

Was it a Miracle Sign at this years Memorial Day Cemetery Mass, 2008?

The common definition of *miracle* is an event that is an exception to the laws of nature. In the Bible, however, what we call miracles are described more loosely as “signs and wonders” or acts of power that are attributed to God.

New Testament scholar John P. Meier observes that a miracle has three basic components:

- (1) It must be an unusual event that can be perceived by others.
- (2) It has no natural explanation.

(3) It appears to be the result of an act of God. John Paul Meier is a Biblical scholar and Catholic priest. He attended St. Joseph's Seminary and College (B.A., 1964), Gregorian University [Rome] (S.T.L., 1968), and the Biblical Institute [Rome] (S.S.D., 1976).

Meier is the author of nine books and more than 60 scholarly articles. He was editor of *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* and president of the Catholic Biblical Association. Meier is Professor of New Testament in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. Before coming to Notre Dame, he was Professor at The Catholic University of America.

Ok, now we have the definition of a miracle. Was there evidence of miracle happening in the cemetery in the small town of Central City on Memorial Day? You read, and you decide.

I received a phone call around lunchtime on Memorial Day. It was Father Joe Maurizio, Pastor of Our Lady, Queen of Angels Parish. There was a lot of excitement in his voice as he reiterated the events of his morning. The following is Father Joe's rendition of the morning's happenings.

‘Was it a Miracle Sign at this year's Memorial Day Cemetery Mass? Those who were there say it was! Approximately 50 people were in attendance, including Brian Warchola, the parish seminarian and a devotee to the memory of Father Ignatius Pilz.

Father Joe Maurizio said:

“I was preaching in front of the Father Pilz Memorial Cross (in the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cemetery), which was newly erected by SHA (Slavic Heritage Association for the Preservation of Church and Culture). In my Memorial Day homily (26 May 2008), I was preaching on the passage about the young man who said he kept all God's commands and what did he need to do to receive everlasting life? Jesus told him to sell what he has and give it to the poor; then come and follow him. A sign if we are going to follow Jesus, we can't let the things of this world; possessions, power, and greed of anything, rule over our lives. The young man went away sad, because he could not let go of the things of this world.

I said to the people gathered there for the Mass that yesterday I went to Gallitzin for Monsignor Przybocki's 50th anniversary of the Priesthood. Before the service (25 May 2008), I went to the grave of Father Ignatius Pilz (former pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Central City & Founder of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cemetery) in Saint Mary's Cemetery and got on my knees and prayed for the intercession of Father Ignatius Pilz to help me with the problems in our Church cemeteries. We have been having problems with a lot of people and situations, and I felt I was being persecuted for wanting to take control of the cemeteries for the Church.

I stated in my homily that praying for the intercession of the saints to God to help us with our needs was an old tradition, just as we pray to Mary for her intercession. I said it was just like a parent coming to the priest and begging him to help them because a child or loved one died and did not go to or support the church, but the family wanted a Christian service and a burial in the Catholic cemetery. The faithful person was interceding for their loved ones because they were close to the church. The saints in heaven hear our pleas because we try to stay faithful to God.

I continued on, speaking about some of the problems of the Church that I was experiencing regarding the cemeteries and how I was attempting to take control again for the faithful of our Church.

At this point, some of those in attendance began to cry out, telling me to look up into the sky. The day was cloudy, and in one spot the clouds separated into a circle and the blue sky was in the background and a large white cross appeared in the hole in the clouds. The two lines that made up the cross appeared to be something like two jet streams that had crossed in opposite directions to form a cross. As I kept looking, I felt that it was not two jet streams, but rolling clouds the came together to form the cross-like sight.

Some of the faithful began to say that it was a miracle, God sending a sign because of Father Pilz's intercession with God. Father Pilz heard Father Joe's prayer request. Was it a miracle sign from God?

I took one look at the cross in the sky behind me; and I believed that this was a sign from God. I could not look back again for some time because it was so overwhelming. When I did finally look back, the cross was gone, swallowed up by the clouds. It left a lasting impression on my mind. I believe I have seen that cross someplace before but I can't remember where.

