



# Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry



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*"Always be happily at peace with your conscience, reflecting that you are in the service of an infinitely good Father, who comes down to His creatures out of sheer goodness, to raise and transform them in Him, their Creator."*

— St Pio of Pietrelcina

## Clara and Dan Steele Two Lives Blessed by Padre Pio

Clara and Dan met in 1947 in Clara's hometown of Trieste, Italy where Dan, a military police officer in the U.S. Army, was stationed. Clara and Dan became good friends and when she introduced Dan to her mother, her mother seemed to like him at once. Because she was always looking out for the best interest of her daughter, she soon suggested to Clara that Dan would make a wonderful husband. But Clara was not looking for a husband. She was only fifteen years old and marriage was the farthest thing from her mind.

One day when Clara was in church, a woman whom she did not know came up to her and said, "Do you need a grace?" Clara asked the woman what she meant. "There is a saint living in San Giovanni Rotondo named Padre Pio," the woman said. "If you need a grace or if you have a special intention, you should go and see him."

Clara thought about the conversation she and her mother had just had about Dan Steele and decided it would be a good idea to go to San Giovanni Rotondo and talk to Padre Pio about him. Clara and her mother arrived at the little church of "Our Lady of Grace," at 4:30 a.m., and already there was a large crowd assembled outside. When the doors opened, people ran as fast as they could to get a seat near the front of the church. After Mass, Clara made her confession to Padre Pio and then said to him, "I would like to know if Dan Steele would be a good marriage partner?" Padre Pio said, "Is he a good Catholic?" "He is a devout Protestant," Clara replied. "You don't know what you are doing," Padre Pio retorted in a loud voice. "You are trying to buy a cat in a bag." Obviously angry, Pio closed the shutter of the confessional. Clara had been dismissed. Angry and embarrassed, she left the confessional. "Let's leave at once," Clara said to her mother.

But on the way back to Trieste, Clara began to ponder Padre Pio's words. What did he mean by a "cat in a bag?"



*Padre Pio baptizing Dan Steele in 1948.  
(Clara is standing directly behind Dan - with scarf on.)*

she wondered. "Perhaps I do not know what I am doing. Maybe Padre Pio is right," she said to herself. As she thought more about the encounter with Padre Pio, her anger began to subside. Padre Pio often made remarks in the confessional which were hard to understand and he did it for a reason. It caused people to stop and think, and to reflect on their lives. Clara came to realize that Padre Pio had done her a great favor. She needed to be shaken up and to think seriously about her life. It was true, as a young girl of fifteen, she really didn't know what she was doing. Padre Pio's abruptness was just the kind of "shock treatment" she needed to move forward and to consider important life decisions. The short encounter with Padre Pio, which seemed so unpleasant at first, actually marked a great and positive change in Clara's spiritual life. It was a blessing.

Dan did not know that Clara and her mother had gone to see Padre Pio. When he saw Clara again, he told her that he had an unusual experience. He was taking a walk and enjoying the fresh air and suddenly there came over him a very strong desire to become a Catholic. He told Clara that it really had nothing to do with the fact that she was a Catholic. It was something he had to do for himself and he felt convinced that this was what God wanted for him. His desire to become Catholic occurred at

about the same time that Clara and her mother were in San Giovanni Rotondo talking to Padre Pio.

Dan was baptized into the Catholic Church by Padre Pio in 1948. He was 19 years old. Mary Pyle, Padre Pio's American secretary, acted as his godmother. Although very nervous, and with very limited Italian, he made his first confession to Padre Pio. Due to the fasting rules, Padre Pio said that he must wait till the following day to receive his first Holy Communion. Without realizing it, Dan had absent mindedly put a little twig, like a toothpick, in his mouth and Padre Pio had noticed it.

Dan and Clara wanted to get married in San Giovanni Rotondo but because of Army regulations, they were married in Trieste instead. Shortly after, Dan spoke to Padre Pio and asked him if he could bring Clara to San Giovanni Rotondo to have their marriage blessed. Padre Pio smiled at him and agreed. Dan would recall later, after many visits to the monastery, that was the one and only time that Padre Pio had ever smiled at him. By nature, Padre Pio was serious and reserved. His smile was indeed, a blessing in itself. On one of these visits, Dan asked Padre Pio if he could be his spiritual son. Padre Pio thought for a moment and then said to him in Italian, "As long as you stay good."

In the beautiful 16th century church of Our Lady of Grace, Clara and Dan knelt before Padre Pio as he blessed their marriage. Clara prayed silently to him for his intercession regarding her future. She was only sixteen years old and was somewhat apprehensive about her newly married status. During the blessing, Padre Pio smiled at Clara, and said, "To you I offer my hand."

