

St. Padre Pio
Born May 25, 1887
Died September 23, 1968
Canonized June 16, 2002

It was said that Padre Pio was the only saint in the history of the Church that had all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. While extraordinary events were common in his life, he counseled others not to seek them. "I am convinced that so many people don't want to live by faith, but seek the extraordinary." Padre Pio's advice was "Live by faith!" It was the offering to God the ordinary, everyday living of life's joys and sorrows, that he felt was most important, not the extraordinary. Seeking out and living the will of God is what Padre Pio did, and is what he wanted of all his spiritual children.

Padre Pio was also Practical

One day a priest brought a husband and wife to Padre Pio so that he could bless them. Three of their sons were in prison for burglary. Padre Pio said to them, "I absolutely refuse to bless you! You didn't pull in the reins when your children were growing up, so don't come along now when they are in jail and ask for my blessing."

A woman came to Padre Pio whose daughter had just died in the process of giving birth. The woman couldn't think of anything else but the loss of her daughter. Padre Pio said to her, "And why are you weeping so much for her when she is already in Paradise? You would do much better to devote more attention to the activities of your seventeen-year-old daughter who comes home late at night from dances and entertainments."

Padre Pio was well aware that we are prone to seeking supernatural solutions to problems that we in many instances have caused and would prefer not to deal with.

Prayer & Spiritual Reading

Padre Pio said, "If the reading of holy books has the power to convert worldly men into spiritual persons, how very powerful must such reading be in leading spiritual men and women to greater perfection." Good books can aid us in the proper understanding of all the things God desires us to accomplish while here on earth.

Padre Pio said that all prayers are good when they are accompanied by good intentions and good will. He recommended people to make short mental prayers, offering everything they did, no matter how trivial, to Jesus Christ. "Prayer," he said, "is the key that opens the heart of God."

If we would only take these simple suggestions by Padre Pio to heart and apply them in our life, we would become better people. Prayer when understood properly, is the uniting of our heart and will to that of our Lord's. If our will is not in union with our Lord's then our prayers are not going to be as effective. Padre Pio's prayers were powerful because his prayers were in conformity to his life, which in itself was a prayer.

The Devil

It is said that the devil is far more effective when people think that he does not exist. In many quarters of the Church today, speaking of devils or Satan is analogous to speaking of Santa Clause.

For Padre Pio, devils were far from being fictitious make believes. He was attacked quite frequently by devils which were called by him “impure friends” and “ugly monsters.” He received interior and exterior assaults throughout his life. Padre Pio also explained that the Devil cannot harm us spiritually unless we let him in: “The Devil is like a mad dog tied by a chain. Beyond the length of the chain he cannot catch hold of anyone. And you, therefore, keep your distance. If you get too close, you will be caught.” This statement brings to mind the Church’s teachings on the near occasion of sin.

Modern-day Fashions

Padre Pio had extremely strong views on female fashions in dress. When the mini-skirt craze started, no one dared to come to Padre Pio’s monastery dressed in such an inappropriate fashion. Any woman who came into his confessional wearing a skirt that was not below the knees was sent away immediately without being able to go to confession. Women, who managed to enter dressed somewhat improperly, were ordered out by Padre Pio, with him sometimes shouting, “Out! Out! Out!”

Padre Pio tolerated neither tight skirts nor short or low-necked dresses. His severity increased each year. He would dismiss women from the confessional, even before they got inside, if he discerned their dress to be inappropriate. He would rebuke some women with the words, “Go and get dressed.”

Sins of Impurity

Jacinta of Fatima said, “The sins which cause the most souls to go to Hell are the sins of the flesh.”

Padre Pio was not against using harsh, rough, and shocking language, as we saw already. This was especially true when he was dealing with cases of impurity, scandal, and sins against Motherhood. He didn’t forgive these people without a rebuke, and often a very severe one. While serious sinners were often admonished with a severe warning, others were refused absolution because they were not sufficiently prepared.

A man who was being unfaithful to his wife confessed that he was having “a spiritual crisis.” Padre Pio stood up and yelled, “What spiritual crisis? You’re a vile pig and God is angry with you. Go away!”

Confessions

On the occasion of Padre Pio's canonization Pope John Paul II stated that even when he treated pilgrims with apparent severity, they would keep coming back to him for confession. He helped them to understand the gravity of sin.

It is very understandable that one who was so close to Christ that he was allowed to share the suffering of our Savior, would more than we, understand the horror of sin. When one understands that something is extremely bad or evil, that person if sincere has to react accordingly. The reason we do not react as Padre Pio did, is likely due to our acceptance of sin. Bishop Sheen once said that the greatest evil in the world is not sin but the denial of sin. Padre Pio knew the gravity of sin, and his actions were in perfect harmony with his belief. He had no doubt that there is a hell and that there are demons who are at war with God.

Padre Pio's life itself screamed out the horror of sin, and that life was so authentic that multitudes of souls were turned back to Christ and right living. According to one estimate, Padre Pio heard a total of approximately five million confessions. He dedicated his life to saving of souls, and unlike those of us who have justified sin, he cared little for the feelings of sinners who wanted to embrace and cling to a sinful lifestyle. Padre Pio understood that once a sinner is allowed to surround himself with those who will condone his sinful lifestyle, there is little chance for him to return to a life of virtue, leaving the poor sinner's soul in grave danger. Padre Pio knew full well that a sinner can never be truly sorry for a sinful lifestyle unless he truly understands how horrible sin really is. The short lines, and in some cases no line, for confession is a wake-up call, that we in the Church today, have accepted sin.

Padre Pio demanded that each confession be a true conversion. He didn't tolerate a lack of honesty in the explanation of sins. He was very hard on those who made excuses, spoke insincerely, or lacked a firm resolution to change. He demanded frankness and total honesty from the penitent. He also required a true and sincere sorrow of heart, and an absolute firmness in a person's resolutions to avoid sins in the future. While in his confessional many expressed the feeling that they were before the judgement seat of God. We must understand that one day we will stand before the judgement seat of God and we will be exceedingly grateful if we too had a confessor, who like Padre Pio, instilled in us, sincere sorrow for our sins and the desire not to commit sins in the future.

It is said that Padre Pio threw certain priests and bishops out of his confessional. He told a priest, "If you know fully what a fearful thing it is to sit in the tribunal of the confession! We are administering the Blood of Christ. We must be careful that we do not fling it about by being too easy-going or negligent." He also considered going to confession frequently to be something necessary for growth in the spiritual life.

The following statement will illustrate the devotion Padre Pio had to his people. "I can't have a minute of free time; it is all spent releasing brethren from the grip of Satan. Blessed be God! The greatest charity is that of liberating souls captivated by Satan and winning them for Christ." Notice that Padre Pio did not say making them feel good and justifying their sins.

Simply put, Padre Pio had a special gift, which enabled him to see what many of us who are immersed in the world cannot see. That is, the extreme ugliness and horrible consequences of sin. He, like Christ, understood and he, like Christ, suffered willingly for our sins, sins that in many instances bother us very little.