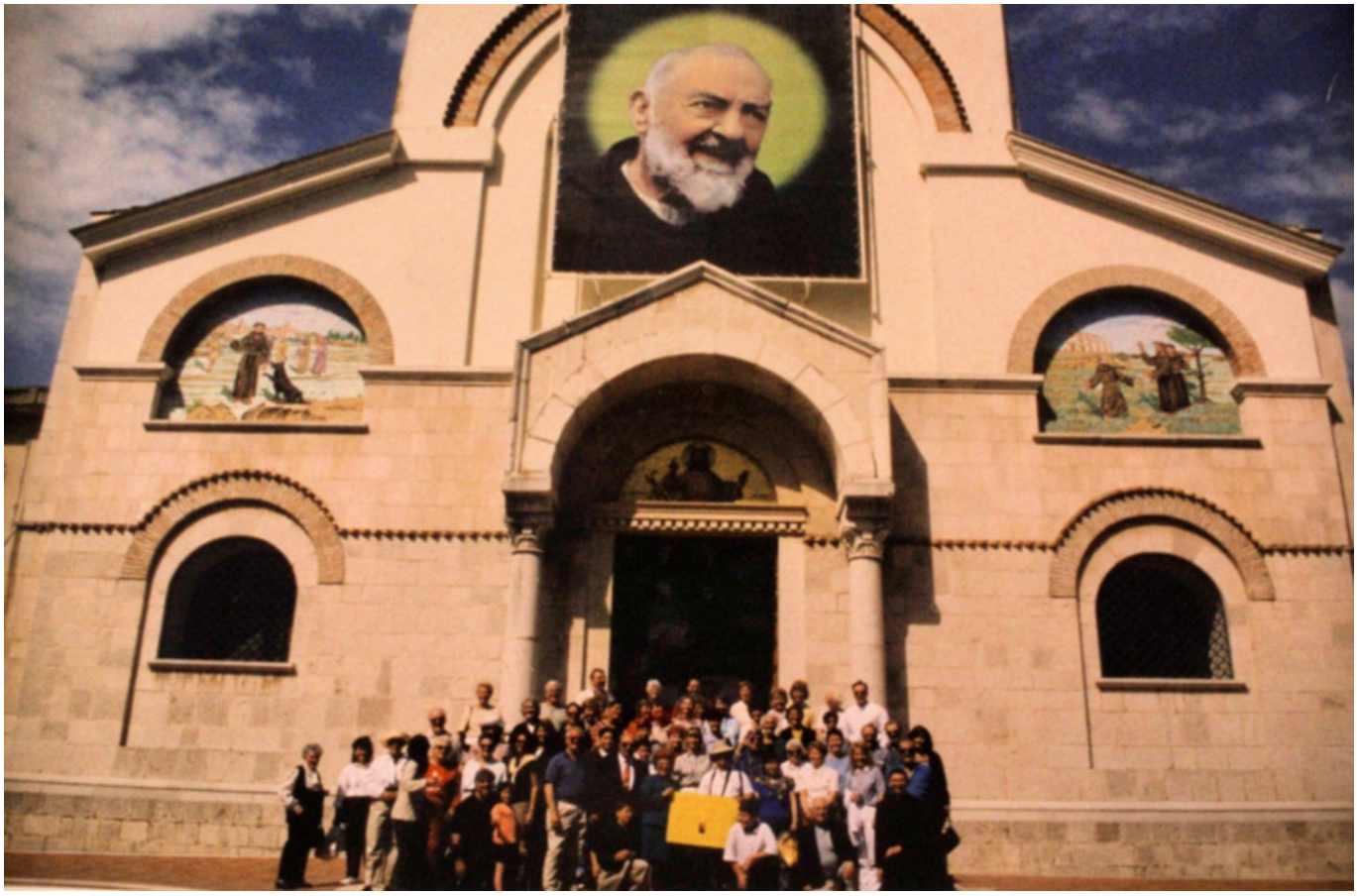


Church of the Holy Family of the Capuchin Friars in Pietrelcina

By Father Ladis J. Cizik

Editor’s Note: This article continues our “Week with Padre Pio” series. This particular article was originally published in an earlier edition of our monthly paper

One of the benefits of making a pilgrimage is being able to do some firsthand research into the lives of the Saints. During a pilgrimage to Italy that I led for two busloads of pilgrims on May 2, 1999, one of the places that we visited was Pietrelcina, the birth place of Padre Pio.

