

THE POPE WHO REVEALED TO THE WORLD THE MERCIFUL FACE OF PADRE PIO

» by Bro FRANCESCO DILEO OFMCap

Although we were already at the final stages of preparing this issue of *The Voice of Padre Pio* for print, with the presses still silent, we were able—at the *very last moment*—to completely rearrange the layout of the magazine in order to pay fitting tribute to Pope Francis: a man who has left an indelible mark on the recent history of the Church and who deserves, once again, our heartfelt gratitude. He was a great gift—not only to Catholics, nor even just to Christians or believers across the globe, but to the whole of humanity. He saw himself as its father and shepherd, carrying above all its spiritual longings in his heart, while never forgetting its material needs, starting with the cause of peace, the economic development of impoverished regions, and the protection of creation.

Even though we were aware of the Holy Father's fragile state of health, the news of his passing reached us unexpectedly. It is news that grieves us

deeply and moves us to renew, through these pages too, our thanks to God and to this great witness of the faith. He was undoubtedly an exemplary apostle—humble and truthful in his approach to the life of the Church, which he wished to see fully attuned and ready to respond to the needs of our times.

At this moment, like many of you, my mind is flooded with memories. I think above all of the events that touched our Provincial Fraternity in February 2016, during the Jubilee of Mercy, when Pope Francis asked for the precious relics of Saint Pio's body—and that of Saint Leopold Mandić—to be brought to Rome, in order to present to the world two men who, through their ministry, had dedicated their lives to administering God's mercy. I recall his visit to San Giovanni Rotondo in March 2018. I shall never forget—and nor shall we forget—his warmth and good humour when he met us in the Church of Our Lady of Grace, and when, breaking with protocol, he chose to visit a sick bishop receiving care in our Provincial infirmary.

In the pages that follow, we will revisit both of these extraordinary moments, which were experienced with joy and enthusiasm not only by us Capuchin friars, but also by the worldwide family of devotees of our venerated Confrère.

What I truly hope, however, is that his constant exhortation to show the merciful face of God to the world—and his uncompromising call to peace—will not go unheeded. As the Capuchin Fraternity of the Religious Province of Saint Angelo and Padre Pio, which I have the honour of serving as Minister, we join the whole Church in offering heartfelt prayers for the blessed soul of the Holy Father, together with our mourning and deep gratitude.

I am certain that Saint Francis of Assisi—whom he chose as a model for his pontificate—and Saint Pio of Pietrelcina will be waiting to welcome him at the gates of Paradise.

Rest in peace, our dear and beloved Pope Francis! ▼

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