended up in there. They are tragic, poor, sad men." Sometimes being in the community is seen as more tragic than being in the street as a real drug addict. Community is seen as greater tragedy than the drug addiction itself. People in the community are struggling day and night. Every day they are thinking shall they stay or go, struggling with their own problems, with problems of their family, their failures and fears and problems in general. The whole life becomes a struggle but they crawl. You see them tired, but they crawl for life and they are surviving. Maybe after a year of suffering and surviving in the community a little good, better, person starts resurfacing. They become a little bit more confident. But people still say, 'they'. For "AA" people also say "they". For people in the community of men and women, we always say people become marked, marked forever and we keep saying "they". Now I ask who is healthy, they or us? I believe we who are healthy are the sick ones. We, in the normal society in our cities and villages have established a way of life that is sick and they are healthy. This is the absurdity in our culture: The sick ways have become the healthy ways; the healthy ways have become the sick ways. What is happening in the society? In the society strange things are happening. The notion of freedom is something that deceives us. Notion of our freedom leads us to think that freedom can be only found in the secular society where the selfish man in me is allowed to do selfish things. Rarely freedom is associated with deep prayer and life of sacrifice. Secular freedom has become the norm, inheritance and the greatest accomplishment. So man is free not to go to church, free to watch any television program, free to drink, free to have any relationships even out of marriage, free to say anything and go anywhere. Secular freedom is possible when man is able to do things according to his most selfish desires and his norms. This has become a sacred right that belongs to each man. The secular world gives this to man and teaches him to live that way. The thought is that those in faith communities are deprived of true freedom. Where do we see prayer fit into our life? How do we pray? Prayer needs to become sacramental to free us from the bondage of the world. We need to accept the mentality and the culture where we admit that we are addicts, all of us. This is not in some imaginary way. In reality we are all addicts to the world. The society or ordinary life is making us addicts to the things of the world. So we'd better begin to establish community, a family, a neighborhood, the church, the society where we will allow protection from dangers that are coming upon us. Like little

children we need to be deprived of some dangerous things. There is a beast, a dog in me. That is dangerous for me and for others. So if there is no community that will shape and discipline me, that will precisely establish my path and my ways, I will be lost. Without the community that will establish my definition, my limits, my borders, my norms, I will be lost and I will be dangerous for others and I will hurt others and myself. Without the meaningful impact from others, from brothers and sisters around us we will lose it. Mutually we need to help each other in establishing this common sense of faith. Without that we will be all lost. So what does that mean to pray? To pray means to allow our life to come into the Holy Christian environment. To pray means to be in Christian environment, to live in it, to function in it, decide in it and be shaped and guided by it. Our effort to accept discipline of obedience is a struggle for life. If we don't allow this common sense obedience to run our life and the life in the family we will be lost, being young and old. We are all in the same danger and we are all for it. There are things in the life of each and everyone that need to be decided minute by minute, situations by situations. We at Mother's Village have a community Merciful Father for drug rehab. Some of these people will stay for six months in the community and then decide to leave. He says: "Father, I have firmly decided that I will not touch drugs again" and he means that. Or I have seen people with alcohol problems saying: "I have decided that I will never touch alcohol again". They mean it. For three months, for six months, for a year, he will stay clean. But he will not allow the mechanism to watch over him, which is the major problem, why he is broken. We always want to keep a bit of freedom of movement. Somewhere at the end of it all we make sure that our "freedom" is intact. This person, this addict will stay in the community but not long enough. Or this man will decide against alcohol but he will not go to AA meetings. One will say: "I will be a believer in God but I don't have to go to church." Being in church on Sunday is a line, a survival, return to your senses. The church helps us to stay with the reality of God. The Church is saving addicts, you and me, from self-destruction. So when I say in this general sense of the word, we are addicts it means that we are addicts addicted to the ways of the world. We are being shaped by these things of the world and even we don't notice it. Things of the world are there and they shape our life, our mentality and we think it has to be that way. Then all this time we think we are free. So is a dog free, who knows? Is he free more with the chain, or without the chain, with the fence or without the fence? It depends what we want. So still we remain with that question, "how do we pray?" Prayer often is something we pretend to do. Prayer becomes our own self-deception. We keep looking good, but we know that we are lying. We know that prayer does not really shape our lives. We know that prayer is not something that will shape every area of my life according to the measures of Christ. And that is a common problem and a terminal illness of our culture of prayer. That is a problem present throughout the history. That is the problem that