

# LIVING CRUCIFIX

AND A "TOUGH" SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

*H*e is more likely to growl at you, and criticize you, than to pat you on the back and just say "Go and sin no more". No matter how good you may think you are, or how good you may be, he will not waste time on your virtues. He will scare you with your faults. He will even read your past sins, lest you have forgotten.

## NO ABSOLUTION

Once when I was in San Giovanni I heard of a woman who got on a bus moaning and crying. Father Pio had refused her absolution! Another woman in the bus consoled her: "But I didn't get absolution, either!" Little by little, over half the people in the bus . . . all of whom had come to San Giovanni and been on a three-week wait-list to get to Confession to the "saint" admitted that they had all been refused absolution! Why? Usually it would be just because they were not in the proper disposition for the sacrament, or because they had not prepared seriously enough.

So you see what I mean: A *tough* spiritual director. No time for what you have accomplished; only time for what IS to be accomplished. If you think you are a saint, you can gain a GREAT deal by going to San Giovanni.

But I suppose you know you don't HAVE to go. No trip is necessary to get closer to God, Who is everywhere. And Father Pio's prayers reach out to all who want them. That's one of the gifts with which God has rewarded his thirst to help souls.

## PRIEST'S VIEW

One does not see too many priests visiting San Giovanni. I have heard some priests on our own tours express the opinion that, after all, Father Pio is just another priest, and the Mass is the Mass, no matter who the priest who celebrates.

by John M. Haffert

But what has impressed me most at San Giovanni has been the attitude of the priests who really KNOW Father Pio . . . the priests who live with him in community.

They don't paw over him, as an emotional visitor might tend to do. They aren't bathed in pleased smiles and bowing from the waist in the great "presence". They don't act, for example, the way I see most priests act around the Holy Father. But they are reverent. They are like men who know that they have a living crucifix in their community. They are like men who know that a fellow man, with whom they are privileged to live, is an instrument of miracles in the world. Father Pio could never take their reverence and respect as a personal compliment. It goes beyond the personal. It goes to God, to the pierced Christ, to the weight of the sins of the world which seem particularly felt in this little corner of Italy. One of their fellow priests, for half a century, has brought, with bleeding wounds of Christ, a sense of evil in the world and need for reparation . . .

## UNDERLINES EVIL

You may gather that one should not expect to go to San Giovanni to feel "comfortable". We can get a pleasant glow at Lourdes: "Oh! to think that I have touched the very rock on which Our Lady stood!" We can thrill to the miracles of the Lourdes Spring, to the sight of the incorrupt bodies of John Vianney, Catherine in Paris, Clare in Assisi, Lucy in Venice, Mary Magdalen in Florence.

This "glow" is the realization of God's nearness.

The same realization certainly may come to us at San Giovanni, at the sight of Father Pio's wounds or in the ecstatic moments of his Mass or Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. But we are more likely to feel as Saint Theresa of Avila did, before the crucifix.

That is what we will be seeing: A LIVING CRUCIFIX.

If I could put my feelings about Padre Pio into one sentence, I would say that God has given him to the world *to underline the evil of sin*, particularly that of *pride, and the need for reparation*. He is here to help save the lost—and to make the good better.

Many of us take the first step toward real goodness because of some physical need: trouble with children, other family troubles, illness, physical incapacity, need . . . some material or physical problems which cannot be solved by ourselves or our fellow man, but only by God. So we turn to God.

## IMPATIENT LESSON

For some, this becomes a turning to an obvious saint like Padre Pio, whose prayers have been the instrument of almost every possible kind of miracle, including the raising of a man to life.

Whatever it is that causes us to turn to God, the saints teach us that He alone can satisfy us.

And this is Father Pio's impatient lesson to all who go to him. The only thing that can keep us from God, he will say, is sin, including the sin we have conveniently buried in the recesses of our subconscious mind, or to which we have become inured or forgetful just because we have lived with it so long.

He seems to say to the world "Look at the crucifix: See how He loves you! Now look . . . *really look* . . . at yourself."

He is what every one of us needs: a tough spiritual director.