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Padre Pio and Bill Gleason



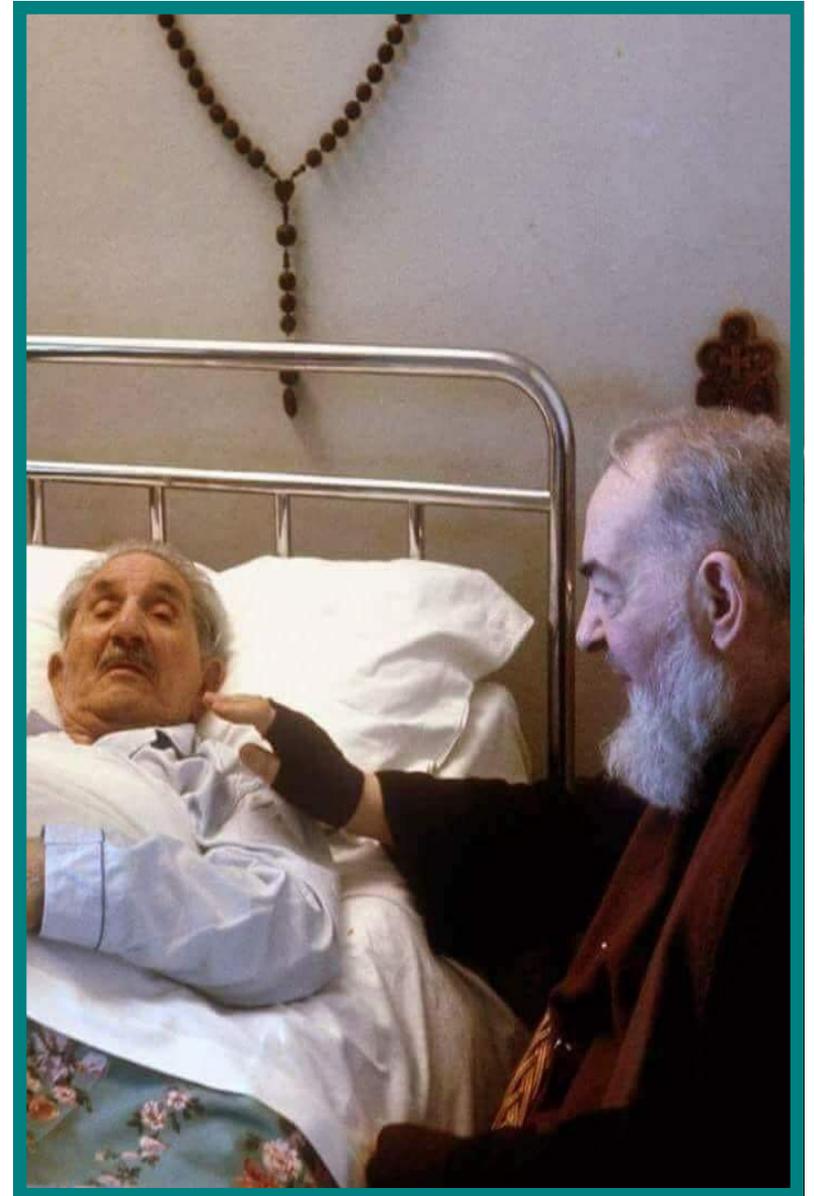
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Padre Pio and Bill Gleason

Bill Gleason was getting ready to have shoulder surgery in the winter of 2008. The night before the surgery, Bill decided to go to the rectory at Our Lady of the Rosary parish and ask one of the priests for a blessing. Father Louis Solcia answered the rectory door that evening. He blessed Bill with the holy oil of St. Pio and gave him a prayer card. It had St. Pio's picture on one side and the novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the other. Bill did not know anything about St. Pio but he was happy to accept the holy card. Father Louis told him to put it in the pocket of his hospital gown and to keep it there during the surgery.

Bill was not too concerned about the surgery. It was going to be a routine operation, a rotator cuff repair. Nevertheless, he was going to have to go under general anesthetic and he was glad that Father Solcia had prayed for him. Bill had been praying quite a lot in recent months. Due to budget cuts in the state of California, he had been laid off from his supervisory position at the County Office of Education. Ever since the lay off, he had prayed to God for guidance. "Lord, show me what you want me to do with my life and lead me in the path you have marked out for me," he frequently prayed.

Bill had the shoulder surgery and was to be discharged from the hospital that very afternoon. However, during the surgery, Bill's breathing became erratic. He had to stay overnight in the hospital and receive breathing treatments throughout the night. Late that evening, his wife Mary Ann called his nurse to see how he was doing. She told the nurse that Bill had a Padre Pio prayer card in the pocket of his hospital gown and she wanted to make sure that he still had it with him. The nurse explained to Mary Ann that Bill had put on a new gown and his other gown had already been sent to the hospital laundry room. The nurse was sorry, but it was too late to recover it.



