

CANONIZATION OF ST PIO OF PIETRELCINA

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

16 June 2002

1. *"For my yoke is easy and my burden light"* (Mt 11,30).

Jesus' words to his disciples, which we just heard, help us to understand the most important message of this solemn celebration. Indeed, in a certain sense, we can consider them as a magnificent summary of the whole life of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, today proclaimed a saint.

The evangelical image of the "yoke" recalls the many trials that the humble Capuchin of San Giovanni Rotondo had to face. Today we contemplate in him how gentle the "yoke" of Christ is, and how truly light is his burden when it is borne with faithful love. The life and mission of Padre Pio prove that difficulties and sorrows, if accepted out of love, are transformed into a privileged way of holiness, which opens onto the horizons of a greater good, known only to the Lord.

2. *"But may I never boast except in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Gal 6,14).

Is it not, precisely, the "glory of the Cross" that shines above all in Padre Pio? How timely is the spirituality of the Cross lived by the humble Capuchin of Pietrelcina. Our time needs to rediscover the value of the Cross in order to open the heart to hope. Throughout his life, he always sought greater conformity with the Crucified, since he was very conscious of having been called to collaborate in a special way in the work of redemption. His holiness cannot be understood without this constant reference to the Cross.

In God's plan, the Cross constitutes the true instrument of salvation for the whole of humanity and the way clearly offered by the Lord to those who wish to follow him (cf. Mk 16,24). The Holy Franciscan of the Gargano understood this well, when on the Feast of the Assumption in 1914, he wrote: "In order to succeed in reaching our ultimate end we must follow the divine Head, who does not wish to lead the chosen soul on any way other than the one he followed; by that, I say, of abnegation and the Cross"(Epistolario II,p.155).

3. *"I am the Lord who acts with mercy"* (Jer 9,23).

Padre Pio was a generous dispenser of divine mercy, making himself available to all by welcoming them, by spiritual direction and, especially, by the administration of

the sacrament of Penance. I also had the privilege, during my young years, of benefitting from his availability for penitents. The ministry of the confessional, which is one of the distinctive traits of his apostolate, attracted great crowds of the faithful to the monastery of San Giovanni Rotondo. Even when that unusual confessor treated pilgrims with apparent severity, the latter, becoming conscious of the gravity of sins and sincerely repentant, almost always came back for the peaceful embrace of sacramental forgiveness. May his example encourage priests to carry out with joy and zeal this ministry which is so important today, as I wished to confirm this year in the Letter to Priests on the occasion of Holy Thursday.

4. *"You, Lord, are my only good"*.

This is what we sang in the responsorial psalm. Through these words, the new Saint invites us to place God above everything, to consider him our sole and highest good. In fact, the ultimate reason for the apostolic effectiveness of Padre Pio, the profound root of so much spiritual fruitfulness can be found in that intimate and constant union with God, attested to by his long hours spent in prayer and in the confessional. He loved to repeat, "I am a poor Franciscan who prays" convinced that "prayer is the best weapon we have, a key that opens the heart of God".

This fundamental characteristic of his spirituality continues in the "Prayer Groups" that he founded, which offer to the Church and to society the wonderful contribution of incessant and confident prayer. To prayer, Padre Pio joined an intense charitable activity, of which the "Home for the Relief of Suffering" is an extraordinary expression. Prayer and charity, this is the most concrete synthesis of Padre Pio's teaching, which today is offered to everyone.

5. *"I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because ... these things ... you have revealed to little ones"* (Mt 11,25).

How appropriate are these words of Jesus, when we think of them as applied to you, humble and beloved Padre Pio.

Teach us, we ask you, humility of heart so we may be counted among the little ones of the Gospel, to whom the Father promised to reveal the mysteries of his Kingdom. Help us to pray without ceasing, certain that God knows what we need even before we ask him. Obtain for us the eyes of faith that will be able to recognize right away in the poor and suffering the face of Jesus.

Sustain us in the hour of the combat and of the trial and, if we fall, make us experience the joy of the sacrament of forgiveness.

Grant us your tender devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother.

Accompany us on our earthly pilgrimage toward the blessed homeland, where we hope to arrive in order to contemplate forever the glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.