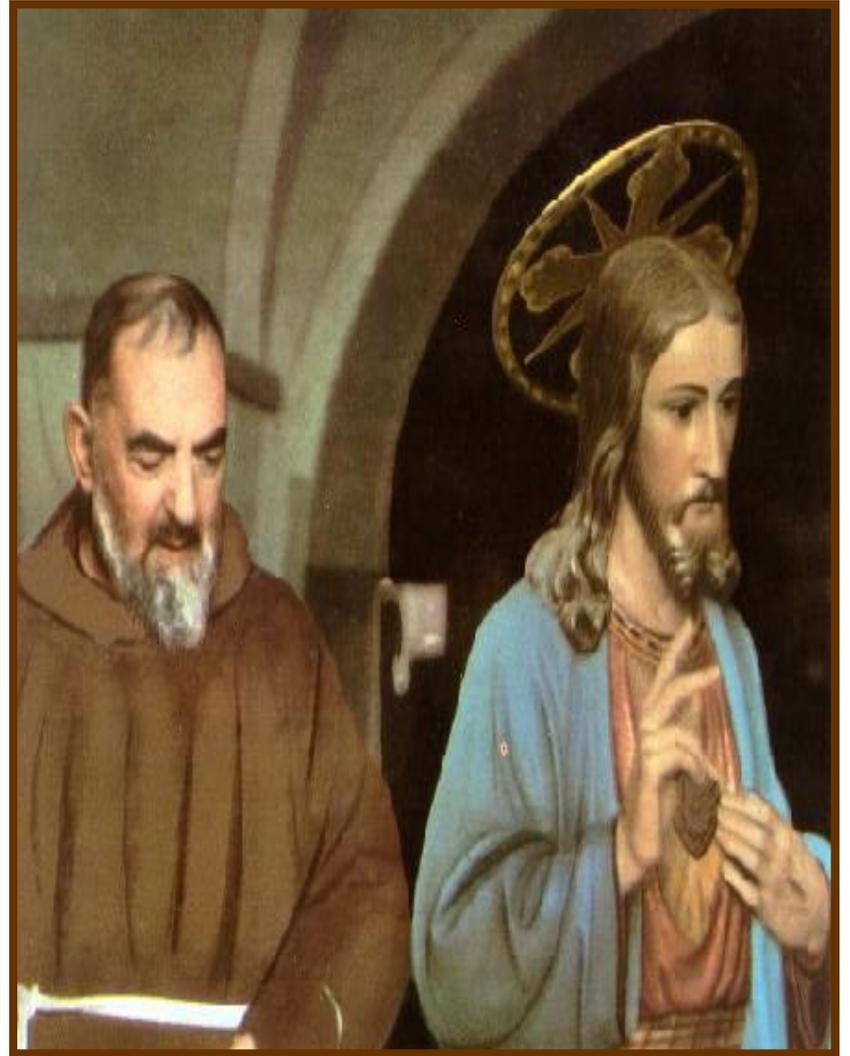




**PADRE PIO
and the
SACRED HEART OF JESUS**



PADRE PIO and the SACRED HEART OF JESUS

by Most Rev. Paolo Carta, Bishop Emeritus of Foggia

When I spoke on the theme: "How I saw Padre Pio during my seven years as Bishop of Foggia from 1955 to 1962," I presented Padre Pio's spirituality as "A man of God who prays—absolves—suffers—offers."

Invited again by the Capuchin Friars, custodians of the tomb which is the destination of pilgrims from all the corners of the world, I am most happy to celebrate today and tomorrow the Mass with you and for you, my very dear brethren, inviting you to meditate with me on two other fundamental aspects of the spirituality of Padre Pio. Today Padre Pio and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Tomorrow, God willing, Padre Pio and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART

