

WORDS OF LIGHT

PADRE PIO (1887-1968) was born Francesco Forgione, lived most of his life as a Franciscan Capuchin friar in Italy, and was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2002. He became famous for his piety, for his counsel to pilgrims, and for the stigmata visible in his hands. He is widely recognized as the most venerated Catholic saint of the last century.

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WORDS OF LIGHT

inspiration from the letters of

PADRE PIO

Compiled and with an Introduction by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa



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CONTENTS

Introduction	9
Introduction to the Italian Edition	15
A Short Biographical Outline	17
I <i>'I pray continually'</i>	25
II <i>'Satan is a powerful enemy'</i>	37
III <i>'I do not wish to ever offend God again'</i>	53
IV <i>'I suffer and I wish always to suffer more'</i>	65
V <i>'I live in a perpetual night'</i>	81
VI <i>'Ob! what a beautiful thing it is to become a victim of love'</i>	101
VII <i>'... and your neighbour as yourself'</i>	121
VIII <i>'Our beautiful Virgin Mary'</i>	134
IX <i>Church, Priesthood and Eucharist</i>	141
X <i>Guide of Souls</i>	154
XI <i>The School of Virtue</i>	166
XII <i>Scattered Flowers</i>	186
XIII <i>'One thing alone remains, my friend: death'</i>	199
Coroncina to the Sacred Heart of Jesus	206

SAINT PIO OF PIETRELCINA

Born May 25, 1887
in Pietrelcina, Italy

Died September 23, 1968
in San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy

Beatified May 2, 1999 by Pope John Paul II

Canonized June 16, 2002 by Pope John Paul II

Feast Day: September 23

INTRODUCTION

My first true encounter with Padre Pio goes back to the time when I was staying at San Giovanni Rotondo in order to preach to the clergy, a number of years after his death. I hadn't known him while he was alive, nor did I feel the need, as a theologian, to deepen my knowledge of him after his death.

During that stay, I happened to read Padre Pio's own account to his confessor of how he received the stigmata, written a few days after the event; this account is on display in the apse of the older part of San Giovanni Rotondo, in the very spot where the event occurred. He ends the account making his own the words of the Psalm, 'O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger, nor chasten me in thy wrath!'¹ The stigmata were not in his eyes, therefore, trophies of glory, but the just punishment of God for his sins. They gave him no satisfaction, but struck fear into him. They were for him what they had been for Jesus on the Cross. If we want to understand the state of soul with which Padre Pio lived his whole life with the stigmata present on his body, we need to read the whole psalm from which this verse is taken: 'For thy arrows have sunk into me... I am utterly spent and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart.'²

1. Ps 38:1.

2. Ps 38:2,8.

This discovery made me want to read his letters, and in them I quickly discovered the same states of soul that were described by the great mystics. Padre Pio's own 'dark night' was in no way inferior to that described by John of the Cross; and equally the 'living flame' of his love for God dazzles the reader and allows them to catch a glimpse of another world.

St Gregory the Great said that the mark of 'greater' people is that 'in the pain of their own suffering, they do not lose sight of what might help other people; while they patiently bear the adversity that afflicts them, they still think to teach others what might be necessary; in this they are like certain great doctors who, they themselves struck, forget their own wounds in order to attend to others' (*Moralia in Job*, I, 3, 40). This description applies perfectly to Padre Pio. Inwardly assaulted throughout his life by the spirit of evil, outwardly opposed and slandered by the very people from whom he could have expected support, Padre Pio – and this is a mark of heroic sanctity – never ceased to tend to the sufferings of others, physical and spiritual, with the tenderness of a mother. Until the very last day of his life.

In the numerous debates conducted through the media on the figure of Padre Pio, secular observers sometimes make superficial judgements about him. Observing the miracles and the forms of popular devotion that surround the figure of Padre Pio, they draw the conclusion that his sanctity is that of the old style, compared with, for instance, the modern sanctity of Mother Teresa. But the saints, as saints, are neither ancient nor modern, but simply different from each other, unique. Anyone who is familiar with the biblical doctrine of the charisms will not have any difficulty in understanding why this is so: some are given the gift

of learning, some charity, some the education of youth, some contemplation, and some action.

