

# An IMMENSE JOY

By Fr. FRANCESCO D. COLACELLI

Our joy is truly immense. It was conveyed in words, on behalf of everyone, by Mgr. Domenico Umberto D'Ambrosio, the Archbishop of Manfredonia-Vieste-San Giovanni Rotondo, who is also the delegate to the Holy See for the shrine and apostolic works of St. Pio of Pietrelcina, and by Fr. Mauro Johri, the Minister General of the order of the Capuchin Friars Minor. However, the news of Pope Benedict XVI's coming visit to San Giovanni Rotondo deserves also some reflection.

This apostolic visit, before 22 September, in fact, was something not at all certain. The hope rested on the readiness His Holiness showed to the several invitations made by Mgr. D'Ambrosio and, on 14 October 2006, also by our Provincial Minister. The hope was given strength by the interest that His Holiness showed in 2002 when, still Cardinal, visiting Benevento to close the diocesan Eucharistic Congress, he asked to visit Pietrelcina, Padre Pio's hometown. And the hope was given further encouragement the seven times the Holy Father referred to Padre Pio during the first three years of his pontificate. To cause doubt however, was the knowledge that many places still await a visit from the

Pope, and San Giovanni Rotondo already received this privilege on 23 May 1987.

It seems, then, Pope Benedict XVI made a choice. A choice made out of affection and admiration. Affection for the millions of devotees of the holy Capuchin, who Pope Paul VI, already in 1971, had described a "worldwide clientele." Admiration for a man who was able to attain the highest summits of Christian perfection, certainly with the help of divine grace, but also at a very dear price and with his own blood to atone for the sins of mankind.

However, it is also possible that the Holy Father's decision to visit San Giovanni Rotondo next year also has a clear goal, and that is to propose again to a world weakened by the errors of relativity and hedonism the example of a man whose whole life was dedicated to Truth and self-sacrifice.

Certainly the apostolic visit will give the theologian Pope the opportunity to fathom further the complex figure of a modern Saint who, what is more, had the tremendous honour to propose again, in soul and body, an exceptional image of Christ Crucified.

Already on 14 October 2006, during a special audience given to the pilgrims of St. Pio of Pietrelcina's Apostolic Works and

Archdiocese of Manfredonia-Vieste-San Giovanni Rotondo, the Pope stressed that "Padre Pio in the first place was a 'man of God.' From childhood, he felt called and he responded with his whole heart, soul and strength. And because of this divine love was able to take possession of him and make him an elect instrument in the designs of salvation." These words as well as supporting and encouraging devotion to the friar, who was the first and only priest to have the stigmata in history, bring across very clearly his role as model for all those who wish to attain perfection as Christians.

Indubitably the Vicar of Christ's visit here, the place where Padre Pio's love for God and for men was manifested, will inspire other important truths for us. And surely, the prayers of the "humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord", as his Holiness described himself on his election, before the mortal remains of St. Pio will obtain, through his intercession, an abundance of graces for the Church and all mankind.

In the meantime, we shall do all we can to bring about the Holy Father's wish to visit San Giovanni Rotondo and that he made known on 23 September through his Secretary of State, and assure our humble prayers for this end. ■

*"May the divine Infant possess your heart more and more and transform it into His" (Padre Pio).*

*A very holy and blessed Christmas to you all!*