

Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry



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"Father Pio is a giant of sanctity. We wish to thank our Father who is in Heaven for having given rise in the Holy Church of God to a man of great faith, of that unshakable faith that moves mountains and creates gigantic good works in this century of struggles, fratricidal wars and egoism. God has given rise in the Italian Church, in this noble region of Puglia, to a giant of sanctity whose heroic virtues recall men of today to their vocation as God's created beings and sons of the Father who is in Heaven."

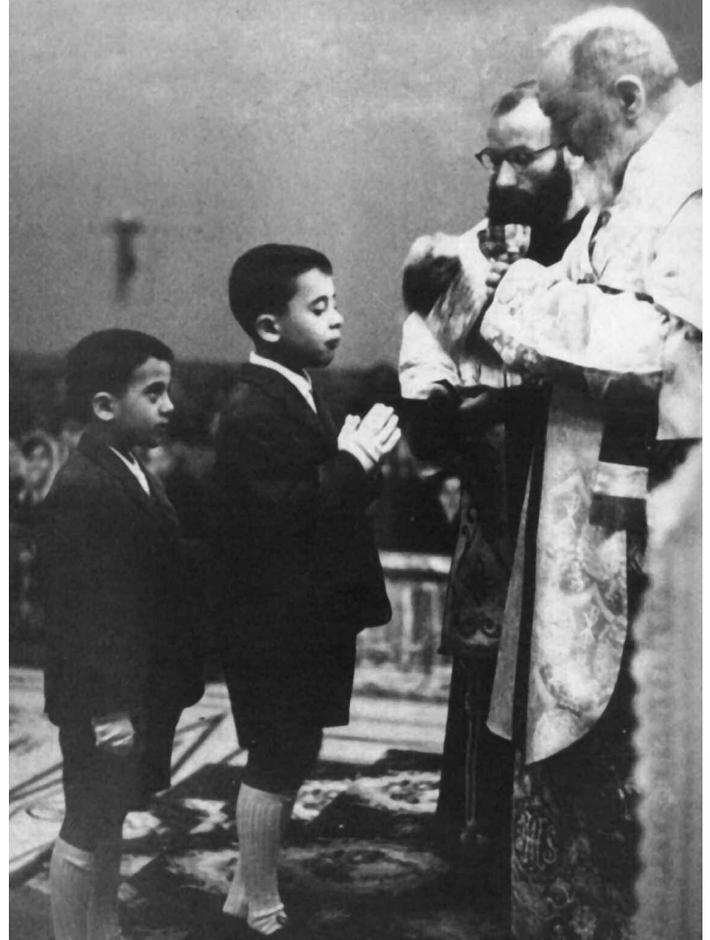
— Cardinal Angelo Sodano,
Vatican Secretary of State

Padre Pio and His Friends from East and West

Father Pio Francesco Mandato, F.M.H.J., of Eastern, PA, Danny D'Agosto of Brooklyn, NY, and James Hurlburt of San Diego, CA, each shared their memories of Padre Pio with us for this issue of "Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry."

Father Pio Francesco Mandato, F.M.H.J., was born in Italy in 1956, and his parents and grandparents were from Pietrelcina, Padre Pio's hometown. Father Mandato's family members, including his great-grandfather, received many graces from their spiritual father, Padre Pio. His grandmother, Maria DeNunzio once asked a friend who was going to San Giovanni Rotondo to deliver a letter to Padre Pio. She fixed her friend a cup of espresso, and they had an enjoyable visit. Then he left for the monastery. He was able to talk with Padre Pio and when it was time to say good-bye, Padre Pio surprised him by saying, "Aren't you forgetting something?" "Not that I can think of," Maria's friend replied. "Not only did you enjoy a cup of coffee and a visit with Maria, but you promised her that you would give me the letter that is in your back pocket!" At once he remembered and quickly placed the letter in Padre Pio's hands.

