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To the Heights: A Novel Based on the Life of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati

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## Prologue

When Saint Benedict Press approached me about this project, my immediate reaction was one of hesitation. How do you tell the story of a real-life, historical figure, especially one as holy as Pier Giorgio Frassati? How do you do him justice and display his virtues accurately? How do you take what biographical information we have and weave it together, while doing your best to fill in the gaps? To the Heights: A Novel Based on the Life of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati of what we don't know? How do you speak for a man on the path to sainthood, a man revered by Popes?

These troubling questions kept me awake for nearly a week. Luckily, I had a newborn baby to keep me company on those sleepless nights.

But above these issues was a dilemma trumping them all—the opposing option was far worse. To decline the offer meant forfeiting an amazing opportunity. Could I let such a chance pass me by, to not only learn more about Pier Giorgio Frassati myself, but also bring him to thousands of others? As with many matters throughout our lives, clarity came through prayer, and here I am writing *To the Heights: A Novel Based on the Life of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati* this just over a year later.

The burden of sitting down to write a biography is certainly a difficult one, but to write a historical fiction novel bleeds over into something else. There are different challenges, different rules, and even more people scrutinizing your work. A writer opens himself up to criticism with each word he writes, a truth only exaggerated when writing about a historical figure.

So why embark on such a project? Why not just write a biography?

There is certainly a place for biographies in the libraries and bookshelves of our world, especially of the Saints. They are informative, inspirational, and integral to spreading the Faith. But most are not told through the medium of a story, and there is nothing more powerful than this; one need only look to the greatest Teacher we've ever known, who chose to teach in parables.

There is no denying biographies have the ability to teach us many things about the colossal figures of our past, lessons we may even be able to apply to our own lives. But does it have the ability to make us cry the way a story can? Does it journey into the caverns of our soul, where the deepest truths hide, and bring those truths back to the surface?

I have always felt that reading a biography, or any non-fiction book, is like looking through a pair of binoculars, while reading fiction is like looking through a kaleidoscope. In both cases you're presenting something new to your senses, but the binoculars merely draw you closer to a reality that is a distant part of the world.

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Heights: A Novel Based on the Life of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati of *this* world, while the kaleidoscope draws you closer to the possible realities of the world beyond, where lights and colors dazzle in such a way we are not accustomed to here on earth. The beauty of historical fiction is that it combines the two, so that perhaps you're looking through the lens of a telescope at the glittering lights of the cosmos, helping you to make sense of your humble place in the universe. But beyond any poetic analogy that can be made, the truth is that when you fall into a story, your own story begins to have more meaning.

It's To the Heights: A Novel Based on the Life of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati my hope that in relaying the life of a young man like Pier Giorgio Frassati through the prism of a story, we can come to know him better than we would in the pages of a biography, or even a book of his own letters. We can place ourselves in his shoes, relate to him, and view life through his eyes. His experiences become *our* experiences, and he holds our hand as we learn from them.

But the reader must not forget that this is a fictional novel. Artistic liberties had to be taken to fill To the Heights: A Novel Based on the Life of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati in the day-to-day details of Pier Giorgio's life. Much of what we know about him comes from the many letters he wrote to family and friends. But a novel about a young man sitting down to pen dozens of letters simply would not work. Therefore, it was necessary, at times, to make reasonable conjectures, both to connect the dots of his life and to ensure the story flows in an engaging and compelling fashion. I've taken the facts, letters, and verifiable episodes from his life and blended them together into what I hope is a story that will give the reader a chance to know Pier Giorgio in a whole new light.

Throughout the course of my research, I began to see just how important Pier Giorgio was, and how vital it was that his narrative spread to the masses. He devoted much of his life to works of charity, spending a great deal of time in the ghettos of Turin with the poor and sick, and was an avid believer in the importance of the sacraments and devotion to Our Lady.

But beyond his spiritual life, he was a good-looking, charismatic, and popular young man who loved to disappear in the rugged Alps of Northern Italy, climbing toward the heights and above the clouds. He had dozens of friends, girls loved him, and he possessed an eternal zest and optimistic attitude in everything he did. To use a modern term, he was simply "cool." There is a quote attributed to Pope St. John Paul II where he claims that the Church needs saints who wear jeans and sneakers instead of veils and cassocks, and saints who eat pizza and go to the movies. If our late Holy Father truly said this, he needn't look further than to this To the Heights: A Novel Based on the Life of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati young Italian.

Pier Giorgio was also bold enough to get his hands dirty when he spoke out passionately against the evils of Fascism, even coming to blows with Mussolini's thugs on numerous occasions. But perhaps most fascinating of all, he carried a unique cross in the form of high-society To the Heights: A Novel Based on the Life of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati parents who actually frowned upon his intense love of the Catholic Church, doing their To the Heights: A Novel Based on the Life of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati best To the Heights: A Novel Based on the Life of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati to steer him away from his religious practices and charitable work.

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## To The Heights A Novel Based On The Life Of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati

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