



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
ON THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE CHARITABLE WORKS
OF PADRE PIO OF PIETRELCINA***

St Peter's Square

Saturday, 14 October 2006

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

With great joy I meet you in this Square, which in 1999 and in 2002 saw the memorable celebrations for the Beatification and Canonization of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina.

Today, you have come in large numbers on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of what constitutes an important and integral part of your work: the House for the Relief of Suffering.

I welcome you with affection and extend to each one of you my cordial greeting: to Archbishop Umberto D'Ambrosio, who I thank for his kind words; to the Capuchin Friars of the Shrine and of the Province; to the managers, doctors, nursing staff and personnel of the Hospital; to members of the Prayer Groups, coming from every part of Italy and also from other countries; to the pilgrims from the Diocese of Manfredonia-Vieste-San Giovanni Rotondo.

All together you form a great spiritual family, because you recognize yourselves as sons and daughters of Padre Pio, a simple man, a "poor Friar", as he used to say, to whom God has entrusted the perennial message of his Crucified Love for the whole of humanity.

You are the first inheritors of his witness, dear Capuchin Friars, who are the custodians of the Shrine of *Santa Maria delle Grazie* and the large new church dedicated to St Pio of Pietrelcina. You are the principal animators of these places of grace, visited each year by millions of pilgrims.

Spurred on and sustained by the example of Padre Pio and by his intercession, do your best to emulate him in order to help all to live a profound spiritual experience, centred on contemplation of the Crucified Christ, revealer and mediator of the merciful love of the Heavenly Father.

Padre Pio's heart, on fire with charity, gave rise to the House for the Relief of Suffering, whose name already shows the inspiration that characterizes it and the programme it intends to accomplish.

Padre Pio wanted to call it a "house" because the sick, especially those who are poor, would feel at ease in it, welcomed in a family atmosphere, and in this house one could find "relief" from his suffering. Relief thanks to two converging factors: prayer and science. This was the idea of the Founder, which must always be kept in focus and personalized by all those who work in the hospital.

Faith in God and scientific research cooperate to the same goal, which can be expressed better with the words of Jesus himself: "that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10: 10).

Yes, God is life, and wants man to be healed from every ailment of body and spirit. This is why Jesus takes untiring care of the sick, forecasting with their healing the Kingdom of God already near.

For the same reason the Church, thanks to the charisms of many saints, has extended and diffused throughout the centuries this prophetic ministry of Christ by means of the countless initiatives in the fields of health and service to the suffering.

If the scientific and technological dimension is proper to the hospital, prayer pervades the entire work of Padre Pio. It is, so to speak, the transversal element: it animates every initiative. It is the spiritual strength that moves all and orients all according to charity, which is ultimately God himself.

God is love. Therefore, the fundamental binomial that I want to repropose to your attention is what is at the centre of my Encyclical: love of God and love of neighbour, prayer and charity (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, nn. 16-18).

Padre Pio has been above all a "man of God". From childhood he felt called by him and responded "with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his strength" (cf. Dt 6: 5). Thus, divine love was able to take possession of his humble person and make of him an elect instrument of his salvific design.

Praise be to God, who in every age chooses simple and generous souls to accomplish great things (cf. Lk 1: 48-49)!

In the Church all comes from God, and without him nothing can stand. The works of Padre Pio offer an extraordinary example of this truth: the House for the Relief of Suffering can be well defined as a "miracle". Who could have humanly thought that next to that little convent of San Giovanni Rotondo there would arise one of the largest and most modern hospitals of Southern Italy?

Who, if not the man of God, who looked at reality with the eyes of faith and with great hope, because he knew that nothing is impossible to God?

This is why the celebration of the House for the Relief of Suffering is at the same time the celebration of the Padre Pio Prayer Groups, that organization whose work it is to "knock" continually at the Heart of God, like an army of intercessors, in order to make amends, to obtain the graces necessary for the Church and the world.

Dear friends of the Prayer Groups, your origin goes back to the winter of 1942, while the Second World War shook Italy, Europe and the world.

On 17 February of that year, my venerable Predecessor, Pope Pius XII, launched an appeal to the Christian people so that many would gather to pray together for peace.

Padre Pio urged his spiritual sons to readily respond to the call of the Vicar of Christ. Thus, the Prayer Groups were born, and they had the very same House for the Relief of Suffering as their organizing centre, then still under construction.

This is an image that remains an eloquent symbol: the work of Padre Pio as a large "construction site" animated by prayer and destined to charitable works.

The Prayer Groups have spread to parishes, convents and hospitals, and today the more than 3,000 groups are present on every continent. You, here today, are a representative crowd!

That original response given to the appeal of the Pope has marked for ever the character of your "spiritual" network: your prayer, as the Statutes state, is "with the Church, through the Church and in the Church" (*Preface*), to live always in full adhesion to the Magisterium, in ready obedience to the Pope and to the Bishops, under the guidance of the presbyter appointed by the Bishop.

The Statutes also prescribe an essential commitment of the Prayer Groups: "undertaking works of charity, especially to bring relief to the suffering and the needy, as a practical demonstration of the love of God" (*ibid.*).

Here again is the binomial: prayer and charity, God and neighbour. The Gospel does not allow short cuts. Whoever addresses the God of Jesus Christ is spurred to serve the brethren; and vice

versa, whoever dedicates himself or herself to the poor, discovers there the mysterious Face of God.

Dear friends, the time has passed, and it is already the moment to conclude. I want to leave you my sincere "thank you" for the support that you give me with your prayer. May the Lord reward you!

At the same time, for the community working in the House for the Relief of Suffering, I ask the special grace to be ever faithful to the spirit and the works of Padre Pio.

I entrust this prayer to the heavenly intercession of Padre Pio and the Virgin Mary. With these sentiments I warmly impart to you and those dear to you the Apostolic Blessing.

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