Those who claim to admire only those saints who are engaged in matters of social justice or in works of charity (not forgetting that Padre Pio himself accomplished great things in this field with his 'House for the Relief of Suffering'), effectively want to secularise sanctity. This way of thinking makes an important mistake: works of mercy are not exclusively bodily, but can be of a Spiritual kind as well. There is a charity that is no less demanding than that which tends to the sores of the body; this charity tends to the sores of a moral and Spiritual nature. This is the supreme charity which Christ exercised towards us in Gethsemane, when he took upon himself, in the form of anguish and sadness, all the sins of the world.

It is necessary to actually read the letters of Padre Pio in order to realise the stature of the man and the purity of his sanctity. Only God knows how those days were, and even more the nights, when Padre Pio left the confessional with his soul full of the sufferings and sins which had been poured into his heart. The sculptor Francis Messina, who designed the Via Crucis of San Giovanni Rotondo, portrayed Simon of Cyrene in the garments of Padre Pio. He could not have had a more beautiful intuition. Those who came to Padre Pio left the meeting feeling lighter, while he remained crushed. These are simple things that even a non-believer should, at least in part, be able to understand because they contain the human dimension of suffering and sympathy, which is well within the range of anyone's experience and precedes any talk of the supernatural.

What can be said, then, about the devotion that has blossomed around the person of Padre Pio, not

only in Italy but the entire world? Some forms of this devotion, it is true, do not progress beyond a very earthly and utilitarian stage, sometimes straying into superstition. Most have a mixed approach, a little for the body and a little for the soul. But the person who follows Padre Pio's own way of internal suffering and expiation, sees in him a companion, a friend and an incomparable light.

People with all kinds of needs and desires, then, 'gather' around Padre Pio today, just as in the Gospels people of all sorts gathered round Jesus. And Jesus, who proved himself so hard against the Pharisees and the Doctors of the Law, was never scandalised by the poor who, impelled by need, turned to him. Jesus used such occasions as an opportunity to speak to them of the Kingdom of Heaven, helping them to devote themselves to a more pure and disinterested level of faith.

An enormous literature on Padre Pio already exists. Books about Padre Pio are among the very few of a religious nature that are frequently found in secular bookshops, news-stands and station kiosks. What would be the aim, then, of making available on the wider religious book market a publication that until now has only been diffused locally? I believe that this anthology fills a serious gap. Those who suspect the existence of a Padre Pio different to the one officially 'divulged' are ever more numerous, and they wish to know this Padre Pio. This little book responds to such a need in the best possible way. In the book Padre Pio finally speaks for himself, and we know how important this is for saints. We have here, in fact, thoughts, excerpts, counsels and recollections all taken from his writings. In particular, the book draws on his letters, his letters being the most faithful mirror of his soul.

Though they are indeed just such faithful mirror, it could prove quite difficult for those who lie beyond the narrow circle of the lovers of mysticism and spirituality to read them in an integrated way, a way that manages to take in all the aspects of Padre Pio's life of prayer, love and suffering they contain.

With the beatification of Padre Pio, the Friar of Pietrelcina, coming up,* it would be hard to think of a more useful contribution to making the true Padre Pio known, a thing that was very close to his own heart. Above all, this book gives us access to the fruits of the sanctity of Padre Pio. In reading it, we can partake of some of these fruits.

Fr Raniero Cantalamessa, ofm cap

* Translator's Note: Fr Cantalamessa wrote this introduction before the beatification, which took place on 2 May 1999.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ITALIAN EDITION

Searching through the correspondence of Padre Pio with his Spiritual directors³, we have chosen and arranged the pages of more intense spirituality – both theoretical and practical – that flowed from his pen. Now we present these letters in an anthology.

It was not our intention to produce a complete and thorough study of the spirituality of Padre Pio, such as could have been obtained from the first volume of his correspondence. Because this kind of systematic study is not our aim, we do not intend to develop our material in a step-by-step manner; furthermore some of the chapters contain a selection of texts that were chosen according to our personal criteria. Each chapter is a collection of texts structured around a central idea.

This anthology is intended to be a collection of the most important parts of Padre Pio's correspondence, of moments that reveal his soul, his asceticism and his mystical life.

The selected passages have been arranged in thirteen chapters, whose general contents are outlined in the introductory comment found at the head of each chapter. These observations and reflections are brief and simple, outlining the chapter and its central idea.

