

The same and approximately with no difference, goes for his spiritual direction.

Here too Padre Pio was not just the "teacher" of the spirit, he did not limit himself to giving the usual moralizing sermon, with a sprinkling of learned citations, of obscure philosophic ideas, mystifying philosophisms, adaptable to every season: a kind of "commune sanctorum."

Padre Pio was a very discreet guide. One notices this in his speech, written or verbal, in his very self effacing manner, the effort to "remove himself" or at least to reduce his presence as much as possible, on behalf of an encounter as direct as possible between the soul under his direction and divine action.

Padre Pio made himself the mediator of the Mediator, but in the most reserved way possible.

A guide who did not dare to suppress and overpower a soul.

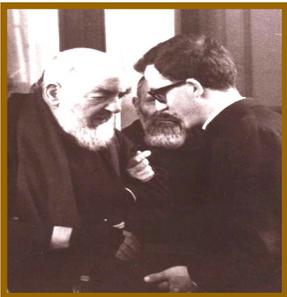
Truly a prophet, not just in the sense of foreseeing, but in the sense of one who spoke on behalf of the Lord, of the Holy Spirit," comforting souls by bringing calm, peace and tranquility; resolving problems, eliminating difficulties, satisfying expectations and upholding aspirations.

He became everything for everyone.

He did not see the flock for the sheep, he did not see the forest for the tree.

His spiritual direction had one precise goal: the growth of the interior life and sanctification attained through the intervention of Grace, prayer and intimacy with God.

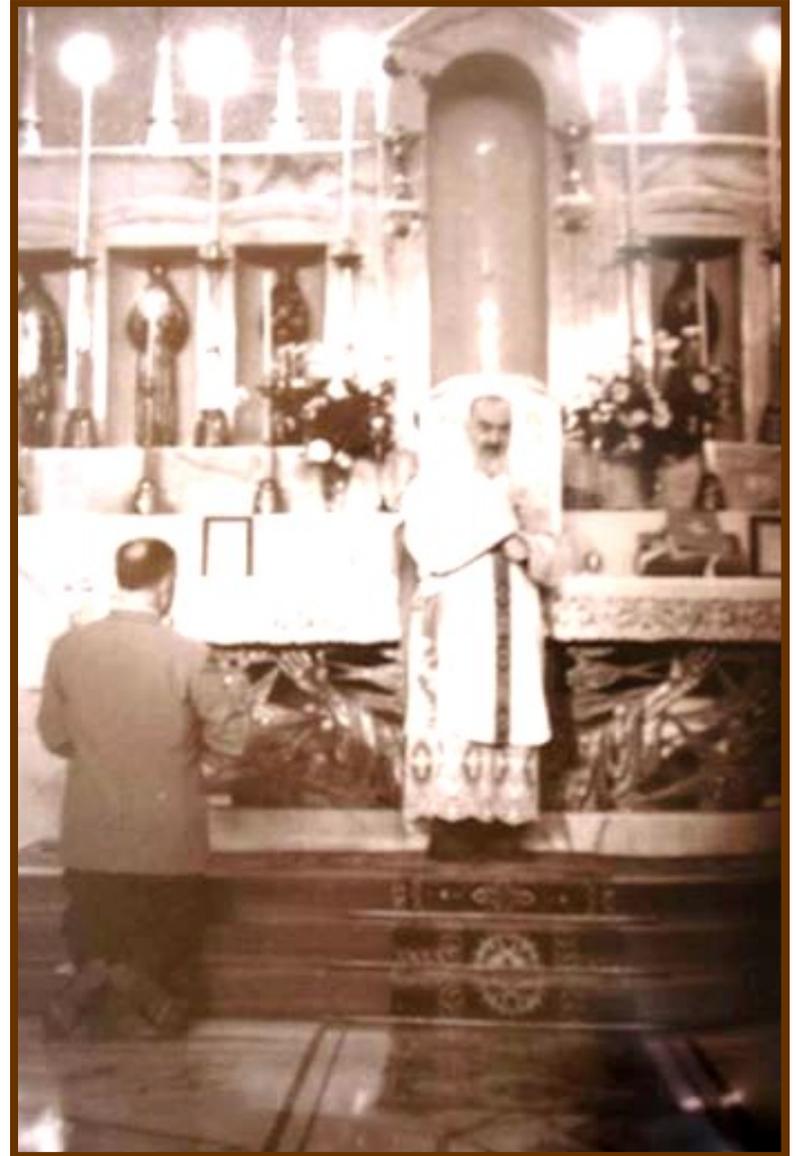
Padre Pio's spirituality, in short derived from the constant and determined identification with God, right up to the Agony: It was the work of love!



