

July 1961

Dear B,

Your letter was a great comfort to me, and particularly what you said re Padre Pio. Your statement, "I feel that I'll be meeting Padre Pio through you and I'm frankly a little excited, though I don't know why," was amazing. In fact it's far truer than you would ever think. It's all tied up with my experience with Padre Pio. I hardly know where to start, but I'm sure it's important, very important, so I'll do my best.

Maybe I ought to begin by telling you a little of my experience first, then you'll be able to see what your feeling about Padre means.

Well, it was all arranged for me to have my conference with Padre Pio. The D's had seen a Commandante Batisti who, I think, is director of Padre Pio's hospital "Casa Sollevis della Soffferenza", a person very close to Padre Pio, the D's told me. So I arrived in Foggia, the railroad station (about six hours from Rome) Friday nite, July 29th, took the bus to San Giovanni Rotondo, Padre Pio's place, got my room at the hotel. The next morning, as per my instructions I got up at 4 A.M., went to Padre Pio's Mass, which begins at 5, but you have to be early if you want to be close enough to be able to follow what happens.

The Mass, which lasts about an hour and a quarter, was something of an experience. The chief thing I noticed was that things were happening inside to me, as though an angel were telling me about myself. I wasn't close enough to the altar to follow Padre Pio there. He drops off into profound meditation at certain points, or maybe it's a kind of ecstasy. I'm sure in one way or another he's carried out of himself, whatever it is.

Well, I didn't think too much of what had happened to me. Probably it was, I thought, some light I got in myself thanks to Padre's holiness, or something of the kind. Then I was told to look up a Signorina Lucibelli who would be my interpreter and take me to Signor Batisti, who would arrange the appointment with Padre Pio, at which time I would give Padre the statue of the Niño.

What we entered his office, a huge one on the main floor, Signor Batisti, without ever looking up from his desk, said he was too busy to see me, to see his secretary next door.

The secretary was presumably the devil's advocate who began to ask me all sorts of questions about myself, how old I was, what I wanted to do, whether I wanted to be in an order, etc. etc. Then he began to say how hard it was to get to see Padre Pio. At this point I suggested that I came because the appointment, I was told, had been arranged but that I could go right back to Rome if it couldn't be. The Signorina Lucibelli was getting more empathetic with me each

moment, in fact we have become great friends since. But the upshot of that weird interview was that I was to come back at 11:30 that morning and I would be taken, with the statue, by a certain gentleman, half British and half Italian, who would be my interpreter. So I came back to the office at 11:30 A.M. and met Signor Trevener. Then together we took the Niño, now out of his case, in His royal dress, through the street to the Capuchin Monastery. Then we ascended stairs to a choir where Signor Trevener informed me Padre Pio had received the stigmata some forty years ago, only there was a whole crowd of men who had come to the same place with the same intention, to see Padre Pio.

And so I realized that this was not going to be a private interview. Only at 12 noon Padre Pio would emerge from the new choir and come to where we were, the old choir, and lead the Angelus. Then, Signor Trevener told me, we would have the chance to speak to Padre Pio and present him with the statue. At that point, I frankly didn't care if I ever saw Padre Pio or anyone connected with him. In fact I was secretly hoping I could have the Niño for myself, but there I was and there was no gracious way of getting away from there. The way persons pursued the poor saint, hounding him at every step, grabbing his poor pierced hands, begging his blessing, trying to kiss his hand, giving him objects to bless, etc. was revolting to me, and I suspect to Padre Pio too. He said once "They'd walk on my head if I let them." And here I was, now, part of this throng.

Well, Padre finally came at 12, said the Angelus, and then tried to get away from everyone, even me!, as fast as he could, which is just what I felt like doing. But then the Signor Trevener couldn't have it that way. So he pursued Padre Pio with the others while I kept lurking farther and farther back, with the Niño, hoping Padre Pio would get away before we met. I just couldn't drag myself after the poor man for one thing, and then I half hoped if this fell through they would be forced to arrange a real appointment. But there was this undaunted Signor Trevener who wouldn't have it that way, and who kept beckoning over the heads of the surrounding people (Signor Trevener is about six and a half feet tall) to follow him. So I did so with much reluctance.

And so we finally caught up with Padre Pio, who by this time wanted only to be rid of everyone. Then Signor Trevener told him about the statue. Padre Pio took a furtive look at me, grunted, allowed me to kiss his hand, told Signor Trevener to put the statue in his (Signor Trevener's house) until further notice, and then he fled to the refectory.

