

# Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

May the Lord grant you peace!

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it ... He came to what was his own, but his own did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave the power to become children of God ... And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory of the Father's only Son full of grace and truth. (John 1: 1-14)*

The society in which we live is filled with words. Everyone seems to have something to say. Those who speak these words often remind us that we are 'entitled to their opinions'. In fact, we are more often than not expected to take their words to heart and do whatever is proposed. Commercials expect us to buy the product advertised. Millions of dollars are spent to 'push' some medical 'breakthrough' or pharmaceutical remedy as a miracle drug for what ails you, even when the counter warnings that must legally be presented are quite disconcerting not to say frightening; still these products are bought to the billions of dollars, regardless of the possible dangerous, harmful or even fatal effects. Newspapers and news broadcasts saturate us with information, often about less important, insignificant matters or even opinionated editorials, when we would rather want to be made aware of more significant events and objective comments of pressing local, national and worldwide interest that in fact do or most possibly will affect our lives. Sermons and homilies are delivered in a manner that captivates the listeners' attention and opens their hearts to remember what was presented to them, but the words many times are knowledgeably and beautifully delivered but do not challenge the listener; no one wants to 'make waves', so something good, correct and 'nice' is spoken, but it is often a word that will not set the soul afire with enthusiasm to be a 'living gospel message'.

There is nothing essentially wrong or sinful with speaking with one another, having an opinion in which one believes firmly, marketing products, researching and 'experimenting' medicines intended to help better our human condition, informing people of current events, following one's own conscience, speaking with people of faith matters in an encouraging and uplifting manner ... or even writing monthly circular letters intended to inform, instruct and, God willing, inspire people to accept the challenge every day to improve our relationship with God and others. All these, and many other examples you are no doubtedly able to list, are intended for good. How we cooperate with the words we hear or read will determine the good or not so good, or even the bad effect we allow them to have on our lives. The Word is necessary to communicate, and it seeks a response; even silence can be a very powerful response.

Scripture class in Seminary was always an interesting event. The professor held our attention. One fact we were reminded of was that *We are People of the Word*. We may not have heard this specific expression given us Catholics, but it is a fact. Whether we have heard it or not, this is what we are. The faith we share was first spoken to both the simple as well as the educated people. They listened to the message (the *Good News*), reflected upon it, and ultimately decided to accept or reject what was proclaimed to them. Once the words spoken were accepted, the next step was to concretize them in life. Until we read and allow the Lord Jesus to be 'enfleshed' in our lives by following His teachings and example, we can never truly be fully a 'People of the Word'.

In a letter to Antonietta Vona (February 14, 1918), Padre Pio writes: *In order to imitate Him, we must reflect each day*

*on the life of the One we intend to take as our model. From reflection is born esteem for His acts, and from esteem springs the desire and consolation of imitation.* Several years later, in a letter to Erminia Gargani (January 17, 1921), he writes: *Jesus is and will always be yours and nobody will take Him from you. Isn't this sufficient for you? Assiduously study Jesus Christ and His divine doctrine, and follow his illustrious example which He places before us as a model, in divine Scripture, and do not fear the roaring tempest, which is permitted by God as a countersign of His predilection for your soul.*

Padre Pio makes it quite clear to his spiritual daughters that the Word must be the first rule of life. Unless we know the Lord we will never be able to follow Him. His words must be rooted in our hearts for us to live the Lord Jesus. This past Christmas season we celebrated the God of creation Who was 'enfleshed' (incarnated) in human history. To do so, God took on our nature; *He became one with us in all things but sin.* God took on the best of all He created. Sin was not a part of God's creation because sin is un-natural; it was not part of the 'original model'. Sin is a consequence of disobedience and not the product of God's creative Love. God, the All-Good, All-Holy, created us for goodness and in goodness. Our first parents sinned and caused all their descendants to suffer the effects of their act of insubordinate self-centeredness. At Mass the priest celebrant prays when he mixes the water and wine before offering the chalice: *By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.* Christ entered creation that we might find our way back to original goodness by becoming one with Him through grace in the Holy Spirit, by listening to His Word and following His example.

There was an amusing game on TV a good number of years ago. There were few channels then and TV programs were in black and white. The game consisted in a group of ten or more people standing shoulder to shoulder. The first person in the line was told a story whispered in their ear. Then that person was to whisper the same story, exactly, into the ear of the person next to him/her. By the time the last person heard the story it was totally different than the original. That is what can happen with us when we are inattentive to the Word of God we hear and read, or when we carelessly proclaim and spread God's Word, and use that Word to foster and promote personal issues and agendas, rather than keep faithful to the integrity of the message. The test was rather amusing when the final story eventually emerged from the lips of the last one in the line. When this happens in real life, however, and possibly leads to misunderstandings and exaggerations that direct our lives, the problem can be quite serious.