He was asked for guidance which he lovingly gave.

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The Spiritual Personality of Padre Pio



The Spiritual Personality of Padre Pio

by Gennaro Prezioso

Padre Pio had an extraordinarily rich personality and many pages would be necessary to give justice to its diversity and exceptionality. Because of limits imposed I must restrict my consideration to only three aspects: the human, the spiritual and the social.

The Spiritual Aspect of Padre Pio

The spiritual aspect of the personality of Padre Pio, that is his spirituality, is so variegated, multifarious (I do not say complex or intricate!) as to put into serious difficulty anyone who wishes to achieve, as much as possible, a complete examination and summary.

I will endeavor to do so by distinguishing the "spiritual" inquiry into four points: In the first place Padre Pio's response to his innate need for the infinite, the transcendence of God.

How this need is felt by man today.

The transcendent signifying all that which excels and surpasses human experience, that exists apart, not subject to the limitations of the material universe. In short, that realization that there exists a reality higher than that verifiable by the senses.

Man needs to transcend, he needs to transcend himself, to go beyond himself, to transcend the limits of death.

To transcend himself in an act of faith that frees him from the limits of reason.

To transcend himself in hope to surpass the ensnarement of the here and now and open himself to the future.

To transcend himself in love so as to come out of himself, to expand in a boundless wealth.

All this man needs today.

And at times he is not aware of this and seeks refuge in the occult.

It would make up a chapter in itself the different and at times contradictory manifestations of contemporary religiosity.

On the altar, he would render sacramentally present the event of Calvary. His highest identification with the Paschal victim would be attained in the very moment of Consecration. "On his face there would be conveyed the interior vibrations of his soul, moved by the memorial of the Passion" that would become "his" passion.



I said that Padre Pio's spirituality sprung "first and foremost" from the Holy Mass. But also the "Confessional" constituted a source of his spirituality, a further aspect of it.

Personally, I am of the opinion that it is not enough to consider Padre Pio's confession only as an "appendage" of his spirituality.

Padre Pio did not just "confess" someone, remaining in some way remote from the dynamism of Grace.

The Padre felt himself absorbed; to use a metaphor, he became a kind of catalyst.

The catalyst, in fact, in chemistry is an element in the presence of which there takes place a reaction.

With this intimate involvement, the Padre became part of everything that serves to realize the channel through which there flows the Grace merited by Jesus, Grace that is Jesus Himself.

Here too, I believe I am being quite bold, but I have the feeling that I am being orthodox.

Bearing in mind these considerations, we can find an explanation for his "harshness" or "roughness" and perhaps we will understand why with a fellow friar who wanted to imitate him and sent away a penitent without absolution he said, "No, you cannot do what I do!"

Padre Pio loved too much the penitent. He loved the person under his direction so much that he would not permit that Grace result vain, or rather become a motive of sacrilege and condemnation.

He stooped and lowered himself so much to the moral suffering of the penitent to the point of exhaustion, not just of his physical strength, but also in a kind of kenosis caused by love and above all in imitation of Jesus, who "rich became poor," "taking on everything of mankind except sin."

