

Who is Padre Pio?



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Who is Padre Pio?

Never forget that in the hospital are also those who are dying. O. Guarini

PREFACE

In writing this little book my object is to spread knowledge of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, of the Capuchin Fathers, increasingly all over the world.

In a few pages the reader should be able to get some idea of this son of Saint Francis of Assisi, who so much resembles the apostle of charity.

Unfortunately, the tumultuous existence that we lead interferes with reading large volumes; we are driven by too many occupations and interests and are obliged to take advantage of the merest fractions of our free time, which we often use in far different ways than in the renewal of our spiritual life.

Many people have complained to me by word of mouth or in writing that they were unable to read my books: “Per la Storia,” “Fino alla Meta,” and “Fatti Nuova,” because of their cost or from lack of time.

I believe that these difficulties have been eliminated with the publication of this little volume and I hope these same people will now be able to form an adequate picture in their minds of the Reverend Padre Pio of Pietrelcina. If as a result they feel the desire to know this messenger of love better, try by all means to go to him. This may of course be impossible, because of a question of health or money. So the next best course is to read all that has been written about him, so that they may become familiar with this man of God who has been sent to us in this critical moment of the world’s history.

They, too, will learn to “believe” in the fullest meaning of the word, since believing in a mystery truly admits of no limitations and no compromises with one’s intellect, for if it did, we would be merely philosophizing. To believe, however, it is essential to want to believe, and whoever goes to the Father with this intention will acquire courage for the fullness of life; living consists not only of Faith, but also of Hope and of Charity.

It is in the name of these three virtues that I am writing these pages, and whatever profit I make of them will be turned over to the “House for the Relief of Suffering,” the magnificent hospital built by the father to minister to the sufferings of the very poorest.

I declare, as I always do, that, in obedience to the decrees of the Sovereign Pontiffs, I recount these facts with purely human credibility, having recourse to the prescriptions of the Church, our only Mother and Teacher.

The Author

BIOGRAPHY

Telling of the Reverend Padre Pio of Pietrelcina is the easiest as well as the most difficult of tasks. It is easy since his life is like an open book that all may read. It is hard because the impression each person who sees him is seldom the same as the next person's. These impressions are varied and complicated, according to the state of grace, the condition of the conscience, and the personality of the visitor.

Who is this Padre Pio? Many people wondered after hearing him spoken of so often.

I shall begin by saying that he was a very humble Capuchin who wore the habit of Saint Francis of Assisi. He was born on 25 May 1887 and came from poor country people in Pietrelcina in the Province of Benevento. His father, who was called Zi'Orazio (Uncle Orazio) by everyone, died on the 7 October 1946 and is buried at San Giovanni Rotondo with his wife, Giuseppa, who died some years earlier. Their tomb is visited by all pilgrims who come to see the Padre.

Padre Pio was born of parents who were poor in material things but rich in matters of the spirit, for they had a deep love and respect for our holy religion. He was baptized Francesco Forgione and grew up in Pietrelcina. He was different from his contemporaries in that he did not share in the wild games and adventures or the strife of the other boys. From his earliest childhood, he showed a kind of recollection of spirit and a love for the things of God, seeing Him in the beauty of the clouds and the stars and loving to hear of his goodness.

This awareness of God brings with it a sort of change in focus on the world. In the case of Padre Pio, he developed a profound conception of justice, discrimination of good and evil, and of the pure and the impure. At the same time, his awareness of God implanted in his soul a grace and gentleness that led him toward the goal that he had set himself—to perfect his nature and live forever in harmony with his ideals.

In spite of this, the little peasant boy took part in the rural festivities and the simple life of his family. When the grown-ups danced or beat out the grain on the threshing floor of their houses and the children played about their mothers' skirts or when the bigger boys were teasing each other with practical jokes, little Francesco, who had surely never heard of the Canticle of the Sun, was expressing the same ideas in his own words when he praised God and Mother Earth and his brother the Sun, all of the natural beauty surrounding him and filling him with joy.

Padre Pio received his first instructions in reading and arithmetic from an inadequate private tutor who was not able to teach him much. Family gossips blamed the pupil

rather than the teacher for the little progress that was made. They were wrong however, for as soon as the boy was entrusted to another teacher, a certain Caccavo, with whom he remained until he was fourteen, little Francesco immediately showed a lively intelligence.

In 1902 his father entered him in the monastery of Morcone where he was to prepare for the novitiate. His superior was extremely severe with him, and Padre Pio admits to never having seen the countryside when walking about with his classmates, as they were all obliged to keep their eyes fixed on the ground.

It was at this time that he began his severe penances and fasting. When his parents went to see him, they found him so emaciated and run down that they tried to take him home. The Father Provincial, however, having sensed a quality in his young pupil that distinguished him from the others, persuaded the parents to leave him.

From Marcone, he went to Sant Elia in Panisi and then to Venafrò, where he lived for twenty-one days with the sacred host as his sole nourishment. In spite of his fasting, he had gained weight and when Zi'Orazio came to see him a year later he was pleased with his appearance.

After this he was transferred to Serra Capriola, to Montefusco, and to other places, where he continued his advance on the road to perfection through penance, fasting, and prayer.

Our Lord was well pleased with his new servant, but Satan, the spirit of Evil, seeing that this most desirable prey was evading him, proceeded to tempt him with unprecedented variety and violence.

Whenever he was forced by his poor health to seek a little change, he came back to Pietrelcina and his father's house. He was once advised to take off his monk's habit and become a secular priest, but he refused, not wishing to be unfaithful to Saint Francis.

One day, as he was walking with the Pastor of the village, when they had reached the open country he suddenly stopped and became rapt in a kind of trance while listening to the ringing of distant church bells.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Don Salvatore.

"Nothing," he answered, "but the sound of those bells reminds me of bells of the vanished monastery. It will someday be here again yet larger and more beautiful than before!"

It seemed to him that he was hearing a chorus of angels giving praise to the Lord. He added, "I don't know when this will come about, but it will."

