



Padre PIO

Glimpse
into the
Miraculous

PASCAL CATANEO

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Introduction

I am privileged to have known Padre Pio personally. My first meeting with him took place at midday on June 17, 1940. I had just arrived from Bologna, Italy, where, the day before, I had been ordained a priest. I reached San Giovanni Rotondo, which was then quite different from the city it has since become. Before going to my own native village on Mount Gargano, I visited Padre Pio to consult him on a few personal problems, find out what he felt, and get his advice. I wanted to make a good start as a priest right from the very beginning.

Padre Pio received me in his cell, telling me he had not been able to go down to the chapel that day because of a severe headache. He immediately kissed my hands, as I was a new priest, and made himself completely available to me for as long as I wanted. At the end, he told me what he felt and gave me his advice.

To be honest, on walking out of his cell, I had the impression he had not given me more than any other priest I might have consulted. At that time I was also under the illusion that he had a kind of miraculous solution for every problem presented to him. In time I learned that Padre Pio intervened in a special way only when God moved him in that direction.

As a matter of fact, in all the years I knew and met with him, from 1940 until his death in 1968, I experienced extraordinary interventions on very few, rare occasions. It is mostly through other people, intimately connected with him, and through the numerous biographies written about him, that I have put together what is recorded here.

In this way I have become aware of the many sides of his personality harmoniously blended into a deep humanity and profound spirituality, which spontaneously manifested itself in many circumstances. I want to show this through this variety of episodes, which I call *I Fioretti di Padre Pio* [the Little Flowers of Padre Pio], not because they have entered into the realm of legend, but because they have an aura of mystery surrounding them.

Twenty years after his death, the picture of Padre Pio, far from fading, has taken on the dimensions and bearing of a giant in faith. One day, when a Brother remarked that the large number of visitors attracted by Padre Pio meant a great deal of extra work for those around him, Padre Pio replied prophetically, "This is nothing to what it will be one day!" On another occasion he said, "Wait a while . . . and you will see how truth will fly at you."

We now see the fulfillment of those words. My desire is to contribute in some small way to a better understanding of Padre Pio by offering these "gleanings" for our reflection. I believe that what is written here, presented in a style acceptable to our contemporaries, will help build up that Kingdom of God so much needed by our world.

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“You cannot escape this. You must fight. Courage! Go, fight boldly and with confidence. I will be here beside you to help you, and I will not allow the creature to defeat you.”

The battle began and it was terrible. Helped by the resplendent person in white, Francis had the upper hand. The monster was forced to retreat, followed by all the ugly, shadowy men, shouting, screaming, and cursing at the top of their voices. The handsome group in white robes applauded and praised the one who had helped Francis in this hard battle.

The resplendent one, who shone brighter than the sun, placed an indescribably beautiful crown on Francis’ head but removed it immediately saying: “Another crown, more beautiful than this, will be yours if you learn to fight this creature you have just defeated. He will always be back to attack you. Fight bravely and count on my help. Don’t be afraid of being harassed by him nor terrified by his horrible appearance. I will be with you, and I will help you every time so that you will be victorious over him.”

Padre Pio was called, in an extraordinary way, to wage war against the forces of evil, against those who assail mankind, against those who direct these forces and represent them, to help build up the Kingdom of God.

This struggle would be enacted, directly or indirectly, a thousand and one times, in various ways. The events reported in these pages offer only a few examples. They are, however, numerous enough to amaze us. May they also inspire us to advance on the path of spiritual maturity, to the point of finding perfection in the fullness of Christ!

is not a matter of accepting suffering for the sake of suffering. This is neither human nor even Christian, but suffering is an essential component of love.

Padre Pio's stigmata caused him continual and intense suffering. The Lord asked from him an extraordinary participation to "completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col 1:24). He accepted with all his heart whatever God asked of him. Sometimes, when asked by his spiritual sons about the suffering the stigmata caused him, he lifted the veil a little to reveal a sight terrifying to anyone.

He particularly spoke of what he endured while celebrating Mass, during which, in some degree, he lived again the passion of Christ. When others, however, offered to share his terrible agony, Padre Pio would tell them he was jealous of his sufferings and that he would not give them up to anyone! This showed his great love of God and for souls. He not only accepted his suffering but desired it to save the numberless sinners who crowded around him.

