



## Saint Padre Pio of Pietrelcina

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On June 16, 2002, Pope John Paul II canonized in Rome Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, one of the greatest saints of all times. There are saints who have been known for healing; there are saints who could "read" souls; there are saints who were

known for levitation; there were saints who bore the stigmata, or were seen in apparition, or who had the "odor of sanctity." There are saints who could understand languages they didn't know. But Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, who died on September 23, 1968, had all these charisms, and more. In fact, not since St. Francis of Assisi has there been such a miracle-worker.

And as a matter of fact, Padre Pio was the first priest to bear the stigmata — the holy wounds of Christ — just like St. Francis of Assisi. Saint Pio is a man who healed literally thousands — while he was still alive; who could read souls — knowing in case after case exactly what a person in Confession had done; who was seen in dozens of cases in bilocation (appearing far from where he actually was). There were accounts that defy the belief of even the most ardent believer: a sighting of him at the Vatican, even though he never left the San Giovanni monastery; the transfiguration of his face into that of Jesus' during the Consecration; a worker named Giovanni Savino who lost an eye that later materialized under the bandages after Pio visited him in bilocation.

Like the Apostle Paul, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina placed at the centre of his life and apostolic work the Cross of his Lord as his strength, his wisdom and his glory. Inflamed by love of Jesus Christ, he became like Him in the sacrifice of himself for the salvation of the world.

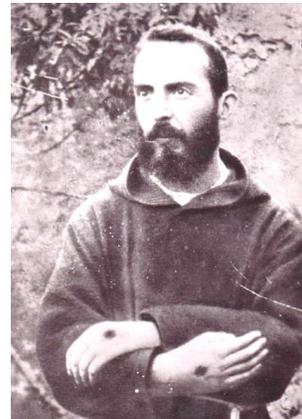
This worthy follower of Saint Francis of Assisi was born on May 25, 1887, at Pietrelcina, in the Archdiocese of Benevento, Italy, the son of Grazio Forgione and Maria Giuseppa De Nunzio. He was baptized the next day and given the name Francesco. At the age of twelve, he received the Sacrament of Confirmation and made his First Holy Communion.

On January 6, 1903, at the age of sixteen, he entered the novitiate of the Capuchin Friars at Morcone, where on January 22 he took the Franciscan habit and the name Brother Pio. At the end of his novitiate year, he took simple vows, and on January 27, 1907 made his solemn profession. After he was ordained a priest on August 10, 1910 at Benevento, he stayed at home with his family until 1916 for health reasons. In September of that year, he was sent to the friary of San Giovanni Rotondo, and remained there until his death, in 1968.

The demons, furious at seeing him so devoted to the Lord, left him no respite, and disturbed him continuously as their worst enemy. Unable of diverting him from his holy resolutions with their Satanic threats and trickery, they waged against him at night a fiery fight, of which the invincible soldier of Christ kept more than once the visible marks on his body. These diabolical scenes were often followed by ineffable celestial visions that put on his face the reflection of a high spirituality.

On the level of social charity, he committed himself to relieving the pain and suffering of many families, chiefly through the foundation of the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza (House for the Relief of Suffering), opened on May 5, 1956. For Padre Pio, Faith was life: he willed everything and did everything in the light of Faith. He was assiduously devoted to prayer. He passed the day and a large part of the night in conversation with God. He would say: "In books we seek God, in prayer we find Him. Prayer is the key which opens God's heart." Faith led him always to accept God's mysterious will.

## The Stigmata



It was in Pietrelcina on September 17, 1915 — the same date as St. Francis Assisi — that Padre Pio received the first invisible stigmata. These signs of the Passion of Our Lord gave him so cruel pains some days, and especially on Fridays, that his confessor, the only other person to know about his stigmata, thought it wise to excuse him from saying the Mass. However, Padre Pio did not use this dispensation, and continued to celebrate Holy Mass in an old chapel dedicated to Saint Pius, martyr.

