

Padre Pio, Priest with the Saviour's Wounds

By JAMES C. O'NEILL

San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy (NC)—"Pray for me! Padre Pio, pray for me!"

"Why? It's late. It's time you prayed for me."

This brief and brisk conversation took place on the staircase inside the Italian Capuchin monastery in which lives Padre Pio, the 75-year-old stigmatic who has borne the marks of Christ's Passion on his body for more than 40 years.

As a conversation it is both typical and unusual. It is typical of the fervent, chance encounters of Catholics with the exteriorly brusque monk. It is unusual since it is not like the usual sentimental portrait painted of men and women famed for holiness. For the grizzled white-haired friar, whose fame is worldwide, appears so human, so ordinary in most things as to make one wonder.

The whole feeling of this small town on the slopes of

Mount Gargano near the Adriatic Sea is a mixture of contrasts. It is a town in which faith and science not only live peacefully together but also serve each other. It is an active town where the bustle of every day life is somehow muted and transformed by a spiritual isolation and contemplation, by sorrow and exultation.

The big "new" of San Giovanni today is the immense multi-million dollar addition that is well on the way to completion of the hospital which the friends of Padre Pio have built with their contributions from all over the world.

The present hospital, called the House for the Relief of Suffering, has more than 300 beds. With the new addition it will jump to 800. The modernity of the spacious, handsomely designed plant, which rivals anything found in the United States, catches the visitor by surprise.

Completed last September, the hospital has 10 operating

rooms, facilities for 100 student nurses (double the previous enrollment) and a medical convention and study center capable of handling international congresses.

Impressive as the new hospital is, it is still only a reflection of the greater story, Padre Pio himself.

Morning here begins at 4:30 when townspeople and visitors get up in time to attend the daily 5 a.m. Mass celebrated by the friar who has been a stigmatic for almost 45 years. Despite snow and rain, the average number of people clustered outside the door of the new monastery church of Our Lady of Grace is at least 500. When the doors are opened the crowds hurry to the two sides flanking the main altar and wait for Padre Pio to appear.

His Mass is a slow, deeply felt event. Frequently Padre Pio takes a handkerchief and wipes his eyes. Asked about this, a fellow monk said: "O,

they are real tears all right; tears of sorrow and pain."

Age and physical exhaustion have taken their toll of the remarkable friar. He said no longer could he do the traditional. Brother friars assist him up the stairs of the altar, lest he fall. And Communion is distributed only after the Mass by another priest to spare Padre Pio the exertion of the hundreds upon hundreds of Communion receivers daily.

During the portions of the Mass when rubrics require the priest to lift his hands, those of Padre Pio are centers of attention, both of the devout and curious. However, the possibility of seeing the marks on the hands is slight since the sleeves of the alb cover a part of the lower part of the hand.

After Mass, Padre Pio sits in the sacristy of the new church with his head covered by his rough brown cowl, pressed against a table. Around him stand 20 or 30 men, pilgrims who shuffle in respectful silence as he makes his thanksgiving. Frequently the sounds of sobbing and occasional cough break the concentrated quiet of the room.

As the half-hour period of prayer draws to an end, the assembled men form themselves into two rows running from the table to the doorway leading to the stairs up to the monastery cloister. Thanksgiving completed, Padre Pio rises and moves steadily past the impromptu honor guard of devoted pilgrims.

Most grab at his hands, kissing the woolen half-gloves that cover them. A definite odor of medical alcohol emanates from them. Some of the men are silent, others ask for prayers: "A holy Father," "Bless you, Father."

One man called out "padre mio" (my father), and the friar touched his head and said in a good strong voice "figlio mio" (my son).

Some boys broke out of the line and almost tripped the old man as he moved towards the door. The friar pushed them

aside half-roughly and laid chidingly: "Boys, boys! Out of the way."

Once out of the sacristy, Padre Pio climbed the steep stairs leading up to the old monastery, a staircase by two younger friars. Thinks inside the sacristy could still see him, for the wall of the sacristy is a glass partition decorated with frosted figures of Franciscan saints, and none left until he had disappeared through the upper doorway of the monastery.

After a brief breakfast and rest, Padre Pio returns to the church to hear confessions of the women. For almost two hours each morning he sits in his confessional, carefully railed off to protect him from too enthusiastic penitents, hearing the sins of the great and the obscure.

