

# Pope John Paul II beatifies Padre Pio

By John Thavis  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — In one of the biggest religious ceremonies in Rome's history, Pope John Paul II beatified Padre Pio da Pietrelcina and said the Capuchin friar "astonished the world" with his simple life of prayer.

The Mass May 2 was attended by some 200,000 people who overflowed St. Peter's Square and another 100,000 who watched on giant TV screens in an open area across the city. Many were devoted followers of Padre Pio, a southern Italian priest known for his direct style of hearing confessions.

"By his life wholly given to prayer and to

listening to his brothers and sisters, this humble Capuchin friar astonished the world," the pope said in a sermon.

The pope, who personally knew and admired Padre Pio, praised him for the long hours he spent with penitents, for his charity works on behalf of the poor and sick, and for his ascetic practices undertaken in imitation of Christ. Padre Pio's reputed "stigmata" — the appearance of bleeding wounds like those of the crucified Christ — showed the priest's intense sharing in the Lord's Passion, the pope said.

Referring to years of suspicion by church officials, who investigated and temporarily suspended Padre Pio from his priestly ministry, the pope said it showed that saints are

sometimes "misunderstood" even by their own superiors.

Padre Pio was exonerated from the allegations of impropriety and fraudulent conduct, but these accusations represented a painful and distressing trial for the priest, the pope said. He said Padre Pio endured it all with a spirit of obedience, which itself became a path of purification. The priest died in 1968 at the age of 81.

At the beginning of the three-hour liturgy, the pope read the beatification decree and set Sept. 29 as a day for special devotion to Padre Pio.

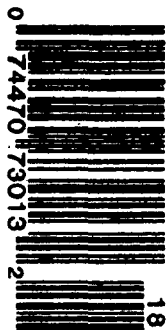
A drape was lifted on the facade of St. Peter's Basilica to reveal a giant portrait of the

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Reuters/CNS

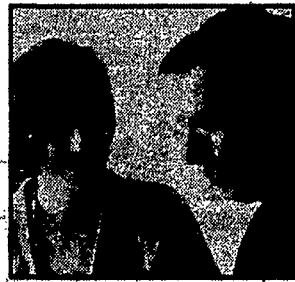
Pilgrims crowd a Rome street waiting to enter St. Peter's Square for the beatification of Padre Pio May 2.



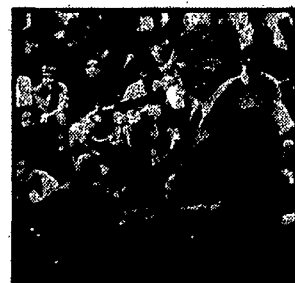
# Catholic Courier

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# KOSOVO

## Morality of air war questioned

Shpend — who asked to be identified only by his first name — has lived in the United States since he was a little boy, when his family moved here from Yugoslavia. However, he has kept in touch with his ethnic Albanian relatives in Kosovo, and visited there as recently as 1997.

Since NATO began bombing Serb forces in Kosovo, one of his aunts has fled the region with her six children and is now in neighboring Albania. But the fate of his uncles and male cousins is another story.

"All the males are still inside (Kosovo), and we've heard stories that they might all be dead," he said.

He noted that his fear of what the Serb-dominated Yugoslav forces may do to his relatives is grounded in personal experience. When visiting Kosovo over Christmas, 1997, he claims he was harassed repeatedly by police who stole money from him and detained him for questioning.

Shpend has volunteered to serve as an interpreter for any ethnic Albanian refugees who may come to Rochester in the next few weeks under the auspices of Catholic Family Center's Department of Refugee & Immigration.

Those refugees will be among the 20,000 the United States has agreed to take in order to relieve pressure on Kosovo's neighbors, Macedonia and Albania. Those two countries have been overwhelmed by the largest refugee movement in Europe since World War II.

Shpend is one of 16 volunteer interpreters along with 34 other individuals who have offered to help ethnic Albanian refugees adjust to life in the Rochester area, according to Jim Delaney, refugee program



manager. Delaney added that parishes and individuals interested in helping out the refugees can call him at 716/262-7074.

The first refugee families were slated to arrive in Rochester the first week of May, but Delaney did not know yet how many Kosovar Albanians to expect. Shpend, for

one, is excited he'll finally be able to make a personal difference in the lives of those affected by Kosovo's war.

"It's my big chance to do something, whereas before I was freaking out," Shpend said.

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