

GARABANDAL



THE MESSAGE OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL

JULY/SEPTEMBER 1997

PADRE PIO

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Padre Pio

The altar and the confessional were the pillars of his priestly ministry.

By Irene Dutra



...in him [Padre Pio] the two aspects that characterize the Catholic priesthood were particularly embraced and found a special spiritual resonance: the faculties to consecrate the Body and Blood of the Lord and to remit sin. Were not the altar and the confessional the two poles of his life?

—Pope John Paul II, May 23, 1987, San Giovanni Rotondo

AT DAWN ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1968—the final day of a solemn triduum celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of his stigmatization—the Capuchin friar, Padre Pio, ashen and trembling, climbed the steps to the altar of Our Lady of Grace Church. Hundreds of red roses donated by “spiritual children” and prayer groups all over the world decorated the sanctuary. The church was packed with people and hundreds more were standing outside. As the 81-year-old priest approached the altar, he looked out over the crowd with love and compassion. Then, bending his head, he became totally absorbed in offering the Mass.

Later that morning—as he had done nearly every morning for the past half century—he returned to the sacristy to hear confessions but gave up the effort after hearing about a dozen penitents, too weak to continue. Those penitents would be the last to receive his “I absolve you.”

In the early hours of September 23, Padre Pio died. The extraordinary life of the first priest to bear the stigmata had come to an end.

His Early Years

His life had begun in a seemingly ordinary way. The fourth of eight children, he was born to Grazio and Giuseppa Forgione on May 25, 1887, in Pietrelcina, a small village in southern Italy. He was baptized the following day and given the name Francesco. His parents were simple, hardworking peasants of strong faith who, though barely eking out a living on their few acres of farmland, always provided their children a loving home. “It was hard to find even ten lire in the house,” Padre Pio would recall in later years, “yet we always had enough of everything.”

Francesco, who at the age of five started having mystical experiences, was a quiet child, drawn to prayer and solitude, penance and mortification. When old enough, he was given the family’s small flock of sheep to tend. In the morning he would lead the

PADRE PIO



Peasants work the fields around Pietrelcina. Padre Pio's parents, Giuseppa and Grazio Forgione, right, were among this working class. Below, the house where Padre Pio was born.



flock to pasture and in the evening attend primary school. When at age ten he told his parents he wanted to become a priest, Grazio Forgione decided to migrate to America to earn the money for his son's seminary studies. Grazio worked first as a farmhand in Pennsylvania, then as a day-laborer in New York—helping build "Broccolino," as Brooklyn was

called by the Italian immigrants. The nine dollars a month he sent his wife enabled Francesco to attend a private secondary school in his village.

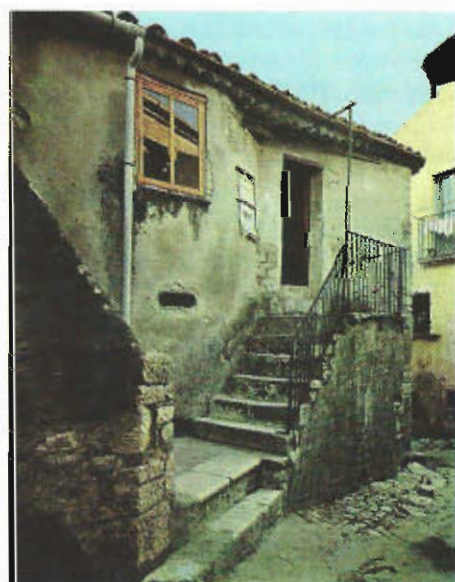
In January 1903 Francesco entered the Capuchin novitiate at Morcone, where he was given the religious name Fra Pio of Pietrelcina. Never a robust boy and asthmatic, in the novitiate he became even more frail and sickly, subject to sudden high fevers and mysterious illnesses which caused his superiors concern.

Fra Pio was ordained Padre Pio on August 10, 1910, in the city of Benevento and said his first Mass in Pietrelcina, in the little church where he had been baptized twenty-three years earlier. On the back of the holy cards given out that day was a prayer he had composed: "Jesus...today when trembling I elevate You...may I be for the world the way, the truth, and the life, and for You a holy priest, a perfect victim...Make me an altar for your cross. A golden chalice for your blood."

Within a month and in a most awesome way, the Lord gave a sign that

he accepted the young priest's offer of self-immolation. While praying alone one day, Padre Pio received the stigmata, the five wounds of Christ. Confused and embarrassed, he begged the Lord to make the wounds invisible. His prayer was answered. For the next eight years his stigmata, though painful, were invisible. Only his superiors knew about them.

In the first years after his ordination, his health continued to deteriorate, and the young priest had to be sent back to Pietrelcina for long periods of convalescence at home. In 1915 he was called up for military service—Italy having entered the First World War—but actually served only a few months, spending most of his time in the military on medical leave at home or in the monastery. In 1916 he was assigned to the Capuchin Monastery in San Giovanni Rotondo, an isolated village halfway up the barren slope of Mount Gargano in southeastern Italy. There from 1918 on, except for occasional short visits outside the friary walls, he would spend the rest of his life.



**May I be for You a
holy priest, a perfect
victim. Make me an
altar for Your cross,
a golden chalice for
Your blood.**

—Padre Pio, 1910

He Receives the Visible Stigmata

Finally discharged from the Italian army in March 1918, Padre Pio returned to community life in the monastery. His unique priestly mission began a few months later with two extraordinary events.

On August 5, while hearing confessions, he had a vision: a mysterious person stood before him and hurled into his side a flaming lance that caused the young priest to cry out with pain. He had received the grace of transverberation, a physical piercing of the heart. "From that day on," he would later tell his spiritual director, "I have been mortally wounded. I feel in the depths of my soul a wound that is always open and causes me continual agony."

A month later, on September 20, while praying before a large crucifix in the choir loft after Mass, Padre Pio was overtaken by a deep repose. Suddenly there appeared the same mysterious person as the one who had pierced his side in August. Shafts of flame leapt forth from the crucifix, wounding the friar in his hands and feet. Not until some years later, when prodded for further details, did he identify the mysterious person:

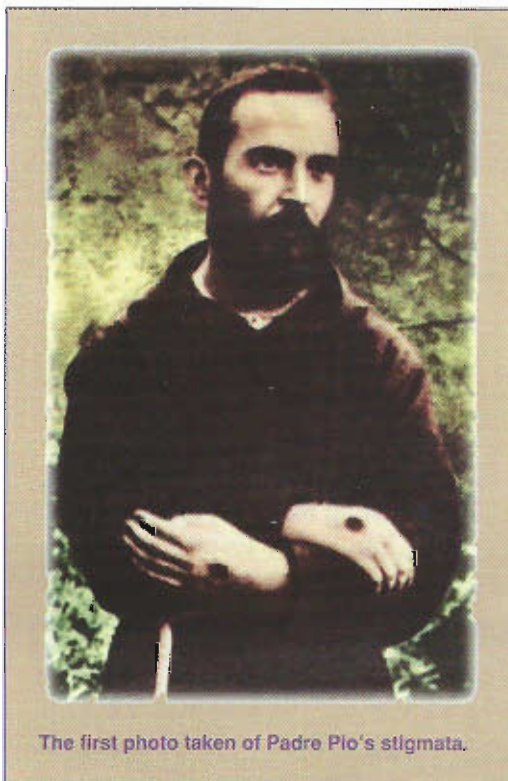
"...a great light shone round about my eyes," he recounted, "and in the midst of this light there appeared the wounded Christ."

When the ecstasy ended, Padre Pio was on the floor, his hands, feet and side bleeding. Weakened and in pain, he dragged his way back to his cell.

Although he welcomed the pain of stigmatization, he was embarrassed at the thought of his wounds being seen. "I will raise my voice and will not cease to implore Him," he confided to his spiritual director, "until in His mercy He removes, not the wounds nor the pain, but these outward signs." This time, however, his plea was not answered. For the next half

century Padre Pio bore the visible stigmata.

The wounds in his hands, feet and side never changed in all that time. They remained fresh and bled continuously, never becoming inflamed or infected. Padre Pio had to clean the wounds himself every day with spirits



The first photo taken of Padre Pio's stigmata.

of camphor. To cover those in his hands, he wore dark woolen mitts, taking them off only to say Mass. The wounds on his swollen feet were concealed under socks, but he could not conceal his painful hobble.

