



Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry



Padre Pio Newsletter • Issue 75

www.saintpio.org

Editors: Diane and Deacon Ron Allen

Padre Pio's Love for the Blessed Virgin Mary

One of the outstanding characteristics of Padre Pio's profound spirituality was his deep and abiding devotion to the Virgin Mary. His love for Mary was one which was present from the early years of his childhood. It was a love that grew steadily in fidelity and devotion, lasting throughout his entire life.

Francesco Forgione (Padre Pio) was born on May 25, 1887 in Pietrelcina, in southern Italy. He was baptized the following day in the parish church of St. Anne. The church of St. Anne was dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels and from his young years, Francesco had a great love for Mary, Queen of the Angels. Throughout his life, he was assisted and protected by the continual presence of Jesus and the Virgin Mary and his guardian angel as well. When he was only five years old, Francesco consecrated his life to God. Pietrelcina, the small town where Francesco grew up, has a long history of devotion to the Virgin Mary. Our Lady Liberatrix (Our Lady of Liberty) was the special patroness of the area and was venerated in the parish church. Every year there was a festival in her honor with a procession through the streets.

Francesco's parents, Grazio and Giuseppa Forgione, both deeply religious, raised their children to love God above all things and to be firmly rooted in their Catholic faith and in the teachings of the Church. As a family, the Forgiones went to church every day and prayer came before all other activities. Padre Pio's mother, Giuseppa, by word and by example, taught her children to love the Virgin Mary and to pray the Rosary daily.

The Virgin Mary, who was close to Francesco all through his childhood, assisted him in a special way when he was fifteen years old, on the eve of his departure for the Capuchin novitiate in Morcone. Francesco felt a strong attachment to his family and friends and the thought of leaving them and all that was familiar to him was extremely painful. As the day of his departure grew near, so too the sadness in his heart increased at the thought of saying goodbye. It caused him to feel as if his "very bones were being crushed." The day before he left for Morcone, he had a vision of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Resplendent and beautiful in glory, they appeared to him and assured him that they were with him and would remain with him as he embarked on a new life. Jesus laid his hand on young Francesco's head in a blessing. The experience strengthened him to such a degree that he was able to bid farewell to his family without shedding a single tear.



Padre Pio prays before an image of Our Lady of Grace in San Giovanni Rotondo

Francesco entered the Capuchin novitiate on January 6, 1903. On January 22, he was vested in the habit and given the name Brother Pio. Brother Pio excelled in the novitiate in Morcone. He embraced the rigorous monastic life, the austerity, the penance and self-sacrifice. He loved the study of Sacred Scripture, the silence of the cloister, the communal prayers, the solitude. The Capuchin monastery in Morcone was considered by many to be extreme in its strictness. At the top of the stairs in the novitiate, there was a painting of Our Lady of Sorrows with words inscribed in Latin, "Remember to say a Hail Mary as you go by." Brother Pio would always genuflect and say a prayer to the Virgin each time he passed. One of the novices, Brother Guglielmo said, "He (Brother Pio) was extremely pious in the fulfillment of his practices of devotion. He would be the first, with great fervor and faith, to make acts of adoration, to pay reverence and to make genuflections before the Blessed Sacrament and the image of Our Lady."

As a young Capuchin preparing for the priesthood, Brother Pio's great piety was observed by both his teachers and his fellow students alike. Padre Leone, who had been a classmate of his, recalled, "He (Brother Pio) was a person of ordinary talent, but he always knew the lesson, although we had the impression that he did not study a great deal. Using one excuse or another, I would go to his cell and almost always I would



The Image of Our Lady of Grace which is venerated at the shrine at Sardhana, India. This picture was blessed by Padre Pio on Sept 28, 1955.

find him on his knees in prayer, his eyes red from weeping. I could say that he was a student in constant prayer." Padre Ilario, another one of his classmates wrote, "As a student at Montefusco, I would be with Brother Pio in choir as he recited the Office of the Blessed Virgin and sometimes I saw him with tears in his eyes. He was sickly, of delicate health, frequently with a fever and suffering severe pains."

