

Padre Pio: There is No One Like Him! Or is There?

By Fr. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy

Padre Pio has been canonized a saint. For this all people should rejoice without reservation. Another one of us has reached the goal for which he or she ultimately is created — heaven. Beyond this, however, Padre Pio is a spiritual enigma.

On the one hand, a few weeks ago a nationally syndicated ABC television talk show, “Politically Incorrect,” spent a significant portion of its time mocking both Padre Pio and his canonization. The premises of the program’s demeaning discussion were that he was a self-mutilating fake and that segments of the Catholic Church made him into a cult figure in order to snooker the unsophisticated and make money from pilgrims. On the other hand, more people attended Padre Pio’s canonization than any canonization in recent memory. All these people, plus tens of millions of others across the world, could not be stupid, gullible rubes.

The issue is not easily resolved, however. Where is the objective evidence for a life of “heroic sanctity” in Padre Pio’s case? His devotees would respond to this question by noting that such objective evidence is there for all to see in his stigmata and the many signs and wonders attributed to him during his lifetime. But, this would be to put the cart before the horse. Inexplicable phenomena, even of the most extraordinary kind, are not in Catholic theology necessarily indicators of holiness. Paranormal activity can be supernatural, that is, of God. It can also be natural, with the causes of it

Important Dates in the Life of Saint Padre Pio

Padre Pio was the first stigmatized priest in the history of the Church. (St. Francis of Assisi who also bore the stigmata was a deacon, not a priest.) Padre Pio bore the stigmata (the five wounds of Our Lord’s Passion) for fifty years! He experienced intense sufferings (physical and spiritual) during his life, as well as extreme peace and joy. His “strength” came from his burning love for the Holy Eucharist and our Blessed Mother, Mary. Padre Pio received Holy Communion daily and prayed the rosary many times during the day. He had great devotion to his Guardian Angel and was gifted in being able to see and converse with his own Angel.

Birth - May 25, 1887 in Pietrelcina, Italy

Baptism - May, 1887 - Pietrelcina

Confirmation - September 27, 1899

Investiture - January 22, 1903 - name chosen Padre Pio (Father Pius)

Ordination - August 10, 1910 - Benevento

Temporary Stigmata - September 7, 1910

Transverberation of heart causing visible wound on side - August 5, 1918

Stigmata - September 20, 1918 - received visible wounds of Jesus crucified

Death - September 23, 1968 at 2:30 A.M. - his last words were “Gesú e Maria” (Jesus and Mary)

November 29, 1982 - Pope John Paul II approved the decree for the opening of the canonical informative Process on the life of Padre Pio.

Padre Pio acquires the title of Venerable in the Vatican Concistorum in the presence of Pope John Paul II on December 18, 1997.

