



PADRE PIO'S CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

The tradition to send greetings and good wishes to people who are dear to one, before important occasions and feast days, goes back to remote times. It is an ancient custom that originated in China and that then spread quickly in Europe. In German speaking countries the custom to send good wishes in writing for religious or secular occasions had become common practice by the 15th century. Padre Pio, following this usage, inspired by the liturgical solemnities of the year, would formulate words which revealed his holy aspirations and

feelings.

A few days before Christmas his prayers, meditations and writings would be concentrated on the mystery of Our Lord's incarnation.

On 17 December 1914, he confided to the noblewoman Rafaelina Cerase: *"At the opening of the sacred novena in honour of the holy Child Jesus I felt my soul being born, as it were, to a new life. My heart felt too small to contain the heavenly favours and my soul seemed to disintegrate in the presence of this God who took human flesh for our sake. How can we help loving Him more and more ardently? Oh, let us draw near to the Child Jesus with hearts free from*

sin, that we may discover how sweet and delightful it is to love Him" (Letters II, p. 288).

He was confused and moved when he considered the "Kenosis" of a God who humbles Himself; who *"empties Himself"*, as St. Paul affirms, and *"assumes the form of a servant to be born in the likeness of men"* (Phil 2,7), who made Himself manifest through His Son, making Himself present in the world, making His voice heard to proclaim His Word of salvation.

Often when Padre Pio would read the prologue of St. John's Gospel at the end of Mass, tears would be seen in his eyes.



Asked the reason for those tears, he answered: *“And do you think it nothing that God converses with His creatures?”*

Padre Pio would reflect on God’s mysterious ways, *“always intent in confounding the wisdom of this world”*; a God who came in our midst in the greatest abjection, who renounced even to be born in a modest inn and who sought shelter and relief from the lowly animals. He desired that the hearts of everyone become like a *“cradle adorned with flowers”* in which the divine Infant could *“rest without the slightest discomfort and hear no echo of the words: ‘I came from the Father and have come into the world’”* (Letters I, p.1230).

Jesus did, in a certain way, leave His Father in order to come into the world, in poverty and suffering. Therefore, the crucified Seraphim of the Gargano would send letters full of love to his Superiors, fellow friars, parents, friends and spiritual children.

To Padre Bernardo d’Alpicella, General Commissioner of the Capuchin religious province of Foggia he wrote: *“Most Rev-*

erend Father; May the Child Jesus always assist and protect you with His grace, fill your heart with His choicest graces and blessings, and above all convert you wholly to Him”. *“May the Child Jesus reign always in your heart, fill you with all His divine love and make you always more worthy of Paradise”* (Letters IV).

To Padre Paolo da Casacalenda he sent the following wishes: *“May the divine Infant possess your whole heart, convert it wholly to Him and make it always more worthy of the glory of the blessed comprehensors”* (Letters IV).

To his priest friend Fr. Giuseppe Orlando he wrote: *“May the Child Jesus bring to your heart that peace that you so desire, may His star shine with always new light in your intellect, may His love increase always more your love so that in the end you de-*

sire only Him” And further on: *“The feast of Holy Christmas is nearing and incites me not to overlook to wish you a very happy one with the loveable and gentle Lord. What prayers shall I ask for from the Child Jesus? They will be the same as those that I ask continuously for you. Wishes and prayers with my whole heart for you of sincere and complete conversion to Jesus, wishes of holiness, everlasting well being and spiritual happiness. On this day of divine love I will pray with more fervour and intensity to the Good Jesus and I will persist until He fulfils my fervent prayers”* (Letters IV).

To Paolo Bavassano he sent the following wishes: *“May the Child Jesus fill you with His divine charisms, bestow to you all the fullness of that charity for which He became the least in our midst,*

« MAY THE
DIVINE INFANT
POSSESS YOUR
WHOLE HEART »



“MAY THE INFANT JESUS BE BORN AGAIN IN YOUR HEART; MAY HE ESTABLISH HIS DWELLING PLACE THERE AND RENDER YOU ALWAYS MORE WORTHY OF HIS DIVINE EMBRACES”



and make you become always more similar to Him in His simplicity and love” (Letters IV).

