

# PADRE PIO AND MARY PYLE

*The Vice Postulator Gerardo Di Flumeri  
writes of Mary Pyle's faith and love.*

I have often stopped to reflect on Mary Pyle and the faith and love she had for Padre Pio during those 45 years she lived close to him on the Gargano. Her faith, that struck me as unshakeable, and her love, that seemed so docile and yet so powerful, always filled me with admiration. When I came to San Giovanni Rotondo this admiration grew even more as I was able to examine the few writings and memories that she left us and that are kept in the archives of the friary.

In the following few lines I shall try to give you some examples of these memories and writings, choosing those that seem more important and that enable us to fathom that faith and love.

## **In search of the Padre's words**

As soon as Mary Pyle arrived in San Giovanni Rotondo (3 October 1923), she set about searching for letters written by Padre Pio, in whom she had at last found the unmatched spiritual director, searched for so zealously on her travels throughout America and Europe.

Getting to know the many spiritual children of the Padre, Mary discovered that they possessed a great treasure, that she desired for her own soul. And because of this she borrowed those precious writings which she eagerly began to read and meditate upon. But to have them always with her, as food for her soul, starved for genuine spiritual direction, she thought of making a copy of them before returning them to their legitimate owners.

Thus many of the Padre's letters have come down to us not just in the Padre's original handwriting, but also in the faithful and clear script of this fervent disciple of his who had come from far off America.

However Mary Pyle was not satisfied. As well as his written words she wished to collect also his spoken words. So she began to write, in Italian, an exercise book entitled in fact, "Words Spoken by Padre Pio."

These words she retrieved from her memory, others she gathered from pilgrims who visited San Giovanni Rotondo and some she copied from holy pictures signed by the Padre. A few examples will give you an idea of these words of the Padre.

Written in my book in October 1923, shortly before Padre Pio received the prohibition to write: "The man of good heart is always strong; he suffers but he hides his tears and consoles himself by offering himself for his neighbour and God. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina."

Words spoken by Padre Pio to a young man in the sacristy: "Where there is no obedience, there is no virtue. Where there is no virtue, there is no good. Where there is no good, there is no love and where there is no love there is no God and without God one does not go to Paradise. These form a ladder and if one misses a step one falls to the ground."

Words that I heard Padre Pio say in the sacristy as I remember them: "Love and fear must go together. Fear without love becomes cowardice. Love without fear becomes presumption. When there is love without fear, love rushes forward without prudence and control and without looking where it goes, and then other means become necessary (namely beatings)."

