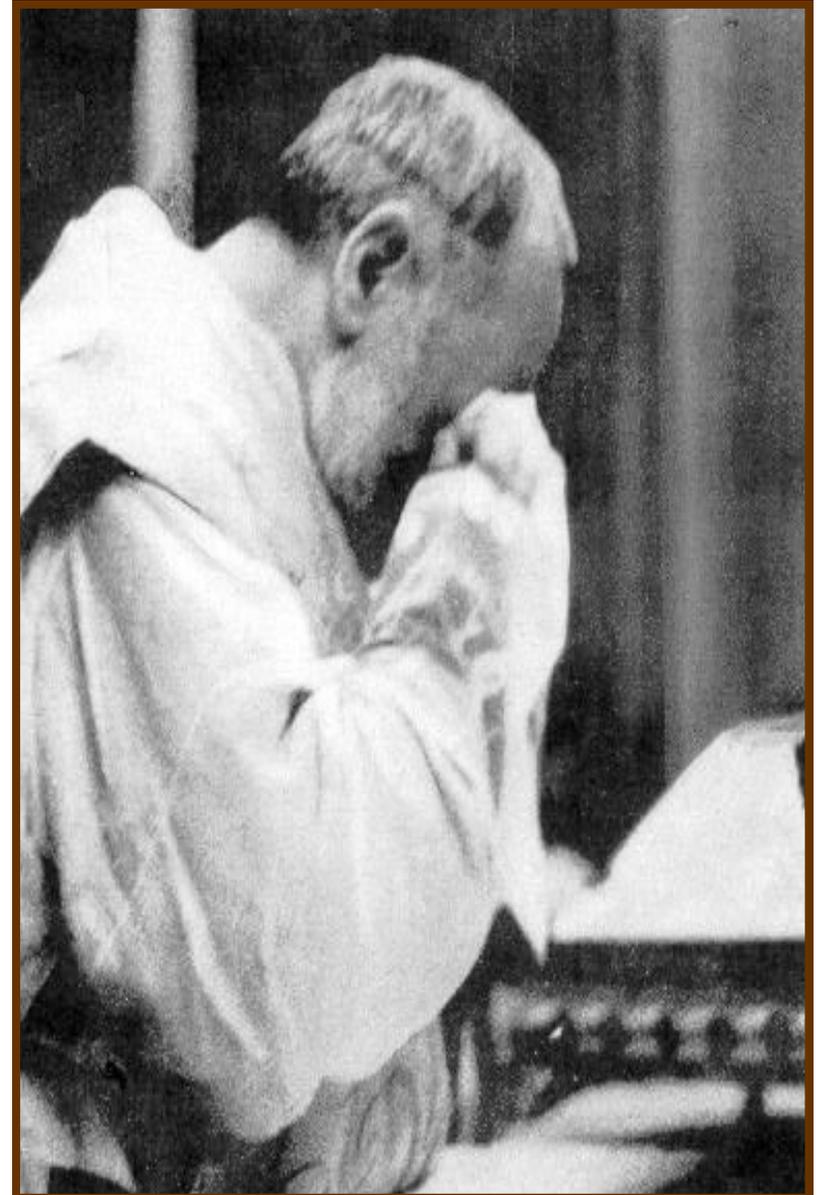




PADRE PIO CELEBRATING THE TRIDENTINE HOLY MASS

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Padre Pio and His Mass



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Essentially connected with Padre Pio's share in Christ's Priesthood was his share in the Lord's sacramental immolation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Remarkable in the Gospel accounts is Our Lord's longing to celebrate the Pascal Mystery of Holy Thursday and Good Friday.

There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! (Lk. 12:50)

I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. (Lk. 22:15)

Padre Pio was likewise eager. He would often awake by 12:30 or 1 a.m., asking whoever was caring for him if it was time for Mass yet. He would sit in his chair for several hours saying the rosary and preparing for Mass, finally going down to the sacristy around 4 a.m. for his immediate preparations. These would last until 5 a.m., when he would ascend the Altar for Mass like Jesus ascending Calvary.

During the course of the Mass Padre Pio would cry almost continuously. To an inquirer about this he said,

I don't want to shed small tears. I want to shed a flood of tears. Don't you see the great mystery of the Mass?

Maria Winowska, who has written a biography of Padre Pio (*Le vrai visage du Padre Pio* - The True Face of Padre Pio), described his Mass in this way,

The Capuchin's face which a few moments before had seemed to me jovial and affable was literally transfigured. . . . Fear, joy, sorrow, agony or grief I could follow the mysterious dialogue on (his) features. Now he protests, shakes his head in denial and waits for the reply. His entire body was frozen in mute supplication....

Suddenly great tears welled from his eyes, and his shoulders, shaken with sobs, seemed bowed beneath a crushing weight. . . . Between himself and Christ there was no distance....

I defy those who have been at San Giovanni Rotondo to attend Mass as mere spectators....

One Friday I saw him panting, oppressed as a wrestler at bay trying in vain with swift tosses of the head to shake off some obstacle which prevented him from uttering the words of Consecration. It eventually resembled single combat from which he emerged victorious but broken. On other occasions after the Sanctus great drops of sweat poured from his forehead, bathing his face which was distorted with sobs. Here was truly the man of sorrow at grips with the agony.

This mystical Mass of Padre Pio could last for three hours, during which time Padre Pio not only experienced the Passion but also prayed for and saw *in God* all those who had recommended themselves to him. In time this length declined, until the years before his death it lasted about an hour.

This length of Padre Pio's Mass was not always appreciated, however. During his early priesthood, when for convalescence he was sent home to Pietrelcina, the length of the Mass represented a real burden to the farmers and shop-keepers who attended the parish church of St. Pius V. They loved Padre Pio, but their livelihood was being endangered. When this was mentioned to the pastor, Fr. Pannuello, he took care of the problem in a most unusual way. Standing at the back of the Church one day he made a mental command to Padre Pio to limit his Mass to 30 minutes. After that the Mass no longer was a burden for the parishioners. Such was Padre Pio's obedience and God's indulgence of the human authority He left His Church.

Owing to the era in which he lived the Mass which Padre Pio offered was according to the Missal as it existed before the Second Vatican Council (the so-called Tridentine Mass, named after the Council of Trent). When the new Rites began to appear in the mid 1960s (finalized in 1969 after his death) Padre Pio continued to celebrate the old. It has been alleged by some that this was due to his dissatisfaction with the liturgical changes. However, this was not the case. Already over 80 years of age and going blind the only practical way for Padre Pio to offer the Mass was to pray the one he had been celebrating for 50 years. This same privilege was granted by law to all elderly priests. Later on, Padre Pio would also be given permission to sit during the entirety of the Mass, being unable to stand for long periods. The true character of Padre Pio's impeccable submission to the Church and his acceptance of all papal and Vatican II teaching and discipline can be seen in the letter he wrote to Pope Paul VI in September 1968.



Vatican Coat of Arms of Pope Paul VI