With me were members of the Reali family from New York (and Florida), led by Mario and his beloved wife, Antoinette (Toni). Antoinette Masone Reali was actually born in Pietrelcina and received her First Holy Communion from the hand of Padre Pio. The Reali’s *knew* Padre Pio. So on the bus traveling to Pietrelcina, when I happened to mention that Padre Pio’s “name in religion” came from Pope Saint Pius V, as is noted in so many writings, Mario Reali’s strong voice corrected me privately and with authority: “No Father, he got it

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from “Saint Pio the Martyr!”



Francesco Forgione

Before he was known as Padre Pio, he was Francesco Forgione. This infant, destined for great sanctity, was born on May 25, 1887 in Pietrelcina, Italy to Grazio Forgione and Maria Giuseppa Di Nunzio Forgione. He was baptized the very next day in Saint Ann’s Church in Pietrelcina as Francesco; a sign, perhaps, that he would one day become a spiritual son of

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Saint Francis of Assisi, and also bear the stigmata of Our Lord and God, Jesus Christ.

The Church of Saint Ann is the church where the Sacred Heart of Jesus appeared to Francesco when he was just five years old, beckoning him to the Altar where he placed His hand on his head, foreshadowing the child’s future ordination to the holy Priesthood. There, one can pray before the Baptismal font where the stain of Original Sin was washed away from young Francesco. This is also the place where our Saint received his First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Above the main Altar is a huge canvas painting of the Translation of the Holy House of Loreto. And, not to be missed, because few ever take note of it, is the small side Altar in honor of Good Saint Ann built over the treasured relics of “Saint Pio the Martyr,” who is especially honored in Pietrelcina.



Saint Pio the Martyr

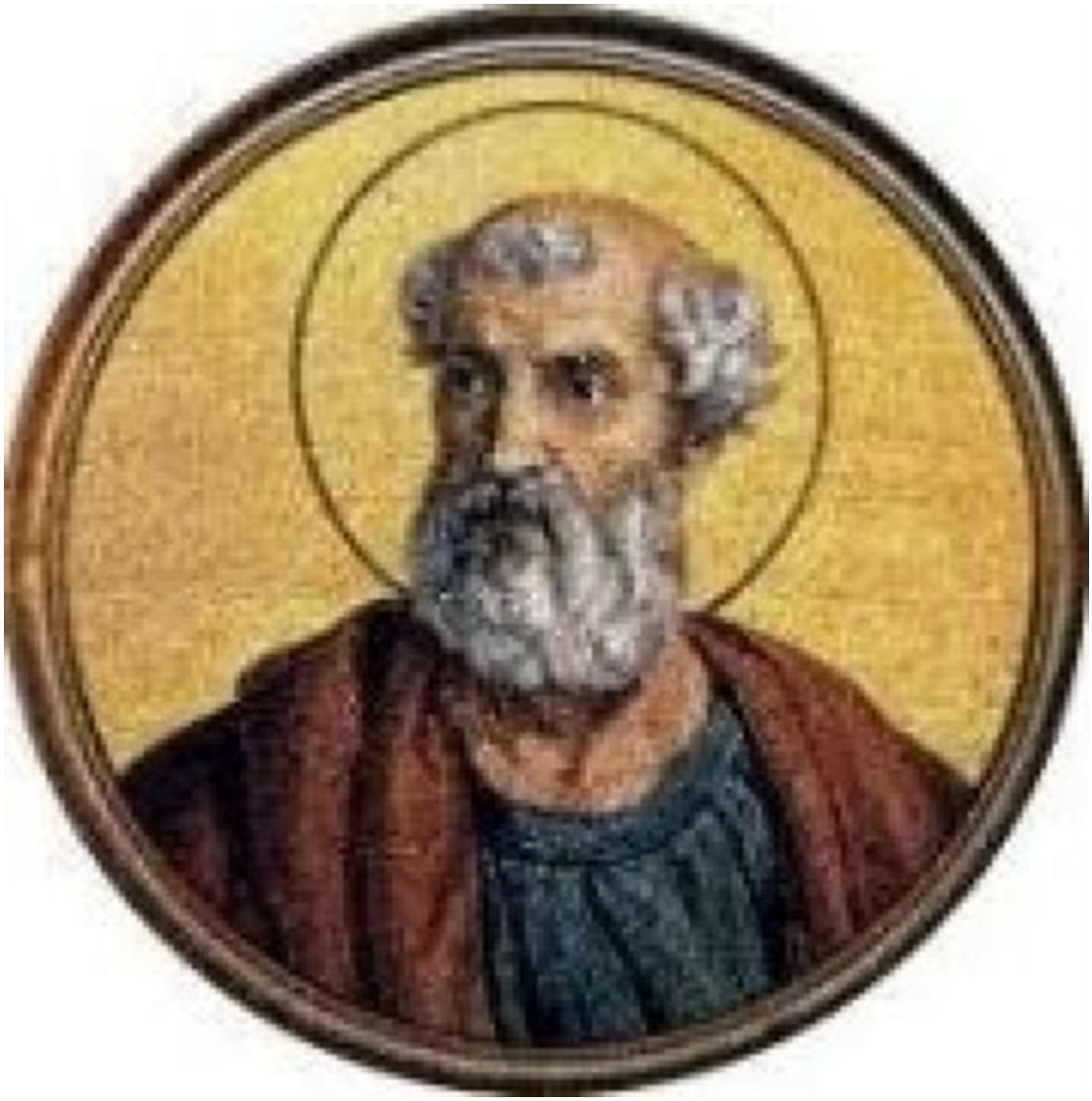
The relics of Saint Pio the Martyr were donated to Pietrelcina by the feudatory House of Carafa in 1801. Saint Pio was a soldier who was among the protomartyrs executed in the first century for professing the Holy Catholic Faith during the Roman persecutions. He was entombed in the Catacomb of Priscilla on the Via Salaria in Rome.