In Pietrelcina, everyone called Padre Pio, *Il Monaco Santo*, the holy friar. The townspeople loved to exchange stories about their experiences with Padre Pio. Everyone felt very proud that the "holy friar" was a fellow citizen of Pietrelcina. The people from Pietrelcina were characteristically simple, devout, hard-working, and strong in their Catholic faith. Many people in the area were related or distantly related to each other. Pio Francesco's mother



Seven year old Pio Francesco Mandato and his younger brother receive Holy Communion from Padre Pio in 1964.

was related to Padre Pio through her paternal grandmother.

Padre Pio never forgot the town from which he had come. He loved Pietrelcina and he loved the people who lived there. He said that he remembered Pietrelcina, "stone by stone." In a letter to his brother Michael, who still resided there, Padre Pio wrote, "Pietrelcina is totally in my heart." Regarding his spiritual life, Padre Pio once said, "Everything happened in Pietrelcina. Jesus was there." It was in Pietrelcina that the Lord began to pour out his graces on the young Capuchin. Once Padre Pio made this prophetic statement, "During my life I have cherished San Giovanni Rotondo. After my death I will cherish and favor Pietrelcina." How fitting that today he is known as St. Pio of Pietrelcina.

During World War II, the people of Pietrelcina were worried about their safety. "Do not worry," Padre Pio said. "Pietrelcina will be protected." History bears out the truth of his statement. Padre Pio was transferred to the Capuchin monastery of Our Lady of Grace in San Giovanni Rotondo in 1916 and remained there until his death in 1968. A number of the residents of Pietrelcina moved to San Giovanni Rotondo to be closer to their spiritual father.

Once Paris DeNunzio, Pio Francesco's grandfather, made a trip to San Giovanni Rotondo from Pietrelcina to see Padre Pio. The road that led up to the monastery was steep and dangerous. Paris' companion, who was driving, fell asleep at the wheel and the car swerved and veered off the road. Paris, who was very frightened, began praying, "Padre Pio, helps us!" At the last moment, the driver was able to gain control of the car. When they arrived at the monastery and went to Padre Pio's cell, Paris told his spiritual father about the near accident. "And were you frightened, Paris?" Padre Pio asked. "Yes, I was frightened," Paris replied. "Well, don't you know who was driving?" Padre Pio asked. Paris asked him what he meant. "I was driving the car," said Padre Pio, "and you all arrived safely!"

Paris used to pray daily to Padre Pio, recommending to him his wife, his daughter, his son and other family members. Once when he was talking to Padre Pio, he asked him to pray for his family and began to name them. Padre Pio said to him, "You do not need to tell me their names. I hear their names every day in your prayers." Another time, Paris was experiencing pain in his chest and was worried that perhaps he had heart trouble. He told Padre Pio about it and Padre Pio replied that there was nothing wrong with his heart. "Of course there is something wrong," Paris said. "If there wasn't something wrong, I would not be in so much pain." Padre Pio told him to stop talking about it. "If you don't stop, I will give you a punch," Padre Pio said. He then gave Paris a light punch on his chest. From that moment on, he never experienced another pain in his chest.

Pio Francesco's mother, Graziella, first met Padre Pio when she was ten years old, when she traveled with her father, Paris DeNunzio, from Pietrelcina to San Giovanni Rotondo. They found Padre Pio inside the 16th century friary church of Our Lady of Grace, surrounded by a group of people. Being small, Graziella was unable to get close to him. She could only see the top of his head. When

Padre Pio saw Graziella, he extended his arm over the people, and allowed her to kiss his hand. His eyes made a profound impression on her, an impression that she would not forget.

In 1946, a few days before Christmas, Graziella and her brother visited the monastery and Padre Pio blessed Graziella by placing his hands on her head. Then, in his paternal way, he gave her a fatherly embrace. At once, she became aware of the beautiful scent of roses. She believed that the fragrance was coming from the wound in his side.

One time Graziella told Padre Pio that she had met a man she was thinking of marrying. "Don't do it. He is not for you. You don't know what kind of coat he wears," Padre Pio said to her. She and her father did a little research and found out that the man was a communist. When she inquired about a second suitor, the answer was again a firm "no." When she finally named a third man, Andre Mandato, Padre Pio said, "The angel of God has passed. Do it with the blessing of God." She married Andre in 1955.