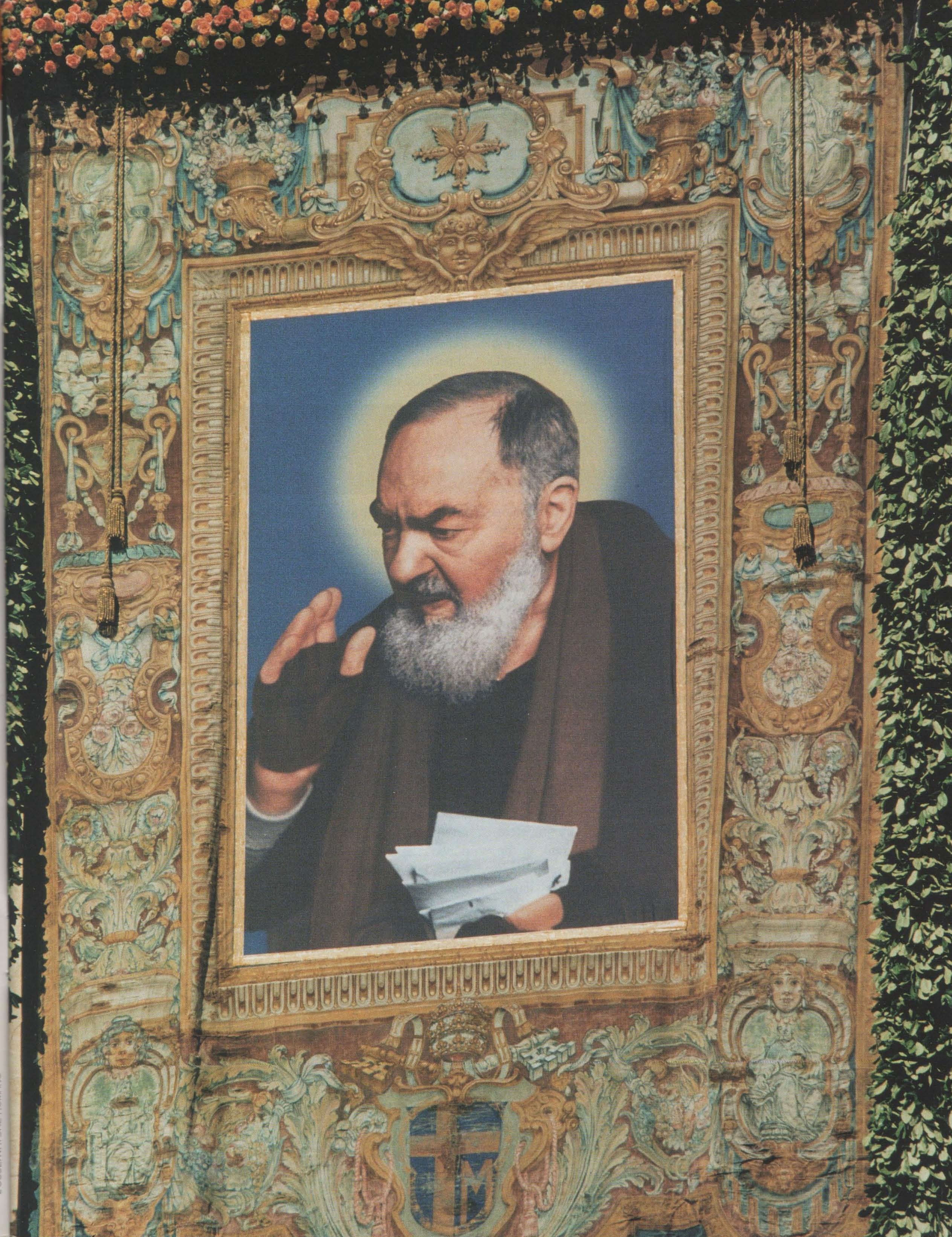
Beatified by Pope John Paul II - May 2, 1999 (Sunday)

Canonized by Pope John Paul II - June 16, 2002 (Sunday)

just unknown at this moment. It can be satanic. Satan possesses the power to produce the seemingly impossible. Paranormal phenomena can be merely psychological. Mental health institutions house many folks who see what is not there, who talk to God or to the saints and who suffer mentally in ways that produce the manifestations of almost every disease and metabolic malfunction known. Finally, seeming paranormal markings and events can be the product of intentional deception. Magicians can make objects drip liquid and make blood apparently ooze from the skin. Therefore, inexplicable phenomena happening around or through a person in no way can be automatically attributed to “heroic sanctity.”

Yet, there are innumerable people of incontestably sound mind, body and spirit, people whose word no one would doubt in any other area, who unequivocally contend they were helped by Padre Pio in some mysterious way. Many of these occurrences take place in situations where Padre Pio is far removed physically from the actual event. What is to be made of this quality of testimony? To dismiss it out of hand would be irrational and prejudicial. If it is valid, it is evidence of a Christ-like life of holiness and love. It would be evidence of mercy for others purchased at an extraordinary cost. It would be evidence of a life of “heroic sanctity.”