More than just clouds! Today Padre Pio would have prayed and made others pray that the Church be defended from the forces of evil!

In the third point of this reflection I believe it is of interest to determine the source of Padre Pio's spirituality. And I do not think it rash to affirm that it was, above all, the Holy Mass.

The celebration of Mass was not, in my simple opinion, only an "expression," an "epiphany" of Padre Pio's spirituality. It was first and foremost the fount and primary source.

For Padre Pio to speak of celebration is to "miss the point:" it does not tell us in fact of his active participation in the renewal of the Sacrifice of Jesus.

Rarely, I believe, was the "ministeriality" so taken up by the "mystery" as in the Mass of Padre Pio.

And vice versa: a mystery so absorbed by the minister.

Padre Pio himself became the "signum" of the "res significata" that is of Jesus immolated.

Moreover, I would be so bold as to say: that the priest minister acting "in persona Christi" was in some way Jesus Christ acting "in persona Patris Pio."

Does this sound like heresy? Theologians do not cry out scandal. At times the heart has its intuitions that the mens theologica does not know; the heart reaches what the reason cannot know. (And then there is no harm in a little overstatement).

The sacrifice of the Cross would be renewed by Padre Pio in an intimate participation with his personal mark of suffering, and blood.

This participation was so visibly reflected in the physical aspect of the "Crucified one of the Gargano" that those who assisted at his Mass would be profoundly impressed and mesmerized.

At 2:30 a.m. the Padre would recollect himself in prayer to prepare himself not just to celebrate, but to "live" his Mass.

The "sitio" (I thirst) of Golgotha would be repeated in his heart. He would await with anxiety the moment of "offering himself."

The reverse to faith is not reason, but superstition!

They have become best sellers all those publications that concern death, life after death. A sign of our need for God, that we cannot reconcile with substitutes, nor suppress and eliminate light heartedly.

70 years and more of atheistic propaganda in Russia did not succeed in eradicating God from the heart of man.

Padre Pio, I would say felt more urgently, more amply, more deeply and dramatically the need for God, the need for the supernatural. And this in relation to the enormous dimension of his spirit, soul and heart. A most rare, mighty and sublime sensibility. An aptitude (it is certainly the case to say) for the infinite; and aptitude understood as a "capacity to contain", of extraordinary proportion. And if that aptitude was not filled by God? I do not know what would have happened. I do not even dare to think!

To understand, at least in part, how great, impelling and devouring was Padre Pio's need for God, it is enough to look through his letters.

One letter in particular reveals this extraordinary intensity. The Padre wrote it on 4 June 1918, to his spiritual director Padre Benedetto of San Marco in Lamis, in a moment in which he believed he had lost God who instead perhaps only out of the playfulness of love had only momentarily hidden Himself from the eyes of his soul:

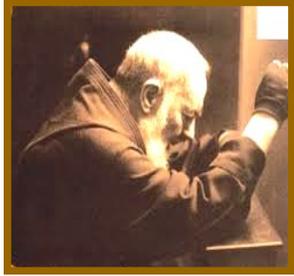
"I am stretched out on my bed of pain, panting in my search for my God. But where am I to find Him? From my bed of suffering and my prison of expiation I try in vain to come forth to life.



"My God! I have gone astray and have lost you, but will I find you again? Or have I lost you for ever? Have you condemned me to live for all eternity far from your countenance?"

"I am looking for God, but where am I to find him? Even the very idea of a Lord and God has vanished; of a Master, Creator, Love and Life. He has dispelled everything and I, alas, am lost in thickest darkness, while I return in vain to disconnected memories of a lost love and am no longer capable of loving. O my great Good, where are you to be found? I have lost you, I am unable to find you again, because you accepted with alacrity the total offering I made to you. You have taken back everything and you exercise supreme dominion over it. I entrust it entirely to you and hope that you will preserve in your keeping all that is mine, entirely abandoned in the most heartrending privation of love...."