Because of the popularity of Padre Pio's confessional, a booking system had to be put in place at the monastery. People would take a ticket and wait for their number to be called. It sometimes required a wait of eight days or more. Once Graziella had a tremendous desire to speak to Padre Pio. The way to speak to him was through the vehicle of the confessional but Graziella did not want to wait that long. She somehow had the courage to approach the confessional without a ticket. The woman at the front of the line told her she could go ahead of her.

Just as she stepped into the confessional, Padre Pellegrino, Padre Pio's assistant, whose job it was to check tickets, told Padre Pio that Graziella had just entered without a reservation. Padre Pio said to him, "And when she did, who were you watching?"

Graziella was permitted to make her confession regardless and she told her spiritual father that she and her husband were expecting their first child. "You will have a son," he said. "Name him Pio Francesco." When her baby boy arrived on July 6, 1956, she was delighted that he shared not only Padre Pio's baptismal name, Francesco, but also his name in religion, Pio. Padre Pio sent his blessing as well as a medal with the Blessed Virgin on one side and St. Michael the Archangel on the other.

Pio Francesco Mandato was four years old when his grandfather, Paris, took him for the first time to see Padre Pio in his cell. Padre Pio blessed little Pio Francesco and embraced him. Little Pio came just up to the middle of Padre Pio's waist. Afterward, he told his mother, "Padre Pio has perfume on his tummy." Graziella told her son that he did not wear perfume. He had perceived the characteristic fragrance of Padre Pio, wholly supernatural in origin and most frequently a sign of grace.

Paris took little Pio Francesco with him a number of times to the monastery to visit Padre Pio. The men were allowed to go into a gathering area and converse with Padre Pio. Women were not allowed. Pio Francesco remembers what joyful occasions they were for all concerned. In the presence of a number of Capuchins and

PADRE PIO DEVOTIONS

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 3 stamps and your address to:

D. Allen • P.O. Box 191545 • San Diego, CA 92159

Find Padre Pio information and newsletters online at **www.saintpio.org**

laymen, Padre Pio enjoyed the fellowship and he loved to tell jokes and to make his friends laugh.

Seven year old Pio Francesco and his younger brother Vincent received their first Holy Communion from Padre Pio on October 3, 1964, on the feast of the Transitus of St. Francis of Assisi (the celebration of the death of St. Francis of Assisi). Afterward Padre Pio said to the young boys, "I pray that your last Holy Communion will be even more beautiful than your first." Pio Francesco remembers the solemnity and the great devotion with which Padre Pio celebrated Mass. Although his Mass was long, the time seemed to pass very quickly. Another remarkable aspect of Padre Pio's Mass was that although it was always very crowded, a profound silence pervaded the church.

The Mandato family emigrated to the United States in 1964 and settled in New Jersey. Naturally, they missed Padre Pio immensely. Father Alessio Parente, Padre Pio's secretary, relayed a message to Graziella from Padre Pio. He said, "Tell Graziella that I always have her present in my prayers and I am united to her whole family."

On September 22, 1968, Graziella had a vivid dream of Padre Pio. "I come to say goodbye to you," he said. She said to him, "Don't leave," and he replied, "The Lord is calling me." The next day Graziella learned that he had passed away in the early morning hours.

Following in the footsteps of his spiritual father, Pio Francesco Mandato was ordained to the priesthood in Hoboken, New Jersey in 1985. He and his family made a trip to Italy so that he could celebrate his first Mass in Pietrelcina at the *Madonna Della Libera* altar (Our Lady of Liberty), at Our Lady of the Angels parish. It was the very same church and altar where Padre Pio had celebrated his first Mass on August 14, 1910.

Today, fifty year old Father Pio Francesco Mandato, F.M.H.J., belongs to the Franciscan Missionary Hermits of St. Joseph and lives in Eastern Pennsylvania. He continues to live out his priestly vocation in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi. He feels that Padre Pio is still guiding him and helping him on his spiritual journey. "More than anything else, I remember Padre Pio as a very loving man, like a loving father," Father Pio Francesco said. The words that Padre Pio said to his mother so many years before remain a consolation to him, "Tell Graziella that I always have her present in my prayers and I am united to her whole family." Father Pio Francesco Mandato continues to carry on the work of the Lord.

