

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

## Friday & Saturday

(20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> September)

Confessions from 6:30pm until  
7:20pm. Mass 7:30pm and  
blessing with the relic after  
Mass.

## Sunday

(22<sup>nd</sup> September)

Confessions from  
6pm until 6:50pm. Mass  
7pm and blessing with  
the relic after Mass

## Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2013

*(Feast of Saint Pio)*

Confessions from  
6:30pm until 7:20pm

Mass 7:30pm and blessing with the relic  
after Mass.



*O God, you gave Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, Capuchin priest, the great privilege of participating in a unique way in the passion of Your Son, grant me through his intercession the grace of ... which I ardently desire; and above all grant me the grace of living in conformity with the death of Jesus, to arrive at the glory of the resurrection.*

*Glory be to the Father (three times)*

## Feast of St. Pio

*Fr. Angelus*

On 22 September 1968, Padre Pio was feeling very weak and feared that he might be too ill to complete the Solemn High Mass he was due to celebrate. But there were large numbers of pilgrims present for the Mass, and so Padre Pio's superior asked him to celebrate the Solemn High Mass. In the spirit of obedience to his superior, he went on to celebrate the Solemn High Mass. While celebrating the Solemn High Mass, he appeared extremely weak and in a fragile state. His voice was weak when he said the Mass and after the Mass had concluded, he was so weakened that he almost collapsed as he was descending the altar steps. He needed help from a great many of his Capuchin confreres. This was Padre Pio's last celebration of the Mass.

Early in the morning of 23 September 1968, Padre Pio made his last confession and renewed his Franciscan vows. As was customary, he had his rosary in his hands, though he did not have the strength to say the Hail Marys aloud. He always has a great devotion to our Mother Mary. Till the end, he repeated the words "Gesù, Maria" (Jesus, Mary).

At around 2:30am, he said, "I see two mothers" (taken to mean his mother and Mary). He died in his cell in San Giovanni Rotondo with his last breath whispering, "Maria!"

A little earlier that morning, a fellow Capuchin and friend of Padre Pio, went to open the church at Manoppello, more than 200 kilometres away to the north, in the province of Abruzzi. Inside the church he found Padre Pio on his knees, his head in his hands, before the image known as the Holy Face. Padre Pio said to him: "I do not trust myself any more. Pray for me. Goodbye until we meet again in Paradise." Within 24 hours, Padre Pio died in his cell in the friary at San Giovanni Rotondo.

Since 1660, the church at Manoppello has contained an ancient piece of a rare cloth which bears the image of the face of a bearded man with open eyes, a slightly opened mouth and a bruised left cheek. It was believed locally to be what was once known as the Veil of Veronica. It is believed that the Holy Face of Manoppello is very likely the cloth "rolled up by itself", found by Peter and John in the tomb on the first Easter morning. It is the most authentic image of Christ that we have.

There are many reports of Padre Pio's gift of bi-location and on this occasion, he chose to pray before the image of the one whose wounds he had borne for just over fifty years. He could look into the face, the eyes of Jesus – the Saviour he was soon to meet face to face in eternity. In 2002 he was raised to sainthood and he now intercedes on our behalf, on behalf of all his spiritual children.

Yesterday as we left San Giovanni at the end of our nine day pilgrimage, the roads were full with cars heading to San Giovanni to celebrate Padre Pio's feast today. Thousands of Padre's spiritual children throughout the world are celebrating his feast and we are united with them in prayer.

Padre Pio promised us that he would wait outside the gates of heaven until every last one of his spiritual children was safely inside.

### 3. Allowing our Hearts to be Broken Open

Fr. Richard

Last night we meditated on how our focus should be on Christ. Tonight we meditate on what happens when we allow Christ to be at the centre of our lives. Some think that a prayer filled life is one where the person turns in on themselves, or becomes selfish or some might say one would be better *out there doing good rather than prayer filled life*.

Padre Pio lived a prayer filled life and we all know that Padre Pio had the stigmata but how many know about the fact that he went through the pain of the scourging and crowning with thorns on a weekly basis and that he had the pain of the weight of the cross on his shoulder – a pain he bore for the sins of priests.

Few meditate on Padre Pio's most important wound though – the wound known as transverberation. It is best described as the heart broken open with the love of God. Padre Pio experienced this on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1918 and the lance wound of the stigmata came later.

The experience was described by Padre Pio to one of his Spiritual Directors. He said he saw what looked like an angel in front of him with a lance. Padre Pio was asked in prayer to assent to what was going to happen. From that moment, Padre Pio felt the wound of transverberation constantly.