Padre Pio, for Christmas, as well as promising prayers would also ask for them. To his spiritual director, Padre Benedetto of San Marco in Lamis, he wrote: “My very dear Father, with the approach of the Infant Jesus’ feast, I feel it my duty to send you my sincere good wishes, and may they be full of heavenly joy. Although I have always prayed to the divine mercy for you, I promise myself to pour out my entire soul for you before the divine Child during these holy feasts. I will ask him to fill you with his divine Spirit, to transform you and make you holy. May He be pleased to hear all the prayers I offer for you and make you holy” (Letters I, p. 1398).

To Raffaolina Cerase he says further: “I will never fail to pray to this divine Child for all men, and much more will I pray during these holy days. I will pray especially for you and for all those whom you have so much at heart. ...Do not fail to pray particularly during these days for my own soul, that all may go well with it. My soul is greatly in need of the

divine assistance. I see how great my need is of gratitude towards the supreme Benefactor” (Letters II, p. 289).

In front of the friary crib that represented the grotto of Bethlehem, Padre Pio would dedicate to his spiritual children these thoughts: “May the Infant Jesus always reign in your heart and may He establish and consolidate His reign within you more and more” (Letters III, p. 350).

“May the divine Infant totally possess your heart, and transform it more and more to His! This, my beloved daughter, is the synthesis of all the prayers and good wishes, which I continually present for you before the crib of the Infant Jesus” (Letters III, p. 370).

“May the Infant Jesus, reborn in your heart, always reign there; may He transform your heart totally, and fill it with His divine spirit!” (Letters III, p. 387).

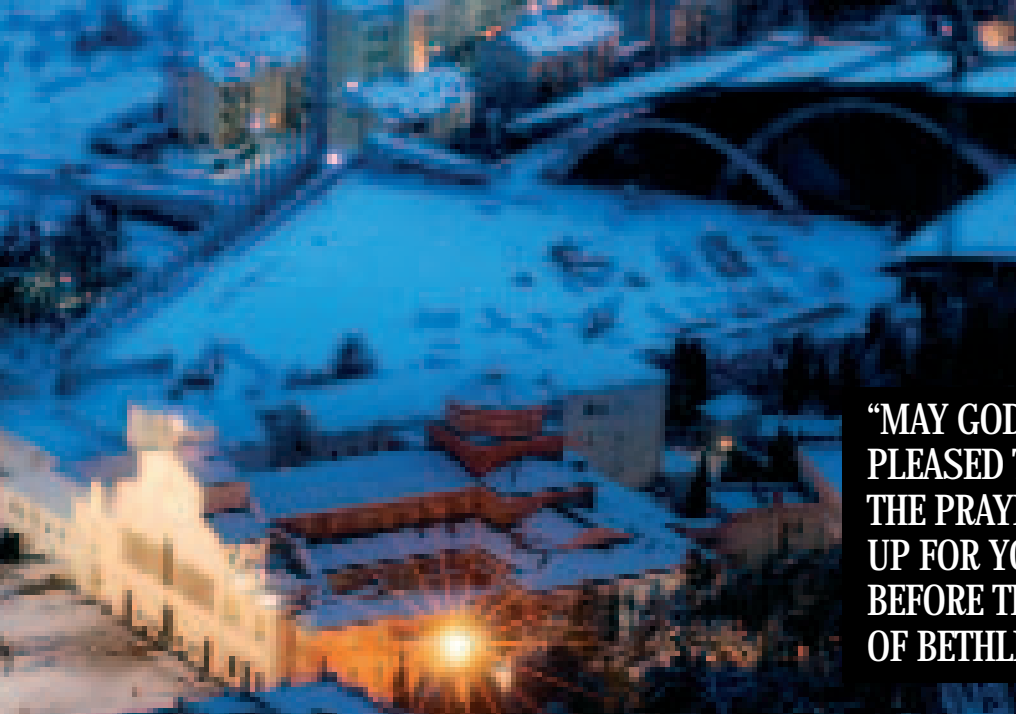
“May the Infant Jesus inspire you more and more to love suffering and despise the world. May His star enlighten your mind more and more, and may His love transform your heart and render it worthy of his divine satisfaction” (Let-

ters III, p. 392). “May the Infant Jesus always reign in your heart; may He be born again in your heart, fill it with his divine charisms and transform it totally in Him” (Letters III, p. 804).

