

The light which shines forth from his agonizing life and reaches the souls for whom he suffers in Christ and with Christ is his love for his fellow man:

"I remind you that I belonged with great ardor to everyone and for this reason I am suffering immensely for all" (Letters-1-dated-6-11-1919).

"I am ready for anything as long as Jesus is happy and will save the souls of my brothers, especially those He has entrusted to my care" (Letters-1-dated-18-12-1920).



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Padre Pio – His Mission A Collaborator of Christ the Redeemer



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A Collaborator of Christ the Redeemer

Padre Pio was aware that he had been chosen by God as a collaborator in Christ's redemptive work and that this collaboration would not be achieved unless by the Cross. The Cross was the beacon which shed light on each step of his painful journey. It was the inexhaustible source of the strength, generosity, fidelity and perseverance demanded by his vocation. He was convinced that his entire life, like that of the Master, would be "a martyrdom."

"On other occasions, although I am not thinking of such a thing at all, my soul goes on fire with the most keen desire to possess Jesus entirely. Then, with an indescribable vividness communicated to my soul by the Lord, I am shown as in a mirror my whole future life as nothing but a martyrdom." (Letters-1 – #131: June 1913 – undated).

This clear vision of the uncertain and acutely painful future, however, neither troubled nor discouraged him. Indeed, in the depths of his soul he rejoiced exceedingly that he had been called to cooperate in the salvation of souls by suffering, which draws its value and efficacy from real participation in Jesus' Cross:

"I am suffering, and suffering very much, but thanks to our good Jesus I still feel a little strength, and when aided by Jesus what is the creature not capable of doing? I don't desire by any means to have my cross lightened, since I am happy to suffer with Jesus. In contemplating the Cross on his shoulders I feel more and more fortified and I exult with a holy joy.

"However, I feel within me the great need to cry out louder and louder to Jesus with the doctor of grace: *Give me what you command, and command what you will.* (St. Augustine, Confessions, X. 29, 40). Hence, my dear Father (this letter was found in an envelope addressed to Padre Agostino on which Padre Benedetto had written: "great consolation and great deeds. He complains of the Provincial's silence."...)

"May the Lord be pleased to present to my mind this day which must dawn as less long than it seems to me" (Letters-1-dated-14-1-1916).

In reality, a great deal of time was still to pass before his cross was "set up on Golgotha," but he never asked for it to be lightened in any way, much less removed:

"What is to become of me in the future? I know nothing, absolutely nothing [...].

"I beseech you, O my good God, to be my life, my ship and my port. You have placed me on the Cross of your Son and I am trying to accustom myself to it as best I can. I am convinced that I shall never come down from that Cross and that I shall never again see a clear sky" (Letters-1-dated-8-11-1916).

The magnetic poles of his cross and of his entire crucified life are two: God and man, the Creator and the creature. His sufferings are a proof of faithfulness to God who has confided this mission to him out of love:

"May the heavenly Father be ever blessed who is pleased to treat me in this way. May He also be glorified in my body, for He is my life and I live for no other reason than to serve Him. I don't live for myself but for Him alone" (Letters-1-dated-30-10-1914).

"Please recommend me to God, not that I may be freed from this trial, but that He may give me the grace to remain faithful to Him forever" (Letters-1-dated-31-1-1918).

"Jesus is my witness and to Him alone do I offer my extreme torment" (Letters-1-dated-1-10-1921).

Allow me to say it, since no one can hear us, I am ready even to be deprived forever of the tenderness which Jesus lavishes on me, I am prepared to bear His hiding His beautiful eyes from me, as long as He does not hide from me His love, for this would cause my death. But I could not bear to be deprived of suffering: I lack the strength for this.

Perhaps I have not yet expressed myself adequately with regard to the secret of this suffering. Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, wants all Christians to imitate Him. Now, Jesus has offered this chalice to me also; I have accepted it and this is why He does not spare me. My poor sufferings are of no value, yet Jesus is pleased to accept them, because He loved suffering very much while He was on earth. Hence, on certain special days on which His sufferings were greater on this earth, He makes me experience this suffering more severely.

Now, would this alone not suffice to humiliate me and make me try to remain hidden from the eyes of men, since I have been made worthy to suffer with Jesus and like Jesus?" (Letters 1-dated-1-2-1913).

Called then to collaborate with Jesus for the salvation of souls, Padre Pio is convinced that the end of his painful journey can only be Golgotha:

"'How many times,' said Jesus to me a little while ago, 'would you not have abandoned Me if I had not crucified you?'

"Beneath the Cross one learns to love and I do not grant this to everyone, but only to those souls who are dearest to Me" (Letters-1-dated-13-2-1913).