Brother Pio was ordained to the priesthood on August 10, 1910 and thereafter became known to everyone as Padre Pio. He was sent to the monastery of Our Lady of Grace in

San Giovanni Rotondo in 1916. Padre Pio loved the simplicity and solitude of the monastery and was very happy to be a part of the religious community there. Our Lady of Grace was the patroness, not only of the monastery, but also of the town of San Giovanni Rotondo. A beautiful painting of Our Lady of Grace which dates back to the thirteenth century was venerated in the sanctuary of the church. Padre Pio spent countless hours in prayer, gazing at the beautiful image of Our Lady of Grace. For many years he lived in cell number five and the words of St. Bernard were inscribed on the door, "Mary is the foundation of my hope." Mary was indeed, the foundation of Padre Pio's hope. Due to the many years he lived at the monastery in San Giovanni Rotondo, from 1916 until his death in 1968, Our Lady of Grace is the Marian image, which more than any other, is most closely associated with him.

Pope John Paul II spoke of Padre Pio's love for Our Lady of Grace to a large gathering of pilgrims in Rome on June 17, 2002, the day following Padre Pio's canonization. The Holy Father said, "May the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom Padre Pio called by the beautiful name of Our Lady of Grace, help us to follow in the footprints of this Religious who is so beloved by the people."

Like a natural son would feel toward his own mother, Padre Pio wanted to protect and shield his Heavenly Mother from any hint of disrespect. He could not bear to hear her name dishonored. Once, a young man went to Padre Pio to make his confession and accused himself of cursing. When Padre Pio asked him whom he had cursed, he told him that he had cursed Jesus and Mary. The young man said that upon hearing this, Padre Pio looked "as though he had been stabbed in the heart." "You really cursed Jesus and Our Lady?" Padre Pio asked him incredulously. Then Padre Pio seemed to collapse against the kneeler. He said to the young man, "What more could Jesus and Mary do for us than what they have already done."

On one occasion, at the monastery of Our Lady of Grace,

some men were having a discussion regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary. Different viewpoints were shared and a number of the ideas that were expressed were in opposition to the teachings of the Church. Padre Pio found the conversation very difficult to endure. He asked his superior for permission to leave the room. "This talk upsets me very much," he said, "and I must leave at once." His superior granted his request.

In 1955, the Archbishop of Agra, India, His Excellency, Most Reverend Msgr. Giuseppe Evangelisti visited Padre Pio. He brought a beautiful painting of Our Lady of Grace with him and asked Padre Pio to bless it. He explained that he intended to build a shrine in Sardhana, in northern India, where the painting of the Virgin would be venerated. Padre Pio was very happy about the Archbishop's plan. He kissed the painting and blessed it and told the Archbishop that he would pray to Our Lady of Grace for her children in India. In 1957, the shrine at Sardhana was completed and during the solemn inauguration, the painting was taken in procession and placed in the chapel of the shrine. On that day, a boy who was so ill that the doctors could offer no hope for his recovery, was instantly healed when he touched the painting. The healing of the young boy was the first in a long list of healings and special favors that many were to receive who visited the shrine.

Padre Pio venerated Mary according to her many titles. He was devoted to Our Lady of Loreto, Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady Liberatrix, Our Lady of Grace, Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of Pompeii, Our Lady of the Assumption and more.

Several days prior to the feasts of Our Lady, Padre Pio prepared himself by giving up certain foods that he enjoyed. He asked his superior for permission to give up fruit every Wednesday in honor of the Blessed Virgin and he found many other ways to make sacrifices in her honor. He fasted completely on the feast of the Immaculate Conception and on all of the other feasts of the Virgin Mary. He also fasted on the feast days of Our Lord, Saint Francis of Assisi, and St. Michael the Archangel.