The Church Intervenes

Despite the attempt by the Capuchins to keep Padre Pio's stigmata secret, word soon got out and people began flocking to San Giovanni Rotondo. Cures and conversions were being re-

ported and other miraculous happenings. Within a year, life in the monastery revolved entirely around Padre Pio's ministry. Friars were spending much of their time hearing confessions, greeting visitors and helping answer the flood of letters.

In 1919 and 1920 the Capuchin Order and the Holy Office ordered a series of medical investigations. Three doctors probed the wounds and conducted experiments to try to get them to heal. Their lengthy medical reports (one doctor later wrote a whole book on the subject) described the stigmata in great detail but could offer no scientific explanation for the phenomenon.

Through all the turmoil the humble friar kept his equanimity and keen, peasant humor. When told one day that a professor in Florence had opined that the stigmata were probably the result of autosuggestion, Padre Pio, his dark eyes lighting up with mischief, slyly proposed that the good professor focus intensely on an ox and autosuggest himself into growing horns!

When sensational and inaccurate stories about the stigmatized friar began appearing in the secular press, Rome decided to intervene, sending a succession of apostolic visitors to San Giovanni Rotondo to investigate the matter. Beginning in 1922, the Holy Office issued a series of exhortations, orders and decrees: Padre Pio was not to offer Mass at regularly scheduled times; he and his confreres were forbidden to answer the letters pouring into the monastery seeking counsel and prayers; the Capuchins were ordered to transfer Padre Pio to a remote monastery in central Italy—an order quickly rescinded when the local populace vehemently protested. Particularly heartbreaking was the order forbidding Padre Pio to ever again correspond with or visit his longtime spiritual director, Padre

Benedetto.

While friends were at times upset and even indignant about the restrictions, Padre Pio himself remained serene, obediently complying with each order, uniting his own will to that of Christ.

Then on May 13, 1931, came a final lacerating blow: Padre Pio was prohibited from saying Mass in public or hearing confessions, even those of his brother friars.

The stigmatized priest spent the next two years in prayer and solitude. His Masses, celebrated in the tiny monastery chapel with only one server in attendance, often lasted two to three hours. When referring to this painful period of silencing years later, he expressed his complete agreement with the Church's actions: "The severity of the Church is always necessary in order to clarify our ideas," he declared. "Otherwise, there would be chaos."

On July 15, 1933, after further study by Rome, the prohibition against public Masses was lifted, and the following day—the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel—Padre Pio offered his first public Mass in two years. The prohibition against hearing confessions was lifted in 1934.

For the next thirty-four years Padre

Pio, who in his middle years was fairly robust, followed a full schedule of prayer and service. He arose around 2:30 a.m., after just a few hours sleep, to pray and meditate for several hours before offering Mass at dawn. For long hours each day he heard confessions. His only meal was lunch in the refectory, but he merely nibbled at what was set before him. After lunch there would be a half hour recreation in the monastery garden, during which he was wont to regale his confreres and friends with humorous anecdotes recounted in his Neapolitan dialect. In the late afternoon he led the Rosary and Benediction service, and each evening from his window he blessed the pilgrims gathered below, sending them on their way with an affectionate "Buena notte, bella gente!"

His Masses

"The world could exist without the sun in the sky," Padre Pio once declared, "but it could never exist without the Holy Mass."

His Mass, celebrated at dawn, was the center towards which all the moments of his day converged—the silent, prayer-filled hours of the night a preparation for it, the hours afterwards a prolonged thanksgiving.

Nobody who assisted at one of his Masses ever forgot the experience. An Italian bishop has described a Mass at which he was present in 1960: "At the altar Padre Pio was transfigured. His face was deadly pale, radiant and sometimes bathed in tears. There was an intensity in his fervor...painful contractions of his body...great silent sobs...everything about him told us how intensely he was living the Passion of Christ."

Another bishop described Padre Pio's Mass as a genuine participation in the crucifixion, the stigmatized priest not merely renewing in a mystical manner the sacrifice of the cross but living over again in his heart and in his body the entire Passion. Padre Pio, he believed, was made to suffer everything during Mass: the agony of Gethsemane, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the mockery of the crowd, the carrying of the cross, the crucifixion.

When Padre Pio raised the paten and chalice at the Offertory, his sleeves fell back a little and revealed the wounds in his hands. On seeing those pierced hands lifting the Sacred Host, many people were shaken to the point of renouncing a sinful life. Tepid or superficial Christians became fervent; non-believers converted.

His Confessions and Charismatic Gifts

It has been estimated that in his fifty-two years at San Giovanni Rotondo, Padre Pio heard at least two million confessions. In the early years, he sat in the confessional fifteen hours a day or more. Later this was limited by his superiors to six or seven hours, and towards the end of his life, fewer hours still. He heard women's confessions in the morning in the church, and the men's in the afternoon in the sacristy, face to face. Each encounter usually lasted just two to three minutes.

What was it that drew people from all over Italy and from many other countries to kneel in his confessional, many having waited two to three



Padre Pio in the refectory. The little he ate would not normally have been enough to sustain life.

weeks for their turn?

Padre Pio, first of all, had a profound understanding of the enormity of sin. He himself confessed weekly, sometimes even more often. To a generation that was rapidly losing all sense of sin, he became a beacon, arousing in souls a recognition of the terrible reality of evil. His demands on penitents were tough: a radical change of conscience, a deep repentance, a firm purpose of amendment—in short, a true conversion. “I don’t give candy to someone who needs a purgative,” was his response to those who questioned his severity.

Then, he had the gift of reading hearts; that is, God often disclosed to his eyes the status of a penitent’s soul and permitted him to reveal part or even all that he discerned. Padre Pio would tell penitents about sins they had forgotten or deliberately withheld. He was compassionate and reassuring with those who were sincere, harsh with those who needed to be jolted. He never shrank from refusing absolution to the unrepentant or to those who had not sufficiently prepared for the sacrament. “Go away, go away from me and come back here in two months!” he might suddenly roar at a penitent. Remarkably, most of those he banished from his confessional without absolution eventually came back, this time ready to make a good confession.

Each morning and afternoon as Padre Pio came through the cloister on his way to the confessionals, a line of men would be waiting for him, eager for a blessing. His gift of discernment was apparent in the individual way he treated each person. One he would tap playfully on the cheek, another ignore; give his hand to one to be kissed, thunder at another. But if he acted gruffly with certain people, he did it always with a supernatural intention. After one impassioned outburst, he assured a shocked confrere: “I didn’t get angry in my soul. I was shouting, but my heart was laughing.”

Two other charismatic gifts associated with him are bilocation and fra-



Men’s confessions were heard in the sacristy and the women’s in the church proper.

grances. Although from 1918 until his death in 1968 Padre Pio never left San Giovanni Rotondo, there were numerous reports during his lifetime of his appearing throughout Italy and in other countries. There were numerous reports as well of people becoming suddenly aware of his fragrances—a flowery scent most often, occasionally a tobacco or a medicinal aroma. Since Padre Pio’s death, people have continued to report seeing him or smelling his fragrances.

Diabolic Assaults and Heavenly Protection

The Church has constantly taught that the devil exists and must be reckoned with in the Christian life. During his fifty-eight years as a priest, Padre Pio wrestled continuously with Satan and succeeded in snatching countless souls from his grasp.

Just days before entering the Capuchin novitiate in 1903, he had a powerful vision that prefigured his priestly mission: A majestic figure led him to a wide gulf dividing a vast plain. Ranged on one side of the gulf were beautiful people dressed in white; ranged on the other side was a hideous throng dressed in black. The soon-to-be Capuchin seminarian was commanded to fight the powerful monster who suddenly loomed up be-

fore him. Urged on and aided by his celestial guide, he entered the combat, fought furiously and succeeded in throwing the monster to the ground.

While Padre Pio was reticent to speak about the diabolic assaults he suffered, in obedience to his superiors he gave accounts of them. In 1913, for example, he wrote to Padre Agostino: “They vent their anger on me continually...my body is bruised all over from the blows I receive at their hands...they sometimes throw me out of bed.” His confreres in the monastery had some inkling of the fierce battle Padre Pio was engaged in, for on occasion they heard loud noises coming from his cell—chains clanking and furniture being toppled over.

Confronted with the reality of diabolic power, Padre Pio sought heavenly protection, especially that of the Blessed Virgin—whose heel will crush the serpent’s head; and St. Michael the Archangel—whose legions fought and defeated Lucifer and his followers.

