



# PEACE MARATHON 2008

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## 17. May 2008.

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## Marco Piagentini

Written by Robert Rukavina

Srijeda, 23 Travanj 2008



The first thing one might ask is ... why this story?

Well, first of all, because I will never forget the day I first heard about the Peace Marathon, to be more exact - 19th May 2007.

That day a friend of mine called me from Medjugorje saying, 'Hey, it seems that there is a marathon taking place here...!' and I said, 'What?!..A marathon? ... You must be wrong... maybe it's some short race through Medjugorje, but a marathon...?..Impossible.... But he insisted, 'No, no... it's really a marathon...!' and I knew then that it must be true.

And it was indeed true - the first Peace Marathon was being held with me not knowing anything about it. If somebody had informed me about it just one day before it began I would have travelled all night to get to Medjugorje and run this marathon.

But then again, someone may also ask – what could be so special about a marathon with around 100 runners in Medjugorje? And to explain that, I have to tell you a very personal story, a story which is rooted in the very foundations of my life.

I really can say that I have always loved running, but I basically started seriously doing it when I was 11 years old. But there were some serious obstacles to my desire to become a professional runner – I had severe orthopaedic difficulties related to my feet, tendons and hips. I clearly remember the time when I was 17 years old and started serious track and field training with a coach: within 2 weeks a severe pain developed in my right leg and persisted for the next 12 years. It seemed that there really was no way that I could become a professional runner and it was equally inconceivable that I would be able to run even just recreationally since this painful condition continued and seemed to be past cure.

No matter how many doctors I consulted, it seemed that I was just wasting my time as well as my money – there seemed that there was nothing I could do to recover from this pain. Doctors contradicted each other on different treatment methods I was advised to get, so I received all kinds of different therapies, but since there was no improvement in my condition the agony just continued. But nevertheless, against all the odds I held firmly to my dream, and in spite of all the difficulties I kept saying to myself: 'I don't know how, but one day I am going to run a marathon.' And I set my mind on nothing less than to run the New York Marathon by the year 2000.

To cut a long story short, from 1990 on, year by year, I tried to run in races organized in my town, but I was never successful since I wasn't able to train for more than two or three weeks without an unbearable pain developing in my right leg. And since there is no way that you can properly prepare yourself for marathon running without previously training for at least 6 months, it seemed that I would never be able to make my dream come true.

So, finally, the year 2000 came. Unfortunately, it wasn't only that I didn't run the Y2K Marathon, but it was right in that year

that my doctor strongly advised me to avoid in the future any kind of activity that includes jumping (and running, of course, is nothing else than a series of continuous little jumps). He also sternly warned me that in the future I was going to have great difficulties even with walking.

So, what did I do in the end? Well, I simply turned to God.

The year 2000 was a special period in my life when I got quite a few "hints from above" pointing me towards God. So, it was December 2000 when I decided to take Advent very seriously and really get myself into the preparations for Christmas. I decided to observe the fast as strictly as possible that year. I was regularly taking my Sunday meal along with having breakfast every day, but that was all I ate aside from several small snacks I had a couple of times when I felt unbearably hungry.

Did I manage to keep the fast to the very end? Well, unfortunately I broke it just 3 hours before the "target time" which I had set on Midnight Mass. I went to visit some close relatives with my parents and there was simply no way to avoid eating. But I went further in my failure and only made this worse by having further "unruly feasts" on the very day of Christmas, then on St. Stephen's day and on St. John's day as well. Afterwards I felt so angry that I said to myself: "No matter how hard my leg hurts, I am going to run tonight".

So, at exactly 11:00 pm on 27th December 2000, I went running. But instead of soon experiencing the same old pain, something amazing happened. I can clearly remember the part of the street where I looked at my leg and started to wonder: "Unbelievable.....where's the pain....?" At that time I wasn't that much aware of or thinking about the power of Mary, but later I found out that that place was near a crossroad with a statue of Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I remember how I simply couldn't believe that I didn't feel any pain. I was thinking: "Will someone tell me exactly what is happening here?!.....". But there was no sign of pain whatsoever.

How did this happen? Well, there are several possible explanations, but proper fasting definitely does human body a lot of good. The health benefits of fasting have been scientifically proved through many studies. The other thing that came with it is that I also lost some weight which also helped to prevent the pain. And finally, I don't want to introduce any supernatural elements here, but I definitely wouldn't be able to keep such a strict fast without prayer.

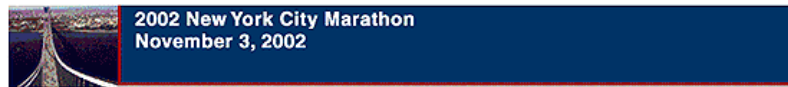
And what was the first thing that I did after this wonderful surprise? Well, of course, I decided that I will try some serious

...and what was the morning that did it? The answer surprised me. From of course, I realized that I had to come back to running again. Day after day I was gradually increasing my training volume slowly trying to run faster and faster. Along with that I kept praying and fasting on Fridays. Amazingly enough, until December 2001 I completed my first 10km race having made a time of approximately 45 minutes.

