

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy

Jubilee for Prayer Groups of Padre Pio

6 February 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

I welcome you — I see there are so very many of you! — and I thank Archbishop Castoro for the words he addressed to me. I greet all of you who have come from many countries and regions, united in great love and gratitude to St Pio of Pietrelcina. You are very grateful, because he helped you to discover life's treasure, which is the love of God, and to experience the beauty of the Lord's forgiveness and mercy. And this is a science which we must learn day by day, for it is beautiful: the beauty of the Lord's forgiveness and mercy.

We can truly say that Padre Pio was a servant of mercy. He did so full-time, sometimes practicing “the apostleship of listening” to the point of exhaustion. Through the ministry of Confession, he became the living caress of the Father, who heads the wounds of sin and revives the heart with peace. St Pio never tired of welcoming people and listening to them, expending time and energy in order to spread the perfume of the Lord's forgiveness. He could do this because he was always connected to the source: he ceaselessly quenched his thirst with Jesus Crucified, and thus became a channel of mercy. He bore in his heart many people and many sufferings, uniting all to the love of Christ who gave himself “to the end” (Jn 13:1). He lived the great mystery of sorrow offered up for love. In this way his little drop became a great river of mercy, which brought water to many deserted hearts and created oases of life in many parts of the world.

I am thinking of the prayer groups, which St Pio called “nurseries of the faith, the fertile soil of love”; they were not just centers for happy gatherings with friends and to find support, but the fertile soil of divine love. This is what prayer groups are! Prayer, in fact, is a true and proper mission, which brings the fire of love to the whole of humanity. Padre Pio used to say that prayer is a “force that moves the world”. Prayer is a force that moves the world! Do we believe this? It's true. Try it! It — he said — “spreads the smile and the blessing of God over every languor and weakness” (Second International Congress of Prayer Groups, 5 May 1966).

Prayer, then, is not a nice practice for finding a little piece of heart; nor is it a means of devotion for obtaining useful things from God. Were it so, then it would be an act of subtle selfishness: I pray in order to be well, just as if taking an aspirin. But this is just making a deal. No, it's not like this. Prayer is something else, it is something else. Prayer is instead a spiritual work of mercy, which means bringing everything to the heart of God. "You take it, you who are Father". It should be like this, speaking to him in a simple way. Prayer is saying: "You, take it, you who are Father. Look at us, You who are Father". This is the relationship with the Father. Prayer is like this. It is a gift of faith and love, an intercession needed just as bread is. In a word, it means to entrust: entrust the Church, entrust people, entrust situations to the Father — "I entrust this to you" — so that you will take care of it. That is why prayer, as Padre Pio liked to say, is "the greatest weapon we have, a key that opens the heart of God". A key that opens God's heart: it is a simple key. The heart of God is not "heavily guarded" with many security measures. You can open it with a common key, with prayer. For his is a heart of love, a father's heart. And it is the Church's greatest strength, one which we must never let go of, for the Church bears fruit only if she does as did Our Lady and the Apostles, who "with one accord devoted themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14), as they awaited the Holy Spirit. Dedicated and united in prayer. Otherwise we risk relying elsewhere for support: on means, on money, on power; then evangelization vanishes and joy is extinguished and the heart grows dull. Do you want to have a dull heart? [the people respond: No!] Do you want to have a joyful heart? [Yes!] Pray! This is the recipe.

While I thank you for your commitment, I encourage you. May the prayer groups be "centres of mercy": centres that are always open and active, which through the humble power of prayer may bring the light of God to the world and the energy of love to the Church. Padre Pio, who called himself "a poor brother who prays", wrote that prayer is "the highest apostolate that a soul can exercise in the Church of God" (Epistolario II, 70). May you always be joyful apostles of prayer! Prayer works miracles. The apostolate of prayer works miracles.

Along with the work of spiritual mercy in prayer groups, St Pio desired an extraordinary corporal work of mercy: the "Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza", inaugurated 60 years ago. He wanted it to be not just an excellent hospital, but a "temple of science and of prayer". Indeed, "human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern" (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 31). This is so important: to treat for the disease, but above all to care for those who are ill. Both are important but they are two different things: treat the disease and the one who is sick. It can happen that, while the wounds of the body are treated, the wounds of the soul may worsen, and these are slower to detect and often difficult to heal. Even the dying, sometimes seemingly unconscious, take part in the prayer offered with faith by their side, and they entrust themselves to God, to his mercy. I remember the death of a priest friend. He was an apostle, a man of God. But he had been in a coma for a long time, a long time.... The doctors were saying: "we don't know how he is still managing to breathe". Another priest friend came in, approached him and spoke to him. He heard him. "Let the Lord

take you. Let yourself go forward. Have faith, trust in the Lord”. And with these words, he let himself go in peace. So many people are in need, so many sick people, may they be spoken to, may they be caressed, may they be given the strength to bear their illness or go to meet the Lord. They need to be helped to entrust themselves to the Lord. I am so grateful to you and to those who serve the sick with competence, love and faith. Let us ask for the grace to recognize the presence of Christ in those who are sick and suffering; as Padre Pio said again and again, “the sick person is Jesus”. The sick one is Jesus. He or she is the flesh of Christ.

I would also like to offer a special wish for the faithful of the Archdiocese of Manfredonia-Vieste-San Giovanni Rotondo. St John Paul II said: “Those who went to San Giovanni Rotondo to attend [Padre Pio’s] Mass, to seek his counsel or to confess to him, saw in him a living image of Christ suffering and risen. The face of Padre Pio reflected the light of the Resurrection (Homily for the Beatification of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, 2 May 1999: *Insegnamenti* XXII, 1 [1999], 862). May whoever comes to your beautiful land — I would like to go there! — find in you too a reflection of the light of Heaven! I thank you, and I ask you, please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

All together let us pray, let us knock on the door of the heart of God who is the Father of mercy: Our Father...

And we are not an orphan Church: we have a mother. Let us pray to our mother, let us pray to our mother: Hail Mary...