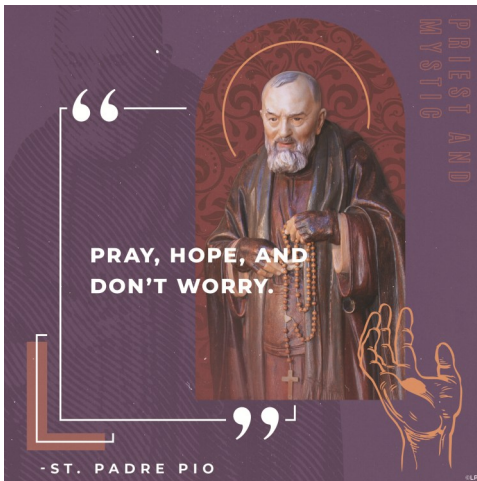


FROM FR. JASON



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we journey together, I invite you to pause and reflect on the Feast of St. Pius of Pietrelcina, which we celebrate on September 23. In the midst of our daily struggles and the call to conversion, this saint - better known as Padre Pio - stands as a luminous sign of God's mercy and the transformative power of the Cross. He reminds us that the Christian life is not a path of ease but a paschal mystery, where suffering united to Christ becomes a fountain of grace for the Church and the world.

Padre Pio was born Francesco Forgione in 1887 in the small Italian village of Pietrelcina, a place marked by poverty and simple faith, much like the humble beginnings many of us experience in our own lives. From a young age, he felt the Lord's call, entering the Capuchin Order at 15 and taking the name Pius in honor of Pope St. Pius V. His ordination in 1910 marked the beginning of a ministry that would be profoundly shaped by the wounds of Christ. In 1918, during a time of intense prayer, Padre Pio received the visible stigmata - the wounds of the Crucified One on his hands, feet, and side. For fifty years, he bore these marks, not as a badge of honor, but as a participation in the suffering of Jesus, echoing St. Paul's words: "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal 6:17).

Padre Pio's life exemplifies the reality of dying to self and rising with Christ. His stigmata were not merely physical; they are a spiritual invitation to embrace the cross in our own lives. Think of our parish: how often do we gather in the Mass, singing the psalms and listening to the Word, only to confront our weaknesses and sins? Padre Pio lived this daily. He celebrated Mass with such fervor that it often lasted hours, his face transfigured in ecstasy as he relived the Passion. Pilgrims flocked to him, not for spectacle, but for the encounter with God's love that radiated from his wounded body. He once said, "Pray, hope, and don't worry. Worry is useless. God is merciful and He will hear your prayer." These words resonate deeply as we learn to abandon ourselves to the Father's providence, trusting that even in our falls, He raises us up through the sacraments.

But Padre Pio's charism extended beyond his personal holiness; he was a tireless apostle of reconciliation. As a confessor, he spent up to 18 hours a day in the confessional, discerning souls with supernatural insight. He could read hearts, reveal hidden sins, and offer absolution that brought profound healing. Let us humbly acknowledge our idols - money, power, vanity - and allow the Lord to exorcise them. **Padre Pio understood that true conversion comes through the mercy of God, not human effort.** He founded prayer groups and a hospital, the "Home for the Relief of Suffering," to embody this mercy in action, caring for the sick and poor as Christ did. We too are called to this mission: to evangelize not just with words, but with lives transformed by the Gospel, reaching out to the peripheries as Pope Francis urged.

Yet, Padre Pio's path was not without trials. He faced skepticism from Church authorities, restrictions on his ministry, and even demonic attacks - reminders that the evil one prowls, seeking to devour (1 Pet 5:8). Through it all, he remained obedient, offering his sufferings for the salvation of souls. Padre Pio's canonization in 2002 by St. John Paul II affirmed his witness, declaring him a model for priests and laity alike.

As we mark this feast, let us ask St. Pius of Pietrelcina to intercede for our parish. May his example inspire us to deepen our prayer life, frequent the sacraments, and live the beatitudes in our families and communities. Perhaps join a prayer group or volunteer at our outreach programs, seeing in the suffering of others the face of Christ. Let us unite our own "stigmata" - our hidden wounds and struggles - to the Cross, allowing the Resurrection to shine forth. May the Lord bless you abundantly, and may Our Lady, whom Padre Pio loved dearly, wrap you in her mantle.

Peace,