



*“Indulge in reading holy books...  
they are like pasture to the soul and a great support on the way to perfection”*

## 5<sup>th</sup> Month: FEBRUARY

# LET THE WORD MOULD YOU

### From the Gospel according to Matthew (13:3b-10)

*Then he told them many things in parables: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”*

Jesus refers to the power of the seed to cling to the soil, to die in it and then sprout and bear fruit as He wants to tell us how stubbornly and how lovingly his Word wants to cling to us and bear fruit in our existence. In fact Jesus tries all sorts of ways so that this may happen, even though our heart is like a stony ground, full of weeds or as shallow as the road where the Word even accepts the fact that it might be trampled on. Jesus is willing to take the risk as He firmly believes in the power of the Word to change the soil. What He needs from us, though, is the humility of the seed, so that we allow the soil to become a good soil.

The Kingdom of God, that Jesus came to bring, takes root in us, turns our lives upside down and makes us partakers of the beauty of God, precisely through the Word, which must die in us just like the little seed, that needs to sacrifice itself so as to bear fruit.

### From a letter by Padre Pio to Raffaolina Cerase

*Pietrelcina, 28 July 1914, Epist. II*

*In his cloistered ladder, St. Bernard used to teach about the four steps or means by which one can ascend to God and to perfection. These are reading and meditation, prayer and contemplation. He proved this, thanks to the words of our Divine Teacher: “Seek and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you”. He applied these to the four means or degrees of perfection. Through the lesson of the sacred scriptures and other holy and devout books, we seek God; in meditation we can find him, in prayer we knock at His heart, and through contemplation we become part of the scene of divine beauties, opened wide to the gaze of our mind through lesson, meditation and prayer.*

*In some other writings, Saint Pio explained that reading is like spiritual food applied to the soul's palate. While meditation chews it up, in other words it processes it through its thoughts, prayer tastes its flavour; and contemplation is the sweetness itself of this food of the spirit that brings refreshment to the whole soul and comforts it. Reading lingers in the outer bark of that which is read; meditation penetrates its marrow; prayer seeks it out with its questions; contemplation delights in it as in something it has come to possess.*



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Padre Pio recommends us to read various holy texts to support the importance of meditation. It is immediately clear that in his choice of these passages he is influenced by his conception of Christian life, which is free from any kind of mediocrity. In their humanity and understandable weakness, the faithful must never lose the aim of their journey, which is heading towards the perfection of God. With Padre Pio, we witness what we could be seen as a "democratisation of the mystical life"; the quest for our total union with God. While this would normally concern particular categories, such as the consecrated, Padre Pio applied it to everyone. This is why he would teach about St Bernard's four steps of perfection to all of his followers.

The idea that meditation is a nourishment of the soul refers to the profound relationship between listening to the Word and the exercise of the virtues, and it is on this subject that we wish to insist in our reflection.

### **The 'power' of the Word**

In the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*, which we have already talked about, Pope Benedict XVI stated: "In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus explains that 'the field is the world. The good seed is the children of the Kingdom' (13:38). These words apply particularly to lay Christians, who live their vocation to holiness with an existence according to the Spirit that is expressed "in a particular way in their insertion in temporal realities and in their participation in earthly activities".

The Pope adds, 'Christians must be trained to discern God's will through a familiarity with the Word of God, once it is read and studied in the Church, under the guidance of legitimate pastors. This formation in reading the Word of God has a concrete implication, according to Pope Benedict, 'in the spiritual growth of the faithful through the exercise of the virtues'.

We have already dwelt on the concept of the Word in the Old Testament: the Hebrew word is 'dabar' (word), and it indicates something more than just a sentence; it refers to something which is being said, and which is simultaneous to what is being done. In other words, every time we read the Word of God, not only does God speak to our heart, but He also acts, changes us, sanctifies us, precisely in the direction of the word which we are reading.

In our previous catechesis we were asked to read and see how God works in us through the Word, in collaboration with our faithfulness. We would now like to add a reflection on the three attitudes that make up our own way of meditating: one, is the intellectual way, grasping the meaning of what we hear; a second one is the affectionate kind, having a childlike predisposition to accept what the Lord is telling us; and the third one is the effective attitude, regulating our behaviour so that the Word will bear its mark in our existence.

#### **Getting to know ourselves in the Word**

In Padre Pio's correspondence with his spiritual directors and with the people he used to direct himself, it is frequent to spot a large number of biblical texts quoted directly or indirectly, as a sign of recurrent and in-depth meditation of the text. With the words of Psalm 14, for example, he reassured Raffaolina Cerese: "Is it perhaps that he is not faithful in keeping his promises? Is there a soul that thinks so? Yes there is one, and you want to know why? It is that of the fool: 'The fool said in his heart there is no God (the true God)'. Similarly, addressing Annita Rodote, he urged her to have the utmost trust in God: "Let the ship of your spirit have the strong anchor of trust in divine goodness and keep before your eyes the promise of God that 'he who trusts in him will not be confounded', that he 'gives grace to the humble and to the proud he resists', that 'those who watch and pray will not enter into temptation'.