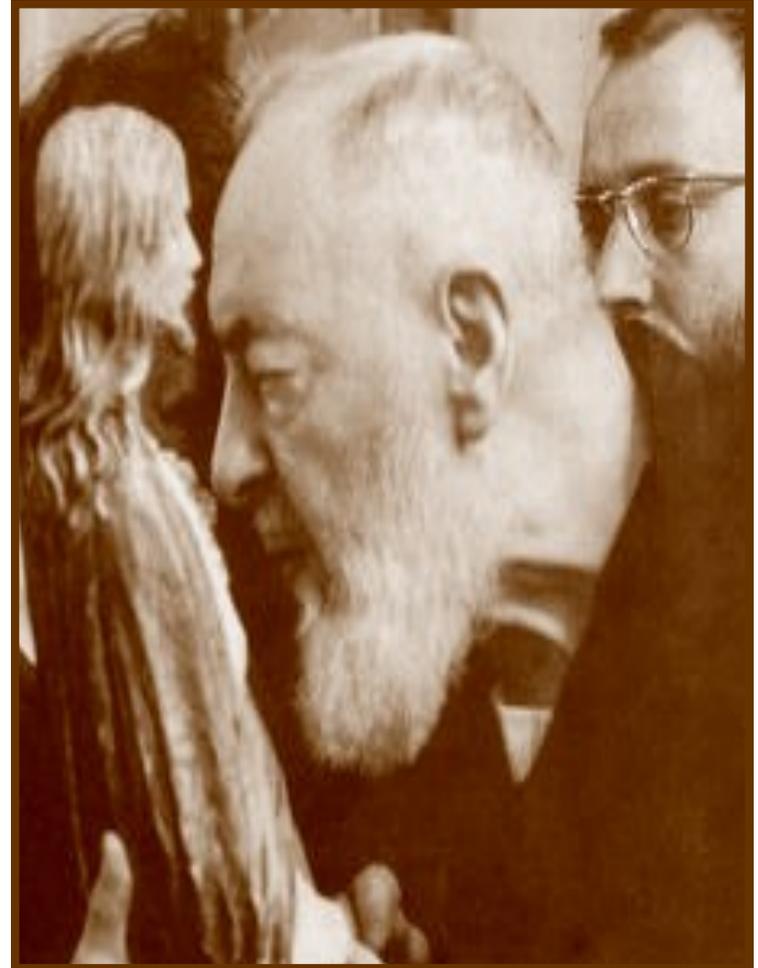
First of all it will be well to remember the deep significance of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

According to the admirable Encyclical of Pius XII *Haurietis aquas in gaudio*, the object of this devotion is the physical heart symbol of the triple love of Jesus: divine spiritual love that Jesus, as God, has in common with the Father and the Holy Spirit—spiritual human love—human tangible love.

It is the devotion to the love of Jesus for the Father and for us, and it is the devotion of love for Jesus as our reply, because love is repaid with love. This devotion ends with the Person of Jesus Himself, but considering his love, his interior life, his perfect human life.

The Heart of Jesus is the center of his personality; it is the intimate source from which his thoughts originate, his affection, his words, his works. It is the key of all the dogmas, it is the explanation of all the mysteries, it is the profound sense of each word of the Gospel because everything is illuminated and inflamed by charity. This is why Pius XI wrote in his Encyclical *Miserentissimus Redemptor*: "The Heart of Jesus is the compendium of the whole Catholic religion."

It is not a devotion amongst others; it is the soul of all devotions. It is not a sentimental devotion because it obliges us to imitate the virtues of the Sacred Heart and especially to love the Heavenly Father and the brethren up to the heroism of total immolation. It is not a devotion foreign to actual social problems, because it aims at establishing the social kingdom of the Heart of Christ which is the kingdom of justice, love and peace.



Relief of Suffering for them—for the crowds who came from all parts of the world, blessing them with a warm paternal gesture. You really have worked for a Civilization of Love in the world.

We beg you: continue today, tomorrow and always your evangelical mission to save humanity from the explosion of hatred, the ruin of terrorism and the tragedy of war.

Now that you contemplate the Heart of Jesus in all its radiance, now that you are eternally and fully united to Him in that blessed Kingdom "where the boundaries are only of love and light" as Dante says, obtain with your powerful intercession that in the name of Christ, the Civilization of Love spreads, reigns and triumphs in all nations and peoples.



Padre Pio knew this thoroughly through his profound intellectual knowledge and the prodigious personal experience he had of Christ's divinity and of his most sacred humanity.

But he certainly did not ignore the place occupied by Saint Francis in the story of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, which was revealed by Jesus Himself to Saint Margaret Mary in the vision of 4 October 1673, feast of the Saint of Assisi. Here is what the Saint relates: "Our Lord showed me this great Saint clothed in light and incomparable splendor and raised to very great glory, above all the Saints, because during his life he was most devoted to the Passion: a devotion that compelled Jesus, the divine and crucified Friend, to imprint Himself in the Saint with the five wounds and make of him one of the greatest favorites of his Heart."

