



# A Great Testimony of Faith

By Bro FRANCESCO DILEO OFM Cap.

The outdoor church was packed with faithful for the morning Mass on 22 September, presided by Mgr. Nunzio Galantino, and also in the afternoon for the long vigil that began at 6:00 p.m. and ended at 2:00 a.m. the next day. Not even the brief but intense interruptions of rain could disperse the crowds. There was also a great turnout for the three solemn concelebrations of 23 September, each officiated by an Archbishop: Mgr. Domenico Umberto D'Ambrosio, Mgr. Rino Fisichella and Mgr. Franco Moscone. And there was a greater turnout than expected, larger even than previous years, for the evening procession with the statue of Saint Pio in the streets of San Giovanni Rotondo. This year we can say, and without any worry of disrespect to Padre Pio or the authorities who honoured our liturgies by their presence, that the true protagonists of the saint's feast were the people of God.

There was no doubt, the people of God turned out in force. Nevertheless, to consider this massive response merely numerically would, in my opinion, be reductive. Those crowds were not an inchoate mass, but a group of persons, of individuals with souls and faces who

wished to encounter and to see with their eyes the countenance of God.

This desire to see the Invisible God, that was made possible in the fullness of time with the incarnation of the Word, the Son of God, who took on human form in Mary of Nazareth, is renewed in every generation and in the saints given to us from time to time, in the course of history, we can find the reflection of Jesus' countenance. Among these is Padre Pio, who like the Seraphic Father St. Francis and the other stigmatists are the most faithful image of the Crucified and Risen Christ. They are His "stamped representatives," to use an expression of Saint Paul VI, by now well known, and which he used to describe our venerated fellow friar.

Having said this though, the powerful attraction of the saints and the massive response from the people of God, is all the fruit of grace. Even just the desire to know God "is already in itself, a genuine grace," as the Minister General of the Capuchin Friars Minor, Bro Roberto Genuin, told us in his homily in the Mass he presided a few minutes after midnight on 23 September. It is this desire, in fact, that at once sets in motion our search. And Jesus

has told us: "Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (Lk 11, 9-10).

To the many who came to San Giovanni Rotondo to seek the countenance of God, reflected in the holiness of Padre Pio, I wish to say thank you. Thank you for your testimony of faith and thank you because your presence makes our ministry as priests and fellow friars of the saint successful. But I wish to express my gratitude also to those who, animated by the same desire, could not come because nailed, like Christ, to their different crosses of sickness, and who wanted all the same to pray with us via our television channel.

With the feast of Christmas approaching, I wish to thank also our readers and supporters who enable through this journal to spread Saint Pio's "Voice" around the world. May Saint Pio assist you in a special way to find and see God's countenance, to receive Jesus into your hearts and return this love. A very happy and holy Christmas to you all. ♥

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