

A photo of Padre Pio's hometown of Pietrelcina, Italy, with the Capuchin friary in the background. On one occasion, in 1909, Padre Pio was walking in Pietrelcina with Don Salvatore Pannullo, the parish priest of the town. Padre Pio told Don Salvatore that he could hear angels singing and church bells ringing and he perceived the fragrance of incense. Padre Pio said that someday a church would be built on the very spot where they were standing, and would be for the glory and praise of God. It was a prophecy that came to pass many years later. Construction for a church and friary was begun in 1926, a gift to Padre Pio from his American secretary, Mary Pyle. He named the friary, "Holy Family."

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Padre Pio Enters the Friary



Around age three Francesco recited the rosary and other prayers by himself.

Offered himself to God at age five forever to God.

The Sacred Heart put his hand on Francesco's head.

The Sacred Heart accepted his offer:

"Jesus from the tabernacle made a sign with the hand to come to the altar, and put his hand on Francesco's head."

Padre Pio Enters the Friary

by Stefano Campanella

Only a few days remained before he would leave the world.

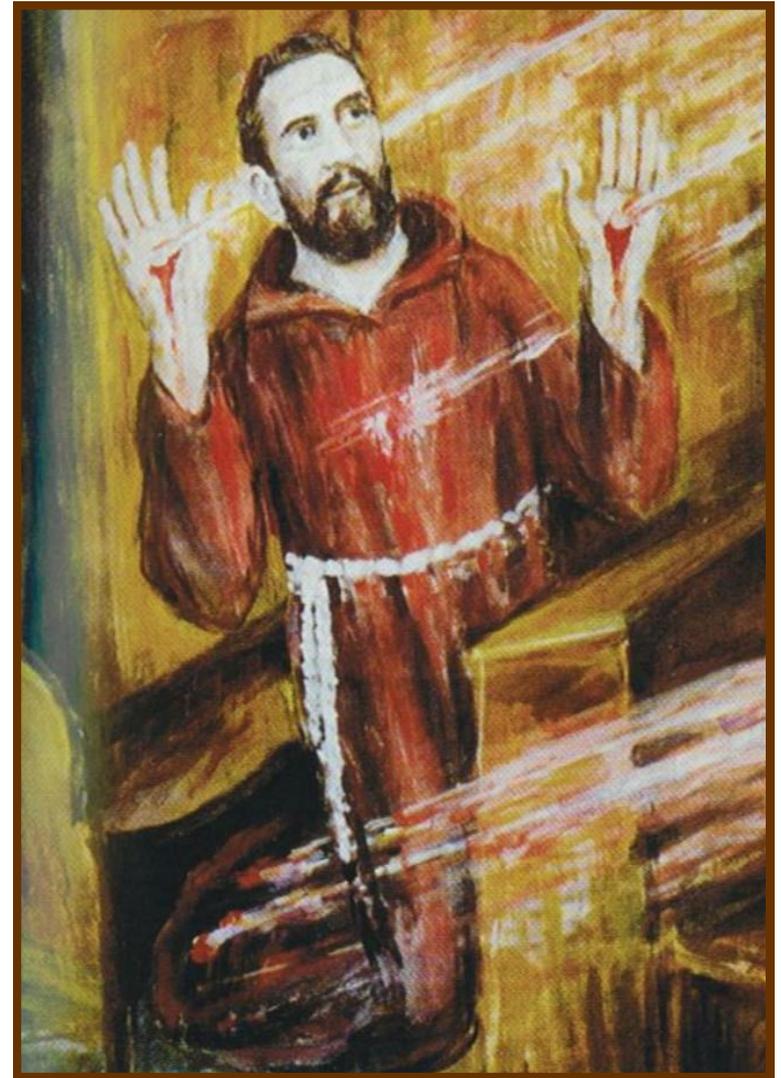
Francesco Forgione (Padre Pio) knew that on the day of Epiphany, 6 January of 1903, he would be entering the Capuchin friary to fulfill his dream.

