

RECALLING THE FINAL HOURS OF SAINT PADRE PIO OF PIETRELCINA

On 22 September 1968, after 9:00 p.m., when Father Mariano had already left cell No. 4 and I had entered, Padre Pio called me with the intercom to his room. He was in bed and lying on his right side. He only wanted me to tell him what time it was from the alarm clock on the table by his bed. I wiped a few tears from his red eyes and returned to cell No. 4 where I remained with the intercom left on in case he needed me.

The Padre called me another five or six times before midnight and his eyes were always red with tears, but they were gentle and tranquil tears.

At midnight like a frightened child he begged me: *"Stay with me, my son"* and he began to ask me frequently what time it was, looking at me with imploring eyes and holding my hands tightly.

Then as if he had forgotten the time, which he had asked me in continuation, he asked: *"My son, have you said Mass?"*

I answered smiling: *"Spiritual Father, it is too early now for Mass"*.

And he answered me: *"Well this morning you will say it for me"*.

And I: *"But I say it for your intentions every morning"*.

He then wanted me to hear his confession, and after he had confessed himself he said: *"My son, if the Lord should call me to Himself today, ask my fellow friars to forgive me for all the trouble that I have caused them and ask my spiritual children to say a prayer for my soul"*.

I answered: *"Spiritual Father, I am sure that the Lord will let you live still for a long while, but if you should be right, may I ask you for a last blessing on behalf of your fellow friars, all your spiritual children and the sick?"*

And he: *"Yes I bless them all; and ask the Superior that he give on my behalf this last blessing"*. Finally he asked me to renew the act of his religious profession. It was 1:00 a.m. when he asked me: *"Listen, my son, I can no longer breathe here in bed. Help me to get up. I will be able to breathe better in the chair"*.

Between 1:00 and 3:00 a.m. was the usual time that he would get up to prepare to say Mass and, before sitting in his armchair, he would take a few paces in the hallway. That night, to my great surprise, I noticed that he walked erect and quickly like a young man, so that I did not even have to help him.

At the doorway of his cell, he said: *"Let's go onto the balcony for a while"*.

I followed him, holding his arm. He switched on the light and when he reached the armchair, he sat down and looked around the balcony as if he was looking for something. After five minutes he wanted to return to his cell. I tried to help him up, but he said to me: *"I can't manage it"*. In fact he had become heavier.

"Spiritual Father don't worry", I said to him, encouragingly and at once went to get the wheel chair that was nearby. I lifted him up from the armpits from the

armchair and placed him in the wheel chair. He himself placed his feet on the foot rest.

In his cell, after I had seated him in his armchair, looking at and pointing to the wheel chair with his left hand he said to me: "*Take it outside*", Back in the cell, I noticed that the Padre began to turn white. On his forehead there were cold beads of sweat. I became frightened however, when I saw that his lips began to turn bluish.

He repeated continuously: "*Jesus, Mary!*", with a voice that became always more weak.

I got up to call a fellow friar, but he stopped me saying: "*Don't wake anyone up*". I went off running all the same and, I had only gone a few paces from his cell, when he called me again. And not thinking that he had called me to say the same thing, turned back. But when I heard him repeat: "*Don't call anyone*", I said to him imploringly: "*Spiritual Father, let me see to things now*". And running I started for Father Mariano's cell, but seeing the door to Brother Bilol's cell open, I went in, switched on the light and shook him awake saying: "*Padre Pio is in a bad way!*"

In a moment, Brother Bill reached the Padre's cell and I ran to telephone Doctor Sala.

About ten minutes later he arrived and as soon as he saw the Padre he began to prepare an injection. When it was ready Brother Bill and I tried to help him up, but not able to we rested him on his bed. The doctor gave him the injection and then helped us to place him in his armchair, while the Padre repeated with an always more weak voice and with the movements of his lips always more imperceptible: "*Jesus, Mary!*".

Called by me, the Father Guardian, Father Mariano and other friars immediately arrived; while one by one, having being called by phone by Doctor Sala, there arrived Mario Pennelli, Padre Pio's nephew, Doctor Gusso, the Medical Director of the "Home for the Relief of Suffering", and Doctor Giovanni Scarale.

While the doctors were giving him oxygen, at first by tube and then with a mask, Father Paolo of San Giovanni Rotondo gave the last sacraments (the anointing of the sick) to his spiritual Father and the other friars, on their knees around him, prayed.

At about 2:30 a.m., he gently inclined his head and gave up his soul.

In faith

Padre Pellegrino Funicelli

San Giovanni Rotondo, 29 September 1968