Three years later, in 1918, after his transfer from Foggia to San Giovanni Rotondo, the wounds of Christ appeared visibly on the hands and feet of Padre Pio, who was from now on no longer able to hide them. He relates himself the event (as reported by Bernard Ruffin in his book “Padre Pio: The True Story.”):

“I was hearing the confession of our boys when suddenly I was filled with extreme terror at the sight of a heavenly Being who presented himself to the eye of my intellect. He held some kind of a weapon in His hand, something like a long, sharp-pointed steel blade, which seemed to spew out fire. At the very instant that I saw this, I saw that Personage hurl the weapon into my soul with all His might.”

That was on August 5, 1918, and it was the onset of Pio's side wound. His hands and feet were pierced later – on September 20: "Between nine and ten in the morning, while my students were taking their recreation in the garden, I was alone in the choir, sitting on the bench in the spot reserved for the vicar," he wrote. "I was there making my thanksgiving after Holy Mass. All of a sudden, a great light shone round about my eyes. In the midst of this light, there appeared the wounded Christ. He said nothing to me before He disappeared.”

The crucifix in the choir, he said, had transformed itself into the Being. The hands, feet, and side of the Being were dripping blood. And the countenance terrified Pio. “From Him there came forth beams of light with shafts of flame that wounded me in the hands and feet. My side had already been wounded on the fifth of August of the same year.”

Padre Pio would bear the wounds for fifty years. A few minutes after his death, they mysteriously vanished.

## The Mass of Padre Pio



Filled with love of God and love of neighbour, Padre Pio lived to the full his vocation to work for the redemption of man, in accordance with the special mission which marked his entire life and which he exercised through the spiritual direction of the faithful: the sacramental reconciliation of penitents and the celebration of the Eucharist. The pinnacle of his apostolic

activity was the celebration of Holy Mass. The faithful who took part witnessed the summit and fullness of his spirituality.

Michael Brown, of Spirit Daily, wrote: “Pray to Pio for healing. Pray to him when seeking relief from the devil. And follow his standard of Mass. This was where his true colors became most pronounced. So intense was Padre Pio during Mass that many claimed his face transfigured into that of Christ's, especially during the Consecration. At times, St. Pio held the Host up for more than ten minutes, seeing a reality others could not see, feeling One with Jesus, realizing the Real Presence. So prolonged were such moments that his Mass typically lasted more than two hours (without a homily, which he rarely gave).”

“Whoever attended just one Mass of his, never forgot it,” noted a friend of his, Padre Alberto D'Apolito. “It produced such an impression that time and space between the altar and Calvary disappeared. The Mass of Padre Pio visibly reproduced the Passion of Christ, not only in a mystical form, but also physically, in his body.

It is said he saw the entire Passion, and we know that he physically suffered the wounds of Jesus — so intense that often he wept during the readings. Notes another biographer, the saint was motionless for long moments at the offering of bread and wine, “as if nailed by a mysterious force,” eyes moist, staring at the Crucifix. During the Consecration, St. Pio's hands sometimes jerked back with pain (the Consecration lasting several times longer than normal) and after, he seemed exhausted from the suffering, leaning over the altar for minutes at a time to commune with the Lord.

He suffered during the Consecration. He glowed during Communion. He saw angels and saints. He saw the splendor of God and Paradise open. Throughout Mass, St. Pio seemed to be peering into another dimension. At the side, he said he could see the Blessed Mother. Was the Madonna present at every Mass, he was asked? “Yes.” Did angels always attend? “The whole celestial court is present.” Whoever doubted the Real Presence, says D'Apolito, had only to assist at St. Pio's Mass.

## The “Flying Monk”

It is impossible to do justice to the entire array of miracles worked by Padre Pio. They are endless, and they have transcended his death. As for the sky phenomenon: “There are many stories concerning allied pilots who attempted to bomb San Giovanni but were stopped by an apparition of a 'monk' standing in the air with his arms outstretched,” says Ruffin. “There are fliers

who swore that they had sighted a figure in the sky, sometimes normal size, sometimes gigantic, usually in the form of a monk or priest. The sightings were too frequent and the reports came from too many sources to be totally discounted. Several people from Foggia, where thousands were killed in the air raids, said that a bomb, falling into a room where they had huddled, landed near a photograph of Padre Pio. They claimed that when it exploded, it 'burst like a soap bubble.' Others reported that while bombs were raining down upon the city, they cried, 'Padre Pio, you have to save us!' While they were speaking, a bomb fell into their midst, but did not explode."