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At Pietrelcina there is a strong devotion to this heroic saint. Mario and Toni Reali emphasized that the town folks traditionally hold that this relatively unknown Martyr, Saint Pio, venerated throughout his tender years by Francesco Forgione, and by the people of Pietrelcina for many years, is the person from whom Padre Pio took his name in religion. Saint Pio the Martyr, about whom very little is known, was willing to give his life for the One True Faith. This must have had a great impact on young Francesco’s soul, especially when he became a “soldier for Christ” at his Confirmation before the relics of this soldier/martyr.

It would be reasonable to conclude that this devotion to Pio the Martyr would indeed have been instrumental, if Francesco had a say, in choosing the religious name that he would carry with him for the rest of his life and into eternity. It is not known whether Francisco had any input into receiving the name of “Pio.” In addition, twelve Popes have taken “Pio” (Pius) for their name; some of whom may also have been especially close to the heart of young Francesco Forgione as he was preparing to receive his name in religion.

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Pope Saint Pius I

The first pontiff to take the name of "Pio" was Pope Pius I *(Pio Primo)*, who served as the Successor of Saint Peter from 140 to 155. He was believed born into slavery in Aquileia, Italy. Pope Saint Pius I, our tenth Pope, is believed to have opposed the heresies of the Valentinians and Gnostics under Marcion, whom he excommunicated. The Traditional Latin Mass Liturgical Ordo lists Pope Pius I as "Pope and Martyr" on his feast day of July 11th. We can only imagine the holy inspirations that Francesco/Padre Pio must have had when attending or offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on Pope Saint Pius I's feast.

The relics at Pietrelcina of Saint Pio the Martyr are not identified as "Pope" Saint Pio the Martyr. The identification placard underneath the side Altar of Saint Ann Church simply reads: *"San Pio Martire"* (Saint Pius Martyr). Hence, the "Pio the Martyr" that Padre Pio

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venerated and prayed before when he was growing up in Pietrelcina, was no doubt *not* the sainted martyred pontiff of the same name. But it is possible that both Saint Pope Pius I and Padre Pio *both* had a devotion to the soldier-saint that was among the first martyrs of the Holy Catholic Church.