This brings us to the problem of hagiography. The word “hagiography” is derived from the Greek



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words “hagios” which means holy and “graphein” which means to write. Hagiography is holy writing about holy people. Unfortunately many Catholics, past and present, have felt that they must shore up God’s truth by writing or manufacturing “holy” falsehoods. Recently here in New England a “seer,” who for years displayed “bleeding hosts” and the stories to go with them, and who was written about as a holy man, ran back to Ireland when it was discovered he was engineering the effect. There is an entire society of scholars in the Church, the Bollandist, dedicated to separating fact from fiction in the writings about saints. Why some people feel they have a right to lie about God’s work is beyond the scope of this article. But, that this temptation has been near impossible to resist for many Christians over the centuries is a fact. To believe that the work of Jesus, who is the Truth, could in anyway be advanced by a lie is perverted.

fidelity to the truth of Jesus is the Way to advance the coming of God’s Reign (Kingdom). A mustard seed of fidelity to Jesus and His truth has infinitely more salvific power in it than a colossal “holy” charade.

The Catholic Church does not make mistakes about who She says is in heaven, about whom She canonizes. Most theologians agree that canonization is an exercise of “that infallibility which Christ granted His Church.” But, as Dorothy Day notes, “If you follow a saint in what he does that is not Christ-like, you go to hell.” Saints are not Jesus Christ. All saints with the exception of Mary are sinners. Jesus, the sinless One, the Eternal Word of God made flesh, is the final norm by which we discern whether a particular activity of a particular saint is to be imitated or avoided.

If God chooses a person to be a canonized saint, it is because he

God, unlike a political party or a business, does not need numbers to achieve His ends; He needs only fidelity to the truth as revealed by His Eternal Word, Jesus Christ.

God spends a lifetime with a human being building the person through his or her cooperation with grace into a genuinely holy individual, i.e. into a saint. Part of the reason why the Holy One does this is in order to reveal to the world what holiness looks like within the context of the struggles of actual human existence. So what do these “holy embellishers” do, and often do with a sense of zealous righteousness? They alter the person’s history by omitting what they think would dis-edify people or by adding what they believe would edify people. In short they find the truth of holiness, which God has created for the world to see through this person, inadequate. Therefore, they cosmeticize it by “pious” fabrications, distortions, omissions and outright prevarications.

This is just wrong. It is to interfere with God’s work — although most of these people, I am sure, would maintain that they are supporting God’s work. I once heard of a person, who is known to be intimately involved with a non-approved Marian apparition, who said: “What difference does it make if Mary is appearing or not. Look at all the people who are praying.” So let’s get it straight, clear and precise once and for all. If a person of whatever rank in the Church knows that something is untrue, yet continues to promote it as authentic in order to get people to pray or to go to confession or give alms, etc., he or she is doing evil. Lying is intrinsically evil. Furthermore, he or she, by choosing evil means (lies) to achieve good ends, is for a second time choosing what is morally forbidden and hence compounding evil with more evil. What this person is doing, if he or she is fraudulently orchestrating “holy” non-realities, is a direct attack against God and an interference with the Divine Plan for the coming of the Kingdom. He is doing the work of Satan, The Father of Lies. “Lying for God” is never of God.

The “holy” distortionists, the “holy” embellishers, the “holy” omitters are roadblocks to the coming of the Kingdom even if, especially if, millions of people buy into their illusions of sanctity. God, unlike a political party or a business, does not need numbers to achieve His ends; He needs only fidelity to the truth as revealed by His Eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Fidelity to the truth of Jesus and only

or she is a saint amidst failures, faults, fallibilities and fragilities. God knows what God is about. No one in the Church or outside the Church possesses the authority to fictionalize a saint’s pilgrimage with Christ. If, for a significant portion of her life, St. Therese of Lisieux is crucified on a cross of mind-breaking scruples, induced by a pathological form of French Catholicism existing at that time, this should be known. For the world to know this is part of God’s design for purposes humans cannot necessarily fathom. If Padre Pio smoked cigarillos or had faults, even serious faults, this should be known. God is trying to impart something to humanity about true holiness and salvation through him and through St. Therese “*as they really were*,” — not as some “holy” make-up artist would spiritually doll them up to be.

