

ON THE OCCASION OF THE PADRE PIO RETREAT AT WALSINGHAM

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TALK BY: FATHER JOSEPH PIUS

‘HIS LIFE WITH PADRE PIO’

I am in a predicament because, like many of you, years and years ago in America I had heard about Padre Pio and read a book about him. I eventually went to San Giovanni and saw him from the outside and, when he told me to stay, I lived there for a year and a half outside the Friary. Then I lived with him for the last three years of his life. The quarter of a century has flown by since he's gone to heaven. I've been filled with the constant revelation on this man and I must confess to you in all seriousness I do not know who Padre Pio is. I really do not know who he is.

When I first went there I heard that reputation he had about been gruff and answering people in a rude way and so-forth and I saw it happening but when I went into the monastery and lived with him every day for those three years I understood that that public figure of Padre Pio was not the real Padre Pio. The real man was very simple, extremely humble – when you lived with him in the friary on a day to day basis there were no airs; he was just one of the friars – he wouldn't have it any other way - never asked for anything special – never wanted to be treated in a special way so that living day to day with this saint became a very ordinary experience – you wouldn't think that would you? After the beginning when my timidity died down he became an ordinary thing and I realise that the man I thought was Padre Pio wasn't Padre Pio at all. He was an entirely different man. He was a beautiful, simple, humble man with a great sense of humour even in those last years when he was suffering terribly, physically and even spiritually. In the last days of his life they would say to him “How are you?” and he would reply “The only thing I need is the casket!” He still had a beautiful sense of humour a very warm, warm humanity. But then that makes a lot of sense doesn't it? Because a man could not spend more than half a century dripping out his blood without giving love. Sometime he would take the cord which was around waist hit people with it –and so forth. It wasn't easy watching him doing these things. In the very last months of his life, one of the friars, who has since died got into the little lift by the sacristy with Padre Pio after he had let go at a man - I tell you I really I just wanted to leave him there and walk away. It was painful to see it. We got in the lift and as soon as the doors closed in front of us the friar said “but you shouldn't treat people like that.” Padre Pio, very calmly said “But I want to treat him like that.” He was working on a whole other wavelength that we didn't even know existed, we couldn't tell. There is a funny story, but it is a true story. There was a woman who wanted to come to see Padre Pio, her name was Rose. She wanted to ask Padre Pio to find her a husband. Don't laugh because a lot of ladies did that then, they wanted to make sure that they were getting a good Catholic man. Rose couldn't come to San Giovanni but her friend could. So Rose wrote a little note to hand to Padre Pio as he went through the crowds blessing after the morning confessions. The friend did that and two or three days went by and this friend had to leave and there was no answer. So finally she said to Padre Pio – she stopped him one morning and said “What shall I tell Rose?” and Padre Pio said “Tell Rose she will become a Carnation.” You hear a thing like that and you think “the old gent is getting really old!” Instead, the next year, at Rose's wedding, she married a man whose name means ‘Carnation’! Padre Pio was living in a realm that we didn't know!

My introduction to this man was strange. Because I would bring him his food in the last part of his life and I could not believe what I was seeing every day taking away that tray. The Superior had told the cooks to put extra things on it to try and tease him into eating something because the doctors were very strict in the last part of his life; "You have got to eat. You have got to eat." He nibbled at a tray, he tasted a meal then we'd stand out in the hallway and one of the reasons I'm so fat (Fr Joseph was very large!) is that after we'd put him to bed and he'd rest we'd be out in the hallway and we'd be nibbling these things. One doctor would come frequently to see Padre Pio at that time of day and I'd say "Look at this. Could he live on what he eats?" Of course the doctor said "Not even a one year old child could." I knew there was no way that he would be sneaking food.

He was sleeping only two hours a night – in the last part of his life not even that. So my introduction to the man – the human being – was all wrong. The real Padre Pio was entirely different from the public figure that had come across in books and hearsay of people. His confessor, Father Clementi, who was a saint himself, he was a beautiful Franciscan Friar, he was Padre Pio's next to last confessor. He had, I don't know how many years of martyrdom with terrible illnesses, he said to me one day "Padre Pio is starved for affection." Like human beings, inside this big public figure - well known public figure – letters came from places and I didn't even know where they were – do you know where the Cook Islands are? I don't know. There was mail from every place. So the public figure was not the real man. So I've tried to understand – Who is Padre Pio?