Padre Pio's devotion to the Sacred Heart manifested itself in the mystical union, in a faithful imitation, a loving reparation and confident prayer.

Padre Pio achieved intimate union with the most Sacred Heart of Jesus above all through intense faith which inspired his whole life, which enlightened all his difficult road, which inspired all his prayers and that sustained his heroic penances.

Moreover, he lived in union with the Divine Heart really present in the Eucharist. How many hours of silent adoration he passed up there in the gallery of this shrine, in his favorite place, the angle closest to the altar of the Most High!

And how ecstatic was his expression when he lovingly contemplated the holy Host as he raised it slowly on high to bless not only the crowd present at the evening service, but the whole world! At that moment he asked for rivers of grace to gush from the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus to convert sinners, to relieve the suffering, to sanctify consecrated souls, for the good of the whole church and the salvation of all men. I like to think that at that very moment Padre Pio heard repeated again the gentle and consoling words from the Sacred Heart: "Come to Me, all of you who are tired and oppressed and I will restore you."

But his union with the Heart of Jesus was much more intense during the celebration of Mass. It was the great moment when Padre Pio fully participated in the Passion of our Lord and relived it in himself in an impressive and prodigious way. But the Passion of our Lord was threefold. The Passion of the Body in the scourging, crucifixion and death—Passion of Honor, through the infamy of the death sentence and the death of the cross, punishment reserved to slaves and the worst malefactors—Passion of the Heart, especially at Gethsemane and on the Cross for the betrayal of Judas, the flight of the Apostles, the ingratitude of the people, the

knowledge of the souls who, despite his sacrifice, would precipitate to hell. During the celebration of Mass, Padre Pio relived this triple Passion of Jesus, but in a special way the Passion of the Heart, his sentiments, anguish and his agony.

All this transported him to the highest ascetical sphere, in a complete effusion of his heart into the Heart of Jesus.

But this effusion became a fusion reaching the highest peaks of mysticism and penetrating the deepest mystery of the meeting of the creature with the Creator. Padre Pio himself revealed this sublime and inexpressible experience with words that I have already recalled last year, but which I now repeat for your and my admiration and edification. These are the exact terms of a letter he wrote on 12 April 1912: "When Mass was over I remained with Jesus in thanksgiving. Oh, how sweet was the colloquy with paradise that morning! It was such that although I want to tell you all about it, I cannot. There were things which cannot be translated into human language without losing their deep and heavenly meaning. The Heart of Jesus and my own—allow me to use the expression—were fused. No longer were two hearts beating but only one. My own heart had disappeared as a drop of water is lost in the ocean. Jesus was its paradise, its king. My joy was so intense and deep that I could bear no more and tears of happiness poured down my cheeks. When paradise is poured into a heart, this afflicted, exiled, weak and mortal heart cannot bear it without weeping."

FAITHFUL IMITATION

Union, leads to imitation. And Padre Pio was exemplary in receiving the strong and gentle invitation of Jesus: "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

a) Humility

Padre Pio's humility shines in many episodes of his life.

Above all his perfect religious obedience to the Superiors of his Order, and with his prompt and serene acceptance of all the orders coming from Rome, even when they were difficult and put him to the very hard test, even preventing him the free exercise of his priestly ministry for a good two years to his profound sorrow and bitterness.

And how humility shines from his letters to his spiritual Fathers to whom he opens his soul with the candor of a child, asking and often in dramatic accents, for light and comfort in those terrible interior trials and in the terrible diabolical assaults.

Most humble for all the extraordinary gifts he received from our Lord, such as the phenomenon of ecstasy, bilocation, healing, scrutinizing of hearts he attributed

3. O my Jesus, who said: "Truly I say to you, heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away," encouraged by your infallible words I now ask for the grace of...

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in you.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, to whom it is impossible not to have compassion on the afflicted, have pity on us miserable sinners and grant us the grace which we ask of you, through the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary, your and our tender Mother.

Say the Hail Holy Queen and add:

St Joseph, foster father of Jesus, pray for us.

CONVERSING WITH THE PADRE

Mystical union—Faithful imitation—Loving reparation—Confident invocation: these were the essential characteristics of Padre Pio's devotion to the Sacred Heart that I have proposed for reflection and I now conclude by talking to the Padre with the confidence I have always had when talking to him at all my personal encounters or when confessing to him or in friendly and amiable conversation.