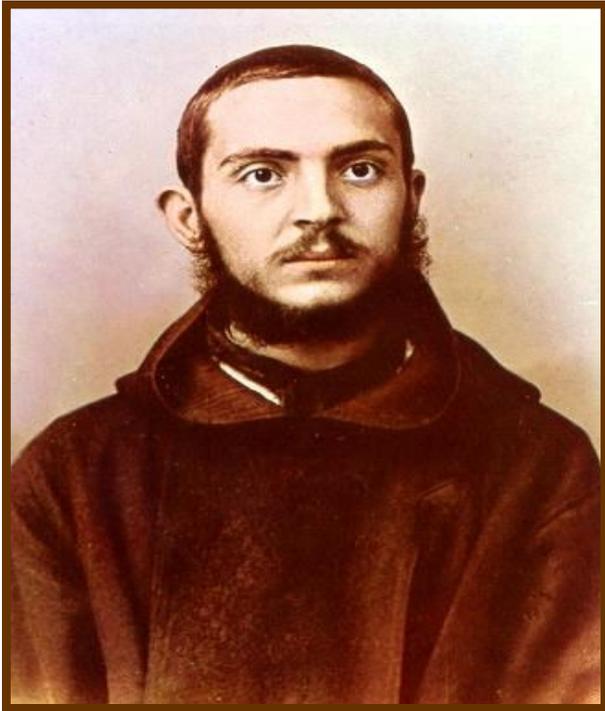
However, he also knew that this meant leaving his home, the place where he was born and grew up, the fields where he had played and grazed his sheep and so many other things that were very dear to him. This knowledge caused him suffering and a battle in his soul between: "*His vocation on one side...and the sweet but false delight of the world on the other,*" which risked suffocating "*the good seed of his vocation.*"

The Lord seeing the state of his soul made his vocation clearer to him in a vision. While he was "*meditating on his vocation*" and how "*to say goodbye to the world to dedicate himself completely to God in the religious life,*" he was suddenly taken up in ecstasy. At his side he saw "*a majestic figure of rare beauty, as brilliant as the sun*" who took him by the hand and said: "*come with me, for it is fitting that you fight as a valiant warrior.*" And he led him to a vast plane, where there were many people gathered and divided into two groups. "*On one side he saw men of beautiful countenance dressed in white as candid as the snow...and on the other side men of hideous appearance, dressed in black like dark shadows.*" Between these two large groups was a wide space where he was placed by his guide and a man who seemed like a giant came towards him. Francesco was terrified and while "*the strange person continued to advance, the majestic man of rare beauty told him that he had to fight with that individual. The poor soul turned pale. He began to tremble and was about to fall into a faint from fright. But the guide supported him at his side. When he got over a little from the fright, the youth turned to his guide and begged him to spare him from being exposed to the fury of that strange person who seemed so strong that not even all the strength of all the men together would be able to bring him down.*" But the answer he received left him no escape: "*Your every resistance is in vain; you must fight. Take courage, enter into the battle with faith; advance courageously as I will be close to you. As a reward for the victory which you will sustain I will present you with a splendid crown.*"



Within a month of his ordination, (September 7, 1910), as Padre Pio was praying in the Piana Romana, Jesus and Mary appeared to him and gave him the wounds of Christ, the Stigmata. For Padre Pio's doctors, the wounds created much confusion. He asked Jesus to take away "the annoyance," adding, "I do want to suffer, even to die of suffering, but all in secret." The wounds went away and the supernatural life of Padre Pio remained a secret...for a while.





An early photograph of Brother Pio. One of his classmates said, "He was always humble, recollected and silent. He had something that distinguished him from others...He was very handsome. His behavior which was so different from that of the others was admired by everybody. He was not shy in character, but affable and very simple...His personality was truly beautiful because of his countenance and because of his self possession. He distinguished himself from other students by his modesty, humility, and great piety."

On January 22, 1904, Fra Pio knelt before the altar and made his First Profession of the Evangelical Counsels of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. Then, he traveled by oxcart to the seventeenth-century friary of St. Francis of Assisi and began six years of study for the priesthood and continued his development in community life toward the profession of his solemn vows. After three years of temporary profession, Padre Pio took his final vows in 1907.

The young man took courage and "*entered enthusiastically into battle with this formidable and mysterious person.*" The battle was terrible. But thanks to the help of that majestic man of rare beauty, who never left his side, the 15-year-old youth finally got the better of the giant of dark countenance, "*he overcame him and forced him to flee. The guide then faithful to his promise took out from beneath his robe a crown of rare and indescribable beauty, and he placed it on his head, but at once removed it,*" saying: "*I have another much more beautiful crown reserved for you if you fight well the being whom you have just fought now. He will always return to the assault to regain his lost honor; you must fight valiantly and never doubt my help.*"

Always remain on the watch because that mysterious person will try to take you by surprise. Do not be afraid of his attacks, do not fear his formidable presence and remember that I have promised you that I will always be close to you, to help you always so that you always are able to overcome him."

After the mysterious person had fled, "*the whole multitude of men of hideous appearance*" left also "*with shouts, imprecations and deafening cries,*" while from "*that other multitude of men of beautiful countenance voices of applause and praise were raised for that majestic man brilliant as the sun,*" who assisted Francesco so "*splendidly in such a bitter battle.*"

This vision left the youth "*full of courage,*" so that he now longed to make his definite break from the world to dedicate himself wholly to his religious vocation.