Dr. Mario De Giacomo had a great admiration for Padre Pio. On one occasion when he was visiting Padre Pio at the monastery, he asked him if he liked a certain Italian dish called *spaghetti ala napoletana*. Padre Pio said that he enjoyed it very much and that it had been a long time since he had eaten it. The doctor wanted to bring the dish to him for dinner and Padre Pio agreed to it. The next evening the doctor brought the specially prepared meal to Padre Pio's cell. Padre Pio said the blessing over the food and then became quiet. He said to the doctor, "Mario, why don't we offer this to Our Lady. Please take it to the poor. They will enjoy it so much and the Virgin Mary will bless you for your kindness." The doctor did what Padre Pio requested.

On August 15, 1929, on the Feast of the Assumption, Mary made a visitation from Heaven to Padre Pio in order to console him. It was a time in his life when he was beset by a multitude of trials, both physical and spiritual. On that day, while Padre Pio was celebrating Mass, Mary appeared to him holding the Infant Jesus in her arms. Padre Pio wrote:

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 mor-

tal 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 Eucharist, 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, "Be at peace. We are with you. You belong to us and we are yours."...I felt the whole day as if I was engulfed in a sea of indescribable sweetness and love. (Letters IV)

Padre Pio felt at a loss to express in full, his gratitude to the Virgin for the many graces she had showered on him throughout his life. He used to say, "She treats me as if I were her only child on the face of the earth. Her loving care toward me cannot be described in words." In a letter to Padre Benedetto, he wrote, "My only regret, dear Father, is that I have no adequate means with which to thank the Blessed Virgin Mary, through whose intercession I have undoubtedly received so much strength from the Lord, to bear with sincere resignation the many humiliations to which I am subjected day after day...and I do not believe this strength comes to me from the world." (Letters I)

Our Lady of Sorrows was one of the titles of the Virgin that Padre Pio frequently contemplated. Padre Pio meditated on the Passion of Jesus and on Mary's devotion to her Son as she stood at the foot of the Cross. He would say to his spiritual children, "Go and keep company with Jesus in his Passion, and with his Sorrowful Mother."

Padre Pio recommended devotion to the Sorrowful Virgin to one of his spiritual daughters, Madame Katharina Tangari. Katharina first visited the Capuchin monastery of Our Lady of Grace in San Giovanni Rotondo in 1950. The beauty of the Mass celebrated by Padre Pio made a profound impression on her and she was deeply edified. She returned to the monastery more than seventy times.

One Easter, Katharina received a beautiful Dominican edition missal as a gift. Her great desire was to have Padre Pio write an inscription in the front of her missal. She asked the superior of the monastery to give her missal to Padre Pio to sign. The superior told Katharina that he could not make any promises. There were too many people with too many requests. Katharina waited patiently for two months and when her missal was finally returned to her, Padre Pio had written on the first page, "If you want to assist at Holy Mass with devotion and fruitfully, keep company with the Sorrowful Virgin at the foot of the Cross on Calvary."

Padre Pio encouraged people to approach the Virgin Mary with faith in her maternal and loving heart. On July 18, 1916, he wrote to his spiritual daughter, Giuseppina Morgera, "You must remember that you have in Heaven not only a Father, but also a Mother...And if our wretchedness saddens us, if our ingratitude to God terrorizes us, if the memory of our faults hinders us from presenting ourselves to God our Father, let us then have recourse to Mary, our Mother. She is all sweetness, mercy, goodness, and love for us, because she is our Mother."

When speaking about the Virgin Mary, Padre Pio used many endearing terms. He called her Queen of martyrs, Comforter, heavenly Mother, Mediatrix of all graces, most tender Mother

of priests, Mother most pure, Morning Star, merciful Mother in Heaven. He saw the Virgin as the consoler of the afflicted, the advocate of sinners, the refuge of sinners, the most beloved. He frequently referred to her simply as "Mother." An image of the Madonna was found to be weeping in one of the parish churches in Italy. The bishop of the diocese asked for an investigation into the matter and after much study the bishop declared that the phenomenon was of supernatural origin. When Padre Pio was told about the image of the Madonna he said, "When Our Lady is weeping, things are not going well."

