



Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry



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In Padre Pio's presence, one felt that nothing on this earth was of any importance except one thing, to be in the grace of God.

— Kathleen Thornton

Padre Pio – Director of Souls – Part II

Padre Pio's fame as a confessor drew immense crowds to the monastery of Our Lady of Grace in San Giovanni Rotondo. As the crowds grew larger, Padre Pio, by necessity, became more inaccessible to the pilgrims. Outside of the confessional, it was almost impossible for a person to be able to have a conversation with him. Once, one of his spiritual daughters complained to him about the lack of time he had to give her in the confessional. He said to her, "I have spoken to you for many years. Now I ask you to put into practice those things that I have told you to do."

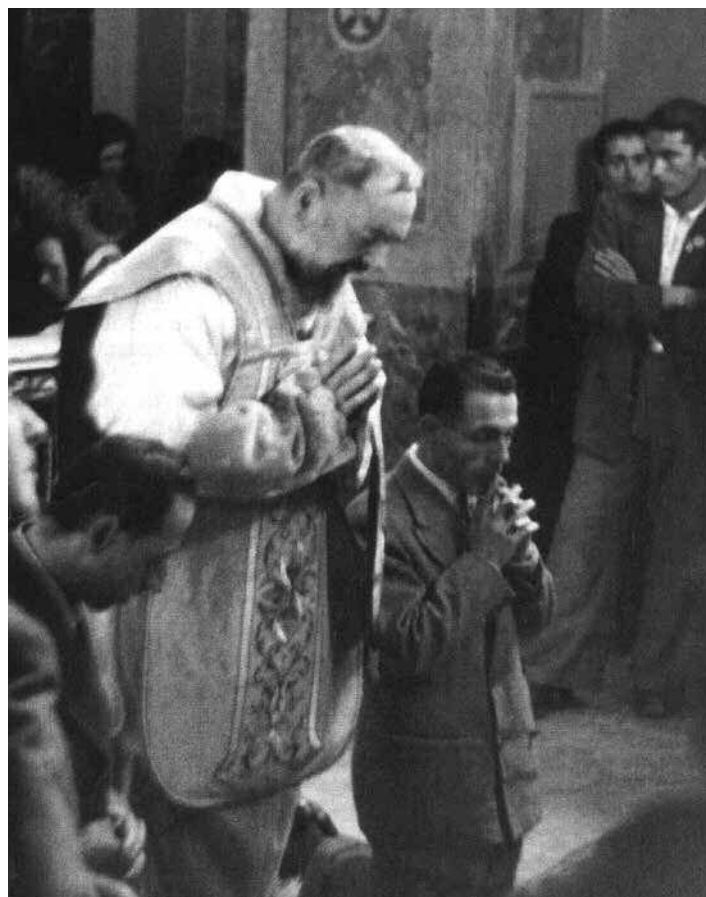
As a confessor, Padre Pio wanted people to understand the seriousness of sin. "We have a greater fear of mortal sin than of fire," Padre Pio once said. On another occasion he said, "Beware of sin as of a poisonous viper." When penitents put questions to him regarding moral issues, his answers left no doubt as to the difference between right and wrong and the proper course to follow. One man said, "Padre Pio's words were firm, candid and pure." A man once confessed to him that he had thoughts against chastity. "How many times have you had those thoughts?" Padre Pio asked. "Six or seven times," the man replied. "But seven is not the same as six because it means one more deadly sin," Padre Pio answered.

Padre Pio had a great fear of offending God and was ready to go to any length to avoid doing so. He had no illusions about human nature. He said, "As long as there remains a drop of blood in our bodies, there will always be a struggle between right and wrong." Looking back on his life, he once said, "Temptations that concern my secular life are those that most upset me . . . They bring on a cold sweat and make me tremble . . . In those moments, all I can do is cry."

In 1915, Padre Pio wrote to Father Agostino:

The thought of going astray and . . . offending God fills me with terror. It paralyzes my limbs, and both body and soul feel as if they are being squeezed in a powerful vise. My bones feel as if they are being dislocated . . . crushed and ground up.

The general opinion was that making one's confession to Padre Pio was of profound spiritual benefit. Nevertheless, to confess to Padre Pio was not an easy task for most. As one per-



son described it, "To go to confession to Padre Pio was to allow him to look right inside your soul." As a confessor, he was strict and demanding. He had great moral strength in directing souls and he did not hesitate to tell the penitents what they needed to do in order to change their lives. He often told people what they did not want to hear. He had a strong character and was afraid of no one. Many people wanted to make their confession to him but were held back by their fear. One man stated, "It is less frightening to take a difficult examination at the university than to make one's confession to Padre Pio."

