

# **The Miracles of St. Padre Pio**

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A woman carrying a suitcase got in line with the other ladies waiting to confess to Padre Pio. He was, by now, famous for the many wonders obtained by his prayers and intercession. When her turn came, she opened the suitcase in front of the well known priest and burst into tears. In the suitcase, along with the clothing, was the body of a little boy about six months old. She had traveled to San Giovanni Rotondo, the home of Padre Pio, with the intent of asking him to heal her sick son. On the way, the boy died. However, with immense faith, the grieving woman put the infant into the suitcase and continued her journey.

As the poor hysterical mother screamed in desperation, Padre Pio took the little boy's body in his arms and prayed for a few moments. Then he said authoritatively to the mother, "But why are you yelling so much? Don't you see that your child is sleeping?" The woman stopped her shouting to find that her little boy was breathing normally — sleeping tranquilly. A baby was raised from the dead — a miracle.

## **Miracles and Their Purpose**

One of Padre Pio's closest friends estimated that he witnessed more than one thousand miraculous cures over the years of his association with the saint. At least another thousand are attributed to Padre Pio's intercession after his death. However, before we can discuss Padre Pio as a worker of miracles, we need to know three things. First, what is a supernatural miracle? Second, how does it differ from the so-called "miracles" of medicine, science, technology, etc.? [1] Third, what is the purpose of miracles?

St. Thomas Aquinas defined a miracle as an effect produced by God in the bodily universe, outside the order of created nature. According to *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1911 edition) miracles occur as "evidences attesting and confirming the truth of a divine mission, or of a doctrine of faith or morals...." Therefore, a supernatural miracle is an event that occurs outside of the normal course of nature, often violating or superceding the natural laws. Miracles can give the divine stamp of authority to the mission of a man chosen by God and always serve as a testament to the soundness of one or more doctrines of the Catholic Faith. Or, as Cardinal Pie (a famous nineteenth century defender of the Faith) once said, "Now for the conversion of the people the thaumaturgus [miracle worker] is more powerful than the teacher; and, consequently, in the memory and worship of the people, the teacher is eclipsed and effaced by the thaumaturgus."

Our Lord promised that miracles would testify to the truth of His Gospel (Mk. 16:17-18). After this promise of His, we are told: "But they going forth preached everywhere: the

Lord working with them, and *confirming the word with signs that followed*" (Mk. 16:20). St. Paul uses the argument from miracles when he relates of the Apostles that: "God [was] bearing them witness by signs and wonders and diverse miracles and distributions of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will" (Heb. 2:4). The argument from miracles is found also in the writings of the Fathers. Chapters 8 to 10 of Book XXII of St. Augustine's *City of God* are a good example of this.

God suspends the laws of His own making in order to testify to the supernatural origin of His Church. All the miracles of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina are, therefore, proofs of the divine origin of the Catholic Faith.

### **The Miraculous Cures of Padre Pio**

With more than a thousand miraculous cures obtained through Padre Pio's intercession, we can do no more than consider a few of them. There is the case of Gemma di Giorgio, the little girl who was born blind, having no pupils in her eyes. After her visit with Padre Pio, she miraculously gained her sight. The continuing miracle was that, although she could now see, her eyes remained without pupils.

One Signora Massari had been stone deaf for twenty years. After asking for a cure through the intercession of Padre Pio, she suddenly began to hear the priest chanting during the Mass. As she left the church, she heard the bells tolling for the first time in two decades. Excitedly, she informed her companion of the cure. Two years later they visited San Giovanni, the home of Padre Pio, and relayed what had happened. Signora Massari had perfect hearing from the day she heard the priest at Mass until the day she died.

In 1919, a priest brought his friend, a Jew named Lello Pegna, to visit Padre Pio. Pegna was totally blind. The priest had evidently brought him to San Giovanni Rotondo in the hopes of a cure. Although Padre Pio was kind to Pegna, he said, "The Lord will not grant you the grace of physical sight unless you first receive sight for your soul. After you are baptized, then the Lord will give you your sight." Some months later, a grateful, newly baptized Pegna returned. He explained that, against the wishes of his family, he was baptized into the Catholic Faith. Gradually, over several months, his sight was fully restored. He continued to keep in touch with the friary and, thirty years later, his sight remained perfect.