One day he was passing me in the hallway and his face in front of me was in profile and on his forehead I saw another pair of eyes looking at me. Now there is the truth of the real Padre Pio because Padre Pio the man hardly existed any more. He had become an empty vase and was filled with Christ. When you went to San Giovanni years ago – now it has become terribly built up – it has to happen I know but you used to be able to hear the birds singing now you hear the car horns. Anyway, years and years ago when you went there you had the same feeling as if you are going to the Holy Land. Even the terrain at times is very much like the Holy Land – I had never seen, growing up in Brooklyn New York, a herd of sheep until I got to San Giovanni. It's just like you have opened a page of the Bible and a times Padre Pio, with that great scarf he would wear to keep him warm, looked like he was a prophet walking out of Scripture.

He was an extraordinary disciple of Christ. This man, who with Christ's priesthood, had embraced his victim-hood in this extraordinary way, was to take on a figure which was for me is one of the great figures of Christianity. I remember a priest who spoke at our ordination Mass. He had three degrees and he stood up in church one day and said "Padre Pio is greater than St Francis." And he said "Don't be shocked by that." He said that because St Francis was so great that he could produce a son greater than himself. So we have awful lot to get into to really find out who is this Padre Pio. You must understand that a man who had become a living crucifix for fifty eight years had such a spirituality that we really can't understand it. One of the Friars who has studied Padre Pio for years, who has lived with him; he said "We have just touched the outer part of Padre Pio so far."

So we really don't know who Padre Pio is. We know something about the man – we know how he lived – how he lived his life – but the implication behind that we really don't know. We don't see the forest for the trees as yet. His life is too simple and it sort of blocks an understanding of this extraordinary figure because the farm lad who grows up in extreme poverty – I mean they were so poor that for instance when Padre Pio was living at home in

that period of hermitage for seven years, just like St Paul, seven years away in a hermitage in preparation for this great mission, when his confessor would come to see them, Father Agostino, the mother would have to go around to her friends on the street and say "Could you loan me a sausage because Padre Pio's confessor has come." That extreme poverty. Still Padre Pio in his letters says that Our Lord said to him "if I didn't crucify you who knows what would have happened to you." Can you imagine? So we really don't know who this man is. We really don't know. We know where he was born; we know how old he was when he died, which was eighty-one years, we know a lot of facts about him but they are still talking about the facts and they are not talking about what that implies. We can say very simply that Padre Pio was a living crucifix for fifty-eight years. Does anyone know what that means? There's never been a saint like him. I remember in San Giovanni I met a woman who had the great privilege of seeing the Mystical Wedding Ring and Padre Pio's hand. This is a very rare thing that at times the mystics actually have a ring on their finger and at times it becomes visible. This is from a mystical marriage with Christ. So we made her write it down, then we went to a Nun whose superior, the foundress, had seen the same thing and she wrote it down. When we consigned it to the cause for canonisation the priest in charge said to me "This is the last one of all the mystical phenomena known in Christian spirituality to be lacking as a document in his life. Thank you for bringing it in." Who is this person that every single phenomena in Christian spirituality was in his life? The stigmata is only one. We get trapped with the stigmata because it is the outward sign but behind that there is so much else. He had gone to an elevation with Christ – I was shocked the first time I heard this, but one woman who had lost her mother the year before said to Padre Pio, because she had found out that Padre Pio actually spoke with St Francis, they were actually very close, because he said that St Francis used to take him down from the Cross at the end of every Mass – they were very close literally like two people living together at times – anyway this woman said to Padre Pio "Father could you ever ask St Francis to say hello to my mother heaven?" and Padre Pio very nonchalantly not intending to give himself any airs he said "I can do that for you." Not for pride but to help this spiritual child of his who really has a need "I can do that for you." Like St Paul who writes in his letters he was visiting parts of paradise. He'd get into bed at night with that Rosary in his hand, other Rosaries under the pillow. What went on during the night no-one knows; where he went. The last year of his life there was a woman came from New York. I know the hospital was called St Vincent's. She was dying of cancer. She had an operation it was not successful, it was too late. She was invoking Padre Pio, she was in a Padre Pio Prayer Group in America. Suddenly he was standing at the foot of her bed in St Vincent's hospital down in Greenwich Village which is down town Manhattan if you know New York and he blessed her. She was cured and came to San Giovanni to thank him and I took her to him to thank him. Who is this man? All these things; they are interesting stories they are entertaining things even if they shock you at times but do we understand who is this Padre Pio? It's easy to say "the monk of the wounds of Christ". But what is behind that? It is like me not really knowing who the man was because I had heard things and so forth which I didn't understand then when I got to live with him I got to know who the real human being was. Now we are confronted with another problem – who is this Padre Pio. There is a document which is not yet in the cause for canonisation, we are trying to get it authenticated. A genuine mystic who told in her revelations that when Padre Pio died she saw him entering heaven with such humility that the saints were surprised at his humility as he stood there. When Christ indicated his place to him he didn't move. So according to the mystic Our Lady left her place took Padre Pio's hand and brought him to his 'throne' – that is the word that is used – to his 'throne' – this is the document of a mystic. So there is a lot more to it than just this Francesco Forgione who grew up to be the monk of the wounds. The implications of this man are fantastic. His writings will one day, I think, make him a Doctor

