

Many years later, when the Archbishop of Cracow had become Pope, I learned from the man who had handed the Archbishop's first letter to Padre Pio, that Padre Pio had said, "I cannot say no to this request."

From then on I put many difficult problems into Padre Pio's hands. I feel I am one of his spiritual children, even though I have only seen him once. He died a year later. I know for certain that he has helped me. Besides, our Catholic faith gives us the certainty of the communion of saints. We can ask the saints to intercede for us. I have Padre Pio, a Capuchin monk whom I have met only once in my life, to help me."

ED. NOTE:

Póltawska was a staunch Roman Catholic, and collaborated with her compatriot Pope John Paul II, influencing him on such topics as contraception and sexuality. When, in 1962, Poltawska was ill with cancer and told she had only 18 months to live, the monk Padre Pio was asked by the Pope, then Bishop Wojtyła, to pray for Póltawska. After this her cancerous growth disappeared and she no longer needed an operation to remove it. This was one of the miracles that led the Pope to canonise Padre Pio in 2002.



Archbishop Karol Wojtyła and Wanda Poltawska

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Padre Pio and Wanda Poltawska



Dr. Poltawska, receiving Communion from Pope John Paul II, at the 100th anniversary of the birthday of Padre Pio

Wanda Póltawska (born 2 November 1921 in Lublin) is a Polish physician and author. She was a victim of the Ravensbrück concentration camp, just north of Berlin, having been arrested in February 1941 and charged with assisting the Polish resistance movement. She was used as a human guinea pig and became the subject of various medical experiments. She spent four years in the camp but survived her ordeal, and afterwards wrote an account of her experiences, *And I Am Afraid of My Dreams*. She later married and had four children.

Padre Pio, The Saint of Our Time
by Wanda Poltawska

“It is my personal conviction that Padre Pio is an extraordinary and holy man. I use the word ‘is’ purposely because it is part of his uniqueness that he is still present in the world. People feel his presence. Many are aware of his intervention in an extraordinary way. To some this may seem impossible, but the lives of the saints are full of unusual events.

In 1962, I was to undergo surgery for what was presumed to be a tumorous growth. However, I was told just before surgery that I was healthy and could go home. I was ready to think that what the surgeons had stated, namely that there was a five percent chance that the growth was merely an inflammation, turned out to be the case.

I had no idea that two letters in Latin had been written on my behalf to Padre Pio by the Archbishop of Cracow, Karol Wojtyla, the first with a request and the second with thanks. I did not know then of the existence of Padre Pio since information about him already well known elsewhere in the world, had not yet penetrated into Poland, as far as I knew.

But even when I learned about the letters, I did not want to reflect on what had happened. It seemed too difficult to comprehend a supernatural intervention. A doctor tends to see natural explanations. Therefore, in some sense I laid this question aside without trying to understand it. However, information concerning Padre Pio and his intervention in people’s lives began to reach me from many sources. And then when Archbishop Karol Wojtyla returned to Cracow, I learned of the exchange of letters and who this Padre Pio is.

In 1967, I went to San Giovanni Rotondo. I arrived toward evening, hoping to participate at Holy Mass the next morning. However I was told that there were always huge crowds and that it would be almost impossible to enter and be close to the altar.

I was standing in the little square in front of the church when I saw a Capuchin priest coming from a side gate. I approached him and told him that I would love to participate in Padre Pio’s Mass, but I was afraid it would be impossible, that I came from far away Poland and that I might not be able to get another passport to make the trip in the future. He said, “Come to this gate tomorrow at 5 a.m. and I will let you in” and that’s what happened. The next morning he led me through the sacristy and I was able to sit near the altar. I could observe Padre Pio from a short distance. He was an old man at the time and walked very slowly. He celebrated Holy Mass with incredible intensity and with an expression of suffering on his face. It is impossible to find adequate words to describe this Mass. This sacrifice was truly the representation of the Passion of Christ. Even people of deep faith hardly ever can perceive this reality on the altar as a representation of Calvary. Here the reality of His Passion, which is beyond our understanding, seemed to be reflected in the Holy Mass celebrated by this old man. Perspiration from Padre Pio’s forehead ran down his face. The agony of the man was visible.

The church, full of people, was silent, unusually silent for Italy, only interrupted now and then by a sob. The Mass lasted a long time, and when it was over, Padre Pio slowly made his way back to the sacristy with short steps. As he was passing by, I happened to be near him. He stopped for a minute, looking around at the people, then looked directly at me. I shall never forget his glance. Smiling, he came even closer to me, patting me on the head, and said, “Adesso, va bene?” (Now, are you all right?) I did not answer. I had no time.

But precisely in this moment, I knew he recognized me. I also knew that it wasn’t because of a wrong diagnosis that I had found myself suddenly well several years earlier, but because this monk had come into my life in such an extraordinary way because the Archbishop of Cracow had asked for it.