More dramatic were the events surrounding Giovanni Savino. He and his wife, Rosa, became devoted spiritual children of Padre Pio. In February, 1949, Giovanni was working on an addition to the friary at San Giovanni Rotondo — Padre Pio's residence. One day, after Mass, Padre Pio blessed him as was customary, but suddenly embraced him exclaiming, "Courage, Giovanni, I'm praying to the Lord that you might not be killed." Padre Pio repeated this unnerving warning for the next two days. The day following the third warning, February 15, Giovanni and another worker had placed a charge of dynamite under a boulder. When the fuse failed to ignite the charge, Giovanni went over to see what the problem was. The dynamite blew up in his face, which was badly mangled. His left eye was filled with "many foreign bodies" and his right eye was

nothing but a "bloody pulp." The doctors felt that they could save his left eye, but determined that nothing could be done for the right one that had been destroyed.

Padre Pio asked everyone to pray for Savino. He exposed the Blessed Sacrament and prayed before It for three days. The friar was even heard to offer one of his eyes for the return of Giovanni's sight "because he's the father of a family." On the morning of February 25, Savino smelled a sweet fragrance (a frequent accompaniment to the action of Padre Pio's intervention). He felt three slaps on his forehead and understood it to be Padre Pio next to his bed. Later that morning the ophthalmologist came to examine his left eye — the one he felt he could save. Suddenly Savino exclaimed that he could see. When the doctor asked him to turn his head so that Giovanni could see him with his left eye, Giovanni exclaimed that it was his *right* eye he could see with. The doctor insisted that the right one had been totally destroyed and that he must be mistaken. However, there was no mistake. Giovanni had completely regained the sight in his right eye, although it remained nothing but "a mess" until his death twenty-five years later at the age of sixty. The left eye never recovered. *Giovanni Savino literally saw without eyes.* The ophthalmologist, who was an atheist at the time, converted to the Catholic Faith "because," he said, "this has happened right in front of me."

A characteristic of many of the miraculous cures effected through Padre Pio's intercession was that the damaged organ would remain damaged, but would begin to function perfectly after his intervention. In a sense, these cures became long term miracles — on-going testimonies to the Catholic Faith, God's Particular Providence, and the veracity of Padre Pio's message of prayer and suffering for the salvation of souls.

### **Padre Pio's Stigmata and Miraculous Conversions**

Undeniably the most famous of the miracles associated with Padre Pio was his stigmata; he bore the wounds of Christ in his hands, feet and side. With the possible exception of St. Paul (see Gal. 6:17), he was the first priest in history to bear the stigmata. He manifested these divine wounds for fifty years — from 1918 until shortly before his death in 1968. A few months before he died the wounds gradually disappeared, leaving no scars — in fact, no trace at all. Only the wounds of the hands were still slightly visible a few moments before his death. Within ten minutes after he died, the examining physician, Dr. Sala, ordered that the hands, feet and side of Padre Pio be photographed. Not a trace of any of the wounds remained, although the wounds of the hands were visible just moments before.

The friar was examined on several occasions and no satisfactory physical explanation could be given for the wounds. The stigmata were not like normal wounds or lesions: they would not heal. This was not due to any medical condition, for he had undergone surgery twice (once for a hernia repair and once to remove a cyst from his neck) and the cuts healed with the usual scarring. In the 1950s, blood was drawn for other medical reasons, and his blood work was entirely normal. The only abnormal thing about his blood was the fragrant aroma which accompanied that emanating from his stigmata.

The wounds were not merely visual representations of the wounds of Christ. Padre Pio suffered continual pain from the stigmata — at times it was agonizing. He could not close his hands completely. He walked haltingly and with difficulty. During his last years, he spent much of his time in a wheel chair. The pain varied and was particularly intense on Thursdays and Fridays, and during Passion Week. Once, when asked if the wounds hurt he replied, "Do you think the Good Lord gave them to me for decoration?" And when certain people suggested that the stigmata were caused by too much concentration on Christ's Passion, he replied, "Go out to the fields and look very closely at a bull. Concentrate on him with all your might and see if you start to grow horns." He bore the wounds joyfully, considering it the highest privilege to share in the sufferings of Christ for the salvation of souls.

Over the years, countless thousands of people visited the stigmatist. Although he became famous for the many miraculous cures that were effected through his intercession, cures were not always to be had. But one thing was certain for all visitors: Padre Pio always bore the stigmata. For all that came — devout Catholics, curious spectators, agnostics, rationalists, even Masons, Jews, and other enemies of the Faith — Padre Pio was there to behold as a living icon of Our Lord's Passion, a living miracle.

