



*"Indulge in reading holy books...
they are like pasture to the soul and a great support on the way to perfection"*

9th month - MAY

MISSIONARIES OF HOPE

From the Gospel according to Matthew (9:32-38)

As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons."

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

We live in a society where silence is favoured over expression, and therefore we find it hard to speak openly about our faith. Our society is also ruled by a human logic that tends to find alternative ways as to those of trusting a God above us. This is obviously not true for everyone, nor for every kind of society, and we do not mean to make absolute generalisations here.

Having said that, we can find many an aspect that can help us compare our present society to the mute man possessed by an unclean spirit who was presented to Jesus. For example, we might consider our difficulties in living our faith, and also how silent many believers are on so many ethical issues; there is also the 'silence imposed' by the many scandals within the Church itself that seem to make those who preach the Gospel look hypocritical. Finally, the ears of those for whom the Gospel message is intended most times seem to be closed to any kind of message that goes beyond the horizons of individualism and hedonism.

However let us always keep in mind that Jesus has the victory over the world, He will overcome the mentality of defeat and the power of the devil who simulates his own victory, using the many stereotypes of false happiness that surround us.

Alongside this kind of widespread attitude, there is also a silent Church, made up of millions and millions of believers who still walk through cities and villages, just like Jesus did, teaching and often paying with their own lives, while healing the physical and moral ills of our society. Indeed we are also part of this picture, as we are all called to play our role, and cannot simply stand by and watch.

Let us bear in mind that the profound connection between the Prayer Groups and our times does not consist in a sterile condemnation of evil or in the regret (nostalgia?) of a past that no longer exists. Today more than ever, our charism is to pray to the Lord of the harvest, so that He may send labourers to his harvest. The meeting point between hearing the Word and saving the world is the mission of the Church, of which we are all called to play an active role with our fervent, constant and generous prayer.

To Msgr. Giuseppe Angelo Poli

San Giovanni Rotondo 17 February 1921, Epist. IV

My dearest Monsignor,

May Jesus always be all yours, constantly assist you in everything with his watchful grace and make your mission, entrusted to you by the divine Shepherd, ever more fruitful. May He



PADRE PIO OF PIETRELCINA PRAYER GROUPS

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make you a holy one with your flock! With these most sincere vows which I often lift up to the Most High for you, I come to acknowledge your most welcome letter and to assure you of the sincere devotion I have for you and the beautiful memory I have of your loving gratitude.

Do not doubt, my dearest Monsignor, of my poor and weak, but also loyal prayers that I make for you and for your mission, that it may be rich in plentiful fruits. Father, I too have made vivid petitions to my spiritual director to be enrolled among your missionaries, but, poor me, he did not find me worthy of this.

Up to now nothing has helped me get this desire of my heart. Should I try again?

Please Father, do recommend this matter to Jesus, and tell Him that if He wants me among his missionaries, He should dispose of the will of the others. In the meantime, since I am not yet allowed to be truly enrolled among your missionaries, I will endeavour to be so in spirit. I will accompany you everywhere with my prayers and pleas, in the hope that you will not disdain to welcome me as one of your last missionaries.

*Your affectionate and humble servant,
f. Pio of Pietrelcina, Capuchin Friar*

Around 1905, probably during the visit of the Minister General, Father Bernardo da Andermati, to the convent of Sant'Elia in Pianisi, the young Br Pio of Pietrelcina, not yet ordained, applied to leave as a missionary. The eagerness to serve the Lord "under the banner of St Francis, the poor of Assisi" urged him to share the story of the many missionary saints and missionary martyrs that have marked the history of Franciscanism from the very beginning.

Sadly, as he would later note in his letter to Bishop Angelo Poli, his poor health would not allow him to fulfil this dream, but the affection and goodwill with which he welcomed the visiting missionaries who came from abroad, and the tenderness with which he embraced his departing brethren, were the sign of his heart keenly projected towards evangelisation. In fact he never ceased to live this deep communion with the path of the Church.

Intense prayer for the coming of the Kingdom of God led him to ask his Capuchin confrere, Mgr Giuseppe Angelo Poli, bishop in India, that he too may feel, spiritually, like one of his missionaries: "I will accompany you everywhere with my prayers and pleas, in the hope that you will not hesitate to welcome me as one of your last missionaries".

Praying to the master of the harvest

On Mount Sinai Moses received the Word, which involved him and totally changed his life; he will not only be the guide of a people that will be freed from slavery by the mighty hand of God, but he will become Himself a missionary of the uniqueness and holiness of God among his people. His same story will apply to the prophets and many other characters in the Old Testament, all conquered by a captivating Word that changed their lives and bound them to the history of the people of Israel. "You have seduced me," writes Jeremiah and I have allowed myself to be seduced.

