

Baltimore Basilica to host veneration of St. Pio relics

Six relics of St. Pio of Petrelcina - a Capuchin priest widely known as Padre Pio - will be on display and available for prayer and veneration June 14-15 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore.

Padre Pio (1887-1968) was known for his deep prayer life, mysticism, healing powers and for bearing the stigmata, the wounds of Christ. Among the relics that will be at the Baltimore Basilica are a glove, a piece of gauze with his blood on it, crusts of a scab from the stigmata, a lock of hair, a handkerchief soaked with his sweat upon his death and his mantle, a type of cloak.

Those items that were part of the saint's body - such as blood or hair - are considered first-class relics by the church. The mantle, which Padre Pio wore, is considered a second-class relic.

The relics will be available for public veneration June 14, 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Archbishop William E. Lori will celebrate a Mass in honor of St. Pio at 6:30 p.m. that day. Veneration will continue June 15, noon-4 p.m.

Padre Pio's stigmata emerged during World War I, after Pope Benedict XV asked Christians to pray for an end to the conflict. The priest had a vision in which Christ pierced his side. A few weeks later, in September 1918, Jesus again appeared to him, and he received the full stigmata, according to information from the St. Pio Foundation. The stigmata remained with him until his death Sept. 23, 1968.

The stop in Baltimore is the last for this portion of the tour, which has been most recently to Canada and North Carolina. Baltimore is the only site in the mid-Atlantic

scheduled for this year, other than New York in September.

Luciano Lamonarca, an opera singer and philanthropist, has made it his mission to advance knowledge about St. Pio in the United States, after he and his wife prayed at the saint's tomb in San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy. They had experienced several miscarriages, and met there with Monsignor Pierino Galeone, a friend of Padre Pio for 20 years who is still alive today. The priest urged the couple not to lose faith and noted that they would experience more miscarriages before a son would arrive.

That was in 2011. In 2014, Lamonarca established the nonprofit St. Pio Foundation, dedicated to the promotion of the awareness of St. Pio and his charisms nationally and internationally by working with institutions and individuals who share the same vision of serving those in need of relief from suffering.

In December 2014, his wife told him that she was pregnant again, "and now we are the blessed parents of Sebastian."

"This is the reason why I put so much so much passion and faith in the work I do because I have witnessed how great Padre Pio is," said Lamonarca, president and CEO of the St. Pio Foundation.

He said veneration of relics does not mean that the faithful are worshipping the item or the saint.

"It reminds us about the saint's own personal life," he explained. "We are talking about Padre Pio who, while he was alive, was already considered a holy man by many."

One prays to God, but can do so through an intercessor such as a saint.

"That makes, I believe, our prayer request stronger," Lamonarca said. "We should

not forget that the miracles or the grace is coming from God. It never comes from the saint; the saint is the intercessor.”

Praying in the presence of relics of a saint fulfills a spiritual moment. Not everyone can go to visit a saint’s tomb.

“That’s why we bring this spiritual sign of Padre Pio to them so that they may feel closer to Padre Pio and ask his intercession for their health or for carrying their own cross throughout their life,” Lamonarca said.

He said the faithful do not have to pray directly in front of the relics; simply praying anywhere in the basilica can be a form of veneration. He said visitors will be allowed to touch the reliquaries containing the relics, and can touch a prayer card, holy medal or rosary to the reliquary. Canon law holds that an item touched to a first- or second-class relic becomes a third-class relic of the saint.

For more information on Padre Pio and a schedule of events, visit www.saintpiofoundation.org.

Listen to an extended conversation with Luciano Lamonarca about the life of St. Pio of Pietrelcina on the “Catholic Baltimore” radio show below.