Padre Pio was aware that his heart was pierced through in front of a large crowd but he didn't recognise the people in the crowd. In time he came to recognise the people as those who would come to him for prayers, healing, confession and support in later years.

The Christian is one who allows their heart to be broken open by the love of God and once it is broken open they grow into what they were meant to be. As we grow in our relationship with God, we recognise that we are sinners, sinners who are always in need of God's love and mercy. Pope Francis described himself as a sinner in need of God's grace. And saints see themselves as sinners too, but they can look at their sinfulness without despairing.

As a friar, I often hear people tell me *"my heart is broken"* – broken because of sin, broken because of a relationship, broken due to illness, broken because of the needs of the world, broken because of the needs of the church. We've all experienced transverberation. When our hearts are broken, we become humbler, gentler and better able to forgive. As a Christian we would declare *"I am a sinner in need of God's grace and healing"*.

Padre Pio declared *"I will stand at the gates of heaven until the last of my spiritual children are through."*

What of us who call ourselves spiritual children of Padre Pio?

We follow in his paths  
Accept the wounds we have suffered  
We all bear our crosses

Christ knows us and he keeps his promise to be with us always. We are asked to turn inward into prayer and outward into action and we know Christ will be with us all the way.

At the crucifixion the soldier simply saw a dead body, the apostles despaired and ran away, a mother lost her son and finally they buried him in the ground and rolled a stone over the opening, BUT the Father saw a new beginning...

Let us grow in our love of God and allow our hearts to be broken, conscious that God is with us every step of the way.

## 2. Prayer

Fr. Richard

During a parish mission, there was a beautiful day followed by a terrible storm. The storm was so bad there was no fishing for two days. At the end of the third day of the mission, an old man came up to me and said *“Father, would you ever say a word to the storm?”* I was struck by the faith of old gent who thought a poor friar would be able to intercede with the storm.

St. Pio, our brother, always wanted to be known as a friar who prays. Prayer was at the centre of his life. All the rest – his stigmata, bi-location and reading of souls were born of a life of prayer.

The power of Christ is mediated through us when we pray. Through Christ we allow Jesus to operate in and through us. It all comes from prayer. We pray for healing and peace and forget that when we speak up in prayer we must be ready to live out in our lives. Imagine what would happen if we put prayer at the centre of our lives.

The Lord doesn't count the number of prayers we say or the number of Masses we've been to, but the Lord listens to the heartfelt prayer of the person who prays.

While on another visit to Donegal, I visited the home of an elderly couple. As is usual when one visits a home in Ireland, I was asked if I'd like tea or coffee. I asked for coffee, a response which was met with some surprise, so I had a cup of tea! We talked a while and then the couple asked me if I would like to stay for tea. After some insistence, I accepted their invitation and I'm glad I did.

The couple went into the kitchen and prepared the meal together. The door between the kitchen and the sitting room was open and I watched them as they worked together in total silence. Such movements and timing comes from years of knowing each other. There is no need for words. They are so in touch with each other that they knew what the other wanted.

As I watched, I saw that this is how prayer is. Very few words are necessary for God to know and understand our needs. God is always with us – that's prayer. We need to let go of words and simply be with Christ. One of our friars was trying to teach us how to pray when we were novices. We had lots of questions and in the end he told us *“Close your eyes and get out of God's way!”* We must keep trying and God does the rest.

Padre Pio was a simple friar who prayed under the following four headings

- (1) Friar of Silence, with the exception of letters to his Spiritual Directors which he never expected to be published and a couple of his sermons. His life was his sermon

- (2) Come to Christ through the saints, the angels and Our Mother Mary
- (3) Man of Charity who worked tirelessly for others and was instrumental in the construction of hospitals and care centres.
- (4) Man who lived the Eucharist.

The invitation open to us is to become a brother or sister who prays, taking time for silence and learning the way of YES, the way that Mary chose when she said YES to God.

We give thanks for the life of Pio and we learn from him.

## 1. Acceptance of his Suffering

*Fr. Bryan*

Last night during our monthly Padre Pio Prayer Group we reflected on Padre Pio's response to his call to sanctity. All of us are called to be saints, but few of us would ever see ourselves as saints of the church. Who among us ever imagines that we would be canonised or that people around the world would gather to pray before an image or statue of us? You're laughing at the thought! It's totally unthinkable for you?

I doubt if Padre Pio ever considered that he would be a saint. He grew up in an ordinary family, with all the happiness and issues of family life, school and friends. But here we are today, kneeling before an image of Padre Pio, a saint for our time, asking him to intercede for us.

