



OUR LADY OF LIBERTY AT OUR LADY OF ANGELS CHURCH PIETRELCINA, ITALY  
PADRE PIO,S PARISH CHURCH

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Padre Pio  
and  
Father Pio Francesco Mandato, F.M.H.J.



7 year old Pio Francesco Mandato and his younger brother  
receive Holy Communion from Padre Pio in 1964

# Padre Pio and Father Pio Francesco Mandato, F.M.H.J.

Father Pio Francesco Mandato, F.M.H.J., was born in Italy in 1956 to Graziella and Andre Mandato. His family lived in Pietrelcina, the town where Padre Pio was born and raised. Fr. Mandato's family and extended family, including his great-grandfather, received many graces through the years from their spiritual father, Padre Pio. Their stories of Padre Pio were told and retold with the greatest pleasure.

Fr. Mandato's grandmother, Maria DeNunzio once asked a friend who was going to San Giovanni Rotondo to deliver a letter to Padre Pio for her. She fixed her friend a cup of espresso and they had an enjoyable visit. Then he left for the monastery. He was able to talk with Padre Pio and when it was time to say good-bye, Padre Pio surprised him by saying, "Aren't you forgetting something?" "Not that I can think of," Maria's friend replied. "Not only did you enjoy a cup of coffee and a visit with Maria, but you promised her that you would give me the letter that is in your back pocket!" At once he remembered and quickly placed the letter in Padre Pio's hands.

In Pietrelcina, everyone called Padre Pio, *Il Monaco Santo*, "the holy friar." Everyone felt very proud that the "holy friar" was a fellow citizen of Pietrelcina. The people from Pietrelcina were characteristically simple, devout, hard-working, and strong in their Catholic faith. Many people in the area were related or distantly related to each other. Pio Francesco's mother was related to Padre Pio through her paternal grandmother.

Padre Pio never forgot the town from which he had come. He loved Pietrelcina and he loved the people who lived there. He said that he remembered Pietrelcina, "stone by stone." Padre Pio wrote a letter to his brother Michael Forgione, who still resided in their hometown and said, "Pietrelcina is totally in my heart." Regarding his spiritual life, Padre Pio once said, "Everything happened in Pietrelcina. Jesus was

Today, fifty year old Father Pio Francesco Mandato, F.M.H.J., belongs to the Franciscan Missionary Hermits of St. Joseph and lives in Eastern Pennsylvania. He continues to live out his priestly vocation in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi. He feels that Padre Pio is still guiding him and helping him on his spiritual journey. "More than anything else, I remember Padre Pio as a very loving man, like a loving father," Father Pio Francesco said. The words that Padre Pio said to his mother so many years before remain a consolation to him, "Tell Graziella that I always have her present in my prayers and I am united to her whole family." Father Pio Francesco Mandato continues to carry on the work of the Lord.

*"Don't doubt my prayers, which are certainly poor, but still solicitous for you. I have never ceased, nor will I cease to pray to the most sweet God that He may be pleased to accomplish His holy work in you; that is, that you may have a strong desire and intention to reach perfection in the Christian life; a desire which you must love and nurture tenderly in your heart, as the work of the Holy Spirit, and a spark of His Divine fire."*

*St. Pio of Pietrelcina*



Paris took little Pio Francesco with him a number of times to the monastery to visit Padre Pio. The men were allowed to go into a gathering area and converse with Padre Pio. Women were not allowed. Pio Francesco remembers what joyful occasions they were for all concerned. In the presence of a number of Capuchins and laymen, Padre Pio enjoyed the fellowship and he loved to tell jokes and to make his friends laugh.

Seven year-old Pio Francesco and his younger brother Vincent received their first Holy Communion from Padre Pio on October 3, 1964, on the feast of the Transitus of St. Francis of Assisi (the celebration of the death of St. Francis of Assisi). Afterward Padre Pio said to the young boys, "I pray that your last Holy Communion will be even more beautiful than your first." Pio Francesco remembers the solemnity and the great devotion with which Padre Pio celebrated Mass. Although his Mass was long, the time seemed to pass very quickly. Another remarkable aspect of Padre Pio's Mass was that although it was always very crowded, a profound silence pervaded the church.

The Mandato family emigrated to the United States in 1964 and settled in New Jersey. Naturally, they missed Padre Pio immensely. Father Alessio Parente, Padre Pio's secretary, relayed a message to Graziella from Padre Pio. He said, "Tell Graziella that I always have her present in my prayers and I am united to her whole family."

On September 22, 1968, Graziella had a vivid dream of Padre Pio. "I come to say goodbye to you," he said. She said to him, "Don't leave," and he replied, "The Lord is calling me." The next day Graziella learned that he had passed away in the early morning hours.