Peter and Jesus had about going to Jerusalem. I keep saying the same thing. Mentioning Peter I want to explain what is going on with us. Peter thought going to Jerusalem with Jesus wasn't a life issue. But soon he learned for Jesus going to Jerusalem was the central moment of his mission. He believed in Christ, he believed every word and he totally accepted Him. But at this critical moment with all his being he asked: "Can I not go to Jerusalem, can we just do not that? Can we skip that? You see I believe in you but can we just skip that?" That was that problem that was decisive for Jesus and meant so big frustration for Peter and that is our mentality that leads us to failure. Peter was an addict to the world. The logic of the world kept him one way and Jesus wanted him to go the other way. That is a struggle that is always within us. It is not an issue so much do we believe in God. Peter believed in God. The problem is: What do you do with your faith? The problem was something more practical. Was he going the way of Jesus or the way of man in him? That is always a drama of our own. So Jesus was very clear to him, "Stay away from me Satan". This was the most real, the most specific, the most literal that Jesus was able to be. These clear words of Jesus explained the will of Jesus and the mentality of Peter and his understanding of the moment. These words of Jesus do address so many situations in your life and in my life today. Today I believe that Our Lady is not so much asking us to comprehend things. That is another trick. We are trying to comprehend things and we will never do that. God is always greater. We will never be able to comprehend the glory and greatness of God's commandments and His plan. Simply God can't be put into our head. When we try to do that we try to control and comprehend mass and all the Sacraments and His will in our lives. We will fail trying to control and understand. That is why it is not comprehension, it is faith. Faith is the trust that the blind man will have for the one who leads him. The little child will trust the mother, that she will lead this child the right way. The one who trusts is able to grow. The child will not understand anything of what is going on. That is the attitude that the person in faith has to have. This is the attitude of a child trusting the mother and the father. One needs not to understand, because simply it cannot fit into the frame of our understanding. God is larger than our understanding. The will of God is always larger than any comprehension that we might have about it. The will of God is always greater. Don't try to put God into your limited mind. He is always greater. To pray means to trust His leadership. This addictive mind, mentality and culture will lead man to do it "my way". So we become addicts to things we even don't realize. We become addicts to our will or the lack of it. We need to make a confession. There were times I was struggling should I have television in my room or not. Then I realized that if I was to put television there I would have a problem. There is no will left in me not to put it on. I would put it on because it was there. It commands me because it is there. It comes to be in charge of your life. It is there so you have to put it on. So after all I did not bring it into my room. Internet? I come home and I say: "Let me see the news in the internet." Then in one minute thirty minutes are gone. Everyday thirty minutes and then you see that happening again and again. So I just disconnected it. I removed the wiring that connects the computer to the wall. If I need it for some serious reason I know that it is there. So it is not there any longer and I find life easier. I don't have to worry should I see the news and I do not have to struggle with problems that I do not have to have. These questions, dilemmas that we all face are similar for all. For your children these are even more difficult questions. That is why I am speaking to you. -----

- When we remove these elements in the secularized environment that create our addictions we create an environment where this addictive mind of ours will be given more gentle, less aggressive pressure. Then we will be able to live in a little bit less aggressive environment and keep this environment gentle. Of course you will have to think about this everyday because there will be new questions, new doubts. When we create this prayerful environment in this practical

way we create prayer, we establish prayer. Then we allow the environment where God will have more space. But it is not without struggle, it is not without efforts to discipline our addictive mind every day because addicts never come to the end of their addiction. Â The other day this mother of a family in central Bosnia called for her son.Â He is an addict in gambling. Everything that he could lay his hands on he gambled.Â She asked: "What we can do?" I said, "Let us keep it simple. Let the young man come to the community of Merciful Father." Then he did come and he is with us. Immediately life becomes easy. With the gentle environment the problem is gone. Once he entered the community where no one will push gambling on him he is well. There is no more a problem. Why does not the whole world become a community? Â What does the community do? It provides the environment where no one will push gambling on him. Â The world needs to be the community that will provide the environment where no one will push gambling or drugs, alcohol on this man. Then there will be an opportunity to pray.Â He will be able to work and to learn and to speak to a human being. In his gambling he spoke to machines. He asked mercy from machines: "When shall you give me break?" Â He was asking mercy from these machines. He was going deeper and deeper into personal tragedy. Prayer happens when we choose the gentle place where we will live a gentle life.Â Prayer keeps an addict out of his addiction and offers to him a holy, normal environment.