

Did Padre Pio Offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the Diocese of Pittsburgh?

by Father Ladis J. Cizik

Editor's Note: **This article begins our new article series *A Week with Padre Pio* to begin Advent**

In Nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

During World War II, an American GI from the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Joseph (Joe) Peluso, first visited Padre Pio on October 6, 1944 at his monastery in San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy. Joe attended the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered by Padre Pio on many occasions, and after 45 visits to see Padre Pio, Joe's unit was transferred to France on July 15, 1945.[\[i\]](#) Joe was stationed, along with other American soldiers in Italy, about 37 miles from the Capuchin Monastery of Our Lady of Grace where Padre Pio lived.

Joe Peluso brought other soldiers with him to see Padre Pio, but it was Joe whom Padre Pio 'took under his wing' and considered him to be his 'spiritual child.' Padre Pio told Joe that he would take all Americans to be his spiritual children provided they be good Catholics and receive the Sacraments frequently.

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Joe Peluso

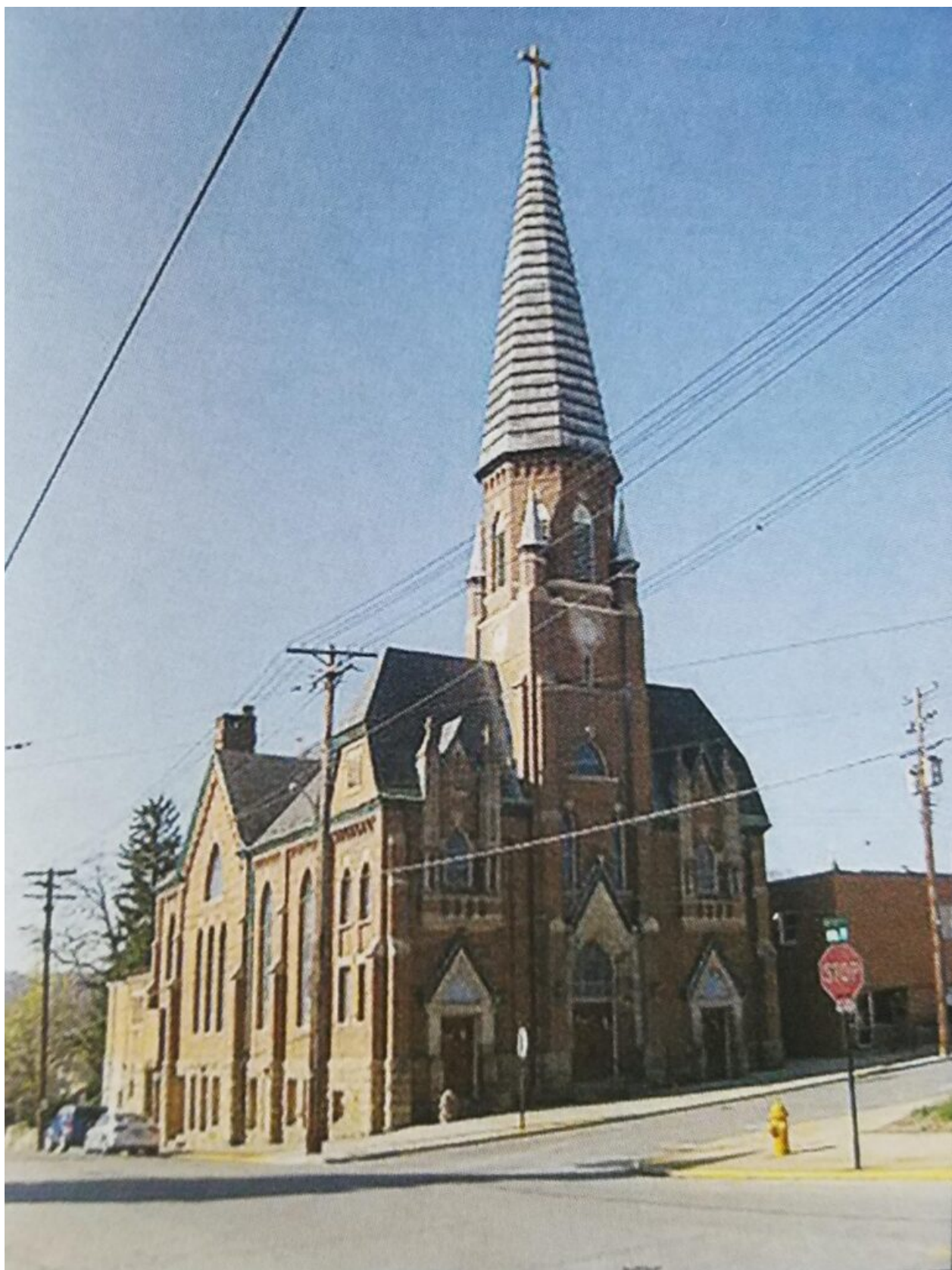
It should be noted that when Padre Pio takes a person to be his spiritual child, he takes that soul's WHOLE family as his spiritual children. The following true story was related to me by Geraldine Grimes who is related to Joe Peluso through marriage. Geraldine's Aunt Catherine Peluso Grimes was Joe Peluso's sister. Catherine married Oliver Grimes, the brother of Geraldine's father. Joe and his wife Rita, along with Catherine and Oliver, lived in New Brighton, Pennsylvania. This was not far from Saint Mary's Church in Beaver Falls, all in the Beaver County section of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

On a chilly day in 1954 or 1955, the Mass Intention at St. Mary's Church (pictured below) was for Aunt Catherine's father-in-law, James, who was Geraldine's grandfather. Geraldine,

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then a very young girl, was taken by her mother that morning to Mass. To their disappointment, and to the surprise of the daily Mass attendees who usually came to St. Mary's for morning Mass, the doors to the church were locked. The faithful knocked on the doors to the rectory receiving no answer.

