

A religious scene featuring a priest in the foreground and a crucifix in the background. The priest, with a full white beard and wearing ornate brown vestments, has his hands raised in prayer. The crucifix is illuminated by candles, and the scene is set against a dark, draped background.

He Carried the Cross *for us all*

Padre Pio longed to fully realize his vocation as a priest and religious. For this reason he imitated Christ's love and humility with all his strength. And yet it was Christ Himself who made him a living image of His love, granting him the gift of the stigmata.

For fifty years Padre Pio carried the visible wounds of Christ's passion and death on his body. The stigmata remained untouched throughout this period, were always fresh and bleeding and gave off a wonderful fragrance. At the moment of death they disappeared completely, leaving behind no scars.

On 5 August 1918, while hearing his pupils' confessions, Padre Pio suddenly had a mystic vision. He saw an angel with a blazing spear. The angel, Padre Pio writes, "carried an instrument in his hand similar to a long, iron blade tapering to a sharp point which seemed to spit fire. And using all his strength he threw this burning instrument at my soul. I could barely utter a groan. I thought I would die... I cannot describe my suffering... **From that day on I began to carry a mortal wound within me. In the very depths of my soul I feel an open wound, the source of my eternal suffering.**"

On 20 August 1918 Padre Pio received visible stigmata. It was a Friday, at the very hour Christ was crucified. He describes the extraordinary event thus: "I was sitting in the gallery after celebrating Mass, when I was overcome by a strange, restless state, similar to the sweetness experienced in sleep. All my inner and outer senses, as well as the faculties of the soul, were steeped in an indescribable state of consolation. Still in this state, I suddenly noticed next to me a mysterious figure, similar to the one I had seen on 5 August, different only in its bleeding hands, feet and side. I felt emotions that I will never be able to describe. I felt I was dying, and I would have died if the Lord had not supported the heart which was throbbing in my chest. When the mysterious figure disappeared, I saw that my hands, feet and side were pierced and blood poured from the wounds. Just imagine the suffering I then experienced and which I experience continually every day. The heart wound bleeds profusely, especially between Thursday evening and Saturday. I fear that I will die from the blood loss, if the Lord does not listen to my groans and remove these wounds." Padre Pio

unsuccessfully tried to hide the bleeding wounds by bandaging them up with handkerchiefs. His superior demanded to see them. After doing so, he wrote to the order's general that these were authentic, penetrating wounds. From the opening in the side, blood flowed continuously.

The news about the stigmata quickly spread throughout Italy and the world. For two years, on the orders of the provincial and the abbot general, the stigmata underwent ongoing and exhaustive medical tests. **The tests determined that science could not explain the cause of these deep, bleeding wounds.** They were caused neither by mechanical nor chemical means. The wounds had smooth edges, with no infection, and they never healed. In his statement sent to the Holy Office, Prof. Romanelli wrote that the blood flowed from the wounds in such quantities that in a typical case blood loss would probably be total. The wounds in the feet and hands were so deep that one could look right through them. The professor writes in his statement: **"One can exclude the etiology of Padre Pio's wounds to be of natural origin. From a scientific point of view their cause cannot be explained... nor can they be classified as typical surgical wounds given their character and clinical history. They have a completely different cause and origin. Padre Pio is a living miracle."**

Dr Giorgio Festa concluded in his report that "Our knowledge cannot explain the source of Padre Pio's wounds and associated bleeding... Blood from cut veins of a living body does not have a pleasant odour. However, the blood which runs from Padre Pio's wounds has a subtle and delicate aroma. This phenomenon is

contrary to all natural and scientific laws. It has no logical explanation, and in all honesty we can do nothing but confirm the facts." **For fifty years, until the moment of his death, Padre Pio's wounds bled and remained continually fresh.** They never became infected or necrotic or showed signs of deformation. All these facts pose science an unanswerable riddle, one which is completely contrary to nature's laws. In addition, at the moment of death, Padre Pio's wounds mysteriously disappeared leaving no scars. This was yet another great miracle.