It happened that, in June 1947, His Excellency Monsignor Manginelli, Bishop of Benevento, did consecrate in Pietrelcina a monastery of the Capuchin Fathers. It had

been endowed twenty years earlier by a spiritual daughter and convert of Padre Pio's, a well-to-do American lady, Miss Mary Pyle.

In this same monastery on 20 September 1947, the thirtieth anniversary of the appearance of the stigmata on the Padre, some of his spiritual children presented him with a ciborium and some vestments.

The dream of the young novice had become a reality.

However, before all these things were to happen, he had to go through much suffering and many disappointments. His pallor betrayed to many that he had a disease that could not be ignored—tuberculosis.

However, the infinite mercy of God never disappoints those who place in Him all of their confidence, and the Padre had more than once told himself, “Oh Lord, I have done your will!” He knew, besides, that suffering was the surest way for God to enter his soul and never leave it.

Padre Pio knew well that to receive one must give and he gave all of himself. The only complaint ever to pass his lips was that he had not given enough and had received too much.

ORDINATION

On 10 August 1910, Padre Pio was ordained in the Cathedral of Benevento. The city had once been named “Maleventum” or Evil Wind by its founder Diomedes, because of the violent winds that prevailed there, but the Romans renamed it Beneventum, or Good Wind.

The higher the Padre mounted up the scale of perfection, the more fiercely did Satan attack him. One night he saw his bed surrounded by the most fearful monsters who shouted to him, “See, the Saint is retiring!”

“Yes, in spite of you!” he answered; and was promptly seized, shaken, and beaten to the ground. The more he was tormented by the Devil, the greater grew his faith and his love for Our Lord.

Another time, when he was ill in bed, he saw a friar come into his cell who looked like his former confessor, Father Agostino. The apparition proceeded to advise him to give up his practice of penance, of which God did not approve. Padre Pio, much astonished, ordered his visitor to call out, “Viva Gesu!” The strange creature disappeared, leaving behind a strong smell of sulphur.

Padre Pio had many of these supernatural manifestations, but it would take too long to describe even the most startling of them.

During this period, the good Father Agostino, although getting on in years, continued to follow the career of his much-loved disciple and kept up a lively correspondence with him. When our Holy Mother the Church comes to permit the publication of these letters, it will be possible to learn about the mysterious attacks that the poor Father underwent from his terrible and invisible enemies. In the meantime, Padre Pio was ordered by the Archpriest to give over the unopened letters to him, without having read them.

One day a letter came to Padre Pio from Father Agostino, whose writing he recognized. He took it to the Archpriest who, having opened it, found a plain sheet of paper with no writing on it. "The good father must have forgotten to write anything," he said, "or else he just put a sheet of paper in the envelope instead of the letter."

"No," answered Padre Pio, "he did not forget, it is "those gentlemen" who want to play me their usual trick."

"What do you know about it?"

"I know . . . "

"You think so! Then you will no doubt be able to tell me what was in the letter?"

"Most certainly!" he said and proceeded to tell him exactly what Father Agostino had written to him.

The Archpriest, not believing Padre Pio, wrote to Father Agostino and his answer confirmed the truth as it had been told him.

Many things of this sort happened to Padre Pio and others besides, but it would take too long to tell of them. The most notable grace, however, that he received from Almighty God was that of the stigmata.

STIGMATA

Padre Pio first received the invisible stigmata in Pietrelcina on 20 September 1915 and the visible ones at San Giovanni Rotondo on the same date in 1918. This did not happen in the case of the seventy other stigmatists that the Church canonized prior to publication of this booklet. Gemma Galgani was the last of these to be so honored.

Much could be said on the subject of the supernatural gift with which Padre Pio was blessed by Divine Providence. I, for one, am too ignorant not only to explain the gift but

also to discuss its nature. I shall only say that the invisible stigmata came to him while he was in the garden or orchard of his home in Pietrelcina in September 1915.

Only his confessor, Don Salvatore Panullo, is in a position to know the whole story, and his account of it has been transmitted to Rome and placed in the safe-keeping of our Holy Mother the Church. We know on that day, Padre Pio began his ascent of Mount Tabor, the scene of the Transfiguration. Since Our Lord was his model and Padre Pio was in a state of grace, God gave him the sign of His love, which Padre Pio received through hardship and suffering. Padre Pio accepted the gift for God's Divine Son and offered it to Him.

God became man in Christ, to suffer for men and among men and Padre Pio, being a man, imitated Christ, the Divine Master. The Capuchin had more than once been heard to repeat the sublime words, "Father in Heaven, do with me what you will, not what I will!"

Then, on Friday, the 20th of September in 1918, there happened to him an event that not only changed his whole life but also singled him out from the rest of humanity. He was praying in his stall in the choir when suddenly the monks heard a piercing cry. On running to find the cause of it they came upon Padre Pio lying unconscious on the floor of the choir, his hands, his feet and his side marked with deep, bleeding wounds. He was carried to his cell where he gradually recovered consciousness, begging his brothers to keep his secret. He had worn invisible stigmata for three years and now the stigmata were there for all to see. They remained the same until his death. Padre Pio was the subject of endless and often painful medical examinations and underwent every kind of healing treatment known at that time. The wounds however remained open and completely free from infection. He lost about a cup of blood every day from his side, which was covered at all times with a linen cloth to prevent the endless staining of his garments. He wore brown half-gloves on his hands except when saying mass. Nobody knew how much Padre Pio suffered from his wounds, but his rather halting gait was evidence enough of his constant awareness of his transpierced feet. When asked if the stigmata were painful, he laughingly replied, "Do you think that the Lord gave them to me for a decoration?"

I shall not dwell upon the manner in which the news spread like lightning all over the village, the Puglie, the Continent of Europe, and finally the whole world.

Padre Pio was the first priest ever to have received the stigmata (Saint Francis was not a priest).

As I have said, the whole world began to hear of this wonder, and our Holy Mother the Church, ever prudent, ordered that the facts be examined by scientific methods.

