



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

FOURTH SHRINE

A Shrine which was not built by human hands

BIBLE COMMENTARY

From the Letter to the Hebrews (9:11-14)

"Christ, on the other hand, came as the high priest of future goods, through a larger and more perfect tent, not built by human hands, that is, not belonging to this creation. He entered the sanctuary once for all, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by virtue of his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and calves, and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkled on those who are defiled, sanctify them by purifying them in the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who, moved by the eternal Spirit, offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse our conscience from the works of death, because we serve the living God?"

What we call the *Letter to the Hebrews* is in reality a magnificent discourse on the priesthood of Christ (cf. *Heb 13:22*) written down and then circulated among the Christian communities who were victims of persecution. The letter is a recommendation to remain firm in Jesus, "the author of faith, made perfect in Him" (12:2). He is the mediator between God and men. So that we can understand the meaning of Christ's work better, the author refers to what to the Jews was the place of mediation par excellence: the Tent of Meeting, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and where Moses went to meet the Lord. This intimate and sacred place was repurposed in the Temple of Jerusalem, it was the Shrine, the Holy of Holies, separated by a curtain. Only once a year, after purifying himself, could the high priest enter to intercede on behalf of the people. Jesus is presented as the High Priest who enters "into a greater and more perfect Tent", he is the Son of God who – after his Resurrection – enters the kingdom of heaven and in so doing, He brings us all in with him.

This new Shrine, not built by human hands, offers us the key to our baptism: although we are on this earth, even though we are called to live the time of faith, we must be aware of the new dimension in which we live: we have been purified to serve the living God, the body of Jesus is the shrine, not built by human hands, in which we encounter God.

SPIRITUALITY

From a letter from Padre Pio to the Ventrella sisters (Epist. III)

"What more can I do and say to stop this flow of thoughts in your hearts? Do not endeavour to heal them, because this fatigue makes them sicker. Do not strive to overcome your temptations, for such an effort would only strengthen them; despise them and do not dwell on them; picture Jesus Christ in your imagination as being crucified in your arms and above your breasts; and while kissing his side say several times: "Behold my hope, behold the living source of my happiness; I will hold you close, Jesus, and I will not leave you until you have placed me in a place of safety!"

The words of Padre Pio seem to echo Jacob's struggle with the Angel: "I will not leave you until you have blessed me!" (*Gen 32:27*). Jacob's struggle with the Angel shows the firmness that is required of those who have chosen to serve God. The Christian life, in fact, does not only imply fighting against sin or heroically defending one's faith and it is not even a momentary ardour. Rather it implies getting closer to God, conquering him at the expense of our freedom; the Holy Spirit who is given to us demands spaces of his own within us. Put this way, it seems like a tangle of situations, but in reality



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this is what happens: we want to conquer God so that he can make the best use of our freedom. However he often makes us wait, as he wants to test our faith.

The day of fidelity

In this month our Groups celebrate the Day of Fidelity: we will be tested "like gold in the crucible", say the Scriptures (cf. *Wis* 3:6). It is not enough to promise something to the Lord during a beautiful ceremony; not everything is taken for granted in our relationship of friendship with Christ; we cannot adapt Jesus to our logic and our needs, as to promise fidelity is to share the total gift of our self that he himself made to the Father: "Whoever wants to be my disciple, let them take up their cross and follow me".

Certainly we are not faced with a divinity who wants to see us suffer, on the contrary, Jesus said: "Come to me, you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest", but then he adds: "Play my game on me and learn from me that I am humble and upright in heart". This Jesus who welcomes, in the words of Padre Pio, and becomes a guide in faith is the "hope and living source of happiness". The choice of faith, that of the one who wants to purify his heart in the crucible, becomes a choice of joy: "I will hold you close, Jesus, and I will not leave you until you have placed me in a place of security". In a nutshell, the promise of fidelity is to say: "I am faithful to you as a bride to a bridegroom, for you are my happiness".

Writing to one of his spiritual daughters, Erminia Gargani, Padre Pio referred to a series of steps that can help us on this path. His correspondence with her lasted about six years, but we know that this woman was followed by Padre Pio throughout her life.