Many non-Catholics who came to visit simply out of morbid curiosity were miraculously converted. One such skeptic was Frederico Abresch. He was born into a Lutheran family but married a Catholic. After they married, as an accommodation to his wife, he converted to Catholicism for a time. Soon he fell away and became a very anti-Catholic Theosophist. Having heard about the priest with the wounds of Christ and out of a skeptical curiosity, he decided to visit Padre Pio. In Abresch's own words, here is what happened:

"It was not I, but Father Pio who spoke. He told me of certain grave sins I had committed in my previous confessions and asked if I had been in good faith. I said in reply that I thought confession was good 'psychologically' but that I did not believe in the divinity of the Sacrament. But, deeply moved by the fact that he had read my past life, I exclaimed: 'Now, however, I do believe!'

" 'These are all heresies,' he said, with an atmosphere of great pain. 'All your communions have been sacrileges. You must make a general confession. Make your examination of conscience and try to remember when you last made a sincere confession. Jesus has been more merciful with you than He was with Judas.' He dismissed me with the words: 'Jesus and Mary be praised.' My head was in a turmoil. I kept hearing those words over and over again: 'Remember when you last made a sincere confession.' "

Abresch spent some time making a detailed examination of conscience of his whole life. When he returned to the confessional, Padre Pio asked, "When did you last make a good confession?"

"Father, as I happened to be..."

Padre Pio interrupted him, "Yes, you made a good confession that time when you were returning from your wedding trip; let us leave out all the rest and begin from there."

"I was struck dumb with the overwhelming realization that I had come in contact with the supernatural. Then, concealing his knowledge of my entire past under the form of questions, he enumerated with precision and clarity all of my mortal sins. He made me understand, with most impressive words, the whole of their gravity, adding in a tone of voice that I shall never forget:

" 'You have launched a hymn to Satan, whereas Jesus, in His tremendous love has broken Himself for you.' He then gave me a penance and absolved me. But to further emphasize the prodigious thing that happened to me... and which, of course, only I could tell... may I repeat that it was impossible for Father Pio to know that I had made that wedding journey, and that the confession that I had made on my return was indeed a good one. It actually did happen just as he said. The day after we returned from the trip my wife expressed the desire that we should both approach the Sacraments. I complied with her wish. I went to confession to the same priest who had prepared me to be a Catholic before the wedding. Knowing I was a novice, little accustomed to such things, he had helped me with many questions... and that is why I had made a good confession....

"To complete this story of my conversion: From that day to this I have been to daily Mass and Communion. Both my wife and I have become Franciscan tertiaries. Not only do I believe in the dogmas of the Catholic Church, but in everything she teaches *[i]c*. And I would not lose this faith without also losing my life."

Among the many others who were miraculously converted was Emmanuele Brunatto, a faithless ne'er-do-well, who squandered his money on high living and women. After having a very impressive dream involving his deceased father, he decided to visit the stigmatic priest. Brunatto made the last part of the journey on foot — a ten-hour walk — because he did not have enough to pay for the bus fare to San Giovanni Rotondo. Once there, he confessed to Padre Pio and underwent a miraculous, permanent change of heart.

Another such "miracle of grace" was granted to Prince Karl Klugkist, an exiled Russian aristocrat who was deeply involved in Eastern mysticism and the occult. He traveled to San Giovanni Rotondo in search of a new guru and wound up having a dramatic, total conversion to Catholicism.

Cesare Festa was a Freemason when he visited Padre Pio at the bidding of his cousin, Dr. George Festa. He engaged in a brief conversation with Padre Pio about Freemasonry. Then Padre Pio took him by the hand, asked him to step off to the side and, with great gentleness, described God's goodness and related the parable of the Prodigal Son. Overcome with supernatural grace, Festa fell to his knees, renounced Freemasonry and confessed his sins on the spot.

As with the miraculous cures, there are too many sudden and miraculous conversions to mention in this short article. Many skeptical visitors, through the intercession of Padre Pio, became "not unbelieving, but believing."

