

St. Padre Pio

and Garabandal

"I am giving you only one advice:

Pray and make others pray, for

the world is on the edge of ruin."

~St. Padre Pio to the four visionaries

By Barry Hanratty



On September 23, 1968, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina died in the odor of sanctity at the age of 81 after having lived one of the most extraordinary lives in the history of the Church. He was beatified on May 2, 1999, by Pope John Paul II, and canonized by the same pontiff on June 16, 2002, in Rome before one of the largest crowds ever assembled in the Eternal City for a canonization ceremony.

The famed stigmatist, the first priest to bear the wounds of Christ in his flesh, was remarkable for a number of reasons. In addition to his great holiness—"goodness walking" in the words of his fellow friars—and stigmata which caused an ongoing martyrdom that lasted more than 50 years, Padre Pio possessed a superabundance of charismatic gifts: visions, perfume (the favored person emits a sweet fragrance; in Padre Pio's case, the fragrance came from his wounds), healing, bilocation, reading of hearts and prophecy.

He was also one of the Church's great confessors, spending many hours each day hearing the confessions of people who came from all over the world to his monastery in San Giovanni Rotondo near Foggia in southern Italy.

Every day they came in droves first to hear his Mass, a remarkable experience in itself, and then to take their turn—which sometimes meant a wait of two weeks—to confess their sins to the humble Capuchin Father. He had a "hot line" to heaven, they believed, and could let them know exactly where they stood in the eyes of almighty God.

After having suffered during the earlier years of his priestly life from censorship, disbelief and calumny, his stature eventually grew until he was regarded as a living saint by everyone from the humblest peasant farmer to the pope.

Because of his reputation for holiness and great charismatic gifts, his advice on matters of discernment was highly sought and carried tremendous weight. And it wasn't a question of his opinion. It was believed that he *knew*. It pleased God that His servant, Padre Pio, should be intimately connected with the Garabandal events.

Some people, unfavorably disposed toward the alleged apparitions, have denied the association between Padre Pio and Garabandal, but their arguments disintegrate in the face of over-

whelming evidence to the contrary.

A group of Spaniards once asked him if Our Lady was really appearing at Garabandal. He answered, "Are you still asking about that? How long do you expect her to appear there? She has been appearing for eight months already!" [See *The Apparitions of Garabandal* by F. Sanchez Ventura, p. 99.] But the evidence of Padre Pio's relationship to the Garabandal events goes beyond oral testimony.

A LETTER IS RECEIVED

On March 3, 1962, a letter that bore no signature was received in San Sebastian de Garabandal addressed to the four young visionaries, Conchita, Mari Loli, Jacinta and Mari Cruz. This incident was reported by Dr. Celestino Ortiz, an excellent witness, and is recounted in the book, *She Went in Haste to the Mountain* by Father Eusebio Garcia de Pesquera from which the following excerpt is taken:

Felix Lopez, a former student of the Seminario Mayor de Derio (Bilbao), who is now the school teacher in Garabandal, was meeting with people in Conchita's kitchen. The girl received a letter that she didn't understand, and she asked him to translate it. It was in Italian, and Felix, after reading it said, "By its style, it could well be Padre Pio."

Conchita asked him if he knew Padre Pio's address, and on receiving an affirmative answer, asked him to help her compose a letter to answer it and express her appreciation. Completing the letter in response, they left it on the kitchen table, unfolded.

After a while, Conchita went into ecstasy and recited the rosary. Returning to her normal state, the teacher said to her, "Did you ask the Blessed Virgin if the letter was from Padre Pio?" "Yes, and she gave me a secret answer to send him."

The girl went up to her room and came down later with a handwritten letter. In front of everybody, she put it in the envelope which had been addressed by the teacher to Padre Pio, and she sealed it.

