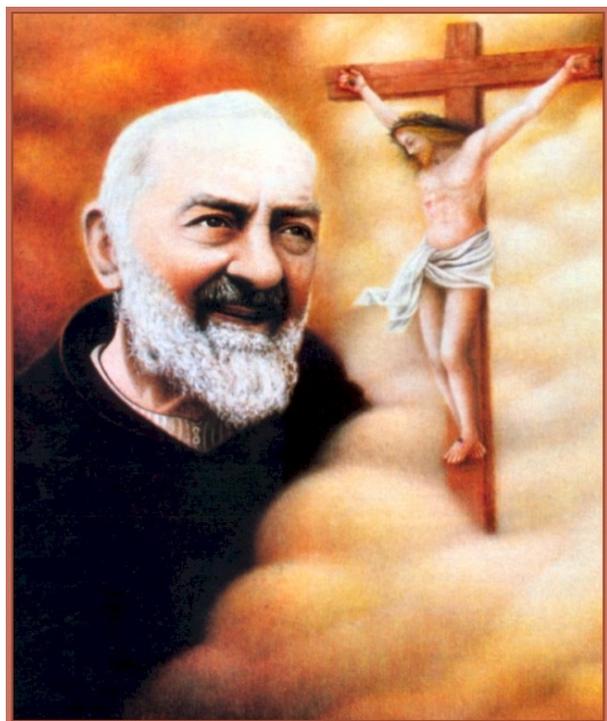


Shortly before her funeral, her two children made peace with each other. Five of her relatives went to confession on the eve of her funeral, all of whom had not received the sacrament in over five years. Clara's family was reaping the benefits of her prayers. One of her children, who had not been to confession in more than ten years, returned to the sacrament a few days after Clara's death.

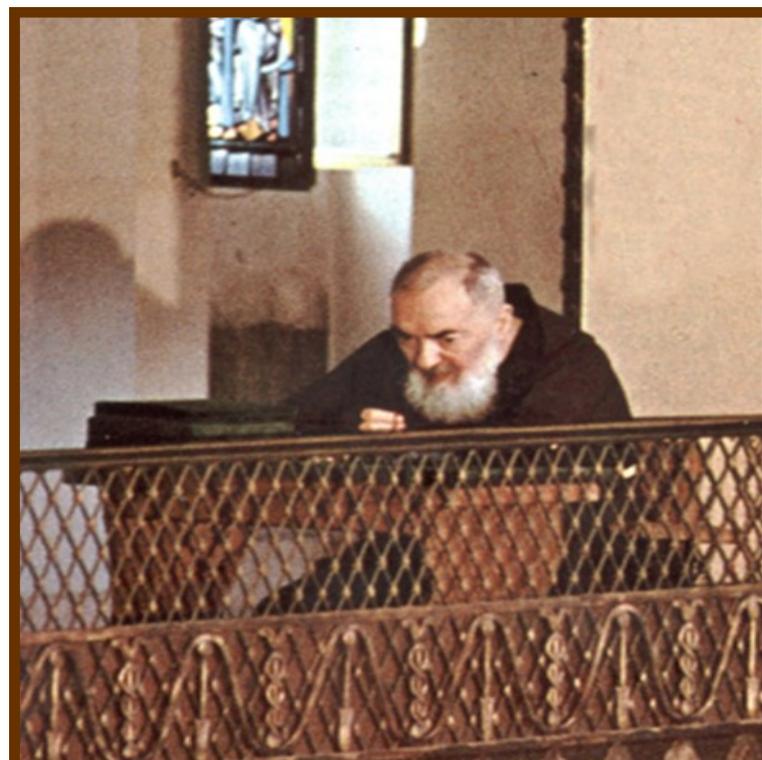
In 2006, Clara, after a short illness, passed away. Dan reflecting on Clara's death stated that while her passing has been a time of sadness for all, the extended family has received bountiful spiritual graces since her passing.

Eternal rest grant unto Clara, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.



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Padre Pio with Clara and Dan Steele



Padre Pio in the balcony of the church of
Our Lady of Grace

"Always be happily at peace with your conscience, reflecting that you are in the service of an infinitely good Father, who comes down to His creatures out of sheer goodness, to raise and transform them in Him, their Creator."

– St. Pio of Pietrelcina

Clara and Dan Steele

Two Lives Blessed by Padre Pio

Clara met Dan Steele in 1947 in her hometown of Trieste, Italy. Dan, a military police officer in the U.S. Army was stationed in Trieste at the time. Clara and Dan became good friends and when she introduced Dan to her mother, her mother seemed to like him at once. Because she was always looking out for the best interest of her daughter, she soon suggested to Clara that Dan would make a wonderful husband. But Clara was not looking for a husband. She was only fifteen years old and marriage was the farthest thing from her mind.

