



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

## SIXTH SHRINE March 2025

### A COMMUNITY THAT THRIVES ON CHARITY

#### BIBLE COMMENTARY

##### **From the Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians (4:1-9)**

*Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

We are here in the final part of Paul's letter. The apostle exhorted the believers in Philippi to have the same sentiments that were of Jesus Christ, keeping in mind the gift he made of himself: although he was God, he chose to make himself one of us. Now Paul summarizes here his message through an invitation: we are to create a space in which Christ can dwell: "... stand firm in the Lord as you have learned." Paul's invitation is not a generic exhortation from a father who takes leave of his children. Evòdia and Syntyche are two women in the community who worked with Paul spreading the Gospel among them, but they were currently finding it difficult to collaborate. The invitation to "get along" is not the search for a compromise and an exhortation to put up with one another, rather it is rooted in that "standing firm in the Lord". Indeed only the bond with Jesus can lead to that communion of intent that fosters understanding, acceptance and forgiveness. The first communities did not hypocritically hide their tensions; rather they tried to resolve them in that spirit of faith that could bring inner changes in people, thus producing a different kind of joy: "Rejoice in the Lord always; I will say it again, rejoice." It is not necessary, therefore, to present the image of a perfect Church, but that of a community finds inner joy in rediscovered harmony the reason for its mission: "May your gentleness be known to all men and women. The Lord is near!". In a society that made economic, physical or political supremacy over others a reason for honour, Saint Paul insists on a profound bond with Christ as the centre of his pride and joy. This bond is capable of detaching us from earthy concerns, helping us not to be distressed – following the path of the Sermon on the Mount – while opening us to higher thoughts: "... whatever is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, honourable, whatever is virtue and deserves praise, let all this be the object of your thoughts."

#### SPIRITUALITY

##### **From a letter from Padre Pio to Raffaelina Cerase (Epist. II, p. 225)**

*Therefore, my dear sister, let us greatly esteem this virtue in the highest esteem, if we want the heavenly Father to show us mercy. Let us be very fond of charity and let us practise it. This is the virtue that makes us all children of the one Father who is in heaven. Let us love and practise charity,*



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*as this is our divine Master's precept. By his we shall be distinguished from the unbelievers by our loving and charitable behaviour. In our love for charity, we must flee from even the shadow of anything that might dim its splendour. Yes, in loving this virtue, let us always bear in mind the great teaching of the Apostle: "We are all members of Jesus Christ who is the head of us all, the members of the body". We should show great love for one another, remembering that we have all been called to form a single body and that if we keep our love for one another, the beautiful peace of Jesus will invariably triumph joyfully in our hearts.*

Both St. Paul and St. Pio insist on the same ecclesiastical vision of charity: this is the virtue that makes us the body of Christ, his own members, the expression and continuation of his generous love. This "feeling of being one" has been the characteristic element of Christian witnesses from the beginning: "Believers kept growing in numbers and all of them felt they were part of one heart and soul, and no one counted what belonged to him as their own, but all things were in common among them" (*Acts* 4:32). The word of the Gospel is a proclamation of hope, which can remain empty if it is limited to doctrinal declarations or a few engaging homilies. It is necessary that Christian hope, in that better world as proclaimed in the Scriptures, finds a valid support in the witness of a community who testifies with deeds to the possibility of the Word of Jesus to change our hearts.