The letter that had come to Conchita, without a signature, without a return address, but with an Italian stamp, said this:



Conchita in ecstasy, 1962

My Dear Children,

At nine o'clock in the morning, the Holy Virgin told me to say to you: "O blessed young girls of San Sebastian de Garabandal! I promise you that I will be with you until the end of the centuries and you will be with me during the end of the world and later, united with me in the glory of paradise."

I am sending you a copy of the holy rosary of Fatima, which the Virgin told me to send you. The rosary was composed by the Virgin and should be propagated for the salvation of sinners and preservation of humanity from the terrible punishments with which the good God is threatening it.

I give you only one counsel: Pray and make others pray, because the world is following the path to perdition. They do not believe in you or in your conversations with the Lady in white but they will believe when it will be too late.

On February 9, 1975, the staff of NEEDLES Magazine conducted a taped interview with Conchita and asked her about this surprising letter said to have been dictated by Padre Pio.

Q. Conchita, do you remember anything about the letter?

A. I remember receiving in the mail a letter addressed to myself and the other three girls, Jacinta, Loli and Mari Cruz. I wondered about the things that were in the letter and, as it was not signed, I tucked it in



Conchita's trip to Rome in January, 1966. From left: Father Luis Luna, Princess Cecile de Bourbon-Parma, Conchita, the princess's secretary and Conchita's mother.

my pocket until I saw the Blessed Mother that day. When she appeared I showed her the letter and asked her who sent it to us. The Blessed Mother said it was from Padre Pio. Since I did not know who Padre Pio was, I questioned her no further.

After the apparition I told the people about the letter, and there was a seminarian present who explained to me about Padre Pio and where he was from. Then I wrote a letter to Padre Pio saying that when he visits my country I would like to see him. Then he wrote me a small letter saying, "Do you think I can go up the chimney?"

I was only 12 years old at the time. I did not understand about the cloisters.

Conchita in 1968 holds the crucifix kissed by the Virgin that was blessed by Padre Pio



Conchita was asked if she remembered what the letter said and although she could not remember all, what she did remember coincided perfectly with the translation included in this article.

CONCHITA'S VISIT TO PADRE PIO

In January 1966, Conchita arrived in Rome with her mother, Spanish priest Father Luis Luna, Professor Enrico Medi and Princess Cecile de Bourbon-Parma. She had been called there by Cardinal Ottaviani, Prefect of the Holy Office, now known as the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

It was during this visit that Conchita had a private audience with Pope Paul VI at which only five persons were present with the Pontiff. We have this on the reliable testimony of one of those present, Professor Medi, then President of the European Association on Atomic Energy and a friend of the Pope. He had also been former Vatican ambassador to Spain. Since Conchita had to wait a day before meeting with

Cardinal Ottaviani, Professor Medi suggested, since they had some extra time, they go to see Padre Pio at San Giovanni Rotondo. Here is Conchita's own account of the visit taken from the 1975 NEEDLES interview:

...We all agreed and drove in Professor Medi's rented car to the monastery. We arrived around nine o'clock in the evening and were told we could not see Padre Pio until the next morning at his five o'clock Mass.

Before Mass, Father Luna and the professor went into the sacristy. Professor Medi later told me what happened there. He said that Father Luna told Padre Pio that the princess from Spain was there to see him. Padre Pio said to Father Luna: "I don't feel very well and won't be able to see her till later on in the day." Then Professor Medi said, "There's another lady who wants to see you. Conchita wants to see you." Padre Pio asked, "Conchita of Garabandal?" The Professor answered, "Yes." Padre Pio then said, "Come at eight o'clock this morning."

When we arrived we were brought into a small room, a cell, which had one bed, a chair, and a small table. I asked Padre Pio if this were his room and whether he slept here or not, and he replied, "Oh no, you cannot see my room. This is a rich room." At the time I did not realize what a holy man Padre Pio was, as I know him to be now. I was very young at the time. I was only 16.

The NEEDLES interview continues:

Q. Who was in the room with you?

A. Only my mother, Father Luna, and a priest from the monastery who spoke Spanish and was taking many pictures. I don't remember the princess and the professor being in the room.

