

SEPTEMBER 23 2025 DEACON MIKE WALSH

The last time I was here with you, I preached on the Seven Sorrows of Mary. And you could see, when I was talking about Mary and my time spent reflecting on her, you could see someone who is just so human.

In today's Gospel story, we see Mary, the concerned mother—the mother who is looking for her son. You have to understand, in the time of our Lord, there was a very strong kinship culture. It was expected that Jesus would follow in the steps of his earthly father. And what did Joseph do? I think you probably know the answer—because we often call him Jesus the carpenter.

At that time, if you were a male, you took on your father's trade. If you were a female, you would marry and raise a family. But Jesus uses this moment in the Gospel not to speak against his mother or relatives, but rather to teach what true kinship means when we are followers of Jesus Christ.

True kinship comes through obedience to God's word and then acting upon it. It shifts the focus from blood ties—which is what most people considered most important at that time—to a discipleship rooted in listening, faith, and action.

And one of the most perfect modern-day examples of that is Padre Pio, whose feast day we celebrate today. Padre Pio was truly a man whose discipleship was rooted in listening, in faith, and in action.

He was born in southern Italy in 1887. At the young age of 15, he knew what he wanted to do and entered the Capuchin Order, later becoming a priest. In 1918, he received the stigmata—the visible wounds of Christ—sharing in the suffering of Jesus. This was extremely painful for him to endure.

But what struck me in reading about his life was a commentator who said Padre Pio was, above all, a man of prayer, confession, and compassion.

Whenever I am asked about the Daily TV Mass and what I love most about being part of this community, I say it is the community of prayer. Each day, 100,000–150,000 people gather in various ways to pray—lifting up the intentions in our Prayer Book. We recently held our first community event, praying the Seven Sorrows Rosary together on Facebook. Padre Pio believed so deeply in prayer that he immersed his entire life in it. He received Communion daily and was known as a man of profound prayer. People came from all over to seek his spiritual counsel.

His ministry of confession drew thousands. People came from all over to have their confessions heard by him. Padre Pio had a gift: he could read hearts. He often knew when someone was not yet ready for true repentance, and sometimes he would even send them away until they were prepared to receive reconciliation sincerely.

His compassion was lived out in remarkable ways, including the founding of a hospital called The Home to Relieve Suffering. This hospital welcomed all, regardless of their means.

Stories from his life continue to inspire. Father Peter told me about Padre Pio's encounter with a young priest named Karol Wojtyła. According to tradition, Padre Pio told him that one day he would lead the Church. Decades later, that priest became Pope John Paul II—the very pope who canonized Padre Pio as a saint in 2002.

For many years Padre Pio was misunderstood. Church leaders at the time did not know how to respond to his stigmata and his gifts, and he was restricted from public ministry. He accepted this with humility and dignity, often celebrating Mass alone.

His final Mass was on September 22, 1968, the day before his death. He was very weak and needed support, yet some accounts say the Mass lasted three hours. At the consecration, he gazed at the Host for a long time, as if beholding the very presence of Christ—which, of course, he always knew it to be. Shortly after midnight the next day, he died, his final words being: “Jesus and Mary.”

So how does all of this connect to today's Gospel? Padre Pio was one who heard the Word of God and acted upon it. He expanded the spiritual family by welcoming all. He lived a life of suffering, obedience, and humility, but most importantly, he showed us what it means to live in true kinship with Jesus Christ.

It is a privilege to be counted among the kin of Christ—to be his brother or sister, united to the one who was crucified and risen. Padre Pio knew that if we are nourished by the Lord in the sacrifice of the Mass, then we can truly go forth in peace.

Following his example, may we glorify the Lord by living lives of prayer, offering and receiving forgiveness, and showing compassion to all.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our brother—God bless.