

## FOURTH STRING

### **THE WORD IS MADE FLESH IN THE SACRED SCRIPTURES: IT IS BOTH PASTURE AND NOURISHMENT FOR SOULS**

#### **BIBLICAL COMMENTARY**

##### ***From the Gospel according to John (17, 6-21)***

*I have revealed your name to those whom you took from the world to give me. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.*

*Now at last they have recognised that all you have given me comes from you for I have given them the teaching you gave to me, and they have indeed accepted it and know for certain that I came from you, and have believed that it was you who sent me.*

*It is for them that I pray. I am not praying for the world but for those you have given me, because they belong to you.*

*All I have is yours and all you have is mine, and in them I am glorified.*

*I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us.*

*While I was with them, I kept those you had given me true to your name. I have watched over them and not one is lost except one who was destined to be lost, and this was to fulfil the scriptures.*

*But now I am coming to you and I say these things in the world to share my joy with them to the full.*

*I passed your word on to them, and the world hated them, because they belong to the world no more than I belong to the world.*

*I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the Evil One.*

*They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world.*

*Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth.*

*As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world,*

*and for their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth.*

*I pray not only for these but also for those who through their teaching will come to believe in me.*

*May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.*

*Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me."*

When the Lord manifests himself on Mount Oreb, Moses asks what His name is, so that he may be able to let the Israelites know who sent him to them. The Lord's answer is «YHWH», «I am». He is the existing God, not only in opposition to the divinities who have mouths and do not speak, have eyes and do not see, have ears and do not hear, but because he is ever present, he lives with his people, he is close to them and walks among them: "You shall be my people and I will be your God" (Jer 7:23).

In the text of John, which is now known as "the priestly prayer", Jesus says: "They were yours and you gave them to me". Through his own blood Jesus welcomed the new people of God, it is for these people that he prays, it is to these people that he reveals himself, not only with important and powerful words, but as 'the Word'. He is the incarnate Word. From now on believers have been renewed: they will strive to possess this Word, to listen to it, to put it into practice: «Sanctify them in truth. Your Word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I too have sent them into the world; for them I consecrate myself, so that they too may be consecrated in truth".

Personal and community listening to the Word of God is like the source from which we drink, so that we can live as believers and be in full communion with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Padre Pio Groups, which gather in prayer, cannot ignore the encounter with the Word, because it is the sure sign of the presence of Jesus in their midst.

The birth of new Prayer Groups is always an important event, it is an outpouring of grace for the whole Church and the individual parish communities. It is often linked to particular reasons, such as gratitude for a grace granted by God or the initiative of some devout person. The Lord often makes use of these particular situations to begin with, but to truly progress according to the spirit of Padre Pio it is necessary that the communities immediately base themselves on listening to and meditating on the Word of God. As a community part of the Church of Christ entails listening to him and knowing how to recognize his presence through the Holy Scriptures. The book of the Bible is the first basic and essential training text for Padre Pio's Prayer Groups, it is the pasture where they diligently feed on.

## **SPIRITUALITY**

### ***From a letter from Padre Pio to Raffaelina Cerase (Ep. II, pp. 235-236)***

*I would like to add a few further words to what has already been said, namely, to suggest the suitable means for the attainment of Christian perfection. The apostle suggests two most powerful means, which are the constant study of God's law and our actions, all for his glory.*

*As to the first means, he writes to the Colossians: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness to God in your hearts.*

*This apostle's doctrine is clear and does not need any comment. If Christians are full of God's law which warns and teaches them to despise the world and its allurements, its wealth and honours and all that prevents him from loving God, he will never fail, no matter what adversities may befall him; he will endure everything steadfastly and perseveringly; he will readily forgive offences and give thanks to God for all things.*

*What's more the apostle recommends that God's law and Jesus' doctrine dwell abundantly in us. Now all this cannot come about unless we apply ourselves to reading the Holy Scriptures and more generally, any books on divine matters, or else listening to God's word as expounded by holy preachers, confessors, etc.*