of the Church in Spirituality. We have only five hundred letters but they are so profound and they are all from a very early period of his life. If he was so elevated in spirituality as a young man, so perfected in Christian charity as a young man, then that first period of his life was only the beginning; there is another whole half century to follow. So what heights did he reach? I'm talking about things I really don't know about. I don't really know who Padre Pio is but I'm getting indications in these last twenty-five years being close to the cause of canonisation that this man is fantastic.

In the beginning I wanted the cause for canonisation to go very quickly "I want to see him a saint – I want to see him a saint!" Now I don't care any more. Because I realise that Our Lord was doing it to give us time to really get to see this man, to understand him. He had to come out in belief that Padre Pio was the saint sent to the twentieth century church to save humanity as the Cure of Ars was the priest sent to France to save it in the last century. These extraordinary singular saints - let us not get in a discussion about which saint is greater – how can you compare masterpieces and every saint is a masterpiece - these extraordinary saints had very particular missions to accomplish. That is certainly the case in Padre Pio. When you think that this man has spent half a century working and praying constantly. Every evening at this time of day he would be in front of the Blessed Sacrament for five entire hours every night after working all day long and think nothing of it. The only thing that stopped him was when his health failed.

His charity – there are some things about the life of Padre Pio that you don't yet know. When he went to San Giovanni in the early years there was a Bishop, Lord have mercy on him, he was not the man of God he should have been - I think he had a lot of problems – he was eventually dethroned by the Vatican and sent off to his home. He said things about Padre Pio which were all untrue – very serious things – you wouldn't want to see the back of him ever again. This exiled Bishop went to live with his sisters. They had no money to live on. So he wrote to Padre Pio's Friary and asked if he could have a monthly allowance to help him live on. Now what would you say if a man had ground your name through the mud – I'm not going to tell you what he said because it is disgusting - and the Church turns around and gives him a kick in the pants. What would you do if he wrote to you and said "Will you send me a monthly cheque to help me live?" Let's talk about these things seriously because the Father Superior at the time, a wonderful man, he brought this letter to Padre Pio and said "What are we going to do?"

Padre Pio said "Send him the money." Perfect Christian Charity and if you start digging under the monk of the wounds, forget the wounds, start looking inside the man, what comes out – perfection in every virtue. Perfection to such a point that you can't measure it any more you can't talk about it because people think you're making it up.