This evening, on the first night of our Triduum, we reflect on the manner of Padre Pio's suffering. Padre suffered the physical pain of the wounds of Jesus, the stigmata, and also the emotional and spiritual pain of being a spectacle. He often asked that the outward signs be taken away but he was happy to bear the pain – for Jesus. Many had theories about the wounds and whether or not he inflicted them on himself. Such theories fall short of the mark when you consider that he had the stigmata for fifty years. Besides the five wounds of Jesus, he also had a wound on his shoulder signifying the mark inflicted on Jesus as he carried his cross.

So difficult was it for Padre Pio to be a spectacle or tourist attraction that he decided to wear mittens to cover the wounds on his hands. We have one of these mittens here this evening and it will be used at the end of Mass to bless each of you.

So Padre Pio is very well acquainted with pain and knows the pain we too endure. Many can attest to the fact that he could also see the inner pain and suffering of the hearts and souls of those who came to him. He recognised the spiritual sufferings and emotional anguish of so many pilgrims to San Giovanni.

Padre Pio worked on plans to open a hospital in San Giovanni Rotondo, and these plans became the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza or "Home to Relieve Suffering". This hospital opened in 1956 and is considered one of the finest hospitals in Italy. Padre knew about suffering and in his time, did what he could to relieve suffering at every level.

So as we start this Triduum, we come to Padre conscious that there is no one better able to understand our physical pain and illnesses. There is no one better able to understand the spiritual pain of the sufferings in our heart. There is no one able to understand the struggles in our souls. And there is no one better placed to intercede for us.



# History of Our Lady of Peñafrancia<sup>1</sup>



Statue in Church Street for the Novena being celebrated at the time of the Triduum

## In Salamanca, Spain

On September 4, 1401, in the city of Paris, capital of France, a child was born to pious and religious parents, Rolan and Barbara. He was christened Simon. They were quite well off; their property was more than sufficient to maintain a family of four. Early in youth, however, Simon despised wealth although his parents could well afford his wishes. When his parents and his only sister died, Simon inherited all their property. To avoid trouble which he thought might ensue from his possession of such wealth, he sold his patrimony and donated the proceeds to the church, the poor and the destitute, and to charitable institutions. He then applied for a position as chamber boy in a convent of Franciscan church in Paris.

Simon frequented the church and would spend hours in prayer before the altar of the Virgin Mary. Many times, in his deep meditation, he would ask the Holy Virgin to inspire him what he might do to please her. Once, while he was absorbed in the spiritual contemplation of the beauty of the Holy Mother, he lost consciousness. His prayer then found its answer for he heard a clear voice that tried to rouse him from slumber: "Simon, wake up; be on the watch.... From now on your name will be Simon Vela. Go to Peña de Francia west of this country, and there you will find the shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

For five (5) years Simon Vela travelled far and wide among caves, hills and mountains, in search of Peña de Francia but he could not find the place. He wanted to give up the search, and was in fact already on his way back to Paris, when one night he heard the same voice once more saying: "Simon, do not give up the search; do not give up what you have begun. Persevere and your labors

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our\\_Lady\\_of\\_Pe%C3%B1afrancia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Lady_of_Pe%C3%B1afrancia)

will be recomposed.” This suddenly buoyed up his spirits and so he resumed his search the next day.

Simon went to the Church of Santiago de Galicia. And while he was passing the market place of Salamanca, he saw two men quarrelling. One was seriously wounded and fell at Simon’s side. The offender was caught by the crowd who milled around them and he brazenly remarked: “Had I killed my enemy, I would have escaped to Peña de Francia where no one, not even the king, could find me.” Simon was overjoyed when he heard this for now he knew that such a place did actually exist.

Several hours afterwards he resumed his way to the church of San Martin. On his way he met a man selling charcoal. Simon asked the man where he came from, and the man said he came from a place called Peña de Francia. This was the second time that Simon heard the name of the place mentioned. He then begged the man to guide him to the place called Peña de Francia but for some reason the latter refused to do so.

Simon traced the road through which he thought the man has passed. He then reached a villa called San Martin de Castañar on May 14, 1434. He went to church and after the mass, he asked a man to kindly indicate where Peña de Francia was. The man took Simon Vela to a place some distance from the church and pointed to him a hill in the far distance saying that the hill was the Peña de Francia he was looking for. Simon was very grateful and thanked God for having found the man who showed him the place of his dream.

