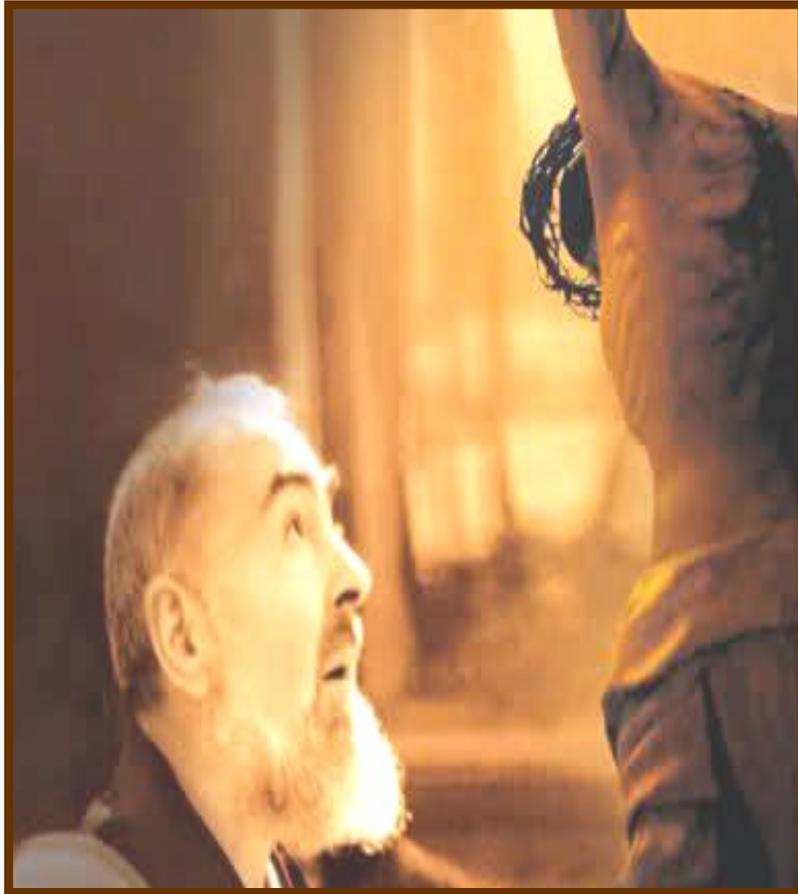
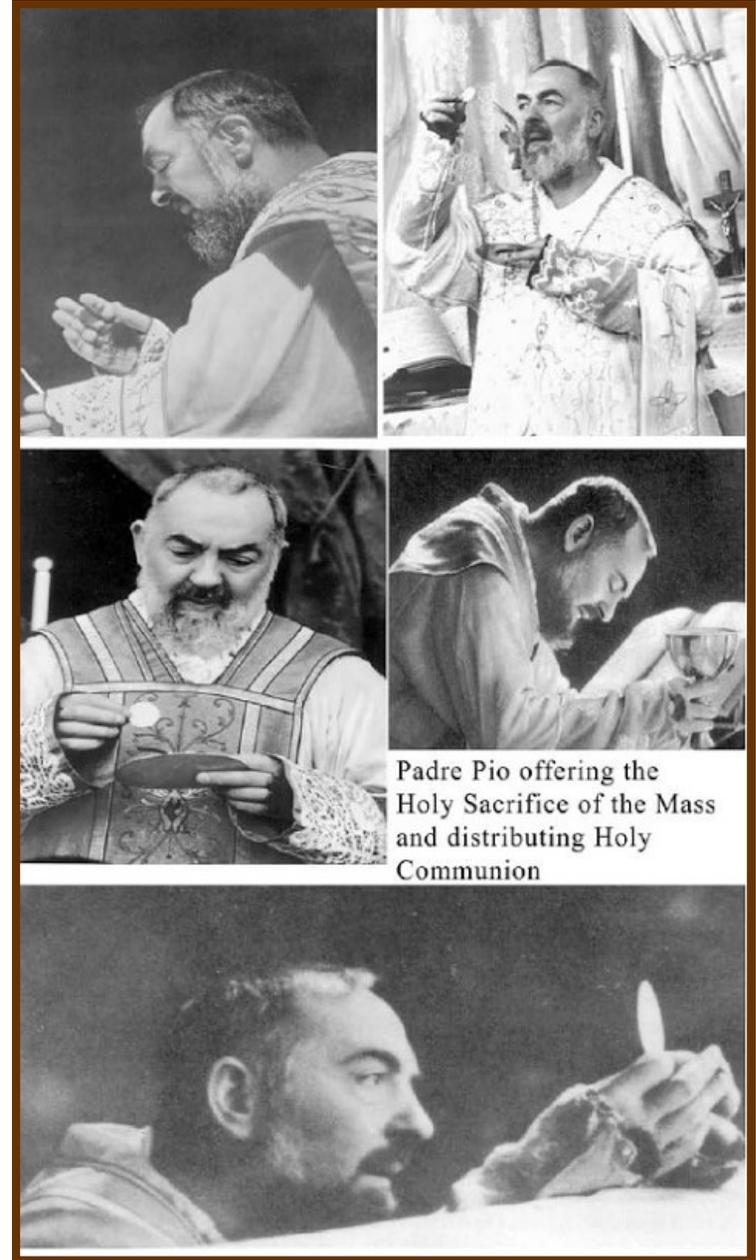