Just look at him from the point of view of a confessor. That man would not take a vacation because he didn't want to, in fifty-one years. The only vacation Padre Pio ever knew was when he was sick in bed – why? – because he wouldn't leave the confessional. He was in that confessional box morning afternoon and evening. When he was in good health and been confessing all day long; "Oh Padre a coach has just arrived with fifty people." He would say "Bring them in!" The very last year of his life when he was so sick and was eighty-one years old and weak, and so forth, the Father Superior came down and knelt down beside him and said "Padre you know you can leave off the confessions if you want to now." Padre Pio was so shocked he didn't know what to do. To answer the Superior was for him was so very delicate. He said "Father Superior?" in other words "I don't know what you are talking

about!” The patience of the man – if you think it is easy - if you think it is easy to hear confessions for hours at a time – seven days a week - every day single day of the year - for half a century - you do not know what you are talking about because you go to confession you are there for five minutes the priest is there for hours. Padre Pio was there for days at a time. How do you describe patience like that?

So we are dealing with this man who was a wonder worker and in his life there are beautiful stories to tell and entertaining things – do we understand what is behind it - I don’t – I really don’t know who Padre Pio is. It’s like looking into a kaleidoscope, that it keeps changing and getting bigger and brighter and you just don’t know who we are dealing with. He is elusive in his simplicity because he was so simple. We are used to people making a lot of noise and being very powerful and being out in the front row. Padre Pio was very silent and in the back row and you wouldn’t know him. The first time I met him – I was taken into the friary by an English Capuchin – he put me in the hallway upstairs and I was waiting for the entrance of ‘the saint.’ There was a row of men and I was in the middle of them – suddenly a door opened at the end of the hallway – two friars came in, arm in arm, came up the few steps that were there and started walking towards us. If Padre Pio hadn’t had the gloves on I would not have known who this Padre Pio was – that is how humble he was. You wouldn’t know at all – there was no “Stand up I’m coming.” The humility of this man – the humility to take on the load he took on – why? - who was paying him? The humility building this hospital in which he could have built a penthouse on the top of it and had servants and have had a lovely lush life and a car with a driver and you name it he could have had it. He remained in that two by four cell. Wouldn’t dare leave it. So when you start analysing what is behind you have to realise “Who is this Padre Pio?” I still don’t know and I’ve lived there for thirty years. I don’t think I will ever know. He once said “Some of the mysteries in my life you will only understand in heaven.” So even when we get to heaven we are going to say “Who was Padre Pio?”

A man who comes from the top of a bare topped mountain – has no money – and builds one of the best hospitals in all of Italy – they have machinery in that place which other hospitals just dream about – one thousand two hundred beds – how can you explain something like that. I once heard Padre Pio described by a Canon Law Theologian; he said “In the gospel of the good Samaritan we talk about one person who was sick – look at that hospital – one thousand two hundred beds – that is what Padre Pio has done.”

There are implications in his life but, my God, what is his story? Who is this man? We were living with a great saint a fantastic saint. I’ll tell you another story, someone else said – when St Francis died the friars who lived with him saw him taking the place of Lucifer in heaven. Lucifer – the word means giver of light – the angel was responsible for bringing light - that was the empty space. We are all to take the spaces of the angels that fell. You know what space Padre Pio took, according to someone who I think is very reliable? The space right next to St Francis.

Padre Pio is – on a ‘throne’ – imagine that – a ‘throne’. So all these pieces are coming out – still coming out – still coming out – still coming out – the mosaic is still not finished – we really do not know who this man is. I don’t think anyone does. Think what Padre Pio went through – can you imagine offering your whole life to the Church and wanting nothing to be but a priest of God and then being slapped into a little cell for two years like a dog in quarantine, that you couldn’t even go out in front of the church and take a walk. That’s what happened to Padre Pio. Then later Padre Pio said “Kneel down and venerate the Church

which is your Mother.” That same Church which had stopped him going out. The extraordinary virtue of this man who, in life, gave everything to Christ.

