

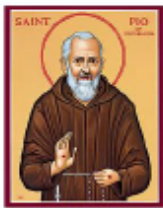
St. Mary of the Angels, Church Street Triduum in Honour of Saint Pio



Thursday, 20th September 2012 to
Sunday, 23rd September 2012

The preacher for the Triduum is

Fr. Richard Hendrick OFM Cap



Thursday, Friday & Saturday
(20th, 21st & 22nd September 2012)
Confessions from 6:30pm until 7:20pm
Mass 7:30pm and blessing with the
relic after Mass.

Sunday, 23rd September 2012
(Feast of Saint Pio)
Confessions from 6pm until 6:50pm
Mass 7pm and blessing with the relic
after Mass.

On the first evening of the Triduum, Frs. Angelus and Richard welcomed everyone, the 'Spiritual Children of Pio' and encouraged them into the quiet to experience the Spirit alive in each one of them.

Fr. Richard spoke of the call of each person to sainthood. "Every saint is born a sinner, but saints overcome sin to become the saint"

Pio himself bore the inward and outward signs of Christ's suffering for our salvation. In his writings, Pio wrote about the stigmata being a distraction to many and often questioned whether or not he should pray for the outward signs to be taken away while he would continue to endure the severe pain and discomfort. "Our Lord sends the crosses; we do not have to invent them."

For all of us, our call to sainthood means enduring the pain and growing in faith and love for God through a life of prayer. "Prayer is the best weapon we possess. It is the key that opens the heart of God."

In our journey through the Triduum, we will reflect each evening on the life and teachings of Saint Pio.¹

- This evening, we reflected on the call to **sainthood**.
- Tomorrow, we will look at his life as confessor to many and at his teaching on the **Sacrament of Reconciliation**. Individual absolution will be available during the Mass. 'In our thoughts and in confession, we must not dwell on sins that were previously confessed. Because of our contrition, Jesus forgave them at the tribunal of penitence. It was there that He faced us and our destitution, like a creditor standing before an insolvent debtor. With a gesture of infinite generosity, He tore up and destroyed the promissory notes which we signed with our sins, and which we would certainly not have been able to pay without the help of His Divine clemency.'
- On Saturday, we will look at his life as a healer. During the Mass we will have **Sacrament of the Sick**.
- On Sunday, the Feast of Saint Pio, we will celebrate our journey with Pio and give thanks for the gift that he is to each of us.



National Shrine to Padre Pio in
Saint Mary of the Angels, Church Street

¹ Full text of the talks is included at the end of our update.



Saint Francis of Assisi Altar in Saint Mary of the Angels, Church Street



Marian Altar depicting the Annunciation and the Visitation in Saint Mary of the Angels, Church Street



Fr. Richard Hendrick on the first evening of the Triduum



David, our cellist and Tommy our server



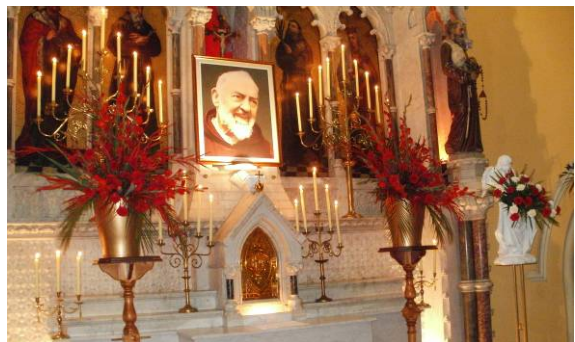
Frs. Angelus and Richard Hendrick with the relics of Saint Pio at the Triduum



Floral tributes in honour of Saint Pio



Fr. Bryan, Guardian and Parish Priest



Saint Pio Triduum **20th – 23rd September 2012**

Talk 1: The Way of Saint Pio

Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, Padre Pio, as we who love him call him, is a prophet of our times and for our times. His life confronts this secular age with the knowledge that God can and does work wonders for His people still. But, like any real prophet, Padre Pio points away from himself to God! Like Francis before him he strains ahead to become Alter Christus, another Christ and for this to happen he knows that he must abandon himself to the Divine Hand. It is a hand that leads him down the road of absolute emptiness before Christ so that his spirit may be filled anew by God's love for all creatures.

