



Seventh step

CASA SOLLIEVO AND THE CHARISM OF CHARITY

“And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.”
(Mc 6, 56)

BIBLICAL COMMENTS

The Evangelist John reminds us in his letter that "God is love"(1 Jn 4). When the Church speaks of Charity, it refers first and foremost to God; in fact even before something to be done, Charity is something to be. God is Charity, for this reason he is love for everyone, especially for the most needy, the sick, the poor, all sinners. Jesus was the revelation of God's charity, and for this reason, full of the Holy Spirit, he showed himself to be patient especially in the long hours of his Passion until death on the Cross.

Through His saving love, we are filled with the love of God. We thus want to make sure that anyone who meets us, who touches us, crosses our gaze, can rejoice in the Lord. May nobody find us detached from their wounded history. Charity is God. Our works are our way to show God's presence close to everyone in need.

SPIRITUALITY

Prayer and charity are a dual essence of one same being, the person of Christ who is intimately linked to the Father. Jesus expresses this bond in prayer and in always obeying his will. At the same time, Jesus receives the Holy Spirit and chooses to live his mission as a perfect gift of charity towards his brothers and sisters. Following Jesus means living prayer and charity together, without any distinctions or organizational devices, but in the light of the Spirit who opens our hearts to holiness and guides us on the path of Love for God and for our brothers and sisters.

From a letter by Padre Pio to Fr Benedetto of San Marco in Lamis (*Letters I, p. 517*)

Pietrelcina, 26th March 1914

My very dear Father,

May our Lord be always in your heart to sanctify you.

...

I no sooner begin to pray than my heart is filled with a fire of love. This fire does not resemble any fire on this lowly earth. It is a delicate and very gentle flame which consumes without causing any pain. It is so sweet and delightful that it satisfies my spirit to the point of insatiability. Dear God! This is a wonderful thing for me, something I will perhaps never understand until I get to heaven.

...

Deep down in my soul, it seems to me, God has poured out many graces of compassion for the sufferings of others, especially with regard to the poor and needy. The immense pity I experience at the sight of a poor man gives rise deep down in my soul to a most vehement desire to help him, and if I were to follow the dictates of my will I should be driven to strip myself even of my clothing to cover him.

When I know that a person is afflicted in soul or body, what would I not do to have the Lord relieve him of his sufferings. Willingly I would take upon myself all of his afflictions in order to see him saved, and I would even hand over to him the benefits of such sufferings if the Lord would allow it.

I see quite clearly that this is a most singular favour from God because, in the past, although by divine mercy I never neglected helping those in need, I had little or no pity in a natural way for their sufferings.

...

Please pray for the one who intercedes with the Lord on your behalf, always and incessantly although by feeble prayers.

Your son

Fr Pio

Casa Sollievo was Padre Pio's answer to a concrete need, that of restoring good healthy standards. At that time they were dramatically poor indeed. Two things should be noted: the first is that Padre Pio's charitable action had its origins in his bond of love with God. After an ecstasy he felt drawn to give himself totally to



the needy, even to get undressed for their benefit. But there is a second very important aspect: "This is the work of providence," says Padre Pio on the day of the inauguration. Casa Sollievo is thus to be seen as a sign of God's concern for people.

The commitment that Padre Pio entrusts to the Prayer Groups to support this hospital with prayer and charity, arises precisely from the desire to give at all times, despite the changed health and social situations, a visible and constant sign of divine providence.

GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO

- ❖ Already in the early 1920s, Padre Pio turned his attention towards the weak and the sick and through his intervention in 1925 a first small hospital, the San Francesco hospital, was inaugurated in the centre of San Giovanni Rotondo – however it closed a few years later.
- ❖ On January 9th, 1940 at 4:30 pm in the Sanvico-Sanguinetti house, the first committee for the construction of the Clinic wanted by Padre Pio was established: Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza becomes a concrete dream, to be built with the help of the Divine Providence and through the work of the many devotees and benefactors already linked to it.
- ❖ On May 19th, 1947, the first blow with a pickaxe marked the beginning of the works. 300 workers were involved in the construction of the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, which slowly rose white and majestic on the mountain adjacent to the small convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Many men and women who had come from afar supported Padre Pio in the realization of this project
- ❖ In 1954 the Outpatient Clinic was inaugurated, including the Emergency Department, the Clinical Analysis Laboratory, General Medicine, Dentistry and Pediatrics.
- ❖ Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza was inaugurated on May 5th, 1956, blessed by Cardinal Lercaro. Padre Pio defined it as "the creature that the Divine Providence, has created, with your own aid". The presence of the Prayer Groups is strongly felt, they are referred to as "the pillars of the building", to which the Father entrusts his work
- ❖ In 1971 Casa Sollievo is classified as a Provincial Hospital and in 1980 as a Regional Hospital, thus becoming part of the National Health System.
- ❖ In 1991 the Ministry of Health assigned the Hospital of Padre Pio the title of I.R.C.C.S. (Institute of Hospitalization and Scientific Care) in the field of "genetic and hereditary diseases", this recognition was extended in 2012 to "innovative therapies and regenerative medicine".
- ❖ In 2001, the Mendel-House Relief Institute, founded by Luigi Gedda, was inaugurated in Rome. It is a multifunctional unit whose mission is "to study, diagnose and prevent rare diseases".
- ❖ In 2002, a few hundred meters from the hospital, the "John Paul II" Outpatient Clinic was inaugurated
- ❖ The ISBReMIT Research Center was inaugurated in 2015, an institute for Stem Cell Biology, Regenerative Medicine and Innovative Therapies, which completed the idea of relief from suffering that San Pio had thought when, on May 5, 1957, he hoped for the birth of "an intercontinental study center".

PADRE PIO'S WORLD: *Casa Sollievo and the charisma of Charity*

After the experience of the small 'San Francesco' Civil Hospital inaugurated in 1925 and closed later on due to the earthquakes of 1937 and the heavy rains of 1940 which further damaged the building, Padre Pio had the idea of building a new and greater hospital. In July 1946, the first commission of technicians and friends of Padre Pio met in the convent to discuss the site and the project of the Opera. On 5th October of that same year, the joint-stock company was set up under the name of Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza.

On May 16th, 1947, the first stone was laid and two days later work began on the excavation of the mountain where the foundations of the Clinic would take place. It was inaugurated on May 5th, 1956, at the end of nine years of shipbuilding works, with 300 beds.

CLOSE-UP ON PADRE PIO'S PRAYER GROUPS: *Casa Sollievo, our common home*

The Prayer Groups are sensitive to the needs of the local Church, supporting - as far as possible - also charitable initiatives of an economic nature. The link with Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, explicitly wanted by Padre Pio, will be expressed in concrete help of charity, particularly on the occasion of the founding day of May 5th, which will be lived in each Group with due solemnity. For this reason since the month of April it is necessary to organize how to live it in the best way, together with the various parish communities.