

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

National Office

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

There is no conflict between faith and reason. Unfortunately, many of "the wise" and "the intelligent" form their own vision of the world and of God. Faith is put on the 'back burner' if any place at all, and reason is the only thing that matters. They believe they know God and have the ultimate answer as to who God is and what God is all about. They do not need the "Good News", because they already know and possess it by reason. (paraphrase - J.P.II, Il Progetto di Dio) This attitude has always been present among certain types of individuals, even at the time of Jesus. *They knew what they knew and knew that it was all there was to know at the time!* Even these persons, free thinkers, self-proclaimed authorities, Jesus did not ask to renounce their God-given gift of human reason. What He did warn all people about, especially those gifted with a greater knowledge and introspection, was to be aware not to fall into the trap of the evil one who continues to seduce us by making us think we can *be like God*. (Genesis 3: 5)

Creation speaks to us of God. The human mind, through experience, can come to know there is a God, but it is faith that opens our hearts, souls, and minds to deepen our knowledge and awareness of the magnificence of our Creator, our Redeemer, and the ever-present Advocate-Guide-Sanctifier. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are known to us and we enter an intimate relationship with this sublime Trinity through God's revelation of Himself through Jesus in the Spirit. Thus, Faith responds to Revelation. Once we have read God's Word in Scripture and recognized His work and attributes in Creation, faith leads us to accept and live the message God speaks to us through these. In a sense *Sacred Scripture requires faith as a response to revelation*. God calls us to faith, and this call of God is through creation; it is a response in time directed toward eternity. Believing is accepting God as creator, liberator, protector, savior. Belief is recognizing Jesus through His death and resurrection: *This Jesus, God raised from the dead. And we are all witnesses to this ... therefore, let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus Whom you crucified.* (Acts 2: 32, 36)

Father Pellegrino - know as the 'Jack-of-all-Trades' in a book recounting his time spent with Padre Pio - tells us that Padre Pio continually encouraged him to update himself in theology, but, at the same time reminded him that faith did not depend solely on theological study. In fact, the story is told how one afternoon, after having finished hearing the women's confessions, Father Pellegrino hurried to the library of the friary intent on immersing himself into various theological volumes to deepen his knowledge of matters his professors had suggested he study more deeply. To get to the library, he had to pass through the friars' choir where the crucifix of the stigmata was located. Padre Pio was there in prayer before Blessed Sacrament. Father Pellegrino, not to waste time, hurried through the choir without giving thought to the fact that he was running past the Blessed Sacrament. Padre Pio called out to him immediately: *Will you at least genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament?!* He turned around and made a genuflection, even if only for formality's sake, because he was in a hurry and did not want another reprimand. Once in the library Father Pellegrino began his 'research' of the texts he planned on reviewing. As he began his reading, he could hear his professors saying to him: *You need Padre Pio to open that head of yours to understand these sacred things*. He enjoyed the solitude and was happy to be alone, without distractions, when, all of a sudden, Padre Pio arrived. *What are you doing?*, he said.

Father Pellegrino told Padre Pio that after all the reprimands he had given him he had decided to study theology more intently. Padre Pio responded, *When did I ever tell you that the study of theology would help you grow in faith?! If that were the case, all theologians would be rich in faith, while we know that some of them do not even believe in fresh water*. Looking at all the books that Father Pellegrino had placed before him, Padre Pio told him that he resembled a 'Don Quixote of theology'. Father Pellegrino understood. He put the books back, and with head down, went to his room to read another book: **Jesus Crucified**. He had been corrected again, but he was happy; he had learned the

meaning of true knowledge and had also made Padre Pio smile.

Padre Pio was aware of the spiritual difficulties his brothers went through. He had his own to endure as well. He found his comfort and solace only in God, and sought always to encourage others to trust. We have one of many such examples in a letter to one of his spiritual daughters, Assunta di Tomaso: *I am extremely sorry to hear you are experiencing such a harsh spiritual struggle. Take heart, my daughter, Jesus will not leave you without comfort or reward. I am with you up the hill to Calvary. Try to look after your health and get well soon.* (undated letter)

Padre Pio knew quite well what the Church taught concerning the attributes of God. He studied the sacred texts, theology manuals, and continually meditated on Sacred Scripture. But he did not limit himself to study. His motto was: *In books we search for God, in prayer we find Him.* The core of his meditation was the love of God the Father Who sacrificed His only begotten Son for the salvation of all humanity. In Christ and in Christ Crucified there is salvation. This depth of Padre Pio's faith in Christ Crucified urged him to write to his spiritual daughter Maria Gargani, who was suffering a great deal: *My daughter, I could not be pleased with you if I did not see you so tested. Take heart, bless the hand that afflicts you for the sole purpose of sanctifying you and rendering you similar to His only begotten Son. Don't believe that the Lord is irritated with you and therefore subjects you to such harsh trials. You would be greatly mistaken in this. The Lord wants to test your fidelity; he wants to inebriate you with the cross of His Son; He wants to purify you; he wants to increase your palm and your crown. Remember and keep well impressed in your mind that Calvary is the hill of the saints but remember that after having climbed Calvary, the cross having been erected and you having died on it, you immediately ascend another mount, called Tabor, the heavenly Jerusalem.* (8 September 1916)