In the confessional, Padre Pio did not want people to make excuses for their sins and omissions. A woman from Gioia del Colle, Italy visited Padre Pio on one occasion. During her confession, she said that she missed Mass the previous Sunday because of the rain. "Yes, but when you left to come to San Giovanni Rotondo, it was raining too," Padre Pio replied. "You must never miss Mass again on Sunday unless illness prevents you from attending," he added.

An atheist was once introduced to Padre Pio and the visit resulted in the man's conversion. He said, "I went to see Padre Pio when I had a thousand reasons for not believing in God. With great delicacy, little by little, he led me back to the faith and gave me the moral stability I lacked."

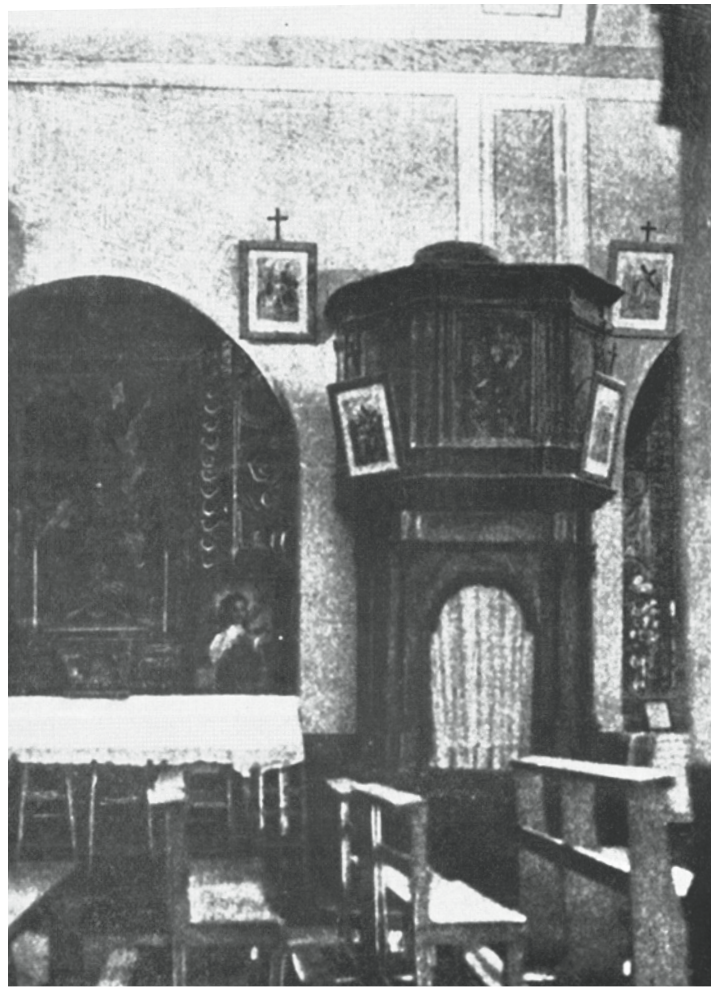
Padre Pio attached enormous importance to the frequent reception of the sacrament of confession. He used to say, "Even if a room is sealed off completely, dust will still accumulate in it." Padre Pio practiced what he advocated to others. He went to confession frequently. Before making his confession, he prayed deeply and sought the intercession of the Virgin Mary. He always felt a great remorse for his sins and often cried when making his confession. To Father Benedetto, who was his spiritual director for twelve years, Padre Pio wrote, "I am seeking the amendment of my life, my spiritual resurrection, true and substantial love, the sincere conversion of my whole self to Him."

Mr. Livio Dimatteo met Padre Pio in 1959. On one occasion, Livio had been undergoing a strong temptation which he was convinced was, "from the devil." Because of it, he was afraid to make his confession to Padre Pio. When he finally gathered up the courage and entered Padre Pio's confessional, Padre Pio placed his hand, much harder than usual, on Livio's head. Livio was certain that Padre Pio knew all about the temptation and would assist him through his prayers.

One man who had initially been denied absolution by Padre Pio stated that Padre Pio was the only person who had been able to help him break away from his destructive lifestyle. "Thanks to Padre Pio, I was able to understand the gravity of my sins," the man said. Previously, the man had always justified his immoral conduct and had no desire to change. People tried to show him the error of his ways but nothing that anyone said made a difference to him. The shock of being denied absolution by Padre Pio caused the him to reflect on his life. He made a good examination of conscience and later made a sincere confession and received absolution.

