



APPROACHING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF PADRE PIO'S PRIESTHOOD

by Francesco D. Colacelli

The special "Year for Priests," announced by Pope Benedict XVI last 16 June in a letter addressed to the clergy calling for a "deeper commitment of all priests to an interior renewal for the sake of a stronger and more incisive witness to the Gospel in today's world," is also significantly connected for us with Padre Pio's priesthood whose 100th anniversary will be celebrated this year.

This connection between Saint Pio and the Year for Priests was made already by the Holy Father who on his pastoral visit to San Giovanni Rotondo, just two days after he had announced this special year of reflection, held up Padre Pio as an example to be imitated: "Padre Pio," he said, "reminds us of the dignity and responsibility of the priestly ministry," and continued, "the holy Friar of the Gargano was consumed until the end of his life by his longing to care for souls and to convert sinners. How many people changed their way of living thanks to his patient priestly ministry..."

In these months now leading up to Padre Pio's 100th anniversary to the priesthood the Capuchin Friars have planned and are still organising a number of events that will give the opportunity to reflect upon this call to a deeper commitment.

Fr. Giuseppe Ruppi, a Salesian priest and professor of Liturgical and Sacramental theology at the Religious Institute in Foggia, will be writing a number of articles on the priesthood for the Voice magazine.

TeleRadio Padre Pio will have special programmes dedicated to the centenary anniversary and will be broadcasting live on the 10th of every month the evening Mass celebrated in Pietrelcina.

Two solemn festivities will also be held in Padre Pio's land of origin. The first in Benevento on 10 August, the Saint's day of ordination, that took place one hundred years ago in the Canonical Chapel of the Cathedral with Mgr. Paolo Schinosi, the titular archbishop of Marcianopoli and auxiliary of the sannite diocese. The second in Pietrelcina on 14 August, the day of Padre Pio's first Mass, celebrated in the parish church of Our Lady of the Angels on the vigil to the feast day of Our Lady's Assumption. In the month of September, also in Pietrelcina, an important conference on the role of the priest and his mission will be held and looking to Padre Pio as an example and in light of the problems of today's world.

Every year Saint Pio's thoughts would return to that "beautiful day" of his ordination and he

would "experience once again the happiness of that day," and experience "a taste of paradise." However, for priests to be able to experience this interior happiness, for them to feel themselves a part of Providence's designs, a living image of Christ and a vehicle of God's grace for their neighbour's eternal salvation, it is necessary for them to be fully conscious of the inestimable spiritual power that Jesus places in their unworthy hands. It is necessary that they comprehend their immense responsibility as His chosen ministers and that they dispense this grace realising that it does not belong to them alone but to their neighbour for their sanctification as well as themselves.

This "taste of paradise" experienced by Padre Pio are my wishes to all priests in this special year dedicated to them that has already begun and that will continue these next six months with our looking to the ministry of Padre Pio.

My best wishes to all our readers for the new year. This year is also the 40th anniversary of the Voice of Padre Pio in the English language! May you all have a year full of joy and spiritual gifts! And a very special greeting to all my fellow priests! ■