This book does not provide the reader with Padre

3. Cf. Padre Pio da Pietrelcina, *Epistolario I. Corrispondenza con i direttori spirituali (1910-1922)*, ed. Melchorre da Pobladura and Alessandro da Ripabottoni, Edizioni "Padre Pio", San Giovanni Rotondo 1971. A volume of 1,377 pages. Third edition, 1987.

Pio's full correspondence. It is, as mentioned earlier, an anthology and therefore gathers together scattered flowers, each one with its own perfume, its own beauty and colours. The reader can pick one at random, according to their taste and need, then close the book and... meditate.

*From the Introduction to the first edition,
written by Fr Melchiorre da Pobladora*

A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE

Parents

Padre Pio was born at Pietrelcina in the Province of Benevento on 25 May 1887, second surviving son of Orazio Forgione, farmer, and Guiseppa De Nuzio, housewife. He was baptised on the following day in the Church of St Mary of the Angels in Pietrelcina with the name of Francesco.

The religious vocation, which Padre Pio had felt from his earliest years, matured and at sixteen years, on 6 January 1903, he arrived at the Capuchin Priory at Morcone. On the twenty-second of the same month he was clothed in the Franciscan habit, taking the name of Fra Pio, 'Brother Pius'.

On 18 July 1909 in the little Priory church at Morcone Fra Pio was ordained deacon. For reasons of health, Fra Pio had to suspend his studies and return to his family in Pietrelcina. His sojourn outside the walls of the Priory was not looked on favourably; the Provincial, Fr Benedetto from St Mark's in Lamis, who was also Padre Pio's Spiritual director, recalled him a number of times, sending him to Morcone and then to Campobasso. Obediently Fra Pio went where he was told to, but after a short time he was constrained to return to Pietrelcina.

Priesthood

At Benevento on 10 August 1910 Padre Pio, as he then became, was ordained priest, and on the fourteenth of the same month sang his first Mass at Pietrelcina.

During these years, Padre Pio maintained an intense correspondence with his two Spiritual fathers, Frs Benedetto and Agostino, both of St Mark's in Lamis. It is from this correspondence that we know of the Spiritual ascent undertaken by Padre Pio, an ascent consisting of both love and suffering.

On the 4 September 1916, Padre Pio was transferred to the Priory of San Giovanni Rotondo by the town of Gargano, where he was entrusted with the direction of the Seraphic Seminary.

The stigmata

In the days of the 5-7 August 1918, Padre Pio received the gift of transverberation, a Spiritual experience in which the heart is mystically pierced. A short time afterwards, on the twentieth of September, he received the gift of stigmata. He had implored the Lord to let them remain invisible, but he was not heard. He tried to hide them, but he did not succeed. At the request of the ecclesiastical authorities he was subjected to various medical examinations and check-ups.

Then began accusations and slander, against the Friars and especially against Padre Pio. The former were accused of trying to profit from the stigmata and of false publicity; the latter of deception and dubious morality.

The Way of the Cross

On 2 June 1922 the Holy Office intervened for the first time, and between 1924 and 1928 three apostolic visitors were sent to San Giovanni Rotondo.

On 23 March 1931 the Holy Office forbade Padre Pio to exercise his priestly ministry, with the exception of the Mass which, however, he had to celebrate in a chapel inside the Priory with only one attendant. On hearing the decree read out, Padre Pio raised his eyes to heaven and said, 'Let God's will be done'.

So Padre Pio began a life of complete isolation.

Padre Pio takes up the ministry once more

After two years of prohibition, on 14 July 1933, the Holy Office returned Padre Pio's licence to him, which enabled him to celebrate in public and hear confessions once again.

So Padre Pio began a new rhythm of life. He said Mass very quickly, normally taking about one and a half hours. A long thanksgiving after communion concluded, he heard confessions of both men and women. In the afternoon he heard the confessions of a few men, and the rest of the time he spent meditating and praying.

The Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza (‘House for the Relief of Suffering’) and the Gruppi di preghiera (‘Prayer Groups’)

On the 9 January 1940 in his little cell, Padre Pio and doctors Carlo Kiswarday and Mario Sanvico came up with the idea for the construction of the *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza*. On 19 March 1947 work began, and the idea became reality.

On 26 July 1954 the outpatient departments were open, and on 5 May 1956 the solemn inauguration took place in the presence of Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro. According to the Instructions of Padre Pio, the *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza* had to offer the same treatment to persons poor and rich alike.