Now, we know that this is the path that all Christians are called to follow. It is the path of the Cross. For we follow a Christ who, as Saint Paul tells us, being humble became humbler yet, event to accepting death, death on a cross. This gradual self-emptying before the cross is the only way for Pio! Indeed it is the only way for us too. In following this royal road of the saints ourselves we are ensuring that Christ, and He alone, will be at the centre of our being, our life within this world. And it is in following Christ to this self-emptying before the cross that we find what all the saints before us have found... that it is the only way that leads to resurrection. The cross of Christ planted in the earth of our soul becomes the seed of resurrection.

So what does it mean then to call Padre Pio, indeed to call anyone, a saint, a prophet or a holy man? Well for me, the best definition of a saint that I have come across is simply this: "A saint is someone who has been healed fully by God!" In other words, the saint is someone who has truly let go and let God. Let God into every aspect of themselves, into every corner of their body, mind, heart, and soul. Let God touch them and cause in the depths of their hearts a mighty conflagration, a great burning, the light and heat of which radiate outwards transforming even the most mundane reality into a Christ centred and Holy Spirit illuminated event. And this is the secret of the saints...this is why Christ is able to work wonders in and through them; because even the most simple circumstances and events of their lives have been touched by His Grace. For them, every moment becomes an encounter with God's love and so the ordinary is transformed into something extraordinary and in those graced moments miracles can occur.

And so saints like the Padre become supports to us in our own lives pointing us along the road that we must travel so that we in our turn begin to recognise that there are no places in our lives, no matter how seemingly dark or sinful, that we cannot encounter the light and love of Christ. The saints became less and less in their own lives so that we could encounter more and more of Christ in and through them. But, of course, we often forget that great truth. Caught up in the blaze of glory that surrounds these holy brothers and sisters of ours we forget where the light comes from. We forget the long and deep struggle of that person to give themselves fully into the embrace of Christ's love, "to hold back nothing of themselves for themselves", as Saint Francis prayed. We forget that every saint started as a sinner. A sinner just like you, just like me. We see the halo drawn around the head of the saint and we forget that it is there to remind us of the light and life of Christ present in their souls, not to mark them out as special in and of themselves. And perhaps when we encounter those saints whose lives are filled with the miraculous we find it hardest of all to connect their lives to ours to see that what they are now we are called to one day become. So we venerate and canonise them and we can use that veneration and canonisation as a way of separating our lives from theirs. We forget, at our peril, that every saint is an invitation to sanctity and that the endless variety of saints is a reminder that our own unique life is the place in which

God wants to be, to work the wonder of raising up another totally new saint for His kingdom. "The Kingdom of God is within you", Jesus tells us, and we must allow Him to bring it forth from us as He brought it forth from Padre Pio.

So then, in the life of our brother Pio, once one scratches the surface at all, it becomes impossible not to see that he too struggled, he too suffered as he walked the path of self-emptying. Padre Pio is so centred on the mystery of the Cross that we cannot know him even a little without realising that the essence of his life's work was the following of the Crucified so as to be transformed by Jesus into an instrument with which to convert others, to remind them of the Love God has for them. In the wounds and suffering of the Padre God reminds a world of the wounds of His Son... "See how much I love you!" He says, over and over again throughout the centuries. "See how I gave myself for you that you might be saved!"