From the time he was a very young child, Padre Pio had an ardent devotion to Mary. As a priest he consecrated himself to her and ascribed all the success of his apostolate among sinners and sufferers to her powerful intercession. He prayed constantly, a

rosary always in his hand. He often passed the early morning hours before Mass, while the sky was still dark, sitting on the little verandah outside his cell saying his beads. Two days before he died, he told an old friend, "Love the Madonna. Make others love her, and recite the rosary. That is an armor against the evils of the world today."

Padre Pio also had great devotion to St. Michael. As penance, he often sent those who confessed to him to the Grotto of St. Michael, which was about twelve miles from San Giovanni Rotondo on the other side of Mount Gargano.

It Is Consummated

As the fiftieth anniversary of the stigmatization approached, there were signs that the end was imminent. The wounds on Padre Pio's hands, feet and side had stopped bleeding and were gradually becoming less visible. In fact, by the day of the anniversary Mass they had almost totally disappeared. Despite these and other signs, no one close to Padre Pio believed—or wanted to believe—that death was near.

The night of September 22, 1968, Padre Pio called six or seven times for Padre Pellegrino, the friar assigned to take care of him. Each time Padre Pellegrino went to Padre Pio's cell, he was asked what time it was. Then at midnight, like a frightened child, Padre Pio suddenly took Padre Pellegrino's hand and begged him to stay with him. He wanted to confess and to renew his religious vows.

Alarmed by Padre Pio's pallor and labored breathing, Padre Pellegrino called the other friars along with doctors from the nearby hospital.

Surrounded by his Capuchin community, Padre Pio died at 2:30 in the morning after receiving the last rites. His final words were "Jesu...Maria, Jesu...Maria."

For four days Padre Pio's body lay

in state in Our Lady of Grace Church, which had to be kept open twenty-four hours a day to accommodate the torrent of mourners. On the afternoon of September 26, the casket was taken from the church and carried in a funeral procession through the streets of San Giovanni Rotondo. Over 100,000 people followed the cortege. That evening, after a solemn requiem Mass, his body was laid to rest in the crypt beneath the main altar of the church.



Padre Pio's funeral procession.

Padre Pio's Legacy and Possible Canonization

Shortly after Padre Pio died, the cause for his canonization was opened. The diocesan investigation was concluded in January 1990 and consigned to the Congregation for the Cause of Saints, where it is now being studied.

San Giovanni Rotondo today is a hub of spiritual radiation. The "city on the mountain" envisioned by Padre Pio first began to take form during his lifetime with the opening in 1956 of the Home for the Relief of Suffering, a hospital joining faith and science that

is one of the most modern and fully equipped in the world. Many supporting institutions have been built since: a rehabilitation center for retarded and spastic children, a retreat center, a home for retired priests.

San Giovanni is also the headquarters of the Padre Pio Prayer Groups, a movement begun during World War II in response to Pope Pius XII's call for more intense prayer. Today there are two thousand prayer groups world-

wide with nearly a quarter of a million members. To keep them abreast of new developments, the Monastery of San Giovanni Rotondo publishes in six different languages *The Voice of Padre Pio*, a journal featuring articles on the stigmatized priest's life and updates on the canonization process.

As for the future, many are praying that Padre Pio will soon be beatified. Although the canonization process is a slow and complicated one, there is cause for hope. During the Capuchin friar's lifetime, despite the restrictions and silencing, he was held in great esteem by popes from Benedict XV to Paul VI.

The present Pope, John Paul II, has long had a special devotion to Padre Pio.

As a young student-priest in Rome in the late 1940's, he had the opportunity to visit San Giovanni Rotondo and confess to the stigmatized priest. In May 1987, John Paul II visited San Giovanni again to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Padre Pio's birth. In an address given at the tomb, the Pope lauded the Capuchin priest's self-offering as a victim of expiation and reparation for the sins of people. "I wish to thank the Lord with you," he said in ending his talk, "for having given us dear Padre Pio, for having given him to our generation in this very tormented century." □

ANECDOTES

Five years ago, in 1992, Father Rufino Megliola, a Capuchin from the Franciscan monastery in Pietrelcina, came to New York with officials from the town, to raise funds for the building of a church there. They were the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Mario Riali. Mario has taken over the responsibility of the church fund-raising effort in the United States. GARABANDAL Magazine took advantage of the occasion of the visit to conduct an interview since some of the people who would be present had their own Padre Pio experiences to relate. Included here are the testimonies first of Mrs. Marie Antoinette (Toni) Riali who is originally from Pietrelcina and then the mayor of the town, Pio Iandanza.

Mrs. Riali

I HAD THREE VERY HARD DELIVERIES, ALL by cesarean. We are talking about 44 years ago when they were not as easy as they are today. After the second one, I never healed; I had tubes in me for seven months at a time. The doctor told my husband that under no conditions should we try to have another child. But, it happened; I became pregnant again. I tried to have an abortion because the doctor said they would have to either save the mother or the

child. And it was not going to be done legally although professionally at a hospital.

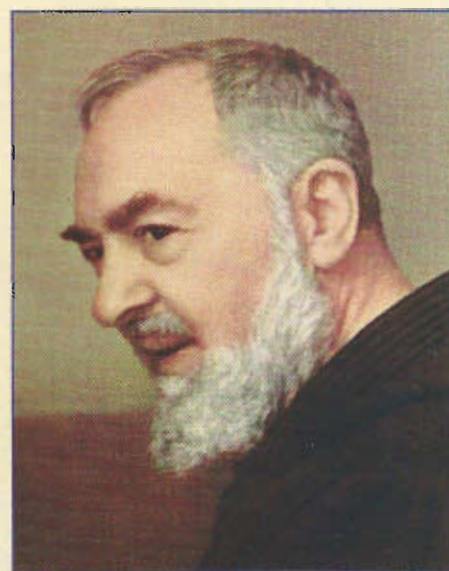
For some reason, it never happened. I was taking everything I could to lose the baby without having to go for the abortion—but it didn't happen. In Italy, [my family and friends] were praying rosaries and novenas because they knew I was going to die. They knew the doctors would try to save the baby.

Once the date for the cesarean operation was set, I wrote to my aunt [in Italy] that the baby was to be born on February 12. We are talking about Michael now.

On February 12th, everybody from the town, my aunt and all the neighbors, went to San Giovanni to pray during the big day. It's cold in February and I don't think there were many cars in those days. Transportation was very poor so I don't know how they got there, whether by train or by mule.

Finally they arrived and were in the church praying. Padre Pio was on the balcony praying in his customary place in the corner where there was a chair. He leaned down and saw these women with their rosaries and said, "What are you doing here? It's getting dark; why don't you go home?" My schoolteacher was there too and said, "My God, it's Padre Pio!"

"What are you doing here?" he asked again.



"We are praying" she responded.

"The rosary beads are working. Go home, go home" he answered.

They said to him, "We can't" and told him what was happening in America. He answered, "Go home, go home, it's all over. A baby boy is born and everything is all right." And guess what he said—remember, Padre Pio was very devoted to St. Michael—"they named him Michael." My aunt said, "Are you joking, Padre?" He replied, "I was there myself" and then realizing what he had just said, tried to retract it.

In the meantime, back here in Kew Gardens [New York], my husband was in the waiting room for what was supposed to be the end [of my life] when my doctor and the surgeon, both Jewish, walked down into the hallway (I have witnesses for this). The surgeon said to my doctor, "Gilbert, in all my years of practice, I have never experienced anything like what happened today. I wanted to cut over here and a hand was pulling me back. I couldn't do it and had to follow that hand. It seemed as if I weren't performing the operation; someone else was. It was the easiest delivery, the easiest, and a good boy."

Back in Italy, my aunt, with the neighbors, left San Giovanni for the three hour trip back to Pietrelcina. When she got back home, she wrote me a letter explaining all that happened, that I had a little baby boy and had even named him Michael.