Some in the Church, including St. Therese’s blood sisters, conspired to hide actual photographs of her and also to publish a highly expurgated edition of her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, because they felt people would not see her as holy as they would like, if they revealed certain things. Did Padre Pio engage in activity that some public relations people don’t want the world to find out about? I don’t know, but if he did, he still managed to get to heaven! Maybe God wants us to know that true sanctity is possible despite warts and weaknesses.

It is Satan who desires that men and women who are saints be caricatured as angels rather than as failing and repenting human beings. The Evil One does this in order to discourage people from even wanting to walk the path of sanctity. He does it also so that when hidden failures are discovered after canonization, the saint as well as the Church Herself will be discredited before the world. God makes sinners into saints. Contrived pietistic histories, whether contrived by subtraction or addition to the person’s real history, undermine the credibility of not only the saint but also of the Church. They bring people to doubt Jesus Himself: If the Church isn’t telling the truth about St. Therese or St. Padre Pio or if it is allowing untruth to be spread unimpededly, why should a person think it is telling the truth about Jesus and His Way? Doubt fosters doubt. It is that simple and

Spiritual Quotes from Padre Pio

Prayer is the best weapon we possess, the key that opens the heart of God.

Do not worry over things that generate preoccupation, and anxiety. One thing only is necessary: to lift up your spirit and love God.

The most beautiful act of faith is the one made in darkness, in sacrifice, and with extreme effort.

My past, O Lord, to your mercy; my present, to your love; my future, to your Providence!

Always be humble in everything you do, guarding fervently the purity of your body and soul, because these are the two wings which carry us to God, and make us almost divine.

Bear in mind that the more the enemy (devil) assaults you, the closer God is to your soul. Think about, and penetrate this great and comforting truth.

Why should you worry whether God wants you to reach the Heavenly home by way of the desert or by the fields, when by the one as well as by the another one arrives all the same at a Blessed Eternity?

Do not fear, Jesus is more powerful than all Hell. At the invocation of His Name every knee in Heaven, on earth and in hell must bend before Jesus; this is the consolation of the good and terror of the evil ones.

Continue to pray that God may console you when you feel that the weight of the Cross is becoming too burdensome. Acting thus you are not doing anything against the will of God, but are with the Son of God, who in the garden, asked his Father for some relief.

Be comforted with this divine thought that your spiritual and physical pains are the test of the Divine Will. All lovers of Jesus must conform themselves always more to this divine and eternal Model.

Pray, hope and don't worry. Anxiety doesn't help at all. Our Merciful Lord will listen to your prayer.

The proof of love is to suffer for the one you love.

Do not be so given to the activity of Martha as to forget the silence of Mary. May the Virgin who so well reconciled the one with the other be your sweet model and inspiration.

The best consolation comes from prayer.

On this earth everyone has his cross. But we must act in such a way that we be not the bad, but the good thief.

Don't spend your energies on things that generate worry, anxiety and anguish. Only one thing is necessary: Lift up your spirit, and love God.

Ahead! Courage! In the spiritual life he who does not advance goes backward. It happens as with a boat which always must go ahead. If it stands still the wind will blow it back.

When you are exposed to any trial, be it physical or moral, bodily or spiritual, the best remedy is to think of Jesus who is our life and not to think of the trial without joining it to the thought of Jesus.

The gates of Heaven are open for all creatures who repent. Remember Mary Magdalene.

Jesus always lends comfort to those who place their trust and hope in Him.