Padre Pio felt greatly humbled by the stigmata. He wrote: "I lift my voice to Him, and I will not cease to beg him to remove – not the torment, nor the suffering, for I consider that impossible – but these exterior signs which cause chaos and create a mortification impossible to describe and bear." Our Saviour did not grant him his wish, because Padre Pio's stigmata were to become a visible sign to all people showing to what degree God loved man. Christ made his wounds visible on Padre Pio's body so that everyone could see them and awaken their hearts to greater faith and trust in his Mercy. A Jesuit who was talking to Padre Pio expressed his astonishment that despite having received such great spiritual gifts Padre Pio had not lost his humility. Padre Pio replied with a smile, "Imagine that someone asked you to take a gold watch to be repaired in Milan. Wouldn't you be acting the fool if you bragged in front of your friends that it belonged to you? Wouldn't you be a thief, if you kept it for yourself?"

After Christ's passion, death and resurrection, all human suffering lived in unity with Christ becomes the way of salvation, a part of that suffering by which Christ gave the world its redemption

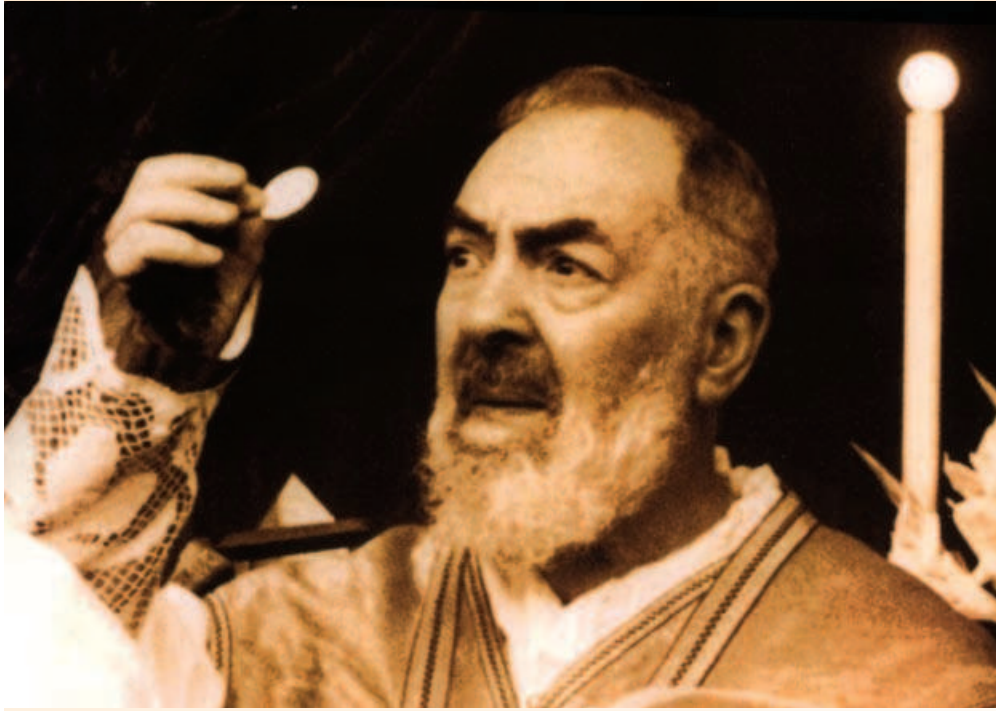


photo: Voce di Padre Pio

My heart has been forgotten. Who cares about my love? For many people, my churches have become entertainment theaters. Even my workers, whom I loved in particular and cherished like the apple of my eye, even those who should share the bitterness of my heart and help save souls, even at their hands – who would believe it?! – I meet with ingratitude and forgetfulness. My son, I look at many of these (at this point Jesus wept) who with horrible hypocrisy betray me with sacrilegious communion, who hold in contempt the graces and inspirations which I continuously give them.”

Padre Pio united his suffering with Christ’s suffering for the intention of the most hardened sinners. He wrote: “How the sight of poor sinners tears apart my heart...these unfortunate people have even lost the ability to consider what punishment awaits them in eternity. Jesus never stops calling them to him, but they pretend they hear nothing. They run away from him, unaware that it is their undoing. How can these “dead” be brought back to life?”