Another deeply Spiritual and charitable work which Padre Pio began, was the foundation of the *Gruppi di preghiera*. In the mind of Padre Pio these groups were to be places where faith is nurtured, hotbeds of charity, where Christ himself is present every time the group meets for prayer and fraternal *agape* under the guidance of their pastors and Spiritual directors.

Whilst these two great works of Padre Pio grew and developed, one for the relief of the body and the other for the relief of the soul, Padre Pio himself strove to climb the high peak of contemplation through internal and external suffering. The whole of Padre Pio's life was characterised by the mystical state known as the 'dark night'.

Further suffering for Padre Pio

On 12 May 1947, during a canonical visit the Father General of the Order noticed certain 'abuses' committed by the so-called 'holy women' in Church and near the confessional of Padre Pio. He left some instructions aimed at remedying these abuses.

Around 1960 the complaints, accusations and appeals began again, particularly because of the fanaticism of some jealous 'followers' of the Friar. It went as far as the placement of microphones and tape recorders in Padre Pio's cell and certain parlours. So on 30 July 1960 another Apostolic Visitor arrived at San Giovanni Rotondo. Following this canonical visit,

some heavy restrictions were placed on Padre Pio's exercise of his apostolic ministry; he accepted them in a spirit of humility and obedience.

On 30 January 1964, Cardinal Ottaviani communicated to the supervisors of Padre Pio's Order the will of the Holy Father Paul VI: Padre Pio was to be allowed full liberty in the exercise of his ministry.

The death of Padre Pio

On 7 July 1968 Padre Pio had a severe collapse. From then on his health became continually worse.

On Sunday 22 September 1968, the fiftieth anniversary of Padre Pio's stigmata was solemnly celebrated with an international meeting of the *Gruppi di preghiera*. Padre Pio, by now worn out, celebrated the solemn sung Mass.

Towards midnight on 22 September, Padre Pio's condition worsened even further. He called his Superior. He confessed himself and received the sacrament of the sick. He asked forgiveness from his confreres for all the annoyances and scandals he had caused. He asked to be dressed in the religious habit and to be made comfortable in an armchair. Towards 2.30 in the morning of 23 September 1968, he breathed his last, ending his life in a holy manner. After his death it was noticed that the stigmata had disappeared without leaving the slightest scar.

The solemn funeral took place on the evening of Thursday 26 September. He was then interred in the crypt of the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie at San Giovanni Rotondo.

The tomb of Padre Pio is now the destination of a continuous stream of pilgrims and faithful who come from all parts of the world to pray and ask for grace.

On 20 March 1983 the process for Padre Pio's beatification was initiated. The ecclesiastical Tribunal was set up at San Giovanni Rotondo in the sanctuary of Santa Maria delle Grazie, and it brought its labours to a close on Sunday 21 January 1990. In seven years it questioned 73 witnesses and collected an imposing documentation of some 104 volumes, which was handed over to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. On 13 June 1997 the consultants delivered a favourable opinion regarding the heroism of the virtues practised by Padre Pio. John Paul II proclaimed Padre Pio 'Blessed' on 2 May 1999 and canonized him on 16 June 2002.

WORDS OF LIGHT

I

'I PRAY CONTINUALLY'

(*Letters*, volume I, p. 751)*

The attitude that best characterises Padre Pio is perhaps that of a 'pray-er'. His earthly day was spent in uninterrupted conversation with God. The irresistible appeal of his person and the overwhelming aura radiated by his priestly activity, could not be understood if detached from his vision of intimate, vital and personal contact with the Father who is in heaven. In fact, it is through the prism of prayer and contemplation that all regarding the stigmatic of Gargano becomes clear; all is illumined and explained; his mission need no longer be a puzzle to the men and women who live in an age of material well-being, technology and secularisation.

The vigorous brushstroke used by Tommaso da Celano in his Spiritual portrait of St Francis is a masterly one: 'Totus non tam orans quam oratio' (prayer rather than praying). Much the same could be said of Padre Pio, and the affirmation that he was a 'man of prayer' is not an emotional exaggeration or a topic for literary discussion, but rather an unequivocal judgement demonstrated by the facts, documents and

* Here, and after each of the excerpts in the following pages, the reference is to the Italian first volume of Padre Pio's collected letters. This book, mentioned in the Introduction to the first edition above, contains Padre Pio's correspondence with his Spiritual directors and runs to 1,377 pages.

the experience of all those who knew him. The life of prayer was the centre of gravity for his apostolate and the keystone of his Spiritual dwelling.