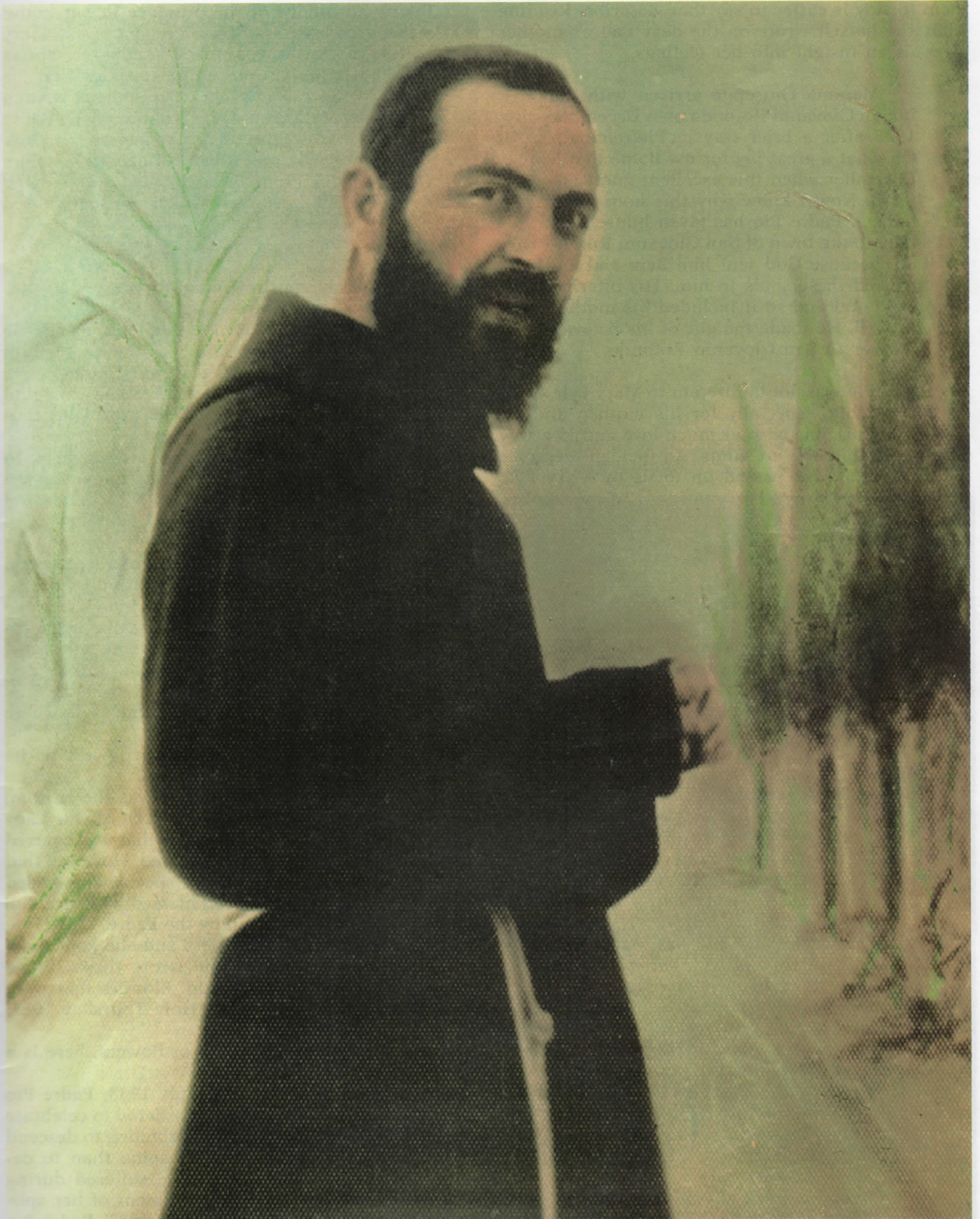
Sometimes it concerns the narration of an episode or the relation of a grace in which the focus of attention is always on the "words" spoken by the Padre.

But even in this the disciple was not satisfied. She wished to pass on to posterity not just the Padre's written and spoken words, but also the details of the many graces our Lord conceded to the faithful through his intercession.

Two thick exercise books written in English and French give evidence to what Mary Pyle was able to gather. Her principal fount of information was the faithful who would gather in the square of Our Lady of Grace church or in her home that had become a centre of prayer and a refuge for pilgrims.

Of course, Mary Pyle was not an exacting historian in the habit of analysing, examining and ascertaining the details of what made up her information: she believed with a simple faith, moved by love.

Prompted by this love, she had Padre Pio's parents as guests in her home. With what joy she had



A photo of Padre Pio taken in 1919, four years before Mary Pyle met him for the first time.

them to stay is easier to say than describe. Reading what she herself wrote on the dear Padre's mother gives us an insight into her feelings.

Mamma Giuseppa arrived with me in San Giovanni Rotondo on 5 December 1928 after a brief stay in Pietrelcina... Oh what a great joy for my home that 5 December when this excellent guest entered. Now I know why this house was built.... Padre Pio has given himself totally to the town of San Giovanni Rotondo, because God sent him here and entrusted these souls to him. His offering was total and so it included his mother as well. He made the gift of his beloved mother to San Giovanni Rotondo.

