

A black and white close-up portrait of Padre Pio, showing his face from the nose up, with his characteristic beard and hair. The image is slightly desaturated and has a soft focus.

SECRETS OF A SOUL

PADRE PIO'S LETTERS TO
HIS SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS

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“God wants to espouse the soul in faith.”

In this letter to Father Agostino, Padre Pio appears a master of authentic spiritual life in his steady ascent on the rungs of the ladder of mystical union. In fact, he clearly explains all the steps necessary to reach union with God, which is a question of a “pure” union of faith. However, this union is celebrated through a process of purification from all actual and habitual imperfections, so that the creation wounded by sin, becomes a new creation [167].

Pietrelcina, December 19, 1913

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I.M.I.D.F.C.

My dearest Father,

May Jesus be with you always.

For the approaching blessed holiday of Christmas, with my heart on my lips and with more than filial affection, I send my most sincere wishes, as I make a promise to the little child Jesus for your spiritual and temporal happiness.

May the newborn Babe welcome my humble and feeble prayers, which I will raise up to Him with more lively faith in these holy days for you, for all the superiors, for the whole world!

May it also please this heavenly Infant to welcome my desires, which are to love Him as much as a creature can love Him here on earth and to see Him loved by all people in the same way!

Finally may He let some heavenly rays fall on the hearts of those afflicted souls! Presently, I do not have any advice to suggest to them, except to say that their fate is enviable. In seeing them so downcast, I rejoice in spirit and feel the holy envy of emulation. Their state, and above all the state of that particular one, dear father, is such that at the present time they are incapable of feeling comfort from whatever good word may be offered to them.

God has plunged their intellects into darkness, their wills in aridity, their memories in emptiness, their hearts in bitterness, dejection, and extreme despair. And all of this is greatly enviable because it all comes together in order to ready and prepare their hearts to receive the true form of the spirit, which is nothing other than the union of love.

God is with them, and this should be enough to convince them to be ever ready to dedicate their wills completely to God and to work in His service and for His honor. Let them not concern themselves at all with the fact that their will to dedicate themselves to God and to do all for the glory and honor of the divine Majesty once produced a particularly gentle and sweet effect in their spirit and sensory appetites. This was all mere fortuity. God grants such things to weak souls who are still infants in spirit, but removes these things from souls already fortified in spirit.

God wants to espouse the soul in faith, and the soul that is to celebrate this heavenly union must walk in pure faith, which is the only appropriate way to this union of love. In order to rise

toward divine contemplation, I say that the soul must be purified of all actual imperfections and habitual imperfections, which consist of certain attachments and imperfect habits, which the purging of the senses did not succeed in eradicating—and which remain rooted in the soul—and one obtains with the purging of the spirit, by which God, with a most exalted light, penetrates all of the soul, pierces it intimately, and renews it completely.

This most exalted light, which God causes to descend into these souls, invests them in a demanding way and, laying waste their spirits, causes extreme afflictions and mortal interior pains to souls. Presently they are incapable of understanding this divine action, this most exalted light, for two reasons. In the first place, the light, which is so lofty and so sublime as to surpass the soul's ability to understand, is sooner a source of darkness and torment than of light. In the second place, this most exalted light is not only unintelligible but painful and distressful because of the soul's baseness and impurity. So, rather than consoling them, it makes them sorrowful, fills them with great pains of the sensory appetites, grave anxieties, and horrendous pain in their spiritual powers.

All of this happens at the beginning, when the divine light finds souls unprepared for the divine union. Therefore, it invests these souls in a purgative way; and when this light has purified them, it then invests them in an illuminative way, raising them up to the vision of and perfect union with God.

Therefore, let them rejoice in the Lord for raising them to this high place, and let them trust in the Lord fully as did holy Job, whom God placed in the same state and who hoped to see the light beyond the darkness.

Before closing, I would be curious to know why that soul does not draw near to the sacred table every day.

Please relay my best wishes to the whole community—and repay a hundred-fold Father Paolino’s greetings—that they might pray for me as I do for them.

On the part of all our acquaintances accept their most sincere regards.

FRA PIO

“The true remedy is to lean on the cross of Jesus.”

