



First Step

PADRE PIO’S LIFE, SEEN AS A WORK BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES

“And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

(Mc 1,11)

After a long time that He spent leading an ordinary life, far from the crowds, Jesus went to John the Baptist as an observant Jew to fulfil his desire to be part of the people who were waiting for messianic times, new times of grace. It is exactly when he received Baptism, that the voice of the Father revealed him his mission as a “beloved”, and as a servant” who will conquer the world in the name of His Father by carrying the sins of the world on his shoulders.

The same applies to us: as we were baptised, we became His beloved, therefore we are also called not to judge the world, but to carry its weight. The weight of the world is its inability to see the love of the Father: injustice, oppression, wars, violence, tyranny. We are called to receive the Holy Spirit to be able to conquer the world in the name of the Father; so that humanity in its variety is open to its own diversity, so as to form harmony in plurality.

SPIRITUALITY

It is not easy to tell you about all of Padre Pio’s life in one meeting. Rather than pointing out some of the details, I think it would be more appropriate to understand the important role that the Holy Spirit played on him, while leading him towards holiness. In this view, we are going to look at a letter that Padre Pio wrote to Raffaolina Cerase, which shows how he prompted his spiritual daughter to be aware of the fact that a life of faith requires both perseverance and loyalty.

From a letter by Padre Pio to Raffaolina Cerase

Pietrelcina, 19th May 1914

Beloved daughter of Jesus Christ,

May Jesus and Mary be always in your heart and may they make you holy.

By the repeated blows of his expert chisel and by his diligent polishing, the divine Artist prepares the blocks of stone which are intended to be part of the divine building. This is how the hymn of the Office for the Dedication of the Church goes, which all of our sweet mother the Catholic Church sings united, and we can testify that it is true.

for eternal glory can be considered as a stone destined for the erection of the eternal building.

A mason who wants to build a house, will first and foremost clean up the stones that he will be using for the construction of the building; this he obtains by a series of blows of hammer and chisel. The Celestial Father acts in the same way with the elected souls that, since eternity, were destined by His supreme wisdom and providence to be part of the eternal building.

The soul that is destined to reign with Jesus Christ in eternal glory, must be shaped by the blows of hammer and chisel. But what are these blows of hammer and chisel by which the divine Artist prepares the stone, that is to say, the chosen soul? Dear sister, these strokes of chisel are the shadows, fears, temptations, spiritual torments and anxiety, with a dash of desolation and even of physical pain.

You had better be thankful then for the eternal Father’s endless mercy, for treating your soul in this way, for it means that it is destined to be saved. Well then, we can feel privileged for all the terms of endearment that the most loving of all fathers has shown towards us. Open your hearts to this heavenly Physician of souls and abandon yourself into His most holy



embrace with complete trust. He is treating you as a chosen one to follow Jesus closely up the Hill of Calvary and I notice this action of grace in you with joy and emotion. Be sure that all that is going on within your soul is according to the Lord’s will and for this reason you must not be afraid of acting wrongly, in a word, of offending God.

...

If Jesus manifests Himself, thank Him; and if He remains hidden, thank Him just the same: it is all a trick of love. I earnestly hope that you will come to breathe your last breath with Jesus on the Cross and with Him softly exclaim: “Everything is accomplished”

...

May God bless you along with your sister and may He calm your anxiety. May He turn His merciful eyes upon you and console you through His compassion.

Fra Pio, Capuchin.

When we read the life of a saint, we admire his or her virtues, but it is necessary to take into account that these are instilled in human beings by the Holy Spirit, especially the theological ones. The action of the grace of the Father acts within man, raising him to communion with him through the various events of his life, purifying him as «gold in the crucible», making him capable to understand and love him in total loyalty. Padre Pio describes all this through an image taken from the Breviary, precisely from a hymn that was recited in the common dedication of the Church; Jesus is the divine Artist who frees the stones from all useless things to build the reign of God. During his whole life, Padre Pio will also be aware that the devil, called the divine artist of darkness by contrast, will hinder the action of God. A particular characteristic of his whole existence will be the faith he will always have in God, feeling as if he had been immersed in an ocean of fire.

GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO

- ❖ Francesco Forgione was born in Pietrelcina in Vico Storto Valle on 25th May 1887. He is Grazio Forgione and Maria Giuseppa de Nunzio’s fourth son
- ❖ In 1901, after a meeting with Fr Camillo of Sant’Elia in Pianisi, who was a capuchin friar in the Convent of Morcone, the young Francesco expressed the strong desire to become a friar, too. His parents enthusiastically accepted his vocation.
- ❖ Francesco Forgione was born in Pietrelcina in Vico Storto Valle on 25th May 1887. He is Grazio Forgione and Maria Giuseppa de Nunzio’s fourth son.
- ❖ Francesco entered the convent on 6th January 1903 and on 22nd January of the following year he took his vows and became Fra’ Pio.
- ❖ In the morning of the 10th of August 1910, Padre Pio was ordained a priest by monsignor Paolo Schinosi, Archbishop of Marcanopoli, in the chapel of Santa Maria in the cathedral of Benevento. On 14th August he celebrated his first Mass in the Mother Church of Pietrelcina.
- ❖ On 7th September 1910, in the family-run fields of Piana Romana, under the great elm where he used to pray, he received the first stigmata, which would disappear a year later.
- ❖ In 1915 Padre Pio was called for military service but, during his medical check up, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and sent back home.
- ❖ In February 1916, Padre Pio entered the religious community of Saint Anne in Foggia and, on 28th July of the same year, he was sent to San Giovanni Rotondo by his superior, Fr Paolino of Casacalenda, in the convent in which he would remain for the rest of his life.
- ❖ On 20th September 1918, in front of the Crucifix of the convent church of San Giovanni Rotondo, he received the stigmata on his hands, feet and side, signs of the Passion of Christ.
- ❖ In 1940 he started the project for his great worldly work, the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza (Home for the Relief of Suffering), which would open on 5th May 1956.
- ❖ In the early hours of 23rd September 1968, Padre Pio returned to the Father’s house.



PADRE PIO’S WORLD: Pietrelcina, his birthplace

Pietrelcina is a charming agricultural village near Benevento. It has very ancient origins, it already existed in 1100. The village, founded on good human and Christian traditions, is characterised by its narrow alleys and by its houses built with lean lime and hard and raw stone, resting directly on the rock. In fact, the whole village is perched on the “Morgione”, that rock at whose base flows the Pantaniello torrent.

Francesco Forgione was born here in Vico Storto Valle n.27 (today the house number is 32).

In Vico Storto Valle there is also the popular “torretta”, an isolated room of quadrangular shape and with a small window where Padre Pio has slept and prayed for a period of time during his permanence in Pietrelcina when he was a young priest, shuttling from here to Piana Romana, where his family had its fields.

CLOSE-UP ON PADRE PIO’S PRAYER GROUPS: The birth of the Prayer Groups

Padre Pio has always prompted his spiritual sons and daughters to pray together. In his correspondence, he recommended – though in different places – that prayers and novenas for the same purpose be said. Between the two World Wars, he started prompting all the people who had gone to see him in San Giovanni Rotondo that when back in their home towns, they should gather to pray together with other faithful. During the Second World War, pope Pio XII invited all the believers to pray to the Lord together to end the conflict. After hearing the news, Padre Pio asked the doctor Guglielmo Sanguinetti to write to his spiritual sons and daughters to gather and pray together for the intentions of the Pope. This initiative, followed by other formal declarations later on, marked the beginning of the Prayer Groups.

OUR COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS

Groups feel united to the other groups through prayer and the devotion to Padre Pio. This communion of spirit is made visible through four celebrations that are celebrated throughout the year, and these help to make our charism clear. The dates of these celebrations are:

- **7th October**, Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary → to celebrate the beginning of the common year;
- **22nd January**, anniversary of Padre Pio’s religious vestment, with the renewal of baptismal promises;
- **5th May**, anniversary of the foundation of Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza Hospital and Anniversary of the creation of St. Padre Pio’s Prayer Groups
- **16th June**, commemoration of Padre Pio’s canonization: Common prayer in spiritual union with Groups from all over the world.

7TH OCTOBER

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY

THE CEREMONY OF THE ROSARY HANDOUT

In all the Groups all over the world the social year starts on 7th October with the delivery of the rosary. The Group Centre proposes a small liturgy based on the theme of the year and the celebration can take place within a single Group or in the diocese.