Pio Francesco Mandato was ordained to the priesthood in Hoboken, New Jersey in 1985. He and his family made a trip to Italy so that he could celebrate his first Mass in Pietrelcina at the Madonna Della Libera altar (Our Lady of Liberty), at Our Lady of the Angels parish. It was the very same church and altar where Padre Pio had celebrated his first Mass on August 14, 1910.

there." It was in Pietrelcina that the Lord began to pour out his graces on the young Capuchin. Padre Pio once made the prophetic statement, "During my life I have cherished San Giovanni Rotondo. After my death I will cherish and favor Pietrelcina." How fitting that today he is known as St. Pio of Pietrelcina.

During World War II, the people of Pietrelcina were worried about their safety. "Do not worry," Padre Pio said. "Pietrelcina will be protected." History bears out the truth of his statement. Padre Pio was transferred to the Capuchin monastery of Our Lady of Grace in San Giovanni Rotondo in 1916 and remained there until his death in 1968. A number of the residents of Pietrelcina moved to San Giovanni Rotondo to be closer to their spiritual father.

Once Paris DeNunzio, Pio Francesco's grandfather, made a trip to San Giovanni Rotondo from Pietrelcina to see Padre Pio. The road that led up to the monastery was steep and dangerous. Paris' companion, who was driving, fell asleep at the wheel and the car swerved and veered off the road. Paris, who was very frightened, began praying, "Padre Pio, helps us!" At the last moment, the driver was able to gain control of the car. When they arrived at the monastery and went to Padre Pio's cell, Paris told his spiritual father about the near accident. "And were you frightened, Paris?" Padre Pio asked. "Yes, I was frightened," Paris replied. "Well, don't you know who was driving?" Padre Pio asked. Paris asked him what he meant. "I was driving the car," said Padre Pio, "and you all arrived safely!"

Paris used to pray daily to Padre Pio, recommending to him his wife, his daughter, his son and other family members. Once when he was talking to Padre Pio, he asked him to pray for his family and began to name them. Padre Pio said to him, "You do not need to tell me their names. I hear their names every day in your prayers." Another time, Paris was experiencing

pain in his chest and was worried that perhaps he had heart trouble. He told Padre Pio about it and Padre Pio replied that there was nothing wrong with his heart. "Of course there is something wrong," Paris said. "If there wasn't something wrong, I would not be in so much pain." Padre Pio told him to stop talking about it. "If you don't stop, I will give you a punch," Padre Pio said. He then gave Paris a light punch on his chest. From that moment on, he never experienced another pain in his chest.

Pio Francesco's mother, Graziella, met Padre Pio for the first time when she traveled to the monastery with her father, Paris DeNunzio. Graziella was ten years-old. When they arrived, they found Padre Pio inside the 16th century friary church of Our Lady of Grace, surrounded by a large group of people. Being small, Graziella was unable to get close to him. She could only see the top of his head. When Padre Pio saw Graziella, he extended his arm over the people, and allowed her to kiss his hand. His eyes made a profound impression on her, an impression that she would never forget.

In 1946, a few days before Christmas, Graziella and her brother made a visit to see Padre Pio. He blessed Graziella by placing his hands on her head. Then in his paternal way, he gave her a fatherly embrace. At once, she became aware of the beautiful scent of roses. She believed that the fragrance was coming from the wound in his side.

One time Graziella told Padre Pio that she had met a man she was thinking of marrying. "Don't do it. He is not for you. You don't know what kind of coat he wears," Padre Pio said to her. She and her father did a little research and found out that the man was a communist. When she inquired about a second suitor, the answer was again a firm "no." When she finally named a third man, Andre Mandato, Padre Pio said, "The angel of God has passed. Do it with the blessing of God." She married Andre in 1955.

Because of the popularity of Padre Pio's confessional, a booking system had to be put in place at the monastery. People would take a ticket and wait for their number to be called. It sometimes required a wait of eight days or more. Once Graziella had a tremendous desire to speak to Padre Pio. The way to speak to him was through the vehicle of the confessional but Graziella did not want to wait that long. She somehow had the courage to approach the confessional without a ticket. The woman at the front of the line told her she could go ahead of her.

Just as she stepped into the confessional, Padre Pellegrino, Padre Pio's assistant, whose job it was to check tickets, told Padre Pio that Graziella had just entered without a reservation. Padre Pio said to him, "And when she did, who were you watching?"

Graziella was permitted to make her confession regardless and she told her spiritual father that she and her husband were expecting their first child. "You will have a son," he said. "Name him Pio Francesco." When her baby boy arrived on July 6, 1956, she was delighted that he shared not only Padre Pio's baptismal name, Francesco, but also his name in religion, Pio. Padre Pio sent his blessing as well as a medal with the Blessed Virgin on one side and St. Michael the Archangel on the other.

Pio Francesco Mandato was four years old when his grandfather, Paris, took him for the first time to see Padre Pio in his cell. Padre Pio blessed little Pio Francesco and embraced him. Little Pio came just up to the middle of Padre Pio's waist. Afterward, he told his mother, "Padre Pio has perfume on his tummy." Graziella told her son that he did not wear perfume. The fragrance was a spiritual gift that the Lord had given him, one among many gifts. It was a sign of grace for those who perceived it.