



THE WAY OF THE CONVENTS OF PADRE PIO

A walking itinerary in the footsteps of St. Padre Pio, begun in Pietrelcina on 6 January 1903.

Francesco Forgione (Padre Pio) spent his adolescence and youth in various convents (friaries) of the Capuchin Province of Sant'Angelo. Sometimes brief, sometimes lengthy, he lived in eleven different convents. From Pietrelcina, he went to: Morcone (BN), Sant'Elia Pianisi (CB), Campobasso (CB), San Marco la Catola (FG), Serracapriola (FG), Montefusco (AV), Gesualdo (AV), Venafro (IS), Foggia (FG) and San Giovanni Rotondo (FG). His time in these places was spent studying, praying, meditating, and boldly striving for inner perfection. Due to illness, Fra' Pio returned to Pietrelcina, his native town. But in those convents the future Padre Pio was formed; in every site, he left the mark of his holiness, his mystical ardor, his indelible presence.

I felt profoundly drawn to this itinerary – not only spiritual, but also physical – that the Saint of the Stigmata traveled during his youth, also due to the personal contact I had many times with Him. Thus, in 2007, I conceived the idea, fulfilled in 2008, to create a walking itinerary that would connect these sites. Named by my daughter, Giusy, “The Way of the Convents of Padre Pio,” the walking route would be realized over

time and through practical experience. What emerged was an itinerary that would illuminate the minds of people of faith or otherwise, of hiking enthusiasts and nature lovers, through direct experience of the territory, landscapes, and extraordinary milieu as touched by Fra' Pio. It is a spiritual journey in which every single person with his or her faith, ideology, or life philosophy can undertake (at any time of the year) to express religious sentiment, gain understanding, and enjoy direct contact with nature and the land – with her traditions, culture, and customs.

I have always been convinced that in visiting and experiencing these places, apparently so different, but made so equal by the Eternal Spirit of the Lord's Intercessor, can fulfill the desires within each of us. Traveling the roads, the paths, the ancient sheep tracks (the ancient grass highways), crossing the hills, forests, mountains, breathing in the morning air full of dew, or perceiving, at dusk, the cool of the evening, and observing the sea in the distance all create a sense of feeling and peace that our body and our spirit must never forget. In this is the deepest meaning of “the Way of the Convents of Padre Pio.” Walking is something that envelops you, accompanies you, welcomes you, supports you, and teaches you to live – sometimes even outside of time and history. Walking is a poor art – a doing nothing, but full of everything. Walking means departing only to arrive, without commitment. Walking is not about getting in shape, but about giving shape to life. For those called to consider this walking journey – to travel and visit the places of his extraordinary youth – may a phrase taken from the “Charisms of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina” be encouragement: “Always walk at this pace, even if it seems to you that it is a slow pace.” (Padre Pio)

Mario and Giusy Caruso (A.P. 2008)