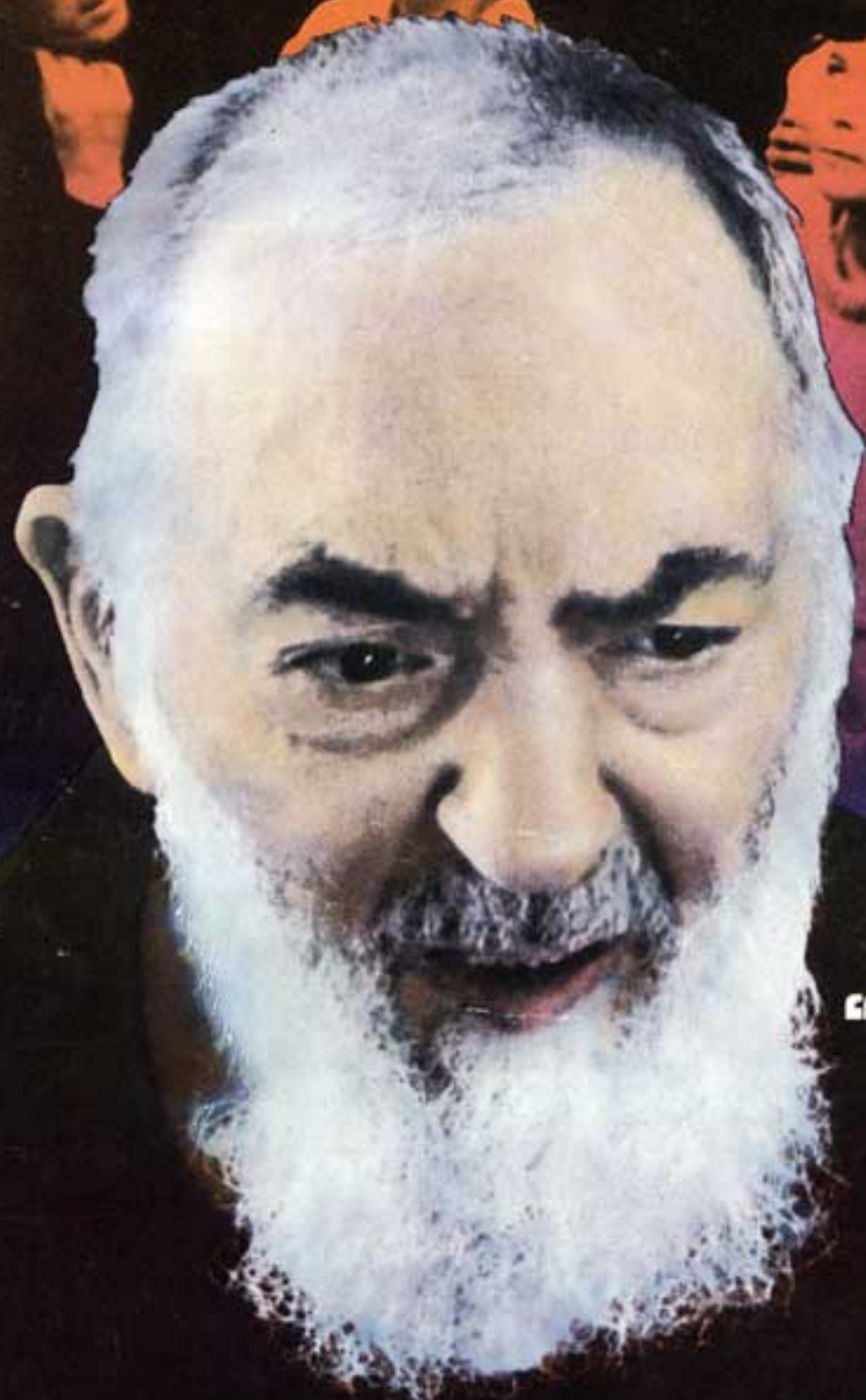


GARABANDAL

THE MESSAGE OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL

JANUARY-MARCH 1986



“They will believe when it will be too late.”

-Padre Pio (1962)

(see page 16)

PADRE PIO AND GARABANDAL

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. His Cause for Beatification is in progress under the auspices of the Holy See. 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, 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 to his monastery in San Giovanni Rotondo near Foggia in southern Italy from all over the world.*

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 overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Being an obedient son of the Church, what Padre Pio would not do

*Whereby the favored person emits a sweet fragrance. In Padre Pio's case, the fragrance came from his wounds.

The veil that covered Padre Pio's face after his death was given to Conchita.