Some time later, Michael contracted tuberculosis. A friend of mine very devoted to Padre Pio, prevailed upon us to go to San

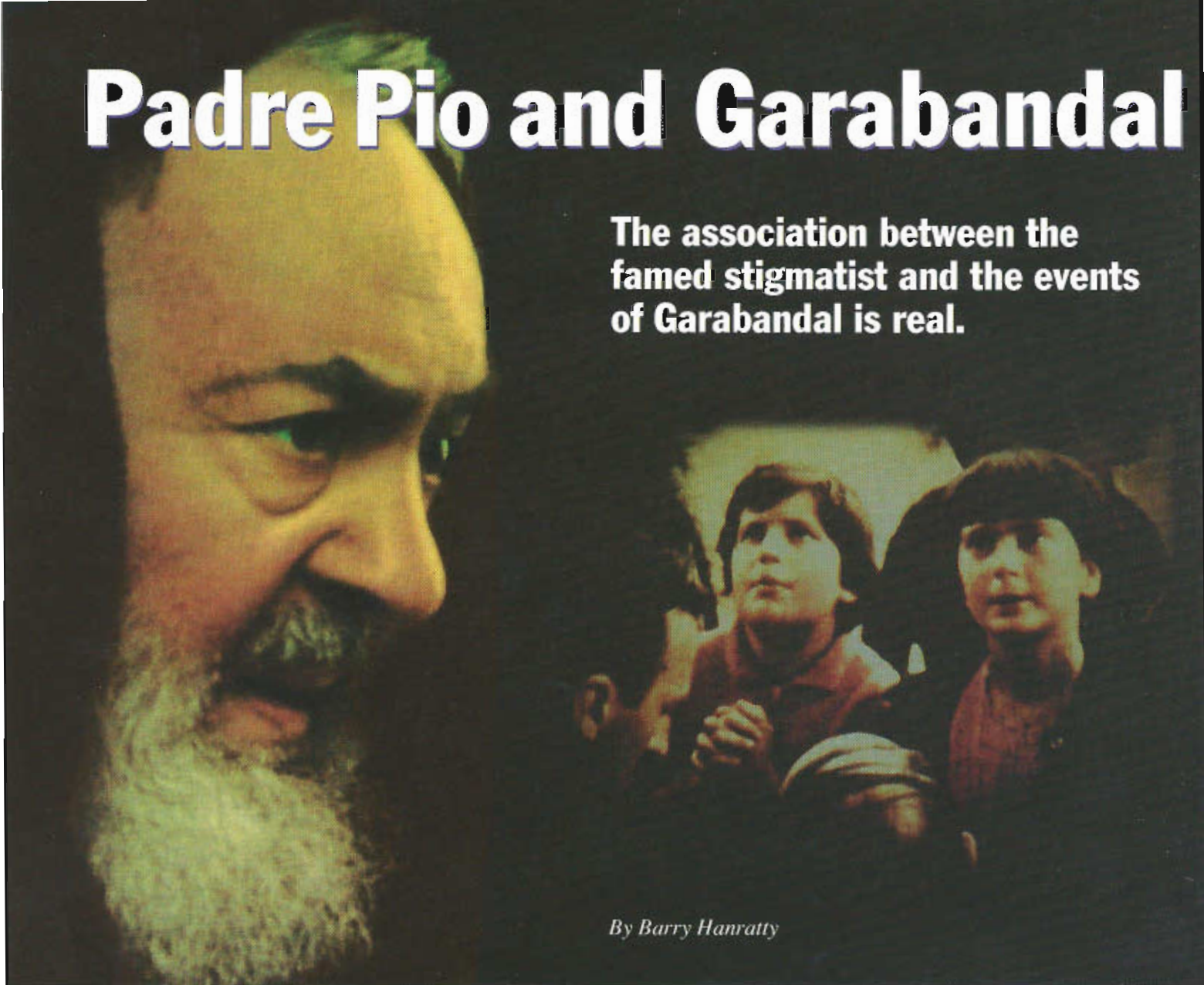
(continued on page 19)



The Riali family at San Giovanni Rotondo in 1957. The little monastery church can be seen in the background. The two women dressed in black were two spiritual daughters of Padre Pio who prayed continually for Antoinette during her dangerous pregnancy. Michael is the youngest boy and the other son is the one who made his first Holy Communion.

Padre Pio and Garabandal

The association between the famed stigmatist and the events of Garabandal is real.



By Barry Hanratty

ON SEPTEMBER 23, 1968, PADRE Pio of Pietrelcina died in the odor of sanctity at the age of 81 after having lived one of the most extraordinary lives in the history of the Church. His Cause for Beatification is in progress under the auspices of the Holy See. The famed stigmatist, the first priest to bear the wounds of Christ in his flesh, was remarkable for a number of reasons. In addition to his great holiness—"goodness walking" in the words of his fellow friars—and stigmata which caused an ongoing martyrdom that lasted more than 50 years, Padre Pio possessed a superabundance of charismatic gifts: visions, perfume [the favored person emits a sweet fragrance. In Padre Pio's case, the fragrance came from his wounds], healing, bilocation,

reading of hearts and prophecy. He was also one of the Church's great confessors, spending many hours each day hearing the confessions of people who came from all over the world to his monastery in San Giovanni Rotondo near Foggia in southern Italy.

Every day they came in droves first to hear his Mass, a remarkable experience in itself, and then to take their turn—which sometimes meant a wait of two weeks—to confess their sins to the humble Capuchin Father. He had a "hot line" to heaven they believed, and could let them know exactly where they stood in the eyes of almighty God.

After having suffered during the earlier years of his priestly life from censorship, disbelief and calumny, his

stature eventually grew until he was regarded as a living saint by everyone from the humblest peasant farmer to the pope. Because of his reputation for holiness and great charismatic gifts, his advice on matters of discernment was highly sought and carried tremendous weight. And it wasn't a question of his opinion. It was believed that he *knew*. It pleased God that His servant, Padre Pio, should be intimately connected with the Garabandal events.

Some people, unfavorably disposed toward the alleged apparitions, have denied the association between Padre Pio and Garabandal, but their arguments disintegrate in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Being an obedient son of the Church, what Padre Pio would not do

"I give you only one counsel: Pray and make others pray because the world is at the beginning of perdition."

is speak before the Church had spoken and since the Church had made no public pronouncement on the authenticity of the Garabandal events, neither would he. This may have given rise to the denials. However, in private, with his fellow friars and certain individuals, he did not hesitate to express his belief in the apparitions. A group of Spaniards once asked him if Our Lady was really appearing at Garabandal. He answered, "Are you still asking about that? How long do you expect her to appear there? She has been appearing for eight months already!" [See "The Apparitions of Garabandal" by F. Sanchez Ventura, p. 99.] Then, of course, there is the testimony of Joey Lomangino (see page 14). But the evidence of Padre Pio's relationship to the Garabandal events goes beyond oral testimony.

A Letter Is Received

On March 3, 1962, a letter that bore no signature was received in San Sebastian de Garabandal addressed to the four young visionaries, Conchita, Loli, Jacinta and Mari Cruz. This incident was reported by Dr. Celestino Ortiz, an excellent witness, and is recounted in the book, *She Went in Haste to the Mountain* by Father Eusebio Garcia de Pesquera from which the following excerpt is taken:

Felix Lopez, a former student of the Seminario Mayor de Derio (Bilbao), who is now the schoolteacher in Garabandal, was meeting with people in Conchita's kitchen. The girl received a letter that she didn't understand, and she asked him to translate it. It was in Italian, and Felix, after reading it said, "By its style, it could well be Padre Pio."

Conchita asked him if he knew Padre Pio's address, and on receiving an affirmative answer, asked him to help her compose a letter to answer it and express her appreciation.

Completing the letter in response, they left it on the kitchen table, unfolded. After a while, Conchita went into ecstasy and recited the rosary. Returning to her normal state, the teacher said to her,

"Did you ask the Virgin if the letter was from Padre Pio?"

"Yes, and she gave me a secret answer to send him."

The girl went up to her room and came down later with a paper written by hand. In front of everybody, she put the paper in the envelope which had been addressed by the teacher to Padre Pio, and she sealed it.

The letter that had come to Conchita, without a signature, without a return address, but with an Italian stamp, said this:

My Dear Children,

At nine o'clock in the morning, the Holy Virgin told me to say to you: "O blessed young girls of San Sebastian de Garabandal! I promise you that I will be with you until the end of the centuries and you will be with me during the end of the world and later, united with me in the glory of paradise."

I am sending you a copy of the holy rosary of Fatima, which the Virgin told me to send you. The rosary was composed by the Virgin and should be propagated for the salvation of sinners and preservation of humanity from the terrible punishments with which the good God is threatening it.

The original Spanish translation of Padre Pio's letter dated March 2, 1962.



I give you only one counsel: Pray and make others pray, because the world is at the beginning of perdition. They do not believe in you or in your conversations with the Lady in white but they will believe when it will be too late.

On February 9, 1975, the staff of NEEDLES Magazine (now GARABANDAL) conducted a taped interview with Conchita and asked her about this surprising letter said to have been dictated by Padre Pio.