When I read the story of Padre Pio the story of the gifts, the charisma which he had – St Paul talks about the mystery of the charisma – Padre Pio had everyone of them. It’s as if he kept giving to Christ and Christ said “Now what can I give him.” Like a mother who wants to get something for her son – I can give him this - and Padre Pio did something else – I can give him that. Its as if Padre Pio was just offering, offering, offering and Christ was just saying take, take, take. He was a man who lived one foot on earth and one foot in heaven - nonchalantly going to see his father in New York City on Christmas Eve way back in 1921! Put his head down on the table when he came out of it – “where were you?” When I say what he said it wasn’t that he made an announcement he might have been answering one Friar who was with him that was recorded. He said “I was in New York to wish my father a Merry Christmas.” What does that imply to you? This extraordinary person who had entered into the realm of God, penetrated into it, to such a point that he could flip off to heaven or flip off to New York. How do you explain it? There really is no-one quite like him is there? There really isn’t – the greatness of this man which is hidden inside and this is the thing that hits me all the time because when the documents come out and when you hear things in the Beatification they keep telling us little things that come up with the Documentation. We will be saying “Is it possible that all of this was in that little, simple, humble man that I knew.” It was always like that – Padre Pio the man with the mask to put in front of this great sanctity. This extraordinary person who would know the future – the day the Pope had died and Pope Paul VI was to be elected, the friars all day long were running Pade Pio up the wall “who’s going to be the next one”; “who’s going to be the next one”; “who’s going to be the next one”. He started in the morning saying “I don’t know” then he couldn’t face it any more. So finally he said “Montini” which is the family name of Paul VI. Penetrating into unknown realms - flipping off around the world – going up to heaven and coming back down to earth. How can you explain this man? One day we were sitting upstairs and he suddenly said “I have to go to confess.”

“No you don’t go to confess at this time of day to confess.” “I must go down now.” He was like a crazy man going down the hallway. We got in the lift we went downstairs, he went into the confessional – there was no-one there - but he was confessing someone. It was like a fight that was going on – he was turning and twisting – and then it was all over. Who had he had dragged out of hell’s door that day? We saw these extraordinary things happening sometimes and he was living in an entirely different realm, but who is it that lives in that realm? Hidden in the simplicity was this extraordinary figure – so I have come to tell you that I don’t know who Padre Pio is. What else can I say? Because it is a constant revelation of a greatness of which I have no conception and of which I have very little understanding. He is not yet known so we still have to go on saying “Who is this Padre Pio.” I have a cousin in America whose is a doctor he married a nurse – two very fine Catholics – couldn’t have any children. They adopted three children. One day, Padre Pio was already dead, and I got a Christmas Card from them and I said “Padre Pio can’t they have a child of their own?” I said not another word. A year went by and on his birthday which is May 25th a letter from my Cousin’s wife arrived, and she’s the nurse, and it said “I’ve had the child I never should have had”, and a year later she had another one. He can do anything. He just goes to the Blessed Mother and says “Can’t we do this?” and the Blessed Mother who loves him so dearly says “Alright, if you want to do it we’ll do it!” The two of them have been in cahoots – ‘Holy Cahoots’ – for years and don’t think that it’s stopped, it is just going on, it’s going on all the time. There was a miracle just a year ago, a year ago tomorrow 10th August. A woman had

hernias on her spine and could no longer walk. The doctors had said “You are going to have to resign yourself to be in a wheelchair for the rest of your life.” She prayed to Padre Pio. He appeared to her in on the 7th August and on the 10th August, she didn’t know it was the anniversary of his death, she just started to get out of bed by herself and started walking around. She was in San Giovanni about a two months ago perfectly healthy fine – returned to life normally – so he is doing these extraordinary things. There again – Who is this Padre Pio who does these things? Natural order, for him, is not a problem. He did them in life on earth so now ask him anything as he doesn’t have to suffer to obtain it – it’s his inheritance. So I leave you with the question that I am still pondering myself – Who is Padre Pio? I don’t know.

During question time Father Joseph was asked:

Question:- Would it be true to say that If the kaleidoscope, which you talked about, were to come together one would see an image of Christ.

Answer:- Definitely, very definitely. Those eyes I saw were of Christ. There is one of our friars who is now very critically ill, one day he looked at Padre Pio and he actually saw Our Lord. In his letters even Padre Pio said “This morning Christ changed His heart with mine.” He was living on a spiritual level which has very seldom been attained. I would almost say ‘had never been attained’ – the spiritual greatness that man was living in. Isn’t that what every Christian is to be – to be another Christ.

Question:- To do with God sending saints when the world needs them.

