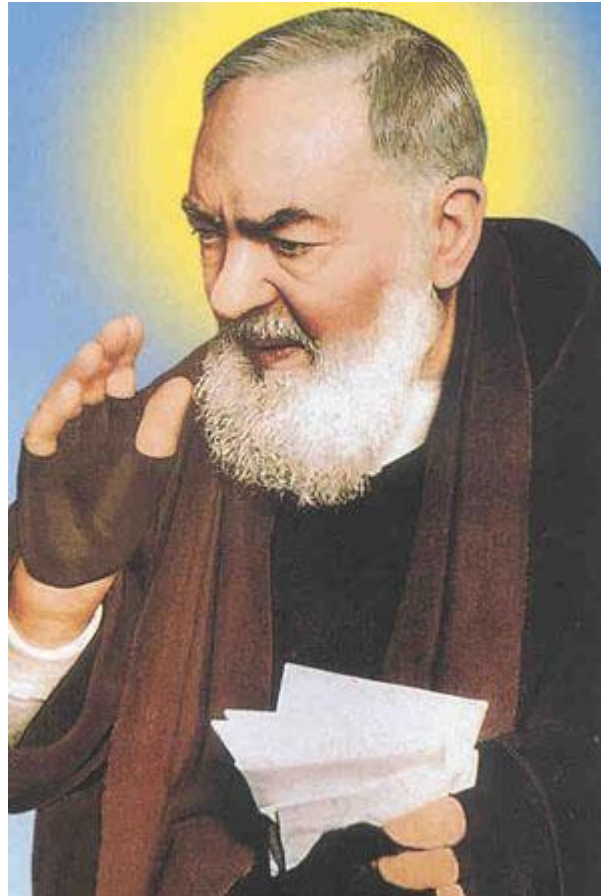


PADRE PIO DA PIETRELCINA



Pio da Pietrelcina (1887-1968)

“Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Gal 6:14*).

Like the Apostle Paul, Padre Pio da Pietrelcina placed at the centre of his life and apostolic work the Cross of his Lord as his strength, his wisdom and his glory. Inflamed by love of Jesus Christ, he became like him in the sacrifice of himself for the salvation of the world. In his following and imitation of the Crucified Christ he was so generous and perfect that he could have said: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (*Gal 2:20*). And the treasures of grace which God had granted him so lavishly and unceasingly he passed on through his ministry, serving the men and women who came to him in ever greater numbers, and bringing to birth an immense host of spiritual sons and daughters.

This worthy follower of Saint Francis of Assisi was born on 25 May 1887 at Pietrelcina in the Archdiocese of Benevento, the son of Grazio Forgione and Maria Giuseppa De Nunzio. He was baptized the next day and given the name Francesco. At the age of twelve he received the Sacrament of Confirmation and made his First Holy Communion.

On 6 January 1903, at the age of sixteen, he entered the novitiate of the Capuchin Friars at Morcone, where on 22 January he took the Franciscan habit and the name Brother Pio. At the end of his novitiate year he took simple vows, and on 27 January 1907 made his solemn profession.

After he was ordained priest on 10 August 1910 at Benevento, he stayed at home with his family until 1916 for health reasons. In September of that year he was sent to the friary of San Giovanni Rotondo and remained there until his death.

Filled with love of God and love of neighbour, Padre Pio lived to the full his vocation to work for the redemption of man, in accordance with the special mission which marked his entire life and which he exercised through the spiritual direction of the faithful: the sacramental reconciliation of penitents and the celebration of the Eucharist. The pinnacle of his apostolic activity was the celebration of Holy Mass. The faithful who took part witnessed the summit and fullness of his spirituality.

On the level of social charity, he committed himself to relieving the pain and suffering of many families, chiefly through the foundation of the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza (House for the Relief of Suffering), opened on 5 May 1956.

For Padre Pio, faith was life: he willed everything and did everything in the light of faith. He was assiduously devoted to prayer. He passed the day and a large part of the night in conversation with God. He would say: "In books we seek God, in prayer we find him. Prayer is the key which opens God's heart". Faith led him always to accept God's mysterious will.

He was always immersed in supernatural realities. Not only was he himself a man of hope and total trust in God, but by word and example he communicated these virtues to all who approached him.

The love of God filled him, and satisfied his every desire; charity was the chief inspiration of his day: to love God and to help others to love him. His special concern was to grow in charity and to lead others to do so.

He demonstrated to the full his love of neighbour by welcoming, for more than fifty years, countless people who had recourse to his ministry and his confessional, his counsel and his consolation. He was almost besieged: they sought him in church, in the sacristy, in the friary. And he gave himself to everyone, rekindling faith, dispensing grace, bringing light. But especially in the poor, the suffering and the sick he saw the image of Christ, and he gave himself particularly to them.

