



Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry



Padre Pio Newsletter • Issue 35

www.saintpio.org

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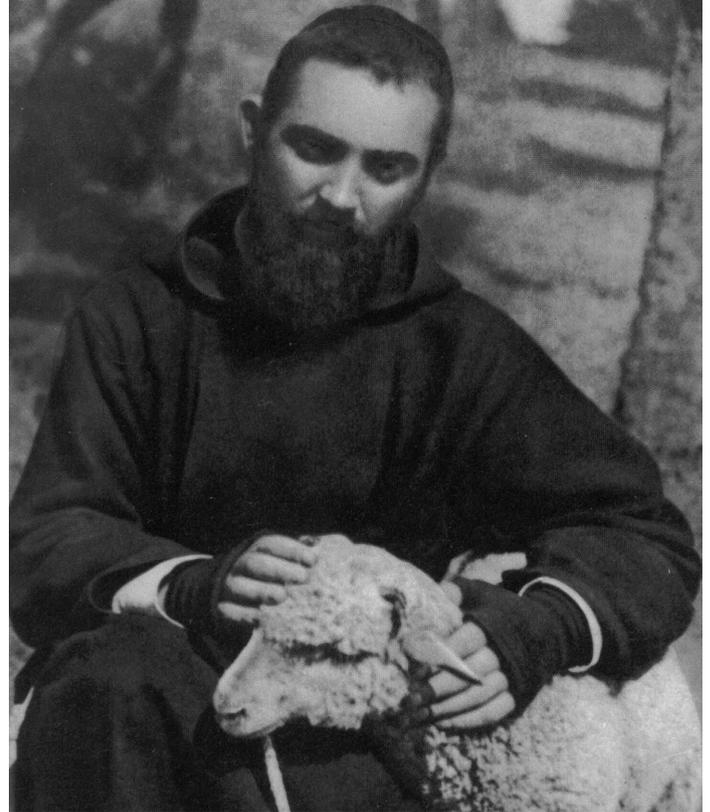
We recently spoke to Fr. James DeVita, SDB of Florida and he shared his story of Padre Pio with us.

Father James DeVita, SDB, was born and raised in San Giovanni Rotondo, the town where Padre Pio lived for almost 50 years. Padre Pio's name was a household word in the DeVita family. Fr. DeVita's mother, Agnes, was a member of the 3rd Order of St. Francis. Padre Pio often encouraged people to join the 3rd Order of St. Francis, calling it a "school of holiness." As a young woman, Agnes used to bake pizza and take it to the monastery for the Capuchins to enjoy for dinner.

When Fr. DeVita was a teenager, he used to walk with his boyhood friends to the monastery to attend Padre Pio's Mass. On one occasion, he was the altar server for Padre Pio's Mass. It lasted almost two hours with long periods of silent prayer throughout. Padre Pio often lost track of time during the Mass. But as a restless teenager, James DeVita did not lose track of time and to him Padre Pio's Mass was just too long for comfort.

Fr. DeVita also made his confession to Padre Pio on a number of occasions. At that time, the men's confessions were held in the sacristy of the church. Confessions were face to face and neither a screen nor a curtain was provided for privacy. The line formed about four feet away from where the penitent was making his confession. The person kneeling before Padre Pio seemed so exposed. Although nobody was trying to listen, one could practically hear the words being spoken. Waiting in line to make one's confession to Padre Pio could be a nerve-wracking experience. One could easily observe the expression on Padre Pio's face while hearing confessions. When people confessed that they had missed Sunday Mass, Padre Pio became visibly upset. He was extremely strict in this regard. Unless one was sick, missing Mass on Sunday was a grave omission. As a teenager, James DeVita would miss Mass from time to time due to his own negligence. When this occurred, he did not have the courage to make his confession to Padre Pio. He would choose another priest.

According to the general opinion, making one's confession to Padre Pio was of inestimable help in the spiritual life. It was true. God gave Padre Pio extraordinary gifts and graces for his priestly work as a confessor. In his lifetime, he reconciled thousands of people back to their faith. He once said that if he had the choice between losing his eyesight or his sense of hearing, he would prefer to lose his eyesight. "Why is that?" someone asked. "It is because with my hearing intact I would still be able to hear confessions," he answered. And hear



A photo from early days of Padre Pio as a young priest.

confessions he did, often more than twelve hours a day. On the last day of his life, although weak and very ill, he heard a number of confessions. Pope Pius XII called him, "The confessor of Europe."

