

## Reflection for Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020

*Pray, hope and don't worry*

This week we celebrated the feast of St Pius of Pietrelcina, better known as Padre Pio, a priest of prayer and sacrifice. He was born Francesco Forgione and his parents were peasant farmers in Pietrelcina in the Italian province of Benevento. He had an older brother and three younger sisters. The family were very devout Catholics who attended daily mass, Francesco was an altar server. He regularly spoke to Jesus and Mary and could see his guardian angel. He thought this was quite normal and thought everyone could experience the same.

The family were very poor and Francesco's job was to look after the sheep. As a result he missed a lot of schooling but at the age of 10 he wanted to be a Franciscan friar. He was initially turned down due to lack of education but at the age of 15 he was allowed to join the Franciscan community at Morcone, 10 miles away from home, taking the name of Pio. He suffered very poor health having already had gastroenteritis and typhoid and at 17 became very ill again and was sent home to continue his studies for the priesthood. He was ordained a priest in 1910 but remained at home due to his ill health. Eventually he was sent to the community in San Giovanni Rotondo where he remained for the rest of his life.

On 20<sup>th</sup> September 1916 something very strange happened while he was hearing confessions. He began to feel pain in his hands and his feet and noticed bleeding wounds which smelt of roses. These wounds continued to bleed all his life but never became infected. Embarrassed by the wounds he started wearing mittens to cover them up. Other strange phenomena were reported such as miracles, prophecies and levitations during mass. The religious authorities were deeply suspicious of Padre Pio's extraordinary powers and consequently had him removed from all public ministry. He was only allowed to say mass privately but accepted the restrictions placed upon him as the

will of God. However in 1934 the ban was lifted and he was allowed to say mass publicly and hear confessions.

Many aspects of the life of Padre Pio are well known and include bilocation, ecstasy at mass and the ability to read people's hearts especially in confession. People would queue for hours to attend his mass or to go to confession. Why? He could be very hard on anyone who withheld sins from their confession and would think nothing of sending them away berating them for wasting his time. His mass would typically last 3 hours, he never said the new mass introduced in 1965 but continued with the traditional Latin mass until his death in 1968. One of his famous phrases was, 'It is easier for the earth to exist without the sun than without the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass,' Another well known phrase was, 'Prayer is the oxygen of the soul. Prayer is the best weapon we have; it is the key to God's heart.'

He attracted thousands of people because he was humble, holy and close to God and as such attracted the attention of the devil who was always trying to drag him away from his holy way of life. He spent many nights wrestling with the forces of evil and on one occasion had to contend with his bed catching fire. He told the other friars, 'Do not fear. Jesus is more powerful than all hell. At the invocation of his name every knee in heaven, on earth and in hell must bend before him.'

Some people, even today, say that they have been visited by Padre Pio, the saintly friar, who is always accompanied by the sweet smell of roses.

Pray, hope and don't worry is good advice from Padre Pio. God is merciful and will hear our prayers. This is easy to say but very difficult to put into practise so let us ask God for some share of the faith that Padre Pio had which sustained him throughout his life.

Deacon Kevin