Padre Pio was not indifferent to Mary Pyle's love for his parents, especially for his mother, and rewarded his disciple with as much love and in a way that is possible only to saints. An incident deserves mentioning. It was passed on to us by Mary Pyle herself in her exercise book entitled, "Words spoken by the Padre."

One day when it was still possible to speak to Padre Pio in the sacristy, I entered and said to him: 'Padre, it seems today my mother must remain in Florence.' But he, decisively and promptly and as if without prior consideration, said: 'No, she is in Umbria.' Taken aback, I said: 'No Father, I don't believe she has to go to Umbria.' And he, shaking his head and looking into the distance as if he could see into space, said: 'She was in Umbria.' A few days later I received a letter from my mother in which she said: 'Thank Padre Pio for the visit he made me when I was ill in Perugia (Umbria). I didn't see him with my eyes, I didn't hear him with my ears, but I felt his presence close to my bed.'

Also when Padre Pio was here in my home, at the time of his mother's death, a similar thing happened. As I was always at the bedside of mother Giuseppa who was sick, I had not found a free moment to write to my mother to tell her what was happening at home and she only came to know when I sent her the telegram with the sad news of her death. My mother answered saying to me: 'Padre Pio came again to visit in these days, but I didn't know he had come to give me this sad news.' I asked Padre Pio if it was true that he had been to her and he answered me: 'I go continuously.'

Taking advantage of the presence in her house of the favoured parents of this excellent priest, Mary made them recount to her at first hand a few stories from his youth, simple and candid episodes, that she then carefully entrusted to an exercise book written in English and Italian entitled, "Told to me by Padre Pio's Father." And we owe to her, to her sure and her agile pen that easily passed from English to Italian and from that to French, the moving story of the death of Padre Pio's mother Giuseppa, that caused Padre Pio to shed tears of love.

### The faithful custodian

This open and unaffected love of Mary Pyle made her also keep, out of devotion, even the least things that in any way had belonged to the Padre.

I would like to mention here a few splendid incidents that in their frankness and simplicity profoundly affected me.

Returning from Rome where she had been to visit her family, Mary stopped at Pietrelcina with the aim of bringing mother Giuseppa to San Giovanni Rotondo.

Needless to say, she took the opportunity to visit the places hallowed by the presence of her spiritual father during his years of childhood and youth.

The respect and devotion with which she made that visit are documented by an envelope in which are contained a piece of straw and some wild flowers, dry and faded with age. On the envelope is written: "Piece of straw from a chair in Padre Pio's home and wild flowers from the countryside where he received the stigmata."

The following episode also has flowers as its object.

On Holy Thursday of 1925, as was the custom, there was prepared in the little church of Our Lady of Grace a beautiful altar of repose that was covered in flowers and splendidly illuminated. However, that year the altar of repose had a special and added attraction because it had been blessed by Padre Pio.

After the blessing given by the Padre, Mary Pyle gathered a few of these flowers and she kept them in an envelope on which she wrote these simple words: "San Giovanni Rotondo. Flowers that were beside the altar of repose on Holy Thursday 1925, blessed by Padre Pio."

And again with the theme of flowers, here is a last episode.

From 11 June 1931 to 15 July 1933, Padre Pio was segregated in his friary and ordered to celebrate Mass in the private chapel and forbidden to descend to the church. It is easier to imagine than to describe what Mary Pyle must have suffered during those two years of cruel imprisonment of her spiritual father. But finally, on 16 July 1933, Padre Pio was allowed to return to celebrate Mass in public.



**Mary Pyle as a young girl  
and young woman.**



Among the faithful who hastened to his Mass there was also the faithful and devout disciple who from the first day of the Padre's segregation had ardently prayed to hasten the joy of that day. But before going into the church, as a kind and sensitive gesture, Mary picked a flower (a daisy) in her garden to offer the Padre on his first day of freedom.

