

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

National Office

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

One of the more well-known of Padre Pio's spiritual daughters from the first years of his priesthood was Raffaolina Cerase. There is a volume of correspondence between Padre Pio and Raffaolina filled with intense counsels concerning the spiritual life and her personal journey of faith. Raffaolina writes openly and Padre Pio responds without hesitation and rather extensively. Raffaolina entered into her relationship with Padre Pio late in life. She knew him briefly before she suffered an incurable illness and ultimately died from it, assisted by Padre Agostino, Padre Pio's spiritual director. Padre Pio guided her and assisted her in her sufferings and pain through his prayers and letters. She was a profoundly devoted and obedient spiritual daughter. During her trials and sufferings, Padre Pio writes: *Let us be consoled when we find ourselves continually oppressed by suffering. Let us thank the divine mercy which makes us sharers in the Passion and Death of our Divine Master. Until we are able to say: 'This Christian is another Christ,' do not let us pause in our ascent of the Hill of Calvary. Let us remember, when we are suffering torment, when we are attacked by Satan, that after Calvary comes Tabor, so that we may not yield to his promptings.* (Letter of September 19, 1914)

Pain and suffering have always been 'problems' for human beings. We all know they are facts of life *from whom no one can escape* (cfr. *Canticle of the Creatures* of St. Francis of Assisi). What we know about suffering and pain, we are convinced beyond a doubt regarding death and dying. Death is the mystery we will understand only when we experience it; and when we do, we cannot tell anyone else about it. Even souls who appeared to persons still on earth, including those who appeared to Padre Pio, never told anyone what death was like. They stated only where they were, why they had appeared, and asked prayers for their quick liberation from Purgatory. Even Sacred Scripture that relates the accounts of several persons being raised from the dead in the Old Testament by Elijah, in the New Testament by Jesus Himself, Peter, John, and Paul, never offers any insight as to their experience. The ultimate act of Faith before entering eternity is the resignation and acceptance of letting go of life to gain Life. That is why those with no faith and those whose faith is more formality, social expression, moral responsibility, and the like, instead of a struggled yet authentic experience, fear the moment of separation leading from time to eternity.

In the Old Testament, the Book of Job presents so eloquently and simply the trials and struggles of a good man, blessed by God in many ways, who loses all he has, including his loved ones, except his wife. He feels himself tested by God, author of his blessings, beyond his strength and for no apparent reason. Job laments his condition and then expresses resignation, acceptance, and faith in God, regardless of how he believes God is treating him. In the Book of Job we read: *O that my words were written down! ... O that they were engraved on a rock forever! But as for me, I know my Vindicator lives ... Whom I myself shall see: my own eyes, not another's, shall behold him, and from my flesh I shall see God; my inmost being is consumed with longing.* (Job 19: 23-26). Though he expresses an initial acceptance of his condition, his situation overpowers him. His friends, who came to console Job, end up accusing him of some wrongdoing towards God that merit his suffering; at that point, Job questions God's actions. God poses questions for Job's reflection and response. Ultimately, Job reconfirms his unconditional faith in God. We know from the story what Job has to say about pain, suffering, and death. He was raked with pain and suffering to the point of cursing the day he was born: *Let the day perish in which I was born,... Let that day be darkness!* (Job 3: 3-4) In the end his suffering and pain that challenged his faith and perseverance help him acknowledge that pain and death are not a tragedy for the innocent one, but a challenge to grow beyond the 'comfort zone' one creates, into an authentic act of faith and trust in

God. God, Father and Creator, knows us personally; God cares and provides for each one.

Aware of the reality and our personal involvement in the mystery of death, how often we Christians may feel like Job. We question, barter with, blame God for the 'bad' things that happen to others as well as to us. But, the Christian is enlightened by the assurance of the Faith that tells us Jesus lived, was sacrificed to death for all humanity, and arose to Life. St. Paul himself reminds the community of Rome: *And hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly ... While we were still sinners, Christ died for us ... We have been justified by His blood ... We even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation.* (Romans 5: 5-11) This is the great God to Whom we entrust ourselves and all those who have gone before us. With unselfish love we offer ourselves to God Who is for us, for me, for every child of His Creation. It is this God Who has given us the most excellent means to enter His loving embrace with joyful anticipation - Jesus. And Jesus establishes a perpetual means to keep that the promise and pledge alive - the Eucharist.

Jesus said: *I am the living bread come down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.* (John 6: 51) When we gather around the Eucharist, sacrifice and sacrament of the Lord Jesus Christ, we reaffirm our faith in Life; we encounter death and dying with serenity and even joy; we let go of a lifetime of false securities that we might be 'poor in the things of this world but rich in those of heaven'; we break the shackles of the responsibilities and affairs that seem so important in this, life with the freedom of the children of God who remember that *we have here no lasting city, but we seek one that is to come.* (Hebrews 13: 14); we speak of ourselves *to be strangers and pilgrims on earth ... seeking a homeland* (Hebrews 11: 13)... We accept everything as a gift that we may offer each moment of life as a 'gift' for others to share with us; we see, as did Saint Francis of Assisi, everything in creation as intimately related to us because of God and so can even call on *Sister Bodily Death from whom no human can escape* with the trust and acceptance of Francis' *Canticum of the Creatures*, where St. Francis added these words praising God in 'Sister Bodily Death' shortly before his own death. In the Eucharist we discover the source and pledge of Life. The Eucharist is our defiance of death. In the Eucharist our concerns and confusions are clarified, our discouragements and despair are dispelled, our faults are forgiven, our self-centeredness is embraced with a love that opens our hearts to all. How much more can we say about this 'heaven on earth' we are privileged to possess, celebrate, and 'become' when our hearts and souls prepare for the encounter!