There is only one way; to love them with the same love as Jesus. It means taking on the suffering caused by their sins, to be wronged as God was through their indifference, rejection and hostility towards his love. And through this suffering to make amends and repay God for the terrible wrong and pain caused by rejecting his love. Throughout his ministry Padre Pio always offered himself and his suffering up for the redemption of sinners. On the day he was ordained he committed to “being a holy priest and perfect offering.” He wrote to his spiritual

Padre Pio used to say of himself that “he carried the cross for all.” The wounds caused him continual pain. “Whenever I allow myself a little sleep,” he said, pointing to the wounds in his hands, “their pain increases unbearably.”

Through Padre Pio’s stigmata, Jesus Christ showed us the wounds of His passion and death on the cross to remind us of the truth of his infinite love. It was He, God made man, who “endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain that we should have borne...because of our sins he was wounded, beaten because of the evil we did.” (Is 53: 4-5) It is God who in Christ’s humanity takes upon Himself all our sins, and demonstrates how great is the suffering caused by sin, in order to do away with it, to conquer Satan and to give all people the possibility of salvation. After Christ’s passion, death and resurrection, all human suffering lived in unity with Christ becomes the way of salvation, a part of that suffering by which Christ gave the world its redemption.

Padre Pio shared the Saviour’s suffering in a unique way. His body experienced all the stages of Jesus’ passion and death. He particularly experienced this during Holy Mass, when the mystery of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection is made present. During daily Mass, Padre Pio experienced a deep unity with the crucified Christ, who suffered from man’s sins of unbelief and ingratitude.

He admitted that during the celebration of the Eucharist he suffered from beginning to end with ever increasing intensity, the pain being at its worst between consecration and communion. Padre Pio suffered together with Christ, united with him in a love capable of the greatest self sacrifice, but a love which is scorned and rejected by many. Padre Pio wrote down Jesus’ words of grievance, which he heard during a vision: “With what ingratitude people answer my love! I would be less offended by them if I loved less. My father can take no more. These lazy people make not the least effort to overcome temptation, and what is more, they find pleasure in their sins. Whenever my most beloved souls undergo trials, they imitate me with ever diminishing fervor; the weakest among them give in to fear and hopelessness, and the most fervent grow cold by degrees.

The Shrine of San Giovanni Rotondo



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Padre Pio's Canonization - Rome, June 16, 2002

director in 1910: "For some time now I have felt the need to offer myself up to the Lord as an offering for poor sinners and the souls in purgatory. This desire has continually grown in my heart so that now, I may say, it has become a strong passion. I have made this offering to the Lord many times asking him to send upon me other sufferings prepared for sinners and the souls in purgatory, even multiplying them a hundredfold, just as long as he converts and saves sinners and speedily welcomes souls in purgatory to heaven."

Appearing before Padre Pio (in 1913) the Lord Jesus made the following request: "My son, I need sacrifices to appease the justifiable anger of God, my Father; renew your complete sacrifice for me and do it without reservation."

Throughout his life Padre Pio renewed the act of offering himself up to the Lord several times a day. Uniting himself to Christ's suffering, Padre Pio changed his suffering into glory and joyous thanksgiving to God. He wrote: "I rejoice as never before at my suffering, and if I were to listen only to my heart's voice I would ask Jesus to give me all of mankind's troubles. However, I will not do this, since I am afraid of being too great an egoist, wanting the very best for myself: pain. He comes begging for suffering and tears... He needs them for souls... I have been made worthy to suffer with Jesus and to suffer like Him. Yes, **I love the Cross, and only the Cross; I love it, because I always see it on Christ's shoulders.** By now, Jesus is well

aware that my whole life, my whole heart is devoted to Him and His suffering. I am crucified by love."

On his ordination day, Padre Pio sang a wonderful love song, which sums up his

entire earthly life: "Jesus, my breath and my life, today, trembling as I praise you in the mystery of love, together with you I will be the Way, the Truth and the Life to the world, and for you a holy priest, a perfect sacrifice" (August 10, 1910).

Sharing his experience he wrote: "We cannot begin to comprehend what great relief we bring Jesus when out of love we do not demand any solace from Him, in order to unite ourselves with his suffering even more... The most beautiful act of faith flows from our hearts during nights of sacrifice, of suffering and the greatest efforts in doing good. Like lightning it tears apart the darkness of your soul and hurls you through the storm to the heart of God... If love does not nourish, does not gather new strength from the Cross, it is only short-lived zeal and not true love."

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photo: Voce di Padre Pio