Answer:- When you read church history you are instructed that God sends the church the saints it needs at the times it needs them. But he doesn’t send them like a copying machine in various copies, just one. There was one Cure of Ars in France in the last century – the say that if there were five of them France would not be in the pagan state it is in today. God sends one.

Question:- To do with Padre Pio’s fights with the devil. Part way through the answer someone mentions ‘exorcism’ and Father Joseph also answers that.

Answer:- The fights with the devil were frequent in his life. You must remember that this man’s ‘raison d’etre’ was particularly to fight evil, the evil spirits. There were times in the beginning when, for instance, he was just a young priest and had just ended that seven period of hermitage and was in Foggia at St Anne’s Friary on his way up to the Gorgano at San Giovanni never to leave it ever again, and in St Anne’s Friary Padre Pio would never take an evening meal. He’d be upstairs and suddenly the friars down in the friary would these bangs and crashes and yelling and so forth. They got to the point where they just couldn’t take it any more. A bishop came to the evening meal, hung up his hat and coat in the hallway, went into the dining room with the friars, and suddenly these bangs and crashes and yells started. The bishop just got up and ran out of the place and they had to send his hat and coat after him the next day. Then the friars said to Padre Pio “Look we’ve had enough of this.” So he said “Alright it won’t happen again.” How did he do that? He just told Our Lord “I don’t want to disturb the friars any more. Please stop it.” There was never a sound again. But he was physically beaten by evil spirits even in July of 1964 and he died in 1968. He couldn’t say Mass for three days when that happened the last time. Even in the very last hours of his life – Satan knew when he was to be called and they were constantly sending spirits against him.

But he was a warrior. We shouldn't be afraid of the devil as he wasn't. He didn't like it but he wasn't afraid - there is no power like Christ. I was at his Mass one day – still a layman - and there were two Anglicans came, they were seminarians and they were thinking about entering the Roman Church and one of them, I'm convinced, had an exorcism during Padre Pio's Mass.

Question:- To do with the stigmata.

Answer:- The stigmata disappeared with his death. They were disappearing for a short time before his death and they completely closed with his death so that when we dressed the body for burial the wounds were completely closed and left no scar which is an impossibility because when he held up his hands and the crust would fall from the stigmata you could see light coming through the hand. I cut my hand five years ago and I still have a tiny little scar. His flesh was like baby flesh. From Padre you could get as much information from about his interior spiritual life as if you were talking to the wall, never would he tell you a thing, never would he show you a thing. But the stigmatists always have a little doubt about the stigmata so the fact that in the last months of his life the stigmata began to close and dry up and then disappeared completely in the last days for him would have been a burden I should think. Just another trial. You can only understand something about Padre Pio if you read the diary of Father Agostino, which is a big bore, to tell you the truth, as a book. Because this priest would go to see Padre Pio from another monastery far away and he would arrive for an hour and he would just put down in a tiny little diary 'I found Father Pio tired', 'I found Farther Pio struggling', 'I found Father Pio suffering' it just repeats itself, it is not a book to read. But in that diary he quotes a demon speaking through a person in 1923 who said "I can no longer work directly at you Padre Pio but I will get at you through other people." That is the only way you can understand Padre Pio's life. Part of the victim-hood he had to suffer. This extraordinary victim-hood. He knew how to say only "Yes." The crucifix that he was praying in front of when he received the permanent visible stigmata has four nails in it. Now nails in spiritual language are the vows that a religious takes to hold them to the cross. Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. Padre Pio had a fourth vow – a fourth nail – and that crucifix, which was made three hundred years before he was born, has a fourth nail – the feet are separated – he had a vow to God to never say "No." Who was Padre Pio?

Question:- Do you agree that the second book of letters to his spiritual children enables those of us who are not on that exalted plane to really come to know Padre Pio much better, to understand him more?