He exercised to an exemplary degree the virtue of prudence, acting and counselling in the light of God.

His concern was the glory of God and the good of souls. He treated everyone with justice, frankness and great respect.

The virtue of fortitude shone in him. He understood very early in life that his would be the way of the Cross, and he accepted it at once with courage and out of love. For many years, he experienced spiritual sufferings. For years he endured the pains of his wounds with admirable serenity.

When he had to submit to investigations and restrictions in his priestly ministry, he accepted everything with profound humility and resignation. In the face of unjust accusations and calumnies he remained silent, trusting always in the judgement of God, of his immediate superiors and of his own conscience.

He habitually practised mortification in order to gain the virtue of temperance, in keeping with the Franciscan style. He was temperate in his attitude and in his way of life.

Conscious of the commitments which he had undertaken when he entered the consecrated life, he observed with generosity the vows he had professed. He was obedient in all things to the commands of his Superiors, even when they were burdensome. His obedience was supernatural in intention, universal in its scope and complete in its execution. He lived the spirit of poverty with total detachment from self, from earthly goods, from his own comfort and from honours. He always had a great love for the virtue of chastity. His behaviour was modest in all situations and with all people.

He sincerely thought of himself as useless, unworthy of God's gifts, full of weakness and infirmity, and at the same time blessed with divine favours. Amid so much admiration around him, he would say: "I only want to be a poor friar who prays".

From his youth, his health was not very robust, and especially in the last years of his life it declined rapidly. Sister Death took him well-prepared and serene on 23 September 1968 at the age of eighty-one. An extraordinary gathering of people attended his funeral.

On 20 February 1971, barely three years after the death of Padre Pio, Pope Paul VI, speaking to the Superiors of the Capuchin Order, said of him: "Look what fame he had, what a worldwide following gathered around him! But why? Perhaps because he was a philosopher? Because he was wise? Because he had resources at his disposal? Because he said Mass humbly, heard confessions from dawn to dusk and was – it is not easy to say it – one who bore the wounds of our Lord. He was a man of prayer and suffering".

Even during his lifetime, he enjoyed a vast reputation for sanctity, because of his virtues, his spirit of prayer, sacrifice and total dedication to the good of souls.

In the years following his death, his reputation for sanctity and miracles grew steadily, and became established in the Church, all over the world and among all kinds of people.

God thus showed the Church his desire to glorify on earth his faithful servant. In a short time the Capuchin Order took the steps prescribed by canon law to begin the Cause of Beatification and Canonization. After examining the case, the Holy See, in accordance with the norm of the *Motu Proprio* "Sanctitas Clarior", granted the *nihil obstat* on 29 November 1982. The

Archbishop of Manfredonia was thus enabled to introduce the Cause and set up the informative process (1983- 1990). On 7 December 1990, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints recognized its juridical validity. When the *Positio* had been completed, there was the usual discussion on whether the Servant of God had exercised the virtues to a heroic degree. On 13 June 1997 the Special Meeting of the Theological Consultors was held and gave a positive judgement. In the Ordinary Session on 21 October 1997, with Bishop Andrea Maria Erba of Velletri-Segni, the Proposer of the Cause, together with the Cardinals and Bishops, recognized that Padre Pio da Pietrelcina had lived to a heroic degree the theological, cardinal and associated virtues.

On 18 December 1997, in the presence of Pope John Paul II, the Decree on heroic virtue was promulgated.

For the Beatification of Padre Pio, the Postulation presented to the competent Congregation the healing of Signora Consiglia De Martino of Salerno. The regular canonical process on this case was held at the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Salerno-Campagna-Acerno from July 1996 to June 1997. On 30 April 1998 at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints the Medical Board examined the miracle, and on 22 June 1998 the Special Meeting of Theological Consultors gave its judgement. On 20 October 1998 the Ordinary Congregation of the Cardinals and Bishops belonging to the Congregation was held in the Vatican. On 21 December 1998 in the presence of Pope John Paul II the Decree on the miracle was promulgated.

On 2 May 1999, in the course of a solemn concelebrated Mass in St Peter's Square, Pope John Paul II by his apostolic authority beatified the Venerable Servant of God Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, naming 23 September as the date of his liturgical feast.

