



“you must be thirsty for your brothers’ wellbeing”

CATECHESIS FOR PADRE PIO’S PRAYER GROUPS

by Father Luciano Lotti

*January 2021*

## **HOPE AND MISSIONARY JOURNEY**

### **From the Second Letter of Saint Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians (4:7-18)**

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in us. For we who are alive are mortal for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal flesh. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written: I believed; therefore I have spoken, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

### **From a letter of Padre Pio to Monsignor Giuseppe Angelo Poli (Epist. IV, p. 40)**

*My dearest Monsignor,*

*May Jesus always be all yours, may He assist you always and in everything with His vigilant grace and may He make the mission, that the divine Shepherd entrusted to you, ever more fruitful and make you holy as one with His flock! With these most sincere vows that I assiduously raise to the Most High for you, I come to give feedback to your Excellency to assure you of the sincere devotion that I have for you and the beautiful memory that I have of your fortunate gratitude.*

*Do not doubt, my dearest Monsignor, of my poor and weak but also assiduous prayers that I make for you and for your mission, may it be rich in fruitfulness. Listen, Father, I too have made very strong requests to my director to be enlisted among your missionaries, but, poor me, he has not found me worthy. And nothing has helped me so far to obtain this grace. Shall I go back to him? Please recommend this matter to Jesus, and tell him that if He wants me to be one of His missionaries, He should arrange for the will of others. In the meantime, since I have not yet been allowed to be really included among his missionaries, I will try to be so in spirit. I will accompany you everywhere with prayers and groans, in the hope that you will not disdain to welcome me as one of your last missionaries.*

*On the twentieth of September 1918 I received from Above the great and immense humiliation and confusion. Thank you for the ten liras sent me for the chocolate. May Jesus and Father Saint Francis reward you double for such flowery charity. I beg you not to trouble yourself about my poor person, as the Divine Providence does not make me lack anything, reserving such privations for the poor ones who are much more needy than me. For the rest, I assure you that if I need anything I will let you know.*



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*Recommending myself to your holy prayers, I respectfully kiss your sacred ring with veneration and ask you for your pastoral blessing.*

*Your most affectionate and humble servant*

*f. Pio of Pietrelcina, Capuchin.*

### CATECHESIS

#### **A question: What announcement for our mission?**

*On January 22 we remember the day when Padre Pio dressed the habit of Capuchin friar. In his footsteps, we celebrate the Day of Fidelity, during which our Groups commit themselves, as he did, to live in coherence with their own baptism.*

*The catechesis offers us the opportunity to reflect that a true missionary proclamation starts from ourselves. We must "clothe" ourselves in the garment of fidelity and our consecration to God.*

St. Francis dedicates Chapter IX of his Rule to the brothers assigned to preaching. It concludes with these words: «I Admonish and exhort even the same brothers so that when preaching, they use words which are thoughtful and pure in utility and edification of the people, proclaiming to the faithful the vices and virtues, punishment and glory with brevity of speech, because the Lord Himself chose short words when he was on Earth.(cf. Rom 9:22)».

Padre Pio explained that he had almost never preached in his life, because at that time there were no microphones and it was necessary to have good lungs, while he could barely breathe. However, all this did not prevent him - both by letter and in his meetings with his spiritual daughters - from taking every good opportunity to explain the Word of God, the truth of faith and to give valuable advice. His language was very consistent with the spirit of St. Francis: an essential word, which had to exhort towards personal edification and had as a reference point "the vices and virtues, the punishment and the glory with brevity of speech". His advice was rapid, his reflections simple, rich in examples, but the whole was peremptory: fidelity and that's it, because the Lord gave us his life.

Starting from these considerations, we want to go deeper into this year's theme - you must be thirsty for the salvation of souls - by comparing ourselves with Padre Pio's style: should we show the same intransigence? Is his language with no half-measures really inappropriate, or do we have an inner weakness that makes us incapable of firmly speaking the Word of God? These are questions that cannot remain external to us, because - beyond methods and language - there remains the duty to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel; a duty that is ever more urgent precisely in the times in which we live.