Padre Pio, a man unparalleled in his time, raises a stigmatized hand to give a blessing.

is speak before the Church had spoken and since the Church had made no public pronouncement on the authenticity of the Garabandal events, neither would he. This may have given rise to the denials. However, in private, with his fellow friars and certain individuals, he did not hesitate to express his belief in the apparitions. 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!"* Then, of course, there is the testimony of Joey Lomangino (see page 10). 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, Loli, Jacinta and Mari Cruz. This incident was reported by Dr. Celes-

*See *The Apparitions of Garabandal* by F. Sanchez Ventura, p. 99.

tino 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 schoolteacher in Garabandal, was meeting with people in Conchita's kitchen. The girl received a letter that she didn't understand, and she requested 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.

Padre Pio and Garabandal

Completing the letter, 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 Virgin if the letter was from Father 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 paper written by hand. In front of everybody, she put the paper 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:

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 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.

On February 9, 1975, the staff of NEEDLES Magazine (now GARABANDAL) 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 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 Father Pio. Being I did not know who Father 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 Father Pio and where he was from. Then I wrote a letter to Father 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.

In the NEEDLES interview, 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 February, 1967, Conchita arrived in Rome with her mother, a Spanish priest, Father Luis Luna, Professor Enrico Medi and Princess Cécile de Bourbon-Parme. She had been called there by Cardinal Ottaviani, prefect of the Holy Office which is now called the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It was during this visit that Conchita had a private audience with Pope Paul VI in which only five persons were present with the Pontiff. We have this on the reliable testimony of Professor Medi, then President of the European Association on Atomic Energy and a friend of the Pope, who was one of the five.

Since Conchita had to wait a day before meeting with Cardinal Ottaviani, Professor Medi suggested, since they had some extra time, that they go to see Padre Pio at San Giovanni Rotondo.

Here is Conchita's own account of



The original Spanish translation (dated March 1962) of the letter in Italian that came from Padre Pio.

This is the cross kissed by Our Lady that Padre Pio blessed when Conchita went to see him in 1967.



the visit 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 Father 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 Father Pio that the princess from Spain was there to see him. Father 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." Father Pio asked, "Conchita of Garabandal?" The Professor answered, "Yes." Father Pio then said, "Come at eight o'clock this morning." (The next day we arrived we were ushered into a small room, a cell, which had one bed, a chair, and a small table. I asked Father Luna if this was his room and whether he was here or not, and he replied, "Oh no, Fr. Luna cannot see my room. This is a rich man's room." At the time I did not realize what a holy man Father 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 Father Pio and Father Pio replied, "You have been taking them since you came in."

Conchita on her 1967 visit to Rome where she had been called by Cardinal Ottaviani. On the left is Fr. Luis Luna and on the right, Conchita's mother, Aniceta. The other woman is unidentified.

I remember I had the crucifix kissed by Our Lady, and I said to Father 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... during 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 is still living at San Giovanni Rotondo. He was here in the United States several years ago promoting Padre Pio's Cause and visited with Conchita at her home. Because the Cause is now in progress, the friars are reluctant to release copies of the pictures apparently because the Garabandal apparitions have not yet been recognized by the Church. The pictures were again

mentioned by another one of the friars of San Giovanni who saw them and said as much to one of our magazine staff members who was on the 1987 pilgrimage sponsored by the New York Garabandal Center during the tour stop at the monastery last July. Needless to say, these photos are important documents that verify Conchita's meeting with Padre Pio.

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* had been granted. He saw the great Miracle before he died.

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 and *Padre Pio would see it too*. When the famous stigmatist died in

*On the night of August 8, 1961, Fr. Luis Andrea, S.J., saw a preview of the Miracle while observing the visionaries in ecstasy at the pine grove on a bluff overlooking the village of Garabandal. He died on the way home the following morning.



Padre Pio and Garabandal



The note written by Padre Pellegrino and given to Conchita at Lourdes reads as follows: "For Conchita, Padre Pio has said: 'I pray to the Most Holy Virgin to comfort you and guide you always toward sanctity, and I bless you with all my heart.'" (signed) P. Pellegrino.

Bottom, Joey Lomangino has a religious object blessed by Padre Pio as others wait their turn. Padre Pellegrino, who looked after Padre Pio in his final years, is on the left.

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 as well.

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 Iran, 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 from Madrid. Once again we quote Conchita from the 1975 NEEDLES that interview:

Once I had the veil in front of me as I was undressing when suddenly the whole room was filled with a fragrance. I had the Church of the fragrances of Padre Pio but I did not pay much attention. The room

was filled with perfume so strong that I was unable to cry. It was the first time I had experienced this. All this happened after he was dead.

As mentioned in the introduction, Padre Pio's Cause for Beatification is in progress and it seems almost certain that one day he will be canonized a saint. Many hope it will come soon. It also seems certain that 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. □

*Padre Pio attributed all the graces he received to Our Lady and said an impossible number of rosaries each day, as many as 40 (of 15 decades) or more. It has been said that once when asked how he could do this he replied that for him God made time stand still.