When twelve-year-old Mariella Lotti of Cosenza approached Padre Pio's confessional, his words startled her. "If I heard your confession right now, we would get nowhere. You are not prepared to make your confession at this time," Padre Pio said. Mariella, as well as her parents, felt offended, but when Padre Pio gave a further explanation for his actions, they not only understood, they agreed with him. It proved to be a turning point in young Mariella's life. Another young woman wanted to make her confession to Padre Pio but she was not willing to make the needed changes in her life. Padre Pio spoke of her and said, "She is just like coal. When exposed, it stains. When lit, it burns."

Padre Pio prayed continually for the salvation of all people. To a woman who was in great need he said, "Rest assured that I will pray for you. Even after my death I will remember you in my prayers." To another he said, "You must understand the responsibility I have assumed before Jesus for you. If something



A photo of the confessional used by Padre Pio in the early days.

bad should happen to you which is to your spiritual detriment, Jesus will ask me to account for it directly." To a woman who asked him how often she could write to him, he responded, "Write to me whenever you have the desire or the need. In me, you will always find a father."

Antonio Monari had a remarkable experience the first time he entered Padre Pio's confessional. Antonio stated:

I was expecting to see a saint but I never imagined I would experience what I did. I told Padre Pio the many troubles of my family and myself and he listened paternally. I asked him for a grace for which I had waited many years for in vain. "Men can do nothing my son," Padre Pio said and he pointed upward. "Only God who is above can help us. I will pray for you," he added. He then gave me his blessing. I cannot describe to you the feeling of profound emotion I felt, so much so that when I got up, I lost my balance. He touched me affectionately on the right side of my head. My right ear, in which I was completely deaf, suddenly opened and I have been able to hear perfectly ever since.

In the confessional, people frequently asked Padre Pio for his counsel regarding family situations, vocational choices, business concerns, health issues, and even advice on farming mat-

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Each week we post inspirational stories of Padre Pio and those whose lives he touched, on our Facebook and Google + pages:

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 Padre Pio Devotions

ters. He was glad if he could help people on any level, but above all else, his desire was to help people on a spiritual level. He wanted people to realize their need for God. Professor Michael Melillo, one of Padre Pio's spiritual sons, once said to Padre Pio, "Father, please give me some spiritual advice that I can use for my whole life." Padre Pio answered him and said, "You have been born to know, to love and to serve God, and to be happy with him eternally in heaven."

Capuchin Father Ruggero observed that many of the pilgrims who greeted Padre Pio handed him personal letters which contained their prayer requests. It seemed impossible for Padre Pio to read all the letters that he received. Father Ruggero wondered how he could find the time to pray for so many people. He asked Padre Pio how he could keep up with the task. Padre Pio touched his hand to his heart and said, "This is where they all pass. They are all here in my heart."

Padre Pio insisted that people dress modestly whenever entering the church to attend Mass or to make their confession. To many, his standards of modesty were considered to be extreme. As time passed, Padre Pio became even stricter regarding church attire. One priest, who knew of Padre Pio's rigid standards, told him that he could not insist on such a strict dress code in his parish because he feared that the members of his congregation would become angry and quit. "An empty church is better than a profaned one," Padre Pio replied.

There was once a lady from Germany who made her confession to Padre Pio. She was fluent in Italian and was planning to make her confession in Italian. Before she could say even one word, Padre Pio began speaking to her in German. She noticed that his accent was perfect. Sometime later, she saw Padre Pio again. She spoke to him in German but he made no reply. She spoke to him a second time in German. He said nothing. Finally, she spoke to him in Italian and said, "Padre Pio, you spoke so well with me in German in the confessional. Why is it that you will not do so now?" "Oh," he replied. "Confession is a completely different matter."

Padre Pio's fidelity to his priestly ministry as a confessor was revealed to Dr. Filippo Pancaro on one occasion. Dr. Pancaro, who was on staff at the Home for the Relief of Suffering, once gave Padre Pio a thorough physical examination. Besides having a high fever, Padre Pio also complained of dizziness, weakness, and a disturbing ringing in his ears. His exhaustion at the time was so great that he could hardly stand on his feet. Dr. Pancaro told Padre Pio that he needed to rest more in order to regain his strength. He advised him to discontinue hearing the evening confessions for a while.

