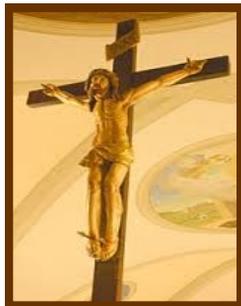


The psychological reactions of St. Francis and St. Pio before this mystical phenomena were different. St. Francis was extremely reserved about his spiritual experiences because he feared that if he revealed them to others, without explicit permission from God, he would risk vainglory. The stigmata in his hands and feet were visible to everyone and he could not hide them. The side wound one notice through his habit. St. Francis did not have any previous experiences like St. Pio with the transverberation. We can say that St. Francis' stigmata was "instant," without forewarning. While St. Pio's experience we could say develop progressively and with painful preparations. At his death St. Francis wanted to be placed naked on the bare ground, in the presence of about 50 of his brothers who in this way were able to see his wounds.

Padre Pio became aware of this mystical phenomenon much more dramatically and he wrote candidly on what he was experiencing and had already experienced in his body. In the stigmata itself, we notice quite a significant differences. Padre Pio's stigmata were studied by modern science.

The Padre allowed himself to be examined only out of obedience. The wounds on his hands, according to Dr. Festa, were lesions of circular form about 2 cm wide. Their color was a red/brown and were covered with blackish scab, the exterior furrowed by rayed streaks. On the back of his hands this gap was thinner and with tapered edges. The wounds on his feet were similar to those on his hands but smaller and shallower. The side wound was on his left and in the form of a reversed cross. A thin and small film covered the central part, nevertheless it was much more painful, intense and widespread than the other parts of his body. But how difficult it is to write of such things that exceed the boundaries of nature and reason!

Admire and revere these two great Saints with the stigmata. Entrust yourself to their powerful intercession with the Lord. Seek to imitate, with the Lords assistance, their virtues in particular their patience in bearing terrible pain. And above all their boundless love for Jesus, who wanted them to share his suffering. Trying to live the Franciscan spirit that they spread in the world one of peace of spirit and serenity of soul. That peace that one finds in prayer, in the contemplation of the beautiful spread throughout the universe and comes from a sound conscious and being a friend of the Lord. That peace that comes from the loving embrace of the Savior's wounds. We too in some form bear the stigmata in our crosses, sufferings, failures and lapses. From that peace comes the good, both spiritual and temporal. That good which is patience with oneself and trust in the Lord especially when you surrender into the arms of Christ crucified. Amen.



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The Stigmata

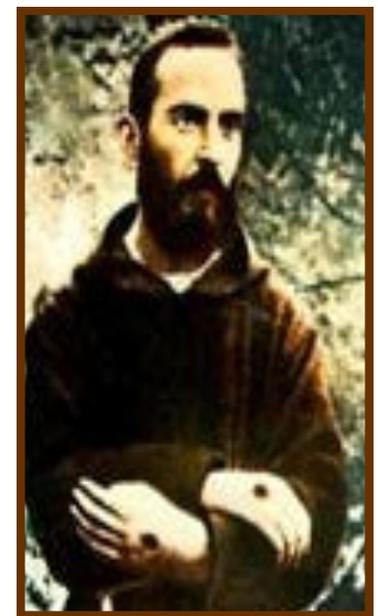
The significance of this phenomenon in St. Francis of Assisi and St. Padre Pio has spiritual meaning for every believer



Our Lord Jesus Christ



Saint Francis of Assisi



Saint Pio of Pietrelcina

The Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Padre Pio

by Mgr. Antonio Del Gaudio

The month of September is full of "sorrowful" occurrences. It is the month where we celebrate the triumph of the holy Cross upon which Jesus was crucified and marked with the stigmata. On the following day the liturgy recalls, the filial compassion, Our Lady of Sorrows who at the feet of Jesus on the Cross had her heart transfixed, thus fulfilling the aged Simeon's prophecy: "and a sword will pierce through your own soul."