Padre Pio's use of the Scriptures is especially interesting with regard to the description of his inner world: "Now the soul is going to understand what the royal prophet said: 'For iniquities you



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corrected man, and made the soul dissolve like a spider that disintegrating itself. “Propter iniquitatem corripuisti hominem; et tabescere renden sicut araneam animam eius”(Latin for: I fall short at corrections from the strength of your hand. For you have chastised man for iniquity. And you have made his soul shrink away like a spider. Nevertheless, it is in vain that any man be disquieted.) But this fortunate man of whom the prophet speaks here is acceptable to the Lord, and what he experiences is a touch of mercy to grant him new favours, and not a touch of punishment; I wish God could be that good to me, too”.

We can thus have an idea of the first way of meditating on the Scriptures: they can help us understand ourselves within the sacred text. We are made part of the Lord's reading of our existence.

### **Obeying the Word**

In meditation, Padre Pio could also put into practice his feelings of being a child of God and his desire to serve his Lord. "The sure sign to know if such souls truly love God is to know that they are always ready to observe God's holy law; to see them always attentive and vigilant so that they do not fall into sin: the desire they habitually have to see the heavenly Father glorified and to this end they do not neglect anything, as far as it is in their power, to propagate the kingdom of God: to see them continually praying to the divine Father with the same words of the divine Master: 'Our Father... Thy kingdom come'".

And on the subject of charity, he wrote: "By this virtue we make ourselves supremely dear in the eyes of the Heavenly Father who wanted to love us from eternity, to the point of giving his only-begotten Son for us. What an abyss of charity from such a tender Father! Yet by strict command of the Divine Master every Christian soul is called, is forced to imitate our Heavenly Father!

‘Be perfect as my Father who is in heaven is perfect!’

We shall just keep to these quotations so as to keep it short, as they give us an idea of how important it is to meditate in order to live the Word as obedience to the Father, within that personal journey that leads us - as mentioned earlier - to mirror ourselves in the faithfulness of the Son of God.

### **Letting ourselves be "wounded" by the Word**

The last aspect to bear in mind is the ability to let the Word of God "mark" our existence. We can find quite a few examples of this in the pages of Padre Pio's Epistolary. "I wish that in the storm, you would not even cry out: Domine, save me, so that you would not deserve the reproach: Modicae fidei, quare dubitasti" (Man of little faith, why did you have doubts?), he writes to Br. Emmanuele da San Marco La Catola.

In other passages, we can find the recommendation that one should face life with the simplicity of Jesus: 'Jesus is pleased to communicate himself to simple souls; let us strive to acquire this beautiful virtue, let us hold it in high esteem. Jesus said: 'Unless you become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven'".

Last but not least, Padre Pio insisted that we should live the virtues, as taught in the letter to the Philippians: "The virtues then that make the pious persons perfect as to the regulation of their senses are three: modesty, continence and chastity. By the virtue of modesty the pious soul comes to regulate all its outward motions. With good reason, therefore, St Paul recommends this virtue to all and declares it to be necessary; and as if all this were not enough, he also wants this virtue to be manifested to all. With continence, then, the soul comes to restrain all the senses: face, touch, taste, smell, hearing, from the excessive pleasures, however licit. With chastity, a virtue that makes our nature subservient to that of the angelic, the soul represses sensuality and detaches it from the pleasures that are forbidden.



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### **THE SPIRITUAL DIARY**

P. PELLEGRINO FUNICELLI, *Padre Pio between sandals and hood*, Leone, Foggia, 2006, p. 111

There was a knock at Father Pellegrino's room and he absent-mindedly answered: 'Come in', but when he realised that it was Padre Pio, he quickly closed the notebook he was writing in and put it back in the drawer. Very politely, but just as firmly, Padre Pio did not let himself be intimidated by that gesture, he opened the drawer, took out the notebook and read: "Gospel Diary". And so Father Pellegrino was obliged to explain that a former director of his (who was later my novitiate master, God bless him) had instructed him to write down a thought each day to reflect on the Gospel, nothing important, but the habit of referring to the Word of God day by day. Father Pellegrino reports of Padre Pio's enthusiastic reply: "Listen my son, your former director has taught you a really good practice. Now, I don't know whether through your fault or his, you have poisoned it with the ambition of some theological discovery. But go ahead. Think about what Jesus says. And as you write his words in your notebook, so print them in your heart. Then you will discover something beautiful and good for your soul.

### **PRAYER TO SAINT PIO by MONS. MICHELE CASTORO**

O Glorious Padre Pio  
humble and faithful servant of the Lamb,  
you followed Him onto the cross,  
you offered yourself as a victim for our sins.  
United with Him and filled with His same love,  
You bring the glad tidings of His Resurrection  
to the poor and to the sick,  
showing them the merciful face of God the Father.  
O tireless worker, friend of God,  
bless all those who work and support  
your Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza,  
and guide from Heaven your Prayer Groups,  
that they may be beacons of light  
in this tormented world,  
spreading everywhere  
the fragrance of your charity.  
O Holy One in Paradise  
obtain for us from the Most High  
health of body and spirit,  
peace in our families  
and the coherence of our Christian life,  
that we may one day deserve to enter  
the blessed homeland with you.

Amen