In this chapter we have gathered together those passages which more directly and importantly touch on the subject of prayer. The passages were not written – it is worth repeating – with the aim of producing a complete and comprehensive treatment of prayer, in all its different forms and with all its different levels. The passages tell not of theoretical principles, but of lived experiences. Nevertheless, these pages that follow contain sure guidance and well-grounded suggestions for everyone's life, whether they be masters or disciples in the Spiritual life.



1 My ordinary way of praying is this. No sooner have I set myself to pray than I immediately feel my soul begin to recollect itself in a peace and tranquillity that cannot be expressed in words. The senses remain suspended, with the exception of the hearing, which sometimes is not suspended. Normally this sense does not cause any bother, however, and I must confess that even if I were to be surrounded by a deafening noise, I would not be in the least disturbed. From this you will be able to understand that there are few times that I manage to discourse with the intellect during my prayer (420).

2 Time seems to fly past and it never seems that I have enough of it for prayer. I feel a great love of good reading, but I read little enough because both my ill-health prevents me, and also because on opening

a book and reading for a little, I become so profoundly recollected that reading becomes prayer (422).

3 I never tire of praying to Jesus. It is true that my prayers are worthy rather of punishment than reward, because I have sickened Jesus too much by my numberless sins; but in the end he will be moved to have mercy on me (209).

4 I want to tell you about a curious thing that has been happening to me for some time now, though I don't really give it much thought.

In prayer it happens that I forget to pray for those who commend themselves to me (not all, however), or for those who I intended to pray for. I strive beforehand to make myself pray and commend such a person or another; but of course, O Lord! as soon as I enter into prayer, my mind rests in a perfect emptiness, and not a trace remains of what was there before, even though I had it very much at heart.

At other times, on the other hand, I feel moved, standing in prayer, to pray for those I had no intention of praying for and, what is even more marvellous, for those who I have never known, nor seen, nor heard of, nor have they commended themselves to me, not even through other people. And sooner or later the Lord always answers these prayers (443).

5 As soon as I set myself to pray, I immediately feel as if my heart has been engulfed by the flame of a living love. This flame has nothing to do with any flame in this world here below. It is a delicate and sweet flame that gives no pain. It is so sweet and so delicious that the spirit finds a great satisfaction in it, and remains satisfied by it in such a way that it does

not lose the desire for it. It is, O God! the most marvellous thing for me, and perhaps I will never understand it until I enter the heavenly homeland.

This desire, far from taking away the soul's complete satisfaction, continually refines it. The enjoyment that the soul feels in its centre rather than being diminished by the desire, becomes more and more perfected. The same can be said of the desire to delight always in this most living flame, because such a desire is not quenched by the delight, but is refined by it. From this you will be able to understand the times when I can discourse with the intellect or make use of the functionings of the senses are being ever more rare.

I don't know whether I've managed to explain myself, but I don't know how to express myself more clearly. The soul which has been placed in such a state by the Lord, enriched by so much heavenly knowledge, ought to be more eloquent; and yet this is not so in my case, my soul has become almost mute. I do not know if this phenomenon is true only in me. In terms that are very general, and more often than not also empty of meaning, the soul manages to express a little bit of what the Spouse of the soul is doing in it. Believe me, my Father, all this is no light torment for the soul.

What happens in this situation is similar to what would happen to a poor shepherd boy if he was brought into a royal chamber, where an array of precious objects had been gathered together, the like of which he had never seen before. When the shepherd boy leaves the chamber he would undoubtedly have all those various precious and beautiful objects present in his mind's eye, but he would also undoubtedly not be able to say how many there were, nor to give them their proper

names. He would want to speak to others about all he had seen; he would gather together all his powers of reasoning in order to explain himself well. But seeing that all his efforts were unavailing, he would end up preferring to keep quiet.

This is what is happening in my soul which, through divine goodness alone, has been raised to this level of prayer.

Alas, my father, I realise well, of course, that we do not always deserve what we get!

All these extraordinary things, far from ceasing, become continually more and more lofty. I feel that the raptures have become stronger, and they usually come with such force that all my efforts to prevent them come to nothing. The Lord has placed my soul in a greater detachment from the things of this world here below, and I feel that he is continually strengthening it in the holy freedom of spirit (461).