Now beware, in this transformation of Pio into an instrument of Divine Love, this saint and prophet to the ages, I am not talking solely or even mostly about the stigmata. They are powerful visible signs of this interior reality to be sure, but they are the least important signs of what God did in the heart of Saint Pio. He himself knew this and begged his spiritual directors on numerous occasions to allow him to ask the Lord to remove the visible signs from his body and leave only the suffering instead. He was terrified that they would become a distraction from the mystery of Christ's love present in him... or worse that they would distract others. The stigmata only have value in that they show the world visibly what is taking place in Pio invisibly. Like Francis before him, they are a sign of Divine approval and a manifestation of the deep unity between his soul and the Spirit of the crucified Christ. So why would Pio ask for them to be removed, to be taken away? It is a sentiment completely at odds with today's way of looking at things. Today we exalt the external over the internal and the shallow over the deep... and in the plea of Pio to hide his sufferings we once again encounter the counter-cultural reality of the way of the saints. In following this way of depth over surface and internal over external Pio and the rest of the saintly company remind us that their way is open to us all, here and now in this very moment.

It is the way of allowing the Holy Spirit slowly, gently to do to death in us our sinful broken self that is so in need of divine healing. He does this by enabling us to walk ever more deeply in the way of Christ Jesus. And how is this done? In exactly the same way as it was done in Francis, in Clare, in Pio and in all the saints. By living a life that is in no respect selfish, a life lived for others! It is a life that puts the real needs of the other first, while longing only for their good. And that, my friends, is the way of the prophet, the way of the one who sees truly. That is the life of Saint Pio which over the next few days we will encounter together. We will find it in Pio's daily religious life, in his fasting and prayer, in his good humour and in his tears for the sins of humankind. We will find it in his long hours in the confessional and his lonely nights spent in vigil for us who sleep, in his lifelong battle with the evil one and in his sharing the light of Christ with so many who walked in darkness. This is the journey we will go on in the next four days, (only the capuchins could have a four day Triduum), and so that it is a real journey, so that it touches our hearts and minds and begins to make them a little more like the saints we venerate I ask you now to look around this church and to find some person, perhaps a friend, maybe a stranger and to decide that along with whatever intentions you are doing the Triduum for you will also do it for them, for their intentions. You don't need to tell them, you don't need to know what they are praying for, you don't even need to know their name, simply hold them in the eye of your heart and as you bring your own prayers before the Lord tonight through the intercession of Saint Pio, bring theirs also... if we do this we will begin here tonight to walk the way of Padre Pio, the way of the Saints.

Amen

Talk 2: Reconciliation

Yesterday, if you remember, we introduced our Triduum by looking at the life of St. Pio as an invitation to all of us to walk the way of the Saints. Today we will look at one of the greatest gifts and helps to us along that way. The Sacrament of Reconciliation. Along with the Holy Eucharist, the ministry of Reconciliation was the most important way in which St. Pio exercised his vocation, not just as a priest but as one who was sent to remind the world of the mercy of God. It is the Sacrament that dominated his priestly life and by which he became known to so many as a conduit of divine mercy and healing. Indeed, it is impossible to encounter the life of the Padre and not pause in awe at the tremendous gift he was, and still is, to the Church's ministry of Reconciliation. After all, this ministry of reconciling humanity with God is at the very centre of what the Church is for... in a real way it is its "raison d'être", its reason for being. This ministry was given to the Apostles by Jesus just before he ascended into heaven, when, as we read in the Gospel of John, He breathed on them and said; "Receive the Holy Spirit. Those whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven and those whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

This great work of the ministering of the mercy and forgiveness of God flows down the ages through every generation of priests to Padre Pio. In him it is united in a very visible way with his Eucharistic ministry where, participating in the daily renewal of Calvary that is the Mass, he sees the infinite merits and graces of that sacrifice applied in the long hours he then spends in the confessional. Sometimes as much as 11 hours a day. There he brings back the lost sheep to the Good Shepherd. You know, of all the photos that exist of Padre Pio, and he is one of the first of the Church's saints to be photographed during his life, there is one image that always touches my heart. It is in black and white, and slightly out of focus, but it shows the face of Pio in the confessional as he hears the story of a penitent whose face is hidden behind the curtain. To the one who was confessing their sins the face of Pio is hidden but to us he shows such a look of suffering and mercy combined that the true image of this sacrament is revealed in that moment. We understand in a flash what it is all about. The infinite loving power of Divine Mercy is in contact with sinful humanity. The Cross and the Resurrection are both present in that glance. Divinity weeps over the damage we have done to our inner beauty and rushes forward to heal, restore and renew us. I don't think that having meditated upon such a picture it could be possible not to be overcome with sorrow for our own sins and yet at the same time be overcome with joy at the absolute love that awaits the sinner who repents.