Padre Pio finally describes the flame that invades him with an intense love. As he recounts, it is a very delicate and gentle flame that does not cause pain. Confined in the realm of the ineffable, he cannot express how much the Divine Spouse increases the growth of his interior life. In this letter, Padre Pio illustrates his experience with a quaint story of a humble shepherd boy who, ushered into the private chambers of the King, simply cannot describe what he has seen to his fellow shepherds [183].

Pietrelcina, March 26, 1914

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J.M.J.D.F.C.

My dearest Father,

May our Lord always be in your heart and sanctify you.

Five months have already passed since I sent you the last report regarding my spirit.

Since that time the merciful Lord has helped me powerfully with His grace. The Lord God has bestowed very great gifts on my soul, and it seems to me that with such abundant aids, my spirit has been improving [as you will see] in what I am about to say. May all creatures give Him everlasting praise and blessings!

As soon as I begin to pray I feel my heart invaded by a flame of living love. This flame is unlike any flame of this poor world. It is a delicate and very gentle flame that consumes and gives no pain whatsoever. It is so sweet and delightful that the spirit finds great pleasure in it, and remains satiated by it in such a way as to not lose its desire for it. And, O God, it is a thing of such supreme wonder for me. Perhaps I shall never be able to understand it until I am in the heavenly country.

Far from removing the soul's sense of repletion, this desire refines it more and more. Rather than diminishing the desire, the enjoyment the soul feels at its core becomes more perfected. The same can be said of the desire to always enjoy this most lively flame, since the desire is not extinguished by enjoyment, but is further refined.

By this you will understand that the times are becoming rarer when I rely on intellectual reasoning, and more frequent are the times when I take advantage of my senses.

I do not know whether I have made myself understood, but I do not know how to explain myself any better. The soul that is placed in such a state by the Lord, enriched by such heavenly knowledge, should be more loquacious, and yet this is not the case. It has become almost mute. I do not know if this phenomenon has happened only to me. In very general terms, and, more often than not, terms that are emptied of any sense, the soul manages to express a small particle of what the Spouse is doing within.

Believe me, my father, all this is not an easy trial for the soul to bear. In this case, what happens is similar to what would happen if a poor shepherd boy were ushered into a royal chamber where a clutter of precious objects was gathered, the likes of which he had never seen. When he leaves the royal chamber,

the shepherd will surely have all those objects, precious and beautiful, before his mind's eye though he cannot know their number nor be able to assign them their proper names. He might wish to speak with others about all that he has seen. He might gather all his intellectual and scientific powers to attempt this task, but realizing that all of his efforts would fail to make understood what he intends, he prefers to remain silent.

This is what usually happens to my soul, which divine Goodness alone has elevated to this level of prayer. But alas, my father, I know that strictly speaking this comparison does not hold.

All of these extraordinary things, far from being stopped, become more elevated. I feel that the raptures have increased in strength and usually come with such a driving force that any efforts to impede them are worthless. The Lord has given my soul greater detachment from the things of this poor world, and I feel He continues reinforcing this always more with a blessed freedom of spirit.

It seems to me that God has poured many graces into the depths of my soul with regards to compassion for the miseries of others, especially the poor. The great compassion my soul feels at the sight of a needy person gives birth, at its very core, to a most intense desire to succor him and, if I heeded my will, I would be compelled to take off my own garments to clothe him.

If I know that a person is afflicted, whether in body or in soul, what I would not do for the Lord to see that person freed from his ailments? For his salvation I would willingly take on all his afflictions, if the Lord permitted, I would give up the fruits of these sufferings for him.

I see very well that this is a most particular favor from God. Though in the past I never failed, by divine mercy, to help the

needy, by nature I had if no pity at all then only a little for their miseries.

Thanks to the favors God has not ceased to heap upon me, I have improved a great deal in my trust in God. If in the past it sometimes seemed to me that I needed the help of others, I now no longer do. Through my own experience I know that the true remedy for not falling is to lean on the cross of Jesus, trusting in Him alone who, for our salvation, chose to be hung on it.

I have and I continue to pray for all those intentions that you desire, but I refrain from asking the Lord for a response, since He forbade me to do so. If in the past the Lord permitted, or rather, wished to be asked what His will was in this or that circumstance, He has reproved this old way of acting for some time now. Our Lord once said to me, “This way is well suited for those who are like infants on my path, and I wish for you to finally leave that infancy.”

