

A Saint's Work for the Sick - 13 June 2002 - San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy (ZENIT.org-Avvenire)

Interview with Monsignor Riccardo Ruotolo

Padre Pio left humanity two special gifts: the House for the Relief of Suffering, a center for medical and spiritual assistance in this southern Italian town; and the Prayer Groups scattered throughout the world.

The director of both these legacies today is Monsignor Riccardo Ruotolo. Here, he talks about his experience: "Padre Pio wished to leave the clinic to the Holy See. Padre Pio said, 'If I leave the work in the Pope's hands I am certain it will not fail.'"

Q: A gift involving commitment ...

Monsignor Ruotolo: I knew nothing about hospitals. I said this to Cardinal Giuseppe Caprio when he asked me to come here, on Dec. 15, 1977, to study the situation. I told him I had never even been in San Giovanni Rotondo.

Q: And what did the substitute of the Vatican State secretariat reply to you?

Monsignor Ruotolo: "Good, so you go there with a fresh mind, free of prejudices." He asked me to make a report in six months. The Holy See had to decide if it was to keep the administration of the House of Relief or hand it over to the regional government.

Q: Were there debts?

Monsignor Ruotolo: Six months later, when I presented the financial report, I had paid those debts and come to an agreement with the region. The then Monsignor Caprio told me: Good. Now go back to San Giovanni Rotondo and continue to work.

Q: You have been there for 25 years.

Monsignor Ruotolo: Providence decides.

Q: And what have you accomplished in these years?

Monsignor Ruotolo: I have tried to respect faithfully Padre Pio's wish. On May 5, 1957, he expressed in writing the plan, the hope, to double the number of beds. Today the beds have trebled, thanks to the faithful's donations: There are more than 1,000.

Q: So far as I know, the House of Relief is the only hospital where there are guided tours: from the kitchens to the operating theaters. The visitor can see it all.

Monsignor Ruotolo: It is the first hospital in the south of Italy in terms of attracting patients. Twenty-three percent of those hospitalized and patients come from outside the region, including from the North; especially in the oncological sector, which in addition to 34 beds in the department, has a day-clinic with 20 beds; medical visits, examinations, treatments. We have four nuclear accelerators to shorten the waiting lists.

Q: To shorten the waiting lists?

Monsignor Ruotolo: We are trying to do away with them. I think we are the first hospital in Italy to do so.

Q: Is this due to good administration or to a miracle of Padre Pio?

Monsignor Ruotolo: Listen, that question was already asked of Padre Pio: "When you are no longer here, what will happen to this gigantic work?" his friends would ask him. And he would answer: "When I am no longer here, I will pray to Providence, who will help you more and better than at present."

Q: Is there some evidence of this intervention?

Monsignor Ruotolo: Who knows, perhaps Mr. Krupp.

Q: Mr. Krupp?

Monsignor Ruotolo: Gary Krupp, an American Jew from New York, is the intermediary of advanced electromedical equipment: He has helped us get nuclear medicine machines, radiology equipment, two new mammographic machines. He says he is "in love" with Padre Pio and gives us a hand.

Q: A hand?

Monsignor Ruotolo: For example, he arranged for us to get a discount of more than \$1 million on the magnetic resonance machine. He has often said publicly that he is "in love" with Padre Pio.

