

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio ,

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**The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord let his face shine upon you,
and be gracious to you!
The Lord look upon you kindly
and give you peace!**

These are God's words given to Moses and Aaron as a blessing to be said over the people of Israel. St. Francis of Assisi made this blessing his own and used it often. This same blessing I offer you and all your loved ones as we begin a new year of grace. May we hear His Word and find our strength and our peace in His love, mercy, and providence!

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. Friends may offer suggestions or ideas, solicited or not, and will be easily offended if we opt to follow another opinion or, maybe even our own. 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 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 that one believes firmly, marketing products, researching and 'experimenting' medicines intended to help better our human condition, informing people of current events, suggesting solutions to problems and difficulties, following one's own conscience, speaking with people of faith in an encouraging and uplifting manner ... or even writing monthly circular letters intended to inform, instruct and, God willing, inspire others to accept the challenge each day to improve our relationship with God and others. All these, and many other examples you are undoubtedly able to list, are intended for good. How we cooperate with what we hear or read will determine the good or not so good, or even the bad effect our response will 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. One of the basic facts conveyed to us was that *We are People of the Word*. We may not have heard this specific title given us Catholics, but it truly expresses who we are. The faith we share was first spoken to both the simple as well as the educated people. They listened to a message, reflected upon it, and ultimately committed themselves to accept it. Once the words spoken were accepted, the next step was to concretize them in everyday life. As time passes, if we are not careful to safeguard the authenticity of what

we hear and read, we fall into the danger of losing the integrity of the message. We no longer are who we say we are, nor live what makes us stand out as a People of God, founded on His Words, followers of the Word, Who became one with us that we might one day share Life with Him.

There was an amusing game I remember seeing on TV a good number of years ago; TV programs were few and still in black and white. A group of ten or more people stood shoulder to shoulder. The first person in the line was told a joke to be whispered in the ear of the person next to them so that no one else present could hear what was being said. Then that person was to whisper the same joke, exactly as told them, into the ear of the person next to him/her. Well, by the time the last person heard what was being 'whispered down', the joke was totally different than the original. This is what happens when we are not attentive to what we hear and read. We are called to be faithful in proclaiming and spreading God's Word and His words. We must not use or manipulate the Word to foster and/or promote our own personal issues and agendas. It was amusing to hear the final joke, now totally different, that emerged from the line of people who had 'faithfully repeated' what they had heard. When a distortion of this magnitude happens to the truth in real life, when misunderstandings and exaggerations are passed on as truth, and this 'truth' directs lives, the consequences can be quite serious.

Often, even innocently, individuals hear what they are 'intuned' to hear. This happens in religious organizations, political gatherings, social groupings, churches, and even in The Church. In the 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*. There are many safeguards in the Church to avoid error and 'misunderstandings'. What happens when we read but do not perceive? What happens when we hear but do not listen? What happens when we proclaim and promote but do not live? What happens when we, like *sounding gongs and clashing cymbals*, repeat correctly all the proper words that indicate what we have been taught, but then live as though we have heard nothing, nor have allowed our lives to be transformed by the power of the Word, Whose words are *spirit and life*?

Padre Pio was an advocate of respect for the Word. The first gatherings of his spiritual children, often twice a week, always had as their primary their guiding force in God's holy Word in Scripture. This respect for Sacred Scripture of Padre Pio was rooted in his awareness that all he had become, and all he had offered thousands of others to become in response to God's call, had its beginning in the words he read, heard and meditated to be able to live his life as one who was called *to live the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Rule of St. Francis of Assisi for all Franciscans. He accepted the words of God *without gloss*, and gave himself wholeheartedly to Live Jesus in such a way as to help thousands to let their lives be transformed by the grace of a loving God, Whom they encountered through Padre Pio, the living example of the Lord Jesus. To follow Jesus is to follow the Gospel; and to follow the Gospel is to be a living image of Jesus. Living the Word *without gloss* allows the Word to come alive in, with, and through us who believe It and believe in It.

St. Francis of Assisi wrote: *Because whoever belongs to God hears the words of God, we who are more especially charged with divine responsibilities must not only listen to and do what the Lord says but also care for the vessels and other liturgical objects that contain His holy words in order to impress on ourselves the sublimity of our Creator and our subjection to Him. I, therefore, admonish my brothers and encourage them in Christ to venerate, as best they can, the divine written words wherever they find them ... For many things are made holy by the words of God and the sacrament of the altar is celebrated in the power of the words of Christ* (Letter to the Entire Order).

As spiritual children of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, we are also a *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 for us to follow, be the guiding force of our lives. This Word of God offers us the ability to be spiritual sisters and brothers, not intimidated nor intimidating, ready and trusting enough to be able to express our feelings - happy, sad, annoyed, contrary, and so forth, to one another openly and respectfully at our gatherings and anytime we have occasion to be with each other. The great virtue Paul speaks of regarding Jesus, the Word Incarnate, was His humility *in emptying Himself unto death and unto death on a cross*.

We are 'Catholic', Roman Catholic'. 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 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 take on the commitment because of our faith-filled conviction and Catholic Profession of Faith to read Scripture more often and intently. Just as *His own did not receive Him*, as St. John tells us, there are those who do not accept the challenge of their profession to Live Jesus with joy and surrender to the Word of God. *The Word was made flesh* and must be enfleshed in each one of us. As He came *and dwelled among us*, so that others might be able to see Him through us. So that to those who come

to believe in Him through our example, 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 and transforming the lives of others.

As you can see, there is power in a word, a power that not even hell can destroy or shake. 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 our guiding force each day. And may the Eucharist, great gift of the Word through the Spirit, allow the Mystery of the Incarnation we celebrate and receive to fill us with the graces of the Holy Spirit and always give us 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 2013. May God bless you; Our Lady guide, guard, and protect you; and our Spiritual Father and Founder, St. Pio of Pietrelcina, watch over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

Remembering the words of St. Jerome: *Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ*, we can take that further saying, as can be seen on some Church signs: *No Christ, No Peace! KNOW CHRIST, KNOW PEACE!* May we 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 THEIR TRUST IN HIM. LORD, THIS YEAR AND ALWAYS WE PLACE OUR TRUST IN YOU!*** May the Peace, Joy, Blessings ... and Love of this Season fill your hearts and those of your loved ones. Happy New Year to all!

Peace and Blessings
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