I implore you, pray for him who intercedes on your behalf with very weak but continuous prayers to our Lord.

Your son,

FRA P^{IO}

The Lord will repay you for the applications you sent.

“No one is spotless before the Lord.”

Realism is an unmistakable trait of mystics. When Padre Pio wrote, he did not consider himself holy, rather, as one barely touched by the holiness of God, and this only to illuminate the misery of his sins. Padre Pio is aware that his youth was marked by guilt (Ps 24:7), but the severity of God toward sin is balanced by the gentleness of God’s mercy [191].

Pietrelcina, May 27, 1914



I.M.I.D.F.C.

My dearest Father,

May Jesus and Mary be always in your heart and make you holy.

I received together with your letter, the letter from that soul. I am thankful for the Lord’s pity, for in my abjectness He does not deprive me of your welcome correspondence, of which I acknowledge myself unworthy.

I read that person’s letter, which you sent with yours, and, that person permitted me to respond directly, as this was the

Lord's will.²⁹ I hope that I have not merited your censure for not following your suggestion. If the liberty I took has caused you the least inconvenience, I immediately declare that I withdraw it and promise to never again take such liberties in the future. But I did not believe I was doing any harm, and I did not act according to my own will.

At this moment, my father, my spirit is severely oppressed. It seems to me that my life has come to a halt. My heart is shattered by a most acute sorrow that fills me completely. A dense darkness thickens on the horizon of my spirit, which only the mercy of the One who authors it can and must dispel.

In the meanwhile, my soul decays under the weight of its infidelities toward the Author of life. I know that no one is spotless before the Lord, but my impurity is limitless before Him. In my present state the merciful Lord, in His infinite wisdom and justice, deigns to raise the veil and reveal my hidden shortcomings in all their malignancy and ugliness, and I see myself so deformed that my very clothing shrinks in horror from my defilement. This grim portrait is not painted by a man, with whom the soul could easily exculpate itself, but by God, who, for a little while, acts as a Judge with whom there is no appeal.

29. In this letter Padre Pio makes reference to persons who have either written to him directly—as is the case here—or who have been referred to him by his own spiritual director (cf. the postscript). Padre Pio refers to these people as *anima* (“soul”), or *persona* (“person”). The gender of the individuals mentioned is unclear since, in the Italian, both of *anima* and *persona* as well as their respective pronouns are feminine.

In this state no creature, whether human or angelic, no matter how worthy, can stand between the poor soul and God the Judge, who reveals so grim a portrait.

O for those happy days of my life when my most gentle Good was with me and lived inside my heart! Where have you gone? Living is difficult for me, O God, and in the bitterness of my heart the road is clear to lamentation! Do not recall here, O most clement Father, the faults of my youth³⁰ now that you have forgotten them! Alas, my God, let me weep over my sins. It would have been better for me if no human eye had seen me, if I would have perished inside the womb.³¹

These are the lamentations of my soul in this state. Now what must I do? I submit myself with resignation to this action of the divine Doctor, knowing from long experience that all will end with the triumph of God's glory and the soul's benefit.

In the meantime, may it please the Lord in His goodness to quickly veil His great majesty, which acts as judge of my soul, so that I will not remain crushed and terrified. May He give me words to defend my cause before Him and strength to endure His gaze.

Alas, my father, what will become of us when we appear with all our deeds before this God, our Judge! If we suffer such terror now when He simply lifts the veil that hides our faults from our eyes so that we might look upon them in their deformity, what will happen when we appear before Him to endure the severity of His gaze!

30. Cf. Ps 25:7.

31. Cf. Job 10:18.

O God, if everyone knew that Your severity is equal to Your gentleness, what creature would be so foolish as to dare to offend You?

My God, three times just and three times holy, show Your severe justice to all who dare to offend You, so that they will learn if not to love than at least to fear You.

When will I have the comfort of embracing you again, my father?

Bless me and pray to Jesus for me.

FRA PIO

You can assure that soul you referred to in your letter before last to remain calm and not to fear, as that person has no reason to fear; the person's soul is most acceptable to the Lord. I thank the person for his prayers for me, and I would entreat him, through you, not to cease praying. Only God knows how much I, too, pray for his perfection.