Great Pope Pius IX

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Francesco Forgione entered the Capuchin Novitiate in Morcone on January 6, 1903 and received the Franciscan habit on January 22nd, then becoming “Brother Pio.” In his book, Padre Pio: The True Story, Bernard Ruffin notes that some believe that “Pio of Benevento, recognizing him as a young man of great promise, wanted him to have his own religious name.” One could also speculate that another reason for favoring the name “Pio” was that the Great Pope Pius IX *(Pio Nono)* passed to his eternal reward in 1878, just nine years before Francesco’s birth. The young Capuchin and his superiors must have been impressed with the heroic tales from the life of Pius IX, who was the longest reigning pontiffof all time with the possible exception of Saint Peter, who is believed to have reigned for 34 years. Pius IX sat on the throne of Peter for a period of 31 years, 7 months and 17 days.

One of the greatest doctrinal accomplishments of this outstanding Marian Pope was the *ex cathedra* infallibledefinition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary on December 8, 1854 in the papal bull *Ineffabilis Deus.* Pope Pius IX also exposed the evil plans of Liberalism in his “Syllabus of Errors” issued on December 8, 1864, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. The Immaculate Conception was also a favorite Dogma of Padre Pio, who had permission to say the Mass of the Immaculate Conception throughout the year in his old age, once his eyesight began to fail and it became hard for him to see the text in the Missal. His final Mass, on September 22, 1968, the day before he died, was the Mass of the Immaculate Conception.

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Great Pope Saint Pius V

Most writers hold to the idea that Padre Pio received his name in religion in honor of the Great Dominican Pope Saint Pius V *(Pio Quinto)*, who won the historic Battle of Lepanto on October 7, 1571 by invoking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary through the power of Her Most Holy Rosary. His incorrupt body is in St. Mary Major Basilica in Rome. Padre Pio loved the Rosary from his youth and would pray dozens of Rosaries each day. His famous declaration about the Rosary was: “The Rosary is the Weapon!” Bernard Ruffin wrote that “Padre Pio always celebrated May 5th as his feast day,” which is the traditional feast of Pope Saint Pius V. However, since the feast day of Saint Pio the Martyr might not have been known by Padre Pio, or by anyone else, May 5th would have been a good *alternative* date. Likewise, there were no set feast days for Pope Pius IX or Pope Pius X (discussed later) at the time Padre Pio began his religious life, since they were yet to be

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beatified or canonized.



His admiration for Pope Saint Pius V must have also been increased over the fact that it was this great and holy pontiff who codified the Traditional Latin Mass in the papal bull *Quo primum* issued on July 14, 1570. Of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Tridentine Mass, Padre Pio would say: "It would be easier for the world to survive without the sun than to do so without the Holy Mass." In addition, the Pontificate of Pius V gave to the Church the Catechism and Decrees of the Council of Trent which were and still are the *most* formidable weapons against the heresy of Protestantism, as well as the more recent infestation of the heretical scourge of Modernism. Padre Pio, as a great defender of the Faith, would have also admired this saintly pontiff who bore the name "Pio."