devil that his spiritual children might not, and through the mystical conformity of the stigmata, the wounds of Christ's crucifixion, as the first priest in the history of the Church to do so. In all these ways Padre Pio was both priest and Victim like our High Priest Jesus Christ.



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Padre Pio and Christ's Priesthood



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The greatest feature of Padre Pio's life is its perfect conformity to Jesus Christ the Priest. To understand what this means it is necessary to first understand the Priesthood of Christ.

The entire Old Law, with its institutions and rituals, was a preparation for, and foreshadowing of, the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. Foremost among the properly religious institutions was the spiritual leadership of Jewish worship, with its three-fold division of High Priest, Priests and Levites. The role of the Priest was to accomplish the ritual sacrifices commanded by God, in thanksgiving for His blessings, in expiation for sin and in petition for needs. These sacrifices ranged from the bloody expiatory victims (lambs and bullocks) to the un-bloody offerings of incense and cereal (grain). They were most notable for their sheer quantity, offered again and again, day after day, on behalf of Israel, and Israel alone.

However, while commanding these sacrifices God makes clear that he does not need them and that they do not in fact satisfy for sin (Ps. 40:6, Hosea 6:6). Through His prophets He tells of a time when an acceptable sacrifice will be offered by His Suffering Servant (Is. 53:11), and that this Sacrifice will be perpetuated among the Gentiles...for His name is great among the Gentiles (Mal. 1:11).

Furthermore, with the change of victim (from lambs to the Lamb) there needed to be a change of priesthood, from one fixed in time by bodily descent, to an eternal priesthood that transcended time and was thus spiritual. This priesthood was already anticipated in Scripture and foretold by King David to be present in his descendant, the Messiah.

Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, and being a priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram with these words: Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth ... (Gen. 14:18-19)

The Lord says to you, my lord: "Take your throne at my right hand, while I make your enemies your footstool." The scepter of your sovereign might the LORD will extend from Zion. The LORD says: "Rule over your enemies! Yours is princely power from the day of your birth. In holy splendor before the daystar, like the dew I begot you." The Lord has sworn and will not waver: Like Melchizedek you are a priest forever." (Psalm 110:1-4)

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews explains it this way.

Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring, for he himself is beset by weakness and so, for this reason, must make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people. No one takes this honor

upon himself but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. In the same way, it was not Christ who glorified himself in becoming high priest, but rather the one who said to him: "You are my son; this day I have begotten you"; just as he says in another place: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, declared by God high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. (Heb. 5:1-10)

Thus it was that on the night before He consummated His Sacrifice on the Cross He conferred this Priesthood on the apostles, taking bread and saying,

This is My Body which will be given for you, do this in memory of me.

and taking wine and saying,

This cup is the new covenant in My Blood, do this in memory of me.

Thus, He not only fulfilled His promise to give Himself as spiritual food and drink to His disciples (Jn. 6: 54-55), elevating them to eternal life, but left the New Israel of His Church a priesthood which could sacramentally represent His Sacrifice offered "once for all" (Heb. 10:10) on Calvary "until He comes again" (1 Cor 11:26, Mal. 1:11).

It is into this priesthood, whose gifts are bread and wine and whose *priest* and *victim* are one and the same, Jesus Christ, that Padre Pio was ordained on 10 August 1910. The Church teaches that at the supreme moment of the sacramental representation of Calvary in the Mass that the ministerial priest acts *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ), showing forth in a mystical way the death of the Lord by the separate consecration of His Body and Blood.

To this Holy Sacrifice, offered visibly by way of signs - bread and wine - but presenting the invisible and eternal sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 10:14, Rev. 5:6), Padre Pio dedicated His most intense acts of piety, and obtained from the Father perfect conformity to the crucified Lord. So, close was this conformity that he lived it out even outside of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, through the immolation of the service of the confessional, dedicating long hours to the reconciliation of sinners, through a ministry of intense sufferings offered on behalf of others, through enduring the assaults of the