

“But Above All, We Must Lead Good Lives.”

GARABANDAL ECHOES THE BASIC GOSPEL MESSAGE

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“Be imitators of God as beloved children.” Three of the children of Garabandal (left to right) Conchita, Jacinia and Mari Loli at the time of the apparitions. They had never seen television or movies, had never left their remote mountain village, thus, their childlike simplicity and innocence left them open to the pure Gospel message.

Yet, all the phenomena attendant to the Garabandal event - the ecstasies, the levitations, the discernment, the prophecies, the conversions, the miracles and the seemingly more dramatic statements of the formal messages - all relate to Our Lady’s prime objective during the four years of her visits to Garabandal: **to remind us that God expects us to lead good lives.**

For example, Our Lady told us in the June 18, 1965 message, to pray with sincerity, to visit the Blessed Sacrament frequently, and to ask God’s forgiveness with sincere hearts. It is easy to see that prayer, especially prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, will bring us the graces we need to lead a holy life. And, since we shall continue to sin all our lives, at least in small ways, it is evident that **“asking forgiveness with sincere hearts”** will

These words of the Blessed Virgin Mary, spoken to our modern world through the visionaries of Garabandal, summarise the entire Garabandal event. Unnervingly simple, they also echo the basic salvation message of scripture. John the Baptist was saying the same thing when he cried out, “Repent, repent,” as was Jesus when He said, “You must be made perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” and St. Paul in telling us to “walk in love, as Christ loved us” and to “be imitators of God as beloved children”.

On October 18, 1961, about four months after the start of the apparitions in the tiny mountain village of Garabandal, Spain, many people gathered and waited in heavy rains outside the village church to hear the first formal message of Our Lady. The people were disappointed by the simplicity of the words: **“... be very good.”**

always be required if we are striving to **“be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect.”**

Our Lady also tells us to **“make many sacrifices, perform much penance”** and to **“think about the passion of Jesus.”** We tend to neglect these powerful aids to our sanctification because we do not see the relationship between them. Yet, the saints, whom God has raised up as models for us to imitate as we seek to “be very good,” gave penance and reflection on the passion of Jesus a prominent place in their lives. They considered these practices to be spiritual power tools. Prayer alone is like a hand saw. Prayer joined to penance and sacrifice is like a power saw. A hand saw will do certain jobs and do them fairly well. A power saw will do some jobs that a hand saw cannot do, and it will do all jobs with greater efficiency. Prayer alone

will suffice to get certain spiritual jobs done. Penance and sacrifice joined to prayer will be required to get some of the more difficult spiritual jobs done, such as overcoming certain sins and obtaining the conversion of hardened sinners.

The Example of Padre Pio

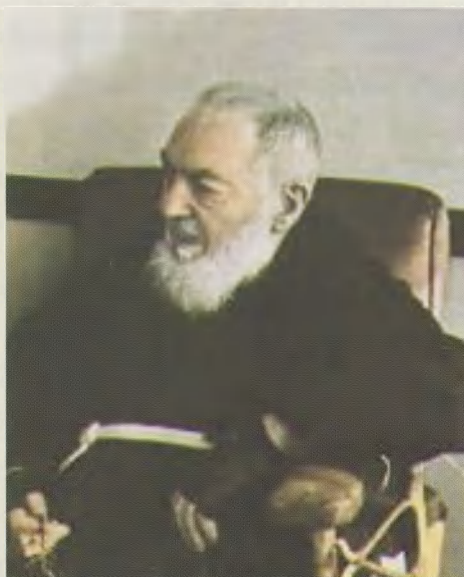
How was it that Padre Pio did such marvellous things, obtained such exceptional graces for people, conversions, healings, all kinds of wonderful blessings! Because he prayed, yes. But suffering and sacrifice were joined to his prayers. He was in pain at all times. Some of this was voluntarily taken upon himself, such as the harsh practices of penance which he assiduously imposed on himself, or the times when he asked God to transfer to him the suffering of some of those who came to him crushed by the weight of their circumstances. But, most of Padre Pio's suffering was what God gave to him and which he gladly accepted.