Q. Conchita, do you remember anything about the letter?

A. I remember receiving in the mail a letter addressed to myself and the other three girls, Jacinta, Loli and Mari Cruz. I wondered about the things that were in the letter and, as it was not signed, I tucked it in my pocket until I saw the Blessed Mother that day. When she appeared I showed her the letter and asked her who sent it to us. The Blessed Mother said it was from Padre Pio. Being I did not know who Padre Pio was, I questioned her no further.

After the apparition I told the people about the letter, and there was a seminarian present who explained to me about Padre Pio and where he was from. Then I wrote a letter to Padre Pio saying that when he visits my country I would like to see him. Then he wrote me a small letter saying, "Do you think I can go up the



Conchita around 1971.

chimney?" I was only 12 years old at the time. I did not understand about the cloisters.

In the NEEDLES interview, Conchita was asked if she remembered what the letter said and although she could not remember all, what she did remember coincided perfectly with the translation included in this article.

Conchita's Visit to Padre Pio

In February, 1967, Conchita arrived in Rome with her mother, a Spanish priest, Father Luis Luna, Professor Enrico Medi and Princess Cécile de Bourbon-Parma. She had been called there by Cardinal Ottaviani, Prefect of the Holy Office which is now called the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It was during this visit that Conchita had a private audience with Pope Paul VI in which only five persons were present with the Pontiff. We have this on the reliable testimony of Professor Medi, then President of the European Association on Atomic Energy and a friend of the Pope, who was one of the five.

Since Conchita had to wait a day before meeting with Cardinal Ottaviani, Professor Medi suggested, since they had some extra time, that they go to see Padre Pio at San Giovanni Rotondo.

Here is Conchita's own account of

A Trip to Lourdes

Conchita received a telegram from Lourdes on October 15, 1968. She was urged to be there on October 17. Providentially, Father Alfred Combe of France just arrived in Garabandal with Bernard L'Huillier. Conchita asked him if he would drive her and her mother, Aniceta, to Lourdes. Father Combe agreed and here is his account of what transpired once they got there.

ON OCTOBER 17, 1968, WE ARRIVED at the Hotel Cluny, Lourdes. This was the rendezvous stated in the telegram to Conchita. We arrived there about 1:00 p.m.

Several Capuchin Fathers and Mr. Bevelacqua from Naples, Italy, welcomed us with joy. But first we wanted to get settled and one of the Capuchins promptly took care of it.

Our hosts and a group of important pilgrims from Naples were lodging at this hotel. A Miss Luigina of Rome had come to Lourdes with this pilgrimage. She carried a personal message that Padre Pio of San Giovanni had written for Conchita before his death. But no sooner had she arrived at Lourdes when she had to be hospitalized, gravely ill. A telegram had been sent to Garabandal requesting Conchita to come immediately to Lourdes. I confirmed what Conchita had told me during the trip. Miss Luigina was a friend of Conchita's who had received her into her home during Conchita's famous visit to Rome at the beginning of 1966.

Very kindly our hosts asked us to dine with them before going to the hospital, and we accepted. But this was not a simple matter.

The news of the arrival of Conchita and her mother was passed from mouth to ear with the speed

of light and despite all the orders of absolute secrecy that I had given to all, we had to introduce Conchita and her mother in a room at the restaurant. A double row of people, in profound silence and admiration, hemmed us in.

Afterwards, Conchita confided to me that she had been embarrassed to death.

Padre Pio's Message

After dinner our Italian friends hurried to lead us to the hospital. Conchita prudently suggested that she not be left alone but that someone stay with her at all times. I promised to be a vigilant observer. Then we proceeded to the hospital.

Two Capuchin Fathers and a religious led us to the sick room. They entered first followed by Conchita and her mother and then me. My friend, Bernard, decided to stay with the others on the landing in the passageway.

These are the places we occupied in the hospital room. Conchita on the patient's left, Aniceta, Conchita's mother, at the foot of the bed a little toward the side, and I myself at the foot of the bed. Behind us were the Capuchin Fathers and the religious.

From my point of observation, which was excellent, this is what I saw and heard. Luigina, the patient, although in a great deal of pain (an enormous ballooning of the stomach which made me think of peritonitis), showed great joy upon seeing Conchita. She embraced her affectionately. There followed an exchange of greetings and a few words about the state of her health. But it was brief. Luigina (Gina) explained that through Professor (Enrico) Medi at San

Giovanni, she had been given a message for Conchita from Padre Pio. This message, full of peace and comfort, had been dictated to Father Pellegrino by Padre Pio at San Giovanni Rotondo before his death. She directed the religious to look in her purse and from the bag I saw her take out two envelopes. On the first was written, "Through Father Pellegrino to Professor Medi." On the second envelope it said, "To be sent to Conchita through Gina."

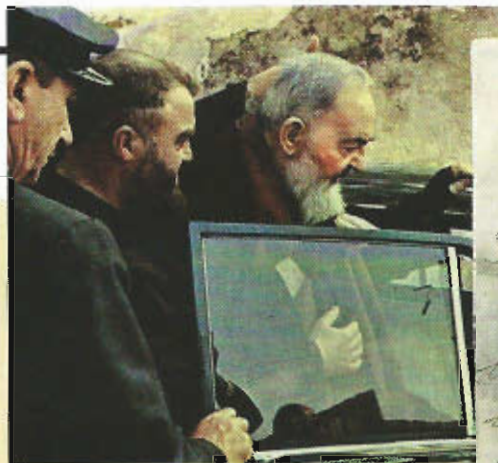
From the second envelope she took out a sheet on which was handwritten a short message of five or six lines that she handed publicly to Conchita who held it in her hands for a moment. Not understanding Italian, the language in which this message was written, it was impossible to certify exactly the contents of those few lines. That which I *did* understand without question is that Padre Pio assured Conchita of his prayers and the offering of his suffering and he sent her his most paternal blessing.

After a moment, I saw a Capuchin priest approach Gina. She gave him a sheet of paper. He went to the window, carrying the sheet by the corner. I saw him photograph the text of the message.

Evidently it would be relatively easy for the Sacred Congregation to have the exact text of the message through Father Pellegrino of San Giovanni Rotondo.

I couldn't help but notice Conchita's joy and emotion upon receiving the message from Padre Pio. As for Aniceta, like myself, she had missed nothing. She observed carefully the whole time.

To authenticate her mission, Luigina asked the religious to locate another, bigger briefcase. She took from this several "relics" of Padre Pio: the corporal from his last Mass, a handkerchief which was used



Padre Pellegrino was constantly with Padre Pio during his last years and wrote the note right, on behalf of Padre Pio, for Conchita.

to dry his eyes, a dressing from his wounds and the veil (a piece of netting about 20 x 27 inches) which covered the face of Padre Pio after his death.

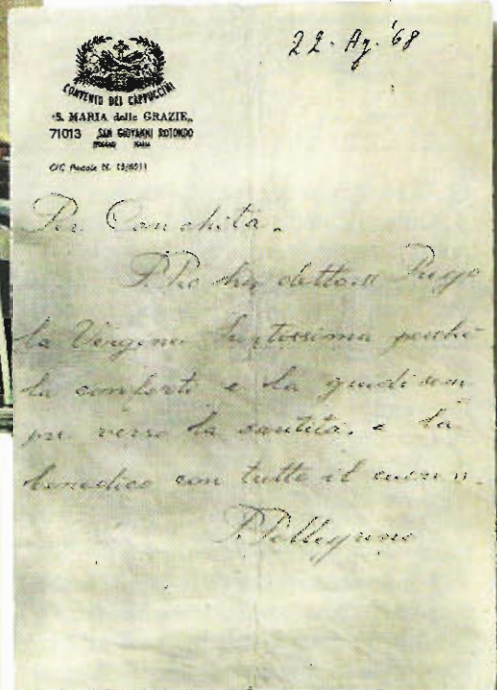
This last one the ill woman gave to Conchita to guard as a precious memento. She accepted it with piety and veneration.

Then Luigina asked that she be allowed to speak to Conchita alone for a few minutes. We were then brought back into the room and said our good-byes.

The ill woman appeared perfectly rational to me with complete confidence in the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She assured Conchita of her prayers and the offering of her cross.

It was already 3:40 p.m. We had to let our dear Italian friends know that we were pressed for time. In fact, Conchita and Aniceta wanted to take part in the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament on the basilica esplanade which started at 4:30 p.m. We had just enough time for Mass. □

The veil that covered Padre Pio's face was given to Conchita at Lourdes.



the visit taken from the NEEDLES 1975 interview:

...We all agreed and drove in Professor Medi's rented car to the monastery. We arrived around nine o'clock in the evening and were told we could not see Padre Pio until the next morning at his five o'clock Mass.