## The Eye Reappears



More astounding still may be the thoroughly-documented cure of a construction worker named Giovanni Savino, who was severely injured on February 15, 1949, in a dynamite mishap. When Dr. Guglielmo San- guinetti, a physician, and Padre Raffaele, another Capuchin, and Father Dominic Meyer rushed to the injured man's side, "all three men noted that among Savino's numerous injuries, his right eye was gone entirely. They agreed that 'the socket was empty'," reports biographer Bernard Ruffin. Other doctors confirmed that the eye was completely annihilated and the other one badly damaged.

It looked like Savino was also going to be totally blind. For three days, the worker lay on a hospital bed with his head and face bandaged. When a surgeon entered the room three days later, Savino reported that Padre Pio had visited him — something Savino recognized because he had detected the beautiful aroma so often reported around the priest. A week later, at about one a.m. on February 25, 1949, Savino felt a slap on the right side of his face — the side where the eye was completely gone. "I asked, 'Who touched me?'" testified Savino. "There was nobody. Again I smelled the aroma of Padre Pio."

When later the ophthalmologist — an atheist — came to examine the remaining eye, there was a shock. "To their amazement," writes Ruffin, "the doctors found that his shattered face was fully healed and covered with new skin. Savino, however, was most delighted at the fact that he could see. 'I can see you!' he said excitedly to the eye specialist."

And indeed, as is medically documented, the doctor saw, to his "utter astonishment", that Savino had his right eye back. Somehow, the eye had materialized. ("Now I believe too," exclaimed the doctor, "because of what my own hands have touched!") As Ruffin notes, it's one thing when diseases disappear; this is exciting. It's tremendous to hear of diabetes or arthritis or even cancer leaving a person. "For a missing part of the body to be restored, however, is another matter," noted the expert biographer.

## Modesty in Dress

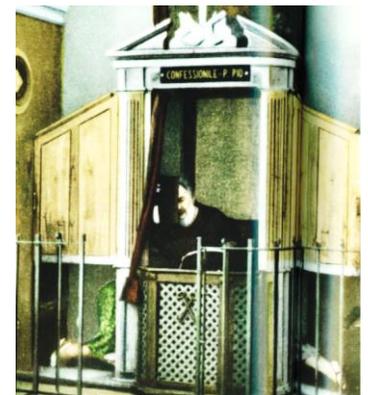
Padre Pio requested people to be dressed modestly to enter the Church of St. Mary of All Graces in San Giovanni Rotondo. During the last years of his life, he became even more severe, as fashions became more immodest. He drove away from his confessional, without respite, all the ladies he deemed to be dressed improperly, even before they entered the confessional box. So they had to put up on the door of the church this notice:

"The church is God's house. It is forbidden for men to enter here with bare arms and wearing shorts. It is forbidden for women to enter wearing trousers, bare headed, with short, low-necked or sleeveless dresses. It is forbidden to borrow dresses in the church to be able to go to confession."

The last line of the notice was not superfluous. In the church, a few minutes before entering the confessional box, many ladies made a rapid change of clothes — dresses, smocks, rain coats — to make up for what was lacking. As soon as Padre Pio saw them, he muttered: "Go and get dressed, jokers!"

## Apostle of the Confessional

Padre Pio of Pietrelcina will be remembered in history as "a great apostle of the confessional," said Cardinal Martins, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Like Saint John Mary Vianney, the holy Curé of Ars, Padre Pio spent over twelve hours per day in the confessional box, to hear confessions, and he often told the penitents in advance all the sins they had committed. Padre Pio could read into consciences. Here is one case:



The man who, one day, came to Padre Pio, was of that type of hard, cold criminals who will stop at nothing. This individual wanted to get rid of his wife but in such a way that his crime would be cloaked with a motive of piety. Under the pretext of going to see Padre Pio, he brought his wife with him to San Giovanni Rotondo where he planned to kill her in a most diabolical way. On arriving at the monastery, he went through the Capuchins' church to the sacristy. Padre Pio was there, talking to some people. When he saw the man, he left abruptly, went to the man, and began to push him violently towards the door, shouting at the top of his voice: "Get out! Get out! Don't you know it is forbidden to stain your hands with blood? Get out!"