*Secondly, the apostle requests that Christians do not limit themselves to knowing the divine law; he recommends that they penetrate deeply into its meaning so as to structure their lives on its basis. None of this can take place without their diligent meditation on God's law, which makes Christians exult with joy and sing sweet psalms and hymns to God. All Christian who are striving for perfection will therefore understand how essential meditation is.*

### ***Speaking and listening***

During the years when Padre Pio lived in Pietrelcina, he constantly nourished himself with the Word of God. We can infer this because in his letters he used frequent quotations both from the Gospels and from other biblical texts. Often times he absorbed and made his own the thought of the authors of the Sacred Scriptures: he comes to identify himself with Jeremiah, with Job and with the authors of the psalms.

As a spiritual director he endeavoured to pass on his experience of the supernatural acquired through the reading of Sacred Scripture, often reminding his children of the fruits of baptismal grace: God is not only the author of our sanctification, but through his Word he guides and sustains the soul that opens to him.

This can be exemplified in his first letters addressed to Blessed Maria Gargano. Padre Pio's first reassured his spiritual daughter about her inner journey, while putting her on his own wavelength: «Everything that passes through you is all the work of Jesus and you must believe it. It is not up to you to syndicate the work of the Lord, but you must humbly submit to these divine operations. Leave full freedom to the grace that

works in you and remember never to be disturbed by any adverse thing that may happen to you, knowing that all this is an impediment to the divine Spirit» (Ep. III, p. 239).

August 1916. A few days later Padre Pio would be in San Giovanni Rotondo for the first time. His story was a continuous entrustment to God and contemplation of his graces. Thus he immediately introduced his spiritual daughter in that path of abandonment to the mystery of God which cannot be nourished but through the Word of God.

For this reason, in the following letters he would enquire what time of the day she prayed and recommended she should meditate twice a day, something he would do frequently in his spiritual direction. In a letter dated 16th of September 1916 he even mentioned and recommended a method of mental prayer, presumably taken from the Philothea of St. Francis de Sales, to which Padre Pio often referred (cf. Ep. III, p. 249 et seq.).

Obviously, the object of meditation must be chosen by the interested person, although Padre Pio thought the Sacred Scriptures held a central role, in particular the Gospels: «And here it should be observed that the soul habitually meditates on the life, passion and death of our Lord Jesus. No soul, however advanced in the ways of God, must neglect this".

If we now look at the structure of the meditation proposed by Padre Pio, we realize how much continuity there is between what he suggested and his own personal experience: first of all it is necessary to prepare oneself in an attitude of humility and availability, invoking the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of the saints. This is followed by meditation as such, the analysis of every aspect and the resolution to amend that defect which most "prevents us from uniting with God and which is the cause of many other defects and sins".

As we see, the central theme of Padre Pio's spiritual life always returns: uniting with God; our defects and our sins are elements that disintegrate a relationship that is fundamental for the person. What follows after that, the prayer of intercession, thanksgiving and even the analysis of how the meditation went, are part of this fundamental concept: living in union with the Lord.

### ***The word that transforms***

When speaking about the importance of the Word of God in Christian sanctification, Pope Francis emphasizes its transforming power, recalling a document of the Indian bishops: «The prayerful reading of the Word of God, sweeter than honey (cf. Ps 119,103) and "double-edged sword" (Heb 4:12) allows us to remain in mindful listening to the Master so that he is a lamp for our steps, a light on our path (cf. Ps 119:105). As the Bishops of India have well reminded us, "devotion to the Word of God is not just one of many devotions, something beautiful but optional. Indeed it belongs to the very heart and identity of Christian life. The Word has in itself the power to transform our life» (GE, n. 156).

At this point, it is good to recall the profound relationship that must exist between the Word of God and our testimony, because the risk of having our own words can sometimes be dictated by excessive activism or by an inordinate importance given to pastoral projects. They can make us forget that at the origin of every conversion there is not man but the action of God.