Padre Pio saw his priestly role as confessor as a great responsibility and he always prayed for God's help. "Without the grace of God, we can do nothing," he said. People often came to Padre Pio asking him for advice as to whether certain actions in their daily living experiences were right or wrong. He usually saw questions of right versus wrong in simple, black and white terms. He was able to counsel people in a way that left no doubt in the person's mind regarding the right course to take. He was never tempted to tell people what they wanted to hear. His desire was to tell people the truth.

Padre Pio made no distinction between venial sins and mortal sins. He spoke simply of sin. For Padre Pio, sin was something serious, something terrible. There was to be no compromise with sin. It had to be avoided at all costs. "We will never know what it means to rebel against God," he once said.

Padre Pio said that he had only one fear, that of offending God. He once said, "I would rather undergo death an infinite number of times, rather than openly offend the Lord." On one occasion a person told Padre Pio that he had lied. He explained that it was a very small lie, a white lie. It was of no consequence. "But Jesus died to defend the truth," Padre Pio answered. "A small lie is a sin that offends God," he said. And he went further. He did not condone exaggeration either, even to the smallest degree.

For those who were sincerely seeking to move forward on the spiritual path, confession to Padre Pio was a great blessing. But for the insincere and those who came simply out of curiosity to Padre Pio's confessional, his spiritual direction was described as "demanding, disturbing, and uncomfortable."

Time and space and distance did not seem to be a barrier in Padre Pio's ministry to souls. On one occasion, one of the Capuchins was just about to knock on the door of Padre Pio's cell when he heard Padre Pio talking to someone inside. He decided not to disturb them but he waited at the door anyway. Soon Padre Pio opened the door but there was no one else inside his cell. "I heard you talking to someone but there is no one there," the Capuchin said. "Oh, I was hearing someone's confession," Padre Pio replied. Through the extraordinary gift of bilocation, Padre Pio was able to be present to people, often great distances away, who were in need of his help.

Padre Pio went to confession frequently and he encouraged others to do the same. When some protested that they did not need to go to confession since they had nothing of consequence to confess, Padre Pio used a simple analogy. "Even if a room is very clean and the door is closed so that no one can enter, the dust will nevertheless collect there and it will require dusting," he said. Once Padre Pio made his confession to Padre Eusebio Notte and afterward he began to cry. Padre Eusebio was perplexed. He told Padre Pio that the sins that he confessed were indeed very small and insignificant. There was certainly no reason to cry. But Padre Pio did not see it that way. He had a horror of offending God, even in small matters. He was always truly sorry for his sins.

When Fr. DeVita was a teenager, he used to take part as an actor in the religious plays that were performed in San Giovanni Rotondo. The plays included the life of St. Cecilia, St. Agnes, St. Peter and more. Padre Pio and the other Capuchins frequently attended the performances and enjoyed them immensely. Rehearsals were held at Mary Pyle's home. Fr. DeVita had a great admiration for Mary Pyle. She was often known simply as, "Padre Pio's American secretary." "Mary was a person of great holiness," said Fr. DeVita. "Her love for God and her great willingness to serve Padre Pio's work was truly amazing."

Mary Pyle was an American heiress who had been born into a very socially prominent and wealthy Protestant family and raised in New York's high society. She had become accustomed to every luxury from her earliest years and had traveled extensively throughout the world. When Mary was 35 years old, she accepted an invitation from a girlfriend to visit Padre Pio's monastery and attend his Mass. During the visit, she was able to speak to Padre Pio briefly. She found her

life transformed by the encounter and soon decided to move to San Giovanni Rotondo permanently. She built a house right below the monastery. It was one of the first houses in the area.

Mary joined the 3rd Order of St. Francis and began to lead a simple and austere life, totally consecrated to God. Her workload continually increased through the years but she was always ready and willing to do more to assist Padre Pio. Mary had the heart of a mother, and the charity of a saint. She lived in San Giovanni Rotondo for 45 years until her death in 1968. Her cause for canonization is presently being considered by the Church.