Â Prayer makes life livable, make it possible, and make it human, according to human size and need. For us and for our children the secular culture is building the world that is overwhelming and crushing. When we surround ourselves with all these temptations and problems we are not really capable of making holy decisions. Â In this secularized aggressive world we are not capable of being holy. When all this around us comes into motion, when it all becomes vulnerable we are crushed and gone. So in prayer we are creating an environment that will not be aggressive, that will respect your freedom, your space and be gentle to your weaknesses and will not play against your weaknesses and use them for profit, pleasure and gains. Human weaknesses are being touched in drugs, in gambling, through internet. Â To rule over us all human weaknesses are thoroughly studied. Human self-protection system, self defenses are attacked and broken. Man loses self control and becomes controlled. Prayer is a contrary process.Â Prayer is creating the environment that is gentle, that is of God. Prayer will provide a space which will enable us to make ourselves available to communicate with the Holy Spirit. Â There is a "disadvantage" of the Holy Spirit in all of this? You see the drugs do not want your freedom to choose it. Gambling does not want your freedom to choose it. Alcohol does not need your freedom to choose drink Addictions in general do not require freedom for a person to choose them. The Spirit of God will never come uninvited. The world needs no invitation. God wants you and me to decide for Him, to decide consciously and with a purpose. In freedom, where other options are available, God wants you to choose Him. That is why this pilgrimage is the most powerful prayer that there could be. Actually in pilgrimage you pray. In pilgrimage you leave all other options, you remove your body, your soul, your mind from the environment of the world, wherever you live at, and you expose yourself to the ways of God, to the Holy Spirit. You invite the Holy Spirit to come to you. You allow the Holy Spirit to come to you. In pilgrimage we speak with God. Remember Moses<sup>4</sup>. The content of pilgrimage is a hundred per cent prayer. Drug addicts choose the community for rehab freely. Â They decide to be there and they decide not to be the prisoner of addiction. They decide to suffer and to stand for freedom in the Spirit of God. Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem. He was not pushed into it. Â He decided for it. That is prayer. Jesus goes to Jerusalem willing to face the price - the cross. He goes there in obedience to the Spirit of God. Â So how do we pray? There was a notion in the Early Christianity, that describes prayer wonderfully. Christ is the big fish in the sea and you come to Him to be with Him in the water of the sea. You are immersed into the water of God. Your going there is pilgrimage. Â Pilgrimage is the journey towards Eucharist. Eucharist is the central Sacrament of all the Sacraments. Eucharist is where we allow our body, mind, soul and life to be for the glory of God, to glorify God.Â You simply stand there, just like Christ, crucified. You stand there for the glory of God. In this pilgrimage you allow your body to be transformed into the body of Christ. So pilgrimage prayer always goes towards Eucharist. In pilgrimage your body becomes the body of Christ, the body of the church. In pilgrimage we accept all the Sacraments and they become the norms of our life. With them we are building the culture of God in this world. Of course all the Sacraments are part of that process. So whenever you have a problem in life, you have a Sacrament to answer to, to tell you precisely what to do. Sacraments precisely describe to you what to do. That is why today there is a real persecution against Sacraments. Everyone in the culture of secularized world is telling you to believe in God but you don't need Sacraments. Sacraments are being persecuted in this world, laughed at and destroyed. The world is doing everything possible to remove Sacraments. The whole culture is saying to you, "You need God but you don't need Sacraments. You alone have your ways to God." This is playing on our addictive mind. In Sacraments we actually walk out of our addiction into the freedom of the children of God. Especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation needs to come to life for our renewal in faith. Â So in this pilgrimage we are on the journey towards the Sacraments, towards the Eucharist, to become the body of Christ. Thank you so much. Â This is the way we in Medjugorje see things. Â What is to be done? I feel that the spiritual wellbeing of the young is in jeopardy. Â You are absolutely right. Wolves are overwhelming. The entertainment culture, this industry of entertainment is establishing itself as the norm and the way to be. Â The media becomes the sacrament that wants to shape life and decide the way to be. Nothing is given to God to say. Anything that is left of Christian culture is being dismantled. We know Christians cannot live without Sacraments. But which sacrament shall we choose the sacrament of the church or the sacrament of the world? The sacrament of the secular culture is being imposed as the norm upon us.Â This shapes our life day and night. This is done in the family and outside of the family in all areas of our life. This secular culture is the wolf. The lamb has no right and no chance unless it goes into the protected area. The faith will say that the lamb can live. Â We lose sight of what communities need to do. We keep our prayer very superficial and on the surface. We don't allow the prayer to shape our lives in meaningful ways. We too often misplace prayer in our lives. We pray, we believe, and we even go to church but still allow the secular mentality to penetrate deeply and control all the areas of our lives. In relationships, in the areas of moral issues, in education, in business ethics, in the way we dress we allow too much of that secularized element to shape our lives. Â We really need to consciously decide what shall we do and what shall we not. Â When I am in spiritual discussion with