6 The purely supernatural revelations and apparitions concern God, his perfections and attributes. I find it impossible to describe them in writing, even though I have them present in my mind just as I have in my hands this piece of paper on which I am now writing.

An example I hope might make this clearer in a limited way. We carry a mirror around in front of us. What do we see? Nothing other than a human image. Our intellect, if it is not infirm, does not doubt, and would not even dream of doubting, that the image is our own.

Let us imagine that all the world wants to prove to us that we are fooling ourselves in our belief that the image we see is our own; would they perhaps manage, not to remove our conviction, but to cause even a

slight doubt to raise itself in our minds about it? Certainly not.

Well, the same things happens to me regarding these divine revelations and locutions. The soul sees these heavenly secrets, these divine perfections, these divine attributes, very much more clearly than we see our image in the mirror. All the efforts I make to doubt their reality, succeed only in making my soul ever stronger in its conviction. I don't know whether you've ever seen what happens when a little water is poured over a great fire. This small amount of water not only does not put the fire out, but actually feeds the flame.

This is what happens to me after all my attempts to doubt that these things come from God.

But let us return to the image that we observed in the mirror. We cannot separate that image from the mirror, much less can we touch it. And yet the image exists outside of us, but not without us.

The same happens to me. The soul remains itself, fundamentally convinced that the heavenly revelations could only come from God, notwithstanding all its continuing efforts to doubt this fact. But as we find it impossible to separate the image from the mirror or to touch it, it is equally even more difficult for me to be able to write about these heavenly secrets, because of the lack of words to describe them. The soul without being mistaken can only state what these things are not.

I'll try to make myself clear. Let us suppose that God reveals to the soul one of his attributes, his holiness for example. The soul understands this attribute, in as far as God has given it the capacity; that which it has once understood it has always fixed inside it, but it is not able to express that which it has understood and that which it also sees.

But if others speak of this divine attribute, the soul

understands very well and very quickly if they make a mistake or speak in an imperfect way.

This way of speaking may seem incomprehensible to you, but if the Lord has given you some experience in this matter, you will know that I am speaking the truth. If you find this sort of language obscure, my Father, I declare that I don't know how to explain myself more clearly, unless Jesus wished to come to my aid. O father, who could sketch out a faithful image of these things? I would greatly desire to do this, if only to know from you what this state is in which my soul more and more finds itself at present. Patience! Blessed be the God who alone can do great things! (373).

7 Oh, if praying for other people did not include also praying for oneself, my soul would undoubtedly be the most neglected of all; and this is not because it does not recognise its need of divine help, but because it lacks the time to present all its necessities to the Lord! This seems ridiculous, and yet this is how it normally is with me (531).

8 May it please the Lord, source of all life, not to deny me this water – so sweet and so precious – that he in the exuberance of his love for humankind promises to those who thirst for it. I thirst for it, O my Father, for this water; I ask Jesus for it with continual groans and sighs. Pray yourself also, that he doesn't hide it from me; tell him, Father, so that he knows how great my need for that water is, that alone can heal a soul wounded by love.

Let this most tender Spouse of the sacred Canticle console a soul that thirsts for him, and let him console it with that same divine kiss which the holy spouse

requested of him. Tell him that until a soul receives this kiss, it will never be able to conclude a pact with him in these terms: 'I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine'⁴ (699).

9 The storm wants to submerge me, and I fear that sometimes I have already been submerged. Nothing is able to lighten the thick darkness in which I am immersed. It seems that the waters of tribulation might suffocate me at any moment.

I feel that both my physical and moral forces are exhausted. I pray, but no ray of light comes from on high. My continual asking for help from the Most High parches my throat. My God, who will free me from this dreadful prison, from this double inferno? My Father, since my praying is of no avail, ah! for the sake of charity do me the favour of asking God again and again to show me his mercy (1256).

10 Heaven, I think, is closed to me, and every impulse of spirit and every sigh I send there returns in the company of some thunderbolt to wound my poor heart. My prayer seems to be vain, and my battered spirit finds when it draws near yet again to try and gain access once more, that it is powerless to reach the very one who clothes it with courage and power. It finds itself reduced to this nothingness because it is unable to take any more risks, even though a little later it will once more take a risk and find itself reduced to the same powerlessness (1073).