“May the Infant Jesus be born again in your heart; may He establish His dwelling place there and render you always more worthy of His divine embraces” (Letters III, p. 1056).

Little by little as the holy night approached, Padre Pio would invite his spiritual children, depending on the state of soul in which they found themselves, to be joyful, but also to accept suffering with serenity.

To Assunta Di Tomaso he suggested: “Live joyfully and courageously, at least in the upper part of the soul, amidst the trials which the Lord places you. Live joyfully and courageously, I repeat, because the Angel who foretells the birth of our little Saviour and Lord, announces singing, and sings announcing that He brings tidings of joy, peace and happiness to men



**"MAY GOD BE
PLEASED TO HEAR
THE PRAYERS I SENT
UP FOR YOU...
BEFORE THE GROTTA
OF BETHLEHEM"**



of good-will" (Letters III, p. 470). While to the Ventrella sisters, who were suffering a painful spiritual trial, he said the following: "My daughters, this impotence does not prevent you from withdrawing into yourselves, but rather from being content with yourselves. Remember that one thing only is necessary, to be close to Jesus. Tell me, my dear daughters, you know well that at the birth of Our Lord, the shepherds heard the divine and angelic singing of the heavenly spirits. Scripture tells us this, but it does not say that the Virgin Mother and Saint Joseph, who were closest to the Infant, heard the voices of the angels or saw these miraculous splendours. On the contrary, instead of hearing the angels singing, they heard the Child crying, and saw by the light of a poor lamp, the eyes of this divine Infant all wet with tears and trembling with cold. Now, I ask you would you not have chosen to be in that dark stable filled with the cries of the little Child, rather than beside yourselves with joy, with the shepherds...? Yes, undoubtedly, you too would have exclaimed with Saint Peter: 'It is good that we are here.' You are nowhere but close to the Infant Jesus, trembling with cold in the stable of Bethlehem" (Letters III, p. 568).

Padre Pio joined, moreover, to his wishes, some animated exhortations very useful to the spiritual life. To Antonietta

Vona, for example, on the occasion of Christmas of 1918, he wrote: "May the Infant Jesus always reign in your heart, and may He establish and confirm His reign within you more and more!... Stay very close to the crib of this most beautiful Child, especially during these days of His birth. If you love riches, here you will find the gold the Kings left Him. If you love the smoke of honours, here you will find that of incense. And if you love the delicacy of the senses, you will smell the perfume of myrrh, which perfumes the entire holy stable. Have a great love for this heavenly Infant and be respectful in the familiarity you will obtain with Him through prayer and full of delight at the joy of feeling within you holy aspirations and affections at your being His in a most singular manner" (Letters III, p. 889). Every reader will find among the preceding citations, the good wishes most fitting to his present situation and can imagine them coming directly from the Padre. However the Saint of Pietrelcina dedicates to everyone, for these approaching Christmas festivities, the following which he wrote on 28 December 1917: "May the heavenly Child arouse in your heart also all the holy emotions He made me feel during the holy night when He was laid in the poor little crib. Dear God! I cannot describe to you, my dear Father, all that I felt in my heart on that most hap-

py night. My heart seemed to overflow with a holy love for our God become man. The night of the soul continued even in that moment, but I can tell you that in the midst of such pitch darkness, I was surfeited with spiritual joy.... I am unable to tell you all that happened during this night, the whole of which I spent on my feet without closing an eye. May God be pleased to hear the prayers I sent up for you and which I go on repeating before the grotto of Bethlehem" (Letters I, p. 1095)

If we are unable to spend the holy night of Jesus' nativity on our feet in prayer, without closing an eye, we can at least make sure that our hearts, will be transformed, with the necessary purification, into a "cradle adorned with flowers", that overflow with gratitude and love for God who became man.

And Padre Pio's good wishes will become a certain and wonderful reality. ■