The Capuchins in San Giovanni Rotondo set aside time every day for a period of recreation. For Padre Pio, this time was usually spent in the garden of the monastery, enjoying fellowship with his brothers in religion. As the time drew closer to his ordination day, James DeVita was allowed to visit Padre Pio in the monastery garden anytime he wished. He recalls that Padre Pio delighted in telling funny stories and making everyone laugh. "Padre Pio had a wonderful sense of humor," Fr. DeVita said. "He was a simple man. He was not an intellectual. He was a man of prayer, a man who loved God above all things."

Padre Pio wore brown half gloves to cover the wounds of the stigmata. He would always remove the gloves before the celebration of Mass. On several occasions, Fr. DeVita was able to kiss the stigmata on Padre Pio's hand when his gloves were removed. It was a grace-filled experience and yet it was not something that was easy to do. Fr. DeVita would close his eyes tightly and with trepidation, kiss the wound on Padre Pio's hand.

Because of the inadequate health care in San Giovanni Rotondo in the early years, many of the people in the area died an untimely death. Padre Pio felt compelled to remedy this situation. He worked tirelessly to make the *Home for the Relief of Suffering* a reality. Fr. DeVita saw first hand, the great blessings of Padre Pio's hospital. Not only did it save the lives of many of the sick and infirm, it was also of great benefit to the poor. San Giovanni Rotondo was an economically depressed region and many of its citizens struggled to find work. The *Home for the Relief of Suffering* provided much needed jobs for many of the families in the town. Fr. DeVita's own sister Raffaella felt very fortunate to be employed at the hospital.

Fr. DeVita became a patient at the *Home for the Relief of Suffering* shortly after it opened its doors. He contracted typhoid fever and remained in a coma for four days. A rumor went around San Giovanni Rotondo that James had passed away, but Padre Pio set the record straight. He said, "Do not worry. James has not passed away. He is going to recover."

In 1957, James DeVita was ordained into the Salesian Order, founded by St. John Bosco. Mary Pyle and the ladies choir that she directed, and that sang for all of Padre Pio's Masses, came to the parish of San Onofrio in San Giovanni Rotondo to provide the music for James' ordination Mass. When Fr. DeVita celebrated his first Mass, he had the great joy to wear one of Padre Pio's priestly stoles.

Before he moved to the United States, Fr. DeVita went to Padre Pio to say goodbye. "But there is so much



Fr. James DeVita, SDB

work for priests to do here in Italy," Padre Pio said to him. "Why do you have to move so far away?" Fr. DeVita explained that he wanted to be closer to his family who had emigrated to Canada.

June 29, 2007 marked Fr. James DeVita's golden jubilee anniversary of fifty years in the priesthood. Most of his priestly ministry has been spent serving parishes in New York and New Jersey. Today he is retired and living in Florida where he also assists at a parish. Looking back on his life, Fr. DeVita is very grateful to have grown up in San Giovanni Rotondo and to have had a saint as his role model. Fr. DeVita said that the beautiful words spoken by Pope Paul VI on the life and spirituality of Padre Pio, echo his own sentiments in a profound way. In speaking of Padre Pio, Pope Paul VI said, "What fame he had. How many followers from around the world. Why? Was it because he was a philosopher, a scholar, or because he had means at his disposal? No, it was because he said Mass humbly, heard confessions from morning until night and was a marked representative of the stigmata of Our Lord. He was truly a man of prayer and suffering."

Recently, while visiting some people on the East Coast who had known Padre Pio personally, we learned about Pasquale D'Andrea. Pasquale, who currently lives in Bayside, New York had a beautiful story to share with us.

Pasquale D'Andrea grew up in Pietrelcina, Italy. His father, Cosimo owned a piece of land in Pietrelcina and earned his living by growing tobacco. One day Padre Pio approached Cosimo and said to him, "You do not go to Mass on Sunday, but you go to the town square." Cosimo was shocked that Padre Pio knew that he did not attend Sunday Mass. He had never discussed it with anyone. He explained to Padre Pio that he had to spend his Sundays working in the fields to earn his living and support his family. But Cosimo was well-aware that his explanation was unsatisfactory to Padre Pio. From that day forward, he never again missed attending Sunday Mass.

