

# **BEATIFICATION OF PADRE PIO OF PIETRELCINA**

## **HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II**

**2 May 1999**

*“Sing a new song to the Lord!”*

1. The summons of the entrance antiphon captures well the joy of so many of the faithful who have long awaited the beatification of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina. By his life given wholly to prayer and to listening to his brothers and sisters, this humble Capuchin friar astonished the world.

Countless people came to meet him in the friary of San Giovanni Rotondo and, since his death, the flow of pilgrims has not ceased. When I was a student here in Rome, I myself had the chance to meet him personally, and I thank God for allowing me today to enter Padre Pio's name in the book of the blessed.

Guided by the texts of this Fifth Sunday of Easter, which provides the context for the beatification, let us this morning trace the main features of his spiritual experience.

2. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God and believe also in me” (Jn 14:1). In the Gospel just proclaimed, we heard these words of Jesus to his disciples who were in need of encouragement. In fact, his allusion to his imminent departure had thrown them into turmoil. They were afraid of being abandoned, of being alone, and the Lord consoled them with a very specific promise: “I am going to prepare a place for you”, and then, “I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (Jn 14:2-3).

Through Thomas, the Apostles reply to this reassurance: “Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” (Jn 14:5). The remark is apt, and Jesus does not avoid the question which it implies. The answer he gives will remain for ever a light shining for generations still to come: “I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me” (Jn 14:6).

The “place” that Jesus goes to prepare is in “the house of the Father”; there the disciple will be able to be with the Master for all eternity and share in his joy. Yet there is only one path that leads there: Christ, to whom the disciple must be conformed more and more. Holiness consists precisely in this: that it is no longer the Christian who lives, but Christ himself who lives in him (cf. Gal 2:20). An exhilarating goal, accompanied by a promise which is no less consoling: “Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than I will they do, because I am going to the Father” (Jn 14:12).

3. We hear these words of Christ and think of the humble friar of Gargano. How clearly were they fulfilled in Bl. Pio of Pietrelcina!

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe ...”. What was the life of this humble son of St Francis if not a constant act of faith, strengthened by the hope of heaven, where he could be with Christ?

“I am going to prepare a place for you ... that where I am you may be also”. What other purpose was there for the demanding ascetical practices which Padre Pio undertook from his early youth, if not gradually to identify himself with the Divine Master, so that he could be “where he was”?

Those who went to San Giovanni Rotondo to attend his Mass, to seek his counsel or to confess to him, saw in him a living image of Christ suffering and risen. The face of Padre Pio reflected the light of the Resurrection. His body, marked by the “stigmata”, showed forth the intimate bond between death and resurrection which characterizes the paschal mystery. Bl. Pio of Pietrelcina shared in the Passion with a special intensity: the unique gifts which were given to him, and the interior and mystical sufferings which accompanied them, allowed him constantly to participate in the Lord's agonies, never wavering in his sense that “Calvary is the hill of the saints”.

4. No less painful, and perhaps even more distressing from a human point of view, were the trials which he had to endure as a result, it might be said, of his incomparable charisms. It happens at times in the history of holiness that, by God's special permission, the one chosen is misunderstood. In that case, obedience becomes for him a crucible of purification, a path of gradual assimilation to Christ, a strengthening of true holiness. In this regard, Bl. Pio wrote to one of his superiors: “I strive only to obey you, the good God having made known to me the one thing most acceptable to him and the one way for me to hope for salvation and to sing of victory” (Letter I, p. 807).

When the “storm” broke upon him, he took as his rule of life the exhortation of the First Letter of Peter, that we have just heard: Come to Christ, a living stone (cf. 1 Pt 2:4). He himself thus became a “living stone” for the building of that spiritual house which is the Church. For this we today give thanks to the Lord.

5. “You too are living stones, built into a spiritual house” (1 Pt 2:5). How fitting are these words if we apply them to the extraordinary ecclesial experience which grew up around the new blessed! So many people, meeting him directly or indirectly, rediscovered their faith; inspired by his example, “prayer groups” sprang up in every corner of the world. To all who flocked to him he held up the ideal of holiness, repeating to them: “It seems that Jesus has no interest outside of sanctifying your soul” (Letter II, p. 155).

If God's Providence willed that he should be active without ever leaving his convent, as though he were “planted” at the foot of the Cross, this is not without significance. One day the Divine Master had to console him, at a moment of particular trial, by telling him that “it is under the Cross that one learns to love” (Letter I, p. 339).

The Cross of Christ is truly the outstanding school of love; indeed, the very “wellspring” of love. Purified by suffering, the love of this faithful disciple drew hearts to Christ and to his demanding Gospel of salvation.

6. At the same time, his charity was poured out like balm on the weaknesses and the sufferings of his brothers and sisters. Padre Pio thus united zeal for souls with a concern for human suffering, working to build at San Giovanni Rotondo a hospital complex which he called the “House for the Relief of Suffering”. He wanted it to be a first-class hospital, but above all he was concerned that the medicine practiced there would be truly “human”, treating patients with warm concern and sincere attention. He was quite aware that people who are ill and suffering need not only competent therapeutic care but also, and more importantly, a human and spiritual climate to help them rediscover themselves in an encounter with the love of God and with the kindness of their brothers and sisters.

With the “House for the Relief of Suffering”, he wished to show that God's “ordinary miracles” take place in and through our charity. We need to be open to compassion and to the generous service of our brothers and sisters, using every resource of medical science and technology at our disposal.

7. The echo stirred by this beatification in Italy and throughout the world shows that the fame of Padre Pio, a son of Italy and of Francis of Assisi, has gone forth to embrace all the continents. And I gladly greet those who have gathered here — in the first place the Italian authorities who have chosen to be present: the President of the Republic, the President of the Senate, the Prime Minister, who leads the official delegation, and the many other ministers and distinguished guests. Italy is represented most worthily! But also the many faithful from other nations have gathered here to pay homage to Padre Pio.

My affectionate greeting goes to all who have come from near and far, with a special thought for the Capuchin Fathers. To everyone I offer heartfelt thanks.

8. Let me conclude with the words of the Gospel of this Mass: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God”. There is a reference to this exhortation of Christ in the advice which the new blessed never tired of giving to the faithful: “Abandon yourselves fully to the divine heart of Jesus, like a child in the arms of his mother”. May these words of encouragement fill our hearts too and become a source of peace, serenity and joy. Why should we fear, if Christ for us is the Way, and the Truth and the Life? Why should we not trust in God who is the Father, our Father?

May “Our Lady of Graces”, whom the humble Capuchin of Pietrelcina invoked with constant and tender devotion, help us to keep our gaze fixed on God. May she take us by the hand and lead us to seek wholeheartedly that supernatural charity flowing forth from the wounded side of the Crucified One.

And you, Bl. Padre Pio, look down from heaven upon us assembled in this square and upon all gathered in prayer before the Basilica of St John Lateran and in San Giovanni Rotondo. Intercede for all those who, in every part of the world, are spiritually united with this event and raise their prayers to you. Come to the help of everyone; give peace and consolation to every heart.

Amen!