So Pio becomes the prisoner of the confessional, hour after hour in stifling heat he gives to those who come to seek forgiveness and counsel. Indeed, as word gets out about this the holy man of God very soon people are talking not just of his stigmata and his celebration of the Holy Mass but above all of the encounter they have had with him in the confessional. Sometimes, it is true he could be tough, even a little frightening, for those who come just out of curiosity or unprepared! We all know the stories of those he threw out of the confessional because he discerned they were not truly repentant. When asked about this he likened himself to a surgeon that only has a very little time to operate and can't afford the time to administer anaesthetic! But always those who were put out returned, realisation having dawned upon them and true repentance emerging they were received back by the Padre with love and the fullness of the mercy of God. They emerged from that encounter with a firm purpose to change and live a deeper life of real conversion. For others the encounter in the confessional is a miraculous one... hardened sinners are converted on the spot, others hear their whole life and inmost thoughts read as though they were an open book. All encounter the infinite mercy of God in Christ Jesus as the Padre's confessional becomes another place in which the healing plan of God for humankind is shown forth.

And what of us? How should the example of the Padre change us, or effect our participation in this great Sacrament? Do we value it as he did, seeing in it a direct encounter with the mercy of God? Do we avail of the opportunity to use it often? Or perhaps we have fallen into that belief so common in our church these days that we don't really need the sacrament of reconciliation? So many people I meet say to me, "I don't go to confession anymore... why should I confess my sins to a priest...sure they're just as bad as I am...I just apologise to God directly instead!" Does that sound familiar to you? Well if it does, let's pause for a few moments to encounter what the Church says about this sacrament to see if those arguments stand up.

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church each of the sacraments are dealt with in depth, as you would expect, but there is something unique about the way in which it deals with this Sacrament in particular. It is explained by looking at the various names it was known by over the centuries. We learn that at different times in the Church's history different sides of the Sacrament have been stressed through the different names it has borne. Let's look at them now together so as to learn more about this great Sacrament:

It is the sacrament of Confession: Confessing our sins is one of the most important acts we can undertake for our spiritual growth. It is an act of humility that allows the Holy Spirit to root out the seeds of pride within us that are the sources of so many sins. By confessing our sins we are really confessing our need for God. And God rushes into fill our needs when we make them known to Him. St. James tells us in his letter that confessing our sins is necessary for our healing both inner and outer. Incidentally, did you know that it was the Irish monks in celtic times who pioneered the practice of celebrating the Sacrament in private? Before then the Christian was expected to confess their sins publicly! I'm sure we are all glad that they brought in that particular innovation....

It is the sacrament of Forgiveness: This seems obvious at first. But when we look at it closely we see that it is the assurance of the forgiveness of God in and through the sacrament that makes it so extraordinary. We are sure of God's mercy once we repent of our sins. There are no terms and conditions. We are reminded that God sent His Son not to condemn the world but so that through Him the world might be saved. God intends us to be saved. He wants to forgive us and knowing that we would doubt this he has established this sacrament so that we would know without doubt that we are forgiven. Apologising in our own hearts for our sins is good and we should never doubt the mercy of God, but the sacrament guarantees that we have received that forgiveness fully.