Father Mariano, one of the Capuchins at Our Lady of Grace monastery, went to Padre Pio's cell one evening to visit him. When he greeted Padre Pio, he saw that several other Capuchins were visiting him as well. One had brought a statue of the Virgin for Padre Pio to bless. Padre Pio was asked if he liked the statue and he replied that it was indeed beautiful. Father Mariano exclaimed, "But Padre Pio sees more. He can see the Madonna in flesh and blood." Padre Pio then said, "From the time her Son crucified me, she has never left this cell of mine." And to Padre Tarcisio da Cervinara who once asked Padre Pio if it was true that he was assisted in the confessional by Saint Francis and the Virgin Mary, he replied, "My son, if it were not for those two with me, what would I be able to accomplish?"

When Padre Pio's eyesight grew weak and it became difficult for him to read, his superiors allowed him to replace the Mass of the day with the Mass of Our Lady and also to replace the reading of the Divine Office with the prayers of the Rosary. He preferred the Rosary above all other prayers and insisted that his spiritual children carry a Rosary with them at all times and pray it every day. For Padre Pio, the Rosary was a profound meditation on the mysteries of the Christian faith.

Padre Pio defined the Rosary as, "The synthesis of our faith, the expression of our charity, and the foundation of our hope." He referred to the Rosary as a "crown of graces." On one occasion when Padre Pio had forgotten his Rosary, he said to Padre Onorato, "Please, go to my cell and get my weapon." Padre Onorato did not understand and so he asked Padre Pio what he meant. "Please go and get my Rosary," he answered. He called the Rosary a weapon against the evil in the world.

Padre Pio was aware that many people had abandoned the practice of the Rosary, considering it outdated and too repetitious. Nevertheless, he never stopped encouraging people to pray the Rosary daily. He said to one of the friars, "My son, if we do what we have always done, what our fathers did before us, we cannot go wrong. Satan wants to destroy this prayer, but in this he will never succeed. The Rosary is the prayer of those who triumph over everything and everyone. It was Our Lady who taught us this prayer, just as it was Jesus who taught us the Our Father."

Padre Pio once said, "Some people are so foolish that they think they can go through life without the help of the Blessed Mother." By word and deed, Padre Pio taught those who were close to him to pray continually for Mary's intercessory help. Padre Pellegrino Funicelli, who spent many years at Padre Pio's side, knew how fortunate he was to be guided spiritually by Padre Pio. In an effort to encourage Padre Pellegrino in the daily recitation of the Rosary, Padre Pio once said to him, "If you will recite the Rosary daily, you will become an angel."

One day when Padre Pellegrino and Padre Pio were sitting together in the monastery garden enjoying a moment of relaxation, Padre Pio noticed one of his fellow Capuchins, Brother Costantino, who was sitting a short distance away. The elderly Brother was praying his Rosary in the open air. Padre Pio recognized that Brother Costantino, in his great devotion to the Mother of God, was a great spiritual role model for all of the other Capuchins. Padre Pio said to Padre Pellegrino:

Do you see Brother Costantino? Old and sick as he is, he seems now to be worth nothing. And yet, as an obedient son of Holy Mother Church, who knows how to hold a Rosary in his hand and knows how to pray to the Madonna, he is worth more than you or me. Do you know why he has so much peace of soul? Because he has placed all his trust in the Most Holy Virgin, and because he interests himself as little as possible in the problems of the world. His spirit of prayer and his devotion to the Most Holy Virgin are virtues that wash away all defects and all human weaknesses. He draws on himself the gaze of the Madonna and his prayers have saved many souls.

You think that the penitents are attracted by the confessor, but instead they are spurred on to penance by these hidden prayers. The Madonna listens to these devout sons of the Holy Church. I would almost say that she gets her strength from the prayers of these men whom you consider useless. For me, these brothers in the faith always say something on behalf of the Most Holy Virgin, on behalf of the Church, and on behalf of God.