young people I always ask practical questions. Like "Where do you have television in your life space? Where do you have internet? How much time do you spend for it?" What role did you give to these? These are the things that will shape our life. They are decisive for our well being. You would be surprised what people say. Two hours on computer and television is wonderful. You are talking about five, ten hours everyday. Experts say one hour and a half of such entertainment or more becomes the permanent damage that will never be repaired. If we spend one hour and a half or more daily in TV entertainment, even watching pious things it will cause permanent damage because it creates a hole where we are not creative in life. You are relating to a machine and it disables you to be creative especially in relationships. Then you lose a human touch. The machine becomes the "person" you relate to. We think that we are communicating with a human being on the other side but we are actually communicating with plus and minus, with electrical impulses. When you are with the machine then there is nothing but you totally alone, alone in the misery of this process of electrical activity. Brain experts speak about wiring in the brain that is messed up through addictions. So we need to be careful and create the environment of God in our lives. That is meaningful, positive, creative relationships. The message of Our Lady is prayer. In prayer we create the environment of God's Spirit in our lives. It is really a heroic task. In it we will not be glorious; we will not be victorious every day. We will just crawl through it, surviving day by day. To do that means to be a saint. We will do that crawling and surviving. That will make you a saint. It is like a marathon runner. He comes to the end of the race exhausted but victorious. A Question, in your opinion should we keep all things in moderation? For example if we go on the internet that should be in moderation? If we have a drink could that be in moderation? What is your argument? We need to be professional. We need to have an internet. But where do we have it? We need to have in a house where we have the work to do. Internet is for our life and our work. We need not to ignore it. We need to place it where it belongs. Our life and physical environment needs to be organized. If you are a professional with internet, you have to spend eight hours on it on a professional level. You need to do your work. If you are a doctor you need to be very much professional, you need to be in touch. We need not to be naïve, ignorant or stupid. We need to take every advantage of these tools that are given to us, even in our entertainment. This is for our professional knowledge and our communication. That needs to be in the Spirit of God, in truth. We need to be enriched by it but not crushed by it. There is no moderation in this. This is a dangerous word I am afraid. Like for drug addicts there is no moderation. For them in drugs there is no moderation. Simply you don't touch that any longer in your life. People who are drinking? We are talking about dangerous people, addicts. We have a priest who is alcoholic and he is not even allowed to have a drink from the chalice in the Holy Mass because he is an addict. Moderation is dangerous for him. So it takes great, great wisdom. It takes wisdom and courage. A Question, you mentioned about permanent damage when we watch television? When we watch television or waste too much time with internet we experience permanent damage in two ways. First of all the loss of two hours is a permanent loss. We will never be able to make up for this loss. Once when you are sixty (or fifty five like me) then you get a greater sense of responsibility for time. Then you realize you will never be able to do some of the things you were hoping to do. Loss of two hours is the same as the loss of one year. One comes from the other. Those two hours are gone forever. There is the other reason why this is a permanent damage. We are meant to be creative. When we are creative our whole person is engaged. In this selfish state of life mental laziness is overwhelming. We let the machine to do it all for us. Someone who created the TV program was creative. The one who is watching is only a consumer and is not allowed to contribute, to create. In gardening you create flowers and trees. When you are knitting, when you are cooking, when you are painting, when you are cleaning, when you are learning, when you are studying, when you are reading you are creative and you create. The loss of two hours is immense, not to mention years. I have seen students with this loss. Students suffer a lot. When I speak with students I always ask: "How do you do in school?" When they say that they have a problem often I discover that they watch too much television. I ask: "How many hours do you watch television?" Answer: "Four hours a day." student at the university!? Why? This is not for the desire to find out something on television. This is an escape, running away from the effort to be creative in studying. So this television becomes an escape. This is a great loss and permanent damage. You see people losing one, two, three years of their university studies. One is lost simply because of being controlled by the environment.

1 Alcoholics Anonymous a self-help organization founded in the US in 1935 for people fighting alcoholism. The organization, based on a system of local groups, has now spread around the world. In regularly organized meetings, mostly once a week, people help each other to stay away from alcohol. 2 Fr. Slavko Barbaric organized The Merciful Father community to help drug-addicts. 3 Mt 16, v22-23. 4 Exodus 34 v4-29, Moses went up Mount Sinai in the early morning as Yahweh had ordered. And Yahweh descended in a cloud and stood with him there and pronounced the name of Yahweh. Yahweh then said to Moses, "Put these words in writing." online casinoonline casino