#### *The Lord has risen*

Kerygma is the Italian transliteration of a Greek expression that means "proclamation, a cry" and is used to synthesize the fundamental proclamation of the Christian life, which can be synthesized in this way: «The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour». Then, the evangelist continues, Jesus made his great proclamation, precisely the kerygma: «Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing» (*Luke 4, 18-19.21*).

This is only one of the Gospel passages we can mention, but it is important because the announcement made by the Apostles in their preaching strictly depends on it. Once again we will take only one example, what St. Peter says in his speech immediately after the descent of



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the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Day: «Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God made among you through him, as you yourselves know - after he was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge, you nailed him to the cross by the hands of wicked men and killed him. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to hold him in its power...God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it...Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that <sup>j</sup>God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified». (*Acts 2,22.32.36*)

This synthetic and essential announcement in the post-conciliar language has become the core of what we call the new evangelization; surely the expression new is used to indicate new methods, new instruments and new areas, but first of all, it should be understood as an adverb: again. It is necessary to evangelize again, from the beginning, even those places and persons who have already received the proclamation of the Gospel.

Certainly in Padre Pio's language we do not find words such as kerygma or evangelization, but we find what these terms refer to in his pastoral ministry. The essentiality of his language and the authority with which he required consistency from the people who were visiting him - especially in confession - recall the central content of his ministry: once you have met the Lord you must live a new life in the Spirit. This is what he made a point to reiterate in every confession; we could say - recalling the adverb "again" - after every confession, you were required to convert "again".

On several occasions, both John Paul II and the actual pope have called upon the Christians in old Europe, those who feel the urgency to respond to a missionary call, to go towards "the others", those who do not believe, those who make mistakes, to be themselves the first subjects of evangelization. In other words, it is necessary that all those who go to church, who are constant and consistent in the Christian life, feel themselves called to an ever new life by this announcement: "Christ died and rose again for you".

We are too often concerned about the others who need to be rehabilitated, to be included in our structures, in our ways of thinking; when we face the cross or go through difficulties we have ready answers, almost a cliché that is the same for everyone. We should be the ones who receive the Gospel proclamation once again, with humility and rigour as if we were listening to it the first time. This enables us to be with all the brothers and sisters we meet, walking together towards that conversion which comes from the contemplation of the only Christ who died and rose again for us.

We are often concerned with "what to say" and "how to say" to others, to those who need our advice; perhaps we should first ask ourselves: "what do we listen to" and "how do we live", what the Lord says to us, for our real and constant conversion. Many times, when I was preaching among the popular missions, I would wonder, "We ask people for conversion and to come to church, to our groups and parishes. But what are they going to find? Will they be able to see the Lord in our faces or will they have to slalom through our power games, the small ambitions and the greed that have penetrated our institutions?" Perhaps Padre Pio's harsh language is what we need in the first place.

*The salvation that we care about*

The new evangelization calls for a new and involving commitment that touches the heart of each person. In many sectors of our society, from education to any working place, to the political and charitable spheres, there is an attitude towards renunciation: we delegate, we expect others to do, we might contribute financially, but our lives must remain the same. In the



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meantime, we live in large apartment buildings where there is a need for hope, for an assistance that is not only economic; sometimes we realize that it is necessary to rebuild relationships, to help people find their way back to life. Our alibis, our age, our privacy, our suspicions and our aversions help us build walls of indifference and disinterest. The new evangelization is not a loudspeaker in which to trumpet a bit of the Gospel. Rather it is the mirror of the Incarnation, it is retracing the footsteps of this God who compromised himself even to the point of death. «To be thirsty for the salvation of one's brothers and sisters" is the answer to those words of Jesus on the cross, "Sì, I thirst.»

Let's try to focus on Padre Pio and to understand how his story is gradually transformed into this almost spasmodic longing for his brothers.

We remain curious or amazed by the many phenomena of bilocation witnessed during his life. Let us try to go beyond the miracle and read the sign the Lord wants to give us: that need for the other that makes Padre Pio a messenger around the world. Physically he never moved from San Giovanni Rotondo and - even if bilocation phenomena were attributed to him - it was there where he carried out his great work: by giving himself totally to others. His Eucharists were a continuous immolation, his pain a special value of those who unite themselves to Christ's sacrifice.