Q. Can you tell us what was said during your visit with Padre Pio?

A. I remember only a little. I do remember that the priest who was taking the pictures asked permission from Padre Pio and Padre Pio replied, "You have been taking them since you came in."

I remember I had the crucifix kissed by Our Lady, and I said to

Padre Pio, "This is the cross kissed by the Blessed Mother. Would you bless it?" He then took the crucifix kissed by Our Lady and placed it in the palm of his left hand, over the stigmata. Then he took my hand and placed it in his palm, closing his fingers over my hand, and with his right hand he blessed my hand and the cross. He did the same for my mother when she asked him, "Would you please bless this rosary which was kissed by the Virgin?"

I was kneeling in front of him the whole time I was there. He started holding my hand with the cross while he was talking to me.

The priest who took the pictures of Conchita with Padre Pio was Father Alessio Parente, now deceased. He was in the United States several years ago promoting Padre Pio's Cause and visited Conchita at her home.

PADRE PIO AND THE MIRACLE

Padre Pio's involvement in the Garabandal events culminated in his being granted a privilege that only one other person enjoyed. Padre Pio saw the great Miracle before he died. (On the night of August 8, 1961, Father Luis Andreu, S.J., had seen a preview of the Miracle while observing the visionaries in ecstasy at the Pines in Garabandal. He died on the way home the following morning.)

One of the prophecies to come from Our Lady at Garabandal regarding the Miracle was that the Holy Father would see it from wherever he was at the time, and Padre Pio would see it also.

When the famous stigmatist died in September 1968, Conchita was perplexed as to why the prophecy apparently hadn't come true. One month later her mind was put at ease and she was given a precious souvenir, a memento of Padre Pio. Here is what happened.

On October 16, 1968, Conchita received a telegram from Lourdes which bore the name of a woman from Rome whom Conchita knew. The telegram requested that Conchita go to Lourdes to receive a letter addressed to her from Padre Pio. Father Alfred Combe and Bernard L'Huillier of France were in the village at the time and consented to drive Conchita and her mother to Lourdes. They left that very night. In the rush, Conchita forgot her passport.

When they got to the border, they were detained six hours, and only due to the granting of a special passport signed by the Military Governor of Irun, were they able to cross over into France.

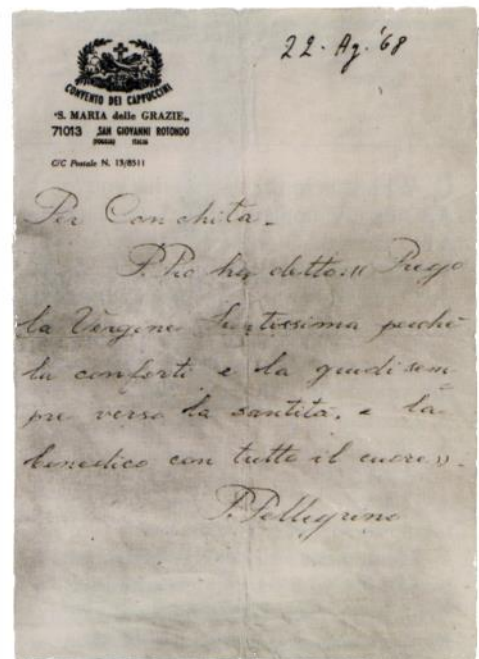
At Lourdes they met Padre Pio's emissaries from Italy, among whom was Father Bernardino Cennamo, O.F.M. Fr. Cennamo was not actually from San Giovanni but from another monastery. He was, however, well known by Padre Pio and Padre Pellegrino, the latter being the one who looked after Padre Pio during his final years and who transcribed the note which appears on this page that had been dictated by Padre Pio for Conchita.

Father Cennamo told Conchita that he did not believe in the apparitions of Garabandal until Padre Pio told him to give her the veil that would cover his face after his death. The note and the veil were given to Conchita.