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St. Mary's Church

As they stood on the sidewalk outside the locked doors of the church, two men were seen, seemingly priests, approaching the church. One had 'salt and pepper hair' and a beard, the other was a younger man, both in brown religious habits. As they reached the door to the church, the priest with the beard displayed a stern look and asked: "Why are the church doors locked?" The two mysterious men then walked around to the side of the church. A short while later, they opened the locked front door from the inside and let the people in. The parish priest never showed up.

The Traditional Latin Mass, offered by the bearded priest began soon thereafter. When it was time for Holy Communion, Geraldine, who had yet to make her first Holy Communion, remained in her pew as her mother went up to the Altar Rail to kneel and to receive our Eucharistic Lord. When Geraldine's mom returned to the pew, she quietly, but excitedly, said to her little girl: "The priest has holes in his hands like Jesus! There was a strong beautiful smell of flowers about him!" There were no flowers around the Altar.

After the Mass, Geraldine and her mother waited outside the Sacristy door to speak with the visiting priest. After a while, the church lights were turned off and they discovered that the Sacristy was empty. It was as if the two men just disappeared.

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Padre Pio wore Gloves concealing his wounds except at Mass

Later, Geraldine and her mom saw a picture of Padre Pio and recognized him as the priest with holes in his hands! A parish priest told them that it must have been Padre Pio at that Mass. Indeed, in the 1997 Vatican Decree on “the Heroic Virtues of Padre Pio,” he is described as a stamped representative of the Stigmata of Our Lord. [Official Decree of the Heroic Virtues of Padre Pio | EWTN](#)

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Padre Pio bore the visible wounds of Christ on his hands, feet and side for fifty years, which ended on the day of his death on September 23, 1968.

Geraldine feels that the younger 'man' with Padre Pio who was tall, slender, with dark hair and who never spoke, may have been Padre Pio's Guardian Angel. It is known that when Padre Pio, then Francesco Forgione, was very young, his Guardian Angel made himself visible as another child with whom young Francesco played.

One of Padre Pio's other special gifts bestowed upon him by Almighty God was the gift of bilocation, which enabled him to be in two places at the same time. Hence, although Padre Pio was no doubt in San Giovanni Rotondo on that day, he was apparently by the grace of God, at St. Mary's Church in Beaver Falls at the same time. Padre Pio is known to have bilocated many times.



The poster features a background image of a large Gothic cathedral with a prominent spire. In the foreground, on the left, is a black and white portrait of a man in clerical attire. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image. A QR code is located in the top left corner. A small icon of two figures standing under a cross is in the top right corner.



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The 'gift of perfume' is also associated with being in Padre Pio's presence. The fragrance is usually described as that of roses, lilies or sweet pipe tobacco. Joe Peluso experienced this perfume many times after he returned from the war to America.

Decades after this incident, St. Mary's Church became the home of the "Divine Child Jesus Padre Pio Prayer Group." Joe Peluso, who lived nearby, was a founding member of that prayer group. I began serving as the Spiritual Director of that Padre Pio Prayer Group in 1988 at St. Mary's Church and it was a privilege and joy to have Joe Peluso enthral us with his personal stories and anecdotes about Padre Pio.

St. Mary's Church later developed structural problems and was razed. The Divine Child Jesus Padre Pio Prayer Group relocated eventually to St. Blaise Church of St. Augustine Parish in Beaver County. The former site of St. Mary's Church is also within the St. Augustine Parish territory. Joe Peluso passed away on January 12, 1996, but Geraldine Grimes is still with us as a valued member of our prayer group and captivated us with this story, never before published, which she has given me permission to relate to you.



Divine Child Jesus Padre Pio Prayer Group at St. Blaise Church 2023

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Geraldine Grimes is behind the Altar Rail immediately to Father Cizik's left

It should be noted that all members of an official Padre Pio Prayer Group, recognized as such by San Giovanni Rotondo, officially become spiritual children of Padre Pio. Their family members then are also treated by Padre Pio as his spiritual children. As seen in this story, and in the lives of his spiritual children all over the world, Padre Pio literally goes 'out of his way' for those entrusted to his care. For that, we remember and are grateful.

In Nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

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The Soldier and the Saint, the Memoirs of an American Soldier; compiled by Thomas Konvolinka, 2022; may be obtained at konvolinka@gmail.com; Also available as an ebook on Amazon. Search for THE SOLDIER & THE SAINT: The Memoirs of an American Soldier.

[i] The Soldier and the Saint, the Memoirs of an American Soldier; compiled by Thomas Konvolinka, 2022.