Such was the pain he experienced from the wounds of Christ, the stigmata, that he bore in his body, visibly for the last 50 years of his life, and invisibly for some time prior to that. Such was the pain that came from his mysteriously weak and unstable physical constitution that was beyond help from doctors and that resulted all during his life in frequent colds, gastric upset, and temperatures which would rise sky high and then come crashing down to normal. There was also the suffering that resulted from frequent attacks and molestations by the devil, not to mention the verbal attacks over many years by some in high places in the Church, a number of his fellow priests, and even some of his own Capuchin religious superiors. Considerable moral suffering came during that period of his life when he was forbidden to hear confessions, to say Mass publicly, and even to engage in spiritual direction through the mail. Finally, there was the torture and tedium that was a necessary part of his daily duty, such as hearing confessions for 18 hours or more in a single day. His was truly a life lived on the cross. Like St. Paul, he could say: **"In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of His body, the Church."**

Padre Pio was linked to the Garabandal events by Our Lady because he is a contemporary. Throughout his extraordinary life, which ended in 1968, God used him to provide us with a lesson for our time. The Capuchin stigmatist's mission was to remind a world that had developed a pathological fear of suffering, that pain and suffering have a redemptive value and are essential ingredients of a good Christian life.

The two things that Our Lady asked for most at Garabandal were prayer and sacrifice. She made it clear that she was not seeking extraordinary voluntary penance such as the wearing of penitential chains or hair shirts. She was asking what she had asked at Fatima, namely, the willing and loving acceptance of the disagreeable and sometimes painful things that accompany the faithful performing of our duties: getting up without grumbling when the alarm clock goes off; not getting ugly when the person in the car ahead delays starting up after the light turns green or when some other car suddenly cuts in front of you at the intersection; not watching TV to such an extent that you must race through your housework and not have adequate time to prepare the meal for your family; being patient and listening with love to the long-winded neighbour who is always complaining or always seems to phone you when you are busiest.

The nitty gritty of our daily life provides blessed opportunities to suffer and do penance, and this is the



Always with his beads in his hand, Padre Pio recited an unbelievable number of rosaries each day

sacrifice that Our Lady asked of us at Garabandal. In our morning prayers, we should ask God to keep us open to the numerous golden occasions for sacrifice that present themselves to us each day. They represent a tremendous potential for our own spiritual growth and for attracting God's blessings on our loved ones, on the Church and priests, and on the world.

Thinking About the Passion of Jesus.

The passion of Jesus casts its illuminating rays over the entire life and work of Our Blessed Saviour. That life and work were all of love, and that love reached its peak during the passion and on the cross. Much of the mystery of God's love has to do with its greatness. This we just cannot comprehend. However, God wants us to make every possible effort to penetrate the mystery of His love. The great means for doing that is thinking about the passion of His divine Son, Jesus. **Jesus came on earth to reveal God's love, and the revelation that love comes principally through the passion, the enormous suffering that Jesus endured for each and every one of us.**

That is why the Holy Spirit inspired the Church to adopt the crucifix and to introduce the devotion of the Way of the Cross. Because the devil knows well that these lead us into the mystery of God's love, he is waging a battle to get us to discard them. As always with good-intentioned people, he does not conduct a head-on attack. He proceeds in subtle ways, suggesting partial truths, bringing our minds purely human rationalisations that obscure our faith. And how successful the great deceiver has been!

We need to get back to displaying and venerating the crucifix in our homes. It is the sign of the devil's defeat and the assurance of Jesus' blessings and protection. We need to get back to making the Way of the Cross, especially on Fridays and during Lent.

We also need to be reminded of a few things in regard to the Way of the Cross. The devotion was

originally introduced not for the purpose of gaining indulgences, but to encourage people to take time to think about the sufferings of Our Blessed Saviour and to reap the benefits that would flow from that reflection.

The passion of Our Lord is portrayed for us in the Way of the Cross. The pictures and paintings on the walls of our churches and the little meditations found in prayer books and pamphlets are meant to help us in our personal "thinking" as we stop at each of these stations. Let us get back to the original intention of the Church. Let us see in the Way of the Cross a time-proved effective means of thinking about the passion of Jesus, of reflecting in a concrete way on the great love our dear Saviour showed us in the many different things He gladly suffered for us.

Jesus said, "You must be Made perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

If you don't have time to say the usual prayer at each station, don't let that hold you back from this holy practice. If you only have time to reflect seriously on one or a few of the stations, do that. We have to keep reminding ourselves that, whatever the form of prayer, it is quality and not quantity that counts. Thinking seriously about just one station can inspire love of God and the desire to lead a good life as a personal response to that love.

Here is one last suggestion that is in keeping with what has been said above. You do not have to go to a church to make the Way of the Cross. Remember, what you should be seeking above all is to learn more and more about the love of Jesus. This you can get from using a prayer book or pamphlet at home and spending some time thinking about the special mystery of suffering and love which is proper to each station.

Prayer, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, penance, sacrifice, and the use of the crucifix and the Way of the Cross to think about the passion of Jesus – these are the means for compliance with Our Lady's exhortation to lead good lives. ☩