



AWAITING *the* Vicar of CHRIST

By Fr. FRANCESCO D. COLACELLI

We had no doubts. We knew the Holy Father would come, and this was not just a hope but almost a certainty, founded on the various declarations of esteem he expressed for Padre Pio both before and after his election to the Holy See. He had promised to come in person to our Archbishop, the Vicar General of our Order, the Provincial Minister of our religious province as well as the retired Bishop of Trivento, resident in our retirement home for priests in San Giovanni Rotondo.

We were just waiting to know when. An initial answer was given last 23 September by the Cardinal of the Secretary of State, Tarcisio Bertone, who made known the year: 2009. Then on 7 December a document from the Prefect of the Pontifical House, Mgr. Harvey, made known the exact day: 21 June.

We now know more. We know that Pope Benedict XVI will celebrate the Eucharist for Padre Pio's devotees and spiritual children and that he will remain in the town where Padre Pio lived and worked the whole day.

There can be no doubt that these two gifts that the Holy Pontiff has wished to make us, are a further sign of his predilection for one whom he described as "a simple man, and 'poor friar'", as Padre Pio would describe himself, "through whom God wished to make known His infinite Love for all mankind."

However, this recognition as well as bringing joy to us, fellow friars of Padre Pio, also inspires us to an always increasing awareness of our responsibility. The responsibility to defend and to make known to everyone, in a spirit of service and love for Truth, the exemplary figure of a Christian, religious and priest who knew how to resist the endless allurements of the modern world; a priest who had the courage to look beyond the lesser things of life so as to fix his gaze on the Eternal; a priest who was able to surrender his heart to the infinite fount of love that pours forth from Calvary.

Padre Pio captures one's heart. He captured and captures the hearts of Popes. He was respected by the meek Pope Benedict XV. He received a remarkable sign of kindness from the cultured Pope Pius XI. He was in full spiritual accord with the mystical Pope Pius XII. He won over the lies that tried to discredit him in the eyes of the good Pope John XXIII. He was a support to the reflective Pope Paul VI. He touched the heart of the humble Pope John Paul I. He became one of the points of reference in the life of the thinker Pope John Paul II, and he has attracted the attention of the theologian Pope Benedict XVI.

Padre Pio also captures the hearts of the young. Last December our Capuchin family was blessed and enlarged with another two friars who made

the profession of their final vows, and many other youths, although still living in the world, are drawn more and more to the Franciscan way of life and participate in our prayers and apostolate.

Padre Pio captures the hearts of everyone - believers and non-believers alike. He has converted communists and freemasons and still today continues to bring to our confessionals hardened atheists who transform their lives beneath the life giving light of divine grace.

We await the Holy Father in a spirit of gratitude. We await the authoritative words of a man of faith and theologian, but above all the Vicar of Christ who, we have no doubts, will assist us in evaluating even further and in the most fruitful spiritual way the wealth of mercy that God placed in the hands of his "poor friar" and that now is in our even poorer hands.

We shall continue as best we can to share and make always more known our holy fellow friar to his immense "world-wide clientele."

This year 2009, "The Voice of Padre Pio", in its Italian version, celebrates its 40th anniversary. So our grateful thanks to you also, dear readers, who have made possible this significant landmark and who allow us to speak to you of the love of God, just as Padre Pio did his whole life. ■