

A very good example of this charity is that of the person who insulted him gravely before he became a friar. When Brother Vittore heard, sometime after he had been vested in the habit, that this man was dying, he began to pray for his conversion and while praying for the soul of his "enemy," Our Lord appeared to him and told him that his prayers had made up for all the man's sins and that he had died in peace and saved his soul.

Padre Pio acted similarly with his enemies, sometimes his own fellow friars. It is enough to recall the troubled times when friars had hidden microphones in his cell to eavesdrop on his conversations, and despite this his kindness and good humor with them.

The General of the Order Father Benigno of Sant'Ilario Milanese came on a visit during these times. He had lunch with them in the refectory, said grace, wished them all "Bon appetit," and then with a wink in the eyes said "May you always grow in sanctity, but not like him," pointing to Padre Pio, "because he causes us no end of trouble." Padre Pio was able to take the joke with no hard feelings and responded: "oh, but how much trouble... How much trouble, dear Father, comes to us from Rome!!!", And the incident ended amicably there.

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PADRE PIO AND FORGIVING OFFENSES



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Story by Marianna lafelice

AN INSIGHT INTO PADRE PIO'S SPIRITUAL LIFE

Padre Pio's existence revolved totally around the paradigm (example) of forgiveness, a forgiveness that was never held back nor extended with the concessions of the other in mind. It was never that "conditional forgiveness" of which Jacques Derrida speaks, with hidden motives of gain and opportunity. Padre Pio's love always rose above the appeal for forgiveness, it was never for him something to be bartered and he never made a distinction between friends and enemies.

With all those, who vilified, criticized and offended him, and there were many, he was always able, over time, to resolve matters peacefully and with his praying for those who cause them suffering.

Prof. Lucentini said of Padre Pio rightly: "he knew how to keep silent, to forgive and to always preserve his peace," the piece of one "who saw life in a different light," and he inspired in those around him a continuous brotherly charity.

For Giovanni Gigliozzi, Padre Pio's greatness was also because "compelled to live among the lowly and underprivileged, he was always able to draw out greatness from this lowliness.

To forgive an offense is perhaps one of the most difficult things for man, who often goes off course when he brings up the question of justice.

Forgiveness, as John Paul II made clear in his message for the Celebration of the 35th World Youth Day on January 1, 2002, "is in no way opposed to justice, as if to forgive meant to overlook the need to right the wrong done. It is rather the fullness of justice, leading to that tranquility of order which is meant more than a fragile and temporary cessation of hostilities, involving as it does the deepest healing of the wounds which fester in human hearts. Justice and forgiveness are both essential to such healing."

Not by chance the whole of Pope Francis' homily given to the Capuchin Friars order on February 9, 2016, in the Mass dedicated to them for the occasion of the translation of the mortal remains of St. Pio of Pietrelcina and St. Leopold Mandic to Rome, was centered on forgiveness. The Pope defined the friars as "men of forgiveness and reconciliation" and spoke of the Capuchin's tradition "a tradition of forgiveness" and underlined, very fittingly, how "when we forget the need of forgiveness, we slowly forget God." The Pontiff described forgiveness as "a seed," "a caress of God," that was and always has been, furthermore, a supporting pillar of this religious Order's history. From their beginnings the "Friars with a beard," that is how the Capuchins are often referred to, were great confessors because, as the Pope underlined, many of them considered themselves to be great sinners.

We need only to think of Brother Vittore Bergamasco to find an example of this, a friar who before he left this world fulfilled a last gesture of mercy, calling to him a man from Varese, a Paolo Visconte, a distant relation and persuading him to confess sins that he had hidden from his confessor and thus receive a complete absolution for his sins. Historians of the Order remember Brother Vittore most of all for a very distinctive feature, his loving without reserve for his enemies, that is, those who during his lifetime offended him and made him suffer most.