"God remains concealed all the time from my vigilant soul which spends itself in frantic but always necessary seeking, while I am consumed by the continual fear of offending Him, since I am utterly alone in a most desolating solitude. I am alone with my fiery character, alone with my internal and external vexations, alone with my natural corruption, alone in combat with the enemy.



"My supreme God, where are You? I no longer know You or find You, but I must necessarily seek You, You who are the life of my dying soul. My God, My God! - I can no longer say anything else to You - why have You forsaken me? I am aware of nothing but this abandonment, I am ignorant of all else, even of life, which I am unaware of living....

"Dear God! I ask You for the strength to suffer stripped of all consolation. Make these resolutions of mine constant, steadfast and fruitful, so that they may at least suffice to disarm your fury. Offer them yourself, my supreme Good to your outraged Majesty, but not before You have strengthened them by your divine power, while I myself will endeavour to find a resting place in my unbearable affliction on this bed of sharp and cruel thorns and will receive from your hands the capacity to relish as my food this rejection and abandonment You mete out to me....

"I am hungry, my dear Father, for the return of my God to my soul. Give Him to me. Appease my hunger for Him, my Life and my All. The condition of this soul of mine is nothing but utter ruin, nothing but sinister lights which tend to show up the desolation and to alarm the victim who is a prey to his unknown destiny. My God! This cry is necessary, my dear Father, and it is all that is left to me in the midst of such affliction. I understand nothing anymore. I greatly fear to be abandoned for ever to myself and in this fear I clutch or try to clutch at obedience, but even this seems to elude me."

Any comment would be superfluous!

And now we come to the second point, that is revealed from these texts just quoted. That is the mode and particularity in which Padre Pio lived his spirituality, precisely as a need, anxiety and longing for the infinite.

Everything "ad modum recipientis recipitur... et (I add) exprimitur" (Everything is received according to the personality of the one receiving - everything is expressed according to the personality of the one expressing).

Experience is always personal!

Never forget the unity and singularity of every human being. Man is one with his diverse aspects, dimensions and parts.

And he is unique, that is he is un-repeatable.

Padre Pio lived his spirituality as his own, personally and individually, but with the common denominator (of every man, person and believer) of the substantial unity of the spiritual, the supernatural and the ecclesiastical.

In simpler words: Padre Pio did not live his own spirituality as a kind of personal adventure, separated from the Church, with a kind of direct and independent line with the Holy Spirit.

This is individualism, religious egoism of the Lutheran Protestant kind.

Padre Pio loved the Church because the depository of the mystery of salvation. "I want to live and die in the Church," he would say. And he would suffer greatly when he heard about the troubles going on in the Church.



On 20 April 1914, writing to his confessor he affirmed,

"I do not conceal from you, however, that it afflicts my heart to see so many souls apostatizing from Jesus. What freezes the blood close to my heart is the fact that many of these souls become estranged from God solely because they are deprived of the divine word. The harvest is great but the labourers are few, who is then to reap the harvest in the fields of the Church when it is almost ripe? Will it be scattered on the ground by reason of the scarcity of workers? Will it be reaped by Satan's emissaries who are, unfortunately, both numerous and extremely active?" (Letters I).

What a prophetic concern!

Padre Pio ' defied the enemy, he obeyed blindly, he defended the genuine evangelical doctrine by unfailing, steadfast priestly activity.

Never did he stray from traditional doctrine. For him the Supreme Pontiff was really the "Sweet Jesus on earth."

He showed the Pope his filial respect in his faithfulness, obedience and submission. More than once he repeated, "For me after Jesus, there is only the Pope!" For the Pope and the Church, I would give my life a thousand times!"

He would constantly invite one to pray for the Church. To Padre Agostino of San Marco in Lamis he wrote, "Let us pray, my father, until it pleases the Lord to remove these dense clouds that are accumulating over the Church" (Letters I).