



THE CARESS OF GOD....

BY BRO MARIANO DI VITO, OFM CAP.

The Holy Father when he met with the Padre Pio Prayer Groups in St. Peter's Square, during those days that the holy friar's mortal remains were publicly exhibited for veneration, described the Padre in this way: "We can truly say that Padre Pio was a servant of mercy. He did so full-time, sometimes practising the apostleship of listening to the point of exhaustion. Through the ministry of Confession, he became the living caress of the Father..." (6 February 2016). Pope Francis has by now accustomed us to this style of language, that we can call the 'language of the heart', in which sentiments and emotions of ordinary everyday life clearly dominate over more verbose, technical "ecclesiastical" language, that can seem often distant from ordinary life. God embraces us, He moves us, He caresses us... There is no doubt that Pope Francis is in search of the wayward! And we know how difficult it is to speak about God today, and especially to the younger generations, who paradoxically after their first Communion and Confirmation instead of 'beginning' an adult life of faith, more often than not, end it. Something so frequent that many

pastoral workers refer to Confirmation as the "sacrament of farewell (Adieu)."

Clearly just "speaking about God" and presenting systematically the fundamentals of our faith is not enough. It is necessary to inspire, or at least attempt, what is described in the well-known story of Emmaus in the Gospel of Luke: "Were not our hearts burning (within us) while He spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24, 32).

"Burning hearts," "walking together," "opening the Scriptures," are expressions of those affective emotions that come from being together and sharing which in the transmission of the faith must begin with an encounter with Jesus, that is a faith that fills the mind with light and sets the heart afire.

Because of this there is space and work for everyone, for truly everyone, from parents to priests and the many pastoral workers and assistants who generously offer their services in announcing the Gospel. The Office of Catechesis both on a national and local level certainly does its part and publishes literature and offers assistance in the ongoing research for new, updated

ways to communicate to the men and women of our times. This is a task that clearly must be carried out with great care and effort, but... who will walk with these neophytes, set their hearts afire, explain patiently to them the Scriptures, who will break bread (in the liturgy) to open those horizons, perhaps very small, that allow the Holy Spirit to enter and raise up their everyday lives?

It is difficult and complicated if not impossible to know how to answer all these questions. Nevertheless we can try to learn from the saints, from Padre Pio, practising (and here I mean parents and teachers generally) the apostolate of listening, the therapy of compassion and the medicine of mercy.

Like Padre Pio, we must, first of all, learn to "speak with God" with simplicity and confidence. Then it will not seem so strange and outmoded to "speak about God" and be for our fellow travellers too, just like Padre Pio, "a caress of God!"

I wish you all a very holy and prayerful Christmas!

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