We have emphasized the kerygma, the proclamation of Christ who died and rose again. The tales of those who said they saw Jesus in him were often misinterpreted; there has been talk of idolatry or infatuation. In reality, his person was transpiring that welcoming and that incessant gift without measure which can only stem from Christ, and he - as should be the case for every baptised person - was the only one who saw Jesus.

*Sent by the Holy Spirit*

To go towards the other, welcoming him or her with their history, means welcoming a life that should not be changed, but should be visited by the Spirit of God.

Let's try to focus on the language we use towards others when they share their crosses with us: often listening, and solidarity turn into nasty behaviours; when we talk about people we know, rather than bringing mercy and forgiveness, we feed grudges and demolish whatever bridge the Spirit is creating. This is just one example of how our missionary presence can help us read life in a different way, depending on whether we want to bring the word of the Spirit or that of division.

In this journey it becomes important to learn how to read the Word of God, to know how to cherish it in our hearts, to let it die and be reborn in us in order to live our missionary vocation to the full. In this regard, I would like to quote two texts from the Sacred Scripture that I believe can be our guide. The first is that passage from the prophet Jeremiah that reads: «Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth". (Jeremiah 1:9)

The awareness that words are not ours but belong to God must make us live in humility and surrender before the Lord. Often the opposite can happen to us, and that is to pretend that others accept our words, those that come from the heart and are marked by partiality and often by pride, as unquestionable words, as if they came from on High. A word truly comes from God when it is not a prisoner of our points of view, of the desire to defend it at all costs, of the fear that others will not welcome it as we want them to. The first exercise of the missionary is not to possess a word, but to become a disciple of the Word.

A second passage that I think can be useful to us is taken from the letter of Saint Peter: «knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own



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interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit». (2 Peter 1:20-21) I must say that from this point of view the devil manages to create a lot of confusion. At first we had a moral of "according to me"; I often talked about it in our meetings. We often hear the following words: "According to me this is right, according to me this is not a sin". It is our Mother Church who shows us the way, without uncertainty and without straying in one direction or another. At times we find ourselves faced with a morality without any constraints, while other times - unfortunately - there are also those who want to put more constraints than those indicated by the Church.

We need to put order in our way of thinking, of speaking and also in many attitudes of our groups: the word of the Church, of this Church of our time is the one we are called to obey. Along with obedience we also have the duty of formation. Too often in our groups we have people who think they can speak and teach without having first had the appropriate training. Formation is not only linked to the possibility of doing catechesis: loving God means knowing Him. We always remember that Padre Pio ordered Raffaelina Cerase - and if she had not done so, she would no longer have been his spiritual daughter - to read «Monsabrè’s exposition of the Catholic doctrine, set out in eighteen small volumes, which reading is a true feast for the spirit». (Epist. II, p. 187) Padre Pio wanted us to know from close up, to contemplate even with our intelligence, that God to be loved with the heart.

### *Men and women missionaries*

When I watch videos of the songs that young people listen to today, I sometimes get discouraged: there is a language, images and symbolism that have nothing to do with our faith. Our youth know very well (much more than we can imagine) that they are empty images, and that emptiness often resounds in our hearts. Announcement? Sermons and rebukes? Perhaps being those true images that they seek can give meaning to their lives. I think that the gift that Padre Pio makes of himself, total, radical, without measure, could be the missionary announcement that they are waiting for.

## **FIDELITY COMMITMENT**

*to be read together on January 22 or during a dedicated meeting*

O Father,

you have chosen us and called us to belong in the people of God, to be «nurseries of faith and the fertile soil of love», we commit ourselves, here before our community

to be ministers of prayer and service to the suffering;

to renounce sin with serious commitment;

to grow in all virtues, especially in our families;

to share our journey in this Prayer Group,

following the spirituality of St. Pio of Pietrelcina and the teachings of the Church.

We promise fidelity to the Pope, to our Pastors, and to the commitments we make in our common journey with the brothers and sisters of our Group.

In the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi, we choose to welcome the needy, to be of support to the poor, and to love creation.

Virgin Mary, you who guide the path of St. Pio of Pietrelcina, welcome our holy desires and accompany us on our journey towards holiness.

Amen.