

Is all of this of interest only to scholars or is there a pastoral relevance? In the journey of faith of each one of us, what use can the awareness of our unworthiness have? We can say that his serves to reveal the true meaning of humility, beyond that sterile humility that is more outward show and motivated by self-interest than a reality.

Moreover there are also types of humility that can be described as nihilistic, that is without any awareness of our limitations, but are instead a total lack of self esteem. The confession of our unworthiness is a form of equilibrium, that brings us to recognize that the fount of all the graces and gifts we have is God and which brings together truth and humility because it prevents an exaggerated consideration of ourselves and at the same time does not permit us to deny these gifts.

This sense of unworthiness if properly developed, assists us in the growth of two fundamental aspects in the life of faith: the first, the continuous gratitude to God for His gifts to us, and the second, a consequence of the first, the profound fervent desire to love our Lord always more.

When we consider God's action in Padre Pio's life, we can say that he lived and shared in an extraordinary love story that required the continuous purification and submission of his heart to God to the point that his soul had only one desire, that is, to be admitted into the heavenly homeland close to His Beloved.



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## Insights into Padre Pio's Spiritual Life

(The certitude of his love for our Lord,  
still did not free him from his doubts)



The Sense of Unworthiness is the Fruit of Our Love for God

# Insights into Padre Pio's Spiritual Life

"I am not worthy, but only say the word..."

By Bro Luciano Lotti

The year is 1913, and Padre Pio has, for at least three years now, been speaking about his spiritual life in his letters to his spiritual directors. The mysterious illness that kept Padre Pio in Pietrelcina and his mystical ecstasies that alternated with attacks from the devil, are well-known to us. During these three years Padre Pio received from God inestimable favors like the prayer of contemplation, the prayer of quiet, and the fusion of hearts. These were profound mystical experiences they caused in the mystic moments of profound spiritual joy, but were the cause at the same time of his becoming fully conscious of his limitations, those limitations common to all creatures before the Creator. All this would produce in him that profound sense of unworthiness that accompanied him his whole life.

His spiritual director, Father Benedetto, who received his letters, would at first remain silent, cautiously and attentively observing, but later he would reassure him, using his authority as spiritual director; to fully accept this state of soul, understand it and reject any pessimistic thoughts or melancholy. Hence, God's presence that for Padre Pio was such a sublime and marvelous experience had at the same time another psychological aspect to it that was the cause also of an intense spiritual torment, so intense that he compared it to that of lost souls; and also the doubt that crosses his mind as certain times, as we can read in the following letter that perhaps Padre Pio had been deceived.

It is quite easy for us to see in Padre Pio state of soul here a similarity with our own moments of doubt in our faith. This doubt however that takes hold of Padre Pio has nothing to do with the reality of God's providence; more seriously, His existence, but is about the genuineness of his own spiritual life.

There is in us an "ideal self," that is made up of our many lofty ambitions and goals and our religious life is part of this. Then there is an "actual self," that is made up of our everyday experiences, failures and infidelities that is often the cause of a low esteem of ourselves and capabilities. In our moments of doubt we become very aware of the great distance caused by our limitations and sins that separates us from God, and it becomes even difficult to speak to God in prayer.

Padre Pio, in his letters confesses to his spiritual directors that he has several times made an examination of conscience, but can find no grave motives to cause his separation from God. Despite this, he feels the weight of his being a creature while also feeling being separated from God continuously. He also complains of the devil's work which tries to separate him from the spiritual direction of his spiritual directors Father Benedetto and Father Agostino, and at the same time persuade him that the demonstrations of God's love and predilection towards him are all a deception.

It is here, in these temptations of the devil, to persuade Padre Pio that everything related to the sacred, God's work, His words and His very providential presence are all a deception, that contemporary man can perhaps find closes affinity in the spiritual life Padre Pio. When we undergo a trial, experience a failure and are suffering, we can quickly question God's presence in our lives. This is the immediate, almost spontaneous reaction of one who has been wounded. The devil instead does all he can do to deepen his doubt within us, to question the extent of this deception and, philosophically, the limitations of our minds ability to reach God.

Padre Pio incarnates the Centurion's response: "I am not worthy... But only say the word..." (Mt 8, 8). We read in Padre Pio's letter of this number: "what I comprehend most clearly and truly is that my heart loves to a much greater extent than my intellect perceives." The feeling of unworthiness does not come from the consideration of our limitations but is the fruit of love: that gratuitous infinite love of God and our humble grateful desire to respond to this love. In this context, the disparity between the temporal and eternal is clear, and that language – summoned to speak to God – is unable to find appropriate words.

So, the immensity of God, that was affirmed until now as a limitation, becomes now the cardinal point in the encounter with Him. Padre Pio, after confessing his fear of being deceived, in other words his being far away from God, as a profound act of faith: "I am so perfectly sure that my will loves this most tender Spouse that, apart from Holy Scripture, I am certain of nothing else to the same degree to which I am certain of this."

Before the believer of today, a road opens, to the "actual self," that self-conscious of its limitations and sins, that may open to grace if the awareness of its very unworthiness becomes a need for God. This is the demarcation line that perhaps most separates Padre Pio's search for God and that of man today. Padre Pio then writes: "in reciting the Lord's Prayer, before I pronounce the words deliver us from evil, my whole soul is so taken up that, in spite of the efforts I make to restrain these movements, I feel myself carried away, as it were, into a different sphere, and I ask the heavenly Father to deliver me from every evil such as the present life." This is the experience of a true son of God! We can have our doubts, our failures, experience the inadequacy of language and fear that we have been deceived, but we must never renounce that desire to live "in a different sphere," that is to be in this world, but desiring without ceasing to be completely with God in the heavenly homeland.