

## **Introduction.**

In preparing a homily on St. Padre Pio as we affectionately call St. Pius of Pietrelcina I had some personal difficulty, not with the saint who is a fascinating modern hero and mystic, but at the recency of his canonisation only in 2002 by Pope St. John-Paul II, the Great. St. Pio is not in my printed Breviary, not in the New Advent Catholic Encyclopaedia on-line and not in the three books I have in my personal library on saints' feasts generally! Nor is he at any length in my daily saints' reflection book. And he is not in the current Lectionary we have for Mass; only the New Roman Missal. Thankfully, without any of his writings in my Breviary, I was able to resort to my personal copy of the 1<sup>st</sup>. Edition 286-page book by Fr. Constantino Capobianco entitled *Words and Anecdotes of Saint Pio* from Edizioni Padre Pio da Pietrelcina, ©2011. And of course *Wikipedia*, that devil's advocate of any saint's cause.

## **Pray, Hope and do Not Worry.**

Padre Pio's famous exhortation **Pray, Hope and do Not Worry** is particularly apposite for our Covid times as he was a young priest in the thick of the pandemic of Spanish Influenza at the end of World War I, himself with another Capuchin personally administering vaccines to as many locals as he could in southern Italy in a field clinic from his monastery. Corporal works of mercy were only part of his superlative mystical spiritual life 1887-1968. As a priest held out to priests in training (though not himself a priestly patron saint), like St. John Mary Vianney he had many assaults of the devil, spent hours hearing confessions, lived in austerity, had a poor diet, and spent a long time, 52 years in an obscure place St. Giovanni Rotondo (St. John in the Round) in Pietrelcina in South Western Italy. With Fr. John Lovell and myself living in Rome, we can attest that even from there it was hours, relatively costly, and many convoluted means of transport to go to his earthly resting place. We never got there. Please God it will happen one day.

Like St. Therese de Lisieux, Patroness of priests and seminarians who had devout parents now saints themselves, St. Pius had poor devout *and* illiterate peasant farmer parents, though not saints, just saintly. He was one of six children, two of whom died in infancy. Looking at the derivation of his parents' and siblings' names this was a lively Catholic family. A father Grace Mary, a mother Mary Joseph, brother Michael Archangel, sisters Felicity, Pilgrim and Grace (who became a Brigettine nun). St. Pio's family had a great devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. They attended daily Mass, had evening Rosary, abstained from meat three days a week and had regular family Bible reflection from parents and grandparents who knew many parts of the Bible parables and narratives by rote. Truly this reflected the historical tradition (words, the Divine Word handed across) as illiterates held fast to oral tradition just as how the Bible came to be reduced to writing. In a world today where sophist, literates do not appropriate, reflect, contemplate in prayer or live the Word of God, Padre Pio's family did that and more. His father also left Italy for some time to go abroad to America to get enough money to enable his son to have a sufficiently high education to enter the seminary as a Capuchin Franciscan. What self-sacrificing devotion. Yes, Padre Pio's given name was Francis. Do have a cappuccino coffee today for this poor Franciscan.

## **Practical, Simple Faith Life.**

St. Pio's life and hagiography is replete and legion with manifold accounts of the stigmata, bi-location, levitation, mind reading, ecstasy during Mass and otherwise, humble austerity, fasting, prophecy (including to Fr. Carol Wojtyla in 1947 that he would have the office of Pope, 31 years before it happened), miracles, the gift of tongues and spiritual visions for himself and others. But he did the "basics" so well. In a busy world where with every modern aid there is supposedly not time for God, even though God created the time in which we have existence and being, still his family found time for prayer and Mass whilst busy raising six people working hard and busily.

He advocated a simple regime of practical spiritual labours, a spiritual "circuit-training" of the soul by: (1) daily Mass, (2) daily Rosary, (3) spiritual reflection—for commitment and examination of conscience—at the beginning and end of the day, and (4) austere quiet living, and (5) weekly Confession. His best day for those consulting him for spiritual direction was a day begun and ended in the seeking to know and serve the Lord doing only His will, by intercession of Our Lady. Interestingly as a Franciscan, he would often give people a Benedictine Crucifix. His own example of a life spent in prayer and works was both Franciscan and Benedictine. He held great stock in his Franciscan humility and being self-effacing. When an air conditioner was installed in his monastery cell by his Superior while he was away, he used it, yes, as a bookshelf--only to store books on top!

Looking at St. Pio's simple recipe for prayer life a daily Mass, Rosary, spiritual reflection and weekly Reconciliation may seem daunting for us. Until we drill down into what the saint himself did. His Masses could last hours because of spiritual visions and ecstasies during them. He would recite 33 fifteen decade Rosaries a day, and more. When a supplicant asked him "Padre, when we are far away from you and wish to be a little closer to you, where must we look?" He replied "Look for me in front of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. You will find me there." Not only does this mean he willingly spent long devoted time in front of the Blessed Sacrament in a lineal, temporal way, but he also imaged and practiced what St. Paul said "For me to live is Christ".

## **Verisimilitude, Credulity and Incredulity.**

Padre Pio's heart was united into the Sacred Heart of the Blessed Sacrament in a Communion of ardently desired Love. Both in his spirit and in his body, St. Pio was conformed spiritually and physically to his Crucified and Resurrected Lord. In a modern world credulous with fake spiritualities, neo-Pelagianism and Gnosticism, the blessings of sanctity which surrounded St. Pio and continue moreso now because he is a powerful saint intercessor. That seems incredulous in a world that has eyes everywhere but cannot see and focus on the God who created it and us and holds us in being.

When called to his window to give a blessing to those in the *piazza* below, Padre Pio always used these words with beatific face and paternal love: "Yes my children! A river of blessings! May the Lord bless you and make you holy +". Another priest there once added vociferously "But without difficulties!" And Padre Pio immediately said: "What? We must always have difficulties!" Otherwise, I suppose we would not have the lived truth and sanctification in daily life as Christ himself lived and died as us, with us and for us. We cannot have a life less difficult than Christ's. To have an easier life is not to be Christian and

to seek to rise above God's own life on earth. We the stream cannot rise above God our source and destiny. We ascend and transcend this life only when falling like Jesus into the depths of the Father's merciful love. The greatest pain is not physical pain, even stigmata, but the spiritual pain of never taking up the challenge of worshipping God truly and simply, denying our selfish false selves and accepting to appropriate the true self, conformed ever more closely to spiritual communion with our Eucharistic Lord.

Jesus mercy. Mary help. St. Padre Pio pray for us!