Beloved Padre Pio, you know that the Holy Father, Paul VI, has recently made a solemn and sublime declaration: "In opposition to the barbarity of hatred we proclaim the Civilization of Love."

There is so much hatred in the world today; between nations, between social classes, between political parties, between men with contrasting interests. And hatred generates violence and death. But we want to be united to the Pope proclaiming the Civilization of Love. I ask you, beloved Padre, from where can we obtain this spirit of love to spread over the world? And your reply is that we must obtain it from where you obtained it, from the Heart of Jesus! Because you were a marvelous authority and announcer of that fraternal love which has its inexhaustible source from the Heart of Christ. Modeled on the Divine Heart, your big heart, as big as the world, has always been full of love for everyone; for repentant sinners, giving them back saving grace—for tepid souls, inflaming them—for fervent souls, guiding them to sanctity—for the sick, building the Home for the

The more these souls suffer without the slightest consolation, the more the sufferings of our good Jesus are alleviated. This is the whole reason why I desire to suffer more and more without the slightest consolation. In this consists all my joy." It is like Saint Paul who exclaims: "I am filled with comfort: I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation"—2 Cor 7,4.

CONFIDENT INVOCATIONS

In a letter to one of his spiritual daughters of high virtue, Padre Pio wrote: "Do not ever lose heart when the tempest rages; place all your trust in the Heart of the most gentle Jesus. Pray and I might add, devoutly pester the divine Heart."

What he advised the souls he guided along the paths of high spiritual ascents, he was the first to put into practice and more than anyone else lived this intense devotion.

When the storms raged in his life which was filled with crosses, and to those who recommended themselves to his prayers, he placed all his hope and all his trust in the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The fervent animation and luminous expression of this confidence was the devout daily recitation of a prayer called the "Irresistible Novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus." Why irresistible? Because founded on three solemn statements and promises of Jesus in the Gospel. Promises that are unconditional when concerning graces of a spiritual order; and that are conditional for graces of a temporal order if they are in accord with the plans and the will of our Lord for our good in time and in eternity.

Many of you know and recite this Novena, but allow me to read it for those who do not know it, exhorting them to obtain it and recite it every day adding the prayer for the canonization of Padre Pio.

1. O my Jesus, who said: "Truly I say to you, ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened for you," behold I knock, I seek and ask for the grace of...

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in you.

2. O my Jesus, who said: "Truly I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, He will give it to you," behold, in your name, I ask the Father for the grace of...

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in you.

nothing to himself, but attributed everything to God and our Lady. And as for the incomparable gift of the Stigmata, not only did it give him no human complacency, but it was for him a source of "confusion" and he asked for the grace of having those "exterior signs removed, even saying: 'I have to answer for this terrible gift to our Lord'."

Those who well understand the human heart with its tremendous instinct of pride and presumption when achieving grandiose works must greatly admire Padre Pio who took no credit for having built this stupendous shrine of Our Lady of Grace and the providential Home for the Relief of Suffering.

I was sitting near him on that 5 May 1956 when the Home was solemnly inaugurated in the presence of Cardinal Lercaro and a group of high ranking personalities who had come from various parts of the world. He was raised to the heights by chance speeches, the object of universal and immense admiration, overwhelmed with thunderous applause, held up to the veneration of all, honored by the presence and the word of a Cardinal, I saw him with bent head, recollected, indifferent to so much applause and I said to myself: "And this is Padre Pio, humble in the midst of so much glory." And with sincere humility he began his speech: "The Home for the Relief of Suffering is finished. I thank the benefactors from all parts of the world who have co-operated. This is the creature that Providence has created helped by you; I present it to you. Admire it and together with me bless the Lord God.

"A stage of the journey has been accomplished. Let us not stop along the road, let us readily answer God's call for the good cause, each one of us fulfilling our duties: I with the incessant prayer of a useless servant of our Lord Jesus Christ and you with the ardent desire of clasping all suffering humanity to your hearts to present it with me to the mercy of the Heavenly Father. Go ahead then with humility of spirit and your hearts on high."

But perhaps the strongest temptation to human complacency could derive from another significant fact: that of seeing on their knees before him Confessors, Spiritual Fathers, illustrious personalities from every walk of life, Religious, Priests, Bishops, Archbishops, Cardinals, famous men from far regions and nations, all eager to receive absolution from him, an enlightened word of consolation and hope. Before the so-called "great ones of the world" he remained indifferent to their homage because he was used to seeing in those who approached him only souls that had to be purified, sanctified and saved.

b) Gentleness

Exemplary, edifying and moving the humility of Padre Pio. Less evident and less constant could appear the other virtue for which the Heart of Jesus is the incomparable model: meekness, gentleness.