The divine artist

On 6th of December, 1916 Padre Pio wrote his first letter to Erminia. He intended to help her understand God's way of acting: "With repeated strokes of the salutary chisel and with diligent cleaning, the divine artist usually prepares the stones that will make up the composition of the eternal edifice. Thus sings the Church in the hymn of the office of dedication, and so it truly is" (*Epist. III*, p. 659). The young woman had gone through various sad events of her life with a strong faith, but then started having doubts about her spiritual life, because she felt as if she had been abandoned by God. Padre Pio reassured her: "It is not abandonment, but love that the most sweet Jesus is showing you" (*Epist. III*, p. 660).

According to Padre Pio, the strong point for spiritual growth is the awareness that Jesus is within us: "Be calm about the existence of divine charity in your heart" (*Epist. III*, p. 665). The two virtues he recommends at such time are patience and docility: when the future seems to be blurring, it is necessary to know how to wait for the manifestation of God's will and promptly welcome his inspirations as they manifest themselves.

The necessary tools in such circumstances are meditation on the Word of God and the Eucharistic table: "You will make the preparation for the whole day, which is done briefly in the morning, lifting up to God everything you will do during the day. He advised to practise mental prayer before approaching the sacred table for about an hour... From after lunch onwards, he encouraged to choose another fixed time to retire before God, an hour which would be dedicated to meditation" (*Epist. III*, p. 671).

When Jesus Is Our Role Model

We are often taught that our lives must bear witness to our faith, and this is expected to be the basis of our apostolate. Padre Pio believed that conformation to Jesus as our role model in our Christian life is the starting point for every apostolate. For this reason he suggested to Erminia Gargani that she should meditate often on Jesus' life: "... in order for imitation to take place, daily reflection on his life is



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necessary; from reflection and meditation comes the esteem of his acts, and from esteem comes the desire and comfort of imitation" (*Epist. III*, p. 712). He then listed a series of attitudes to follow in order to be a true witness of Christ:

1. you will never be pleased with yourself;
2. you will never complain of offenses, wherever they may come from;
3. you will excuse everyone with Christian charity;
4. you will always humble before God, like a poor before the richest man;
5. You will not be surprised at your weaknesses, but recognizing yourself for what you are, you will blush for your inconstancy and infidelity to God, and you will trust in him, abandoning yourself quietly in the arms of the heavenly Father, like a child in the arms of its mother;
6. You shall not exalt yourself in the slightest of virtues, but act as if everything were coming from God and give him all honour and glory (*Epist. III*, p. 713).

Missionaries with the Stigmata

Padre Pio's stigmata are the most evident sign of the continuous offering of himself that he made for the benefit of the Church. The wounds he suffered from for fifty years were like a tool, to bring many people closer to faith. On the other hand, one could not stop at his wounds as an external sign, as we should also consider the profound relationship between Padre Pio's suffering and our own daily crosses. Those physical signs were an opportunity to speak of a suffering lived in faith and in generous participation in Jesus' sacrifices.

In reality, we are faced with that mystery of pain that unites all believers and makes them missionaries, precisely when they embrace the cross of Jesus and follow him to Calvary. The insistence with which Padre Pio involved Erminia Gargani and the other people he spiritually guided in perceiving the presence of Christ in their lives, was based on his certainty that all men and women should understand the presence of Jesus through the cross.

Such a moment, when we partake of Jesus' suffering, becomes our act of joyful fidelity to Him: even with pain in his heart and tears in his eyes, even with the signs of the cross on his shoulders, the believer continues to hope: "Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he returns; Truly, I say to you, he will clasp his garments around his loins, and have them sit down at the table, and come and serve them. And if, arriving in the middle of the night or before dawn, he finds them like this, blessed are they!" (*Lk 12:37-38*).

22nd of JANUARY, DAY OF FIDELITY

LOYALTY COMMITMENT of the members of the Padre Pio Prayer Groups

O Father, you have chosen and called us to be among the People of God, and you want us to be "nurseries of faith and hothouses of love". Here before our community, we commit ourselves to be ministers of prayer and servants to the suffering; to renounce sin with serious commitment; to grow in virtue, especially within our families; to share our journey in this Prayer Group, following the spirituality of St. Pio of Pietrelcina and the teachings of the Church. We pledge fidelity to the Pope, to our pastors and to the commitments we make on the common journey with the brothers and sisters of our Group. In the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi, we choose to welcome the needy, in solidarity with the poor and in loving respect for creation. Virgin Mary, you guided the path of St. Pio of Pietrelcina, please accept our holy desires and guide us, too on our path to holiness.

Hymn