Note: *Padre Pio: Encounters with a Spiritual Daughter from Pietrelcina*, is an excellent book written by Graziella DeNunzio Mandato and published by Angelus Media Distribution Group.



"Don't doubt my prayers, which are certainly poor, but still solicitous for you. I have never ceased, nor will I cease to pray to the most sweet God that He may be pleased to accomplish His holy work in you; that is, that you may have a strong desire and intention to reach perfection in the Christian life; a desire which you must love and nurture tenderly in your heart, as the work of the Holy Spirit, and a spark of His Divine fire."

— St. Pio of Pietrelcina

James Hurlburt shared his testimony at the Padre Pio Devotions in San Diego. When he talked about seeing Padre Pio for the first time, James was visibly moved, and it was hard for him to continue speaking. James said, "The experience of seeing Padre Pio in prayer was so powerful that I still cannot talk about it without crying."

James Hurlburt "I spent 24 years in the U.S. navy, and as a chief petty officer, I had become accustomed to many deployments in a number of different countries around the world. However, there is one trip that stands out among all the rest. It was my visit to the monastery of Padre Pio in 1960. It has remained one of the greatest experiences of my life.

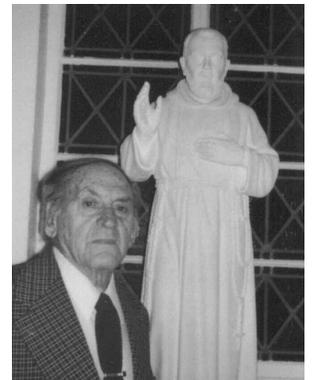
At that time, the ship I was assigned to was stationed in Naples, Italy where we serviced navy ships of the 6th Fleet. My shipmate, Stan had met an Italian man who had told him about Padre Pio. They had decided to go to San Giovanni Rotondo to see Padre Pio and invited me and one other shipmate to go with them. I had never heard of Padre Pio but the idea of taking a few vacation days appealed to me. I thought it would be enjoyable to see the southern part of Italy and so I accepted the invitation.

When we arrived at the monastery in San Giovanni Rotondo, I noticed many women dressed in black with rosaries in their hands, climbing solemnly up the stone steps to the entrance of the church. The next day we visited the church in the afternoon and saw many of the same devout ladies, rosaries in hand, praying. I noticed a young priest who was sitting in the church and he acted strangely. He seemed ill-at-ease as he shifted around in his seat. He somehow didn't seem to belong there among so many devout people.

On Sunday morning we got up early to attend Padre Pio's Mass. We were there well before the Mass began and found seats on the left side of the church, near the altar. I looked up in the balcony and saw Padre Pio. It almost took my breath away. He was kneeling and had his hands folded in prayer. He seemed to be totally wrapped in God. Motionless, he was looking up at a fixed point. He remained completely still for what seemed like a long time. I felt like I was looking at Jesus. I will never forget it as long as I live.

His Mass too, was unforgettable. From our seats near the altar, we could see him well. His movements were slow and reverent. It was very impressive to see him as he opened the tabernacle and then prayed. He seemed somehow to be out of his earthly existence, talking to Jesus. He seemed to be in Heaven.

After the Mass, we went to a small reception room near the church. We could hear Padre Pio's booming voice, full of authority, speaking to someone nearby. He was speaking to the priest who had seemed so troubled the previous day. Our Italian companion told us that Padre Pio had said to the



James Hurlburt today.

priest, "You must go to confession if you want to save your soul!" Then the young priest left the church.

The next morning we left for Naples to return to our ship. What began as just a sightseeing trip across Italy turned out to be a glimpse into the world of the supernatural. The visit to San Giovanni Rotondo was a profound experience and it had a great impact my life. I am now 89 years old. Seeing Padre Pio and attending his Mass is a memory that I will cherish forever."

"We belong eternally to God to love and bless Him always, and I live wholly in Him and His Divine Son."

— St. Pio of Pietrelcina

Donato (Danny) D'Agosto, growing up in Controne, Italy, had always heard talk about Padre Pio, and had a desire to visit him. However, San Giovanni Rotondo was a long distance away and Danny could not afford to make the trip.