One day when Clara was in church, a woman whom she did not know came up to her and said, "Do you need a grace?" Clara asked the woman what she meant. "There is a saint living in San Giovanni Rotondo named Padre Pio," the woman answered. "If you need a grace or if you have a special intention, you should go and see him."

Clara thought about the conversation she and her mother had just had about Dan Steele and decided it would be a good idea to go to San Giovanni Rotondo and talk to Padre Pio about him. Clara and her mother arrived at the little church of "Our Lady of Grace," at 4:30 a.m., and already there was a large crowd assembled outside. When the doors opened, people ran as fast as they could to get a seat near the front of the church. After Mass, Clara made her confession to Padre Pio and then said to him, "I would like to know if Dan Steele would be a good marriage partner?" Padre Pio said, "Is he a good Catholic?" "He is a devout Protestant," Clara replied. "You don't know what you are doing," Padre Pio retorted in a loud voice. "You are trying to buy a cat in a bag." Obviously angry, Pio closed the shutter of the confessional. Clara had been dismissed. Angry and embarrassed, she left the confessional. "Let's leave at once," Clara said to her mother.

Through the ensuing years, Clara had several vivid dreams which confirmed to her that Padre Pio, even though separated by distance, was guiding her spiritually. When the Steele's were stationed in Nigeria, at least 15 or more stray cats were always at Clara's door. She tried to feed them and to find homes for them but it was a "no win" situation and it caused her a great deal of anxiety. During that time, she had a dream in which she was walking with Padre Pio in a beautiful, heavenly place. The sky was a brilliant blue. Padre Pio said to her, "You are worried about many things that are not so important. This is what is important." Then he knelt down in prayer and Clara perceived the fragrance of incense. His arms were cradled as though he were holding the Baby Jesus.

In another vivid dream, Clara repeated the beautiful words of a prayer of St. Francis of Paola to Padre Pio. "May the good Lord accompany you all the days of your life because that is the greatest gift." "Yes, I know that prayer," Padre Pio said to Clara in her dream. "That is what I have come to tell you."

During the last years of Clara's life, she offered many prayers and sacrifices for her family members who had strayed away from their faith. She would pray in her little chapel in her home from 4 a.m. to 6 a.m. each morning and then attend the Morning Mass. Even during the winter months in Long Beach, New York, where she and Dan lived, she offered the discomfort of attending Mass in the cold weather and many other sacrifices for the conversion of her family. It seems that Padre Pio was walking with her and listening to her prayers.

Clara passed away after a short illness, on June 16, 2006, the same day as the day of Padre Pio's canonization. (Padre Pio was declared a saint on June 16, 2002.) She was 73 years old. Clara's dying wish was that two of her children who had not spoken to each other for ten years would be reconciled.

say a few words to him, even for a moment, her many burdens would be lightened.

As soon as the Mass was over, Padre Pio left the sanctuary of the church and went to a window of the monastery where he customarily blessed the people who were standing outside. Dan rushed out of the church with all the others to stand outside beneath the monastery window and receive Padre Pio's blessing. Clara and her six children were left behind in the church. She knew that she would not be able to speak to Padre Pio on that day. There were just too many people there. It would be impossible. She was so disappointed that she started to cry. Suddenly she looked up in the balcony and saw Padre Pio. All of her children saw him as well. Her 12 year-old son Bobby, said to her, "Mother, look how Padre Pio is staring at you!" Rays of light were coming from Padre Pio's eyes. As she gazed at him, the church interior and everything else seemed to disappear. She felt such a sense of joy that it was like Heaven, Heaven on earth. Padre Pio was in the balcony of the church looking at Clara and her children and at the same time he was greeting the pilgrims from the monastery window. She could still hear the clamor of the people outside, calling to him and greeting him. When he turned and left the balcony, Clara noticed, by the way that he was walking, that he was suffering intensely from the wounds of the stigmata.

All during her visit to San Giovanni Rotondo, Clara had prayed to Padre Pio to lift the many burdens she was carrying. When she returned to Germany, her outward circumstances did not improve. However, she felt a great sense of peace and a renewed strength. Her burdens had been lifted, not exteriorly but interiorly. She knew that she had received a spiritual healing.

Clara's extended family also benefitted in many ways from Padre Pio's ministry to souls. Clara's aunt, who was a Communist, decided one day to go to confession to Padre Pio. He said to her, "You came here with no sorrow for your sins and no faith. I cannot give you absolution and you cannot receive Holy Communion." The characteristic "shock treatment," often typical of Padre Pio, worked its magic in her heart and it wasn't long before she returned to her Catholic faith.