She then asked Father Cennamo, "How is it that the Virgin told me Padre Pio was supposed to see the Miracle and he has died?" He answered, "He saw the Miracle before he died. He told me so himself."

When Conchita returned home from Lourdes she decided to write about the whole incident to a friend in Madrid. Once again we quote Conchita from the 1975 NEEDLES interview:

...I had the veil in front of me as I was writing when suddenly the whole room became filled with a fragrance. I had heard of the fragrances of Padre Pio but never paid much attention. The room smelled



The letter given to Conchita at Lourdes reads: For Conchita— Padre Pio has said: "I pray that the Blessed Virgin will comfort you and guide you always toward sanctity, and I bless you with all my heart." (signed) P. Pellegrino

of perfume so strongly that I started to cry. It was the first time I had experienced this. All this happened after he was dead.

IN CONCLUSION

Padre Pio will go down in Church history as one of the greatest figures of the modern era, a man unparalleled in his time. It is not without significance that this extraordinary son of St. Francis so devoted to Our Lady, who labored so long and arduously in God's vineyard for the good of souls, should be irrevocably linked to the apparitions of Garabandal. n

The veil that covered Padre Pio's face was given to Conchita



CERTO Y VERO!

An important testimony of Saint Pio and Garabandal

For almost thirty years, Joachim Bouflet was silent about his 1968 encounter with Padre Pio until a friend asked him to write it all down.

Translated from French by Helen Rozeluk

In July of 1968, I had invited four of my friends—like me, students at the Sorbonne—to come spend ten days at my family's home in Germany (my mother's family is German). We were all about 20 years old and, being active in the Catholic students' movement at the university, we asked ourselves about our future which for some of us would eventually be a religious vocation. For some years I had hoped to enter the Order of Carmelite Fathers, which one of our group, the product of a totally agnostic environment, was hesitating to reveal her choice of a religious life to her parents (soon afterwards, she joined the Sisters of Bethlehem).

These points indicate the atmosphere in which we found ourselves; we spoke often of religion and while in the enchanting surroundings of the Lake Constance region, we added to our relaxation the pleasure of a life practice, the recitation of the Holy Office and meditation.

One of our group, Janine, was sever-

ely physically disabled. One day, in the course of conversation, she shared with us a wish; that someone would go in her name to see Padre Pio and ask him to pray for her. She was unable to go to see him, not so much because of her handicap, but because her mother, a nonbeliever, was radically opposed to it. I volunteered to go in her place. At the end of our stay in Germany I decided to hitchhike by cutting across Austria I thought it would be easy. And so, having spent time with my family, I set off in mid-August.

It proved to be quite easy from the very beginning because a bus full of pilgrims bound for San Damiano [site of alleged apparitions] picked me up and took me all the way there (San Damiano) in one stretch. I was acquainted with the place, having been there before, but it didn't attract me very much. Nevertheless, I took advantage of the pilgrimage which was going there for August 15.

Providentially, at San Damiano I met another student, Loulou, quite an extraordinary woman of about fifty, an ex-cloistered nun, who was studying Russian. When I told her of my intention to hitchhike to San Giovanni Rotondo, she declared she would accompany me and that she would not let me wander alone on the roads of Southern Italy (to hear her speak one would think it was a land full of danger, a den of brigands and murderers), and that she would be useful to me since she spoke Italian while I knew only a few words.

I liked this idea and on August 16 we set off. Three days later, much to our delight although totally exhausted, we arrived at San Giovanni Rotondo. I had only one thought to meet Padre Pio.

Once there, I became disillusioned.

