

All attempts by Padre Pio "to hide the signs of the passion beneath the sleeves of his habit or behind a stole," were in vain. The news was by now known by everyone in San Giovanni Rotondo.

And it was Nina Campanilla who informed Father Paolino Casacalenda, the Superior of the friary, who had not noticed at thing.

"Do you know, Father Paolino, that Padre Pio has received the stigmata?" She asked him with a beaming smile. The Father Guardian "burst out laughing... Believing it impossible, since he had always been with him and he would surely have noticed." "There is no need to laugh. It's the truth," she said. "Ask the Padre or see for yourself."



The following morning **Father Paolino** went to visit Padre Pio and entered his cell without knocking. Padre Pio was at his desk writing, but he rose at once and remained standing with the stigmata hidden. The Father Guardian invited him to sit down and said to him, "please continue with what you are doing, because this morning I have nothing to say. I have come in only to say hello and to stay with you a few minutes before I go to teach." Padre Pio obeyed and Father Paolino was able to see the wounds on both his hands, the back and front, except for the palm of his left hand that he held down on his desk over the paper he was writing on. But that was sufficient. The very same day he wrote a letter to Father Benedetto at San Marco la Catola, informing him of what had happened.

In a letter of November 1922, Padre Pio also opened his heart to Nina Campanile. In those few pages he described to her his "inner martyrdom" when he had to decide about his religious vocation: "I felt the two forces within me, that struggled against each other and lacerated my heart. The world that wanted me for itself and God who called me to a new life." And he told her that God had entrusted to him "a very great mission," that was known only to himself and God; and an aspect of which was to "sanctify himself and to sanctify others."

With Padre Pio's spiritual guidance, Nina Campanile made a vow of chastity, that she renewed every year on the feast day of the Immaculate Conception, until the Lord called her to Himself on 9 January 1989, at the age of 95, living her last years in a retirement home at Lucera, after a life of great suffering.

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Padre Pio and Nina Campanile



**EVERY YEAR UNDER PADRE PIO'S SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE
NINA CAMPANILE WOULD RENEW HER VOW OF CHASTITY**

Padre Pio and Nina Campanile

by Stefano Campanella

Nina was born in San Giovanni Rotondo on 8 September 1893. She was the fourth of ten children. Her parents Nicola and Maria Campanile, gave her the name Marianna (Mary Anne), and for short would call her Nina. Before her Lucia, Vittorina and Angela were born, and then after her Pasqualino, Ernestina, Rachelina, Umberto, Antonietta and another boy who died very young.

Her family was one of the first that Padre Pio came to know when he arrived in the Gargano town, in the summer of 1916. Padre Pio had come up from the city of Foggia to San Giovanni Rotondo to escape from the great heat that affected negatively the symptoms of a strange illness that he had suffered from since youth. Extraordinary things were already said of him. That was why her mother Maria and the elder sister Lucia one day asked Nina if she would like to come up with them to the friary to see "the saintly friar." But Nina was already working as a teacher and said no. However, not much later she found herself making her way up the steep and difficult lane to the ancient Capuchin friary.

On 16 September 1916, her brother Pasquale, born after her, was killed in World War I. This time Nina could not say no to her heartbroken mother who begged her to ask Padre Pio if her brother had saved his soul. On 5 October, together with her colleague Vittorina Ventrella, she entered Our Lady of Grace Church and found herself before the gentle penetrating eyes of the "saintly friar" with her most agonizing question. The Capuchin friar calmed her down and told her: "If God's mercy depended on our way of thinking, everyone would be in hell. He is indeed saved, but he needs many prayers to free him from purgatory."

That meeting was an 'eye-opener' for her. Nina became a frequent visitor to the friary and a disciple of Padre Pio. Her spiritual direction continued even during Padre Pio's rare absences from San Giovanni Rotondo. For instance on 18 October 1917, during his military service and in bed with a fever in the Naples Army hospital, he wrote a letter to his "dearest daughter" guiding her to "steadfastly practice the virtue of gentleness with her neighbor and humility with God."



Early visits to Padre Pio were by horseback

He would always address his letters to Maria Campanile and not Nina since that was "her proper name," he told her. During those first years, Nina and a small group of other young women from San Giovanni Rotondo would meet every Thursday and Sunday to receive spiritual guidance from Padre Pio.

From Padre Pio's letters we learn that Nina experienced such agonizing "desolation and spiritual suffering" that "if it was not for the Lord who sustained her she would have died," and that this suffering was to be accepted as "a great mercy of God... conceded only to the greatest saints because they protect the soul from all feelings of vanity and pride and strengthen the virtue of humility that is the basis of all true Christian virtue and perfection." Moreover, her spiritual director clearly had a high opinion of her since he would ask her to ask God for answers to his own doubts on his mission as a religious and priest.

It was Nina who was responsible for making known that Padre Pio had received the visible stigmata and that Father Benedetto of San Marco in Lamis, Padre Pio's spiritual director, who was also the Provincial Minister at the time, came to know of it. In actual fact the first person to see the wounds on the day in which they became permanently visible was Philomena Ventrella, but she told no one but her family. Nina visited the friary the following day as all her family had gone down with the Spanish flu, as well as her sister Vittoria who was "six months pregnant," and since many expectant mothers had died, Nina, asked by her mother, went to Padre Pio to have a Mass said.

"When I gave him the stipend offering for the Mass," she wrote in her journal, "I saw on the back of the Padre's right-hand, in the very center, the stigmata. It looked like a burn, but I knew at once what it was even though I pretended not to and said: 'Oh, Padre! You've burnt your hand!' He did not answer and hid his hands behind his back. We continued talking about other things. When evening was nearing we left the sacristy. I joined my cousin Nunziatina Campanile and the Padre walked with us as far as the Chapel of St. Francis that was then half way along the road to the Villa Pia Hotel... When I said goodbye, I tried to kiss his hand on the stigmata, but the Padre exclaimed in pain: 'If you knew what a humiliation you caused me!' But I was ready with an answer and said: 'Father, the Lord, because of these stigmata, will grant you many graces for Christmas!' And he answered back: 'What they won't go before Christmas!' And continued: 'I shall say many prayers to the Lord so that He makes them disappear!' And he returned to the friary."

As soon as I reached home I told my mother that Padre Pio had received the stigmata like St. Francis and I told Lucietta, my sister. Very quickly the news of the stigmata was spread in the village."