

FROM HER DIARY

Mary Pyle describes how she first came to San Giovanni Rotondo and met Padre Pio

Capri - August, September 1923

What a beautiful place! We are in a lovely house with a terrace and a splendid view! Delightful swims in the sea, amusing friends. But the heat was so great and the mosquitoes so unbearable that they spoiled everything. It had been two dreadful months, quarrelsome and boring.

But Rina d'Ergin told me she wanted to go and see Padre Pio but didn't want to go without me. I don't know why but I wasn't too keen on going, in fact I had said I wasn't going, when one day while I was writing to Trompa, I thought that I shouldn't let this opportunity go by and so after having asked Maria Montessori's advice I decided to go. We decided to leave on Tuesday and when I looked in the book I saw that Tuesday was the 2nd of October, feast of the Guardian Angels and that our first day at San Giovanni was 4 October, feast of Saint Francis.

There is no doubt the Guardian Angels led me and Saint Francis called me, and I who hadn't even asked, received this grace. I am glad to have been at Capri for this.

Padre Pio - October 1923

Rina came to us at Capri on 1 October and stayed the night in our house. We left on the morning of the 2nd, taking the train, 3rd class for Foggia. We arrived at five o'clock after a pleasant journey, because the people in 3rd class are good and after having searched in several hotels we found a good room in the Albergo di Roma. The next morning we went to church and I went to communion. We left by bus for San Giovanni. There was an old priest, various people, two young people and a signorina who were also going to Padre Pio. The country is very plain. A combination of mountains and desert. How I love it; how restful it is. The signorina, who was the sister of the Father Superior pointed out the friary to me from afar. At last we arrived at San Giovanni. A small town, poor, dirty but full of hearts that loved Padre Pio. An old woman took our suitcases and led us to a house, not to say hotel, because it really didn't deserve that name.

"L'Alloggio Siciliano" where we found a room that had been prepared for us. We just washed off a bit of dust and then we left immediately for the friary in the hopes of still being able to see Padre Pio, but everything was already closed. A young

woman from Florence, Signorina Giacomini, rang the bell to ask at what hour Padre Pio said Mass and the Superior came down and said that Mass would be at 6.30 and then we left with Signorina Giacomini and some others, this time on the right road, because we had taken the wrong road, very difficult, steep and full of stones. We went to bed but I couldn't sleep. We got up early and arrived at the friary before 6 o'clock. There were already many people but we were able to get seats near the front and we waited. It was the feast of Saint Francis and little by little the church filled up with people – mostly farmers in their work clothes.

At last a simple little friar, thin and light in his movements with dark hair and beard, black bands on his hands from which one could see only the white fingers, passed through the crowd, limping a bit and everyone kissed his hand as he passed. He entered the confessional and I had seen Padre Pio for the first time. I joined the penitents who were waiting to go to confession, nearly all peasant women, and there were so many that I had to wait two hours or more. And then it was my turn for confession. At first I couldn't hear anything but then I heard a lot. He wanted to send me away without absolution but I protested and he changed his mind.

I asked if I could confess again another time and he said: "No, no, no" (shouting out loud the last 'no') and then, "have you understood that I have said no?" and I had understood without a doubt. Then I asked if my friend who was not a Catholic could speak to him in the confessional and he replied: "And I who have so many good Catholics to confess cannot lose time with those who are not." But then he added, "To speak outside the confessional – perhaps." I thought we had finished and that he had given me absolution so I got up to leave and I wanted to kiss his hand, but he pulled it away, saying something I did not understand and so I went away, but he called me back and then I saw in his big black eyes, innocent and beautiful, that laughter from heaven and he said to me with a voice that would have seemed harsh if I had not seen his eyes, "Do you want me to give you absolution or not?" And he told me to get back into the confessional. I told him I thought he had given me absolution but he said, "No, you went away with nothing." After the absolution I kissed his hand for the first time. At about 9 o'clock he said Mass, and it was a sung Mass.

He was assisted by the Superior and a very old friar. As always his hands during Mass were without mittens and even though he keeps the sleeves pulled down as much as possible we can see the holy stigmata when he raises his hands to say, "Dominus Vobiscum." His hands during Mass seem to be made of ivory – white and transparent, of a supernatural beauty – they really seem transparent, with dark pink nails, almost red as if the tips of those white fingers

had been put in the chalice – as if they had touched the divine Blood.

During the prayer for the living, which lasts a long time, there is a profound silence, his body moves a little, he prays, he is with Christ – then he continues with a small strange voice which seems to come from afar – almost as if his spirit had been outside the body during those moments. During Mass his face matches his voice. Padre Pio is not with us during that time – he is with God. He is no longer the one who gives but the one who receives. His heart must have two doors, one for God and the other for men. When the door to God is open the door to the world is closed, and when the door to the world is opened, the one to heaven is closed momentarily. During Mass Padre Pio has the door to Heaven opened, and one can almost feel the grace of God coming down over him. Afterwards in the sacristy when everyone goes to him to kiss his hands and ask him for graces, he opens wide the door of his heart to the world and one feels a river of love and warmth coming from his heart to heal physical and moral ills, to console those who suffer, to shout at those who need it but always with love, to bless the objects (medals, crucifixes, rosaries, etc.), animals, people, and with a special love, children. One can see that he loves them and jokes with them, and they love him. I once heard him sending someone away from the sacristy, shouting loudly with that voice that penetrates to the soul, "No, one must be good to children." After Mass everyone follows him to the sacristy. Half joking, half scolding, with that voice that tries to be hard to hide the sweetness of his pure heart, that is so loving, he encourages all to come soon, to speak to him if they have something to say or to ask, as he has to work and cannot waste time. If they want to speak to him on his own, he replies that for this there is the confessional. If they say they can't find the words to explain he says that if God wants them to talk He will put the words in their mouths.

Then he returns to the confessional where he stays for hours at a time with those hands touched by God resting on the little window of the confessional. Everyone takes hold of his hands as if they did not belong to him, to kiss them and sometimes they pull his sleeve to attract his attention. Sometimes a look of his sends them away running and other times he gives a look full of affection. He shakes and wakes up the soul, and then treats it more gently. He continued to hear confessions all morning and then we went back to the sacristy and I received his blessing. Rina and I went back to the house at midday still fasting yet stirred and moved. After lunch we went back for Benediction, and we saw him for a moment afterwards at the door which leads to the cloister.

□