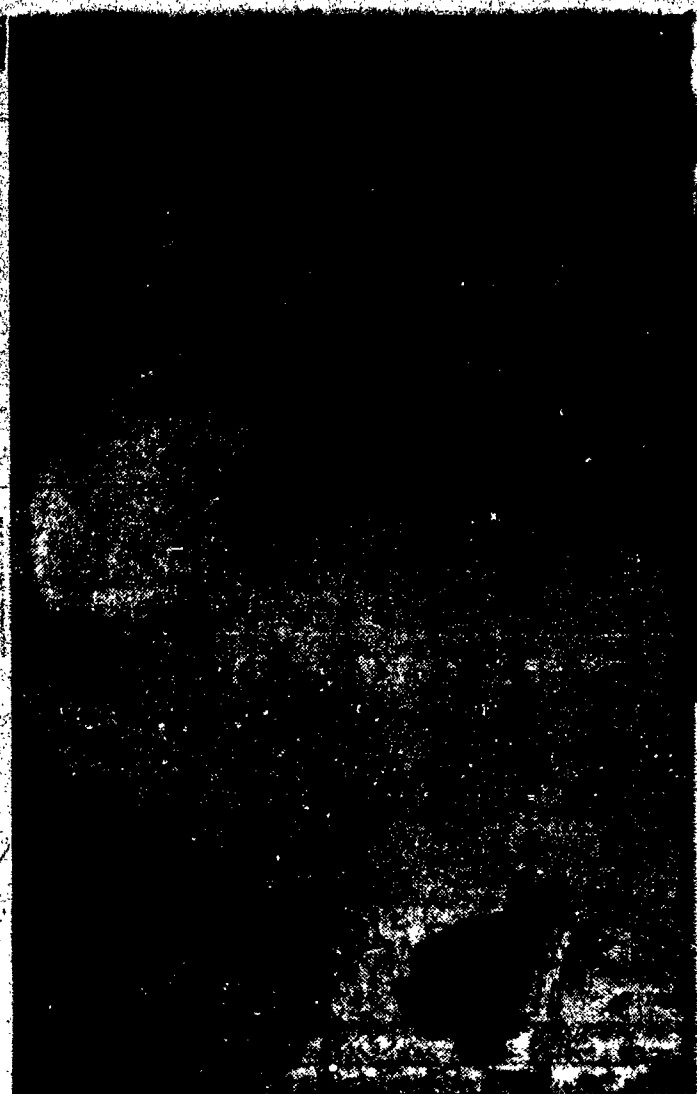
So heavy is the demand on his time, that tickets must be issued by number to people waiting to confess. One half the day's tickets are allotted to people of the town and the other half to visitors from afar.

At noon Padre Pio is, again the object of an intense but orderly group of men who line the corridor of the monastery leading from his cell to the refectory on the floor below.

In the afternoon Padre Pio hears the confessions of men and in the later afternoon leads the recitation of the Rosary and officiates at Benediction.

In all, it seems a simple and not unusual routine for a friar, but the attraction of Padre Pio draws thousands. Many more thousands "visit" him by mail monthly. One of his secretaries estimated that the English-language mail alone is more than 1,000 letters a month.

The devotion of his followers and the growing interest of the curious press have bedeviled his life. Newspapers constantly scrutinize Padre Pio, the administration of the hospital—the funds flowing into the hospital from abroad are immense—and even the Vatican has sent a visitor to investigate the phenomenon which is Padre Pio.



The bleeding hands of Padre Pio are seldom seen. He keeps them bandaged. Here at Mass, however, visitors get a rare glimpse of the priest with the wounds of the Saviour.

At present the hospital remains in the name of Padre Pio who has been especially exempted from his vow of poverty for this purpose. However, administrators of the hospital say that a plan is being worked on by which title to the hospital can be transferred to a special foundation fund which will be under Vatican protection in the future to avoid the need of paying taxes on donations leveled by the government.

grossing as the man himself and the effect he has on hundreds of thousands of persons around the world. For there is nothing except Padre Pio himself to attract anyone to San Giovanni.

A man of rough good humor, according to his fellow monks, a man can bark as well as pray, a man obviously not conscious of himself and unmoved by the attention centered on him, Padre Pio, at 75, remains a lightning-bolt of faith on a barren mountainside for hundreds of thousands, many of whom have never seen him.



Capuchin Padre Pio of Italy is spiritual director of this new 300 bed hospital called the "House for the Relief of Suffering." Funds given by pilgrims to see the famed stigmatic were used to build the hospital.

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Ancient Skull Reveals Saga in Sod of Greenland



Patron of Ceylon

Roman martyr—St. Lawrence was chief among the seven deacons who served the Roman Church during the mid-third Century. The young cleric field a position of great trust, caring for the goods of the Church and distributing alms among the poor. He was arrested under the Emperor Valerian in 258, laid upon a gridiron, and slowly roasted to death. Lawrence rejoiced in his awful martyrdom and died praying for the conversion of the City of Rome, in the hope that from it the faith of Christ might spread throughout the world. From that time idolatry began to decline in Rome.