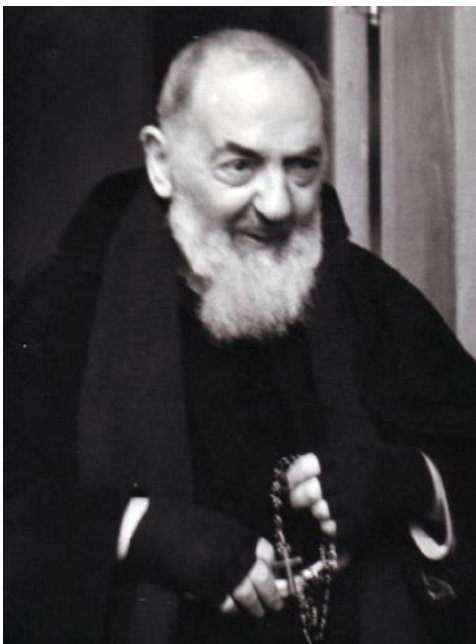
It was not as easy as I had imagined. To tell the truth, it was even impossible. The holy priest, quite old and frail, hardly ever received visitors anymore and the waiting list for the few confessions he still heard had been pretty well full for some time.

But I would at least have the grace to attend his Mass and to see him with the other men in the sacristy. When that happened, it overwhelmed me so much that I was transported with joy. I left a small note with the porter for Padre Pio explaining the reason for my coming. They assured me that all requests were delivered to him.

In the afternoon of August 23, I went to the little church of Our Lady of Grace. There were only two or three persons there; the others were only passing through. A young Capuchin approached me asking me something in Italian. I couldn't understand him but from his gestures I understood what he wanted of me, that I help him carry a large papermache statue of Saint Louis, King of France.

He took the statue by the head while I took the base and we went through a side door into a cloister. A short distance away, in the shade under the arcade, sat Padre Pio in an easy chair. He seemed to be dozing. I was filled with emotion at finding myself so close to him. But the young priest was pulling me and so, carrying the statue, we went into the new church where we placed the Saint's image beside the altar.

While draping the supporting stand with a piece of cloth and arranging vases of flowers, the young Capuchin explained to me slowly, in order to make himself understood, that St. Louis was a Third Order Franciscan, that they were celebrating his feast day on the evening of the next day (Vigil) and





that it was right that it was specifically me, a Frenchman, who had helped him. I guessed, more than understood what he was saying, since my Italian was very limited.

Finally I asked him how to get back to the little chapel of Our Lady of Grace. With a guesture he indicated the door we had just used and I returned to the cloister to make the return trip.

To be so close to Padre Pio! An opportunity like this would never come again! I bolted across the garden of the cloister and fell at his feet. He seemed surprised. At the same time, Two Capuchins rushed out, crying unintelligible words. Padre Pio made a sign to them with his gloved hand and they were silent but stayed nearby.

“Consecrate yourself to the Virgin of Carmel who appeared at Garabandal.”

Then he gazed at me severely but I am sure there was amusement in his eyes. He put his hand on my head (I was kneeling in front of him) and he said a few words to me. The two monks retreated some distance. I listened to Padre Pio who kept his hand on my head. I understood perfectly what he said to me.

I confessed my sins and he responded, commenting on what I had disclosed and then I was given the overwhelming experience of the charism

attributed to him, that of his knowledge of hearts. I felt a profound peace and a profound anguish. I don’t know how long this exchange lasted.

Finally, he told me, “Pray to the Madonna. Consecrate yourself to the Virgin of Carmel.” “Yes, Padre, I pray to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. For that matter, I would like to become a Carmelite.” He didn’t comment on this but responded with repeated insistence, “Consecrate yourself to the Virgin of Caramel who appeared at Garabandal.”

I was somewhat dumbfounded. I had vaguely heard about the events of Garabandal but I didn’t attach the importance to them that Padre Pio’s insistence suggested. I asked, “The apparitions at Garabandal?” He told me clearly, “Yes. So then consecrate yourself to the Virgin of Carmel who appeared at Garabandal.”

“So it’s true?”

“*Certo y vero!*” (“Yes, it’s true!”)