I want to make clear that until that time I hadn't known that much about Medjugorje, Mary, the Holy Rosary or anything like that. I regularly went to the Adoration Chapel every day and attended the Mass daily as well, but my faith was still quite formal. For example, I used to joke back then about those old ladies saying the Rosary every day before the Mass calling it "the machine-gunned rosary". I would think to myself: "I will praise the Lord in anyway that He wants me to, but He better not expect me to do it like this". I couldn't understand what was it that made those ladies say their prayers so mechanically, in a way that seemed to me to be entirely without heart, even cold. And mind you, they did it DAILY. Then it happened that a girl who, I didn't know that well, invited me to go to Medjugorje for the celebration of New Year's Eve. I heard about this famous shrine back in 1997 and from then on I always had this peculiar feeling about it, so in spite of the fact that I had already made many arrangements that December I felt that I definitely had to go there. So I went. Since I travelled there with one Rosary prayer group I promised them on our way back to Italy that as a token of my gratitude I would come to attend one of their meetings, but since I didn't feel comfortable with this way of praying I immediately warned them not to expect me to seriously join the group. Well, surprisingly enough, after only 4 months not only was I praying the Rosary, but I also became a prayer leader in that "youth prayer group" spreading the good news all around my town. And what's even more important, I started praying the Rosary in ALL of my trainings and have been doing it ever since then, as I will probably do it for the rest of my life, as long as I will have THE GIFT OF RUNNING! The effect has been fantastic! I immediately started feeling like having Our Lady, Gospa, as a personal trainer! But it also had several other amazing "side effects"...

I was still holding on to my dream of running the New York Marathon so I finally decided to really do something about it. So in February 2002 I visited the official website of this marathon and soon realized that the only way to try to get in was to sign up for the lottery that they normally organize for all those who can't meet the qualifying time standard which was then set at 2 hours and 40 minutes. I knew that the chances to get in like that were one in a million, but since there really was no other way, I decided that I had nothing to lose and I signed up. There was nothing else that I could do but wait until June and the lottery drawing, so I continued with my trainings and 'running rosaries' trying to be as patient as I could. Then after one month I received a letter from the organizers of the marathon informing me that there was something wrong with the

data I entered at my registration, and although I readily supplied the information that they requested, this did not seem like a good sign for the result of the lottery drawing. But after a couple of days, when I simply checked the website to make sure that my application was now in order, I was beside myself when I saw this:



#### 2002 NYC Marathon Entrants Listed by Name

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STATUS	LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	AGE	CITY	STATE/REG./PROV.	COUNTRY
ACCEPTED	PIAGENTINI	MARCO	M32	TERNI	TR	ITALY


I thought – wait a minute...A-a-a-accepted?!..How come?!..Few days ago I wasn't even among the proper applicants, and now my application is ACCEPTED..?! And all this as soon as 4th April...?!

I further checked their entire database and found out that I was also the only one whose application had been accepted before the lottery drawing without meeting the qualifying time standard of 2h and 40mins. I made several hypotheses of how this could have happened, but regardless of the actual circumstances that led to the acceptance of my application, for me this was a clear sign, the one I had waited for.

So, it was time to start doing some really serious training. From the experience that I now have, I can definitely say that the way I trained then was inappropriate and that I was supposed to use a completely different approach, but one aspect of my training then was definitely not in vain: during those 7 months there wasn't a single training session during which I didn't pray at least one part of the Holy Rosary. Even on days when I felt like I had no physical strength to train or had absolutely no will to do it, just remembering that I didn't pray the Rosary made me put on my training suit and go run my Rosary Training at 2:00 am, if necessary. After I would get back home, I would feel as good as new, take a quick shower, sleep for a couple of hours and be up on my feet at 7:00 am all ready for another day of work. Along with keeping the fast on Fridays, I was truly dedicated to preparing myself for the big day of the marathon. In May I even managed to finish one half marathon. Although after the race I felt completely exhausted and my entire body ached, which was a definite sign that I wasn't yet ready for the marathon, it was nevertheless a tremendous progress. So I kept training and training and training. Which, of course, meant the same amount of praying.

