



Third Step **THE MERCY OF GOD**

BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES

“And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him”. (Lc 15, 20)

All monotheistic religions - based on their belief in one God only - agree on His most qualifying aspect: God is Merciful. In ancient languages this term refers to his inclination to act based “on his gut feelings”, in other words it is a God that acts and judges “according to his heart, rather than his thoughts”.

In the history of Israel, what is revealed about God is precisely his ability to be affectionate, caring, reassuring, always ready to offer new opportunities to his people. Throughout the history of salvation, God is exactly as Jesus says in his parables: it is a Father who runs towards his repentant son, throws himself at his neck and kisses him.

We too must learn to be like God the Father, who loves us always and despite our faults: we should never crush anyone, nor offend their dignity, we are never to upset a weak person, mortify anyone with our judgments, disrespect their image of children of God. God is merciful and he does not know what it would be like to be anything but Love. We are His creatures, and we want to testify this by walking our path in life, showing our awareness of His image in each one of us, by letting our lives announce His love for all humans alike.

SPIRITUALITY

God's mercy comes before human sin, it has its origins in creation and in the incarnation, which are the great signs through which we understand his merciful love. The Church - and in particular those who administer the sacrament of Reconciliation - are called to announce this love, to make it understood and to make it present and tangible through the sacraments. Man is called to give God a response made of love and availability to his grace.

From a letter by Padre Pio to fr Benedetto of San Marco in Lamis

Pietrelcina, 2nd september 1911

Dear Father,

Jesus is still with me, He has not left me yet, for I am finding it increasingly easier to react to temptations and abandon myself to God's will, as I told you in my last letter. You can see, then Father, how tender and good Jesus is, no matter how bad and wicked I am! I wonder how I can ever correspond to such great mercy. How can I repay him for such great gifts? If you only knew how often in the past I have exchanged Jesus for some contemptible thing of this world! I can see something mysterious in myself: I continuously repent of the sins I have committed, I resolve continually to never commit them again, and yet, I must admit with bitter tears, that in spite of all this I am still very imperfect and it seems to me that I often offend the Lord. At times I am really in despair because it seems to me almost impossible that Jesus should forgive so many sins; again, more often than not, it seems impossible that Jesus should let me go astray. Oh, what on earth is this all about? I would be grateful if you could explain this to me. I can only say that all this occurs to me without realizing it, for I have by no means the will to offend God even to the slightest extent.

I also suffer greatly Father, when I see how people ignore Jesus, and what is worse, how they even insult Him, especially by some dreadful blasphemies. I had rather die, or at least become deaf rather than hear so many insults offered by men to God's respect.

I have prayed to the Lord as follows: Lord let me die rather than be present when people are offending you! Please recommend me to the Lord and ask Him for this grace on my behalf, should this be for his greater glory.

I have finished celebrating the Gregorian Masses. May I ask you to send me a small offering, because at the moment, for want of money, I am unable to get the medicines I need.

Do not cease to bless me at all times.

Yours

Fr Pio

Many witnesses tell us about Padre Pio being very strict towards those who went to confession. It may be useful to go back to the origins of this behaviour, so that we can fully understand his message. First of all Padre Pio considered himself as a sinner, and he was aware of the great mercy of God; we may thus find it hard to understand why he claimed that he did not want to offend God in any way. This behaviour of his can be explained by the fact that he could feel the presence of the Lord in his life and therefore – compared to such perfection - he felt small and always imperfect. At the same time, God's presence was so intensely enriching him



PADRE PIO PRAYER GROUPS

“Follow the path that God has chosen for you”

with His power, that he felt compelled to fight evil with all his strengths. He was aware that people did not fully appreciate that God’s mercy was not only powerful in freeing them from sin, but also in making them free as to fully live their dignity of children of God.

GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO

- ❖ August 4th, 1910 during Padre Pio's first mass, Father Agostino recalls the three pillars of the priestly mission: preaching, celebration and confession; almost prophetically he adds: «your health is not so good, so I suspect you will not be a preacher. I therefore wish you to become a great confessor».
- ❖ As early as 1910, Father Benedetto Nardella forbade the young friar to hear confessions and Padre Pio repeatedly insisted, asking for his permission: in a letter of April 1911 he wrote "I come then again to beg you, in the name of the parish priest, so that he may deign to grant me the said faculty to confess [...] I would like to point out that this faculty would embrace only the Easter precept ». The negative response of the spiritual father will come on April 12: this activity would cause "damage to his physical health, and disturbance to the peace of his soul".
- ❖ In the letter of March 4, 1912, Padre Pio will again see his request denied "not only because of your poor health, but also because I have to be sure of the necessary scientific capacity before authorizing someone to the sacred ministry", in fact, Father Benedict writes.
- ❖ On March 15, 1913 the young friar again begs his superior, “I come to ask you for permission to hear confessions, at least those of the sick. Rest assured that this will do no harm to my health ", but the spiritual father will answer him again" I cannot give you the faculty to confess because I do not know your scientific capacity in moral theology "(March 16, 1913).
- ❖ Starting in 1916, after arriving in San Giovanni Rotondo, Padre Pio began his apostolate of the confessional, which will reach men and women from all over the world. He will later say: "I tremble every time I have to go down to the confessional because I have to administer the blood of Christ there".
- ❖ In a letter dated June 3rd, 1919, Padre Pio wrote to his spiritual director: «I do not have a free minute: all the time is spent in freeing the brothers from the snares of Satan. Blessed be God".
- ❖ Since May 23rd, 1931, the Decree of the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office has kept Padre Pio away from the ministerial faculties except for the private celebration of Holy Mass. Only two years later, on July 16th, 1933, will he resume celebrating in the convent church.
- ❖ On March 19th, 1934 he was given the faculty to hear confessions again, but only those of men and on May 12th of the same year he was allowed to "hear the sacramental confessions utriusque sexus"- of the other gender.
- ❖ In 2015 Pope Francis indicated Saint Pio of Pietrelcina and Saint Leopoldo Mandic as role-models for all confessors, and on 6th February of the following year their bodies would be exhibited in Saint Peter's Square on the occasion of the Jubilee of Mercy.

PADRE PIO'S WORLD: The convent of Foggia

Foggia is a city that has its origins in the 11th century, and its genesis is closely linked to the destruction of Arpi, a town located a few kilometers from the current city area. Padre Pio arrived at the convent in Sant’Anna, on February 17th, 1916, to spiritually assist Raffaolina Cerase, whose spiritual direction he had already undertaken by correspondence.

In fact this was the motivation devised by the then Provincial Father Benedetto, who decided that it was high time Padre Pio should go back to the convent, after he had stayed with his family in Pietrelcina, for health reasons, for too long. In Foggia, Padre Pio would not only dedicate to the direction of Donna Raffaolina, but he would hear many confessions, so much so that he would write: "A crowd of souls thirsty for Jesus will fall upon me, to make me put their hands in my hair". Thanks to the pages of the Diary of Father Nazareno of Arpaia, who was at the time the guardian in the Foggia convent, we also know that Padre Pio, in recent months, had been victim to a series of diabolical harassments.

PADRE PIO PRAYER GROUPS

Prayer Groups are called to express themselves in a polite and merciful way towards everyone. This should be particularly so within families and church communities: may they be seeds of communion, striving - when necessary - to take a step back, in a constant endeavour to favour the common good. They are to warmly welcome their brothers and sisters, especially those who are wounded by difficult moral or social situations, making this their main characteristic.