Individuals naturally are more 'intuned' to hear what they expect or want. This happens in religious organizations, political gatherings, social groupings, churches, and even in The Church. In the Catholic Church it is the guidance of the Holy Spirit that gives the grace of infallibility in matters of faith and morals to the Holy Father, Successor to St. Peter and Vicar of Christ for the sake of Christ's Body, the Church, founded on the faith of St. Peter. Our Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi placed great trust and confidence in the presence of the Holy Spirit and His holy operation. St. Francis went too far as to tell the brothers that the Holy Spirit was the true Minister General of the Order (cfr. 2 Celano, chpt. CXLV). Notwithstanding, the words proclaimed in their original form, when 'translated' to meet the 'needs of the times, persons, places, or things, etc.' can undergo an alteration that affects their original meaning. There are many safeguards in the Church to avoid 'misunderstandings'. Nevertheless: What happens when we read but do not perceive? What happens when we hear but do not listen? What happens when we proclaim but do not live? What happens when we, like *sounding gongs and clanging cymbals*, repeat correctly all the proper words that indicate what we have been taught and have said we will accept, but then live as though we have heard nothing new, nor allowed our lives to be transformed by the power of the Word, Whose words are *spirit and life*?

Padre Pio, following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, was also an advocate of respect for the Word. His letters and instructions were often enforced by quotes from Sacred Scripture. In the brief comments to his spiritual daughters quoted above, Padre Pio makes it clear that the journey to perfection is rooted in faithfulness to Jesus and His words. The thousands over the years who sought to be his spiritual children were always directed to Jesus. Where can Jesus be known? Where can we understand what God wants of us? Where can we see the road that leads to fulfillment and Life? These questions and many more find their answer in Sacred Scripture and the life and words of our Lord Jesus Christ. God's Word offers a true *Form of Life* for all to live. To follow Jesus is to follow the Gospel; and to follow the Gospel is to be a living image of Jesus. It is in living the Word *without gloss* that we allow the Word to come alive in, with, and through us.

As spiritual children of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, we have accepted the call to holiness, the call to live the Gospel Life,

according to our state in life. As *People of the Word*, if we have not already done so, we must let the Word of God written for us to read and meditate, and the Word of God, Jesus the Christ, enfleshed in human nature in all things but sin, be the guiding force of our lives. Even the simple statutes of our worldwide Association of the Prayer Groups of Padre Pio, studied and approved by Holy Mother Church and offered for us to follow, give us opportunities to progress in *Spirit and Life*. Padre Pio had definite intentions for his Prayer Groups to follow that would help them progress in the spiritual life. Do not let convenience or human respect lead you to betray the original and effective all-embracing spirit of our Association. One basic expectation re-affirmed and promoted by the Association of Padre Pio's Prayer Groups is the responsibility to gather for Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, Rosary, Faith sharing in the presence of a priest at least monthly, charitable care for one another and the needy, and also to seek ways to grow in our Catholic Christian faith. By 'Catholic', I do not refer to the Catholic 'card holder, baptized in the Roman Catholic Church'. By 'Catholic' I refer to the person baptized into the Roman Catholic expression of Christianity who seeks to be faithful to Scripture, Tradition, the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, and who willingly strives to be an affirming presence in the world, wherever and however God has asked that person to be.

We have begun the New Year. What lies ahead of us is in the hands of God. May we re-commit ourselves as spiritual children of Padre Pio to further our knowledge and love of God's Word in Scripture. In understanding Scripture more profoundly, we understand more deeply who we are as a People of God and how Jesus in His Church and Sacraments can truly 'come alive' in our world. In view of this, a new spiritual suggestion is being added to the monthly calendar. Following a daily division of Sacred Scripture, every month, readings from the Bible will be suggested for daily reading and reflection; together with these, and for our formation in Catholic Doctrine, numbers that refer to paragraphs in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* will also be suggested for daily reading. Faithfully reading and reflecting on the proposed citations - some may be lengthy - you will have read all of Sacred Scripture and the entire Catholic Catechism in one calendar year. The monthly letters, calendars and prayers, and now these Scripture and Catechism passages, are suggestions that hopefully will assist you on your spiritual journey and, in so doing, also help to create an awareness of our unity in the spirit of prayer and reflection will remaining diverse and unique in our particular Prayer Groups.

Just as *His own did not receive Him*, as St. John tells us, there are those who do not accept to take on the challenge to live Jesus, to live the Gospel life with joy, and to surrender to the Word. *The Word was made flesh* and must be enfleshed in each one of us. As He came *and dwelled among us*, others should be able to see Him through us, and know that Jesus is alive and well on earth not only in the Eucharist but also in those who live His Word. Thus, to those who come to believe in Him through the example of a spiritual child of Padre Pio who trusts in the power God's Word offers them, may receive from Christ *the power to become the children of God*. These children of God will *see His glory, the glory of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth*, alive in their hearts, transforming their lives and those of others. There is infinite might and transforming power in the Word. May that Word, who entered time with us that we might enter eternity with Him, be your guiding force each day. And may the Eucharist, great gift of the Word through the Spirit, allow the Mystery of the Incarnation you celebrate and receive, to fill you with graces of the Holy Spirit and give you peace in the Father's love, mercy and providence.

My prayers are with all of you and your loved ones for a most blessed and peace-filled New Year 2011. May God bless you; Our Lady guide, guard, and protect you; and Padre Pio watch over each one of us, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

Remembering the words of St. Jerome: *Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ*, we can take that saying further, as can be seen on some Church signs: **No Christ, No Peace! KNOW CHRIST, KNOW PEACE!** May we make this a **Year of the Word** for us to get to Know Christ that we may Know His Peace in our hearts, homes, and the world around us. **Jesus, our peace, does not disappoint anyone who places his/her trust in Him. Lord, this year and always, we place our trust in You!** May the Peace, Joy, Blessings ... and Love of the Lord fill your hearts and those of your loved ones. Happy New Year to all!

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