It is the sacrament of Reconciliation: But who are we reconciled with? First and foremost of course we are reconciled with God through the person of the priest as His minister of mercy and then we are reconciled with the community against whom we have sinned. We forget often that every sin is a sin against the community, against the body of Christ. To the Christian there is no such thing as a private sin. Every sin is like a pebble thrown into a still pond. Ripple effects move out from that act and affect the whole surface of the pond, effects every relationship that exists in the same way that a good act affects every other person on the face of the earth. Through the sacrament of Reconciliation God's Holy Spirit calms the surface of the pond once again and allows the relationships sundered by sin to be healed and sanctified once again.

It is the sacrament of Penance: The penance we receive from the priest in confession is not just a few words or a token prayer to be said to make things right again. Rather it is a spiritual medicine prescribed by the divine physician for the healing of our souls. By responding to our sins with a virtuous act we are rebalancing our soul's equilibrium and allowing God to reign in the centre of

our lives and loves once again. Penance is an ascetical exercise that strengthens our spiritual muscles and makes us stronger in the times of temptation we know will come anew.

So they are the names the Catechism uses, but there is one other ancient name. A more mystical description of the Sacrament to be sure, but it is my favourite. *The Sacrament of the beauty of God*. It means that in this sacrament we are restored to our original beauty before God. Or rather the image of God in our Spirit is made so clear that we are transcended by the beauty of God. A God who wants His countenance to shine from the heart of every human being. We are God's work of art, St. Paul tells us, and it is in this great sacrament that the hand of the Divine Artist who is also our healer is seen most perfectly. Tonight we celebrate that Sacrament anew. With confidence in the mercy of God we bring our brokenness before Him and we allow Him to restore our beauty. Together, priests and people alike, we are a community of sinners who know our need for God, and in this sacrament God's forgiveness covers us like a snow shower that covers a dirty street with pristine beauty.

Finally some practical advice as we approach the Sacrament. Remember the three "B's" of Confession. "Be sorry, Be clear, Be gone!" Trust in His love. He has already proven it on Calvary. Do not be afraid. Come to His mercy. You will not be turned away.

Talk 3: Healing

God heals. And all healing comes from God. Sometimes He heals in unexpected ways, sometimes at unexpected times. But all healing comes from His love and as a way to bring us closer to Him. Padre Pio understood this absolutely. The many people who came to him to be healed often left San Giovanni in exactly the same physical state as when they had arrived. But they had been healed. Healed in the most important way possible; healed in Spirit. Now they were able to bear their infirmities with greater patience and wisdom, uniting their sufferings to those of Christ and His Church. When physical miracles were worked they were often of the kind that would affect not just the one healed but all those who surrounded them also. I think of the great miracle of the young woman born without pupils in her eyes. Having been blessed by padre Pio she was now able to see! But she still had no pupils! Medically inexplicable, her 20/20 vision was a testament to the power of God to heal until the end of her days, her healing made her a living Gospel that brought so many others to faith and love.

Again and again Padre Pio repeated, "God alone is the healer!", and whether we are healed instantaneously or slowly through the mediation of medicine and doctors it is God who is doing the healing. The great esteem that the Padre had for the advances in modern medicine can be clearly seen in his founding of and lifelong work for his hospital; "The Home for the Relief of Suffering". There he wished the sick to have the best of both medical and spiritual care. Years ahead of the holistic revolution in medicine he understood that true healing can only occur when all the parts of our human being are touched with tender care. Body, Mind and Soul all need the healing of Christ at various times in our lives, and Pio attempted to make sure that this was a possibility for all those who came to see him.

Of course, for many who came the difficult lesson that needed to be learned was that their suffering could be used to deepen their own conversion and their compassion for others. They were called by the Padre to unite their sufferings with Christ upon the cross and to offer them for the church and for the world. This can be a terrible lesson to learn at the best of times, but it was made a little easier by the example of the Padre's own suffering. The unremitting pain of the stigmata carried upon his own body for fifty years. Endless migraines, fevers that broke thermometers in their extreme temperatures, nausea for weeks on end and the inability to eat more than a little morsel each day all served to teach others that it is possible to bear our bodily sufferings even cheerfully when we unite them to those of Jesus on the Cross. Unfortunately our society has lost this truth. We live in a world that cannot face suffering of any kind or imagine that good can be born from pain. Padre Pio stands as a witness to the fact that both suffering and resurrection go hand in hand at the heart of our faith. There is no empty tomb of light and peace without the walk towards Calvary. No Easter Sunday joy without Good Friday sorrow. For Christ has, in his own body on the Cross, taken our human weakness and pain and made of them forever the path to the Father. And we would know this truly if we would just open ourselves to His redeeming love. The saints teach us that while suffering and pain are never good in and of themselves they can be transfigured by the Love of God to show the glory of Christ shining through our human world.

