



"Jesus is my hope, and the living source of my happiness"  
Padre Pio Prayer Groups, pilgrims of hope

## THIRD SANCTUARY

### OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AND HIS HUMANITY

#### BIBLE COMMENTARY

##### From the Letter of St. Paul to the Galatians (4:1-11)

*I mean to say that as long as the heir is not of age, he is no different from a slave. Although he is the owner of everything, he is under the supervision of guardians and administrators until the date set by his father. 3 In the same way, when we were not of age, we were enslaved to the elemental powers of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might be received as his adopted children. As a proof that you are His children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!". So you are no longer slaves but children, and as children you are then his heirs, through God.*

*At a time when you did not know God, you became slaves to things that by nature are not gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and destitute elemental powers? Do you want to be their slaves all over again? You are observing days, months, seasons, and years. I am afraid on your account that perhaps I have laboured for you in vain.*

The *Letter to the Galatians* testifies to the slow journey made by the members of the first Christian community in consolidating their faith. After his preaching, Paul left the Galatian community and some preachers were gaining the upper hand, trying to get them to return to the traditions and rituals of the Old Testament. According to the Apostle, going back to those rites meant not understanding the value of Jesus' coming. Those norms, in fact, were given to accompany the Jewish people in their inner growth, just as a guide accompanies a child through to maturity. Now it was necessary to welcome God's visit in its totality.

Certainly in this passage there is no abolition of the Old Testament morality; the freedom Paul often refers to is not the freedom to do what one wants. Rather it is a different matter. Jesus thus explains it in the Sermon on the Mount: "I have not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to bring it to fulfilment."

Regulating the relationship with God through norms often meant measuring, giving a limit to his presence in the life of man; to speak of a relationship with a God who becomes man and with the Spirit who works in us involves a full belonging to Him, which in turn generates us as completely new creatures.

There was a reason behind Nicodemus' question to Jesus: "How can a man be born when he is old?" (Jn 3:4). Nicodemus understood very well that that birth was not something physical, but internal, it was necessary to be re-born, so as to change one's mentality, but it was difficult. This is why Jesus specified: we must be reborn of water and the Spirit; water is baptism, but it can remain one of the rites of the Old Testament, if it is not accompanied by the gift of the Spirit who renews us and changes our hearts.

Welcoming Jesus in truth means stripping ourselves of everything else, touching his poverty with our own hands, while making it our own, in order to be able to truly belong to God.



"Jesus is my hope, and the living source of my happiness"  
Padre Pio Prayer Groups, pilgrims of hope

## **SPIRITUALITA'**

### **From a letter from Padre Pio to the Ventrella sisters (Letters III, p. 565)**

*Tell me, my dear daughters, you know well that at the birth of our Lord, the shepherds heard the divine and angelic singing of the heavenly spirits. Scripture tells us this, but it does not say that the Virgin, his Mother and St. Joseph, who were closest to the Infant, heard the voices of the Angels or saw that miraculous splendours. On the contrary, instead of hearing the angels singing, they heard the Child crying, and saw by the light of a poor lamp, the eyes of this divine Infant, all wet with tears and trembling with cold.*

There is a real danger of being dazzled by the Christmas atmosphere to the point of not recognizing Jesus in the cave. In fact, all of us believers in some way share in the consumerist vision of Christmas. At the same time, we can sometimes also be carried away - says Padre Pio - by the emotional atmosphere of Christmas, represented by the choirs of angels of heavenly spirits. Living the true spirit of Christmas means entering the cold of the cave, which outside of the metaphor, means entering precisely into what most makes us anxious and makes us suffer and there recognizing the presence of Jesus, who came for us, for each one of us.

### **The nativity scene of poverty**

Never before have we been experiencing the precariousness of that cave on a daily basis: wars, economic crises, the problems that our families are going through often make us feel like a poverty from which we try to escape for a moment, almost alienating ourselves in the lights, in the parties, or even in beautiful religious functions, which – however – make us forget about our problems for a short time.

In reality, as they say, sometimes it is also necessary to unplug, although afterwards the mouth may remain dry, and we are left with the regret of having lived a Christmas without having really met the Lord.

Padre Pio proposed a place to meet Jesus speaking of an internal Kingdom, "how happy the internal Kingdom is, when this holy love reigns there!" (Epist. III, p. 697).

Staying outside the cave with the shepherds to listen to the hymns of the angels means waiting for a Messiah who will change history, who will put things right, without our sacrifice. We live in many situations of precariousness, the ever-looming danger of war, a difficult social and economic situation, we often see our families torn into a thousand pieces: the only hope we have left is the intervention of heaven.

Padre Pio asks us to enter the cave where there is poverty, and make a very hard choice: that we should give a different order to our requests, our priority being that of seeking the Lord, indeed using our own poverty as a tool to encounter Jesus.

