

Famed Italy Stigmatist

Padre Pio Builds Hospital For Poor

The author of the following article is a member of the Rome bureau of the N.C.W.C. News Service. He has returned from a tour of southern Italy where he went to make a first-hand report on the area's developments and interview its outstanding Catholic personalities.

By FATHER JAMES I. TUCKER
(N.C.W.C. News-Service)

San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy—Humility and charity go hand in hand. The one glorifies, the other sanctifies.

These words, which Padre Pio of Pietradalata, the famed stigmatist Capuchin priest, once wrote to one of his spiritual children, have become the cornerstones of his hospital here, The House for the Relief of Suffering.

HUMILITY AND CHARITY are everywhere in the little world that clusters about the Capuchin monastery of Our Lady of Grace. They are written on the facade of the new 300-bed hospital. They are felt in the silence of the pious congregation attending the stigmatist's Mass at 4:30 in the morning.

They are apparent in the conduct of the spiritual and physical invigilade who come here from every part of the world for relief. They are the predominant theme, the motive for every word and action performed on this desert mountain of Gargano.

It is true that the thousands who come to San Giovanni Rotondo come to attend Padre Pio's Mass and go to confession to him. But even there his personality escapes the faithful. When you attend this Mass, you forget about Padre Pio and are drawn to concentrate on the true meaning of the sacrifice.

ONE OF HIS regular penitents said to me:

"In the confessional Padre Pio loses his personality. He is a simple soul in God's hands. He is joyful with the joyful, suffers with the suffering, weeps with the sorrowful. Yet he refuses the least compromise. Where it is a matter of violating God's laws, he seems at times to be almost brutal, but only as the doctor's scalpel seems brutal cutting into rotten flesh."

If you spend only one or two days at San Giovanni Rotondo, you understand what one bishop wrote after his visit there: "There are no bodies at San Giovanni Rotondo; there are only souls."

Everyone is praying. There is a constant flow of faithful entering and leaving the small monastery church. Everything focuses on the altar and the confessional. There are actually the focal points: Padre Pio is the magnet that draws them there. Here humility is most in evidence. In the hospital, charity is most in evidence.

In 1940 a handful of men gathered in Padre Pio's cell and joined him in making the first plans for the hospital. It was then that he himself gave it the name which was to be a simple description of its function: The House for the Relief of Suffering.

TEN YEARS ago, on April 16, 1947, the picks first struck at the rock of Mount Gargano to prepare the foundation. The hospital was finally dedicated in late 1953 in the presence of Cardinal Lercaro, Archbishop of Bologna, and with the blessing of Pope Plus XII.

From the beginning there was no thought that Padre Pio would have any part in the hospital other than in its conception and in encouraging its completion. However, last year Pope Plus XII himself acknowledged Padre Pio as the hospital's founder and designated him director for life.

At the same time the Pope assigned the hospital to the management of the Congregation of Third Order Franciscans of Our Lady of Grace under Padre Pio's leadership.

The House for the Relief of Suffering was built at a cost of approximately one and a half million dollars. Under the management of laymen, members of the Third Order Franciscan, it is staffed by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

It is a complete and modern hospital in every detail, including among its facilities a helicopter airport on the rooftop for

transportation of those patients whose condition prevents them traveling over the rough mountain roads that lead to San Giovanni Rotondo. Its five stories comprise an area of 6,000 square meters.

THE HOSPITAL operates on a strict policy of pay if you can, do not pay if you cannot. No patient is turned away because of inability to pay. Its 300 bed capacity is almost constantly full.

There are regular chaplains assigned to the hospital from the Capuchin monastery. Padre Pio is not one of them, although he sometimes goes into the hospital for special cases, particularly to prepare the dying.

A great part of the contributions for construction of the hospital came from the United States, and contributions continue to come from Americans for its maintenance.

American interest in Padre Pio and his hospital project was stimulated by U.S. servicemen who visited San Giovanni Rotondo during the war. Padre Pio is commonly known to have "a special tenderness" for the American GIs.

Some who knew him during the war have since become priests. Many, both priests and laymen, return to visit him from time to time. He remembers many of them by name, and always welcomes them warmly.

With the new hospital completed, the framework of a new monastery church is beginning to rise on the Capuchin hill. Even in its early stages one can see the tall and stately lines that it will have. It will have additional confessionals to handle the increased number of penitents as well as additional altars for the Masses of visiting priests.

An additional floor has been added to the monastery itself providing roomy cells for the community of 20 monks. Padre Pio, however, has remained in his old cell, and it is said that he has so far not even seen the new addition to the monastery.

ALTHOUGH PADRE PIO is now approaching 72 years of age, he is still broad shouldered and erect. To see him is to know something of his character. He stands about five and a half feet, square built and chunky like most of the country people of the Naples area from which he originates.

His face, of soft and solemn expression when he is about his priestly duties, assumes a playful look when he is engaged in conversation, betraying the fine sense of humor for which he is commonly known. He speaks with a strong resolve, rather deep voice.

Inside the convent he takes part in the community life as his duties will allow. He always takes his noon meal with the community. During recreation he is said to be an interesting conversationalist and has the reputation of being the prankster of the community.

ONE FELLOW monk said of him: "Padre Pio has sometimes been accused of hysteria. They try to explain away his stigmata this way. I do not believe that a man with his sense of humor could be said to be hysterical."

Today Padre Pio receives about 500 letters a day from all over the world (not 1000 daily as reported elsewhere) but very few are answered by him personally. Sometimes he will jot down a short note to one of his penitents. For the rest, his correspondence is handled by fel-



Padre Pio's bleeding hands are visible as he gives blessing at Mass. He is marked with crucifixion wounds of Christ.

low monks who know several languages.