Pasquale's wife, Giovannina, also had the greatest respect for Padre Pio. On one occasion she had an important decision to make regarding a personal matter. She felt that she needed to seek advice from Padre Pio at once. She went to the church to speak to him, but realized that it would be impossible. On that particular day there was a continuous crowd of people around him. However, Padre Pio answered the questions in her heart in a unique way. At three different times that morning, he fixed his eyes on Giovannina. With a penetrating gaze and a serious expression on his face, he slowly moved his head from side to side, indicating "no." Without saying a word, Padre Pio had given Giovannina the answer she needed. She felt completely satisfied.

Before leaving Italy in 1955 to make his home in New York, Pasquale went to San Giovanni Rotondo to say good bye to Padre Pio and ask for his blessing. Padre Pio was always very friendly and approachable. He simply said to Pasquale, "There will be three days of storms on your journey, and after that smooth sailing!" Once again, his words proved true.

Ellie Hunt was one of the pilgrims who we met while traveling with the Padre Pio Foundation of America to the canonization of Padre Pio in Rome. We have remained friends with Ellie ever since. This is her story.

Padre Pio has been a part of Ellie Hunt's family ever since she can remember. Ellie's father, James Rummo as well as her maternal and paternal grandparents lived in Pietrelcina, Padre Pio's hometown. It was a small and close-knit farming town where everybody knew everybody else. Francesco Forgione (Padre Pio) would eventually become Pietrelcina's most famous citizen, although no one ever imagined it at the time.

Ellie's maternal grandmother, Anna Maria Scocco was the same age as Padre Pio and knew him as a child. Anna Maria's family owned a farm in the countryside of Pietrelcina, an area called Piana Romana. Padre Pio's family, the Forgione's, also had a small landholding in Piana Romana as well as a vineyard. As a youngster, Padre Pio tended the family's sheep.

Anna Maria recalled that Padre Pio was very pious as a young boy and always carried a devotional book with him. He was a quiet child and quite shy. Anna Maria once asked him why he was always reading books. Instead of answering, he asked Anna Maria why she didn't attend school. She told him that it was because her father wanted her to stay home and learn how to cook, clean and sew. At the time, education was not mandatory in southern Italy.

Padre Pio's health, which was never good, began to deteriorate during his time in the Capuchin seminary. Doctors were never able to successfully diagnose and treat the mysterious illnesses that continually wracked his body. The distressing symptoms of his ailments would come and go with no apparent reason. Padre Pio was forced to interrupt his studies for the priesthood and move back to the family home. For the better part of 7 years, from 1909 until 1916, he remained in Pietrelcina. He spent much of his time in prayer and solitude and did his best to regain his health. It was one of the few times of relative quiet and peace in his life. During this period, his prayer life grew in intensity. It is thought that the 7 years he spent in his hometown were almost like an extended retreat, arranged by Divine Providence, to prepare him spiritually for the great mission that was just up ahead.

It was during the time of his long convalescence in Pietrelcina that Ellie's father James came in contact with Padre Pio. James' grandmother, Saveria, would send him with fresh eggs to deliver to Padre Pio. The hope was that the eggs would build up his strength. Everyone in the community knew of his illness and hoped for his recovery. Even in his youth, the townspeople held him in the highest esteem.

It was difficult to make a living in Pietrelcina and for this reason, Ellie's father, grandparents, and other

relatives eventually moved to New York. Once in New York, the men joined the "Pietrelcina Society," which sent regular financial help to those who had stayed behind.

Alfred, one of Ellie's cousins, made yearly visits back to Pietrelcina all through the 1950's. He noticed that St. Anne's parish, where Padre Pio had celebrated Mass for a number of years, was in a great state of disrepair. "Someday people from all over the world will be coming to our town," he said to his relatives in Pietrelcina. "They will want to see Padre Pio's birthplace and the parish of his youth. The church must be kept clean at all times. It must be swept and dusted daily. It cannot be neglected like this!" he said emphatically.

In the 1950's when Alfred spoke these words, Padre Pio was almost completely unknown throughout the world. The tiny, impoverished town of Pietrelcina was even more unknown. It could barely be found on a map. Many of its residents had long since moved away. But Alfred was convinced that the saintly priest from Pietrelcina would one day become world-famous and that people would be interested in seeing his hometown. His words proved to be prophetic. Gradually people from all parts of the world began to learn about Padre Pio. Today, the pilgrims who annually visit the town of Padre Pio's birth and pray in the rustic church of St. Anne's, number in the thousands. The increase in visitors has been so dramatic that the town is hard-pressed to accommodate the crowds.