And so what of us who come here tonight seeking healing for ourselves or others? What would the Padre say to us? I feel that firstly and most importantly he would ask us to dispose ourselves to the will of God, whatever that may be for us. If we are to be healed, then we will be healed. Instantaneously or through medicine doesn't matter once we know that God is at the root of all healing. If we are not to be healed then we will not be healed...yet. And that YET is important. God

wants us to be healed and healed fully... but remember what we said earlier in the week. The fullness of being healed is the inner journey we make towards becoming saints ourselves. Bodily healing is only a step on that journey. Even if we are healed in body we will still pass through the gates of death to that ultimate healing that comes with the entrance into heavenly life. Even those healed in body by Jesus Himself had to die eventually or they would not have experienced the fullness of divine healing. So remember God never says no to our prayers. Indeed there are only three answers that God makes to our prayer: He says, "Yes!" He says, "Not yet!" Or He says, "I have something better planned for you!" When we realise this all our anxiety fades and our prayer becomes that of Jesus, that of the saints, simply: "Let thy will be done!"

Secondly, let us remember that healing is normally a gradual process. It is a journey that runs parallel to our gradual opening to the grace and light of God in every layer and facet of our existence. We said at the beginning of the Triduum that St. Pio helps us to understand that a saint is someone who has been healed fully by God. Even for the saints, even for Padre Pio this inner healing took a life time. Our God is a gentle physician who works from the perspective of eternity and who knows that we are all unique and move at different speeds. So while you will receive healing here tonight it may be as a little seed planted within you that will gradually open up and flower at its appointed time. If you would have those seeds of inner healing grow well then water them with deeds of kindness and compassion to all those around you and then you, yourself will be a healing word of God to others. Remember! We have already received the single greatest act of healing God offers us in our Baptism. And the grace received there goes on working and growing for the whole of our life!

Thirdly, let us remember that healing is never just for me. It is always for the whole community. If I am truly being healed by God, whether directly in a miraculous way or indirectly through the work of the doctors and nurses, my healing should effect not just me but all those around me, bringing them closer to God too, deepening their faith, their hope and their love. Ask yourself this tonight; do you realise that, as a Christian, you are called to be a healing word spoken by Christ into His world? By doing the ordinary things with extraordinary love we become conduits of God's healing power and grace in the world. In that sense we all have a vocation to be healers with Christ and we must work to become ever more fully the face of His gentle compassion and infinite kindness whenever we meet anyone, for it is to those we live with and work with that Christ wants us to be his healing hands, and words. We are responsible for them just as they are responsible for us. In the body of Christ no one is journeying alone.

Finally, in a few moments we will approach the Sacrament of the Sick and be anointed with the Holy Oil that signifies the healing power of the Holy Spirit. In doing this we are following exactly the instruction of Christ to His Apostles when at the beginning of their mission to preach the Good News they were also confirmed with the ministry to heal. This ministry is still powerfully present with and in the Church through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit working through the priests as the successors of the Apostles. So as you come forward to receive the anointing do so with trust. Remember God wants to heal you. That is never in doubt. Come forward with the prayer that you will be open to receive the form of healing that He knows you need. Come forward with the prayer that you too may become a healing word from God to others. Come forward knowing that this is areal encounter with the Lord who healed the blind, opened the ears of the deaf, raised the dead and lifted the burdens of all those who listened to His saving word. Come forward and be healed.

