

25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 22-23, 2018

Readings: Wisdom 2:12,17-20; James 3:16-4:3; Mark 9:30-37

“Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us.” I do not know if the phrase “Goody Two-Shoes” is still prevalent among young people– I strongly suspect it is not. But I assure you there must be some phrase that carries with it the same connotation. For many and varied reasons, some people can’t stand virtuous people, and their very existence bothers them. The phrase dates from an 18<sup>th</sup> century children’s story, a variation of the Cinderella. The poor orphan girl’s good deeds earn her a new pair of shoes; previously she had but one shoe.

Sadly, the phrase took on a different meaning, one connoting someone who is virtuous but in a rather smug manner, something most people despise. Virtue absent of humility and charity is hardly virtue– it could easily be a sin of pride. But by the same token, virtuous people are obnoxious to some precisely because the virtue of another unmasks their own failures. But why blame the virtuous person?

The pursuit of virtue is a lifelong duty, privilege and endeavor. We are never done, and we must consistently regroup and try again when we fail. The sacrament of Penance helps tremendously in this regard as does a daily examination of conscience.

Fifty years ago today (Sunday), a Capuchin Franciscan Friar popularly known as Padre Pio, died in San Giovanni Rotondo, located in the Puglia region of Italy, near the “back of the boot.” He received the stigmata, the wounds of Christ 100 years ago on the morning of September 20, 1918. After having celebrated Holy Mass, the priest Padre Pio retired to the choir stalls for his usual thanksgiving. In a vision of a mysterious person, with his hands, feet and side dripping with blood. It was indescribable as he would later recount.

But of this much we may be certain–he did not seek the stigmata: “I am dying of pain because of the wound and because of the resulting embarrassment which I feel deep within my soul...Will Jesus who is so

good grant me this grace? Will he at least relieve me of the embarrassment which these outward signs cause me.”<sup>1</sup>

Understandably, the Church was cautious and indeed Padre Pio suffered the pain of being silenced, not allowed to offer public Mass for a period of several years. The Church’s concern was around a possible personality cult, again, not unreasonable. But in time, it became clearer that the stigmata were real, that this was no ordinary friar.

His sanctity drew people by the hundreds and then the thousands, all to attend his Masses or to confess their sins, seeking his absolution. People sometimes waited days, and the friar spent countless hours in the confessional. At his 2002 canonization, Pope John Paul II said: “Our time needs to rediscover the value of the Cross in order to open the heart to hope.” As a young priest, John Paul II had gone to confession to the saint. He noted his severity at times with penitents, and yet, “Even when that unusual confessor treated pilgrims with apparent severity, the latter, becoming conscious of the gravity of sins and sincerely repentant, almost always came back for the peaceful embrace of sacramental forgiveness.”<sup>2</sup>

My favorite phrase from St. Padre Pio is undoubtedly the one, “Pray, hope and don’t worry.” In difficult times, I think about this, I try to heed his advice. I have leaned on it before. One of my favorite stories about St. Pio centers upon his desire to see his spiritual children enter heaven before himself. “When I die,” the friar said many times, “I will ask the Lord to let me remain on the threshold of Paradise, and I will not enter until the last of my spiritual children has entered.”

His dedication to the people of God knew no bounds and he gave them a reason for hope. We need prayer and hope today, and we need it in abundance. There are certain things that are out of our control, both in our own lives, the lives of loved ones, the life of the Church. When we do have some influence, we ought to use it truthfully and lovingly.

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<sup>1</sup> (Ep., V. 1, no. 5 10, p. 1094).

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II Homily at the Canonization of St. Padre Pio, 16 June 2002

These rights are enshrined in the Church's Code of Canon Law which notes that the Christian faithful are "free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones and their desires."<sup>3</sup> Many of you have shared with me your desires, including your desire for transparency and accountability in the Church. Again, the Code states:

In accord with the knowledge, competence and preeminence which they (the faithful) possess, they have the right and even at times a duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church.<sup>4</sup>

Now is such a time, and I too have made known to proper ecclesial authority the concerns I share with many of you over the lack of transparency and accountability in the Church. Still, I will continue to pray for our Holy Father daily, on account of the gravity of the Petrine ministry to which he has been entrusted.

While he and our bishops deserve our respect and obedience in matters of faith and morals, that respect does not preclude making known our concerns. Let us heed the words of St. Pio, to pray, hope and not allow worry to sidetrack us from our daily goal of pursuing virtue and truth, both in our own lives and the lives of those to whom we look for leadership.

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<sup>3</sup> Code of Canon Law 212.2

<sup>4</sup> Code of Canon Law 212.3