The month of September we also encounter two giants of Franciscan spirituality, who both bore the stigmata. On the 17th, we recall the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi and on the 23rd we devoutly recall the anniversary of St. Padre Pio of Pietrechina's death. Thus we can say, that the month of September is significantly signed by the stigmata and in a special way by these two dear protectors and exemplary masters in the spiritual life. We will now consider the significance of the stigmata in our own spiritual life. May St. Francis and St. Pio both bless and assist us.

The Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi

"On the harsh rock, between the Tiber and the Arno, he received the final wounds, from Christ, that his limbs showed for two years."

This is how Dante, the great poet, immortalized St. Francis' receiving of the stigmata (Paradise XI). Many centuries have passed since St. Francis lived in this world (1181 – 1226), but his message of spirituality, peace, universal brotherhood, solidarity with the whole universe and evangelical poverty is always alive and of great contemporary value. The Franciscan spirit has permeated, influenced and inspired society ever since. How much the Church owes to this young man from Assisi!

Tiny in stature, almost blind and worn out by sickness, St. Francis was a man, as well as being a great saint, who learnt how to change the world through the purity of his faith in following the Gospel: "No one instructs me in what I must do, but Almighty God Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the Gospel."

This revelation inspired his life and was the cause of his work of reform. St. Francis was the first to originate a monasticism that was incorporated in history, in which God as well as a being to be contemplated was a living presence in the world who embraced poverty and lived amongst the poor.

St. Francis was above all a person who loved! He loved nature and he sang of this love in verse in his "Canticle," that is a hymn to the sun, to the moon and to all of creation. His love for the Lord inspired him to "rebuild" His Church, as Jesus asked him in St. Damian's. It inspired him to invent the Christmas crib and above all was why he received in his body the wounds of Christ crucified.

These wounds that St. Francis received came during a profound ecstasy on Mount La Verna. The way and the year in which he received the stigmata is recounted in a reliable and concise writing of Brother Leo on the back of a parchment with St. Francis' Prayer in Praise of God and his Blessing to Brother Leo. "Blessed Francis two years before his death kept a Lent in the place of Mount La Verna in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Lord, and of the blessed Michael the Archangel, from the feast of the Assumption of the holy Virgin Mary until the September feast of St. Michael. And the hand of the Lord was laid upon him; after the vision and speech of the Seraph and the impression of the Stigmata of Christ in his body he made and wrote with his on hand the Praises, on the other side of the sheet, giving thanks to the Lord for the benefits conferred on him."

The angelic being who appeared to him seemed at the same time like an angel and Christ crucified and his great beauty and suffering caused in him awe and compassion. The beauty and ardor of the heavenly interlocutor's countenance caused in him mystical joy. When the Saint came out of his ecstasy he became aware of his wounds that little by little began to open in his side, hands and feet just as he had seen in the crucified Seraphim. And here before us is the Poor One with the stigmata, a faithful copy of Christ Crucified and an exemplary model for all Christians and believers!

The Stigmata of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina

St. Pio described his mystical crucifixion that took place on 20 September 1918, in a letter written about one month later to a spiritual director. After he had celebrated Mass in the friary church of San Giovanni Rotondo, Padre Pio went to pray at the foot of the crucifix in the choir loft. He was overcome by drowsiness similar to a sweet sleep and in a flash there took place what he described in this way: "I saw before me a mysterious person... Whose hands, feet and side were dripping blood... The vision disappeared and I became aware that my hands, feet and side were dripping blood...".

This is how St. Pio became the new willful victim of expiation, the elect creature consumed by love for God and neighbor. Christ cannot be separated from the Cross and sanctity is always in some way a crucifixion of the soul, and sometimes also of the body, as it was for St. Francis and Padre Pio.

With and through the stigmata Padre Pio fulfilled for his whole life the painful mission entrusted to him by Christ. The stigmata was an instrument of his apostolate. And at the end of his life, with his mission in the world over, they disappeared.