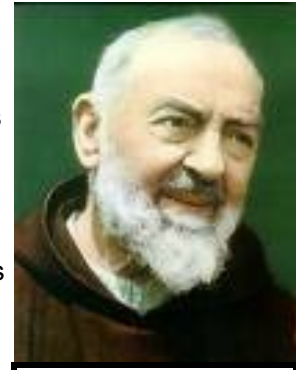


Francesco Forgione was born on May 25, 1887, in the town of Pietrelcina, Italy. He was the son of a poor, but devout farming family. It was claimed that as a child he began to have deep experiences of God in prayer. This led him at an early age to believe that God was calling him to become a priest. In 1903, at the age of 15, he entered the Capuchin Franciscan monastery in the town of San Giovanni Rotondo. There he took the religious name of Pio, in honor of Pope St. Pius V, the patron saint of his hometown. Seven years later, he was ordained a priest and became known as Padre Pio.



**St. Pio of Pietrelcina  
1887-1968**

Often plagued by poor health, during World War I, Padre Pio served briefly as a chaplain in the Italian army, but was discharged due to illness. He soon returned to teaching in a seminary and acting as a spiritual director. He considered the men and women who came to him for guidance to be his spiritual sons, and daughters. He had five basic rules for spiritual growth: weekly confession, daily Communion, religious reading, meditation, and examination of conscience. He directed Christians to recognize God in all things and desire above all things to do the will of God. He was well known for saying, "Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry".

In September 1918 it is believed that Padre Pio received the stigmata, bodily marks of the wounds of Jesus on the Cross. In his case, the stigmata appeared as wounds on his hands, feet and side. It was also the first time a priest is recorded to having received this spiritual gift. A number of other miracles and visions were associated with him, which caused his reputation to spread through Italy and beyond. Pilgrims began to crowd the monastery where he would spend up to nineteen hours a day celebrating Mass, hearing confessions, and giving spiritual guidance.

As his fame grew, so did attention from his religious superiors. Some believed that his visions were authentic while others thought that he was a dangerous fraud. His detractors made accusations that he was mentally ill, had faked the stigmata, misused financial donations, and broken his vow of chastity. This caused severe restrictions to be placed upon his activities beginning in 1923. He was not allowed to teach, to celebrate Mass in public, hear confessions or give spiritual direction. While deeply hurt by the accusations he obeyed the limits placed upon him.

The restrictions started to be lifted in the 1930's allowing him to resume his duties as a priest in public. The accusations against him were eventually dismissed. Among those who sought the guidance of Padre Pio in the late 1940's was a young Polish priest studying in Rome, Fr. Karol Wojtyla. In 1978, Wojtyla was elected Pope John Paul II.

In the 1960's, Padre Pio's health, which was rarely strong, began to decline. On September 23, 1968, at the age of 81, he died peacefully surrounded by the friars of the monastery. The marks of the stigmata ended with his death. An estimated 100,000 people attended his funeral three days later. A number of miraculous healings are attributed to his intercession since his death. Pope John Paul II canonized him in 2002. St. Pio of Pietrelcina's feast day is September 23. St. Pio, pray to us!