Before Mass, Father Luna and the professor went into the sacristy. Professor Medi later told me what happened there. He said that Father Luna told Padre Pio that the princess from Spain was there to see him. Padre Pio said to Father Luna: "I don't feel very well and won't be able to see her till later on in the day." Then Professor Medi said, "There's another lady who wants to see you. Conchita wants to see you." Padre Pio asked, "Conchita of Garabandal?" The Professor answered, "Yes." Padre Pio then said, "Come at eight o'clock this morning."

When we arrived we were brought into a small room, a cell, which had one bed, a chair, and a small table. I asked Padre Pio

if this were his room and whether he slept here or not, and he replied, "Oh no, you cannot see my room. This is a rich room." At the time I did not realize what a holy man Padre Pio was, as I know him to be now. I was very young at the time. I was only 16.

The NEEDLES interview continues:

Q. Who was in the room with you?

A. Only my mother, Father Luna, and a priest from the monastery who spoke Spanish and was taking many pictures. I don't remember the princess and the professor being in the room.

Q. Can you tell us what was said during your visit with Padre Pio?

A. I remember only a little. I do remember that the priest who was taking the pictures asked permission from Padre Pio and Padre Pio replied, "You have been taking them since you came in."

I remember I had the crucifix kissed by Our Lady, and I said to Padre Pio, "This is the cross kissed by the Blessed Mother. Would you bless it?" He then took the crucifix kissed by Our Lady and placed it in the palm of his left hand, over the stigmata. Then he took my hand and placed it in his palm, closing his fingers over my hand, and with his right hand he blessed my hand and the cross. He did the same for my mother when she asked him, "Would you please bless this rosary which was kissed by the Virgin?" I was kneeling in front of him the whole time I was there. He started holding my hand with the cross while he was talking to me.

The priest who took the pictures of Conchita with Padre Pio is still living at San Giovanni Rotondo. He was here in the United States several years ago promoting Padre Pio's Cause and visited Conchita at her home. Because the Cause is now in progress, the friars are reluctant to release copies of the pictures apparently because the Garabandal apparitions have not yet been recognized by the Church. The pictures were again mentioned by another one of the friars of San Giovanni who saw them and said as much to one of our magazine staff members who was on the 1987 pilgrimage sponsored by the New York Garabandal Center during the tour stop at the monastery. Needless to say, these photos are important documents that verify Conchita's meeting with Padre Pio.

Padre Pio and the Miracle

Padre Pio's involvement in the Garabandal events culminated in his being granted a privilege that only one other

Testimonies

Joey Lomangino

Of all the testimonies of Padre Pio and Garabandal, the one that was to have the greatest impact on the Garabandal movement was that of Joey Lomangino, founder of The Workers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. In fact, it was only because of Padre Pio that Joey became involved in Garabandal.

IN 1947, JOEY WAS A competent young man of 16 who helped his father on his truck route of delivering ice and coal in the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn, New York. On June 27 of that year, he noticed one of the truck tires needed air. He took the tire off the truck and rolled it a few blocks to a gas station. As he knelt down putting air in the tire, it exploded, propelling the rim directly into his face. Unconscious and bleeding from the deep three inch gash, he was rushed to the hospital where he remained in a coma until the following month. Then on July 16, feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, he regained consciousness to the blindness he has known ever since. His optic and olfactory nerves had been severed. Not only was he blind but he had no sense of smell. And there was no cure, at least not from a human point of view.

After attending the New York Institute for the Blind and one year at St. John's University, Joey, along with three of his brothers, was given the opportunity to revive a defunct sanitation company in Farmingdale Long Island, New York. They

worked hard and the company came back to life, eventually developing into a thriving business.

By 1961, Joey was financially secure but all the preoccupations of running the business had worn him out. He needed some time off so his doctor suggested he take a vacation. He decided to go to Europe with his sister, Frances, and cousin, Carl. The last stop on their itinerary was a visit to their Uncle Frank in Bari, southern Italy.

Joey was not practicing his religion very much in those days so when his uncle suggested they take a ride to see Padre Pio at San Giovanni Rotondo, Joey wasn't interested. It was actually Joey's mother, Sophie, who had written to her brother, Frank, asking him to take Joey to see Padre Pio, and Frank wasn't about to let his sister down. He insisted, and Joey, realizing the hospitality he was being given by his

uncle, couldn't very well refuse.

At three o'clock in the morning, Joey was suddenly awakened from a deep sleep. It was Uncle Frank. "Get up! We have to be there in time for the 5:00 a.m. Mass." What? Five o'clock Mass? Joey could hardly believe it but managed to get dressed and piled into the car with his uncle, sister and cousin for the long drive to San Giovanni.

He didn't understand much of the Latin coming from the loudspeakers in the church as Padre Pio said the Mass but he sensed something special in the priest's voice. He couldn't put his finger on it but



Joey today and, right, before the accident.



there was definitely something there.

After the Mass, Joey's uncle took him upstairs to a large room through which Padre Pio always passed. This room was usually filled with men, after the morning Mass, who were there to receive Padre Pio's blessing as he passed through their midst. Joey and his uncle were among the last ones to enter the room and stood at the back, just inside the door. Joey recounts his experience.

As Padre Pio came into the room we all knelt down to receive his blessing. Padre Pio was coming from the left hand side of the room across the front. All of a sudden I heard the moving of knees and all; I didn't know what was going on. Padre Pio had his arms around me and started kissing me on the forehead. He said, "Joey, I am so happy to see you." When my uncle told me it was Padre Pio embracing me, I was at a loss for words because I was almost the last one in the room and no-

body knew I was going to be there, not even myself!

Joey was deeply impressed. How did Padre Pio know his name? He was dumbfounded and knew he had to go back again.

He was not able to return in 1962 but the following year, he and his friend, Mario Covais, planned the trip. They would spend part of their vacation at San Giovanni and the rest in a small Spanish mountain village called San Sebastian de Garabandal where Our Lady was reported to be appearing. Going to Garabandal was Mario's idea.

One of the things people did when they went to San Giovanni was go to confession to Padre Pio, so Joey had his name added to the list. He could never have imagined what was about to happen to him when his turn came.

I went into the confessional, and knelt down on the kneeling bench. Padre Pio was sitting right in front of me. When



Conchita's crucifix kissed by Our Lady and blessed by Padre Pio.

person had been granted. Padre Pio saw the great Miracle before he died. [On the night of August 8, 1961, Father Luis Andreu, S.J., saw a preview of the Miracle while observing the visionaries in ecstasy at the pine grove on a bluff overlooking the village of Garabandal. He died on the way home the following morning.]

One of the prophecies to come from Our Lady at Garabandal regarding the Miracle was that the Holy Father would see it from wherever he was and *Padre Pio would see it too*. When the famous stigmatist died in September, 1968, Conchita was perplexed as to why the prophecy apparently hadn't come true. One month later her mind was put at ease and she was given a precious souvenir, a memento of Padre Pio as explained below.

On October 16, 1968, Conchita received a telegram from Lourdes which bore the name of a woman from Rome whom Conchita knew. The telegram requested that Conchita go to Lourdes to receive a letter addressed to her from Padre Pio. Father Alfred Combe and Bernard L'Huillier of France were in the village at the time and consented to drive Conchita and her mother to Lourdes. They left that very night. In the rush, Conchita forgot her passport. When they got to the border, they were detained six hours, and only due to the granting of a special passport signed by the Military Governor of Irun, were they able to cross over into France.

At Lourdes they met Padre Pio's emissaries from Italy among whom was Father Bernardino Cennamo, O.F.M. Fr. Cennamo was not actually from San Giovanni but from another monastery. He was, however, well known by Padre Pio and Padre Pellegrino, the latter being the one who looked after Padre Pio during his final

(continued next page)



Joey offers a statue of the Infant Jesus to Padre Pio to be blessed.

(continued from page 15)

years and who transcribed the note which appears on page 13 that had been dictated by Padre Pio for Conchita.

Father Cennamo told Conchita that he did not believe in the apparitions of Garabandal until Padre Pio told him to give her the veil that would cover his face after his death. The note and the veil were given to Conchita. She then asked Father Cennamo, "How is it that the Virgin told me Padre Pio was supposed to see the Miracle and he has died?" He answered, "He saw the Miracle before he died. He told me so himself."