Should people continue to pray for Father Ignatius Pilz for his intercession? "

"For those who have faith, no explanation is necessary. For those who do not have faith, no explanation is possible."

Father Joe wanted to somehow put all this down in writing and e-mailed me the above story. He also sent me a list of some of the people who attended the Mass. I spoke with several of them to get their take on the "Miracle on Cemetery Hill."

Dianna Halkovich buried her father recently, and this was the first Memorial Day she would be experiencing without him. She had been missing him, and was not finding the peace within herself that she desired. Dianna was standing with her husband, Ron (President of the Parish Pastoral Council), and next to Patty Bonus at the Memorial Day Cemetery Mass. Patty nudged her arm and told Dianna to look at the sky. There she saw the "cross" between the clouds. By the time Mass was over, Dianna was feeling the peace that she was craving. She said she didn't know for sure exactly what the cross was made of, all she knew is that she finally felt at peace with her father's passing. When asked if she believed in signs from the afterlife, she said that yes, she did believe.

Jenny Novak saw the cross, and the background was blue. She said that it stayed there and that she didn't think that there were tracks like from jets. Jenny said that to the left were white clouds, and behind the cloud, there was some light. It was stunning to her. She said that she really got a chill just looking at it. It was something you just can't understand what it is, and that you never see anything like that. She was so awed by the vision, she did not really have time to think about why it was there and what exactly it meant. She was enjoying this vision. It stayed in her mind all day.

Sophie Sankovitch – "You looked up and there it was. You could hear people whispering. I looked at it and said, 'God be with us!' and enjoyed it. And toward the end of the Mass it went away. I don't know, I just felt different to see something like that. All I know is that it just happened, and it was clearly seen. Toward the end of the Mass it just disappeared. I don't feel it was a miracle, just something that happened. It just made you feel good and made the day and everything else good."

Patty Bonus. "Father started speaking about being in Gallitzen, and then he said that now we will bless the cross. I happened to glance up as he was blessing the cross. It was a perfect cross, with jet streams nearby, but the cross was not formed from the jet streams. I said to person next to me to look up. When everyone had seen it, I told Ken Skone to take picture of it as it was fading away. I kept staring at it, wondering what it was. Is it a sign that we need peace in our parish, I asked myself. It was very beautiful to look at. I feel it was a sign from God. And it happened at the time Father was blessing the new cross. I wish I had a camera to take picture of it. I think it was made of clouds, not jet streams. It was not there very long."

Shirley Roman. "It really shook Father up. Everything was real peaceful. We were all sitting there and there was no wind, and it was very calm. Someone said, 'Look up in the sky!'" The sky was so blue. There was this cross of clouds, not jet streams. I said to Sophie that I could watch it all day long. It stayed in one spot and did not move. Then I brought my attention back to the Mass. When I looked again, it was gone. I don't believe it was a miracle, but maybe a sign. It could have been an intercession from Fr. Pilz saying thank you, or a sign of something else. The pictures I saw did not come out well. When Jane took a picture, it came out as clouds, and there were no clouds there. I do not know what to make of it. It was definitely something extraordinary, and I don't know how much to believe. It was a real sight to see."

Ken and Jane Skone. "The one picture that is just of the cross and turned out well. Actually, it looks like a big "X". I zoomed back, and saw more of the clouds and the entire cross. I did not see the big blue sky and the light. It is definitely a picture of a cross. I showed it to some of my co-workers and did not tell them what it was. They recognized it as being a cross. I felt it was a unique sighting. Father has the Holy Water in his hand, and you can see the cross behind him."

So, there you have it. Was this the Miracle on Cemetery Hill on Memorial Day in Central City? I personally wasn't there to see it, but that doesn't necessarily mean that I don't believe it happened. What I do believe is that everyone will have his or her own interpretation of the same thing conducive to his or her personal feelings. The bottom line is how you feel about it. If a sighting of something out of the ordinary makes you feel good, believe the best about it. Your faith will steer you in the right direction.

- Marie Roman