



Fourth step

THE EUCHARIST, THE ALTAR AND THE VICTIM

BIBLICAL COMMENTS

“Then he said to them, “Those who want to be my disciples must deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow me”. (Lc 9, 23)

Through the Incarnation, the Word of God complies with the Father’s will, it becomes human in all its essence, till His death on the cross.

It is in this faithful obedience that Jesus becomes the Eucharist, which can be considered as an act of thanksgiving, as it is through obedience that He fulfils the Father’s loving care towards humanity. If we want to become Jesus’ disciples, we want to surrender ourselves totally to Him who chose to become as an altar, giving Himself up for us, while we ourselves become victims of love with Him, for Him and in Him.

We shall live every day with love, we will choose to live all our daily chores with love, and in so doing we shall be pleasing the Father, just like Jesus did, becoming immaculate hosts of love, offered for the healing of the world.

SPIRITUALITY

The passage chosen to speak about Padre Pio's relationship with the most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist dates back to a particular period of his life: he is in Pietrelcina, prevented from returning to the convent due to a severe lung disease. His life is made up of prayer and study, with a small apostolate among the sick and in parish life. Padre Pio’s mystical experience has become more and more intense and day after day he gets closer to God.

From a letter by Padre Pio to fr Agostino of San Marco in Lamis

Pietrelcina, 3rd december 1912

My very dear Father, I should like to undress my chest for a moment and show you the wound which our tender Jesus has lovingly opened in this heart of mine!

My heart has found at last a Lover, so close to me that I am incapable of hurting him anymore. You already know this Lover. He is one who never gets angry with those who offend him. My heart carries in itself endless acts of His mercy towards me, while it is aware of how totally unworthy it is of these.

He has loved me and chosen me among many to be one of his favourites.

Whenever I ask him what I have done to deserve such consolations, he smiles and says repeatedly that nothing is refused to such an intercessor. In return he asks me for nothing but love, but do I not perhaps owe him this out of gratitude? Oh, my dear Father, if I could only make him happy just as he makes me happy! He is so much in love with my heart that he makes me burn with his divine fire, with the fire of his love. What is this fire that pervades my whole being? Dear Father, if Jesus makes us so happy on earth, what will heaven be like? I often ask myself if any people exist who do not feel their breast burning with divine fire, especially when they are close to him in the Blessed Sacrament. This seems impossible to me, especially in the case of a priest or a religious. Perhaps those who say they do not feel this fire do not notice it because their hearts are bigger. I resort to this kind interpretation of their words so as not to accuse them of shameful falsehood.

...

Dear Father, let us pray that the Lord may wish to dispel the dense clouds which are gathering on the horizon of the Church.

Fr Pio

The Eucharist is the center and summit of Christian life, according to Sacrosantum Concilium. Padre Pio often refers to this sacrament in his symbolism; from these images it is easy to understand how much the Eucharist really was the cornerstone and the direction of his existence. The altar is the sign of Jesus’ sacrifice: the union of love that springs from the Eucharist pushes Padre Pio to lift himself up with Christ on that altar to be a victim offered to the benefit of all brothers and sisters.

His many references to the Eucharist are a sign of the depth of his mystical experience, and while they refer to his own person, they also hint to a possible itinerary for every Christian. First of all, Padre Pio teaches us how to place the Eucharist at the center of our existence, how to feel within ourselves the constant desire to encounter Jesus, how to choose him renouncing sin, how to surrender ourselves totally to Christ in the Eucharist so as to overcome temptation.

In the Eucharist, Padre Pio finds both the meaning of his existence and the great value of the cross which he embraces out of love; from this sacrament springs the power of charity which also unites him concretely to his brothers and sisters, promoting many good initiatives in their favour.



GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO

- ❖ On Sunday, 14th August 1910, Padre Pio celebrated his first solemn mass in the Mother Church of Pietrelcina. During his years in the seminary, the young friar suffers from very high fevers which prevent him from nourishing himself except on Holy Communion: in a letter dated 29 March 1911 he writes to Father Benedetto: "my heart feels as if it is attracted by a superior strength before joining him [Jesus] in the morning in the Blessed Sacrament. I am so hungry and thirsty before receiving Him, that I feel as if was going to die breathless. As I cannot join him yet, I feel as if I am feverish, and I am then forced to go and eat his meat ».
- ❖ On September 8th, 1911, for the first time Padre Pio writes to Padre Benedetto that he has noticed on the palm of his hands "a red patch accompanied by a strong and acute pain" and also adds that " when I am close to Jesus in the blessed Sacrament, my heart starts beating very rapidly. At times I feel as if my heart is about to burst out of my chest ».
- ❖ From October to November 1911, Padre Pio resides in Venafro. In the small convent of Molise, between 29th November and 1st December, he lives the mystical experience of ecstasies: every day, several times a day, the friar speaks with Jesus. His talks will be witnessed and transcribed by Father Agostino, who is present in those hours of conversation with the Lord.
- ❖ On June 28th, 1912, in an epistle addressed to Father Agostino, Padre Pio writes: "Then, last night, I spent the entire night with Jesus in his Passion. [...] I felt myself tightly bound to Jesus. I burned with a thousand flames, which made me live and die. Hence, I suffered, lived and died continuously».
- ❖ In 1915, in response to the insistent requests of his confessor Father Agostino, Padre Pio states in an epistle that he had already received heavenly visions in the years in which he lived in Sant'Elia, "if I am not mistaken, these must have begun not long after the novitiate "(October 10th, 1915)."
- ❖ On August 26th, 1917, Padre Pio was in Naples for military medical examinations. There are no chapels there and young soldiers are not allowed to go out. He will write to Father Agostino "I am very distressed that I cannot say Mass [...] what desolation without Jesus!".
- ❖ On 22nd September 1968, at 5 in the morning, Padre Pio celebrates his last mass in the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie. At the end of the celebration, in an attempt to get up, he staggers and falls into the arms of Father Bill who manages to support him with the help of the other brothers. Taken back to his cell, he will greet his spiritual children for the last time with the words: "My children, my children ...".

PADRE PIO'S WORLD: *The ecstasies of Venafro*

Venafro was an important Roman city, a transit route and connection between the Sannio and Campania, whose strategic importance is attested in the various eras. A place rich in history, the town is characterized by many churches with soaring bell towers, that determine the urban skyline. The Capuchin convent, built in 1573, when Padre Pio arrived accompanied by Father Benedetto, in the second half of October 1911, was intended as a place of study. Here, during the month and a half of his stay, the young friar experienced numerous ecstasies but also many diabolical oppressions, as Father Agostino of San Marco in Lamis tells us in his Diary. His food in this period consisted of the Eucharist alone. On 7th December 1911, Padre Pio, seriously got worse, and left Venafro to go to Pietrelcina.

CLOSE-UP ON PADRE PIO'S PRAYER GROUPS: *A Eucharistic spirituality*

Sacramental life, and especially participation in the Eucharist, should be at the centre of our spirituality. From the very beginning, Eucharistic Adoration and community participation in the monthly Mass have been the main elements of our spirituality. Whenever possible, we should ask our spiritual director or the parish priest to take care of this meeting specifically for our human and spiritual formation. When this is not possible, we will participate in Mass and Adoration with the parish community, in the awareness that the charism of prayer must be carried out together, not in isolation from the community.

OUR COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS

22 January (Anniversary of the religious Dressing of Padre Pio) - The Day of Fidelity

In line with the evangelical essence that characterizes the life of Padre Pio, all Groups commit themselves to a community celebration (for individual Groups or for dioceses) in which, always keeping to the theme of the year, baptismal promises are renewed, always equal in form, to commit ourselves to consistency and testimony.

This meeting can be a preamble to the upcoming Lenten period and can constitute the beginning of a journey of revision of personal and community life.