4. Song 6:3.

11 My prayer, my Father, is the sting of mortal griefs and pains, horrible to think about again. I don't understand anything anymore, I don't know if my prayers are prayers, or powerful feelings of resentment that the heart addresses to its God in the fullness of its grief. I feel a forsaken emptiness inside me, horrible to think about when one is immersed in it. All there is, is nothingness, the perfect nothingness, except for the very rare lamps of uncertain light flashing in the thick darkness in which I am immersed, that say to the spirit, 'God is in the good!' But God remains hidden from the attentive spirit that burns itself up keeping watch for him, that is compelled to seek for him, though the task is exhausting. Finding itself alone in a desolate solitude the poor spirit goes on consuming itself through the many fears of offending him since it is alone with its ardent character; alone with inner and outer vexations; alone with its natural corruption; alone with the trials of the enemy. My Good, where are you? I do not know you anymore nor can I find you; but this searching for you is a necessity, you who are the life of the soul that dies. My God, my God!... I do not know how to say anything else: 'Why have you abandoned me?' (Mk. 15:34). With the exception of this abandonment I know absolutely nothing about anything, not even about life, which I do not know how to live (1029).

12 But how can I repay all that has been done for me? The answer, unfortunately, is a very painful one for me: to repay all with prayer to the Lord. That's fine, and that's what I do. But you must also agree with me that in this I am bound by many other chains. And then, what value can the prayer of one who prays in a sepulchre of death, of one whom the Lord remembers

no more, ever have? I pray continually, but my prayer does not rise above this world here below. Heaven, my Father, seems to have become made of bronze; an iron hand is placed on my head; this hand pushes me continually further and further away. In some moments it seems to me that my soul is on the point of seizing the object of its yearning. But who would believe it? The object which has been torturing my soul thus, suddenly hides itself from it, and with a hand, a cruel hand I would say, pushes me far away (751).

13 I find, O Father, your proposal completely to my liking – that is, that we unite ourselves in our intention and help each other in prayer. In all bad weather you will find me before him from half-past four until about half-past nine; there I am at all times from quarter to eleven until towards the Hail Mary. The remainder depends on circumstances (678).

14 It happens to me, for a long time now, that when Jesus comes, those things that I had very much at heart to ask him fly away and I remember only what Jesus wants me to remember. It also normally happens to me that when he comes, I feel compelled by an irresistible impulse to pray and commend to him persons whom I have never seen and who I have never heard talked of, to ask for these those graces that have never passed through my mind. To tell the truth, it has never happened when I pray in this way that the Lord leaves one of my petitions unanswered.

I'm not as surprised by this second mystery as I am amazed at the first. Sometimes I start to cry like a baby because I don't remember to ask Jesus for that which I have so much at heart. How this happens, I

cannot understand. I greatly fear the deceit of the enemy. And who knows, I go away thinking, if I am not already in the net of the enemy.

To all I have said up to now we must add the fact that this business has, for a short time, been becoming more usual than ever. Father, believe me, one of the many thorns that contribute to making the martyrdom still more harsh is exactly this. You cannot imagine how much affliction and desolation this new thorn gives me (590).

15 How is it, O Father, that when I am with Jesus, all that I have the intention and resolute will to ask him never comes to mind? Nevertheless I feel a very acute pain on account of this forgetfulness of mine. How can it be explained? Until now no one has been able to fully convince me.

Listen, then, to a very strange thing. When I am with Jesus, it happens that I request of Jesus things that I never had in mind to present to him, and also for persons that not only have I never had in mind, but – and this causes me great wonder – persons such as I have never known and never heard talk of. And here it must be observed that, when this happens to me, I have never known Jesus not to give to these persons those things which I requested for them (570).

16 Let them fear nothing; the Lord is with them. Assure them that I never forget, in my nothingness, to commend them continually to the Lord and that I pray more for them than for me; and the Lord knows if I am lying.

The reason why I pray less for myself, lies not in virtue, dear Father, but rather in my unworthiness that makes me resist asking for more graces, being

that I become increasingly more undeserving as these heavenly favours grow.

Pray for me and get these two angelic butterflies* to pray for me. If I do reach salvation, I will owe everything (after the divine mercy!) to the prayers of these holy souls (435).

* Translator's Note: Padre Pio is presumably writing about two people he knew.