Pope's Greetings Read To Orthodox Congress

Denver—(RNS)—A telegram extending greetings from Pope Paul VI was received here by the 17th biennial congress of clergy and laity of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America.

Archbishop Iakovos received a communication from Amleto Cardinal Cicognani, Vatican Secretary of State, stating that the pontiff "invokes (for) Your Grace and participants in the Congress rich recompense, divine favors and graces."

The telegram also conveyed the Pope's gratitude for "special prayers" offered for him by the Orthodox congress on the Feastday of Sts. Peter and Paul.

Archbishop Iakovos wired the Pope on the feast-day, celebrated each year on June 29 by both Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

(The author of the following story, an American Oblate of Mary Immaculate, is the first missionary priest in Greenland since the Middle Ages. He was in Qagssarsuk only a month before workmen stumbled onto what is believed to be the first Christian church built in the New World.)

By FATHER MICHAEL WOLFE, O.M.I.

Godhaab, Greenland—(NC)—The chance discovery of the first Christian church in Greenland—and perhaps in the New World—has also revealed a striking coincidence in the missionary history of this bleak country.

In 1959 the first Catholic missionary to arrive in Greenland since the mysterious disappearance of the Norse settlers in the late Middle Ages pitched his tent at Qagssarsuk, on the very site of the Church.

Nothing on the surface of the ground indicated the historical and religious treasure that lay beneath.

In fact the missionary was little concerned with the problems of the past at that moment. He was chilled to the bone, and a cold windstorm was driving rain through rents in his tiny tent.

At this point the local Lutheran catechist, Lars Motzfeldt, poked his head into the tent and invited the priest to take shelter for the night in his house nearby.

It was this same Lutheran catechist who later realized that the workmen breaking ground for a new school house

at Qagssarsuk had stumbled onto a magnificent archaeological discovery.

It began when a workman turned up a piece of bone. He noticed at a moment and tossed it aside with an exclamation, "Just an old sheep head."

But at that moment Motzfeldt appeared on the scene. "No!" he cried. "It's a human skull!" Without hesitation he added: "It must be the skull of an old Norseman!"

Motzfeldt had at least two reasons for his deduction. The

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little village had long been believed to be the site of "Brattahlid," the farm of Erik the Red, who discovered Greenland in 982. Motzfeldt knew that the skull could have belonged to an Eskimo since the Eskimos had their dead on top of the ground.

In the early 1800s Danish archeologists turned the settlement upside down to prove that Qagssarsuk was the site of Erik's farm. They established the point beyond all doubt. Dozens of ruins came to light under their shovels, including the long house of Erik the Red and a later and larger church that lies just below it on the slope down to the fjord. In the past few years the place has become the biggest attraction for Greenland's new but growing tourist trade.

An official of the Danish government's Department for Greenland happened to be at a former U.S. airbase at Narsarsuaq, across "Erik's fjord." He was notified at once, called over to take a look and took the skull back to Denmark with him. The Danish National Museum confirmed the Norse origin of the skull.

Jorgens Melgaard, a leading archeologist, saw the significance of the skull immediately. He flew to Greenland and within 10 days was able to conclude that the workers had been digging into the foundations of the first church in Greenland, built by Thjodhild, the wife of Erik the Red.

The story is told in the Saga of Erik the Red, found in an ancient Icelandic manuscript. It tells of the return to Greenland of Erik's son Leif, who

had been converted to Christianity in Norway by King Olaf Trygvasson.

"Leif struck the coast of Greenland at Erikfjord and went home to Brattahlid. Everybody was delighted to see him. He began preaching Christianity throughout the land immediately. When proclaiming the faith he showed people the tokens he had received from Olaf Trygvasson, explaining how excellent and how glorious was the new religion."

"His father, Erik, was not inclined to be much impressed with the new ideas. But his mother, Thjodhild, accepted them readily and had a church built near the farm. This building was thereafter called Thjodhild's church. Here she worshipped, and so did the rest of those who accepted Christianity."

Though some attempts had been made to find the site of Thjodhild's church, many archeologists were of the opinion that it had been built of wood and that little or nothing of the church would be left to find. Melgaard's preliminary excavations revealed something quite different.

The thick walls of the church were built of stone and sod. Only the west gable had been built of wood. This was a common method of constructing churches in Norse Greenland. Wooden churches were established, worthier of God's house in Norse days, but the lack of trees in Greenland allowed nothing more than a token gable of driftwood or of whatever lumber could be imported.