Padre Pio was very disappointed at the doctor's words. "If that is an order, I will do it," Padre Pio said. "But only if it is an order. I do not want to cut back on hearing confessions." Padre Pio then asked the doctor for his prayers. "I ask you to pray for me to the Virgin Mary," Padre Pio said. "Pray that my health will be restored." Dr. Pancaro assured him that he would do so. Padre Pio told the doctor that if he had a choice between losing his sight or his hearing, he would prefer to lose his sight. "As long as I have my hearing, I will always be able to continue to hear confessions," he said. He once told Father Agostino that he would prefer to be taken to the confessional in a wheelchair rather than to stop hearing confessions.

Several hours before he died, Padre Pio asked the priest who was assisting him, Father Pellegrino Funicelli, to hear his

confession. After making his confession, he said to Father Pellegrino, "Ask all my brothers to forgive me for all of the trouble I have caused them. If the Lord should call me tonight, please ask all of my spiritual children to say a prayer for my soul."

Gina Deiana was engaged to be married and was looking forward to the day of her wedding with great anticipation. Two months before the wedding, her fiancé broke up with her. He did not have the courtesy to speak to Gina in person about his decision or even to call her on the telephone. He simply left her a short note indicating that their relationship was over. Gina was devastated by his actions and sunk into a deep depression. Her sadness became so overwhelming that she lost all joy in living.

Soon after the break up, Gina happened to read an article about Padre Pio in a magazine. She had a strong desire to visit Padre Pio and so she invited her aunt to make the trip with her to San Giovanni Rotondo. They left from their home in Genova, and arrived at Padre Pio's monastery two days later. The year was 1952. They felt fortunate to book a room in the one and only hotel in the town.

The following morning, Gina and her aunt attended Padre Pio's early Mass. Later that day, a woman whom Gina had never seen before, approached her and said, "You are the girl whose fiancé broke up with her. Am I right about that?" "But how did you know?" Gina asked. "Padre Pio told me about you," the woman answered. "He wants you to stay here in San Giovanni Rotondo longer than you had intended to. Also, he would like to speak to you." "But our funds are very limited. We cannot afford to stay any longer than planned," Gina said. "Don't give it another thought. I will be happy to lend you the money," the woman replied. The woman's name was Angelina Serritelli. She was one of Padre Pio's spiritual daughters and she went to great lengths to assist him in any way that she could.

Gina was amazed by her conversation with Angelina Serritelli. She and her aunt were strangers in the little town of San Giovanni Rotondo. No one but Gina's mother knew about their trip. But Padre Pio obviously knew that Gina was there. He had sent Angelina to greet her. Gina called her mother in Genova and told her that she and her aunt would be staying longer than they had anticipated.

While in San Giovanni Rotondo, Gina was able to make her confession to Padre Pio. During the confession, she told Padre Pio that her fiancé had abandoned her and that she was very depressed. Although she had made an effort to get over the traumatic incident, she had not succeeded. She told Padre Pio that she had stopped receiving Holy Communion because she had been so upset.

In a fatherly way, Padre Pio counseled Gina. "Be calm," he said. "You must try to stop thinking about your fiancé and how he betrayed you. He was not worthy of you." Gina felt at peace for the first time in a very long time. Padre Pio spoke to her with great tenderness, almost making light of the sins that she confessed. He then gave her a picture of Jesus. On the back of the

Padre Pio Devotions Books

Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry: True Stories of Padre Pio Book I
Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry: True Stories of Padre Pio Book II
written by Diane Allen and available at amazon.com

picture, he had written the words, "Let Jesus be the center of all your aspirations." After making her confession to Padre Pio, Gina was able to put the past behind her and move forward in life.

Guido Biondi visited San Giovanni Rotondo and made his confession to Padre Pio for the first time in 1956. In the confessional, Padre Pio asked Guido if he attended Mass on Sundays. Guido replied that he went to Mass once in awhile. "Then you must leave," Padre Pio told him. "Come back in one month and I will hear your confession at that time," Padre Pio added. Guido was angry when he rose from his kneeling position. He could hardly wait to get out of the confessional. He felt indignant and humiliated that Padre Pio had dismissed him in such a rough way. When he walked out of the church, he immediately went to the bus stop in order to catch the first bus that was leaving for Foggia.

On the bus trip to Foggia, Guido's anger began to subside. As he thought about what had transpired in the confessional, he became more objective. He was able to understand why Padre Pio had spoken to him the way he had. Guido took stock of his life, and for the first time, he felt guilty about many of the actions of his past. He had turned his back on God and in doing so, he had lost his way. He suddenly felt the crushing burden of his many sins.