## **Padre Pio's Challenge for Modern Skeptics**

We live in an age of nearly universal skepticism, particularly when it comes to the supernatural claims of the Catholic Church. The modern age was accurately described by Dom Guéranger in his great work, *The Liturgical Year*. When discussing how St. Thomas the Apostle doubted the accounts of Christ's Resurrection, he said, "How like this is to our modern rationalistic Catholic! He believes, but it is because his reason almost forces him to believe; he believes with his mind, rather than from his heart. His faith is a scientific deduction, and not a generous longing after God and supernatural truth. Hence how cold and powerless is this faith! How cramped and ashamed! How afraid of believing too much! Unlike the generous unstinted faith of the saints, it is satisfied with fragments of truth, with what the Scripture terms diminished truths. It seems ashamed of itself. It speaks in a whisper, lest it should be criticized; and when it does venture to make itself heard, it adopts a phraseology which may take off the sound of the divine. As to those miracles which it wishes had never taken place, and which it would have advised God not to work, they are a forbidden subject. The very mention of a miracle, particularly if it may have happened in our own times, puts it into a state of nervousness. The lives of the saints, their heroic virtues, their sublime sacrifices — it has a repugnance to the whole thing! It talks gravely about those who are not of the true religion being unjustly dealt with by the Church in Catholic countries; it asserts that the same liberty ought to be granted to error as to truth; it has very serious doubts whether the world has been a great loser by the secularization of society."

Padre Pio, wonder worker and stigmatist, was born in 1887 and died in 1968. He was the answer to Rationalists and Modernists who became nervous at the mere thought of the miraculous. On two different occasions, certain members of the hierarchy, caught up in the errant thinking so vividly described above, engaged in lengthy persecutions of this holy man of God. When they could not dismiss him out of hand, they did their best to malign him or silence him entirely. On June 16, 2002, Padre Pio had his triumph over these doubters when he was canonized as Saint Pio of Pietrelcina.

## **Padre Pio's Final and Most Important Message**

As stated above, the Church teaches that miracles are "evidences attesting and confirming the truth of a divine mission, or of a doctrine of faith or morals...." Therefore, we must ask, what was the doctrinal message of Padre Pio? From his writings and many conversations we know that his life was one of suffering and prayer for the salvation of souls. He offered himself that others would be saved. He repeatedly stated that souls are always bought with "the same coin" — the coin of suffering. He taught his spiritual children (those chosen by him for personal spiritual guidance) that it is a privilege and not a burden to be allowed to participate in Christ's suffering.

But there is another message that was lived and preached by Padre Pio. It is the one that he wished to give both by his example and by his words. Padre Pio is known to have prayed 15 or more 15-decade Rosaries every day.<sup>1</sup> In fact, he had resolved to say no fewer than that number. Once, when questioned by his Superior and placed under

obedience to say how many 15-decade Rosaries he had prayed that particular day, the saint answered, "Well, I must tell the truth to my superior, I said thirty-four." He prayed one Rosary before and one after each meal. He prayed the Rosary many times during his recreation time and throughout the day. He prayed it at night and, if he fell asleep during the middle of a decade, he had trained himself to lock his fingers in place on the beads so he could begin again when he awoke. As one witness said: "Near the end of his life he didn't talk much. We told him our thoughts, we asked him for help, but all he did was to show us the Rosary, always the Rosary."

On September 20, 1968, the day before he died, some people asked him to say something to them — some words they all knew could possibly be his last. He replied, "Love the Blessed Mother and make her loved. Always say the Rosary." If we get nothing else from the miracles of Padre Pio, let us hear and heed him when he tells us, "Love the Madonna and pray the Rosary, for her Rosary is the weapon against the evils of the world today."

*St. Pio of Pietrelcina, pray for us, that we may willingly embrace suffering for the salvation of souls and remain faithful to the daily recitation of the Most Holy Rosary!*

1. It is important to note that miracles are not merely amazing or startling effects as are those produced by science or medicine. Technological advances may appear to the unlearned as events that occur outside of nature. However impressive they may be, such effects are within the realm of the laws of nature. In fact, this is how the oft-cited scientific and medical "miracles" are produced — by the manipulation of such laws. For example, some medicines, such as penicillin were called "miracle drugs" when they were first discovered because they actually fought off disease-causing bacteria — something that had never been done before. In some recent popular magazines, the common aspirin has been touted as a newly re-discovered "miracle drug" because it dramatically reduces the risk of certain heart problems. When the microchip first appeared it was touted as a "miracle of technology." But all of these medicines, discoveries, inventions and techniques, as wonderful as they are, still operate completely within the laws of nature. Not one of them has been caused by God's direct intervention to suspend the natural processes.

We must keep in mind that all the laws of nature are hypothetical. That is, they cannot be broken, unless the Power that created them chooses to supercede them. This divine intervention is called a miracle. When all natural explanations of an extraordinary phenomenon have been thoroughly investigated and found unsatisfactory, we may conclude that a miracle has happened.

**1** St. Pio had the grace of being able to pray while engaged in other mental activities. As with many of the saint's charismata, this is a gift given to very few souls.