Amen.

Talk 4: St. Pio and the Holy Eucharist

In the earliest days of monastic life in the church there is the story told of two hermits who lived in the Egyptian desert. For six out of seven days they spent their time alone in prayer and contemplation, and on Sunday's they would gather together to celebrate the Eucharist, after which they would spend a little time in conversation discussing the insights they had gained in the previous week. On one such occasion, just as they were about to depart for their caves one of the hermits paused and said to the other, "Have you ever heard of this thing they call an argument?" "No!", said the other, "What's an argument?"

Well, said the first apparently they're all the rage in the cities at the moment... so I was just thinking, maybe we should have one just to see what all the fuss is about."

"Ok", said the second, "Let's try. What do we do?"

The first thought for a moment... "I'll pick up that stone over there and pretend it's mine, he said with a smile, "and then you can say you want it, and then we'll have an argument!"

He walked over to the stone, picked it up and held it aloft, "This is my favourite stone he said, I love this stone, it is mine."

"I want your stone!" the second monk said loudly.

"Here you go then, said the first handing over the stone immediately. The two hermits looked at each other. "I don't think much of this argument thing, do you?" said the one to the other. They went back to their caves and they never had another argument again.

My friends, the meaning of this story is clear. The more we become open to God's love, the more time we spend consciously in His presence, then the more we become like Him. And this is especially true of our encounter with Christ in the Holy Eucharist. There we have the meeting par excellence between God and Humankind. There we are invited to gather in the presence of the Lord and be fed by Him the very bread of heaven, the body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ. This is why our mother, the Church, teaches us that this participation that we are called to in the Eucharist is so great, that it is, at one and the same time, both the source and the summit of our faith journey as Christians. It is both the beginning and the ending of our eternal journey into the depths of God's love. The beginning, in that it is where our soul begins to participate in God even while still upon earth and where we receive the invitation to start that journey that will one day, please God, result in our presence forever at the heavenly banquet where God shall be all in all and we shall see Him as He really is without the need of the Sacramental veils of bread and wine.

Padre Pio understood this absolutely! Indeed his whole life's journey is a path that leads deeper and deeper into participation in the Eucharistic mystery of Christ. He understands intuitively, from the first moment he encounters it, the nature of the Eucharistic event. From the outset he seeks as the goal of his day to attend the Mass or to at least spend time in adoration before the presence of the Lord. For it is there, he tells his spiritual directors, that he experienced such sweetness and consolation that he believed he would die. So then, let us look at this journey of St. Pio's so that we too may come to a deeper understanding of the Holy Eucharist.

It is at the age of five, Pio reports, again in a letter to his spiritual directors that while praying before the Altar in the local church he experiences a vision of Jesus as the Sacred Heart. The Lord calls him forward to the Sanctuary and places His wounded hand upon his head to bless him. It is an invitation to begin a journey that will one day lead him to priesthood and the immolation of self as a victim, with Jesus, for the sins of the whole world.

Later, as a capuchin friar and student for the priesthood, even through bouts of extreme ill health, he is relentless in his Eucharistic quest. He seeks to spend as much time as possible in the Lord's presence, sometimes spending whole nights in prayer before the tabernacle. Much of that time is spent in intercession for others. The Eucharistic soul of Pio's is opening up, expanding to become a soul for others, (and remember this is what we said a saint is, someone whose life is for others). Pio will be a soul that will draw others to Christ and seek to heal their wounds with his own. He knows that the soul of a Christian, touched by love for the victim of the altar of Calvary must expand outwards to enfold all of his brothers and sisters in the infinite and unconditional love Christ showed upon the cross. He will love them with the same love the Christ had for them.