In a similar way, although unable to fulfil his missionary vocation, Padre Pio will be captivated by the Lord's instruction: 'Go and preach to every creature'. The stigmatisation and the particular condition in which Padre Pio will find himself will definitively put an end to his hope of becoming a missionary, due to his fragile health. Several pages in his epistolary show not only that this desire never really faded in him, not even in his old age, and bear witness to the profound motivations that drove him towards such a choice.

In a letter dated 1914, Padre Pio complimented Father Agostino for the good he was doing with his



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Preaching. He then added, 'However, I do not hide from you the strains that my heart feels in seeing so many souls going apostatising from Jesus and this makes my blood freeze around my heart, as many of these souls turn away from God, which is the source of living water, for the sole reason that they find themselves fasting from the Divine Word. The harvest is rich, but the labourers are few.

Who then will reap the harvest in the field of the Church, which is approaching its maturity? Will it be scattered on the ground because of the lack of labourers? Will it be gathered by the emissaries of satan, who unfortunately are very many and very active? Ah! May the most sweet God not allow this to happen. May He be moved to pity by the human destitution, which is becoming extreme. Let us pray for the cause of the holy Church, our most tender Mother; let us consecrate and sacrifice all to God and totally to this end, and in the meantime let us wait and wait" (Epist. I, p. 466).

Let us raise our hands up to heaven for our brothers and sisters

When talking about meditation, it is easy to fall into the trap of considering it an individual journey, that we experience in search of an inner balance. Yet we are people meant to be in relationship with one another, and this implies our ability to interface with others through a series of suitable behaviours, which can improve over the years, with psychological effort and the contribution of meditation. Being in relationship with others also pushes us to share our responsibilities for our lives, for the world we live in, for the stories we have gone through.

In this perspective, our faith becomes the light of our lives, but also of the lives of the people who share our journey; for this reason, the Word opens us up to new perspectives, as we walk towards the Kingdom to contemplate the presence of God, making us simultaneously apostles and missionaries.

Padre Pio recommended that we should receive the Word with the same spirit and awareness of the great patriarchs and of Mary Herself. We are meant to be missionaries of the Gospel because we deeply feel the responsibility for our brothers.

Let us think back to the image of Moses who stood as a mediator between God and his people. This was true precisely at the moment of the deepest crisis, when the Lord said to him: "I will destroy this people and I will make you a great nation". Moses' reply was clear: "If you destroy this people, then go ahead and destroy me, too". The Word had not only been a recommendation that he should be a missionary, but it also bound him deeply to the fate of his people.

Reopening the paths of hope

At the time when Padre Pio received the stigmata (the end of the First World War) the world faced an economic misery produced by the war and by the great suffering due to the many bereavements in the families, but also by degradation and moral and social disorientation. As we know, he longed to die in order to definitively experience that joy and peace with the Lord that he experienced in faith, but he soon understood that he should stay, and continue his ministry for the realisation of the Kingdom of God.

The Word we are meditating on today summons all of us, in this society that seems to have lost the sense of faith; with our own choices and abilities, we are all called to reopen the channels of faith for the people of our time.

We have often mentioned the parable of the leaven that is put into the dough and causes it to ferment. Our listening to the Word should not be a sterile inner work, but truly make us leaven and set us on the mission for all those who - more or less consciously - thirst for God.



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THE IMAGE OF GOD MUST BE IMPRESSED IN ALL OUR HUMAN ACTIONS

ALBERTO MAGNO, *The union with God*, in <https://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerusonline/it/cyb.htm>
accessed 12 February 2021

The shape of the soul is God, who will impress himself on it like the seal on wax, like the mark on its own object.

This is only fully realised when our reason is completely enlightened by the knowledge of God, the supreme Truth, and our will is entirely chained to the love of the utmost Good, when our memory is fully absorbed in the contemplation and enjoyment of eternal happiness and in the sweet repose of that happiness. Since the glory of the blessed in heaven is nothing other than the possession of this state, it is clear that once we strive for and even superficially reach this possession, this will already constitute the perfection of man in the present life.

ACT OF ENTRUSTMENT to SAINT PIO

Glorious Saint Pio,
you are the Saint of this new Millennium,
you are our friend and the consoler of our souls,
you help us, sinners, in all our troubles.
By your suffering,
you can understand all our sufferings fully,
to you we entrust our requests for our own good, and that of our loved ones;
to you we entrust our spirit,
so that we can learn how to bear all the sorrows we have in our hearts;
to you we entrust our pleas to present
our souls to the Virgin of All Graces,
so that we can obtain eternal salvation from the Lord;
to you we entrust our petition
to obtain from the Divine Goodness the grace
that we so ardently desire..... (silently make your request in your hearts).

Keep us under your paternal protection,
defend us from the snares of the evil one
and above all intercede with the Most High
so that through the forgiveness of our sins,
we may persevere in the ways of all that is good.