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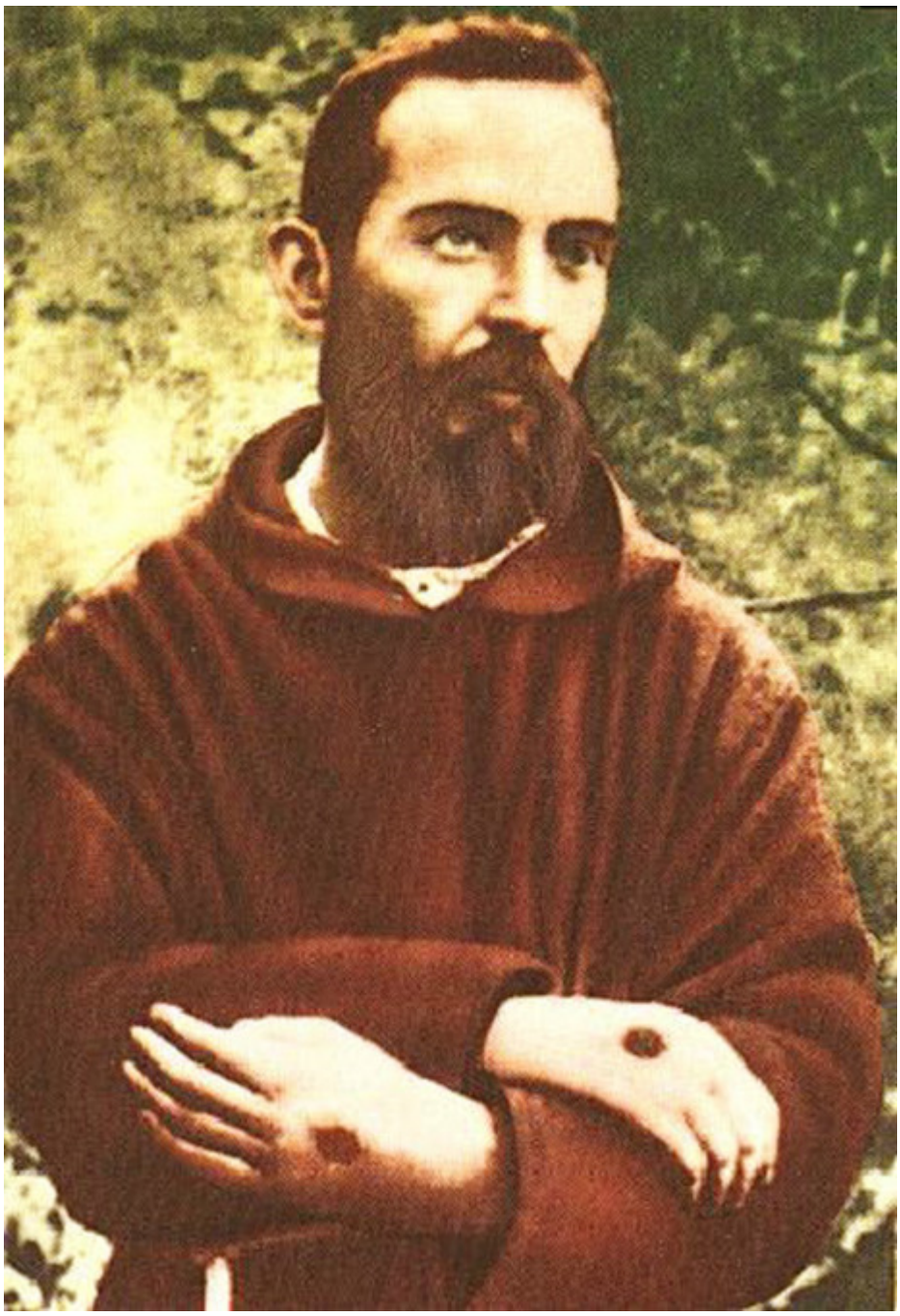


Great Pope Saint Pius X

Pope Saint Pius X *(Pio Decimo)* was elected to the throne of Saint Peter on August 4, 1903, some seven months *after* Francesco Forgione received the name of Brother Pio. Ordinarily, one could then conclude that Pius X would not have had any influence on Francesco possibly choosing/requesting his name. However, we are speaking about a great mystic here, Padre Pio! One could not exclude the possibility that Padre Pio would have foreknown that Giuseppe Sarto would become Pope Saint Pius X.

Among numerous accomplishments, Pope Pius X would defend the Church against the heresy of Modernism that took root before Francesco's birth and which would incubate and spread, like the black plague, throughout the life and times of Padre Pio. Pius X's decree entitled *Lamentabili sane* (July 3, 1907) and his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici gregis* (September 8, 1907) would no doubt have been required seminary reading for Brother Pio, who was ordained to the Holy Priesthood on August 10, 1910.

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Padre Pio

If someone were to mention “Saint Pio” at Pietrelcina, they may be taken by a local resident to Saint Ann’s Church to view the relics of the town’s revered martyr. Nevertheless, “Pio of Pietrelcina” is the formal name given to him by the Capuchin community. We who have known and loved him throughout his life and after his death on September 23, 1968, simply call him “Padre Pio.” What’s in a name? Padre Pio may have received his name in religion

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due to a combination of different influences. Of all the great Saints and Blesseds who have borne the name of “Pio” (Pius), Padre Pio is the one “Pio” that God has given for our times, to continue the battle against enemies of the Church based upon the foundation of those Pios’ and other Saints who have gone before.\

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