For the canonization of Blessed Padre Pio of Pietrelcina the Postulation presented to the competent Dicastery the cure of the young Matteo Pio Colella of San Giovanni Rotondo. The regular canonical process on the case was held at the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of the Diocese of Manfredonia-Vieste from 11 June to 17 October 2000. On 23 October the documents were forwarded to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. On 21 November 2001 the medical testimony was examined by the same Congregation. The Theological Consultors held a special Congress on 11 December and on 18 December the ordinary Session of Cardinals and Bishops took place. On 20 December, in the presence of John Paul II, the Decree on the miracle was promulgated. Finally, on 28 February 2002 the Decree of Canonization was promulgated.

CANONIZATION OF ST PIO OF PIETRELCINA, CAPUCHIN PRIEST

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 16 June 2002

1. *"For my yoke is easy and my burden light" (Mt 11,30).*

Jesus' words to his disciples, which we just heard, help us to understand the most important message of this solemn celebration. Indeed, in a certain sense, we can consider them as a magnificent summary of the whole life of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, today proclaimed a saint.

The evangelical image of the "yoke" recalls the many trials that the humble Capuchin of San Giovanni Rotondo had to face. Today we contemplate in him how gentle the "yoke" of Christ is, and how truly light is his burden when it is borne with faithful love. The life and mission of Padre Pio prove that difficulties and sorrows, if accepted out of love, are transformed into a privileged way of holiness, which opens onto the horizons of a greater good, known only to the Lord.

2. *"But may I never boast except in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal 6,14).*

Is it not, precisely, the "glory of the Cross" that shines above all in Padre Pio? How timely is the spirituality of the Cross lived by the humble Capuchin of Pietrelcina. Our time needs to rediscover the value of the Cross in order to open the heart to hope.

Throughout his life, he always sought greater conformity with the Crucified, since he was very conscious of having been called to collaborate in a special way in the work of redemption. His holiness cannot be understood without this constant reference to the Cross.

In God's plan, the Cross constitutes the true instrument of salvation for the whole of humanity and the way clearly offered by the Lord to those who wish to follow him (cf. *Mk* 16,24). The Holy Franciscan of the Gargano understood this well, when on the Feast of the Assumption in 1914, he wrote: "In order to succeed in reaching our ultimate end we must follow the divine Head, who does not wish to lead the chosen soul on any way other than the one he followed; by that, I say, of abnegation and the Cross" (*Epistolario* II, p. 155).

3. *"I am the Lord who acts with mercy" (Jer 9,23).*

Padre Pio was a generous dispenser of divine mercy, making himself available to all by welcoming them, by spiritual direction and, especially, by the administration of the sacrament of Penance. I also had the privilege, during my young years, of benefitting from his availability for penitents. The ministry of the confessional, which is one of the distinctive traits of his apostolate, attracted great crowds of the faithful to the monastery of San Giovanni Rotondo. Even when that unusual confessor treated pilgrims with apparent

severity, the latter, becoming conscious of the gravity of sins and sincerely repentant, almost always came back for the peaceful embrace of sacramental forgiveness. May his example encourage priests to carry out with joy and zeal this ministry which is so important today, as I wished to confirm this year in the Letter to Priests on the occasion of Holy Thursday.

4. *"You, Lord, are my only good"*.

This is what we sang in the responsorial psalm. Through these words, the new Saint invites us to place God above everything, to consider him our sole and highest good.

In fact, the ultimate reason for the apostolic effectiveness of Padre Pio, the profound root of so much spiritual fruitfulness can be found in that intimate and constant union with God, attested to by his long hours spent in prayer and in the confessional. He loved to repeat, "I am a poor Franciscan who prays" convinced that "prayer is the best weapon we have, a key that opens the heart of God".

This fundamental characteristic of his spirituality continues in the "Prayer Groups" that he founded, which offer to the Church and to society the wonderful contribution of incessant and confident prayer. To prayer, Padre Pio joined an intense charitable activity, of which the "Home for the Relief of Suffering" is an extraordinary expression. Prayer and charity, this is the most concrete synthesis of Padre Pio's teaching, which today is offered to everyone.

5. "I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because ... these things ... you have revealed to little ones" (*Mt* 11,25).

How appropriate are these words of Jesus, when we think of them as applied to you, humble and beloved Padre Pio.

Teach us, we ask you, humility of heart so we may be counted among the little ones of the Gospel, to whom the Father promised to reveal the mysteries of his Kingdom.

Help us to pray without ceasing, certain that God knows what we need even before we ask him.

Obtain for us the eyes of faith that will be able to recognize right away in the poor and suffering the face of Jesus.

Sustain us in the hour of the combat and of the trial and, if we fall, make us experience the joy of the sacrament of forgiveness.

Grant us your tender devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother.

Accompany us on our earthly pilgrimage toward the blessed homeland, where we hope to arrive in order to contemplate forever the glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.