Answer:- To understand him much better – to me they are extraordinary – that book. These are letters which Padre Pio wrote in 1914/15. He was only ordained in 1910. They are full of such exalted spirituality that to me it is unbelievable that such a young man could write like that. They are to a woman – a holy woman, of Foggia who was dying of cancer – she eventually died of cancer. The letters read like a book. It is a school of spirituality. It brings you on to discuss Padre Pio as a Spiritual Director because he operated the gifts of God in a way that no-one has done that I know of. Her could look at you and, it all depends on Our Lord, it all depends on Christ, and he could tell you your sins. I used to confess with him. I'll tell you a true story. When I first got to San Giovanni I wanted to go to confession to Padre Pio. The only things I knew how to say in Italian was Spaghetti, Lasagne and Pizza! So I got a dictionary and translated my sins onto a piece of paper and I had this in my shaking hand for three days waiting on the line to get to his confession. So I got in and knelt down and he said something to me I have no idea what he said – he could have said "what time of day is

it” I don’t know but he had a grin that was cracking his face from ear to ear. So I said “It’s impossible.” He said “What’s impossible” I said “To confess in Italian” and grinning from ear to ear he said “Well go to the priest who speaks English.” Then, two months before he died we were in his little cell on our way to the veranda he turned round to me and, as good as the Queen of England would pronounce it he said “Close the window.” Who was Padre Pio? It is very important how he was as a spiritual director because he will confess you. You wouldn’t get away – one day I had really forgotten a sin and, as it happened with all of us, if you had forgotten something he just kept saying “and what else, and what else, and what else”. Until he got it out of you, you weren’t moving and you weren’t going to get that absolution. On another day I had said that someone was a fraud, then I got scruples about it so I went to confession I said Padre Pio “I have said an awful thing. I said a man was a fraud.” He just looked at me and he just agreed! But because I was so mixed up with the scruple of saying it I wouldn’t accept what he was saying. Finally he said “leave the confessional.” That destroyed me. I was back there a week later. Another story – I was again waiting for days on this line to get to confess with him and I was first in line. Suddenly a side door flew open and there was just time to go. Padre Pio was going to be finishing then because I knew the schedule – in came a friar with two of his friends and put them in front of me. I thought –“I’ve lost my confession for the day” and I was very annoyed at that. I was standing at the door of the church and Padre Pio was confessing on the other side of the old Sacristy. When the first of these two people went in I heard him say “Where is the American?” He said it so loud that I could hear it and I clamed down. He confessed those two people who had been out in the line then he confessed me then he got up and left. He was full of those little tricks. One day I confessed with him – and this makes nothing of me now – so don’t think it does – but someone had accompanied me to the confessional. I didn’t know whether he was looking at my guardian angel or who was there. He’d look at me and say “What did you do?” “When was your last confession?” Then he’d look up and smile at someone then he’d say “What else?” then he’d look up again. I didn’t know who was there – Who is Padre Pio who is living in this realm that we didn’t know? A lady just died in San Giovanni a month ago – Martha the Swiss Lady. The night that Padre Pio died she was out on the balcony of her little home which was behind the friary garden. She couldn’t quite sleep it was 2.30a.m. in the morning. She saw, behind the friary garden, a great globe of light and it suddenly moved off into heaven. He had said an hour before he died, I was there when he died, He said “I see two mothers.” Evidently the Blessed Mother and his own Mother had come to fetch him. Who is this man that the Blessed Mother would get up and leave Heaven and come and get him? But the two of them, I told you, were in holy cahoots his whole life. Anyway I don’t want to lose that point and I keep going away from it; his spiritual direction was such that he would confess you and that’s alright, but then if you move on in the spiritual life and started to take it more seriously and started to pray and really wanted to walk with Our Lord in spiritual perfection he became more severe as you went on – much more severe. He would take things from people who just walked in off the street that he wouldn’t take from a lot of people who were living a spiritual life. In Padre Pio there was no grey it was black or it was white – there was no compromise whatsoever. It was black or it was white. I know a pharmacist who was working in a pharmacy when the pill started to come out in Italy and she was very disturbed. At the end of her confession she said to Father Pio “What am I going to do? The people who own the pharmacy where I work are selling the contraceptive pill.” He said “Get out and get another job.” No grey, either black or white. No compromise whatsoever – So who was Padre Pio? It’s a riddle. It is really a riddle.

Question:- During the days you were in the presence of Padre Pio all those years when you were in San Giovanni when you realised, as you've been explaining to us, the wonderful man, has it affected you personally to know that you were in the presence of such a man.