And finally, there came my D-day. On the very day of the marathon I reached the area around the start line at about 8:30 in the morning where I had to wait until 11:00 am for the beginning of the race. There were all kinds of people there doing their final preparations, but it made me feel especially good to see many of them 'filling their tanks' with the most powerful existing fuel: prayer and spirituality. The cannon was finally shot at 11:00 am. Wow, I was finally running this big marathon! The Holy Rosary was flowing through me steady and continuous as my heart beat, helping me not to focus on the fatigue and pain that I was slowly starting to feel. I somehow managed to keep running and I couldn't believe when I saw that I was approaching the 20 MILES sign. Wow, just 6 miles more to go! Almost finished! I finally reached the Central Park. Well, maybe 'finally' is not such a good word, because regardless of the fact that you only have three miles ahead of you, they always turn out to be the longest three miles and the finish line never seems farther. But I reached it, I crossed the finish line, I successfully finished my first marathon. Here's the proof:

LOVE IT. NEW YORK CITY MARATHON. NOV. 3, 2002



New York Road Runners certifies that

**Marco Piagentini**

completed the New York City Marathon  
(26 miles, 365 yards)  
held on November 3, 2002, in

**3:48:10**  
Official Finish Time  
**3:45:55**  
Net Finish Time

*Allen Stensfeld, Race Director*  
*Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor*

15K Time	0:53:06	Overall Placement	8117 out of 31835 Total Finishers
1/2 Marathon Time	1:46:09	Placement by Gender	3238 out of 21626 Male Finishers
10 Mile Time	2:50:38	Placement in M30-39 Age Group	2237 out of 8078 Age Group Finishers
Average Pace per Mile	08:42	Age Graded Time	3:45:55
		Performance Level Percent	58.1%

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NEW YORK CITY MARATHON  
www.nyrr.com

At the moment when I finished the marathon I can honestly say that every single part of my body ached – muscles, tendons, bones, stomach. But the amazing thing is that my “faulty hip” and my backbone didn’t hurt at all!!! Do you see the point that I’m trying to make here? None of the physical problems that had prevented me from running for years manifested themselves after this exhausting race! Well, I say, praise the Lord!

Yes, this was definitely a MIRACLE. That was clear to me the very moment I crossed the finish line, considering my painful history of serious orthopaedic problems. But that is even clearer to me now, after 3 subsequent marathons and the experience I have gained in the following years. You see, just by looking back at the way I prepared myself for that first marathon I can say that I was completely athletically unprepared for it: my training was totally insufficient, I knew nothing about the efficient management of energy during different stages of a marathon, and I also made several other major technical mistakes, such as mismanaging my weight.

But all these disadvantages and obstacles couldn’t prevent me from completing this race, since I obviously had God by my side. I wasn’t running just to prove something to myself; I dedicated this marathon of mine as a sacrifice to Our Lord, to peace in the world, to peace in families, and to the gift of life as such, especially to the life of the unborn ones. This is a key point for me as a Catholic runner: every worthy sacrifice can be offered to God, so why not running? After all, it is God who has given us our bodies, including legs, so why not use them to His praise?

And now finally, some of you may say – yes, an impressive story, but how is all that related to Medjugorje?

Well, my story here turned out quite lengthy, but it’s easy to follow its main line and see its point. The first time I ran without pain, my first visit to Medjugorje, my discovery of the power of praying the Holy Rosary, and the clear proof of that power through my first marathon – this is all very closely related to Our Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady. For this reason for many years I had the idea of organizing some kind of race in Medjugorje, which I wasn’t telling anybody about, since it seemed to me that this would probably come across as inappropriate considering the holiness of the place. So, you can then imagine how I felt when I heard that there is a REAL marathon organized in Medjugorje! As you can also imagine how much I was disappointed to find out that it was too late for me to apply. Yes, I almost cried.

But after that on a weekly basis I was checking the marathon website to see if there were any announcements for the PEACE MARATHON 2008. As soon as the date for the year 2008 was announced, to be more exact - on 14th November 2007, I applied right away and was ecstatic when I was informed that my application has been accepted. On 17th May 2008 I will be running the Peace Marathon as Entrant No.2!

I would just like to add a couple of things more related to this whole experience: within our Catholic Church we often hear people saying that “it’s impossible to live without Mary”. Well, I must say that I don’t entirely agree with that. Personally, I lived without her for 30 years, so that alone definitely proves that it’s possible to live without knowing anything about Our Lady. But then, I have to tell you this as well – those 30 years were like living without a mother. As we all know too well, Mary

never shows herself before God or his son Jesus. She is always so much “in the background” that it’s sometimes difficult to realize that she’s even there. In one of her messages in Medjugorje she said that “it’s not important that people believe my messages, but that they convert to my Son”. Well, from what I have experienced, her help is practically indispensable and irreplaceable on our path to fully convert to her Son. For me, her help was the most important thing in my effort to get “back on track” and make the crucial quality steps on my path of faith on this earth. She has always been with me, even during those 30 years in which I didn’t even notice her. She humbly waited for the permission of Our Holy Father to make a specific entrance into my life. So I would hereby like to renew the consecration of all my prayers and efforts to Our Lady.

Mary, Our Queen of Peace, pray for us and for the whole world!

Last Updated ( Subota, 24 Svibanj 2008 )

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