

THANK you!

By Fr. **FRANCESCO D. COLACELLI**

Thank you your Holiness! Thank you for the kindness that you showed us on 14 October when we came to Rome for the meeting of Padre Pio's Prayer Groups. We thank you for referring to us as: "the custodians of the shrine of Our Lady of Grace and the new big church dedicated to Saint Pio of Pietrelcina", and for defining us "the first heirs of his testimony". This official recognition of the role that, without any merit of our own, we have always undertaken as "principle organizers of those places of grace and goal of millions of pilgrims every year" fills our hearts with joy and inspires us with enthusiasm in our pastoral work, because this encouragement comes from the greatest authority, from the Vicar of Christ on earth, St. Peter's successor, the rock upon which the Son of God wanted to build His Church.

But we wish to thank you above all because, with these words of affection, that certainly came from a heart inspired with fatherly love, you did not wish to deprive our fragile and imperfect humanity, with your precious guidance, inviting us to find inspiration and support in "Padre Pio's example and in his intercession" and to do all in our power to "imitate him and to as-

sist others to live a profound religious life, centred on the contemplation of Christ Crucified, the revealer and mediator of the merciful love of the heavenly Father".

We needed these words. We always need to hear ourselves encouraged, stimulated and recalled to the example of our holy confrère. He, in fact, supported by divine grace and by uncommon charisms succeeded in living intensely his days and, in particular, his Eucharists and his long hours dedicated to the ministry of Reconciliation, without ever tiring. He was able to give all of himself to each and every person in every instant of his life. "Each one of you", he would say, "can say that Padre Pio is mine". For us instead it is an arduous task to be able to always respond to that great "need for God" and that unquenchable "thirst for transcendence that exists in the hearts of men and women of our time", and of which Cardinal Bertone spoke and that we experience daily in San Giovanni Rotondo.

Blessed Father, with the feast of Christmas approaching, we wish to renew and publicly take up the task that our Provincial Minister, Fr. Aldo Broccato, expressed to you when he addressed you at the end of the audience. The task of multiplying our efforts to

overcome our weaknesses in order not to delude the expectations of "millions of pilgrims" who seek in each one of us, who wear his same habit, at least a faint reflection of the spirituality of Padre Pio "to whom", as you remind us, "God entrusted the perennial message of his Crucified Love for all humanity".

We make our own also the request that our Provincial Minister made to you. Conscious of the immense responsibility that it means to have been called to the religious life, to the priesthood and, above all, to the practice of our ministry in these "places of grace", we ask you to pray for us. We on our part, guarantee to you that we will continue to pray for you, to invoke for you the protection and intercession of our confrère Saint. With the same filial love of before, with the same tenderness that you inspired in the hearts of every Catholic when, after your election, you presented yourself to the world as "a humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord". But also with that interior impetus that we experienced on 14 October, when you made us experience the affection of a father for his children and an emotion that we will never forget. ■