### **The Word can change the relationship among believers**

Our hope of being one body that bears witness to the Gospel cannot just be a theoretical principle or an empty ideal. To Paul's often fiery words, we would like to add what Pope Saint Clement I wrote in his "Letter to the Corinthians", which still seems to be of great relevance: "Why quarrels, anger, discords, schisms and wars among you? Do we not have one God, one Christ, one Spirit of grace poured out upon us, one vocation in Christ? Why tear the members of Christ, why rebel against one's own body and reach the point of delirium that makes us forget that we are all members of each other's bodies?". The humanity present in our communities should certainly not surprise us, but it ought to empower us, just like Padre Pio's Prayer Groups, so as to be bearers of charity. Padre Pio said to his spiritual daughters: "Let us love and practise charity, since it is the precept of the divine Master: from here we will distinguish ourselves from the other people, if we love and practise charity." Our presence in the Church must characterize us as bearers of that charity which has its origins in the shared Word of God. Too often, we tend to speak to others calling them "brother, sister, dearest, etc.", but often these are only façade words. Each one of these expressions shows our hope and desire for communion and fraternity; we, as Prayer Groups, can be the prophets of these words that become flesh, that become truthful and the fruit of concrete choices. Padre Pio writes: "Oh how sublime is the beautiful virtue of charity, brought to us by the Son of God! Charity must be close to everyone's heart, but even more so to those who make profession of holiness. Without any merit of yours, the Lord has called you to this: and although I can see that you are determined to devote yourselves to charity, yet I will not cease to insist that you should grow and grow in it."

### **The Word That Opens Doors**

We are people walking in charity, Padre Pio tells us, thus creating a sort of circle: that charity that flows from Jesus, also becomes the goal towards which we are heading. If we learn to progress constantly in this virtue, we will be able to become instruments of conversion ourselves, also involving people who encounter difficulties in walking in faith, in our journey of charity. The various experiences of solidarity that our Groups live, both in Italy and abroad, are the most beautiful testimony of a charity that opens the doors to faith. Many of us will know the story of the spouses Carlo and Clara Terzaghi, who came to San Giovanni Rotondo to meet Padre Pio. Carlo, a very gifted engineer, had come to the town of Gargano, as often happened, more than anything else to make his wife happy. Padre Pellegrino has passed down to us the chronicle of his first meeting with Padre Pio:



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"Padre Pio, I don't believe," was his presentation card. "You work well and you will see that faith will come to you. Go, my son, and may God bless you." Padre Pio did not point fingers, rather he proposed an itinerary based on charity. Carlo, who had not even made his First Communion, although he had married in church, began a difficult journey that gradually led him to be one of the most fervent spiritual children of the Father. In turn, through volunteering in charity, the Terzaghi couple became instruments for many people to draw closer to God. Let me tell you that sometimes our parishes look like large apartment buildings, where everyone is involved in their own ecclesiastical group or parish ministry and only knows what their duty is. Other people, like newcomers, those who participate occasionally, those who do not believe like us, do not find us open welcoming them, sometimes they are rejected. We are called to involve, to give space especially to those who come among us for the first time, to approach those who find it difficult to believe by asking for their help. The saints did wonderful things by involving those we call sinners, in helping to practise charity.

### **The Word that looks to the future**

Padre Pio writes: "I bless God, who has made me meet truly good souls here, and I have also proclaimed to them that their souls are the vineyard of God, the storage tank is faith, the tower is hope, the press is holy charity, the hedge is the law of God that separates them from the children of the world." Love generates a special covenant around hope: it places in us the certainty that it is possible for things to change, because we are not alone in carrying the weight of the cross. Indeed, it is difficult to speak of hope when war, violence and physical suffering loom over us; only a sharing that is based on that love that Jesus poured into our hearts is able to give rise to greater expectations in us. The presence and comfort of others are the sign that continuing to hope is not an illusion but is sharing faith in the One who died and rose for us.

## **PRAYER**

### **Prayer of Monsignor Luigi Renna to St. Pio of Pietrelcina**

Father Pio,  
our brother and guide  
I want to bless the Lord for your gifts.  
In a mysterious way He marked you with the wounds of Passion  
so you may be a witness of His mercy in the world.

Grant me a true conversion,  
your protection for all those dear to me and, if the Lord asks me,  
to know how to carry my Cross.

I pray to you so that the power of the Gospel  
may be for every man a word of hope and salvation.

Bless with your wounded hand the Church and our society,  
grant that all men be workers of solidarity and peace.

## **HYMN**