

I would be protected. As soldiers in the second World War, our lives were in constant danger. I felt a peace within and I knew that I had met a living saint.

After the war, I attended Holy Cross College in Massachusetts. I eventually got a PhD in English and I enjoyed being a college professor for more than 25 years. I turned 90 years old, this year, 2010. The experience of meeting Padre Pio has stayed with me for my whole life.

I am ready for everything, as long as Jesus is content to save the souls of my brothers, especially those he has entrusted to my care.

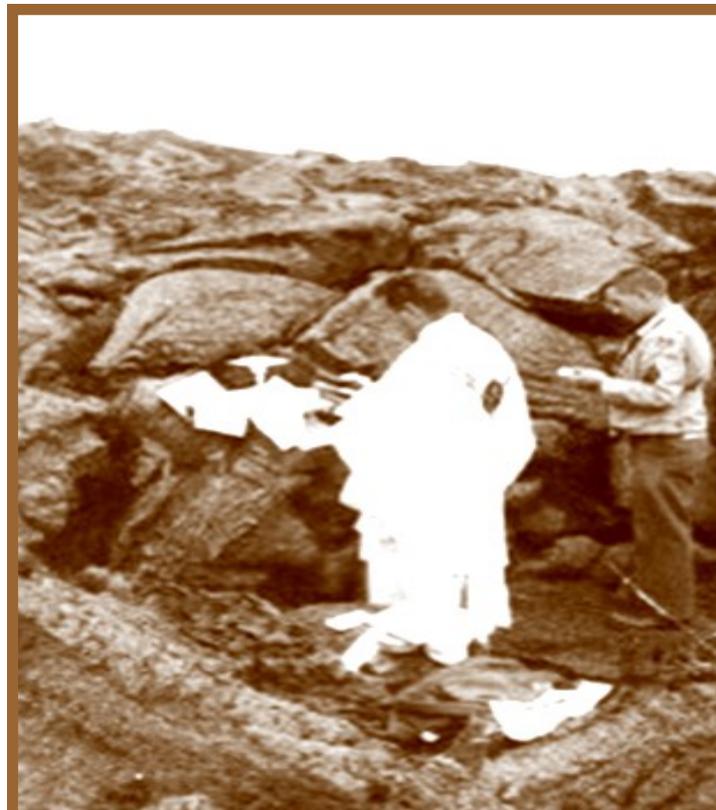
St. Pio of Pietrelcina



A prophet and a peacemaker, Berrigan's legacy is simple: "God is peace. Peace is God" - Bishop Thomas Costello. (Died in 2015)

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Padre Pio and Jerry Berrigan



Jerry Berrigan serving
Fr. Kusman's Mass in 1942
atop Mt. Vesuvius.

Most of the men in the village had no doubt been called up to serve in the Italian army. During the Mass, everyone stared at Padre Pio's hands. I saw that the wounds in the center of his hands were bleeding at the time of the Consecration. All of the American soldiers who were there that day were deeply impressed.

Padre Pio and Jerry Berrigan

I met Padre Pio when I served in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II. I had enlisted in January 1942 and was eventually sent to the U.S. military base in Cerignola, Italy. As a Staff Sergeant, I was assigned to the ground crew and worked in the technical supply department for the U.S. fighter planes. I was also the assistant to our chaplain, Father Stanley Kusman, S.M., a Marianist priest.

One day, Father Kusman asked me an unusual question. “Jerry, how would you like to visit a saint today?” He went on to tell me a little bit about Padre Pio and invited me to go with him to Padre Pio’s monastery. I had never heard of Padre Pio but I was happy to accept his invitation. Two other GIs from my squadron went along with us.

Father Kusman drove us to the monastery of Our Lady of Grace in a military jeep. The church of Our Lady of Grace was a poor little country church. It was very plain and very simple. As soon as we walked through the door, I realized that I had forgotten something and I went back out to the jeep to get it. When I walked back into the church, I was overwhelmed by an intense fragrance of fresh flowers. The wonderful scent of carnations, lilies, and roses filled the air. I looked around but there were no flowers anywhere inside.

Father Kusman was in the sacristy, conversing in Italian with a Capuchin who wore a brown habit with a cord at his waist. As I drew closer, I realized that he was talking to Padre Pio. As I looked at Padre Pio, I felt wonderstruck. I knew immediately that he was an extraordinary human being. Father Kusman then introduced me to him. I did not speak Italian but even if I did, I would not have been able to say even one word. I felt overwhelmed by his presence. Father Kusman asked Padre Pio if we could attend his Mass on our next visit and if I could be his altar server. “Si, si,” he replied. There were a few children in the church making noise and Padre Pio let them know in no uncertain terms that they were to be quiet. That was my first brief meeting with Padre Pio.

After we left to return to the base, I told Father Kusman and the other GIs about the beautiful fragrance of flowers in the church. None of them had experienced it. Father Kusman then explained to me that it was a sign of blessing from Padre Pio. Father Kusman also shared more about Padre Pio’s life with us. He told us that Padre Pio had a spiritual connection with the German mystic, Therese Neumann. Therese Neumann was a simple and devout lay woman who lived in a small farming village in Konnersreuth, Germany. Her deep spirituality touched many souls. She had many of the charismatic gifts that Padre Pio possessed, including the gift of reading hearts, miracles, healing, and more. Like Padre Pio, she bore the five wounds of Christ. Many of the American GIs went to Germany to visit Therese at the end of World War II. Padre Pio had a great deal of knowledge about Therese Neumann. Father Kusman had been told that Padre Pio had visited her through bilocation.

The next time Father Kusman took us to the monastery, I was apprehensive. Thinking about being Padre Pio’s altar server was more than a little unsettling. I hoped that I would be able to perform all the duties of the altar server well and that I would not forget any of the Latin responses.

It turned out to be a very long Mass. As I knelt on the stone floor of the dimly lit church, my knees began to ache. It was very cold inside the church. Since it was wartime, the congregation consisted mainly of women and children. Most of the men in the village had no doubt been called up to serve in the Italian army. During the Mass, everyone stared at Padre Pio’s hands. I saw that the wounds in the center of his hands were bleeding at the time of the Consecration. All of the American soldiers who were there that day were deeply impressed.

Meeting Padre Pio and assisting at his Mass served to strengthen my faith. It also gave me a sense of confidence that