But on the way back to Trieste, Clara began to ponder Padre Pio's words. What did he mean by a "cat in a bag?" she wondered. "Perhaps I do not know what I am doing. Maybe Padre Pio is right," she said to herself. As she thought more about the encounter with Padre Pio, her anger began to subside. Padre Pio often made remarks in the confessional which were hard to understand and he did it for a reason. It caused people to stop and think, and to reflect on their lives. Clara came to realize that Padre Pio had done her a great favor. She needed to be shaken up and to think seriously about her life. It was true, as a young girl of fifteen, she really didn't know what she was doing. Padre Pio's abruptness was just the kind of "shock treatment" she needed to move forward and to consider important life decisions. The short encounter with Padre Pio, which seemed so unpleasant at first, actually marked a great and positive change in Clara's spiritual life. It had been a blessing.

Dan did not know that Clara and her mother had gone to see Padre Pio. When he saw Clara again, he told her that he had an unusual experience. He was taking a walk and enjoying the fresh air and suddenly there came over him a very strong desire to become a Catholic. He told Clara that it really had nothing to do with the fact that she was a Catholic. It was something he had to do for himself and he felt convinced that this was what God wanted for him. His desire to become Catholic occurred at about the same time that Clara and her mother were in San Giovanni Rotondo talking to Padre Pio.

Dan was baptized into the Catholic Church by Padre Pio in 1948. He was 19 years old. Mary Pyle, Padre Pio's American secretary, acted as his godmother. Although very nervous, and with very limited Italian, he made his first confession to Padre Pio. Due to the fasting rules, Padre Pio said that he must wait till the following day to receive his first Holy Communion. Without realizing it, Dan had absent mindedly put a little twig, like a toothpick, in his mouth and Padre Pio had noticed it.



Padre Pio baptizing Dan Steele in 1948. (Clara is standing directly behind Dan - with scarf on)

Dan and Clara wanted to get married in San Giovanni Rotondo but because of Army regulations, they were married in Trieste instead. Shortly after, Dan spoke to Padre Pio and asked him if he could bring Clara to San Giovanni Rotondo to have their marriage blessed. Padre Pio smiled at him and agreed. Dan would recall later, after many visits to the monastery, that was the one and only time that Padre Pio had ever smiled at him. By nature, Padre Pio was serious and reserved. His smile was indeed, a blessing in itself. On one of these visits, Dan asked Padre Pio if he would accept him as his spiritual son. Padre Pio thought for a moment and then said to him in Italian, "As long as you stay good."

In the beautiful 16th century church of Our Lady of Grace, Clara and Dan knelt before Padre Pio as he blessed their marriage. Clara prayed silently to him for his intercession regarding her future. She was only sixteen years old and was somewhat apprehensive about her newly married status. During the blessing, Padre Pio smiled at Clara, and said, "To you I offer my hand."

Whenever they could, Clara and Dan would travel to the monastery to see Padre Pio. One time Clara made the journey because her mother was very ill, and she wanted to ask Padre Pio for his prayers. Clara arrived at the church at 4:00 a.m. and waited in a corridor, because she knew he passed by there each morning on his way to the sacristy. A large number of people had also assembled there with the same intention, to say a word to him or to ask for his prayers. As he came into view, a man pointed to Clara and said to Padre Pio, "Pray for that girl's mother. She is ill." Another person called out to Padre Pio and pointed to Clara, "Pray for the soul of that girl's mother." Clara could not understand it. Both of the individuals were strangers to her and she had not told anyone that her mother was sick. When the two men asked him to pray for her mother, Padre Pio lifted his eyes upward as though to Heaven and remained completely motionless. Soon, one of the friars closed the door to the hall where Padre Pio was standing, and never lowering his eyes, or moving, he disappeared from view. What she did not know at the time was that her mother had already passed away. When she arrived home, she learned that her mother had already been buried.

Dan was transferred to a military base in Germany and as time went by, he and Clara were blessed to have a family of seven beautiful children. In 1964, the Steeles were able to travel to San Giovanni Rotondo once again. They were always very grateful whenever they could attend Padre Pio's Mass. The beauty and spirituality of his Mass was impossible to explain to someone who had not experienced it. Padre Pio did not simply recite the prayers of the Mass and voice the responses. He saw Jesus during the Holy Sacrifice and talked to Him. In doing so, he lost track of time. That was why his Mass lasted so long.

At the time of their visit to San Giovanni Rotondo in 1964, Clara was having many difficulties in her life. All through the Mass, she prayed silently to Padre Pio, asking for his help. Her great desire was to speak to him. She felt that if she could just