### **The Nativity Scene of Mercy**

This is the hope that Pope Francis asks that we should give to everyone, that of encountering Jesus by sharing in his poverty. "The manger of Christmas, the first message of an infant God, tells us that He is with us, He loves us, He seeks us. Courage, do not let yourself be overcome by fear, resignation, discouragement. God is born in a manger to give you the chance of being born again right there, where you thought you had hit rock bottom" (Christmas Eve, 2022).



*"Jesus is my hope, and the living source of my happiness"  
Padre Pio Prayer Groups, pilgrims of hope*

Unfortunately, we are surrounded by false prophets of hope, there are those who delude themselves into thinking they can solve social problems with false promises, those who want to make the signs of aging disappear with surgery, those who think they can solve difficult relationships with violence. The Pope asks that we should embrace the signs of the times, that is, accept this as a wounded society and avoiding any easy illusions, honestly stick to those answers of hope that come from the Gospel. "It is necessary, therefore," he writes in the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee, "that we should pay attention to the great good that is present in the world so as not to fall into the temptation of considering ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence. The signs of the times, which contain the yearning of the human heart, in need of God's saving presence, want to be transformed into signs of hope."

Padre Pio often recommended that we should feel part of this Church that bends down to the sufferings of men, knows how to listen to them, accompanies them with love to the encounter with Christ and then transforms them with the help of divine Providence, in which he always encouraged them to trust.

This was particularly evident when he exercised the ministry of confession, with particular severity, forcefully reprimanding the penitents and on more than one occasion denying them the absolution. There were priests around him, who, believing they were doing good, imitated him with rigorous words and gestures, also refusing sacramental absolution. With great delicacy, Padre Pio called them back, inviting them, instead, to be more understanding and welcoming than usual, as if to remind them that it was indeed necessary to help the penitent be aware of the gravity of his sin, but equally important to welcome him and help him begin a new life.

In this attitude of Padre Pio we can see the sense of community which he wanted to be at the basis of the ministry of the Church, seen not as a leader in the guise of a priest, who arbitrarily gave God's forgiveness as if it were his personal prerogative, but as a family that welcomed the precariousness of the sinners among them and made sure that from the cold of that cave they could access the sanctuary of God.

In this regard, Father Pellegrino recalled how one day he met a man who came from Milan and with great wisdom and arrogance he wanted to meet Padre Pio because he had a misfortune in the family. Given his behaviour, he felt authorized to respond to him accordingly, and then told the Father about it, complaining about the man's rudeness.

The answer left him stunned: "That gentleman from Milan is not an imbecile, nor a pervert; he is just a poor Christ subjected by Heavenly Father to a terrible trial. In God's plans you should have been the consoling angel of the suffering. Instead, against God's plans, you ended up increasing his suffering."

### **The nativity scene of Greccio**

St. Francis wanted to represent the birth of Jesus in a small field outside Greccio. Since then, representations of Christmas with living characters have spread all over the world, giving rise to centuries-old traditions. Not everyone knows, however, that in the Greccio nativity scene prepared by St. Francis there were only the ox, the donkey and a manger, on which the saint had an altar prepared where the Eucharist was celebrated. There were indeed the shepherds and the other inhabitants of the village, but they were not extras, as in today's nativity scenes, they were real people, invited by Francis to look at the poverty of that birth. The Holy Mass, celebrated in that place, helped them to look at the poverty that Christ had chosen: it was the place where they could see Him as God, without obstacles, frontiers or anything else that depended on their own misery or sin.

Certainly we are missionaries of the Kingdom of God who must proclaim the defeat of evil and sin, but we will truly do so starting from our own poverty, in which Jesus manifested his glory. We are not the spectators of the nativity scene, but the protagonists, a destitute and imperfect people who bend over to a manger to worship a God who resembles us.



"Jesus is my hope, and the living source of my happiness"  
Padre Pio Prayer Groups, pilgrims of hope

## PRAYER

### PRAYER OF MONSIGNOR MICHELE CASTORO TO ST PIO OF PIETRELCINA

O Glorious Padre Pio,  
humble and faithful servant of the Lamb,  
you followed Him to the Cross,  
offering yourself as victim for our sins.

United with Him and filled with His love,  
You bring the good news of His Resurrection  
to the poor and the sick,  
showing the merciful face of God, the Father.

O tireless man of prayer and friend of God,  
Bless all who work and support  
your *Home for the Relief of Suffering*,  
and from Heaven strengthen all *the Prayer Groups*  
so that they may be beacons of light  
in this tormented world,  
spreading the fragrance of your charity  
everywhere.

O Saint of Paradise,  
obtain for us from the Most High  
health of body and spirit,  
peace in our families and fidelity to our Christian life,  
so as to be worthy to enter the Blessed Homeland with you.

## HYMN