Padre Pio's love for Mary was evident as he prayed the Rosary whenever there was a free moment in his busy day. He carried a Rosary with him at all times and was either holding it in his hand or had it close by. One of the Capuchins who assisted Padre Pio in the morning when he washed his hands said that he would wash first one hand and then the other because he wanted to keep one hand free to hold his Rosary.

Danny Hickey, of St. Albans, New York, as an American G.I. stationed in Italy during World War II, visited Padre Pio's monastery on a number of occasions. After he returned to the U.S. he felt a call to the priesthood, entered the seminary, and upon completion was ordained as a Capuchin priest. During his visits to the monastery, Danny had a chance to observe Padre Pio closely and he gradually became aware of his great fidelity to prayer. Danny said, "Padre Pio was usually seen standing with his right hand in the front fold pocket of his Capuchin habit. A few times when he withdrew his hand, he was seen to be fingering a small chaplet of beads. It seems it was Padre Pio's habit not to waste a second but to fill each one with a prayer. Any lull in the conversation, no matter how short, his lips would be seen to move slightly as he prayed. But there was nothing ostentatious in all this; it was a long time before I was aware of what he was doing, though I had noticed his hand constantly in the breast pocket of his habit."

Padre Pio had the ability to impart his own love and enthusiasm for the Rosary to others. One of the members of

the Capuchin community in San Giovanni Rotondo once saw a number of men standing together in a group near the church. They all had rosaries in their hands. Happily, and with a sense of pride, the men said to the Capuchin, "It is Padre Pio who taught us how to pray the Rosary." Toward the end of his life, someone asked Padre Pio, "What inheritance do you wish to leave your spiritual children?" He answered simply, "The Rosary."

Father Alessio Parente served as the personal assistant to Padre Pio from 1958 to 1961 and again from 1965 to 1968. He wrote, "I was at Padre Pio's side for six years, and in all that time I never saw him without the Rosary in his hands, night and day. Our Lady never refused him anything through the Rosary... The Rosary was Padre Pio's constant link with Our Lady."

Knowing Padre Pio's great devotion to the Virgin Mary, Father Alessio once said to him, "You have such a great love for the Blessed Mother. Would you like to make a pilgrimage to Lourdes?" He answered, "I do not have to go to Lourdes. I go there every night. I see Our Lady of Lourdes every night." On the wall of his cell, he had a picture of Our Lady of Lourdes as well as Our Lady Liberatrix, Our Lady of Purity and others.

Once a man traveled to San Giovanni Rotondo to attend Padre Pio's Mass. After the Mass, he was able to speak to Padre Pio briefly. He had brought a number of rosaries with him and he asked Padre Pio to bless them. When he returned to his home, he was going to give the blessed rosaries to a number of his friends who were sick. The man was impressed to observe that Padre Pio took the request seriously. Before blessing the rosaries, he prayed for a long time over them.

Padre Pio blessed thousands of rosaries in his lifetime and he also gave religious medals and holy cards to his visitors as a token of his affection. Often on the back of the holy cards, he would inscribe a short message. On one holy card he wrote, "May Mary always look upon you with maternal love, lighten the weight of your exile and one day reveal to you Jesus in the fullness of his glory, without the fear of ever losing him again."

Padre Pio's day began very early. He would rise every morning between 2:30 a.m. and 3:30 a.m. Three hours of sleep proved to be sufficient for him. He always wanted to offer to God the "first fruits" of the day and so he devoted the early morning hours to prayer and meditation as a preparation for his 5:00 a.m. Mass. When he left his cell in the morning, he would stop on the stairs before a picture of Mary Immaculate and pray. Then he would make his way to the sacristy, praying the Rosary all the while.

Once Father Carmelo questioned Padre Pio about his habit of rising so early in the morning. "What time do you get up in the morning?" Father Carmelo asked him. He answered that he rose at 3:30 a.m. or earlier. "But why do you get up at such an hour? Don't you think that is a bit too early to rise?" Father Carmelo asked. Padre Pio answered, "But Father, we cannot prepare ourselves too much for Holy Communion."

—To Be Continued

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
Daily Reflection
written by Diane Allen and available at amazon.com