Then he said two or three personal things to me. And as I was asking for his blessing before getting up, he concluded, “And tell Janine that it’s all right and that I am praying for her.” I had completely forgotten why I had gone to San Giovanni Rotondo! With his supernatural delicacy the Padre was reminding me. What confusion! Then I received his blessing and got up. He looked at me seriously then closed his eyes. The two Capuchins, who had remained at a distance, escorted me to the little church of Our Lady of Grace. They amused them-

selves by jostling me and scolding me. I wondered whether they were serious or not but to tell the truth, it mattered little to me.

Once in the chapel, I burst into tears. I wept for joy. A little later my friend Loulou arrived. She took me outside and said, “So it seems you were able to see Padre Pio!” As my surprise was obvious, she cut in, “I see that you’re not used to this. Around here, everybody knows everything within a quarter of an hour.” It wasn’t long before I found out for myself.

By the end of the afternoon, I had to face the curious interrogations of numerous pilgrims. I was ill at ease especially when I voiced the opinion that perhaps Padre Pio had only a little time left to suffer here below—it was a very distinct impression I had when I was with him.

You would have thought I had uttered a blasphemy, as if the people were persuaded that the holy Padre was immortal or some such thing. I decided to leave the next day and Loulou concurred. In the evening I wrote down Padre Pio’s words (in Italian) which I remembered exactly.

I left San Giovanni Rotondo on August 24, 1968. Padre Pio was called by Our Lord one month to the day after I had seen him. Such is the account of my meeting with the Servant of God and the exact tenor of his suggestions with regard to the events at Garabandal.



Joachim Boufflet received his Ph.D. in history at the University of Paris (Sorbonne) in 1972. After teaching for 10 years, he entered the field of spirituality specializing in the study of stigmatized persons and apparitions, and has authored books dealing with those subjects. For several years, he has worked with the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome as a consultant to the postulators of causes for persons being considered for beatification. Most recently he has been appointed consultor for the cause of French stigmatist, Marta Robin. He is a Third Order Carmelite.

Glenn's Cure

As A Young Boy

I first heard about Garabandal through an aunt of mine, Angelina (Dolly) Glass, who lived in Lindenhurst, NY and was in the same parish as Joy Lomangino, Our Lady of Perpetual Help. She was having Joey over to her house to do a talk about Garabandal and also a chance to see and venerate the medal Joey had, that was kissed by the Blessed Mother. The reason I was there, as about a 13 year old, was I had bone marrow disease in my legs. My Grandmother (who was truly a living saint) was praying for my miraculous healing, was a huge believer in Padre Pio, and I heard he was connected to and approved this apparition apostolate.

I listened to Joey and kissed the medal, which the Blessed Mother kissed at Garabandal. Two weeks later, after another set of x-rays, astonished doctors said the disease was completely gone! So I was certainly surprised and grateful to my Grandmother for her prayers but never really understood the meaning of kissing the medal at that time as a boy. Twenty years later, a close friend, Peter DiNunzio, who was a volunteer worker at the NY Garabandal Center asked me to go to a talk by some blind guy in Lindenhurst who had a link to the Blessed Mother, and an apparition and Padre Pio. I figured, my family always had a devotion to Mary and Padre Pio, so why not? Well, to my surprise I walked in and see this blind guy (Joey) and I'm shocked because I remember seeing him twenty years earlier! He's got a face you can't forget.

After the meeting at the NY Center, I offered to help out making rosaries, and doing mailings of the video (at that time, and later on DVD). After working with Joey daily at the NY Center for some time, he saw I was not a shy person, lol, and so he asked me to be the Public Relations Director, which was a huge honor, and I gladly excepted.

I mainly concentrated on doing talks and

SPECIAL FEATURE

ARTICLES BY GLENN HUDSON

Glenn Hudson is from New York and has a special friendship with Conchita for over 30 years, and stays in regular contact with her.

