

THE TEACHING OF THE STIGMATA

by Bro FRANCESCO DILEO OFMCap

This September will not be like any other; the novena will not be like those of previous years, nor will the vigil and feast of Saint Pio be similar to those of the past.


On 17 September 2024, all Franciscan Orders will commemorate 800 years since the wounds of the crucified Christ were imprinted on the body of the first stigmatised in history. Providentially, this date coincides with the fourth day of the novena in preparation for the liturgical feast of our mystical Brother, a member of the religious family founded by the Poor Man of Assisi, and who today stands as the most recent canonised saint among those marked, during their earthly lives, by the wounds of Jesus's passion. It is worth noting that in his case too, this divine gift was granted in the month of September.

The days ahead, therefore, bring before our eyes the beginning and the end of a great gift bestowed by God upon humanity: the presence of a living icon of His Son's salvific sacrifice, a gift renewed over eight centuries in a select few. From Francis of Assisi to Pio of Pietrelcina – and including the likes of Catherine of Siena,

Teresa of Avila, Rita of Cascia, Catherine de' Ricci, Charles of Sezze, Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi, Maria de Leon Bello y Delgado, Veronica Giuliani, Mary Frances of the Five Wounds, Anne Catherine Emmerich, Anna Rosa Gattorno, Gemma Galgani, Therese Neumann, Marthe Robin, Faustina Kowalska, and Elena Aiello, to name but a few of the roughly 400 stigmatised – the Lord seeks to remind us of the historical reality and theological significance of His redemptive sacrifice. He wishes to prompt us to reflect, as our venerated Brother, whom we shall celebrate as a saint on the 23rd of this month, once did: "Why did Jesus Christ sacrifice Himself to death? Faith answers me: to atone for our sins. Why did He rise with such a tumult of wonders? To testify to us the accomplishment of our redemption. In His death, He reminds us that we were dead because of sin, in His resurrection, on the other hand, we have a most perfect model of our rising to grace." (Letters IV). Through the example of this long and luminous trail of living crucified images, He renews the invitation He extended to His disciples: "If anyone wants to come after me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross

daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

On several occasions, Padre Pio, to convey that the wounds were a continuous and painful torment for him, would say, "Do you think God gave them to me as ornaments?" (*Positio*, vol. II, p. 44; see also *ibid.*, p. 696). But he also sought to help others understand the value of this suffering, highlighting that "how Jesus can be consoled not merely by those who sympathize with His torments, but when He finds a soul who for love of Him asks no consolations and only wants to be allowed to share in His sufferings" (Letters I, p. 377).

Not all are called to the same degree of heroism. However, each one is given crosses to bear, proportionate to the strength needed to complete their personal way of the cross without succumbing and to rise again after each fall. Our task is simply to accept them with faith, for our own redemption and that of others. This is what Francis and Pio, through their stigmata, are teaching us, especially in September 2024. 



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