The first person to be sent to Padre Pio to make a report, was Doctor Luigi Romanelli of Barletta. After five visits Doctor Romanelli felt obliged to state that he, “had been unable to discover a scientific explanation that would authorize him to classify such wounds.”

This positive statement was also full of spiritual meaning, as it declared science to be beyond its depth and unable to explain the circumstances or the facts.

The newspapers sent their correspondents, who were in a great state of bewilderment. However, all of them, willing or not, were forced to admit the truth of what they saw.

From that time on, San Giovanni Rotondo became the objective of pious pilgrimages. People came to the Father to beg his help and intercession with the God of all Love. The good that the Father had accomplished until then was known only to God, who had it written in His great book—for men are not always grateful. Although there were plenty who openly declared and confirmed in writing the miracles or graces they had obtained, there were others who, having gotten what they were so ardently longing for, no longer wished to hear Padre Pio spoken of, and claimed that things would have turned out the same, even without his prayers.

Those are the persons for whom I feel the most sorrow—more than for any atheist who does not believe—for those are the persons who did not wish to believe even though they had seen. They are the unfortunate ones, like a certain Roman professor who, although he had seen the truth with his own eyes, did not wish to recognize it, and repented too late.

The Vatican sent both Professor Bignami of the University of Rome and Professor Giorgio Festa, also of Rome, but without either one knowing of the other’s visit. Whereas the first was violently opposed to the Church, the other was a good Catholic and took the completely opposite side in the discussion. When Professor Festa discovered that his account was entirely different from that of Professor Bignami, he was seized with doubts and scruples, fearing that he had been mistaken in his observation. He went back several times to revisit Padre Pio, only to be convinced after the most meticulous of examinations, that he had made no mistakes. This led him to declare that the five lesions observed by him corresponded to, “The five parts of His body that Our Lord offered up in His supreme Holocaust to faith,” adding, “They can only constitute a mystery for those who are unable to see a connection between natural truths and those of faith and religion.”

Thomas A Kempis, in the *Imitation of Christ*, says, “Worldly honors have always sorrow for company.” Those same words are written on the door of Cell Number 5 in the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie in San Giovanni Rotondo. This is the cell that was occupied by Padre Pio. Later he moved to Cell Number 1. The honors he received indeed brought sorrow to Padre Pio, for he was visited by men of every sect and of the

most varied religious and philosophical beliefs. Many of those visitors published the wildest fictions and most unlikely stories about Padre Pio, while he offered himself all to God and imitated God's Divine Son more closely every day.

Padre Pio returned good for evil, especially in the case of those who had offended him the most. I admit to being myself one of these.

I was once a Mason, a despiser of priests, of nuns, and of saints. In Florence in 1919, I wrote libelous articles against Padre Pio in the anticlerical newspaper, "L' Italia Laica." At that time, I knew him only by name.

God punished me and I thank Him for that punishment since it allowed me to change my opinions in time to save my soul. In November 1930, I went for the first time to see the Father, more out of curiosity than conviction. In the presence of that extraordinary personality, I was able in my inmost being to realize how wrong I had been and to utter a hymn of praise and of thanksgiving to God. I had so often been guilty of blasphemy yet He was allowing me to see the Light. That Light shone ever since on the roads that I traveled, and will continue to do so, please God, for the rest of my life.

The atheist in me was overcome and Satan underwent another defeat; the first fruits of love and of faith began to grow along my path.

I do not know how all this came about. There exist indescribable conditions in the human soul, probably in our subconscious mind but nonetheless guided by reason as well as feelings. Those conditions are like a beneficent rain that comes to a parched land; like a dazzling light that prevents us from seeing at first by what we are surrounded; like a familiar song from a distant homeland, like the gentle talk of a mother and child.

We feel these things in ourselves and are unable to explain or describe them. They make us laugh and sing and long to tell the whole world of our joy, of our love, and of the wonderful melody that intoxicates us and that only a genius can express through the medium of art. It is the true poetry of life, that Dante immortalized in his verse, Michelangelo in his sculpture, Raphael in his painting, and Chopin in his music.

It is something so wonderful that we cannot keep it to ourselves, for it bursts out, breaking all bonds and throwing everyone and everything into confusion. We feel that we simply must tell the world of our happiness.

"Credo, credo, credo!" I kept repeating that when I saw Padre Pio for the first time. Today my Credo is more perfect, for I say, "Christ, I believe in Thee, the ultimate good. Thou art the King of Kings. I adore and worship only Thee."

SUPERNATURAL GIFTS OF PADRE PIO

It has been erroneously stated that the spiritual children of Padre Pio are fanatics, because they love him too much.

This is not true; they love the Padre because he brings them nearer to God—they love him just for that.

You must not forget that, if it is true that the Padre is the first stigmatized priest of the Church, he is also the only known priest with the gift of perfume, of conversion, of bilocation, of discernment of spirits; and of penetrating the future.

Other saints have had the gift of perfume (for example, Saint Theresa, Saint Dominic, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Catherine of Genoa, Saint Rita of Cascia, Saint Frances of Rome, Saint Francis of Paul, Saint Clare of Assisi, and others). Many saints could exercise the power of conversion. The Church has been rich in these.

There have been saints who cured the sick and the infirm and saints who had the gift of bilocation like Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Alphonsus of Liguori, Saint Alma, Saint Malgondus, Saint Bridget, Saint Dominic Guzman, Saint Rita of Cascia, and Saint Theresa of Avila. Certain saints had the gift of the discernment of spirits like Saint Joseph of Cupertino, Saint Frances of Rome, Blessed Anna Maria Taigi, and Don Vincenzo Palotti.

There have been saints who prophesied like Saint Lawrence Cipriano, Saint Perpetua, Saint Saturus, Saint Hildegarde, and others, but not one of them had been given all of these supernatural gifts like Padre Pio of Pietrelcina.

Padre Pio accomplished deeds that were beyond the scope of ordinary mortals and those deeds were daily borne witness to from every corner of the earth. I have reported upon many of these facts in my other books, (“Per la Storia,” “Fatti Nuova,” “Fino alla Meta”) so here I shall only sketch a few, as I have limited myself as to space.