The event

No one actually saw Padre Pio receive the stigmata. On that day, his Superior, Father Paolino da Casacalenda, was at San Marco in Lamis, a village near San Giovanni Rotondo. The other members of the community were out. Everything took place between Padre Pio and the Lord, in deepest intimacy, before the crucifix that can still be seen in the tribune above the entrance to the little church.

Padre Pio did not want this occurrence to become known, but the time came when his Provincial Superior, Father Benedetto, from San Marco in Lamis, insisted that Padre Pio

write an account of the incident. On October 22, 1918, Padre Pio agreed and wrote the following:

On the 20th of last month, in the tribune after the celebration of Mass, I was overcome by a state of repose like a deep and peaceful sleep. All my senses, interior and exterior, as well as the faculties of my soul, were plunged into an indescribable stillness. In addition, there was a total silence within me and around me followed by a deep peace. Then, in a flash, I saw before me someone like the mysterious person I had seen on August 5, but with one difference: His hands, feet, and side were running with blood . . .

Padre Pio was in great distress and deeply distraught. Engulfed in pain he could not rise from the floor and had to crawl, on all fours, back to his cell, leaving a trail of blood in the corridor. He tried to wipe away the blood as best he could and then hid the wounds with bandages.

On returning to the monastery, Father Paolino, the Superior, noticed that Padre Pio was behaving rather strangely, but he did not give this a second thought. Gradually, he began to sense that Padre Pio was hiding something from him. He questioned him, but Padre Pio gave nothing away. Somehow, Father Paolino heard talk of the stigmata. He was suspicious and wanted to get to the bottom of things. One day he walked into Padre Pio's cell without knocking on the door and discovered the secret. He immediately informed the Provincial Superior who urged the greatest prudence in the matter and asked Padre Pio to write down all that had happened to him.

From that moment a strongly emotional atmosphere surrounded the Padre Pio, ranging from cult-like devotion to violent aversion! This would be his Calvary. Until the day he died, Padre Pio would be a sign of contradiction.

“Hey! What are you doing?”

At first, Padre Pio took great care to hide his wounds, not only from visitors but also from his brothers in religion. One of them, who was quite close to him, noticed that the priest was so completely taken up with the sufferings he bore for the love of Christ and the salvation of souls, that he had not changed his socks for a long time. One day, when Padre Pio was ill, this young Brother, who was looking after him, suggested that it might be good for Padre Pio to have his feet washed. Padre Pio let him do it. His confrere was able to see that Padre Pio’s feet were covered with scabs that made it difficult for him to walk. The Brother scraped off the scabs with great care, washed and dried Padre Pio’s feet, and then kissed them before putting Padre’s sandals back on. At this, Padre Pio called out, “Hey! What are you doing?” The Brother explained that this was the custom whenever he washed anyone’s feet. “Well,” said Padre Pio, “you can do that to other people but not to me!”

Capuchin versus Benedictine

Padre Pio had been suffering for a long time from a severe hernia that caused him pain and difficulty when walking. He had always avoided having an operation—until the day he could no longer stand the pain and consulted a surgeon. The doctor, Giorgio Festa, was one of his converts and very devoted to Padre Pio. A room in the monastery was prepared for the operation on October 10, 1925. When the moment came for the patient to be put under anesthesia, Padre Pio refused it and said, “Will you be able to resist looking at my wounds?”

The doctor replied, "No!" with great frankness. "Now you see why I cannot allow myself to be put to sleep!" said Padre Pio.

The surgeon pointed out that the operation would be long and painful, but Padre Pio had been ordered by his Provincial to hide his stigmata, and he wanted to obey even at the price of such suffering. He refused the anesthesia. Dr. Festa asked him to drink at least a little Benedictine liquor to sustain him. He took some. When the doctor offered a second glass, Padre Pio cut him short, saying, "No! That's quite enough; otherwise there will may be a fistfight between the Capuchin and the Benedictine!"

The operation was performed and, as expected, was very painful. Padre Pio endured the suffering with superhuman strength. In the end, he fainted as he was being taken to his cell. Dr. Festa took advantage of this situation to hurriedly examine the stigmata in the presence of two of the Brothers and so got what he wanted in spite of Padre Pio's protests.