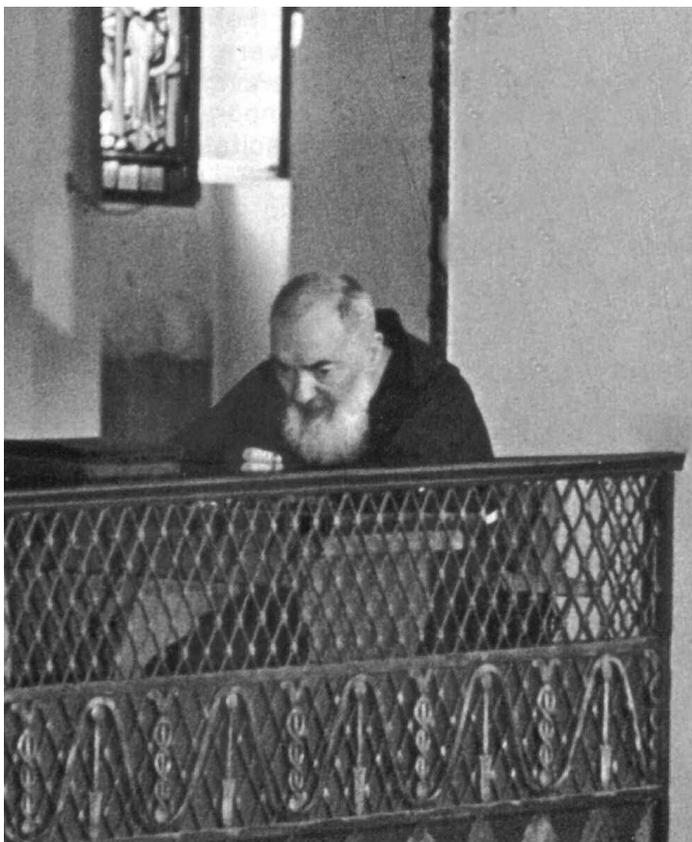
Whenever they could, Clara and Dan would travel to the monastery to see Padre Pio. One time Clara made the journey because her mother was very ill, and she wanted to ask Padre Pio for his prayers. Clara arrived at the church at 4:00 a.m. and waited in a corridor, because she knew he passed by there each morning on his way to the sacristy. A large number of people had also assembled there with the same intention, to say a word to him or to ask for his prayers. As he came into view, a man pointed to Clara and said to Padre Pio, "Pray for that girl's mother. She is ill." Another person called out to Padre Pio and pointed to Clara, "Pray for the soul of that girl's mother." Clara could not understand it. Both of the individuals were strangers to her and she had not told anyone that her mother was sick. When the two men asked him to pray for her mother, Padre Pio lifted his eyes to Heaven and remained completely motionless. Soon, one of the friars closed the door to the hall where Padre Pio was standing, and never lowering his eyes, or moving, he disappeared from view. What she did not know at the time was that her mother had already passed away. When she arrived home, she learned that her mother had already been buried.

Dan was transferred to a military base in Germany and as time went by, he and Clara were blessed to have a family of seven beautiful children. In 1964, the Steeles were able to travel to San Giovanni Rotondo once again. They were always very grateful whenever they could attend Padre Pio's Mass. The beauty and spirituality of his

Mass was impossible to explain to someone who had not experienced it. Padre Pio did not simply recite the prayers of the Mass and voice the responses. He saw Jesus during the Holy Sacrifice and talked to Him. In doing so, he lost track of time. That was why his Mass lasted so long.

At the time of their visit to the monastery, Clara was having many difficulties in her life. All through the Mass, she prayed silently to Padre Pio, asking for his help. Her great desire was to speak to Padre Pio. She felt that if she could just say a few words to him, even for a moment, her many burdens would be lightened.

As soon as the Mass was over, Padre Pio left the church and a huge crowd followed him. He went to a window of the monastery where he customarily blessed the people who were standing outside. Dan had rushed out of the church with all the others to receive the blessing. Clara and her six children were left behind in the church. Clara knew that she would not be able to speak to Padre Pio. There were too many people and they all had the same idea. She was so disappointed that she started to cry. Suddenly she looked up in the balcony and saw Padre Pio. All of her children saw him as well. Her 12 year-old son Bobby, said to her, "Mother, look how Padre Pio is staring at you!" Rays of light were coming from Padre Pio's eyes. As she gazed at him, the church interior and everything else seemed to disappear for a time. She felt such a sense of joy that it was like Heaven, Heaven on earth. Padre Pio was in the balcony of the church and at the same time he was greeting the pilgrims from his monastery window. She could still hear the clamor of the people outside. When he turned and left the balcony, she



*Padre Pio in the balcony of the church of Our Lady of Grace.*

noticed, by the way that he was walking, that he was suffering intensely from the wounds of the stigmata.