Before beginning my story, I wish to make the following statement: Our children and grandchildren will be in a position to say who Padre Pio is when he undergoes his canonical trial. In the meantime we, as obedient children of Holy Mother Church, follow her teachings and abide by her laws.

The spiritual children of Padre Pio are scattered all over the world and they know well who he is. It would be well for those who do not know him to learn to do so, for they would obtain the help of a spiritual guide for the rest of their lives.

Whoever receives the grace of conversion will experience the very same joys that were granted to me for that person will see how the spirit can conquer the flesh, how love can triumph over hate, and faith over incredulity. He will realize that eternal truth banishes

doubt and despair and he will know that all human knowledge pales before the crucifix. We are penetrated by a divine fire that never leaves us, but draws us up into the knowledge and the presence of God. We know that we shall reap the fruit of our work in God's vineyard when He calls us to Himself.

The love that his spiritual children feel for Padre Pio is not fanaticism. Rather, it is a most humble respect for one who will bring them nearer to Almighty God. His spiritual children are crusaders of faith and love, for they are committed to spread the one and the other among those who are lacking in both, and this they do in the name of God and of their spiritual father.

Padre Pio wishes that all of his children should consider themselves brothers and banish all hate forever in the flame of God's love. He also wishes that they come to him with such a deep and sincere longing for perfection that he can bring them before God restored to their baptismal innocence.

Let us follow him then, this chosen one, who takes upon himself reparation for all the evil we have committed and, just as he imitates Our Lord and offers all of himself to God, we can imitate him and advance far along in the spiritual life.

THE GIFT OF PERFUME

Among the many gifts that God bestowed upon Padre Pio one of the most remarkable was certainly that of his perfume.

Many, many people claim they have experienced this perfume of the Padre's, even at great distances. They describe it as similar to that which is noticed when one comes near to him and his stigmatized hands, to his clothes, and even to objects that were touched by him.

It is important to note that the Father reveals himself to different people in different ways. Each perfume has its own significance and is a proof that he has heard their prayer. It comes as a warning to proceed with or to desist from some action, or to pray or to hope. It is sometimes very distinct and sometimes faint; it reminds one of roses or violets or lilies; at times of incense and at other times of carbolic acid or even of tobacco.

It is almost impossible to classify these different types of perfume or to explain their significance, but it is known and attested to by the Church that all through her history there have been holy people who have been gifted in this mysterious way either during life or even after death.

Saint Joseph of Cupertino exuded a sweet and delicate perfume from his person and no one could ever give a reason for it. His clothes were impregnated with it and it clung to his cell for twelve years after his death.

A very special perfume came from the tombs of Saint Anthony of Padua and of Saint Dominic Guzman among others. In all cases, the perfume had the quality of pleasing even those who disliked any perfume.

Professor Romanelli visited Padre Pio five times and at first was surprised that the Father should use scent. Later, the professor realized the true significance of this spiritual manifestation and his surprise was changed to profound admiration during the fifteen months of his medical observations.

This perfume was part of Padre Pio's biolocation and, in a way, a proof that Our Lord dwelt in him and he in Our Lord.

As a general rule, the perfume was first noticed when one was on one's way to Padre Pio or just after having left him. What is more extraordinary is the fact that it was often noticed in far distant lands, such as Africa, America, or Asia. This cannot be explained by autosuggestion, as it is impossible to create odor that will be smelled by a group of people at the same time, but that suggests to each individual something as different as lilies, tobacco, or even carbolic acid.

Perfume is always caused by an emanation from an object or person. It reaches the nostrils of the one who perceives it and that person in turn recognizes it as characteristic of the object or person from whom it comes.

Padre Pio's perfume had and has a real meaning to his spiritual children. It proves to them that he follows them from afar and is warning, guiding, and supporting them—that he is giving them specific advice to do some definite thing or not to do it.

THE GIFT OF CONVERSION

Padre Pio will go down in history as one who knew how to convert.

It is impossible to know the names of all those who were converted by him or to describe all of the spiritual transformations he performed upon the souls of his visitors.

I shall mention only a few names, but each of these has an unwritten volume of suffering and joy behind it. If any of these have been brought to light, the description could be only a pale shadow of what was actually experienced.

Among the most spectacular conversions were Festa, a lawyer of Genoa, and cousin of the Doctor Festa who examined the Father. Also converted were Di Maggio di Partinico

(also a lawyer); Signora Luisa Vairo; the writer Checcacci of Genoa; Russian Colonel Caterinitch; and the sculptor Francesco Messina. Then there is Father Pio of the Trinitarians as well as Pitigrilli and many others.

Among all of the gifts that God showered on Padre Pio, I consider this one is even greater than the healing of the sick and infirm, for in the latter a material change takes place that modifies a situation only for the time being, whereas conversion brings about a spiritual regeneration that almost always has a permanent quality—that is, it lasts for eternity.

I have only mentioned a few names and there are thousands of others. Many of them have never been willing to sign a statement or send in a report either from false modesty or conventionality or perhaps even because of not correctly evaluating the grace they received. We must not forget that whoever has received absolution after confession is returned to a state of grace even after years of sinful life, just as though he had been newly baptized.

Since names without facts are a dead letter to the average reader, I shall make a few rapid sketches of particular cases.

Ferruccio Caponetti

A very dear friend of mine, the late Ferruccio Caponetti, was also once a Mason. Then, he was a convert as I was. He wrote to me in November of 1931.

“My dear Alberto, the Lord has infinite ways! You crossed my path, you showed me the right road, I took heed and climbed up the steep slope of Monte Gargano where I found the Master. He received me with joy because he saw that I was blind. He listened smiling to the doubts that were in my mind. With simple words but with most profound wisdom he demolished one by one all of the theories that filled my mind and I found myself without arguments to oppose him. He stripped my soul bare and, by showing me Our Lord’s sublime teaching, he reopened the eyes of my soul. I was able to see the true light, my inmost heart was touched, and I knew the meaning of Faith.”