When Conchita returned home from Lourdes she decided to write about the whole incident to a friend in Madrid. Once again we quote Conchita from the 1975 NEEDLES interview:

...I had the veil in front of me as I was writing when suddenly the whole room became filled with a fragrance. I had

heard of the fragrances of Padre Pio but never paid much attention. The room smelled of perfume so strongly that I started to cry. It was the first time I had experienced this. All this happened after he was dead.

As already mentioned Padre Pio's Cause for Beatification is in progress and it seems almost certain that one day he will be canonized a saint. Many hope it will come soon. It also seems certain Padre Pio will go down in Church history as one of the greatest figures of the modern era, a man unparalleled in his time. It is not without significance that this extraordinary son of St. Francis so devoted to Our Lady* who labored so long and arduously in God's vineyard for the good of souls should be irrevocably linked to the apparitions of Garabandal. □

*Padre Pio attributed all the graces he received to Our Lady and said an impossible number of rosaries each day, as many as 40 (of 15 decades) or more. It has been said that once when asked how he could do this he replied that for him, God made time stand still.

Rome, 1966: (left to right) Father Luis Luna, Conchita, the secretary to Princess Cecile Bourbon Parma and Conchita's mother (Aniceta).



Testimonies

(continued from page 15)

he took me by the hand I was shocked because I thought of the American confessional with the panel. [Editor's note: Joey is referring to the kind of confessional where the penitent is separated from the confessor priest by a screen.]

As I knelt there with Padre Pio holding on to my hand, he said to me in Italian, "Joey, confess yourself." To be very honest with you, I was embarrassed because I wasn't leading the right life. I was flabbergasted and did not know just what to say. So Padre Pio took me by the hand again and said, "Confess yourself." And again, I just found it very difficult to speak to him. Then in perfect English he said to me "Joey, do you remember when you were in a bar with a woman named Barbara, do you remember the sins you committed?" And in perfect English he went right down the line telling me the people I was with, the places I was at and the sins I committed. Of course, I was perspiring, but I had the grace through God to realize that if I had to endure all that to get back to being happy, it was worth it. I really believed that Father Pio could help me.

When he came to the bottom of all my sins, and it felt to me like a thousand years, he said in Italian, "Are you sorry?" And I said, "Yes I am, Padre." Then as he gave me absolution for my sins my eyes started to roll in my head. I started to rub my eyes and my head kept going around and I kept rubbing my eyes and my head kept going around and around. Then all of a sudden, my mind became very, very clear. Padre Pio put his stigmatized hand to my lips and I kissed the stigmata. Then he gave me a little smack on the face and said in Italian, "Joey, a little patience and a little courage and you're going to be all right." I was 33 years old and I felt I was 16. I had a firm purpose of amendment; I was sorry for all the sins I committed in my life. I felt so good and so clean

that I didn't want to get involved with anybody because I was afraid that just by talking, I was going to lose the grace I received.

But there was still more in store for Joey Lomangino on this fateful trip. After Mass on one of the following mornings, he again found himself in the large room where he had first encountered Padre Pio in 1961. He knelt with the other men to receive the Padre's blessing as he passed by.

When I had my injury in 1947, I not only lost my eyes but I lost my sense of smell. So when I knelt down to receive Padre Pio's blessing, and got the fragrance of roses that came from the wounds in his hands, I was startled and went against the wall with my arms up to protect myself; I didn't know what it was. Padre Pio pulled down my hand and said in Italian, "Joey,



Joey receiving Communion from Padre Pio.

don't be afraid." He then touched me on the bridge of my nose and my sense of smell was restored to me after being without it from the day of my accident in June, 1947, which was 16 years.

Joey was overwhelmed with peace and joy and had no desire to leave San Giovanni. So when Mario reminded him of their agreement to spend part of their vacation in Garabandal, Joey hesitated.

"Mario, how do we know it's true? Maybe it's not a true apparition; maybe it's a trick of the devil to make me lose the graces I just received. Let's go ask Padre Pio." So Mario said "OK." Of

course, we were always given a wonderful reception by the priests at Padre Pio's so when I asked if it would be OK to speak to Padre Pio, the priest said, "Oh yes, Joe."

We made arrangements to come back again that same day and greeted Padre Pio in the cloister. When we knelt down, we said to him, "Padre Pio, is it true that the Virgin is appearing to the four girls of Garabandal?" And he said, "Yes." We said, "Padre Pio, should we go there?" He said, "Yes, why not?" And that's how it happened. Because I received the assurance from Padre Pio that the Virgin was appearing and that he permitted me to go, then I wasn't afraid and I went.

The rest of Joey's story is now history (see GARABANDAL Magazine, Special Edition "Joey's Story," page 23.) and it all came about through the intercession of Padre Pio. □

Joachim Bouflet

Joachim Bouflet was born in Paris in 1948. His father was French and his mother, German. He received his Ph.D. in History at the University of Paris (Sorbonne) in 1972. After teaching for 10 years, he entered the field of spirituality specializing in the study of stigmatized persons and apparitions, and has authored books dealing with those subjects. He is a personal friend of recently appointed French bishops and is a consultant to the postulators of causes for persons being considered for beatification. He is a Third Order Carmelite.

Translated from French by Helen Roseluk

IN JULY OF 1968, I HAD INVITED FOUR OF my friends—like me, students at the Sorbonne—to come and spend ten days at my family's home in Germany (my mother's family is German). We were all about 20 years old and, being active in the Catholic students' movement at the university, we asked ourselves about our future which for some of us would eventually be a religious vocation. For some years I had hoped to enter the Order of Carmelite Fathers, while one of our group, the product of a totally agnostic environment, was hesitating to reveal her choice of a religious life to her parents (soon afterwards, she joined the

Sisters of Bethlehem). These points indicate the atmosphere in which we found ourselves; we spoke often of religion and while in the enchanting surroundings of the Lake Constance region, we added to our relaxation the pleasure of a life rhythmically punctuated with religious practice, the recitation of the Holy Office and meditation.

One of our group, Janine, was severely physically disabled. One day, in the course of conversation, she shared with us a wish: that someone would go in her name to see Padre Pio and ask him to pray for her. She was unable to go to see him, not so much because of her handicap, but because her mother, a non-believer, was radically opposed to it.

I volunteered to go in her place. At the end of our stay in Germany, I decided to hitchhike—by cutting across Austria I thought it would be easy. And so, having spent time with my family, I set off in mid-August. It proved to be quite easy from the very beginning because a bus full of pilgrims bound for San Damiano [site of alleged

apparitions] picked me up and took me all the way there (San Damiano) in one stretch. I was acquainted with the place, having been there before, but it didn't attract me very much. Nevertheless, I took advantage of the pilgrimage which was going there for August 15th.

Providentially, at San Damiano I met another student, Lonlou, quite an extraordinary woman of about fifty, an ex-cloistered nun, who was studying Russian. When I told her of my intention to hitchhike to San Giovanni Rotondo, she declared she would accompany me and that she would not let me wander alone on the roads of southern Italy (to hear her speak one would think it was a land full of danger, a den of brigands and

murderers), and that she would be useful to me since she spoke Italian, while I knew only a few words.

I liked this idea and on August 16 we set off. Three days later, much to our delight although totally exhausted, we arrived at San Giovanni Rotondo. I had only one thought—to meet Padre Pio.



Joachim Bouflet

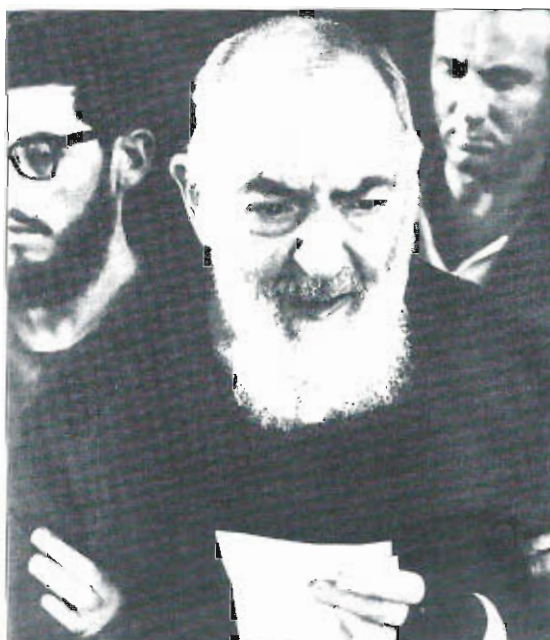
Once there, I became disillusioned. It was not as easy as I had imagined. To tell the truth, it was even impossible. The holy priest, quite old and frail, hardly ever received visitors any more and the waiting list for the few confessions he still heard had been pretty well full for some time. But I would at least have the grace to attend his Mass and to see him with the other men in the sacristy. When that happened, it overwhelmed me so much that I was transported with joy. I left a small note with the porter for Padre Pio explaining the reason for my coming. They assured me that all requests were delivered to him.