All during her time in San Giovanni Rotondo, Clara had prayed to Padre Pio to lift the many burdens she was carrying. When she returned to Germany, her outward circumstances did not improve. However, she felt a great sense of peace and a renewed strength. Her burdens had been lifted, not exteriorly but interiorly. She knew that she had received a spiritual healing.

Clara's extended family also benefitted in many ways from Padre Pio's ministry to souls. Clara's aunt, who was a communist, decided one day to go to confession to Padre Pio. He said to her, "You came here with no sorrow for your sins and no faith. I cannot give you absolution and you cannot receive Holy Communion." The characteristic "shock treatment," often typical of Padre Pio, worked its magic in her heart and it wasn't long before she returned to her Catholic faith.

Through the ensuing years, Clara had several vivid dreams which confirmed to her that Padre Pio, even though separated by distance, was guiding her. When the Steeles were stationed in Nigeria, at least 15 or more stray cats were always at Clara's door. She tried to feed them and to find homes for them but it was a "no win" situation and it caused her a great deal of anxiety. During that time, she had a dream in which she was walking with Padre Pio in a beautiful, heavenly place. The sky was a brilliant blue. Padre Pio said to her, "You are worried about many things that are not important. This is what is important." Then he knelt down in prayer and Clara perceived the fragrance of incense. His arms were cradled as though he were holding the Baby Jesus.

In another vivid dream, Clara repeated the beautiful words of a prayer of St. Francis of Paola to Padre Pio. "May the good Lord accompany you all the days of your life because that is the greatest gift." "Yes, I know that prayer," Padre Pio said to Clara in her dream. "That is what I have come to tell you."

During the last years of Clara's life, she offered many prayers and sacrifices for her family members who had strayed away from their faith. She would pray in her little chapel in her home from 4 a.m. to 6 a.m. each morning and then attend Mass at 6 a.m. every day. Even during the winter months in Long Beach, New York, where she and Dan lived, she offered the discomfort of attending Mass in the cold weather and many other sacrifices for the conversion of her family. It seems that Padre Pio was walking with her and listening to her prayers.

Clara passed away after a short illness, on June 16, 2006, the same day as the day of Padre Pio's canonization. (Padre Pio was declared a saint on June 16, 2002.) She was 73 years old. Clara's dying wish was that two of her children who had not spoken to each other for ten years would be reconciled. Shortly before her funeral, her two children made peace with each other. Five of her relatives went to confession on the eve of her funeral, all of whom had not received the sacrament for over five years. Clara's family was reaping the benefits of her prayers. One of her children, who had not been to confession in more than ten years, returned to the sacrament a few days after Clara's death.

**A note from the editors:** *We visited Clara and Dan Steele in 2005 in their home in Long Beach, New York where they shared their memories of Padre Pio with us. We decided to visit again in 2006, before the printing of this story, and were very sad to learn that Clara, after a short illness, had passed away. Dan shared with us that although Clara's death has been a time of sadness for all, the extended family has received bountiful spiritual graces since her passing.*

*Eternal rest grant unto Clara, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.*

*Recalling Clara Steele's dream of Padre Pio, as he knelt in prayer with the Baby Jesus, we are reminded of Padre Pio's great lifelong devotion to the Madonna and Child. He once said that the Blessed Mother always stood beside him in the confessional in his ministry of reconciling souls back to God. Throughout his life, she gave him strength in times of interior trials and physical sufferings. On August 15, 1929, on the Feast of the Assumption, Padre Pio described an experience he had during the celebration of the Mass, when the Virgin Mary came to him, holding the Baby Jesus in her arms:*

*"This morning I went up to the holy altar, I know not how. Physical pain and interior grief competed as to which could most afflict all my poor being...A mortal sadness pervaded me through and through and I thought that all was finished for me...At the moment of consuming the Sacred Species of the Host, a sudden light flooded through me and I clearly saw the Heavenly Mother with the Christ Child in her arms who together said to me, 'Stop worrying! We are with you. You belong to us and we are yours.' This said, I saw no more...and I felt myself the whole day submerged in a sea of sweetness and indescribable love." Padre Pio – Letters IV*

*"For the feast of the Infant Jesus, my wish for you is that your heart may be His cradle adorned with flowers, where He can rest without the slightest discomfort."*

*Padre Pio – December 20, 1918*

#### **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 p.m. and Mass begins at 7:00 p.m. 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](http://www.saintpio.org)**