“I now enjoy true peace of soul. I now know the true God. For this I am grateful to you, for I owe you so much, and to Padre Pio I owe everything!”

Doctor Festa’s Cousin

A lawyer from Genoa, a cousin of Doctor Festa of Rome, was certain that his cousin was in a state of exaltation, decided to go incognito to Padre Pio.

As soon as the Father laid eyes on him he exclaimed, “What are you doing here? You are a Mason!” This was followed by verbal blows and counter-blows all ending in the lawyer kneeling down in front of the humble friar who had converted him.

Upon his return to Genoa the lawyer wrote a long letter to his cousin in Rome. Among other things he said, "Thanks! You have opened up a way for me which I shall follow. I cannot tell you about it in writing, because it is all impossible to describe. I can only say that I have come home with a deep sense of peace in my soul. I long for silence so that nothing may disturb my spirit."

He later became a stretcher-bearer following the sick pilgrims who traveled to Lourdes. He was received by his Holiness Benedict XV, who said to him, "Padre Pio is truly a man of God. Take on the task of making him better known. He is not appreciated by all as he deserves."

Professor G. Felice Checcacci of Genoa

Professor G. Felice Checcacci of Genoa (a well-known writer in Italy) had lived for upward of forty years in Asia and had the opportunity to study a great variety of religions. The professor read one of my books a few years ago and wrote to me saying, "You are lucky to be able to go so often to see Padre Pio! What peace you must feel in your soul! Please embrace him humbly for me."

He then went on to tell me about his conversion and said, "I must admit that I had not been inside a church out of devotion for over forty years. I obeyed, however. As I prayed, I heard a voice within me that whispered, "Faith cannot be discussed. You must either shut your eyes and accept it and at the same time acknowledge the inadequacy of the human mind when confronted with a mystery or you will have to give it up. There is no middle way. It is for you to choose."

"From that day, I chose the road I would follow and I owe my return to the religion of my forefathers to Padre Pio. From that time, I realized all the beauty that exists in Christian charity and the selfishness and indifference to human suffering existing in Asiatic religions founded on the doctrine of fatalism and reincarnation."

A Communist

One day a poor man came with a very sick child. He had consulted a number of doctors and had spent much money searching for a cure. He brought the child to the Padre while he was still feverish, hoping for a miracle.

When he entered the confessional, Padre Pio chased him away with these words, "What are you doing in front of God's tribunal if you don't believe? Go! Go away! You are a communist!"

The man went back to his lodgings with the intention of taking his child home, but a professor who happened to be there persuaded him to return to the Father and confess his

sins and, at the same time, to renounce the evil teachings of Moscow. In the afternoon the man returned to the monastery Church intending to confess. As soon as he saw the Father the man threw himself weeping at his feet, unable to utter a word.

Padre Pio raised him up from the ground and said, “Now that’s the way! A good scrubbing is what you need, but you must have the will to be clean. You have done the right thing and your son will get well. Now come to confession.”

The poor man wept during his confession, being very deeply moved. The child was cured physically just as his father was cured spiritually.

CURES

The number of people who came to Padre Pio to beg for his prayers was legion. They came to him suffering from every sort of illness (such as, advanced conditions of cancer, tuberculosis of the lungs or of the bones, maladies that had been pronounced chronic or incurable by medical science). He was begged by all to pray to God for the cure to their bodily ills and, ultimately, for the good of their souls.

Whenever the Father accomplished an astonishing cure, he would say, “God has granted you this grace, address your thanks to Him and not to me!” Although he was aware of his power, he never allowed it to encroach upon his humility.

The average reader insists upon deeds rather than words. Let me assure that reader that the Father accomplished more amazing deeds than could possibly be imagined. I do not know all of them, by any means, and in many cases I am not at liberty to record them with the names and addresses of the people involved. It is therefore difficult to describe in a few words that which amply deserves a long and detailed account.

I shall attempt to do the best possible with the small space available.

Maria Panisi

From among many cures, I shall mention the one case I have followed most closely—the cure of Signorina Maria Panisi, who was born in New York and later lived in Pietrelcina.

Maria Panisi was suffering from tuberculosis and had been pronounced incurable by several well-known doctors, among others Dr. Moscato of the University of Naples, who had declared to the girl’s father in 1923 that, “By the time the trees lose their leaves your daughter will have passed on to a better life.”

Thirty years later, Maria Panisi, had moved to the little village where Padre Pio was born. The leaves had fallen thirty times, but she continued to feel perfectly well.

How did this happen? It was very simple. The father of the girl, who came from the same village as Padre Pio, brought her to San Giovanni. The Padre patted her gently on the shoulder with his hand and said, “What do you mean by saying you are sick? Your lungs are made of steel!” From that day, Maria Panisi had no more hemorrhages and was as well as any girl of her age.

Other Cures

- Countess Baiocchi of Gavina lived in Rome and was suffering from an unknown disease. She consulted many doctors and was finally advised by Dr. Giorgio Festa to go to San Giovanni Rotondo. The day after her arrival, she was completely cured.
- A young lady from Bologna, who was still living in 1950, had been warned by an eminent physician that one of her bones could never heal, as she had broken it too long ago. She was completely cured the first time she followed Padre Pio’s instructions (which, incidentally, happened on the feast of Saint Francis).
- A military chaplain told me that in a hospital that received 37,000 patients in the course of two years, only fifty-three of them had died. The chaplain attributed this fact to his having blessed each one of the wounded with a crucifix that had been blessed by Padre Pio. Later on, that same chaplain had two ships torpedoed under him and his life was saved in both cases.
- At Bagnoreggio near Viterbo, a child suffering from meningitis was left in a convulsive condition and sent away from the hospital as incurable. Padre Pio’s prayers cured him.
- In Ragusa, a seven-month-old infant was cured of a convulsive cough owing to the great faith of her parents in Padre Pio, who obtained her cure through his prayers. This was confirmed by Dr. Tagliaferri, a well-known pediatrician.
- A boy by the name of Fernander of Hamrun in Malta was suddenly stricken with a high fever. It was diagnosed by blood test as Malta or Mediterranean fever. Various doctors in consultation decided to immobilize his knee joint in a plaster cast fearing that his leg would be permanently deformed.

