

AFTER 48 YEARS

By Fr. **FRANCESCO D. COLACELLI**

After 48 years of absence the original pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Fatima will be returning to Italy. *"The statue now never leaves the shrine of Fatima and the statues that are taken in pilgrimage around the world are 8 copies"*, I was told by the Father Rector Luciano Guerra when last 29 November, delegated by the Provincial Minister, I went to meet him in Fatima, *"however for Padre Pio we will make an exception"*.

So next 22 September, the original pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Fatima will be coming to San Giovanni Rotondo during what has now become the traditional vigil of prayer that takes place every year for the passing of Padre Pio, and the statue will remain here in the town until the end of the month.

It was Fr. Gabriele Amorth, today a well known exorcist who, with the backing of Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro, organised the historic pilgrimage in 1959, that ended on 13 September in Catania with the act of consecration of the whole of Italy to the Immaculate heart of Mary, during the national Eucharistic Congress. And it was Fr. Amorth, an admirer of Padre Pio *"who arranged for the statue to be*

brought also to San Giovanni Rotondo". This was made known recently by Fr. Amorth, a Paulist priest, in an article published in the magazine *"Mother of God"*.

It was on 5 August 1959, that the statue of Our Lady of Fatima came to the town of San Giovanni Rotondo. Padre Pio was and had been suffering for some months from a lung infection, diagnosed by his medical doctor Sala. That was why when the statue of Our Lady arrived in the church of the friary, Padre Pio was in bed, praying, and unable to get up. But the following day, around 1:00 p.m., a little before Our Lady was brought to the *"Home for the Relief of Suffering"*, he was helped with great care to the old sacristy, where he *"very moved and with tears in his eyes lovingly kissed the statue and placed a rosary blessed by him in her hands; then he was brought back to his room because very tired and because they feared he might have a collapse"*.

This is how Fr. Raffaele of Sant'Elia a Pianisi, one of the eye witnesses, recalled that encounter. He also recounted the most significant part of that episode. Padre Pio when he learnt that Our Lady of Fatima had ended her visit to the Hospital, *"expressed the wish to greet her again"* before her

departure. And this desire of his was again granted. They brought him, on a chair, *"into the choir of the new church and from the last window from the right if one is looking up at the church from the square he watched the helicopter as it took off;... before however it proceeded on its route, it made three circles over the friary and church to say goodbye to Padre Pio. He, as he watched the helicopter fly off with Our Lady, very moved and full of faith with tears in his eyes said: 'Our Lady, my mother, you came to Italy and I became sick; now you are going away and you are leaving me still sick'. Then he lowered his head and felt a shudder go through his body. Padre Pio had received his cure from her. The following day he wanted to celebrate Mass in church, but almost everyone advised him against it. In the meantime, in the evening, providentially there arrived Dr. Gasbarrini, who gave him a thorough check up and found him cured and told the friars present: 'Padre Pio is well and tomorrow he can celebrate Mass in church'"*.

Between next 22 and 30 September when Our Lady of Fatima returns after 48 years to this shrine we shall recall and relive this wonderful grace received by Padre Pio! ■