The unfortunate man was dumbfounded and, livid with rage, bolted out of the church, to the astonishment of everyone there. However, the strong words and behaviour of Padre Pio made such an impression on him that he could not get a wink of sleep all night. He began to understand the horror of what he was planning and, touched by grace, was a different man in the morning.

He went to the monastery, and this time Padre Pio received him with great tenderness, heard his confession, and gave him absolution. To crown everything, Padre Pio asked him before he left: "You have always wanted children, haven't you? Do not offend God anymore, and you will have a son." A year later, the man returned to Padre Pio to celebrate his son's baptism and the confirmation of his conversion.

## John Paul II and Padre Pio: two great friends

Pope John Paul II knew very well the Capuchine priest he officially declared a saint on June 16, 2002. Karol Wojtyla met Padre Pio for the first time in 1947. It was not an ordinary meeting, like with other pilgrims. It is a meeting that lasted almost a week, during which young Father Wojtyla had the opportunity to talk for a long time with Padre Pio, and naturally, went to confession to him.

What did Padre Pio say to Father Wojtyla? We don't know. The Pope did not speak about it. But on the day of his election as a Pope, on October 16, 1978, curious things circulated in Rome about this meeting in 1947. People said that Padre Pio had foretold to young Wojtyla that he would become a Pope. An old Polish priest said to me that Karol Wojtyla, still young, often alluded to this prophecy, and joking, judged its realization impossible. But after he became Bishop, than Archbishop of Krakow, he no longer spoke about it, because he was starting to think that the prophecy might well come true.

In May, 1981, the assassination attempt against John Paul II took place on St. Peter's Square. Padre Pio's prophecy about Karol Wojtyla came back up for discussion. It was said that in 1947, Padre Pio had also foretold to the young Wojtyla the assassination attempt: "You will see your white cassock stained with blood." Before this is confirmed, one can only consider this as a pious legend. However, the Pope never denied the fact that he did meet Padre Pio in 1947, and held him in high esteem ever since.

An indisputable proof of this high esteem for Padre Pio is an event that took place in 1962. Young Bishop Wojtyla was then in Rome, attending Vatican II. He received from Krakow a letter which informed him that one of his main collaborators, Dr. Wanda Poltawska, a doctor in psychiatry with whom he had worked a lot in family services, was seriously ill with throat cancer. The doctors had decided to operate on her, but the hope of saving her was almost nil.

Wojtyla learned of the news with great sorrow, not only because she was a personal friend of his, but also because she was still young with four children, who would have become orphans. Medicine could do nothing. Wojtyla thought about Padre Pio. He wrote to Padre Pio a letter in Latin, which was handed to the Capuchine priest by Msgr. Angelo Battisti, who was working at the Secretary of State of the Vatican, and also the administrator of the House for the Relief of Suffering, the hospital founded by Padre Pio. Msgr. Battista handed the letter to Padre Pio, who replied, after having read it: "Angelo, I cannot say no to this request."

Eleven days later, Msgr. Battisti returned to San Giovanni Rotondo, with a second letter of Archbishop Wojtyla, in which he thanked Padre Pio, saying: "The lady who was ill with cancer was suddenly healed before entering the operating room."

The dialogue begun in 1947 between Padre Pio and Karol Wojtyla continued. The admiration and esteem of Karol Wojtyla for Padre Pio increased after the death of the monk. Archbishop Wojtyla was the first one to send a letter in Rome to ask for the opening of the beatification process. On May 25, 1987, Pope John Paul II made a pastoral visit to San Giovanni Rotondo, to kneel and pray at Padre Pio's tomb. And it is he, Karol Wojtyla, now Pope John Paul II, who now officially declares Padre Pio a saint.