Simon then set out for the place indicated and, after a long weary journey, came to a steep rocky hill. By this time his supply of provision had already been depleted and he was beginning to feel the pangs of hunger. The climb over the hill had considerably weakened him but he lost no heart for he knew deep within him that God had not forsaken him to a fruitless and useless search. And indeed how right he was for on the road otherwise abandoned he found a packet containing a loaf of bread and piece of meat. This relieved him so much until night overtook him and he sought shelter in a cave. Inside he prayed for guidance and soon he was lost in deep slumber.

Early in the morning of the next day, Simon began the search for the shrine in every cave where he had slept the night before. He felt distressed and discouraged for his seemed as distant as it was when he started. He knelt and prayed for strength and courage. And soon he heard the same voice he had heard before sounding clearly through the cave: “Simon, be awake: do not sleep.” Simon continued the search with more zeal in the morning of the next day. At a distance on a rocky hill, he saw a glaring and dazzling light filling the place with its brilliance. Trembling with joy, he approached it and there he found the Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus in her arms sitting on a golden throne. He knelt before her and prayed with all the fervour of his soul. Overflowing with ineffable joy he said: “Oh, Lady, the dream of my soul, the inspiration of men and women! My labors are now ended. Many years have I travelled far and wide to seek you and to drink in the beauty of your eyes! Do not forsake me: be my protection.”

In sympathy for Simon, the Lady answered: “Simon, rejoice! Your constancy will be rewarded. Your dream will be realized. Your labours are now ended. Take heed and keep in your heart what I wish you to do. Dig in this spot and take what you can see and place it on the summit of this rocky hill. Build on this hill a beautiful dwelling. You are to begin it and others will come to finish it.. This must come to pass as it has been the wish of my child.” Then the Lady suddenly disappeared and Simon was left standing alone and rooted in the spot with wonder and awe.

On the morning of May, 1434, on the spot where the apparition of the Holy Virgin disappeared, Simon began the work of digging and excavating. He, however, heard the same voice again saying: "Simon, do not attempt to undertake that big task alone. Undertake it in the presence and with the help of two, three, or more persons." Evidently this was to avert any doubt or suspicion from people as to a veracity of the miracle and the credibility of Simon. So Simon went to San Martin de Castañar, a nearby town from the spot, and asked five men to help him. They were Anton Fernandez, Pascual Perez, Benito Sanchez, Juan Hernandez and Antonio Sanchez, the parish scribe of the place.

These men thought that they were digging for hidden treasure but they were informed that they were going to dig for the objects worthier than world goods their hearts could cherish. They dug and dug, clearly following directions from divine inspiration, and, finally, on May 19, 1434, after removing a huge stone, they found imbedded among the rocks, the most coveted image of the Holy Virgin with the Child in her arms...

### **In Naga City, Philippines**

A Spanish government official from Peñafrancia, Spain, a native of San Martin de Castañar, the Covarrubias family, settled with his family in Cavite in 1712, according to locals. One day, a son, Miguel Robles de Covarrubias, a seminarian studying in the Universidad de Santo Tomas, Manila got very ill. He and his family prayed to Our Lady of Peñafrancia whose picture he was clutching to his breast for his recovery and to spare his life. He also made a vow that if cured he would construct a chapel by the bank of Pasig River in Manila, in gratitude to Her. Miraculously cured, he eventually was ordained a priest not in Manila but in the Ciudad de Nueva Caceres (now known as Naga City) by Bishop Andres Gonzalez.

To fulfil his vow, Padre Miguel, the first diocesan priest to be ordained in Naga, did two things: one, he mobilized the natives along the slopes of Mt. Isarog to construct a chapel made of local materials, nipa and bamboo this time by the bank of the Bikol river in Naga, not by the Pasig river as earlier envisioned; two, he ordered a local artisan to carve an image patterned after the picture of Our lady he always had with him. Miracles happened then and there. Among them was the story of a dog killed, its neck slashed in order to take out the poor animal's blood that was used to coat/paint the newly carved image. Dumped into the river, the dead dog began to swim once again alive with hundreds of people witnessing this prodigy. News of many other miracles spread like wildfire so was the devotion to Nuestra Senora de Peñafrancia. The letter of Padre Miguel to the Dominican Fathers of Salamanca, Spain in 1712 reported many miracles through the intercession of Our Lady. In the meantime, the devotees grew in number as the devotion spread fast far and wide, even outside the Diocese of Nueva Caceres which before comprised not only the Bikol region but including Tayabas (now Quezon), Marinduque, Laguna up to Palanan, Isabela along the cordillera ranges. Like the biblical "mustard seed" the Peñafrancia devotion today is like a "giant tree" whose branches extend to other parts of the world like America, Europe, Australia and Asia. The love story between our Lady of Peñafrancia we lovingly call "Ina" and us, her children is never ending.