## A Testimony

*We recently spoke to Father John Hampsch, CMF, a Catholic missionary priest of the Claretian congregation. Father Hampsch has ministered in all 50 states in the U.S. and in 57 countries. His Claretian tape ministry is one of the largest Catholic tape outreaches in the world. He currently resides in Los Angeles, CA.*

In 1958, while on a pilgrimage to a number of Catholic shrines in Europe, Father Hampsch spent three days in San Giovanni Rotondo and he was blessed to be the altar server at Padre Pio's Mass. Being right beside Padre Pio on the altar, Fr. Hampsch was able to observe the great reverence and solemnity with which he celebrated Mass. The wounds in his hands were visible and bleeding during the Holy Sacrifice. At the time of the consecration, Padre Pio became completely still, lost in God. It was his long pauses of silent prayer during the Mass that caused his Mass to be so lengthy.

On the day that Fr. Hampsch served his Mass, Padre Pio received a little girl who was making her first Holy Communion, and he also gave Holy Communion to a man who was blind. The other priests who were present distributed Holy Communion to the rest of the people in the congregation.

The people who lived in San Giovanni Rotondo knew that Padre Pio only distributed Holy Communion to a small number of people each day. Some of the local people had a very possessive attitude toward Padre Pio. They believed that they should have the privilege of receiving Holy Communion from his hands rather than those who were visiting from far away places, and they would use whatever means necessary, including pushing, pulling, elbowing, and the like, to secure their own place at the Communion rail. The noise, the rudeness, and the irreverent behavior in the church surprised and disappointed Fr. Hampsch. He noticed that it was also upsetting and disheartening to Padre Pio, who always desired silence and reverence in the house of God.

The Capuchin priests and brothers were always close beside Padre Pio, acting as bodyguards and trying to protect him and shield him from the crowds. The people were forever trying to touch him, squeeze his hand, cut off a piece of his habit, obtain a relic. During the three days that Fr. Hampsch was there, he noticed that Padre Pio was always trying to disengage himself from the crowds and the noise. He could not seem to relax or to fully accept the situation.



Fr. John Hampsch

While Fr. Hampsch was in San Giovanni Rotondo, he met Mary Pyle, Padre Pio's American secretary, and she took him on a tour of Padre Pio's hospital, *The Home for the Relief of Suffering*. Mary explained many detailed and interesting facts of Padre Pio's life and apostolate. She told him that the most painful wounds of the stigmata, that Padre Pio experienced, were the wounds in his feet. Mary said that it was almost

impossible for him to stand for any length of time on his pierced feet. That explained why he only gave out Communion to a few people each day at Mass. He literally could not stand up any longer.

Fr. Hampsch had brought a number of letters with him to the monastery. When he handed them to Padre Pio, he was very surprised that Padre Pio seemed to know the contents of each one, even though he did not open them. Padre Pio handed the letters individually to his secretary, saying, "This is a Mass stipend, this is a donation for the Hospital, this is a prayer request." His powers of discernment and knowledge were a gift that the Lord had given him and it was with amazement that people observed his gifts.

Although his visit to Padre Pio occurred almost 50 years ago, the memories are still deeply impressed on his mind. It was a blessing and a privilege. Fr. Hampsch has always known that. You can learn more about the apostolate of Fr. Hampsch at [www.claretiantapeministry.org](http://www.claretiantapeministry.org)

### From our Spiritual Director



During Padre Pio's lifetime, many people received graces and miracles from him. So many in fact, that it would be impossible to calculate. However, they often did not realize that there was a price to be paid for the graces they received. The price was often pain and suffering that Padre Pio experienced in his own body. Once when someone came to thank him for a grace, he said to

the individual, "You do not realize how much you have cost me." He was not complaining. He was expressing a reality.

Even now, after Padre Pio's death, the number of miracles and cures that people have received through his intercession is truly amazing. Some of the stories involving healings that occurred a number of years ago, through the intercession of Padre Pio, have only recently come to light. One impressive story that has come to attention lately, involved the great Italian author, Giovanni Papini. When Giovanni lost his sight, a friend of his told him to invoke the intercession of Padre Pio. Giovanni's friend suggested to him that he give him his photograph and he would take it to Padre Pio to pray over. The friend begged Padre Pio to help Giovanni. Padre Pio took the photograph and prayed and Giovanni's sight was restored.

People often criticized Padre Pio for his sometimes abrupt way of speaking to the pilgrims who came to San Giovanni Rotondo to see him. When he was confronted about it, he would respond, "I treat people as I am directed to by God." His motivation was always to do the will of God rather than to tell people what they wanted to hear.

— Fr. Louis Solcia, CRSP