In the afternoon of August 23, I went to the little church of Our Lady of Grace. There were only two or three persons there; the others were only passing through. A young Capuchin approached me asking me something in Italian. I couldn't understand him but from his gestures I understood what he wanted of me, that I help him carry a large pasteboard statue of Saint Louis, King of France. He took the statue by the head while I took the base and we went through a side door into a cloister.

A short distance away, in the shade under the arcade, sat Padre Pio in an easy chair. He seemed to be dozing. I was filled with emotion at finding myself so close to him. But the young priest was pulling me and so, carrying the statue, we went into the new church where we placed the Saint's image beside the altar. While draping the supporting stand with a piece of cloth and arranging vases of flowers, the young Capuchin explained to me slowly, in order to make himself understood, that St. Louis was a third-order Franciscan, that they were celebrating his feast day on the evening of the next day (Vigil) and that it was right that it was specifically me, a Frenchman, who had helped him. I guessed, more than understood what he was saying, since my Italian was very limited. Finally I asked him how to get back to the little chapel of Our Lady of Grace. With a gesture he indicated the door we had just used and I returned to the cloister to make the return trip.

To be so close to Padre Pio! An opportunity like this would never come again! I bolted across the garden of the cloister and fell at his feet. He seemed surprised. At the same time, two

Capuchins rushed out, crying unintelligible words. Padre Pio made a sign to them with his gloved hand and they were silent but stayed nearby. Then he gazed at me severely but I am sure there was amusement in his eyes. He put his hand on my head (I was kneeling in front of him) and he said a few words to me. The two monks retreated some distance. I listened to Padre Pio who kept his hand on my head. I understood perfectly what he said to me. I confessed my sins, he responded, commenting on what I had disclosed and



Padre Pio in his final years.

then I was given the overwhelming experience of the charism attributed to him, that of his knowledge of hearts. I felt a profound peace and a profound anguish. I don't know how long this exchange lasted. Finally, he told me, "Pray to the Madonna. Consecrate yourself to the Virgin of Carmel."

"Yes, Padre, I pray to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. For that matter, I would like to become a Carmelite."

He didn't comment on this but repeated with insistence, "Consecrate yourself to the Virgin of Carmel who appeared at Garabandal."

I was somewhat dumbfounded. I had vaguely heard about the events of Garabandal but I didn't attach the importance to them that Padre Pio's insistence suggested. I asked, "The apparitions at Garabandal?"

He told me clearly, "Yes. So then con-

secrate yourself to the Virgin of Carmel who appeared at Garabandal."

"So it's true?"

"Yes, it's true (*certo e vero!*)"

Then he said two or three personal things to me. And as I was asking for his blessing before getting up, he concluded, "And tell Janine that it's all right and that I am praying for her."

I had completely forgotten why I had come to San Giovanni Rotondo! With his supernatural delicacy the Padre was reminding me. What confusion! Then I received his blessing and got up. He looked at me seriously then closed his eyes.

The two Capuchins, who had remained at a distance, escorted me to the little church of Our Lady of Grace. They amused themselves by jostling me and scolding me. I wondered whether they were serious or not but to tell the truth, it mattered little to me.

Once in the chapel, I broke into tears. I wept for joy. A little later my friend, Loulou, arrived. She took me outside and said, "So it seems you were able to see Padre Pio!"

As my surprise was obvious, she cut in, "I see that you're not used to this. Around here, everything is known to all within a quarter of an hour."

It wasn't long before I found out for myself. By the end of the afternoon, I had to face the curious interrogations of numerous pilgrims. I

was ill at ease especially when I voiced the opinion that perhaps Padre Pio had only a little time left to suffer here, below—it's a very distinct impression I had when I was with him. It was as if I had uttered a blasphemy, as if the people were persuaded that the holy padre was immortal or some such thing. I decided to leave the next day and Loulou concurred.

In the evening I wrote down Padre Pio's words (in Italian) which I remembered exactly. I left San Giovanni Rotondo on August 24, 1968. Padre Pio was called by Our Lord one month to the day after I had seen him.

Such is the account of my meeting with the Servant of God and the exact tenor of his suggestions with regard to the events of Garabandal. □

JOACHIM BOUFLET
Paris, May 16, 1997

(continued from page 9)

Giovanni Rotondo. It was the first time I had been back there since 1935. There were five of us, two adults with three small children and things were rough. My husband did not believe in Padre Pio at that time.

It was 1957 and I took my oldest son for his first Communion. It was to be in the little church back then, and all the people were waiting and trying to squeeze in to hear. We managed to get my youngest son, Michael, in. My aunt passed him to one of the young friars. As Padre Pio passed by, my aunt said, "Padre Pio, this is Michel- ucho (little Michael)."

All Padre Pio did was put his hand on Michael's back and said, "Ah! So this is the famous little Michael."

Michael had had a hole in his lung. We returned home and the hole no longer existed. To me, that's a miracle.

Because of all these experiences, we have been going to San Giovanni every year and with the help of God we will continue to do so.

Mayor Pio Iandanza

I first met Padre Pio in 1947 at the age of three. Actually he knew me before then. My mother was four months pregnant with me and my father requested his prayers for the child to be born. Padre Pio assured them of his prayers and even told them the name to give me which was Pio.

Another time when my mother was pregnant, my father again went to San Giovanni Rotondo to ask for Padre Pio's prayers. He answered in our dialect, "Boy, this time get ready for two." Then after reflecting for a moment he added, "They will be good sisters but will have to suffer." The twin girls were born and did become nuns, one in the Congregation of the Precious Blood and the other an Ursuline.

In 1954, my father was a candidate for mayor of the town (Pietrelcina). Padre Pio encouraged him to run so he thought he would win. As it turned out, he was not elected and people ridiculed him. He returned to San Giovanni Rotondo and lamented to Padre Pio saying, "Padre, why did you reserve this humiliation for me?" Padre Pio replied, "My boy, you can run for mayor a hundred times but you will never be mayor of Pietrelcina. Your son one day will be." I did not know of this until after my being elected. My mother knew of it but she didn't tell me. □

Meditations

Garabandal

In your suffering, you will find Me. I will be with whomever suffers for Me.

Empty your heart of the worldly things that prevent you from listening to God.

Do not be concerned about temptations. If you remain faithful to My love, you will overcome numerous temptations that await you.

The Blessed Virgin told me that Jesus is not going to send the chastisement to discourage us, but to help us and to reprimand us for not heeding Him.

She said that we should think more on the Passion of Jesus. This would bring us close to the happiness of God and we would accept our crosses with joy and for the love of God.

Love humility, simplicity. Every soul that remains disposed to hear Me shall know what My will is.

If you ask His forgiveness with sincere hearts, He will pardon you. Pray with sincerity.

Padre Pio

You are suffering, it is true. Fear not, because God is with you. Believe that Jesus Himself suffers in you and for you.

Do not worry over things that generate preoccupation, derangement and anxiety. One thing only is necessary: to lift up your spirit and love God.

Stop entertaining those vain fears. Remember that it is not feeling that constitutes guilt, but the consent to such feelings. If the soul would know the merit which one acquires in temptations suffered in patience and conquered, it would say: "Lord, send me temptations."

Thank and sweetly kiss the hand of God that strikes, because it is always the hand of a Father who strikes you because He loves you.

Jesus chooses souls for Himself and among these, in spite of my unworthiness, He has chosen me to assist Him in the great work of the salvation of men. And the more these souls suffer, the more they lighten the sufferings of Jesus. This is why I desire to suffer more and more, and it is in this that I find my joy.

In the measure in which you will be empty of yourself, that is, of the love of the body and your self-will and will keep on rooting yourself in holy humility, the Lord will keep on communicating Himself to your heart. The sublime degree of humility is not only to recognize one's own abjection, but to love it.

Even conceded that you had committed all the sins of this world, Jesus repeats to you: "Many sins are forgiven thee because thou hast loved much." You must speak to Jesus also with the heart, besides the lips.