After Guido returned to his home, he went over every detail of his brief encounter with Padre Pio. He wanted with his whole heart to speak to Padre Pio again but he felt too embarrassed to do so. Padre Pio had rejected him and he did not feel that he could ever face him again.

Guido had a very good job in the automobile industry where he was supervisor to more than one hundred employees. Back at work, he found it difficult to concentrate. He began to lose weight and his health deteriorated. He neglected his responsibilities at work. One day, he had great difficulty breathing. His body was wracked with pain. He prayed to Padre Pio and at once his painful symptoms disappeared. The answered prayer from Padre Pio gave him the courage to make a return trip to San Giovanni Rotondo.

At the monastery of Our Lady of Grace, Guido noticed a Capuchin who greeted five men that were standing nearby. The Capuchin motioned for the men to follow him. What seemed to be a force outside himself impelled Guido to join the group of five men. They followed the Capuchin up some stairs and then down a long and narrow corridor. Suddenly, they were standing in front of Padre Pio's cell. They knocked on the door and heard a loud voice inviting them to come in. Guido was the last one to enter Padre Pio's cell.

Padre Pio greeted the men and asked them for an update regarding someone who was ill. Guido understood then that the five men he had followed into Padre Pio's cell were all doctors. They worked at the Home for the Relief of Suffering. One of the doctors spoke to Padre Pio at length about the individual who was ill. After the doctors conversed with Padre Pio for a while, one by one, they kissed his hand and then left. Guido was suddenly standing all alone with Padre Pio. Fear gripped his heart. Padre Pio smiled at him and offered him his hand. Very moved, Guido kissed Padre Pio's hand and then left.

Those few moments with Padre Pio had made a remarkable impression on Guido. He knew that it was no accident that

he had followed the five doctors to Padre Pio's cell. He was certain that it had been arranged by Divine Providence. That very evening, Guido had an opportunity to make his confession to Padre Pio. He no longer felt afraid. He was able to make a sincere confession. Padre Pio was very kind to him. He blessed him and gave him absolution. When Guido rose to his feet, he felt purified and immensely happy.

Guido's friend had been waiting for him in the little square just outside. When Guido left the confessional, he could hardly contain himself. He ran out of the church and with great joy, he began to shout to his friend, "He has absolved me, he has absolved me!"

Italian-born Dino Segre was a well-known and highly esteemed author. He took the name Pitigrilli as his signature name for all of his published works. Dino was talented and successful and had more money than he could spend. Although he was not religious, as time passed, Dino began to think more and more about the deeper meaning of life. In the process, his interest in spirituality gradually began to grow.

At the advice of a friend, Dino decided to make a trip to San Giovanni Rotondo in order to see Padre Pio. Dino was famous throughout Italy but while he was visiting the monastery of Our Lady of Grace, he wanted to remain completely anonymous. He hoped that no one would recognize him. On the morning that he attended Padre Pio's Mass, he sat in the very back of the church and tried to remain as inconspicuous as possible.

During the Mass, when Padre Pio prayed for the living and the deceased, he spoke to the congregation and said, "Pray, brethren. Pray with your whole hearts for someone who is here with us today, someone who is in great need of our prayers. One day he will receive Holy Communion at the Lord's table. He will be instrumental in bringing others with him back to the Church, others who have lived without God, just like he has."

Dino was thunderstruck by Padre Pio's words. He was certain that Padre Pio was speaking about him. There was not a doubt in his mind. Dino felt as though his heart was breaking. He began to cry. Try as he might, it was impossible for him to stop the flood of tears.

After the Mass, Dino had an opportunity to make his confession to Padre Pio. The moment he knelt down in the confessional, Padre Pio quoted from scripture and said to him, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?" Of course, Dino knew the answer to the question. It profited a man nothing. Padre Pio was obviously speaking about the worldly life that Dino had been leading for many years. Padre Pio then said to him, "The Lord has been very good to you."

The encounter with Padre Pio marked a turning point in the life of Dino Segre. After he left San Giovanni Rotondo, he went to his publisher and insisted that certain books he had written be permanently taken off the market. He was aware that his decision would cause him to incur a great financial loss, but he didn't care. He knew that Padre Pio set a very high moral and spiritual standard. With all his heart, he wanted his literary works to reflect that standard. For the rest of his life, he wrote only books that had a Christian theme, books that would help encourage others in the practice of their faith.