The child’s mother, who was a spiritual child of Padre Pio, sent him a telegram begging for prayers. She received an answer from San Giovanni Rotondo that said, “Padre Pio blesses and prays.” The doctors noticed a distinct improvement on their next visit, the idea of the plaster cast was given up, and a few days later the boy had completely recovered.

- At San Felice a Cancellò, Naples, a young woman by the name of Nicoletta Mazzone was dying of a complication of bronchial complaints in the course of which she had even lost the power of speech. Her agonized father traveled to San Giovanni Rotondo to beg for a cure. Padre Pio smiled when he said to him, “Go back home and be glad, for the Madonna delle Grazie will cure your child.” Mazzone did not accept this statement, but implored the Father anew, at which he answered, though no longer smiling, “Man of little faith! I repeat to you, go home and rejoice, for the Madonna delle Grazie will cure her!”

On his return to his village he was met by his wife and sister who joyfully announced to him that the dying girl had spoken, and had said that she was hungry. From that day on she grew better and eventually was completely cured.

I was told of this by the uncle of the young lady, a Mr. F. Flamman of 6009 8th Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

- A woman from Pesaro, the wife of a workman, brought her deaf child to Padre Pio. He cured the child instantly. In an outburst of gratitude the woman took a gold chain from the child’s neck, the only object of value that she owned, and gave it to Padre Pio for the Virgin. When she reached home she told everything to her husband who flew into a rage at the offering she had made to the Father. He said that she should have chosen some other article rather than the gift that he himself had made to his daughter.

The next morning they found the chain on the bed table.

- The Reverend Emilio Secchi, parish priest of Avandrace, Cagliari, told me the following story in 1947. The head of the Girl’s Protective Association (name not given) came down with typhoid and was taken in all haste to the local hospital for infectious diseases.

As it was impossible for a letter to travel from Avandrace to San Giovanni Rotondo in less than several days, the woman’s father sent a telegram to Padre Pio begging him to pray for the speedy recovery of his daughter whose presence was urgently needed to carry on the work of the parish and who was impossible to replace.

As there was no hope of her recovery, the young woman was sent home to die after only twenty-four hours in the hospital.

However, she recovered. Upon receiving the telegram, Padre Pio asked the Lord to restore the woman to perfect health. The priest who sent me the story added that he had no hesitation in attributing her cure to the prayers of Padre Pio.

- I shall close with the extraordinary story of Wanda Sari of Treviso who was suffering from a grievous malady and was in great pain. The doctors had given her but a few hours to live, when a friend showed her a photograph of Padre Pio. She begged the Father with all her might for a cure. All of a sudden, her pains disappeared. She later went to San Giovanni Rotondo to thank the Padre. On her way there, she came to see me. I had in my possession a photograph that had been sent to me at the time of her illness. In it, she looked completely emaciated. I saw before me now a fine, healthy child whose angelic expression helped me to see the reason for the miracle.

BILOCATION

Padre Pio was blessed with a gift shared with a number of saints who were honored by Holy Mother the Church—namely, the power to be in several places at once. It has often been noticed that when someone has been recommended to the prayers of Padre Pio, his face undergoes a change and his eyes become luminous while at the same time he seems to murmur a prayer. It is as though he were partly absent and had gone to the side of the person who needed him. He did in fact not only go from one place to another, but he was able to project his voice and also his perfume.

This supernatural gift can be proven by various known facts.

Saving an Aviator

In my book, “Fino alla Meta,” I tell of a young aviator who was attached to a fighter squadron in the last war.

One day, the lieutenant started off on a mission and discovered right away that his plane was about to catch fire. He consulted his commanding officer by radio, who told him that if he could not put out the blaze he was to bail out of the plane with his parachute. All of his efforts were in vain so he jumped, but the parachute failed to open. He would have been killed had not a friar caught him in his arms and carried him to earth.

That evening he told his story to his commanding officer who did not believe a word of it, but gave him a short leave in order to recover from the shock of the experience.

When he reached home he told his tale to his mother. “Why it was Padre Pio,” she said “I prayed to him so hard for you!” She showed him a picture of the Padre. Her son exclaimed, “Mother! That is the same man!”

The young aviator went to San Giovanni Rotondo to express his gratitude. Padre Pio said to him, “That was not the only time I saved you. At Monastir when your plane had been hit, I made it glide safely to earth.” The young man later related that this had actually happened.

Inside a Locked Tomb

A certain prelate went to Rome for the beatification of Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus. Wishing to pray at the tomb of His Holiness Saint Pius X, he asked to have the gate of the crypt opened for him. He was astonished to see a Capuchin praying there—inside the enclosure. When the prelate finished his prayers, he turned to speak to the friar but the friar had vanished. Later, after hearing a description of Padre Pio, the prelate realized that he had seen Padre Pio in the tomb.

Leaving a Remembrance

A certain sick woman in Borgomanero was visited by the Padre through bilocation. When she begged the Padre to leave her some remembrance of his visit, he placed his wounded hand on the edge of her bed. Five bloodstains in the form of crosses remained upon the sheet, a fact that needs no explanation.

Saying Goodbye to a Friend

What has always seemed to me the most impressive of all the astonishing facts about Padre Pio is the story of Monsignor Fernando Damiani, the Vicar General of Salto, Uruguay. The Monsignor's brother was the famous baritone, Victor Damiani of the "Colon" of Buenos Aires. At one time, Padre Pio had cured the prelate of a cancer of the stomach and they had become great friends over the years. Sometime later, Monsignor Damiani returned to Italy and went to see Padre Pio. He spoke with some feeling of his desire to stay in Italy, his native land, as he was now advanced in years. Padre Pio advised him to go back to Uruguay, as it was not yet time for his number to be called. The Padre also promised the Monsignor that he would visit him at the time of his death. The Monsignor then left for South America.

