

I Shall Be With You

[The guide answered:] *"Your every resistance is vain. You must fight with this man. Take heart. Enter the combat with confidence. Go forth courageously. I shall be with you. In reward for your victory over him, I will give you a shining crown..."*

The poor little soul took heart. He entered into combat with the formidable and mysterious being. The attack [of the giant being] was ferocious, but with the help of his guide, Who never left his side, [the soul] overcame his adversary, threw him to the ground, and forced him to flee.

As promised, a crown was placed on the soul for a moment... but almost immediately it was removed and the guide said: *"I will reserve for you a crown even more beautiful if you fight the good fight with the being whom you have just fought. He will continually, renew the assault to regain his lost honor."*

Fight valiantly and do not doubt My aid. Keep your eyes wide open, for that mysterious personage will try to take you by surprise. Do not fear his formidable might, but remember what I have promised you: that I will always be close at hand and I will always help you, so that you will always succeed in conquering him."

Now, all the multitude who were in darkness and whose faces were also horrible, after the defeat of the giant, fled with shrieks, curses, and horrible cries, while the other multitude praised and applauded the splendid Man, more radiant than the sun. Who assisted the poor soul so splendidly in the fierce battle. And so, the vision ended.

A day or so later a second spiritual experience confirmed that Francesco's whole life as a priest would require combat with his mysterious adversary from hell. Demons would be present at his battles to jeer, but he must never fear, for the angels would also be there to applaud his victories over the evil one.

He understood furthermore that the heavenly guide was Jesus Christ Himself, Who would sustain him in the battle so long as he **trusted** in the Savior and fought valiantly.



Padre Pio interacted with "Angelino" his own angel and the guardian angels of others.

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Franci, the Boy Pio



*Padre Pio
at
Age 14*

Franci, the Boy Pio

by Patricia Treece from *Meet Padre Pio*

On a hot summer afternoon Mercurio Scocca, a playmate of Francesco (Franci) Forgionne, (later known as Padre Pio), buried Franci under corn shucks as he lay sleeping beneath a tree during southern Italy's siesta time. Waking in darkness, Franci, scared, screamed for his mother, to the other boy's roars of laughter.

The next day, Franci discovered Mercurio taking his siesta atop a small farm wagon. He pulled the wagon, with the sleeping Mercurio, up a nearby hill and shoved it over the crest. Mercurio suddenly awakened to the ride of his life. Fortunately for both boys, the hurtling wagon ran into a tree, which stopped it before the rider could be hurled off and injured.

Like Other Boys... Yet There Were Signs of Holiness

Luigi Orlando, a contemporary who used to play with Franci, agreed "he was like any other boy," and also recalled a day when they were wrestling. Franci pinned Luigi, who swore in exasperation. Immediately Franci released him and fled. He had been taught by his mother, and strictly followed her injunction, to leave immediately any place where bad language was used. (Can we not teach our children that today, and for that matter, do it ourselves!)

He Loved To Pray

The child also loved to pray, which was not unusual in a family known as "the family for whom God is everything." Yet he went at prayer and religious devotion with an intensity that stood out even in the Forgione family.

The local priest Father Giuseppe Orlando later remembered reprimanding the boy because he disobeyed his mother, who wanted him to sleep in his bed, while he preferred, penitentially, to sleep on the floor, using a stone for a pillow.

Franci who had already told his parents he wanted to be a priest, also practiced self-flagellation. When his mother reproached him for beating himself, he replied, "I must beat myself the same way Jesus was beaten." Extremely devout, Maria Giuseppa Forgione felt tears come to her eyes, she later said. From then on she did not interfere with this practice.

From the Beginning, So to Speak

Years later, in 1915, his spiritual director learned that from the age of five, when Francesco first had had the idea of consecrating himself forever to the Lord, the boy had had apparitions, seeing Jesus and the Virgin Mary primarily... but also terrible, diabolical figures.

Francesco never spoke of any of it, assuming everyone else also saw the things he did. Only after he had been some years in the Capuchins did he one day offhandedly query his spiritual director, "Don't you see the Madonna?" When the man said that he did not, Pio immediately responded, "You're only saying this out of holy humility."

And then it all came out. Not only had Padre Pio had visions of Jesus, Mary, and devils, but as a child he saw his guardian angel so frequently that he referred to the angel fondly as "the playmate of my childhood." The guardian angel would play such a prominent role in Padre Pio's adult life that one of his Capuchin confreres would

fill an entire book with incidents where Padre Pio interacted with his own angel and the guardian angels of others.

He Suffered in Giving up the World

When he moved into adolescence, Francesco Forgione did not long for power, riches, sexual conquests, or wild living. Instead, it was the true riches the world offers that drew Franci... to remain with his family, so strong in their love for one another, and to seize the joys he had learned among them.

Chief among these was family life itself, with its innocent pleasures of laughter, food, a glass of wine, sharing a good story, praying together, and, above all knowing they were there for each other in good times and bad. To give up all this and leave the ones he so deeply loved to enter the Franciscans and study for the priesthood, seemed beyond the fifteen-year-old's strength.

Christ came to comfort him during his last night at home. He later wrote, under obedience to his spiritual director, **speaking of his soul in the third person:**

It saw Jesus and His Mother Who, in all Their majesty, began to encourage it and assure it of Their predilection. Finally, Jesus placed a hand on his head, and that was enough to strengthen the upper part of the soul, so as to avoid his shedding even one tear during the painful separation, despite the painful martyrdom which tore the body and soul.

The Whole of His Life

The whole of his life can be summed up in another vision from these final days before his entry into the Capuchin Franciscan seminary. Meditating on his calling by God to become a priest, he suddenly had an unforgettable experience.

Fighting Satan

From the account he wrote under obedience to his spiritual directors, speaking of himself, as always, in the third person:

He saw by his side a majestic Man of rare beauty, splendid as the sun. This Man took him by the hand and he heard Him say: "Come with Me, because you will have to fight as a valiant warrior."

Then he was led to an area of very spacious countryside. Here there was a great multitude of men divided into two groups. On one side he saw men of most beautiful countenance... in snow-white garments. On the other...men of hideous aspect, dressed in black like so many dark shadows.

As he stood between the two groups, a giant man appeared with his forehead seeming to touch the heavens and a face that was horrible. This strange personage approached nearer and nearer and the guide Who was beside the soul informed him that he would have to fight with that creature.

At these words the poor little soul turned pale, trembled all over and was about to fall to the ground in a faint, so great was his terror. The guide supported him with one arm until he recovered somewhat from his fright.

The soul then turned to his guide and begged Him to spare him from the fury of that eerie personage, because he said the man was so strong, that the strength of all men combined would not be sufficient to fell him.