This is because some people experienced harsh and hard treatment from him and complained. But it is easy to defend Padre Pio by giving necessary information.

That Jesus who said: "Learn of Me who am meek and humble of heart" and who was infinitely good, patient and gentle with children, the sick and repentant sinners is the same Jesus who angrily drove away the vendors in the temple, whom He called hypocrites, whited sepulchers, brood of vipers the proud scribes and Pharisees and who even said to Peter: "Get behind me, Satan, for thou dost not mind the things of God, but those of men."

Thus the goodness, meekness and gentleness of Padre Pio is not denied by the fact that he reacted strongly against those who approached him just out of curiosity, or who went to confession without a sincere intention of leaving sin aside, or who gave clear signs of fanaticism towards him and who were in need of severe reproof.

Besides, even supposing that losing his temper could appear as a sign of imperfection it is good to read the self accusation he makes of this to his spiritual father who replies: "Don't be upset about those outbursts, although you should never be satisfied with them. If the Lord doesn't give you the grace of inexhaustible and continual gentleness, it is in order to leave you a means to practice holy humility. As a penance, every time you let yourself go, you must show yourself twice as gentle immediately." The docile spiritual son committed himself to possess completely the virtue of gentleness and informs his "very dear Father," about his efforts in writing: "Lady Gentleness seems to be making progress in me, but I myself am not satisfied on this point. However I don't want to lose heart. I have made many promises, dear Father, to Jesus and Mary. I want to acquire this virtue with their help and in return, as well as keeping the other promises. I have also promised to make this the subject of constant meditation and to suggest it continually to others also.

You see, then Father, that I am not indifferent to the practice of this virtue. Help me by your own and other people's prayers."

But on this subject I am happy to renew my testimony today on the meekness and gentleness of Padre Pio's innermost heart as I admired it every time I met him, and not only towards me but even when I presented sinners to him, people far from the faith and even outside the Catholic Church.

I will never forget his smile which was so gentle, amiable, luminous and radiant! A reflection of Jesus' smile with a heart overflowing with love for all humanity and mercy towards every prodigal son.

And I conclude this second point of our meditation saying that in imitating the Heart of Jesus, Padre Pio revealed a sign of the most profound humility when he told the Superior of the friary who showed esteem for him: "My son, you must know that I am the greatest sinner in the world," and he revealed the secret of the gentleness of his heart when he wrote to his Spiritual Father: "Jesus is gentleness and wants to spread it all in my heart."

LOVING REPARATION

Mystical union—Faithful imitation Loving reparation

Reparation is an essential element of devotion to the Sacred Heart. The reason is obvious: because taking into consideration the love of Jesus which is not appreciated and is insulted—this devotion encourages fervent souls to undertake a generous reparation.

In the Mass of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus we read this prayer: "O God, you mercifully deign to bestow on us the infinite wealth of your love in the Heart of your Son wounded by our sins; grant, we pray, that by our offering to it the home of our devotion, we may also worthily fulfill our duty of reparation."

Most appropriate, therefore, was the idea of the sculptor of the monumental Way of the Cross, to represent Padre Pio as the Cyrenean at the fourth station. And there is a large biography of Padre Pio entitled *Everyone's Cyrenean*.

As a matter of fact, Padre Pio turned his whole life into reparation for the ingratitude of so many souls redeemed by the blood of Christ, for the blasphemies and outrages for which his Heart lamented in the great apparition to Saint Margaret Mary. He implored for mercy and pardon for all sinners and for the salvation of all men.

Reparation through prayer, but above all through moral and physical sufferings. Moral, because of the painful events in his life, tormented with all kinds of painful tribulations. Physical, because of illnesses, the exhausting work of hearing confessions and above all for the martyrdom of the stigmata which lasted for a good fifty years. Fifty years with Jesus, at Gethsemane and Calvary, ready to alleviate the sufferings of the Divine Heart, offering himself as a victim of love, of expiation and reparation. In a letter of 20 September 1912 he wrote to his Spiritual Father: "Jesus has shed tears Himself and continues to shed them every day because of man's ingratitude. He chooses souls and despite my unworthiness he has chosen mine also to help him in the tremendous task of man's salvation.