

24 APRIL 2008

By Fr. **FRANCESCO D. COLACELLI**

It was a memorable day characterised with great faith in the hearts of thousands of devotees who, on a weekday morning, left everything to embrace again spiritually 'their' Padre Pio. And also for those millions who, unable to come, followed the event via television.

We, the Capuchin friars from every part of the world, physically present or spiritually represented in the person of the Vicar General of the Order Fr. Felice Cangelosi, shall not forget this day and always bear in mind our religious duties before the glorious example of our fellow friar, who became a saint not because of his stigmata or supernatural gifts, but because of the integrity with which he bore the Franciscan habit.

Without doubt it will remain an unforgettable day for our Archbishop, Domenico Umberto D'Ambrosio who, on 24 April, was at last able, with profound joy, to reap the harvest of a religious event that he had prepared with the greatest care and that was also veiled with a little sadness for the incomprehension and calumnies.

The day will be treasured also

in the memories of the more than 250 concelebrating priests, the 26 bishops and Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, who described Saint Pio of Pietrelcina in his wonderful homily as an "apostle of our times" and "a limitless spring in this arid age".

There was wind that morning of 24 April. A strong wind, like that which blew on the evening of his exhumation and similar to that which blew the pages of the Gospel on John Paul II's coffin during his funeral. "It is the breath of the Spirit", the same Pope had once said during a celebration interrupted by strong gusts of wind, and adding: "And the Spirit blows where and when It wills."

That wind, at San Giovanni Rotondo, at Communion time blew away the clouds obstructing the rays of the sun. And while the concelebrants made their way in procession to the crypt and on the large screens in the square the first images of Padre Pio's body were transmitted, the landscape all around took on new and more intense colours. It was almost like an answer and sign of encouragement to all those faithful and devotees who had wanted to

fulfil a gesture of love to God on behalf of this holy Capuchin. A sign of clarity that cleared away, like the clouds, the futile and sometimes damaging words of the slanderers and false prophets of doom.

A tree is recognised by its fruits, the Gospel tells us. In these early days, standing at the exit of the crypt, one can see on the faces and in the words of many pilgrims emotion, love and peace. All roads, if followed to their source, lead to one main road: that of holiness. This is recalled to us by the stole that stands out from Padre Pio's brown habit. It is white, the colour of glory. It was placed on a body that underwent the natural process of corruption of every mortal creature, but it is the body of a man who, no different to others, was able to attain the perfection of Christian life, to which every believer is called.

Many other fruits will blossom before 23 September 2009, the date until which the body will be exposed. These are our wishes and that God's grace may become for us a living reality. ■