Monsignor Damiani later joined the throng of distinguished ecclesiastics who came from all over South America to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the ordination of His Excellency Bishop Alfredo Viola of Salto, Uruguay.

In his capacity of Vicar General, Monsignor Damiani was expected to be present at all the ceremonies but an attack of angina pectoris prevented him from doing this.

He died there, assisted at the end not only by a number of bishops but by Padre Pio himself, who kept his promise. Monsignor Damiani was able to scribble a note to with the words, "Padre Pio came."

Two important churchmen confirmed this and when they came to Italy they heard Padre Pio admit that it was true.

Out of the Desert

Padre Pio's appearance to young Giacomo Calice of the Foreign Legion is also noteworthy. One night when Giacomo was standing guard at an advance outpost and feeling miserably frightened by the solitude of the desert, a man appeared full of reassurance and told him to follow him. The man led Giacomo to the coast where he found a raft that took him to Marseilles. From Marseilles he got to Corsica, his native land.

Signor Pietro Calice, the boy's father, had gone to Padre Pio some time before and had begged the Padre to bring his son home. The Padre promised him that the sheep would return to the fold provided that he prayed God with great love and faith. All this came about. When the father showed his son a picture of Padre Pio, the young man said to his father, "That is the man who led me out of the desert!"

I could go on with no end of such stories, but I ask the reader to look in the books I have mentioned above, where they will be found in greater detail.

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

Whoever has used the powers of the soul and has succeeded in raising himself up, even for an instant, above the "burden of his flesh," and lifted his spirit to God, will have experienced something that is unknown to the great majority of the human race.

By reading the lives of the saints, we learn that the mystical life enhances all the senses—especially that of sight—thereby making a saint more observant in matters that concern his walk of life. The Blessed Anna Maria Taig was very close to Padre Pio in this. Saint Joseph of Cupertino could recognize carnal sins by the smell of his penitents.

Skeptics, even among the clergy, who scorn those who believe that Padre Pio can read consciences and be aware of events that are taking place far away from him, either in the past or in the future, must be confounded by what has been proven again and again.

- Padre Pio, just looking at a man said, "Oh Genoese, you have a dirty face!" He was referring to the condition of the man's soul.
- To a young woman, the Padre said, "If you have had the courage to imitate Mary Magdalen in her sins, have the courage to imitate her penance!"
- A woman driver who had blasphemed and did not confess her sin, was reminded by the Padre of the circumstances of her transgression.

- During the elevation, someone prayed for the Padre to obtain for him a certain favor. Later, during an interview, the request was repeated. The Padre responded, “Do you think I am deaf? There is no need to repeat things twice!”
- A Swiss priest presented Padre Pio with an unopened letter. Padre Pio said “This is the answer.” The Padre then gave the priest a written answer to his letter that had not been opened.
- A French abbot, Father Benoit, had been puzzled for some time by a problem he was unable to solve. As he was leaving, Padre Pio (who sensed that Father Benoit was going away unsatisfied) asked him for his breviary. Padre Pio wrote the answer to the problem on the breviary. It is interesting to note that the abbot had never mentioned what was preoccupying him, but Padre Pio was able to detect it, thus again proving his discernment.
- Two girls came to Padre Pio. They had promised their father they would not kiss Padre Pio’s hand for fear of infection. As they approached him, he said, “Pay attention to your father’s advice!”
- Mrs. Mary Forster of Hazelton, New York, received her passport (which was to enable her to rejoin her husband in Europe) after it had been refused her by the State Department. She never knew how it came through, but she and her children were able to sail and were safely brought through a difficult trip. Padre Pio had sent her word that she was not to worry, that he would pray that all would go well with them and would assist them on their journey.

Mrs. Forster and her husband, an engineer, came to see me with their two children in Bologna when they came to Italy to thank Padre Pio.

GIFT OF PROPHECY

God, having given His servant the gift of seeing into the past and the present, certainly gave him the faculty to seeing into the future. There are innumerable proofs of this. Many of his predictions were verified because of the short space of time involved. Others will not be proven correct until a long time has gone past.

Is it not a gift of prophecy when the Padre promises a cure to a person whose case has been pronounced desperate? Or to someone who is in urgent need of help in some emergency? How can one explain his predictions of the sex of an unborn infant? The date of a conversion? A death?

- Padre Pio once told a young man that he would be dead by a certain day and that he must prepare his soul. It happened, as he said.
- During the last war, the Padre promised that not a single bomb would fall upon San Giovanni Rotondo, and none did. Some people may say that it was a question of chance, but many aviators declared were not able to release their bombs when they flew over San Giovanni.
- During an earthquake at Valnure, the water supply was destroyed in Pietrelcina. The inhabitants were desperate as they could not water their cattle. The people came to Padre Pio. He asked them to show him a map of the region where the new monastery was being built (the work was at a standstill due to the lack of water). Padre Pio put his finger on a certain spot and said, “Dig a well five meters from here and you will find all the water you want.” Not even the divining rods had succeeded in finding any, but Padre Pio found it.
- Padre Pio prophesied to a captain of Carabinieri that he would have a son. To someone who wished for a daughter after having had five sons, Padre Pio said, “It will be a little girl.” It was.

Did not Padre Pio say that the Blessed Virgin would save Italy? Did not Padre Pio say that the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza would be built? Did not Padre Pio say that a woman would have a child after eight years of marriage without one? I could go on and on and on.

At times, the Padre stated a fact in the clearest terms, at others he was almost sybilline and oracular. This generally depended upon the spiritual state of the person concerned. It would be too easy to say, “If I don’t get what I want, I’ll do as I please!” You can be sure that this would never happen.

I have attempted to give you some insight towards this wonderful man of God. Before closing I feel I should tell you something of his Mass and of his manner of hearing confessions.

PADRE PIO’S MASS

Impressions made by a visit to Padre Pio are various but what moves people most is his Mass—or rather, the manner in which he renewed the Passion of Our Lord.