And finally, Pio is made Padre – Father, a priest of God. In the Cathedral on the tenth of August 1910 he is ordained and becomes the one who offers the sacrifice of the Mass. Here, perhaps, we should remain silent out of reverence and awe. The mysterious identification Pio has felt since his earliest days with the suffering of Jesus is brought to a new depth, barely imaginable to us, but which becomes manifest to all those who will encounter him as a celebrant of the sacred liturgy. In meditating upon this mystery we can do no better than to listen to his own words describing this identification written on the occasion of his first sung Mass on the fourteenth of August that year:

“Jesus my breath, my life; today with trembling hands, I elevate you in a mystery of Divine Love. May I, with you, be for the world, the way, the truth and the life; and for you, a holy priest, a perfect victim.”

From that moment on it would be, for those who assisted at his Mass, as if they were seeing Calvary all over again. Of course what we all forget so often, what Pio was there to remind us of, is that EVERY Mass is Calvary. Every Mass is a participation in the eternity of the great Sacrifice of Christ whose hands nailed wide upon the cross embrace the whole of broken humanity to offer them healing and unconditional love. The cross was chosen, the fathers tell us, as the instrument by which the Son of God would die, precisely to indicate for eternity the open embrace of God for His creatures. St. Pio's stigmata only have value when we realise this, they are a reminder and a call to us to recognise once again what we are being offered in every Mass a participation in the mystery of Divine Love. For it is there that we enter into a sacred time where we are called to touch once again the saving moment of our history.

So what of us, the spiritual children of St. Pio, how should our participation in the Mass be different after our encounter with him? Firstly we are called to a deep spirit of prayer and meditation on the sufferings of Christ so as to be fully present to them when we are assisting at Mass. Every Mass is the same, but sadly we are not the same at every Mass. By deepening our prayer life at home and by spending what time we can in adoration we will deepen our participation in the Eucharist. St. Pio used to say that he spent the first half of the day offering everything in preparation for the Eucharist and the second half of the day in thanksgiving... what a beautiful way to divide the day. Let us then take moments in the midst of our busyness when we pause and spiritually place ourselves in front of the Tabernacle and ask for the grace of spiritual communion with the Lord. Then, when we can, let us go to Him there, even if for a few moments, of silent adoration and prayer. Remember, as St. Josemaria Escriva said, “He has waited for us in the tabernacle for twenty centuries, surely we can afford a few minutes for One who has shown us such patient love.”

Secondly, we must remember to never lose an opportunity to participate in the Eucharist...not even our sins should prevent us! This is a very important teaching to understand correctly. And here I am teaching exactly what so many of the saints have taught. Even if we have sinned we should not put off going to Communion as long as we have repented of our sins and have the firm intention to confess them as soon as is possible... if those conditions have been met then always, always go to Communion. The Lord comes to us to heal our brokenness and to strengthen us for the fight ahead, not as a reward for our goodness. If that were so then none of us would ever be able to receive the Lord. Let Him dwell within you and ask Him to heal and cleanse the temple you can offer. Show Him your sins and do not be afraid, He comes not to condemn us but to heal and forgive us and He does this above through His Eucharistic presence. So remember, once we have repented and attend confession as soon as is possible, nothing should prevent us from Holy Communion with the Lord. Do not wait until you are worthy, you never will be and He doesn't expect you to be! He does expect you to receive Him with joy and to welcome Him with love... that is all he asks of us.

Thirdly, finally, let us remember that our participation in the Holy Eucharist must change how we relate to our brothers and sisters. There is no point reverencing the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle and not reverencing the presence of the Lord in one another... there is no point bowing before our crucified Lord at the consecration and not seeking to alleviate His pain in the poor and the sick and all those we meet along the way. If your faith can see Jesus behind the sacramental veils of bread and wine then it must also see Him in the beggar on the corner or the one who asks your help when you feel you are too busy. We should never really leave the Mass, rather we should bring it with us wherever we go then we too will be like Padre Pio carrying in our body the life and death of Jesus so that through us all we encounter along the way may be touched by His healing grace and love. Then we will really be the spiritual children of St. Pio and we will be sure of his presence with us as we become, like our spiritual father before us, living tabernacles of our Eucharistic Lord.

Amen.