Bill feels that he has been given a second chance at life. His family was certain that they were losing him. His own doctor confirmed it. But as our faith teaches us, God always has the final word. Indeed, our lives are in His hands. Bill knows for certain now that he has work left to do. Each new day is a gift from God and an opportunity to share his faith and to serve. Today Bill is alive and well and working in the service the Lord.



Saint Benedict Jubilee Medal

The next morning, Bill was very surprised to see his Padre Pio prayer card in his room. Bill's nurse told him that she could sense Mary Ann's disappointment upon learning that the prayer card was gone. The nurse realized that it must have been important. About two o'clock in the morning, she felt a strong urge to go in search of Bill's holy card. She went to the hospital laundry room and looked through the bins of dirty clothes until she found it.

After Bill was released from the hospital, he told Mary Ann that he thought they should start attending the Padre Pio prayer group at Our Lady of the Rosary parish. Neither of them had ever attended it before. He also wanted to make a commitment to pray the novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus every day. Father Solcia had told him that it was the prayer that Padre Pio had said daily throughout his life. Bill had thought a lot about the fact that his nurse at the hospital had taken it upon herself to search for his Padre Pio prayer card. No one had asked her to do so. Bill was amazed, not only that she went in search of it, but also that she had found it. He felt for certain that the odds were against recovering it. He believed that it was a sign that he should start attending the Padre Pio devotions.

Toward the end of the year, Bill began to feel ill. He had chronic pain which seemed to intensify with each passing day. Finally, he was hospitalized. Tests revealed that he had Crohn's Disease. His condition continued to deteriorate. Further tests were taken which indicated that Bill did not have Crohn's disease. His illness remained undiagnosed.

During his hospital stay, Bill contracted pneumonia as well as the potentially deadly bacterial staph infection called MRSA. His condition became critical. He drifted in and out of consciousness. His breathing became erratic, his heartbeat became irregular, and his blood pressure could not be stabilized. As a last resort, his doctor put him into a medically induced coma.

Finally, after Bill had been in a coma for many days, the doctor told Mary Ann that he could offer no hope for her husband. He had done everything that he could for Bill. Bill was dying. The doctor told Mary Ann to take care of any arrangements that she needed to. Mary Ann called Father Solcia and told him the news. He immediately came down to the hospital and gave Bill the Last Rites and the blessing for the dying.

To his family's great relief, Bill did not pass away. He came back to consciousness after being in a coma for eighteen days. He told Mary Ann that while he was in a comatose state, he had a remarkable experience. He found himself in a place of pitch darkness. There he saw the faces of frightful demons. It was truly a place of pain and suffering. An angel came to Bill and tried to lead him out of the dark ravine. "We have to climb the mountain, Bill. We have to go toward the light," his good angel would say. No matter how hard Bill tried, he was always pulled back down toward the darkness. More than anything in the world, Bill wanted to get to the place of light.

At one point, Bill saw a saintly man dressed in robes of pure white. Looking closer, he realized that it was St. Benedict. "Save me!" Bill entreated St. Benedict. St. Benedict pointed toward his right, indicating the way that Bill was to go. Bill went in that direction and soon saw a figure close to him. It was Padre Pio. "Stop right there, Bill," Padre Pio said, in a voice full of authority. "You must go back. Your work is not finished." "But what work?" Bill asked. Padre Pio made no reply.

Bill knew that the light was up ahead, but he only had a faint glimpse of it. He was never able to reach it. Instead, when he finally opened his eyes, he saw his earthly angel, Mary Ann, at his hospital bedside. How happy his family was to know that Bill had returned to the land of the living!

All together, Bill spent a total of seventy-eight days in the hospital. He weighed 223 lbs. when he was admitted and he weighed 139 lbs. on the day he was sent home. Bill's recovery took many months. His family took expert care of him. They were just glad that he was alive.

Bill's experience in the hospital gave him a whole new perspective on life. Before his illness, he had often attended Mass simply to fulfill his Sunday obligation. Not anymore. Today, he looks forward to going to Mass on Sundays. He knows what a privilege it is. His relationship with God has become much deeper and much more real. He has peace of mind and peace of heart. His faith is stronger now than it has ever been in his life.

These days, Bill assists Mary Ann in Our Lady's Catholic Book and Gift Shop on the grounds of Our Lady of the Rosary parish. He sees his work there as a ministry. He always wears a little pin of St. Pio and a medal of St. Benedict. People often ask him about the pin and the medal. It has become an opportunity for him to share his faith with others. He keeps prayer cards of St. Pio with him and often gives them to the customers at the shop.

At the Padre Pio prayer group one evening, Father Solcia surprised Bill by asking him to step forward and share his testimony with the prayer group. He was happy to do so. Since that time, many people have asked Bill to relate his story of how Padre Pio helped him in the hospital, after his doctors had informed his family that he had no hope of recovery. A number of people have told Bill that his words have strengthened their faith.