Two years later he writes again to his director, Padre Agostino:

"I feel crushed beneath the weight of the long exile which still remains before me. It is true that just one more step... and the cross will be set up on Golgotha, but you must agree that the step to be taken to set up the cross will require further time and then, to agonize there with Jesus will take time.

Hence, my dear Father, do not allow the idea of my sufferings to cast a shadow on your spirit or to sadden your heart. So let us not weep, my dear Father, we must hide our tears from the One who sends them, from the One who has shed tears himself and continues to shed them every day because of man's ingratitude. He chooses souls and despite my unworthiness, he has chosen mine also to help him in the tremendous task of men's salvation.

"The more these souls suffer without the slightest consolation the more the sufferings of our good Jesus are alleviated.

"This is the whole reason why I desire to suffer more and more without the slightest consolation. In this consists all my joy" (Letters-1-dated 20-9-1912).

Viewed in this light, all sufferings of body and soul are willingly and joyfully accepted, since they are a sign of great dignity and of a most noble destiny. Hence Padre Pio is deeply moved and bows down in great humility before the evidence that the Lord has need of his cooperation to complete the redemption of mankind:

"The Lord then consoles me and causes me to exult *in my weakness*.

"Believe me, dear Father, I find happiness in my afflictions. Jesus himself wants these sufferings from me, as he needs them for souls. But I ask myself what relief can I give him by my sufferings! What a destiny! Oh, to what heights has our most sweet Jesus raised my soul!" (Letters-1- dated - 14-10-1912).

In Padre Pio's heart the voice of God calling him to sacrifice and immolation for others becomes increasingly insistent. His soul which ardently desires to sacrifice itself for God's glory and in reparation for men's ingratitude yearns to see this salvific action spread everywhere like daylight, to enlighten men's minds and warm their hearts. These desires are pleasing to God and, although indistinctly for the moment, he announces in advance that the end will be achieved by means of mysterious afflictions of soul and body. The agonizing participation in the Passion which is to culminate in stigmatization can already be foreseen.

Padre Pio writes as follows to Padre Agostino on 29 December 1912:

"During these days which are so solemn for me since they are feasts of the heavenly Child, I have frequently been seized by those excesses of divine love which cause my poor heart to grow quite faint.

"Completely penetrated by Jesus' condensation towards me, I addressed my usual prayer to him with greater confidence: 'Oh, Jesus, if I could only love you, if I could only suffer as much as I should like in order to make you happy and make some kind of reparation for men's ingratitude towards you!'

"But Jesus made His voice more clearly audible on my heart: 'My son, love is recognized in suffering; you will feel it acutely in your soul and even more acutely in your body.'

"My dear Father, to me these words remain very obscure.

"Those wretches are trying to torment me in every way; I complain to Jesus of this and I hear him say to me:

"'Courage! After the battle comes peace.' He tells me I must be faithful and courageous. I am ready for anything as long as I am doing his will. Only pray, I implore you, that the little bit of life I have left may be spent for his glory and that I may make use of this time in such a way as to spread the light."

This mission to be accomplished by suffering and immolation emerges with ever increasing clearness. Padre Pio understands its full beauty and to "delight Jesus," to "comfort Jesus," to "please Jesus," he devotes himself entirely and continually to his sufferings. The following lines show the vigor and unction with which he expresses these sentiments:

"Jesus tells me that in love it is he who delights me, while in suffering, on the other hand, it is I who give pleasure to Him. Now, to desire good health would mean seeking happiness for myself instead of trying to comfort Jesus. Yes, I love the Cross, the Cross alone; I love it because I see it always on Jesus' shoulders. By this time Jesus is well aware that my entire life, my whole heart is consecrated to Him and to His sufferings.

"Ah, dear Father, pardon me for using this sort of language; Jesus alone can understand what I suffer when the painful scene of Calvary is enacted before my eyes. It is equally incomprehensible how Jesus can be consoled not merely by those who sympathize with His torments, but when He finds a soul who for love of Him asks no consolations and only wants to be allowed to share in His sufferings.

"When Jesus wants to make me understand that He loves me, He permits me to relish the wounds, the thorns, the anguish of His Passion. When He wants me to rejoice He fills my heart with that spirit which is all fire and He speaks to me of His delights. But when He wants me to be delighted, He speaks to me of His sufferings, He invites me in a tone which is both a request and a command, to offer my body that His sufferings may be alleviated.

"Who can resist Him? I realize that I have made Him suffer exceedingly by my failings, that I have made Him weep too much by my ingratitude, that I have offended Him too grievously. I want nobody but Jesus, I desire nothing else (which is Jesus' own desire) than His sufferings.