Even though the meaning of the vision had been clear to him, he was still "*not completely convinced,*" and so the Lord made it still clearer to him with a "*further vision*" on 1 January 1903, five days before his planned entry to the friary. While praying to the Lord, Francesco's soul "*was suddenly filled within with supernatural light,*" and in an instant he understood that his religious vocation would be a continuous battle "*with that mysterious man from hell;*" and he understood also that the enemy against whom he had to fight was terrible, but "*that he was not to be afraid, because Jesus Christ Himself, represented by that majestic figure who had acted as his guide, would assist him and would always be at his side to help him and would reward him in Paradise for the victories achieved, provided he placed his trust in Him alone and fought generously.*"

The second vision filled "Francesco with strength... so that he could take his leave from the world," but it did not alleviate the very great suffering he felt in leaving his family to which he was very attached. It was almost a physical suffering. He felt as if "his very bones were being crushed" and several times "he felt as if about to faint."

This suffering increased as "the day of his leave taking" approached. Because of this Our Lord consoled the 15-year-old boy with the third and last vision on his final night at home. Jesus and His Mother appeared to him filling him with confidence and assuring him of their special love for him and Jesus placed His hand on his head.

The day of his departure of 6 January finally arrived. The young Francesco got up early to attend the 7:00 a.m. Mass. When the celebration of Mass had ended he returned home and found it full of people just as if it was a wake when someone had died. Their faces too were like those of people at a funeral.

Padre Pio's mother Peppa was unable to hide her emotions. She took her sons hand and said to him: "my son, you are breaking my heart!... But in this moment you must not think of your mother's suffering. St. Francis has called you so you must go!" Then she fainted. When she revived she repeated her words of encouragement to her son: "my son, in this moment you must not think of your mother's suffering. You must go!"



Padre Pio's Mother

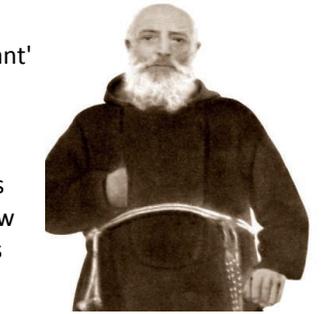
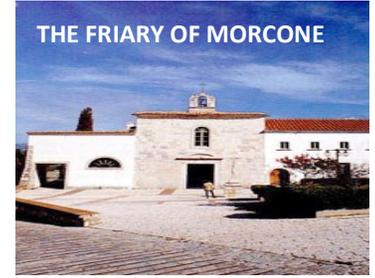
Before Francesco left, accompanied by his teacher Angelo Caccavo, his mother blessed him and gave him a set of rosary beads. The suffering he felt saying his goodbye was like a "martyrdom" that lacerated "his soul and body," but the three visions had made him strong and "he did not shed a single tear."



Angelo Caccavo

With Francesco and his teacher, another two youths aspiring to the religious life, Antonio Bonavita and Vincenzo Masone, left also for the Capuchin friary.

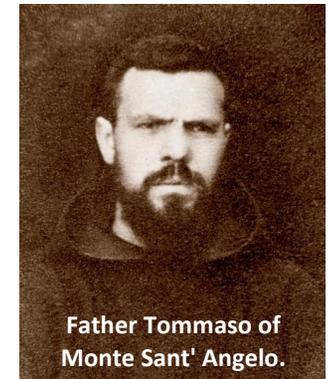
When this little group of townsmen from Pietrelcina arrived in the large square of the Capuchin friary of Morcone he entered at once the church and prayed before the Blessed Sacrament as well as the Child Jesus in the crib. Then they left and the teacher rang the bell of the friary front door. When the large heavy wooden door was opened Francesco recognized, in the half light, a face that was familiar to him. It was Brother Camillo of Sant' Elia a Piansi who had inspired his vocation.



Brother Camillo

Both were surprised to see each other. Brother Camillo, the begging friar as soon as he recognized the boy that he had seen grow up from childhood as he would beg for alms for the community "was overjoyed and embraced him." And he said to him: "Eh, Franci! Bravo, bravo. You have been faithful to your promise and to the calling of St. Francis."

Then he welcomed the others and brought them to meet the Guardian of the friary, Father Francesco Maria Sant' Elia a Piansi and the novice master, **Father Tommaso of Monte Sant' Angelo.**



Father Tommaso of Monte Sant' Angelo.

The teacher Angelo Caccavo stayed only a brief time to chat and then returned with the next train to Pietrelcina to be able to spend some time at home with his family to reflect on the meaning of the Epiphany.

For the three boys this was the beginning of a new life in a new family.