In 1954, when Danny was eighteen years old, he emigrated with his family to the United States. He took a bus to the boat that would take him to his new home and as the bus passed through the city of Pompeii, Danny noticed the beautiful church of Our Lady of Pompeii (Padre Pio had always had a great devotion to Our Lady of Pompeii). Passing the church, Danny made a promise to God that he would someday return to Italy and fulfill his dream of meeting Padre Pio, and he prayed, asking for God's help and blessing in the matter.

Danny and his family settled in Brooklyn, New York. Four years later, when he was 23 years old, Danny had saved enough money to return to Italy and realize the desire of his heart. He managed to get a personal meeting with Padre Pio. "It was 5:00 a.m. when I arrived at the church," Danny said. "Padre Pio was there greeting visitors in the sacristy before Mass. I knelt down to kiss his hand and my heart was full of emotion. Padre Pio looked at me and said, 'You kept your promise. You came to see me!' Padre Pio had never seen me before and had no way of knowing about the prayer and the promise I had made to God four years earlier. It still gives me the chills when I think about it."

Danny had a desire to honor Padre Pio in a special way in New York, where he has lived for the last fifty-two years. With the permission of the parish priest of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, in Brooklyn, Danny purchased the property across the street from the church and built a shrine to Padre Pio. A large statue of Padre Pio sits behind a glass partition in an attractive alcove wher many visitors come to pray. Pilgrims to the shrine have included two Bishops and one Cardinal.



Danny D'Agosto

The shrine remains a work in progress. Danny was able to have the name of the street facing the shrine changed to "Padre Pio Way." Mass is celebrated at the shrine on Padre Pio's birthday, May 25 and on September 23, the day that he died. "Padre Pio was like a light, like a bright and shining star," Danny said. "His holiness was tangible."

"Where did Padre Pio get that light which he so successfully communicated to all those who met him? Undoubtedly from prayer, in listening to God, in prolonged penances, but above all through the celebration of the Mass which was the center of his existence."

— Pope John Paul II

What Makes Up True Holiness

As a Capuchin priest, Padre Pio led a life of profound holiness. He wrote a beautiful reflection on true holiness:

"Let us keep before our minds that which makes up real holiness. Holiness means getting above ourselves; it means perfect mastery of all our passions. It means having real and continual contempt for ourselves and for the things of the world to the point of preferring poverty rather than wealth, humiliation rather than glory, suffering rather than pleasure. Holiness means loving our neighbor as our self for love of God. In this connection holiness means loving those who curse us, who hate and persecute us and even doing good to them. Holiness means living humbly, being disinterested, prudent, just, patient, kind, chaste, meek, diligent, carrying out one's duties for no other reason than that of pleasing God and receiving from Him alone the reward one deserves."

— Padre Pio Letters III



From our Spiritual Director

I like very much the true story about Donald Fitzgerald of Dublin, Ireland and the grace he received from Padre Pio. Donald had been ill and a friend gave him a relic badge of Padre Pio.

Donald always wore it around his neck.

Donald found a job in County Galway on a fishing boat and on one occasion, he and a crew of five others set out on a ten day fishing trip. On the fourth day, 200 miles off the Irish coast, winds built up to gale force. The Captain gave orders to head for shore. The waves were reaching 20 feet in height. One strong wave after another bashed against the boat. A double wave hit the boat and Donald lost his balance. A large bag of prawns swung against him and knocked him into the sea.

Donald, who cannot swim, was carried about 500 feet from the boat. He realized he was going to drown. He grabbed the relic of Padre Pio that was around his neck, and prayed to Padre Pio for his intercession. He perceived a beautiful perfume.

Donald suddenly saw Padre Pio in front of him. Padre Pio told him not to worry, he would not die. He felt someone lift him out of the water and put him back on the boat. The next day the crew was able to return to port with their catch.

Donald Fitzgerald's testimony has been recorded and is kept in the Cause archives. We are to remember that God is always with us and often sends his saints and his angels to protect us. We have nothing to fear. And Padre Pio has reminded us that he will be able to help us more from Heaven, than he was able to when he was on earth.

— Fr. Louis Solcia, CRSP