The little church measured about 15 by 18 feet; it was laid

out in the traditional east-west direction.

Also lying in the customary east-west direction were the 18 graves that have been uncovered in the adjoining churchyard. Melgaard estimates that there must be almost 100 graves in all. This is undoubtedly the first Christian cemetery in the New World, and marks the graves of its first generation of Catholics.

A number of factors make it probable that the grave of Leif Erikson is among them. It is not impossible that further excavations, which now are being planned, will reveal a grave alone with a rune inscription identifying the grave.

Erik the Red landed in Greenland about 985 after being exiled from Norway for robbery and murder. He formed the first small European community there. In 988 Erik sent his son Leif to Norway. Leif returned with the Christian faith and the first priests.

Catholic civilization flourished in Greenland for five centuries and then vanished mysteriously. More than 100 of Greenland's Norse ruins are remains of religious houses of churches. They include some Benedictine convents, one Augustinian monastery, one cathedral and about 20 churches.

Lutheranism came to Greenland with the Danes who they repopulated the island in the 18th century. The present population stems from the Danish colonists and the native Eskimos. No trace of the original Norse settlers of the Middle Ages appears to have remained at the time of the second colonization.

Sudan's Ruthless War against Christianity

BY GARY MacROIN

Spokesmen of the Sudan dictatorship are making cynical efforts to whitewash the persecution raging in the south of that country. They claim that all foreign missionaries were expelled last February because of "legally proved" interference in the internal politics of the country.

They add that the expelled missionaries are to be replaced by Sudanese priests.

I traveled in southern Sudan less than two weeks before the decree of expulsion. I saw the military build-up in Equatoria arranged to terrorize the people into accepting the blow. I gathered evidence from people on the spot which satisfied me that the missionaries were leaning over backward to observe the harshly discriminatory laws and thus avoid any charge of refusal to cooperate.

At the very moment of expulsion I was interviewing victims of the persecution in refugee camps and elsewhere in neighboring countries. These were not foreign missionaries. They were Sudanese who had fled the terror. They were enduring hunger patiently in the hope that somewhere in the world people would be found who

so loved justice and hated evil doing that they would come to their aid.

On the very day that Sudan's Interior Minister announced the expulsion of the missionaries, lawyer K. Boeggaard, chairman of Kenya Justice, was telling me in Nairobi that the Sudan Government had persistently and repeatedly refused to allow him to enter the Sudan. He is the impartial investigator named last year by the International Commission of Jurists, Geneva, Switzerland, to report on complaints of Sudan's violations of human rights.

His interim report based on evidence taken from refugees is in the hands of the Commission, but he was never allowed to visit Sudan's jails or attend trials before its military courts.

Neither are other independent observers permitted to travel and report freely. Contrary to the claims of Sudan Embassies, a special permit had to be obtained in Khartoum from the Interior Minister before Sudan Airways (the only carrier) would honor my ticket to the south. And this permit was obtained only because they believed I was an inoffensive American tourist anxious to swell their dollar reserves. Various

U.S. and British officials assured me that a newsmen could not hope to obtain a permit.

Nobody could speak to me until I had provided documentary evidence that I was not a Sudanese agent. Every informant warned me that disclosure of his identity would bring dire reprisals for telling the truth.

The basic fact about the Sudan is that the dictatorship is engaged on a ruthless policy of imposing the Arab language and culture at the north, along with its Moslem religion, on the south.

As a first step, it has eliminated the leadership of the south's four million black Africans, some of whom are Christians and the rest Animists (pagans). The educated people are in exile, in jail or dispersed in villages in the north.

The Christian missionaries had first been isolated and their schools had been seized over the past eight years. But the people still rallied around them. The policy of genocide required their elimination, and so they have gone.

Perhaps the most cynical of the assertions of the Interior Minister is that Sudan-

ese priests will replace those expelled, and that the government intends to pursue a policy of active training of indigenous clergy.

The fact is that the mission authorities had long been the writing on the wall. Since 1960 both Catholic and Protestant missions had been refused visas for new missionaries. As expulsions were stepped up, they appealed continuously to the authorities for permission to increase the intake of candidates to junior seminaries and for permission to start additional junior seminaries. These requests were absolutely turned down.

In consequence, Sudan has only a handful of ordained clergymen for service in the south, and some of these are in jail, others in exile from which they dare not return.

Within the Sudan no voice can be raised in protest. The dictatorship controls all newspaper, radio and television. The army has an iron grip on the people.

World opinion is so strangely unmoved, is the one hope of the weak oppressed and leaderless Negroes now at the mercy of their traditional enemies.