Years before Padre Pio wrote these words to Maria Gargani, Padre Benedetto wrote to Padre Pio: *It consoles me to hear that the storms are increasing because this is a sign that God's kingdom is being established within you. Temptations are a sure sign of divine favor and the fact that you fear them is the clearest proof that you do not yield to them. Keep cheerful then and do not be discouraged. The more violently the enemy attacks you the more you must abandon yourself to the Lord, confident that he will never allow you to be overcome, according to the words: 'God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it'.*(1 Corinthians 10: 13) ... *Is not the goodness of our God beyond all our imaginings? Isn't he more concerned than we are for our salvation? When we think of his love for us and his zeal for our well-being, we must remain calm and never doubt that he will always protect us with fatherly care against all our enemies.* (Padre Benedetto to Padre Pio 28 October 1910)

Serenity in the midst of trouble is a wonderful witness of a faith that continues to trust in the love of an eternally-loving, ever-present and all-providing God. Reason may help us to know that God exists, but it is our faith that leads us into a relationship with life-giving Love. It is this Love that fills the hearts of those who search for Him. It is this Love that is mysterious in His nature but accessible through His works. It is this Love that we seek to know and understand more during life's journey so that when time meets eternity in death we can joyfully, trustingly, and lovingly 'let go' and let this Eternal Love embrace us with a fullness we could never have imagined. This Love, Who is God, the Father-Creator, the Only-Begotten-Son-Redeemer, the Holy Spirit-Advocate-Sanctifier, can be studied about in books, discussed with others to deepen our human knowledge, but can be personally known, loved and lived only when we abandon ourselves to that Love and surrender to His Infinite Will.

As he did with Father Pellegrino, Padre Pio reminds us to go beyond trying to learn about many spiritual things, and to be spiritual. Spirituality is not reading and knowing the writings of all the mystics, or knowing the prophecies of all the visionaries, though they may be interesting, helpful or even necessary for us to know. Yet, though Padre Pio was privileged to have insights from God regarding future events, he still directed souls to live holy lives in the present and to trust God in all things, and resign themselves to His most Holy Will. Facts only accumulate with other facts whether theological, spiritual, or what have you. The 'book' that makes all others more understandable is the 'book' of Christ Crucified. Reading that 'book' and learning its message well increases faith, rekindles hope, and leads us into a transforming intimacy with Eternal Love and the Source of Life.

Trust God unconditionally. Believe God is Who God is. Abandon yourselves to God's loving providence and accept all that God permits to come your way. The excerpts of the letters of Padre Pio to his spiritual daughters and that of Padre Benedetto to Padre Pio quoted above, enforce our need to recognize, even in our sufferings and pain, whether spiritual or physical, God's way of purifying us. This purification leads us to a more transparent relationship with God and our neighbor because in God we have become transparent to ourselves. We have come to know ourselves better because we see ourselves in the knowledge we have of God. St. Francis of Assisi says: *You are who you are before God and nothing more.* Knowing God more deeply through prayer, meditation, God's Word, and celebrating and receiving the Eucharist often and worthily, strengthens our faith, focuses our vision, clarifies our reasoning, confirms our trust in God's will - direct or indirect - calms our fears, establishes inner peace and serenity, generates inner joy.

The 'process' becomes more intense, as we seek to respond to God's will without reserve. God calls and challenges us to go beyond the limitations caused by our fears, hesitation, caution, or perhaps even our indifference or spiritual lethargy. What God asks of us is based on what God knows about us. Let us remember that God sees the 'whole picture'; we see only the 'now'. True faith enkindles our hope in the One in Whom we responsibly commit ourselves to risk all the world holds dear - power, prestige, possessions. We let go of fearful caution, we 'ride the wave' of God's will, and we experience the exciting fulfillment of all God wants us to be.

The Spiritual Children of Padre Pio know from the example of our Father and Guide how necessary it is to enter the mystery of Christ Crucified before we can recognize the miracles of grace that surround us. All too often people go in search of extraordinary expressions of God's Love yet fail to see and acknowledge the magnificence of God's presence at work every moment, especially in the daily responsibilities, where, with God's grace, we go beyond our limitations and fears. Human reason and logic tell us to be careful, think things out, take time. Do not be overcome by fear of failure; do not accept mediocrity and lukewarmness; believe, trust, and act without hesitation in the Name of God Who strengthens and assists all who surrender to His will.

Padre Pio's famous saying clinches it all: *Pray, hope, and don't worry!* Prayer acknowledges God as the source of all good, thus, believing God is Who He says He is, we cannot help but hope in the One Who loves us, thus, knowing that God makes all things work for the good of those who love Him, and since we strive to love Him, then 'don't worry'! ... because God is on your side ... *if God is for us, then who can be against us?*

My God bless you; Our Lady, guide, guard, and protect you; and Padre Pio watch over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

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