All through Ellie's growing up years, she heard the family reminisce about Padre Pio but she was never very interested in these stories from the "old country." All that changed however due to an incident that happened in 1960, when Ellie was 31 years old. That was the year that her grandfather, Jack Crafa became gravely ill. Ellie and her parents lived close to his home in Flushing, New York and during his illness, the family stayed by his side. When Jack fell into a coma, everyone knew his end was near. One day while Ellie and her parents were at her grandfather's bedside, a stranger knocked at the door. It was a Capuchin monk dressed in a dark brown habit. Ellie was surprised to see that he was wearing sandals without any socks for it was a particularly cold day and there was snow on the ground outside. He said he had come to pray for her grandfather.

Ellie was perplexed. There were not any Capuchin monks in residence at their parish in Flushing or in any other parish in the area for that matter. Ellie was also annoyed. It should have been the parish priest to come to pray for her grandfather and not a complete stranger. But she was impressed by the kindness and compassion of the young religious. He went in the bedroom and blessed Jack Crafa. He told the family to pray the Rosary while sitting at Jack's side and to pray the Hail Mary close to his ear. He had the sense that Jack was still able to hear. After the monk said that, Ellie was surprised to find that when she took her grandfather's hand in hers, she felt a very slight response from him, a very slight squeeze from his hand.

The young monk gave Ellie's grandfather the Last Rites, he blessed the family and then bid them goodbye. As he walked out the front door, Ellie's father, James, observed that there was no car waiting for him outside. James watched him as he walked up the street until he disappeared in the darkness. It was that very night that

Jack Crafa passed away. He had been in a coma for nine days.

After the monk left, James became pale and appeared quite shaken. Ellie's mother Lucy, asked him for the reason. "Don't you know who that was?" James replied. "It was Padre Pio. He came in bilocation to give the Last Rites to your father. He looked exactly like I remember him when I used to deliver eggs to him in Pietrelcina."

Ellie believed her father's explanation and she was aware of Padre Pio's gift of bilocation. Her grandfather, Jack Crafa had been one of Padre Pio's spiritual sons from Pietrelcina. But Ellie was confused about one thing. The black and white photos she had seen of Padre Pio showed him as having very dark hair, almost black. This monk had sandy colored hair. Later when Ellie read a biography of Padre Pio, the author described Padre Pio's hair as a dark sandy color. It confirmed her own observation.

Padre Pio had always said that the people of Pietrelcina held a very special place in his heart. Ellie's mother had a cousin named Rose from Pietrelcina. She was very devoted to Padre Pio. Rose heard that Padre Pio enjoyed American coffee. She used to regularly send packages to her aunt who lived in San Giovanni Rotondo. The packages always included coffee with instructions to take it to the monastery and give it to Padre Pio.

Rose was finally able to make a trip to San Giovanni Rotondo. One afternoon, she was standing among a large crowd of people who were gathered outside the monastery waving to Padre Pio. He was standing at a window, waving a handkerchief in greeting to the crowd below. As he looked at the large gathering of people, he pointed out Rose to one of the Capuchins. The next thing she knew, one of the Capuchins approached her and told her that Padre Pio wanted to speak to her. Rose was escorted inside the monastery and asked to wait. After awhile the Capuchin returned. He apologized to Rose. He said that Padre Pio wanted to come down and personally thank her for the coffee she had been sending to him but he was unable to do so. In that large crowd of people he picked out one of his fellow citizens of Pietrelcina to give a special word of thanks to. He had never seen Rose before nor had she ever seen him. He loved Pietrelcina and he loved his spiritual children from Pietrelcina. Padre Pio once said, "In my lifetime I have made San Giovanni Rotondo known but after my death I will make Pietrelcina known."



Ellie Hunt

PADRE PIO DEVOTIONS are every 1st Monday of the month at Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Church in San Diego. Rosary begins at 6:35 pm and Mass begins at 7:00 pm. Benediction and prayers follow. For more information call (619) 697-5958.

To receive more information about Padre Pio and a copy of the prayers he said daily – send 4 stamps and your address to:

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