

And so how may we live in hope, so that it does not become a delusion? Here again Padre Pio returns to his teacher, St. Paul, to remind us that we must never forget that our true homeland is not in this world but in the next and that the Christian's heart must always be turned to heaven, as only in heaven will we find perfect and complete happiness in God.

In light of this, Padre Pio's desire to die, a theme that returns so often in his spiritual life, also becomes clearer. This desire was not a desire to escape from life, but rather the giving to life its correct orientation and directing it with all one's strength to that complete and perfect encounter with the Lord Jesus.

### **Opening our Heart to Hope**

Let us now, in the light of this, try to re-read Padre Pio's sternness when hearing confessions. The severity he used with sinners shocked many people. With time (and myself included), this began to be understood in the light of Padre Pio's pedagogy, language and methods of his epoch. However, this idea to make his manner seem less offensive must not be exaggerated as one risks betraying his thought and mission. His behavior, in sending away penitents two or three times without absolution and at times with cutting words, was to really and truly shake up souls from the lethargy into which they had fallen, to impel them to open themselves to God's mercy, to hope in His salvation, a hope that was not something abstract but something concrete and profound and fully conscious of the poverty brought on by the exclusion of the Lord from their lives. In this sense, it seems to me one can find a continuity, even with different aspects peculiar to each, between Pope Francis' action and Padre Pio's apostolate. Contrarily to the very superficial image given to him by journalists, the Pope's desire of solidarity with those in need is not mere rhetoric. He truly desires to be close to them and to make them feel the presence of a Church that testifies to the presence of God. To go in search of the lost sheep means being close to those who are suffering and making them see how God can bring light to this suffering and inspire hope. Padre Pio by other roads, but with equal intensity, committed his life to opening sinners to hope.

### **The Ethics of Hope**

Without doubt, progress offers new possibilities for good, but it also opens up appalling possibilities for evil – possibilities that formally did not exist. We have all witnessed the way in which progress, in the wrong hands, can become and has indeed become a terrifying progress in evil. If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man's ethical formation, in man's inner growth (cf. Eph 3: 16; 2 Cor 4: 16), then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world (Spe Salvi, no. 22).

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## **Padre Pio and The Road of Hope**



**"I will be able to do more for you from Heaven than I can while here on earth." Padre Pio**

**So take your troubles to him, your worries, and leave them in his hands.**

# Padre Pio and The Road of Hope

by Bro Luciano Lotti

Pope Benedict XVI donated to the Church an encyclical on hope. It begins with the words of St. Paul: "In hope we were saved" (Rm 8: 24) and with reflections on the life of a slave girl from Sudan, Josephine Bakhita, who was canonized by John Paul II. In the service of an Italian consul Callisto Legnani, Josephine came to Italy and here she became acquainted with the Gospel and its message and united herself to Christ, her new master, or "paron"(owner or boss) as she learned to call Him in the Venetian dialect. This encounter with the faith changed her life, she found "hope," and as our emeritus pope notes, "no longer simply the modest hope of finding masters who would be less cruel but the great hope of encountering He who is the living God."

In this exemplary hope that the Church holds up to us, we can include the hope of all the Saints: from Francis of Assisi who wished to be the Herald of this Great King, and Padre Pio who in a school essay, dreamed of being a good king, so as to be able to spread justice and peace, then later – once a Capuchin friar – would dream of realizing this encounter with the heavenly Father as soon as possible so as to be united with Him for all eternity.

Sometimes when we consider the Christian hope as a theological virtue we can sound rather rhetorical and abstract and lose sight of the very reason that impels us to hope: that encounter with Someone whom we wish never to be separated from again.

## Hope in God's Mercy

Fr. Innocenzo Cinicola who was for many years the hospital chaplain recalls how Padre Pio would often exhort one to abandon oneself to God's mercy, and Fr. Eusebio remembers two frequent sayings of Padre Pio's: "We must place our hope in God's mercy" and "Let us hope in the goodness of the Lord."

To understand this association of "hope and mercy" it is necessary to understand Padre Pio's way of thinking who in his vital relationship with God would underline continuously its disproportion: on the one hand the greatness and magnanimity of God who lowers Himself to man and embraces him as a son and, on the other hand, man's poverty and limitations – that poverty so often decried in the social battles of the 20th century. During Padre Pio's lifetime and around him there were many different solutions proposed to solve this poverty. The myth of progress, the sciences and technology it was believed could resolve everything and create a society free from all economical and social inequalities. A thousand and one hopes, certainly legitimate, originated in this way and which brought about also great results; at the same time however exasperating hope because, to attain these utopias, all means were permitted, dishonesty and violence included. In all this hope was drastically reduced to simple worldly agendas, to economical and political schemes and which

excluded everything at variance but most significantly excluding God, in fact specifying categorically that He had to be excluded because of no use and detrimental to these enlightened visions.

The new leaders of the world zealously pushed forward their schemes but the people felt betrayed, left behind and abandoned.

While Padre Pio, a poor simple Friar on the Gargano mountain continued to teach that only God can fill that emptiness and poverty. Padre Pio, full of the wisdom of St. Paul, his spiritual guide and master, continued to propose the mystery of a God who forsook His place of privilege to clothe Himself in our poverty, an act of mercy that was not some sweet indulgence on His part, but a debasing of Himself to man's poverty, a taking upon Himself of our misery so as to make us rich. So hope became a road to salvation: the opening of our eyes to a new reality, a world in which God, who had been excluded, was instead its true wealth, and who enabled one to live one's life to the full in history. A hope that did not alienate or separate one from life, as the new leaders had believed, but the road to the recognition of a real supernatural presence and force that filled ones world.

For Padre Pio this meant an immense trust in grace and in God's Providence, so that his prayers of intercession would obtain through God's mercy extraordinary and singular assistance especially in difficult trials. Christian hope was a virtue that did not refer simply to one's final encounter with God, but was the certainty of God's presence in one's daily life, the certainty that He was always the one and would never abandon anyone.

## Hope or Delusion?

Is there a difference between Hope and delusion. Yes, certainly, and the examples we have referred to above are a good example. It is a delusion to hope to save the world without God, it is a delusion to hope to save the Church without God and also to save ourselves without Him. Padre Pio in a letter written to Father Agostino expressed himself very strongly with regards to this: "This is an enemy that assails those who have consecrated themselves to the Lord and embraced the spiritual life" (Letters 1). We can use the term "vainglory" to describe this point of view that makes us think that we have already attained our final end and in our self-assurance that we no longer need anything or anyone. Padre Pio reflecting on this in his letter puts it this way: by prayer and penance we separate ourselves from the world and approach God, but by trusting more in ourselves than in grace, which is the only means of salvation, we end up like Narcissus in self contemplation.