



IT IS GOOD TO HIDE THE SECRET OF THE KING

by Bro FRANCESCO DILEO OFMCap

The fortuitous coincidence that allowed us to commemorate the 800th anniversary of Saint Francis of Assisi's stigmatization on the fourth day of the novena in preparation for the feast of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, enabled many preachers and commentators to highlight the parallels between the mystical experiences of the Lord's two chosen ones, thus both becoming His crucified image, during critical moments in the history of humanity.


In this spirit, I wish to add another reflection on the Patron Saint of Italy and Padre Pio: both of them safeguarded the precious gift they received from God within the treasure chest of humility.

In *Vita Prima*, Thomas of Celano writes about Francis: "Few were fortunate enough to see the sacred wound in the side of the Lord's servant while he was still alive. Blessed is Brother Elias, who was able to at least glimpse it, and equally blessed is Brother Rufino, who was able to touch it with his own hands. Once, while he was rubbing Francis's chest, his hand slipped—as often happens—to the right side, and thus he touched that precious scar. Francis felt great pain and withdrew his hand, crying out for God to forgive him. Indeed, he took great care to keep the miracle hidden from outsiders, and even from friends and fellow brothers, so that

even his closest and most devoted followers knew nothing about it for a long time. This faithful disciple of the Lord, even when adorned with such wonderful signs—almost as precious pearls from Heaven and covered in more glory and honour than any other man—never allowed his heart to swell with pride, nor did he ever seek to boast about it for the sake of vainglory. Instead, fearing that human esteem might rob him of divine grace, he did everything possible to keep it concealed from everyone" (FF, 486). Likewise, Padre Pio, even before the Holy Office ordered that "under no circumstances should he show the so-called stigmata," chose to maintain a great reserve. In fact, when the first signs appeared in Pietrelcina, he informed his provincial minister, Father Benedetto of San Marco in Lamis—who was also his spiritual director—twelve months later, admitting: "This phenomenon has been repeating several times for almost a year. [...] Do not be disturbed by the fact that this is the first time I have mentioned it, for I was overcome by abominable shame. If only you knew what it costs me to tell you about it now!" (Letters I, p. 264). Even after the permanent stigmata manifested in San Giovanni Rotondo on 20 September 1918, he "tried to hide the signs of the Passion with the sleeves of his habit, taking the edges of a shawl between his

fingers [...] then he was allowed to wear full gloves and finally half-gloves" (*Le stigmati di Padre Pio da Pietrelcina*), obeying the advice Father Benedetto had written to him in 1911: "Do not reveal anything to anyone, for *secretum Regis abscondere bonum est*." This phrase, taken from the *Book of Tobit* (12:7), is now translated in Scripture as: "It is good to hide the secret of the king," and it can be highlighted by another passage from the Bible, chosen appropriately among the readings for the liturgical memorial of Saint Pio: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches. But let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight" (*Jeremiah* 9:22-23).

Thus lived Francis in Assisi. Thus lived Pio in San Giovanni Rotondo. And thus are their devotees called to live.

In the wake of these holy sentiments and as Christmas approaches may all our beloved readers of "*The Voice of Padre Pio*" find moments of reflection and gratitude, drawing each and every one of you closer to God and those dear to you. We wish you all a Holy Christmas, full of hope and grace, and a happy New Year full of every blessing. 

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