The month of November is dedicated to the souls who have entered eternity: the Saints in glory and the Souls in God's Mercy in Purgatory who are saved but await the fullness of eternal glory. Our Christian Charity and Catholic teaching remind us that these souls are always in need of our assistance through prayer and sacrifice. Padre Pio himself always advocated the prayer of Reparation through sacrifice for ourselves and for the Souls in Purgatory. We become, as I mentioned several times in other letters, 'victims' with Jesus, the Victim for our Salvation.

The Eucharist is 'communion'. Isn't that what we call It - Holy Communion? Death is separation and detachment, but the Death-Resurrection of Jesus in the Eucharist re-presented at every Liturgy, binds us to Christ and one another, and fills us with the graces of God's Love and Life. The Eucharist is Communion and Life! The Eucharist introduces us to acknowledge death as the mystery of Life it really is. It embraces all who celebrate the Lamb Sacrificed and shared in the Paschal Mystery of the Passion-Death-Resurrection of Jesus, thus making Eternal Life the destination of all who 'Live Jesus' in time, and pass through the doorway of death into 'timelessness'.

The Eucharist is 'sacrifice'. The word 'sacrifice' means to 'make sacred'. When we unite ourselves and our lives to that of Jesus, we become the one we offer. The more we enter the 'sacrifice' with Jesus, the more we are assured of a share in His everlasting Life. Thus *life is not ended but transformed* (Preface I for the Dead).

The Eucharist is a 'pledge of future glory'. Each time we celebrate the Eucharist and receive the Body and Blood of Christ we share, according to our cooperation with God's grace, in the mystery of 'heaven on earth'. We live in mystery the Life we are called to share in the fullness of its reality. In faith, we live in hope - the pledge - of sharing in God's eternal Love. *For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance* (Romans 8:24).

In writing to Padre Agostino, Padre Pio writes: *The soul will not enter into its eternal rest until it is lost forever in that*

vast ocean of goodness where it will know what God knows, love what He loves and will only enjoy what is a joy to him ... O my Jesus, I will live and hope and silence will be my strength as long as this life lasts. (September 18, 1915)

To Padre Benedetto, Padre Pio writes: *To love God is the consequence of all awareness in active faith, into whose promises the soul plunges to be refreshed and to abandon itself to repose in sweet hope ... to induce further hunger and thirst and need of God. But may His will be done, I repeat continually and I long for nothing else but the perfect fulfillment of this will in the precise manner He demands, generously and firmly.* (June 19, 1918) *I am ready for anything, I strive to prepare myself for anything that may come ... O Way, Truth and Life, give me what my soul needs ... I have no more hope in anything except in the One Who is the Life, the Truth and the Way. I ask everything of Him and to Him I abandon myself since He has been and is everything to me.* (August 21, 1918)

Padre Pio offers his Spiritual Children the way to live life and anticipate eternity. We are to get 'lost forever in that vast ocean of goodness' Who is Jesus in His word and particularly in the Eucharist. As we consume the Victim, we are consumed and are 'lost' to this world and found in Him, living already the 'pledge of future glory'. The spiritual effect of hope then fills our hearts and our minds with the assurance of God's presence so that we can have a greater inner peace and serenity. Strengthened inwardly, we are empowered to confront challenges, bear burdens, eliminate enemies through Christian love, entrust ourselves totally and unreservedly to God Who 'has been and is everything to me'. Should these not be our attitudes in life, especially during a month that speaks of our need to Respect life at all its stages from conception to natural death and to anticipate with *joyful expectation the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Prayer after the Our Father at Mass) Who calls us and leads us to Life through the common experience of bodily death!?

The thought of the Holy Souls in Purgatory should help us celebrate God's mercy and the Life He promises we will share with Him. Praying for the Holy Souls should help us reflect more deeply on the mystery of the Communion of Saints that we are part of 'in hope', as the Pilgrim People of God, journeying through the desert of time till we cross the waters that separate us from our true Home. The month of the Holy Souls is also the last month of the Church; November leads us into the beginning of a new liturgical year. Every end signals a new beginning! Too often we think only of the fact of dying, and physically 'being no more'. That is not Christian ... not Catholic! Jesus is Life ... even His Death celebrates the newness of Life! Christianity believes and lives The Life - Christ! The Catholic professes to be an 'original' Christian, thus one who lives Christ. A Spiritual Child of Padre Pio, a Christian, a Catholic, a person committed to a deeper relationship with God through prayer-sacrifice-acts of charity, professes by the mere fact of these elements to live in hope, a hope that does not delude. It is a 'vision' of fulfillment yet to be possessed, but already available to those who 'Live Jesus'. Let us all remember this when we pray for the Holy Souls. May the reality of death not shake us, but strengthen our trust in God Who calls us to life, and from life to Life.

May God bless you; may Our Lady guide, guard, and protect you; and may Padre Pio look upon each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings
Fr. Francis A. Sariego, O.F.M. Cap.
National Coordinator