These, however, refer most of the special requests for prayers to his personal attention and he will generally indicate what reply should be given. For the last two years there has been an increase of letters from Poland, running from 40 to 60 letters a week.

There are many things to be seen and experienced on Mount Gargano: Things spiritual in the work with souls, and things material in the new constructions. The essence of it all was summed up by Cardinal Lercaro.

"Where God is, there is charity and love. Do you not notice it at San Giovanni Rotondo? Yes, the whole world has noticed it. God is here. Evidently, charity and love must also be here."

Albert Tjebelle hadn't seen his daughter, Ginette, since she married McEachran in France shortly after VE day and left for Oregon 12 years ago.

Both he and his daughter played a big part in France's defense. MR. TJOEBELLE won the highest military award of his country—the Legion of Honor—for his bravery in World War II, and also the Military Medal, second highest award. He was awarded the Croix de Guerre four times and France's Escape Medal three times, in addition to eight lesser awards.

Convert Becomes Cloistered Nun
London—(NC)—Miss Ann Dover, 29, daughter of British novelist Stella Morton, has entered a cloistered order of Dominican nuns on the Isle of Wight. It was announced here.

A convert, as is her mother, Miss Dover said of her decision: "It is the logical conclusion of everything that I have ever wanted. All my life I have been searching for something and have always had a great love of nature. It seems only a natural outcome for this to develop into a love of God and to make one want to spend a lifetime in

Oberammergau Prepares For 1960

By FATHER PLACID JORDAN, O.S.B.

Oberammergau—(NC)—To be chosen for a part in the world-famed Passion Play here, no matter how modest it may be, means so much to the girls in this Bavarian village that they are willing to have their weddings postponed, sometimes for years.

The reason lies in the fact that only unmarried girls and women, up to the age of 35, are eligible for participation in the play staged every 10 years.

THIS TRADITION has been followed ever since the play was first presented, some 300 years ago. It will once again be strictly enforced by the committee to be elected by the municipality of Oberammergau early next year to prepare the next presentation of the play, which will be held in 1960 to coincide with the International Eucharistic Congress that another tradition is observing.

The committee must see to it with equal strictness. Only native-born Oberammergau citizens or residents of more than 20 years standing can be members of the east, with the exception of children to whom the rule does not apply.

As a matter of fact an American boy was allowed to take part in the play when it was last held in 1950. Some 300 children who will form the choir and orchestra of the next play are already being trained for their future roles.

In 1950 the cast included 600 women and 800 men. Next Spring about the same number will have to be chosen. Then the men who have been selected will start letting their hair and beards grow, and the women who contemplate marriage will know that they will have to wait until the autumn of 1960 for their wedding days.

Wood carver Hans Schweighofer who gave a masterful performance as Judas in the 1950 play is likely to be appointed production director this time, succeeding Johann Georg Lang who served for three consecutive terms.

Schweighofer is a teacher at the school which turns out craftsmen for the village's most important industry, wood carving. It traces its origins to the Benedictine monastery of Ettal near here, and the men and women engaged in it often are called "The Lord's Own Wood Carvers."

Nearly half of the village's 3,000 people are engaged in wood carving, directly or indirectly. Orders for the crosses, creches, angels and animal figures they turn out are received from all over the globe.

All products are carved by hand. A statue of Christ or the Blessed Virgin may require several months to be completed, but the finished products are truly works of art not easily equalled elsewhere, for the artist, chisel and hammer on their wood as a sculptor does on marble.

First Friday First Saturday

Today and tomorrow are days of special devotion for Catholics.

Today, Friday, is the First Friday of the month of August a day dedicated in honor of our Lord's Sacred Heart.

Tomorrow, First Saturday, honors the Blessed Virgin Mary's Immaculate Heart.

Mass and Holy Communion are recommended for both days. Many parishes list First Friday late afternoon or evening Mass. Consult parish bulletins for Mass schedule.

Keep Order's Rules, Pope Tells Nuns

Castelgandolfo—(RNS)—Pope Plus XII, in the second of a series of three talks he is broadcasting to cloistered nuns throughout the world, told them they should wholeheartedly accept the rules of their orders without any "legalistic" spirit of resistance.

He stressed that cheerfulness, work, prayer and self-sacrifice constituted their way of life as virgins consecrated to God.

The Pontiff's message was broadcast in French from his summer home here, where he is expected to remain in residence until November. In his first talk, a week before, he told the cloistered nuns in 3,200 convents around the world that each of them must seek God in different ways, according to her own background, culture and capacity.

Noting that some nuns have suffered breakdowns from "struggling continuously with obligations supported only painfully," Pope Plus said that "no serious order" will accept candidates who agree to obey some rules and refuse to abide by others.

THE POPE SAID that "what one expects first of all from nuns is simplicity and humility."

This means, he explained, "that all desire to become noticed should be put aside, as well as all desire to be admired by others, which was what the Pharisees wanted, but which Our Lord severely reprimanded in the Sermon on the Mount."

Science Courses To Be Started

St. Louis—(RNS)—A formal science course will be introduced for the first time this September in all St. Louis archdiocesan elementary schools.

Have Diapers, Will Travel

Aodachi, Japan—The little singers from the Maryknoll kindergarten and nursery school here are so good at school they have "looked" for them to put them on radio.

A well-known milk company from Kyoto asked to sponsor the singing kindergarten class from the mission of Father Constantine F. Burns, M.M., of Toledo, Ohio, over a local radio station.

The program, based on Catholic themes receives wide reception throughout the area, and through it, the kindergarten has gained such prestige that Father Burns will expand to accommodate applicants next year.

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