With Mass over she waited impatiently for the right moment to speak to her Spiritual Father. When at last she succeeded in meeting him she offered him that flower, symbol of her faith and love for him. Padre Pio was moved: he accepted the flower, kissed it, held it to his heart and then gave it back to Mary.

The astute disciple kept that flower and on the sheet of paper that protects it, she wrote simply the following: "the day that Padre Pio came down for the first time to celebrate Mass in church 16-7-1933, he kissed this flower and held it to his heart."

These few memories, gleaned from among the few things that remain of Mary Pyle, seem to me very indicative of her faith and love for the Padre.

#### **A few excerpts from letters**

And here I could even conclude, but before I do, I would like to give you a few excerpts from some letters Mary Pyle wrote way back in 1924, eleven months after she first arrived in San Giovanni Rotondo. They not only confirm her faith and love, but also reveal all the fervour of the new convert and give evidence of Mary's great joy in being able to live close to Padre Pio, whom she had by then chosen as her spiritual father.

Here I am with my heart full of joy and peace.... Here in this peace close to Padre Pio one understands everything more clearly, also the beauty of our apostolate. I do not speak with the Padre, I only kiss his hand as he passes and receive a blessing, but his presence for me teaches me more than a library of books (22 August 1924).

Today was another day full of beauty – perhaps there is no other day that is so peaceful and intimate as Sunday, especially after lunch when we say the Rosary together with Padre Pio and then he kneels before the altar on a small cushion with his arms resting on a chair and he reads some prayers and then together we sing hymns and Our Lady's Litany and then he blesses us. Afterwards he just turned round and called me or rather made a sign for me to come and kneel at the steps of the altar where repeating word for word, after him, I made the request to be accepted in the Third Or-

der and he placed the small habit on me and had me put on the cord and then in the sacristy he wrote my name in the little book of the rule giving me the name Pia which I had chosen. This little book is a real treasure now that he is no longer permitted to write, not even his own name in books and on holy cards, only in this case when he writes as the Father Director of the Congregation. Everyone who is fond of him becomes a tertiary and he is always happy (24 August 1924).

My dear, everything is extraordinary in this mystical corner of the world, in this school of souls, where the great physician, teacher and father, the perfumed flower of God, Padre Pio is forming a web of souls to embrace the whole world to fish for souls for Jesus. His penetrating voice calls them, his passionate and painful wounds call them. The waves of his perfume and his impassioned heart call them. At times one only smells the perfume of the physician, other times a paternal perfume.... What a fortune to have met with this saint who is perhaps the greatest since Saint Francis! (27 August 1924).

#### **Careful attention to the Padre's words**

This comparison which Mary Pyle made between Saint Francis and Padre Pio, suggests another one to me that she certainly would not have thought of, but that I have always had in mind.

If Padre Pio brings to mind Saint Francis, Mary Pyle makes one think of Saint Clare and Jacopa dei Settesoli. It strikes me that this lady from America who became a Franciscan tertiary was for Padre Pio what Clare of Assisi and "the holy and noble woman of Rome" were for Saint Francis.

I shall say more. The name which Adelia Pyle took at her Baptism that marked her definite conversion from the Protestant religion to the Catholic faith in Barcelona in 1918, has always brought to my mind another woman with the same name: Mary, the sister of Martha, who in the Gospel of Saint Luke is depicted with the disposition of one who listens and meditates on the Word of God, which Jesus defines as the best part.

In other words it strikes me that Mary Pyle had the same attitude towards Padre Pio that Mary, the sister of Martha, had with Jesus.

We can apply to Mary Pyle, who came to live on the Gargano so as to be close to Padre Pio, what the Gospel says of Mary, the silent inhabitant of the town of Bethany: "who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching" – Lk 10,39. □



**The friary and church as it was when Mary Pyle first saw it.**

**The house that Mary Pyle built just below the friary.**