Glenn moderates motheofgod.com and The Message of Garabandal on Facebook.



showing the video, and answering questions afterwards at any place or church that would have me. Heaven somehow implanted the idea in my empty head to try and get the video on TV. After all the major networks turned me down, I targeted Mother Angelica's EWTN Live show. I called and wrote the President, Bill Steltiemier, for six months straight, relentlessly! He finally

“Two weeks later, after another set of x-rays, astonished doctors said the disease was completely gone!”

caved in, probably figured it was easier to put Joey on one time and get rid of me for good, lol. Well, that show was the highest rated show they ever had, and Joey and Mother Angelica had such good chemistry we were asked back again, and

again. That show caused the video to explode in the USA.

I went to Joey and Conchita back in 2009 with the idea to bring the Message of Garabandal to Facebook, since it had a global audience (now posting in 15 languages). Both happily agreed, and that's how this (the Facebook) page started. I am truly blessed to have known Joey, his family and Conchita and her family.



Glenn Hudson and Joey Lomangino

Padre Pio

Restores Joey Lomangino's Sense Of Smell

As told by Joey Lomangino

1961—As Padre Pio came into the room we all knelt down to receive his blessing. Padre Pio was coming from the left hand side of the room across the front. All of a sudden I heard the moving of knees and all; I didn't know what was going on. Padre Pio had his arms around me and started kissing me on the forehead. He said, **"Joey I am so happy to see you."** When my uncle told me it was Padre Pio embracing me, I was at a loss for words because I was almost the last one in the room and nobody knew I was going to be there, not even myself!

But there was still more in store for Joey Lomangino on this fateful trip. After Mass on one of the following mornings, he again found himself in the large room where he had first encountered Padre Pio in 1961. He knelt with the other men to receive the Padre's blessing as he passed by. February 18, 1963—When I had my injury in 1947, I not only lost my eyes but I lost my sense of smell. So when I knelt down to receive Padre Pio's blessing, and got the fragrance of roses that came from the wounds in his hands, I was startled and went against the wall with my arms up to protect myself; I didn't know what it was. Padre Pio pulled down my hand and said in Italian, **"Joey, don't be afraid."** He then touched me on the bridge of my nose and my sense of smell was restored to me after being without it from the day of my accident in June 1947, which was 16 years.

Joey Lomangino
and Glenn Hudson
at EWTN with
Mother Angelica



SPECIAL FEATURE

ARTICLES BY GLENN HUDSON
CONTINUED

Blessings

Joey's greatest blessing

I was accompanying Joey Lomangino on a flight to Alabama to appear again on EWTN's Mother Angelica LIVE show in 1996. While on the flight down, we always had wonderful personal conversations. This one day, we were discussing how we originally met, and what a great blessing it was for me, and I asked him, "What was your greatest blessing?"

Now I expected one of several answers, his family, his Apostolate work, Confession with Padre Pio, Padre Pio restoring his sense of smell, meeting and being friends with Conchita, etc. His answer shocked me! He said, while he had many blessings, "Being blind." I said, "Really, how's that?" He went on, "because if I never had been blind, I never would have been saved." It was his blindness that led to his spiritual sight and salvation. Padre Pio told Joey, "I can't give him sight for his eyes, but I can give him sight for his soul."

Can any of us, who are sighted now, as he once was sighted as a boy, endure that suffering of having lost our eyesight, consider it a blessing? Wow, how insightful.

Padre Pio And The Visionaries Of Garabandal

Feature Story From, *Lifestyles*, May 28, 1993

By Telly A. Zuheta

On March 3, 1962, a letter with an Italian stamp arrived in San Sebastian de Garabandal, Spain. Although it was addressed to the four visionaries (Conchita, Jacinta and Mari Cruz Gonzalez and Loli Mazon) the letter was brought to Conchita, the eldest of the group, by Felix Lopez, a school-teacher.

Conchita read the letter, but since she didn't understand Italian, she requested him to translate it. The letter read:

"At nine o'clock this morning, the Holy Virgin told me to say to you: 'O blessed young girls of San Sebastian de Garabandal, I promise you that I will be with you until the end of the centuries and you will be with me during the end of the world, and later, united with me in the glory of paradise.'

