

Cleonice Morcaldi, one of Padre Pio's spiritual children, heard about Bruno's experience of seeing Padre Pio crowned with thorns. She heard that on seeing the serene and beautiful expression on Padre Pio's face, Bruno was moved to tears. She also heard that Padre Pio told him not to say a word to anyone about the experience but to go home and thank God.

Cleonice wanted to know if the story was true and so she asked Padre Pio directly. He answered her, "Do you have any doubt? You are like St. Thomas. You don't believe." His reply seemed so evasive that she wanted to ask him a second time but was reluctant. She prayed to the Virgin Mary, "Madonna, please let Padre Pio tell me if it is true that he wears the crown of thorns." Time passed and one day while she was making her confession to Padre Pio, she asked him again and said, "Father, do you wear the crown of thorns in all your Masses?" Padre Pio answered, "How many things you want to know! Yes, I wear it before and even after the Mass because I can never take off that diadem which is the crown of thorns that God has put on me. I wear it before Mass, during Mass, day and night."

Another spiritual child of Padre Pio, Professor Gerardo De Caro, in a conference held in Pavia, Italy on May 25, 1983, shed further light on Padre Pio's painful way of the cross. Professor De Caro said: "One evening as I was standing by his cell, I saw Padre Pio return from the choir, walking with his shoulders bent over and with his chest almost touching his knees. His sandals shuffled across the ground as he dragged himself along like one carrying the cross. He must have been in great pain walking. He rested his weight on the edges of his feet and his heels so as not to press on the wounds of his feet. I looked at him and he looked at me. Immediately, and with great effort he straightened himself. For an instant I saw him like Jesus under the cross. After confession I said to him, 'Padre, you are like Jesus.' And Padre Pio tried to reprove me."

These were the sufferings which constituted Padre Pio's calvary and which caused him to be in a state of great pain his entire life.

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PADRE PIO'S WAY OF THE CROSS



Padre Pio's whole life can best be described as a Way of the Cross. He was fully aware that he had been chosen by God to be a collaborator in Christ's redemptive work and that this collaboration would not be achieved unless he shouldered the cross with Jesus.

PADRE PIO'S WAY OF THE CROSS

Padre Pio shared and lived the whole passion of Jesus. The first indication of the stigmata appeared in 1910, shortly after his ordination to the priesthood. Although the visible signs disappeared for a time, the extreme pain of the wounds remained. In addition, he suffered the crowning of thorns, the scourging, the shoulder wound, the transverberation of his heart, and the Passion wounds in his hands and feet. Added to this was a chain of illnesses which began in his youth and ended only with his death. Doctors were never able to successfully diagnose the many mysterious illnesses that plagued his body. He experienced many moral and spiritual sufferings as well.

Valuable information as to the complete state of victimhood which Padre Pio experienced is contained in his correspondence with Padre Agostino of San Marco in Lamis (Padre Agostino Daniele). Padre Agostino, one of the two spiritual directors that Padre Pio was to have, had been his former theology professor and he exercised a deep influence of Padre Pio's life. He comforted him in his spiritual trials and was always near him in his many vicissitudes which characterized his life. Padre Pio loved him like a father and the relationship of mutual esteem continued for over fifty years.

In a letter to Padre Agostino dated January 1912, six years before the permanent stigmatization, Padre Pio wrote, "From Thursday evening until Saturday is a time of suffering, of great suffering. The whole scene of the Passion is presented to me and imagine if any consolation can exist in the midst of all this."

On October 10, 1915, in a long and touching letter, Padre Pio wrote a reply to a number of questions that had been asked of him by Padre Agostino regarding the invisible stigmata and the crowning with thorns. Padre Pio wrote: "You asked if the Lord granted this soul the ineffable gift of the holy stigmata. To this the reply must be in the affirmative and the first time Jesus deigned to grant this favor the signs were visible. This soul was greatly terrified by the phenomenon and asked the Lord to withdraw the visible signs. Since then, the signs have no longer been seen. However, though the wounds have disappeared, the intense pain has not ceased on this account and it continues especially in certain circumstances and on certain days. By your last question you want to know if the Lord made this soul experience His crowning with thorns and His scourging and how many times. The reply to this question must also be affirmative. As regards the number of times, I am unable to specify this. All I can say is that this soul has suffered those things for several years, almost every week."

Capuchin Brother Modestino of Pietrelcina was close to Padre Pio for many years and was an eyewitness to his many sufferings. He left this testimony: "In January of 1945, when still not many people came to San Giovanni Rotondo, I used to serve Padre Pio's Mass at dawn, with about twenty people present. In those times, Padre Pio's Mass would last one hour to one hour and a half. Tired from remaining on my knees, I

would move to the side of the altar assisting at the Holy Sacrifice while standing. From that position I was able to follow carefully the gestures, movements, tears, sighs and profound recollection of Padre Pio.

"When my eyes fell on his forehead and the nape of his neck, I noticed that his skin would seem blistered and on his forehead were marks similar to pricks made by thorns.

"With the middle finger of his right hand, Padre Pio frequently seemed to want to remove something bothering him around his temples. In the end, I noticed imprinted on his forehead a small cross of about three centimeters. I was assisting at the crowning of thorns of Padre Pio."

A precious relic that has been preserved is a cloth that was used by Padre Pio to wipe his forehead. It is stained with blood. To one of his spiritual children who asked him if he suffered the crowning with thorns, Padre Pio responded affirmatively and said, "Otherwise the immolation would be incomplete." The thorns, he assured, were "all around his head," and during Mass there were many as well as before and after Mass.

Padre Pio also relived in his body and soul the painful scourging that Jesus suffered in His Passion. When someone inquired whether he was alone or in company during the experience of the scourging, Padre Pio replied, "The Holy Virgin assists me and all paradise is present."

Another insight into Padre Pio's participation in the Passion is related by Padre Alberto D'Apolito: "In 1950, a young university student, Bruno G. Di Lucera, who had a low regard for religion and who did not believe Padre Pio to be a saint but an imposter and a charlatan, was persuaded by his fiancée to go to San Giovanni Rotondo to see for himself.

"The first morning, out of curiosity he went to attend Padre Pio's Mass. All of a sudden, at the moment of Consecration, he became pale. He had witnessed something extraordinary. On Padre Pio's head he saw a triple crown of thorns and his face was covered in blood like the Ecce Homo (Behold the Man). Believing it to be a hallucination or a trick of the eyes, he said nothing to his fiancée nor to anyone else.

"The second morning, the same thing happened. And again for fear of being thought a fanatic he told no one. However, he began to reflect and change his opinion about Padre Pio.

"The third morning, the final blow came. At the moment of Consecration, he saw Padre Pio suspended from a cross. His face was like the face of Jesus and on his head was a triple crown of thorns. Seeing this, he burst into tears."