We now live in a time of upset, not only because a large part of our society has moved away from any religious form, but also because of the scandals which - unfortunately - are increasingly frequent within the Church itself. It is therefore necessary to reaffirm the strength of this Word which does not prove to change structures or situations in a miraculous way, but rather can and does renew our hearts.

All spiritual children and Prayer Groups have a real and proper mandate from Padre Pio, stemming from his own teaching as addressed to two of his spiritual daughters: «Let them impress themselves well in their minds, engrave them strongly in their hearts and be persuaded that no one is good "nisi Deus" (without God) and that we have nothing but nothing. Let them meditate assiduously on what Saint Paul wrote to the faithful of Corinth: "Quid habes, quod non accepisti? si autem accepisti, quid gloriaris, almost non acceperis?". [What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast about it as if it were not a gift?] (I Cor 4:7)» (Ep. I, p. 399).

Living the Word of God in this way means feeling continually indebted to him, because the good that exists in us is the work of the presence and grace that come from heaven.

It is obvious that this link with the Word cannot be an occasional one, it is necessary that we learn how to listen, for this is exactly what Padre Pio recommends: «You will find support mainly by reading holy books. I earnestly desire to see you reading such books at all times, for this reading provides excellent food for the soul and leads to great progress along the path of perfection, by no means inferior to what we obtain through prayer and holy meditation. In prayer and meditation we speak to the Lord, while in holy reading it is God who speaks to us. Try to treasure these holy readings as much as you can and you will very soon be aware of a spiritual renewal within you» (Ep. II, pp. 129-130).

The fourth string is the string of the heart. Through listening and meditating on the Word, it makes us spiritual, inhabited by the Spirit. It is the Spirit who cries out and sings with us: “Abba,” “Father.” Through the Spirit, our heart vibrates with a different kind of love and is transformed to reach a full communion with God.

### **THE SPIRITUAL DIARY**

One evening Padre Pio entered Father Pellegrino's room just as he was writing his reflections on the Gospel, according to the teachings of his former director. He hurriedly hid the notebook in the desk drawer, arousing the curiosity of Padre Pio who reopened it and «with an angelic candour pulled out the notebook of my diary, which has never seen a living person. “Gospel diary!”, He exclaimed reading the label on the cover of the notebook, “That's a good thing!”. Immovable as a statue, his eyes fixed on the notebook, it seemed that he had cried out at the miracle not so much for the meaning of the diary as for my person who suddenly revealed himself to him dedicated to the sacred writings ».

Surprised by the spontaneity and encouragement, Father Pellegrino explained to him what it was about and, in the end, Padre Pio concluded: «Listen, my son. Your former director taught you a really good practice... Make this diary, think about what Jesus says, and as you write his words in your notebook, so print them inside your heart. Then yes, you will discover something beautiful and good for your soul”.

### **A POOR FRIAR PRAYING**

Indeed, the ultimate reason for Padre Pio's apostolic efficacy, the deep root of so much spiritual fruitfulness can be found in that intimate and constant union with God of which the long hours spent in prayer were eloquent testimony. He loved to repeat: “I am a poor friar who prays”. He was convinced that “prayer is the best weapon we have, a key that opens the Heart of God”. This fundamental characteristic of his spirituality continues in the “Prayer Groups” founded by him, which offer the Church and society the formidable contribution of unceasing and trusting prayer. Padre Pio then combined prayer with an intense charitable activity of which the “Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza” is an extraordinary expression. Prayer and charity is a very concrete synthesis of Padre Pio's teaching, which today is being represented to everyone (JOHN PAUL II, Homily on the canonization of Padre Pio, June 16, 2002).

## **22nd of JANUARY ANNIVERSARY OF THE RELIGIOUS DRESSING OF PADRE PIO The day of fidelity**

Consistent with the evangelical radicalism that characterizes the life of Padre Pio, the Groups commit themselves to a community celebration (for individual Groups or for dioceses). In line with the theme of the year, baptismal promises are renewed, as well as a promise, which is always equal in form, to be committed to coherence and testimony.