When the hour of Mass approached, all faces would be turned toward the sacristy from which the Padre would come—seeming to walk painfully on his pierced feet. Attendees feel that grace itself is approaching, forcing them to bend their knees.

It is difficult and indeed nearly impossible to describe the Mass of Padre Pio. Many have tried without much success. Padre Pio was not an ordinary priest, but a creature in pain, a creature who renewed the Passion of Christ with the devotion and radiance of one who was inspired by God.

After he stepped to the altar and made the Sign of the Cross, the Padre's face was transfigured and he seemed like a creature who became one with his Creator. Suffering shined through his features and all could see the painful contractions of his body—especially when he leaned upon the altar and genuflected—as though he bore the weight of the cross. In the meantime, tears rolled down his cheeks and from his mouth came words of prayer, of supplication for pardon, of love for his Lord of whom he seemed to become a perfect replica.

None of those present noticed the passage of time. It took him about one hour and a half to say his Mass, but the attention of all was riveted on every gesture, movement, and expression of the celebrant. At the sound of the word, “Credo,” pronounced with such tremendous conviction, there was a great wave of emotion through the throng and the most recalcitrant of sinners was carried along as on a stream that brought all sinners to the confessional and the renunciation of their old way of life.

CONFESSION

Many writers on Padre Pio, like myself, said that he was absolutely unique as a confessor. What distinguished him from others was his faculty to bring to the mind of his penitent certain sins that he wished the penitent to confess. He sometimes mentioned those faults himself, especially when he saw that the penitent, although well prepared, was so bewildered in his presence that the penitent was unable to say anything at all. The Padre sometimes reminded the penitent of some sin that had not been mentioned in previous confessions.

The first time I went to confession to him was in November 1930. “Father,” I said, “I have never had faith, but I have always been honest. Even when . . .” “And he told me things that no mortal could have known—things I had forgotten or not mentioned, as they did not seem to me to be important.

Frederico Abresch, a convert from Protestantism was made to realize that in his preceding confessions he had withheld some grave faults. To prove to Frederico that he knew all about it, the Padre asked him when he had last made a good confession. Abresch could not remember, so the Padre said, “The last time that you made a good confession was on your honeymoon.” And this was so.

Padre Pio could tell you exactly how many times you had missed Mass, how many promises you broke, the number of faults you willfully committed, the mortal sins you omitted in confession, and the venial sins you must never commit again.

If he was sometimes severe it was because many people approached the confessional lightly—without giving the sacrament its true importance. Or, what annoyed him more was when people came to him merely to test his apparent omniscience. That offended the Padre, our intermediary between man and God, as it causes a grave offense to Almighty God.

It is only after having received absolution that the penitent was able to ask the Padre for that thing he so much desired.

It is then that the Padre promised to pray:

- for the recovery of someone dear to you,
- for a successful operation,
- that a child presumed lost may return safely,
- for a boy or a girl as yet unborn,
- for the assurance that some definite event will come about or not, or
- for a successful examination.

When Padre Pio left the confessional, his step was slower and he looked very tired. It was as though in addition to his own cross, he was bearing the crosses of the souls that he had brought back to God.

When he absolved, Padre Pio gave the penitent a definite number of short prayers to say and they often were to be recited over a period of months. He knew the irresistible force of prayer and he knew prayer is the key to the Heart of Our Lord—the link that binds the creature to the Creator, the link that makes us slaves to Divine Love.

When the Padre had bought a soul by means of his suffering, he did not allow Satan to recapture that soul, for he was always at hand to guide, to support, and to help it in every circumstance that might arise. He reassured a lawyer from Rome who was fearful lest he return to his former sinful ways. “My son,” he said, “pray without ceasing and never leave off, and you can be sure that when I have rescued a soul I never let it fall again.”

All those who knew Padre Pio heard him tell funny stories. Indeed, he must have had a whole anthology of them in his head. His answers were full of humor and he liked a joke.

On my last visit to him in April 1954, (it was my thirty-fifth) he was in the garden listening to the complaints of some of his spiritual sons. Suddenly, he smiled and said, "None of you are happy, only we monks are happy, do you know why?" Then he made the sign of the cross and said, "We have no debts, we have no credit, we have no wives, nor any children . . . and so be it."

I could go on forever.

CASA SOLLIEVO DELLA SOFFERENZA

(The House for the Relief of Suffering)

Before ending this very short profile of Padre Pio, it is in order to say a few words about the "Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza," the magnificent hospital Padre Pio built at San Giovanni Rotondo in the Province of Foggia. He built it where no hospital existed. He built it for the sick of Monte Gargano as well as for suffering people everywhere.

How did this ambitious plan arise? On the evening of 9 January 1940, the Padre said to three of his spiritual sons, "Our Lord suffers in every creature who is ill." Then, suddenly taking from his pocket a small gold coin he had received as a gift, he said, "I wish to make the first contribution toward the building of a hospital."

The idea took hold immediately and the contributions began to pour in. At first they consisted mostly in small change from a blind man or pennies from a child's bank. Then, in 1947, Miss Barbara Ward, later Mrs. Jackson, brought 250 million lire to the Casa di Sollievo from UNRRA funds.

The hospital is very large and it contains the most modern equipment of every description, including a department of radio-therapy, which is perhaps the best in the world. Signor Lupi of Pescara was the architect and engineer and is well known for his many important buildings.

The director of the Casa di Sollievo was the late Dr. Guglielmo Sanguinetti. Dr. Sanguinetti once was an atheist. He left his practice and his clinic in Florence to support the work of the Padre.

A 20-foot high statue of Saint Francis of Assisi dominates the hospital. It was made by a native artist who, like Cimabue and Andrea de Sarto, was once a shepherd and modeled

little figures out of clay as he watched his sheep. His name was Antonio Berti. Later, he taught in the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Florence and died in 1990.

Above the hospital is a landing platform for the helicopters that are used to transport the patients who come from a distance. From there shines the “Beacon of Love” whose light is visible at a great distance and reminds travelers at night of Padre Pio and how he still serves God on Monte Gargano.

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