

Deacon Philip Neri Lastimoso, O. Cist.  
Our Lady of Dallas Cistercian Abbey  
Feast of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina  
September 23rd, 2009  
Gospel: Luke 9:1-6

I was recently informed that this weekend is Homecoming. And I was also recently informed that the theme of this year's Homecoming dance is Superheroes. I thought that was pretty fun. When I was young, younger than you guys are right now, I really liked superheroes. In elementary school, I watched the Superman movies. In middle school, I watched the X-Men cartoons on Saturday morning, and I even bought a couple Spiderman comic books. I thought it would be so cool to have super powers: to be able to fly like Superman or to be able to read minds like Professor X. But of course, I always knew that those stories were fake. People can't fly, and people can't read minds.

But in Fourth Form, in Confirmation class, I heard more stories that sounded just as incredible. These were stories of the saints. Saint George slew dragons. Saint Maurus walked on water. And my patron saint, Saint Philip Neri, he would levitate when he prayed. That's kind of like flying. And Saint Philip knew people's sins before they confessed them. That's kind of like reading people's minds. But Saint Philip Neri lived 500 years ago. And Saint Maurus, he lived 1500 years ago. Aren't all these stories just legends, embellishments? The saints couldn't really fly or read people's souls.

But today is the Feast of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina. He was a simple Capuchin friar from Italy. And like all the other saints that I have mentioned so far, he could fly and read people's souls. But unlike all the other saints that I have mentioned so far, he didn't live a thousand years ago. He was alive 50 years ago. When your parents were born, Saint Pio was still alive. When your grandparents were growing up, they may have heard

of the famous Padre Pio. He lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He lived in our modern times. And so the story of this saint feels much closer, more real to us than all the other stories. Padre Pio's story is not a legend; it's not a tall tale.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus sends the twelve apostles to cast out demons and to heal the sick. But in our sophisticated world, people tell us that demons don't really exist. Demons are just a superstitious description of mental illness. In our contemporary times, we don't expect miraculous healings. We have modern medicine, and maybe soon, we'll have universal healthcare to cure our diseases.

But today is the Feast of Saint Pio. He fought demons and miraculously cured the sick. At night, demons would rip Pio's clothes and beat him until he was bruised. Padre Pio also cured people from cancer.

There's a famous story about a young Polish bishop whose friend, Doctor Poltawska, was dying of cancer. In 1962, this Polish bishop sent a letter to Padre Pio asking for his prayers for Doctor Poltawska. Soon later, Doctor Poltawska was healed, and medical professionals were unable to offer an explanation. 16 years after this event, that Polish bishop became Pope John Paul II.

So I guess miracles are real; they do happen today. And demons are real too; it is not just superstition. And I guess in some respects we do have superheroes.

Saint Pio was most famous for having the stigmata. He bore the marks of Christ's crucifixion on his own body. His hands and his feet were pierced, and they bled daily for 50 years. Yet they never were infected or gangrenous. They even gave off the sweet smell of perfume. His stigmata were his share in the cross of Christ, and the aromatic smell they gave off was a sign that Christ's yoke is easy and his burden is sweet.

But while God calls only a few Christians to be miracle workers, to bare the stigmata, and to be the superheroes of our times. He calls each of to be saints in our own way, to be regular-type heroes. We can't all be Superman, but at least, we can be like Batman who didn't have superpowers. He simply tried really hard to do good and fight evil. And in our journey to sainthood, we can still look to Saint Pio for guidance. We can still learn from him and follow his example. We can learn that we too have to carry our share of the cross. And we can learn that all the burdens of our lives can be sweet if we embrace them out of love for God.

Padre Pio once said "Prayer is oxygen for the soul." And so I urge you all to pray. Pray for yourselves and for each other. Pray that you may be holy and follow the example of Saint Pio. Pray that you may carry your share of the cross and that your share may be sweet.

I urge you all to pray for priests. As you all may know, Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed this year to be the Year of the Priest. Pray for the priests at you parishes. And pray for the Cistercian priests. Pray for your Headmaster, for your Form Masters, and for the newly ordained Father Joseph. Pray that they may be like Padre Pio and be witnesses to God's superhuman greatness.

And finally, I urge you all to have fun this weekend. At the game on Friday, I want you to follow the advice of today's Responsorial Psalm: "Celebrate days of gladness and give Him praise." (Tobit 13:7) And on Saturday, when you are at the dance and you see all the decorations and costumes, I want you think of Padre Pio and to remember that demons, miracles, and most especially superheroes are real. And on

Sunday, when all the fun is done and it is time to clean up, I want you remember that God is also calling you to holiness, calling you to be Christian heroes like Padre Pio.