For that I had come some 6000 miles! I thought—but my thoughts, which could quite possibly have become morbid at that sad point, were

fortunately interrupted by Signor Trevener who informed me in terms of anxious solicitude and with a thick British accent, “Of course, you know, we’ve only done half the job!” My interior, but unexpressed reaction to that was, “then Lord deliver me from the other half.” But something of what I felt must have got through, because he kept repeating every few minutes or so, “Of course, we’ve only done half the job, you know! We’ve only done half the job!”

So we walked towards my hotel, Signor Trevener doing his best to be gracious. Now he was carrying the Niño to his home, while I was trying to see what this was all about. And then, as we parted, Signor Trevener said something like, “You have to be patient you know, have to be patient!” And I muttered, in return, “One can be too patient at times!” and thanked him as I walked to my hotel.

(This is getting to be quite a saga. I’ll continue with Part II after my siesta)

(Now I not only have had my siesta, but I went to St. John’s of the Lateran Gate. It’s just a five minute ride from where I live. I just know I was never made to be a tourist. I’m always glad to get back to my room. After a while you just stop registering, rather I stop. But there is a kind of compulsion you feel in Rome—so many wonderful things to see, so you feel there’s something wrong with you if you’re not consumed with a passion to see things. I’m sure that, and so many other things, are wrong with me, but it’s just too hot to be very concerned about it.)

To get on with the story of Padre Pio. I began to reflect when I was alone. Yes, this is the way everything happens to me. It always begins with frustrations, like it did in Rome, and then terrific things begin to happen, when I stopped caring whether they did or not. So, I thought, that’s probably what will happen here, and so I almost expected I’d be called at any moment to see Padre Pio. And all the while I was getting more and more convinced that I was communicating with him without seeing him. It was a strange feeling, as I had said, I think, but you know communication is going on, yet you couldn’t say how. It was a little like what happens usually when I write. It feels for all the world that you are just thinking and having ideas, yet you know they are not just your ideas, even though they seem to rise naturally within you.

It was as though my whole life was being laid out in front of me, all the fake, all the corruption, the duplicity, and everything was connected, like having your conscience examined by someone else, and

with it there was a great joy, the joy of truth. You realized that the lies were just keeping you from getting the love of Jesus that you wanted. There is something, among many things I wrote while I was there. I think it will give you some idea of what went on:

“When you love God, and everything else in God, you are one with the Spirit of Truth. In our hypocrisy we seek the consolation of God’s tenderness and love in our lies. But love is strong as death, and the very effect of God’s love is to move us to die to ourselves, to ourselves outside of Him, to our lies.”

And again,

“For God to know is to will, to do, and to do is to know. But you, since you are not God, are able to know a truth yet act contrary to it, as Paul says, “The good what I would, I do not.” And the danger is that you are inclined, therefore, to take your complacency not in Me, by conforming yourself to Me in action, but to seek your complacency in your understanding of general, abstract truths, which thus become a kind of idol, keeping you separated from Me, and like all idols, justifying sin.”

But I couldn’t possibly give you an idea of what was happening to me. I was mystified because I have never experienced anything like it, yet I was sure it was happening.

Then Signorina Lucibelli suggested that I go see a Miss Mary Pyle, an American who settled in San Gionvanni some thirty years ago, and who is very holy and very close to Padre Pio. I liked her right away and said something about what I was experiencing with Padre Pio. And then it was like a deluge. She just poured forth all kinds of confirmation of my experience. And then I began to find it in books everywhere, and it all ties up with your guardian angel, and how we communicate with the other, and how God uses our angels in this way to give us grace, and the tremendous power they have, and how we should trust them as we fight against our own evil tendencies.

But what it all comes down to so far is that Padre Pio is my father. I knew he was, but I wrote him a note just to have his sensible confirmation, which he gave me. And that was all I wanted. And now I know he is always watching out for me, and that our guardian angels are always communicating with one another. And the effect of it all is to make me feel very very little, because it is the first time in my life that I feel I have a father. I guess I know what it was to be without one. That was why I tried to be a father to my children, and now it is as if Jesus said, “Look, do you know? You’re a child too, and you need a

human father, just like your children do.” And then what a father He gave me!

And so now you can see why your remark, quoted above, struck me the way it did. Because you know I love you all, and therefore everything I have is yours, including my new father! So he is yours too. And so, whenever you feel distressed by the truth about yourself, as Jesus shows it to you, send your guardian angel to Padre Pio to tell him about it, and you’ll see how quickly he takes care of you. I’m too tired to write more, but I love you all, all, and G. and Erika. I’ll write to them soon, maybe tomorrow.

Pray for me.

Love,

H.