"I am sending you a copy of the Holy Rosary of Fatima which the Virgin told me to send you. It was composed by the Virgin and should be propagated for the salvation of sinners and for the preservation of humanity from the terrible punishments with which the good God is threatening it."

Beginning of Perdition

"I give you only one counsel: pray, and make others pray, because the world is at the beginning of perdition. They do not believe in you or in your conversations with the Lady in white, but they will believe when it will be too late."

Here is Conchita's written account of what happened next:

"I wondered about the things that were in the letter and, as it was not signed, I tucked it in my pocket until I saw the Blessed Virgin that day. When she appeared I showed her the letter and asked her who sent it to us. The Blessed Mother said it was from Padre Pio. Being I did not know who Padre Pio was, I questioned Her no further.

"After the apparition, I told the people there about the letter. A seminarian who was present explained to me who

Padre Pio was and where he was from. Then I wrote a letter to Padre Pio saying that when he visits my country I would like to see him. Then he wrote me a small letter saying, 'Do you think I can go up the chimney?' I was only 12 years old at the time so I did not understand about the cloisters."

Asked To Go To Rome

Five years later in February 1967, Conchita was asked to come to Rome by Cardinal Ottaviani, Prefect of the Holy Office. Conchita went there with her mother, a Spanish priest, Father Luis Luna, Professor Enrico Medi and Princess Cecile de Bourbon-Parme.

It was during this visit Conchita had a private audience with Pope Paul VI with her four companions present. Since Conchita had to wait a day before meeting with Cardinal Ottaviani, they decided to go see Padre Pio at San Giovanni Rotondo."

Conchita recounts: "We arrived around nine o'clock in the evening and were told we could not see Padre Pio until the next morning after his 5:00am Mass.

"At around 8 o'clock we were ushered into a small room, a cell which had one bed, a chair and a small table. I asked Padre Pio if this was his room and whether he slept here or not, and he replied: 'Oh, no, you cannot see my room. This is a rich room.' At that time I did not realize what a holy man Padre Pio was, as I now know him to be. I was very young at that time. I was only 16.

"I remember I had the crucifix kissed by Our Lady during one of the many apparitions in Garabandal, the last four years, and I said to him, 'This is a cross kissed by Our Blessed Mother. Will you please bless it?' He then took it and placed it in the palm of his left hand over the stigmata. Then he took my hand and placed it on his palm, closing his fingers over my hand, and with his right hand, he blessed my hand and the cross. He did the same for my mother when she

asked him to bless her rosary which was also kissed by the Virgin. I was kneeling in front of him the whole time I was there. He held my hand with the cross while he was talking to me."

Saw The Miracle Before He Died

Padre Pio's involvement in the Garabandal events culminated in his being granted a privilege that only one person had been granted... to see the Great Miracle before he died. (That other person was a Jesuit, Father Luis Andreau who died of joy after seeing a preview of the Miracle while observing the visionaries in ecstasy on August 8, 1961.)

One of the prophecies to come from Our Lady of Garabandal regarding the Great Miracle was that the Holy Father would see it from wherever he was, and that Padre Pio would see it too. So when the famous stigmatist died in September 23, 1968, Conchita was perplexed as to why the prophecy apparently had not come true. But one month later, when a letter from Padre Pio was given her as also the white veil which had covered the face of Padre Pio when he lay in state in the morning of his death, she learned from Padre Bernardino Cennamo, the superior of the order, that Padre Pio had seen the Miracle before he died, asserting: "He told me so himself, shortly before his death."

Fragrance of Padre Pio

Conchita recounts, "I had the veil in front of me as I was writing later that evening when suddenly the whole room became filled with fragrance, the perfume so strong I started to cry. It was the first time I had experienced this." Father Pelletier observes, "It is not without significance that this extraordinary son of St. Francis, so devoted to Our Lady, who labored so long and arduously in God's vineyard for the good of souls should be irrevocably linked to the apparitions in Garabandal."