

So the sacrifice of the Mass would be completed with a real participation of love, of suffering and blood. And it brought about many conversions. At the end of the Mass, Padre Pio would burn with a fire ignited by Christ in his soul, to draw him. Another suffering would devour him: that of going to the choir loft to remain alone and in silence recollected in prayer to be able to thank Jesus. He would remain immobile as if without life. If someone had shaken him he would not have noticed, so absorbed was he in divine contemplation.

The Mass of Padre Pio!

No one will be able to describe it.

Only one who has had the privilege of living it can understand...



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Witnessing Padre Pio's Mass



Padre Pio at 5:00 a.m. would be at the altar. Crowds of people anxious to find a place near his altar would already be waiting for him. The Eucharistic Sacrifice would last more than an hour. Immersed in the divine mysteries, Padre Pio would re-live Jesus' Passion. His dialogue with the eternal was a time of evident suffering, great emotion, and mystical calm. The holy Mass was "the fount and goal", "the heart and centre" of his life. And the people saw in him the living image of Christ, the light of the Resurrection.

Witnessing Padre Pio's Mass

by Bro Modestino Fucci

Many before me have tried to describe the mystery of Padre Pio's Mass, what really took place every morning for fifty years at the altar of Our Lady of Grace Church in San Giovanni Rotondo.

I do not wish to attempt a description of this kind as I know that I would fall even more than others. So in these pages I will recount to you only my own thoughts and what I was able to see and witness while serving as I did on many occasions the Padre's Mass.

He taught me in person how to "serve" at the Eucharistic banquet.

I would watch and observe Padre Pio closely every time, from the moment he left his cell at dawn to celebrate Mass.

I would see him in a state of suffering and anxiety. He seemed restless. As soon as he reached the sacristy where he put on his sacred vestments, I had the impression that already he was no longer aware of what went on around him.

He was totally absorbed and conscious of what he was about to fulfill.

If anyone dared to ask him anything, he shook himself and replied in monosyllables.

His face which was of normal color became frighteningly pale when he put on the amice. From that moment onwards he paid no more attention to anyone. He seemed to be completely absent. Clothed in the sacred vestments, he made his way to the altar. Even though I walked ahead of him for that short distance, I was aware that his gait became more dragging, his face sorrowful. He seemed to stoop always more, as if, I thought, crushed beneath the weight of a gigantic invisible cross.

Once he arrived at the altar he kissed it lovingly and his pale face became inflamed. His cheeks would become crimson, his skin translucent so that one almost saw the flow of blood that rushed to his cheeks.

After the *Confiteor*, he beat his breast with hollow and heavy blows as if he accused himself of all the worst sins committed by man. His eyes remained closed without being able to prevent big tears that disappeared into his thick beard. At the Gospel, as he announced the Word of God, it seemed as if he fed himself with these words, tasting their infinite sweetness. Immediately after the intimate colloquy between Padre Pio and the Eternal began. This colloquy caused Padre Pio to weep abundant tears that I saw him wipe with a big handkerchief. Padre Pio who had received the gift of contemplation from the Lord, entered into the abyss of the Redemption. The veils of that mystery having been torn by the suffering of his faith and love, all things human disappeared from his sight.

Before his gaze was God alone!

Contemplation gave his soul a balmy gentleness which alternated with mystical suffering which was plainly reflected even physically. Everyone saw Padre Pio suffering. He pronounced the liturgical prayers with difficulty and interrupted by sobs. The embarrassment that Padre Pio felt at being in the presence and the searching gaze of the others was enormous. He would probably have preferred to celebrate Mass in solitude so as to be able to give free reign to his suffering and his indescribable love. His ecstatic soul, on fire with "devouring fire" must certainly have implored from heaven, beneficial flowers of grace.

In those moments Padre Pio lived sensitively and really felt the Passion of the Lord. Time went quickly, but he was outside time! That was why his Mass lasted an hour and a half or probably more. At the *Sanctus* he raised with great fervor the hymn of praise to the Lord which preceded the divine sacrifice.

At the *Elevation* his suffering reached its height. In his eyes I read the expression of a mother who assists at the agony of her son on the scaffold, who sees him expire and who, choked with suffering, silently receives the bloodless Body in her arms, able only to give slight caresses. Watching his weeping, his sobbing, I was afraid his heart would burst, that he was about to faint from one moment to the next. God's Spirit had by now penetrated his whole body. His soul was rapt in God. Padre Pio, mediator between Heaven and earth, offered himself with Christ victim for his brothers in exile. Each gesture of his denoted his relationship with God. His heart must have burned like a volcano. He prayed intensely for his spiritual children, for the sick, for those who had already left this world. Every now and then he leaned on the altar on his elbows, probably to relieve his wounded feet from the weight of his body. I heard him repeat often through his tears: "*My God! My God!*" A spectacle of faith, love, suffering and emotion that reached the point of drama when the Padre raised the host; the sleeves of the surplice came down and his torn, bleeding hands were in the sight of all. Whereas his gaze was on God!

At Communion he seemed to calm down. Transfigured in a passionate, ecstatic abandon, he fed on the Flesh and Blood of Jesus. The incorporation, the assimilation, the fusion was total! How much love emanated from his face! The people, astounded, could not by kneel before that mystical agony, to that total annihilation of himself. The Padre would remain as if stunned as he tasted all the divine sweetness that only Jesus in the Eucharist knows how to give.