Answer:- In the beginning – also because I always have a little timidity as a character element – as quiet and shy. That wore off very quickly and after about six months in the friary I can remember saying “The friars are like other people.” It was a shock! Living day to day with Padre Pio it just became a daily thing you didn't think about it any more. But I always, even before going into the friary I always accepted him as a saint. But it was after his death now that a lot of this stuff is coming out and it is making us say “Who is the Padre Pio hidden inside of that simple friar? Simple, humble man.

Question:- Father Joseph – why did you go to see him and how did he help Our Lady.

Answer: The lady behind me! (Behind Father Joseph was a statue of Our Lady). My family in America were very close to the Carmelite Nuns and I know they prayed for me a great deal. I lost my mother when I was six and my father when I was seventeen. As I grew up I consecrated myself to Mary but by no way was a good Catholic. I would go to Mass on Sunday, usually late – didn't even say her Rosary – and I was searching very much for what I wanted to do in life. I'd seen Padre Pio once when I was twenty-one years old in 1959. After five years I went to see him again thinking “If don't go now I'll never see him because he'll die.” He'd accepted me as his spiritual child which means he'll take care of you spiritually as a father would take care of his own child more than take care of other children. It's a very special privilege actually. He told me to stay there without saying why and if at that time you had told me I would have been a friar/priest I would have laughed in your face. I stayed there. I asked if could go to the Holy Land on pilgrimage and he said of course but remember it is where Christ suffered. He put me in the right frame of mind. I had great deal of agitation to get back to him. I had the time and the money to travel more – but I had to get back to San Giovanni. I got back - spent the summer – knew I wanted to be a religious - packed my bags – actually closed the suitcases – went up to the friary to ask his blessing and he said “No, you are to stay here.” I thought “He accepts the responsibility before Our Lord that I'm not following the vocation that I feel I should.” I stayed during the winter and then a need came on for English person – an English speaking person – because they had lost the priest who spoke English. He had been transferred. So I started helping the friars with mail and so forth and you know I just asked to enter and they said “Yes” It had never dawned on me that I was going to enter Padre Pio's friary. He taught me a great lesson. Padre Pio constantly taught in his life. He was such a teacher like his model Christ of whom he was a great disciple as a teacher. The Provincial – the Father Superior of the friary had said “Yes, you're accepted come in” but nothing happened they never told me when to come. I went to Padre Pio and he taught me I had to do everything in the name the Lord. Once I had prayed in the name of the Lord, asking permission to be a friar and to enter and so forth, just prayer now, because all the rest had been agreed I was told “Come in on the 15th September.”

I got into my first cell in the friary - over every friary door there is a little biblical quote – what was written on mine “The name of The Lord is a strong tower. Who takes refuge in it will find.....” I was invested in the habit and Padre Pio would very often be alone in the afternoon on the veranda. He'd always be there. The real miracle in Padre Pio's life, and I'm not kidding you, is that those beads did not take root in his fingers. He was never without them. He'd be talking to you and under the pectoral piece the Rosary would be going. He was sitting there and I got to thinking, because Padre Pio's confessor had said to me “Look, the

greatest gift God can give a person after Baptism is a religious vocation.” So I was thinking “To whom must I thank; Our Lady, because I realised the consecration to her certainly meant something, or Padre Pio?” I didn’t say a word. He looked at me – he looked at me and he said “Our Lady.” The answer to your question is ‘Our Lady’ who brought me there. She did, because if I had gone back to America I would never have been a priest today. Because hell broke loose in American seminaries in the last years when I would have been studying and I never would have got through it.

Question:- To do with Prayer Groups.

Answer:- His advice to the Prayer Groups would be first of all to use prayer as a weapon, as Padre Pio did, in the fight that he was living through in the apocalyptic age, always connected with the Blessed Mother. His Mass was a fight – his Rosaries were fights – this great warrior of God was carrying on the fights. His word to you for prayer would be “Keep it going, don’t let it drop, don’t stop. The Church needs it terribly, and the world needs it terribly.” That’s why he started them. He first started talking about Prayer Groups not after the second world war, which they have in all those booklets, but in 1916.