



WHAT HAPPENS NOW AFTER THE TRANSFER OF PADRE PIO'S BODY?

by *Francesco D. Colacelli*

Another “significant day” has passed which can now be consigned to the history books on Padre Pio. The spotlights have been switched off, the TV cameras of the major Italian broadcasting channels have moved on in search of other scoops, and the countless daily papers and magazines are now in quest of other stories.

So what happens now in San Giovanni Rotondo after the transfer of Padre Pio's body from the shrine of Our Lady of Grace to the crypt of the new church dedicated to him?

Padre Pio continues as before his mission to intercede for the spiritual health of mankind always more disorientated by the false ideals of the world.

He continues to invite his spiritual children to come, an invitation that he left them, almost like a last testament, when they asked him shortly before he died what they would do when he was no longer here: “I will be here with you even more than before. Come to my tomb. Before to speak to me you had to wait. Now it will be I who wait for you. Come to my tomb and you will receive more than before.”

He invites us now to a new crypt whose beauty enchants, and his devotees, who continue to come

as before, perhaps now are able to get to him more easily, closer and even touch the casket in which his body rests.

However this easier accessibility and physical proximity to Padre Pio is not what motivated us, the Capuchin Friars Minor, in full accord with our Archbishop, to transfer his body, especially since we knew that we would be upsetting many who are attached to the old crypt.

What interests us is Padre Pio's message. For us Padre Pio is more than the “miracle worker” and powerful intercessor as he has popularly come to be known. His stigmata and other supernatural charisms were given to him by the Lord to give weight to his real message, that is his mission received from Christ: “to sanctify ourselves and to sanctify others.” “This was always his first concern and anxiety as a priest and spiritual father, that people should return to God, experience His mercy and then, spiritually renewed, discover again the beauty and joy of being Christians, of living in communion with Jesus, of belonging to His Church and practising the Gospel.”

These are the words that the Holy Father addressed to us during his pastoral visit to San Giovanni Rotondo and that our

Archbishop repeated in the upper church of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina when the casket containing Padre Pio's body arrived from the old crypt.

Padre Pio spent his whole life sanctifying himself and practising the Gospel. He wants now to continue to sanctify others and he invites all those who climb the Gargano mountain, just as he did during his life, to turn their eyes from him to Christ and to His Gospel, that is so wonderfully depicted in the mosaics of Fr. Marko Ivan Rupnik in the new crypt.

This was and is Padre Pio's message, and is what is happening now.

Dear readers, please allow me to make to you, at the end of this brief reflection, a request. On 22 April, my fellow friars elected me as their Provincial Minister. Fully conscious of all my limitations I accepted as it seemed to me to be God's will. Because of the confidence and affection that has grown over these past seven years that I have shared with you in directing this magazine, I ask you to please remember me in your prayers so that the Lord may enlighten and guide me in my new appointment on behalf of the friars and whole Capuchin Province. ■