May Jesus be always at the center of your endeavors..... May He offer us comfort in our moments of sadness. May He sustain us with His grace, enlighten our minds and inflame our hearts with Divine Love.

The longer the trial to which God subjects you, the greater the goodness in comforting you during the time of the trial and in the exaltation after the combat.

Keep close to the Catholic Church at all times, for the Church alone can give you true peace, since she alone possesses Jesus, the true Prince of Peace, in the Blessed Sacrament.

You must speak to Jesus also with the heart, besides with the lips; indeed, in certain cases you must speak to Him only with the heart.

Fear not because God is with you.

Prayer is the oxygen of the soul!

Who can assure us that we will be alive tomorrow? Let us listen to the voice of our conscience, to the voice of the royal prophet: "Today, if you hear God's voice, harden not your heart." Let us not put off from one moment to another (what we should do) because the (next moment) is not yet ours.

Oh, how precious time is! Blessed are those who know how to make good use of it. Oh, if only all could understand how precious time is, undoubtedly everyone would do his best to spend it in a praiseworthy manner!

The life of a Christian is nothing but a perpetual struggle against self; there is no flowering of the soul to the beauty of its perfection except at the price of pain.

From his writings

The New Saints

the Adversary of God knows it.

Besides, humanity is now capable of accessing the past as it has never been able to prior to this time. The chances that a fraudulent portrayal of a saint will be uncovered are significantly more probable today than ever before. The tools, techniques, technologies and methodologies of historical investigation have opened up the past as never before. Why not allow a saint to be seen as God loved him or her and saved him or her? If a saint does not happen to measure up to the world's standards of etiquette, decency, normality, virtue or holiness, so what? He or she is in heaven and humanity might have a great deal to learn from saints who do not meet the world's standards of righteousness.

Besides, people can be deprived of graces that God wants them to receive when a saint is misrepresented. After St. Therese's last blood sister died, the Carmelites began the project of setting the historical record straight on St. Therese. The Trappist Monk, Thomas Merton, after reading some of the newly released material on St. Therese, wrote:

In supernatural terms, the great grace I received that October was to find out that Therese of Lisieux is a real saint and not just a dumb, pious little doll for sentimental old women. She is not just a saint, but a great saint, one of the greatest, an extraordinary saint! I owe her countless apologies and public amends for ignoring her so long.

Thomas Merton was kept from St. Therese for most of his life not because of what she in fact was but because of what others made her out to be.

Is Padre Pio destined to become a "pious little doll for sentimental old women?" I hope not. Will most of the fantastic tales about him turn out in time to be more hoax than hard fact? I hope not. I hope not because he was a human being who gropingly made his way along

The Way like the rest of us. By his struggle to be faithful to Jesus, he brought to many an experience of God's mercy and peace. The dross of "holy" fiction, if there is any, should be wiped from his story. The St. Padre Pio, who is hidden behind the barnacles of quasi-cult non-information or dis-information, may have something to clarify for us about holiness and the Church that we desperately need to have clarified.

A man who only a short time before he dies asks to be taken out on a balcony so he can view for the last time the little piece of the world he loves, sounds like he has more grassroots humanity in him than his "holy handlers" often want to admit. The fact that when Padre Pio lay dying he kept repeating two words: "Jesus, Mary" may tell us more about holiness in general and more about his personal journey to holiness than a stigmata or bi-location ever could.

After all, at the heart of every canonization of every saint is the reality of Redemption: a sinner is granted by the mercy of God an eternally graced union with the Holy One through Jesus Christ. Autosalvation based on extraordinary spiritual calisthenics or manifestations of paranormal phenomena is an illusion. The process of salvation is initiated and is consummated by the mercy of God — for all of us: *St. Padre Pio, St. Therese, you and me.*

*Padre Pio is in heaven! Thank God! Alleluia!
May we all be so graced. ■*



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St. Peter's Square during canonization of Padre Pio

