

# Padre Pio Prayer Groups

National Office  
St. Francis of Assisi Friary  
1901 Prior Road  
Wilmington, Delaware 19809

tel: (302) 798-1454

fax: (302) 798-3360

website: [pppg.org](http://pppg.org)

email: [pppgusa@gmail.com](mailto:pppgusa@gmail.com)

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace and lead you  
through the mystery of His Passion and Death  
to the joy of His Resurrection and our Renewed Life in Jesus!

Not many days ago, the whole Catholic world and most of the world who heard the news were surprised at the announcement our Holy Father Benedict XVI made. Pope Benedict informed the Church that as of February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013 he would no longer be the Supreme Pontiff of the Church. For reasons he deemed for the good of the Church and the role She has in the world at this time in history, he will leave the office of Successor to Peter so that the Church, through the College of Cardinals, may elect a successor. As a Family in Christ of people guided by faith and trust in the prompting of the Holy Spirit, we see in all that occurs, even the most surprising events, God's permissive will. Though we were all taken by surprise, the Holy Father, in hindsight on our part, has been preparing the Church for this possibility by some of his comments in talks and actions in the recent past. As we continue our lenten journey, let us remember that nothing happens 'by chance' for those whose senses are alert and whose heart is responsive.

In the history of the Church there have been other renunciations of the Petrine Office before that of Pope Benedict XVI, and each one was for the glory of God and unity and peace among all the faithful.

- Pope Pontian renounced the office while in the mines of Sardinia as did the anti-pope Hippolytus who was sent to the mines as well. As staunch as they were in their 'organizational positions' in Rome, they were even more determined not to deny their faith. They were both exiled by the Roman Emperor to slave labor in the Sardinian mines. They died because of the hardships they endured in the mines reconciled to one another, and are remembered together in the Calendar of Saints on the same day. Their renunciation offered their followers the opportunity to resolve differences and be once more united in the name of Christ and His Church in electing one Chief Shepherd.

- Peter Celestine V renounced the office of Supreme Pontiff less than a year after his election as Pope. He knew he was not capable of shepherding the Church effectively at that critical time in history.

- Gregory XII renounced the office to bring unity back to the Church and to end the Great Western Schism, when the Church had more than one man considered by their supporters as legitimately-elected Pope. Gregory XII offered his renunciation of the office so that one man could be elected to unite the family of Christ.

And now, Benedict XIV, after serving the Church of Christ for eight years, has 'stepped down' that another may be elected to continue the unbroken line of Shepherd of the Church of Christ. The strength of conviction, sincerity of purpose, courage of action, only enhance the integrity of the person. Pope Benedict has manifested himself as truly a man of faith and integrity. Humility in letting go to let God, through the Church, guide His People is the sign of a truly great person.

Pope Benedict XIV communicated his decision to the Church at the very beginning of the Season of Lent. This joyful period that ushers us into the brighter, warmer days of spring and summer, offers the opportunity for our re-birth in the spirit as we celebrate our redemption in the Passion-Death-Resurrection of Jesus. Benedict XIV entered his prayerful solitude for the Church and offers the Church, during Lent, the opportunity to review and renew itself more intensely through the deliberations of the College of Cardinals who must evaluate the Church's place in the world today and, following the prompting of the Holy Spirit, choose one whom they truly believe, in Christ, to be able to shepherd the Church through these challenging and also exciting times. This is an act of humility as well since they, assisting in the workings of the Church, are still subject in obedience to the Gospel of Christ, Tradition, and the Magisterium who speak with them, but also to them through the one they will elect. This is what Lent is all about even for us in our own personal lives - an exciting and challenging time to review and renew our spirits and lives in Christ.

This month of March we celebrate the essence of our Catholic Christian Faith: the Passion, Death and

Resurrection of Jesus. As Lent comes to its climax - not its end - we enter the mystery of God's selfless love for us in Jesus. Lent is a gestation period that nurtures the new life about to be born in the Spirit through the blood of Jesus shed on the Cross. The unborn child within the confined world of the mother's body, oblivious to what the greater world is, still grows and eventually demands to take his/her place in the larger more challenging arena of God's creation. This world is filled with allurements that attract, seductions that entice, pleasures that satisfy momentarily, honors that praise only to raze the person when he/or she no longer accedes to the desires and whims of his/her flatterers. Yet, with all these and many other negatives we could mention, the world is still a sacred place blessed by God in His creation, and the theater of our redemption where a soul in love with God can be an effective presence and transforming element in God's hands. The core of our Christian Faith can be found in the selfless love of Jesus. He invites us to live as He did. We are invited to live the core, that is, the *heart*, of our Christian Faith. Who or What is the heart of our Christian Faith? Jesus! His Life and Love! His Sacred Heart was pierced on the Cross out of love for us. The blood that was shed is a sign of the depth of the emptying love that led Jesus to a total surrender for us. *No greater love has anyone than that of the person who gives his/her life for a friend!* The total surrender of Jesus that we read about, and meditate on, and preach, is not always the total surrender we strive to imitate in our lives.

As we enter the last weeks of Lent, the gospel accounts turn from the teachings of Jesus and His miracles to a chronological account of the last days that lead to His Passion and Death. The intrigue of his enemies, the frustration and sadness of Jesus before the close-mindedness of the Jews and His own chosen followers, even the betrayal of one of His inner circle, would have probably dissuaded anyone else from continuing the mission, much less accepting to die as a criminal, for such an ungrateful and obtuse people. But Jesus had a heart that saw only the fulfillment of the Father's Will in all this. Even the contradictions and outright persecutions were signs that had been prophesied centuries before, to enforce in the minds of all the reality of the depth of God's selfless love for His people.

We live in a world in turmoil: natural disasters, terrorism, war, violence, economic uncertainty, religious prejudice and intolerance, social instability, political upheavals, nuclear threats. Need I add any more? We hear or read about these and other disconcerting, discouraging and devastating events that take place in our own and other nations. We may not be able to change world events, or even the events of our own nation, maybe not even the things that happen within the little world of our own family, but we can take steps to change what happens in our personal life and how we allow ourselves to be affected and affect the life of others. Jesus knew that *You are clean, but not all, for He knew his betrayer.* He knew full well that He would affect the world through the little band of that motley crew He had chosen. He knew that His message would extend throughout the world till the end of time. He could also see that many would reject His message, and many too would use His Name to offend the dignity of human beings and use the gift of free will to reject God's Commandments and His own Law of Love of God, neighbor and oneself. I believe that Jesus' anguish and desolation on the Cross were in some ways increased by the awareness of how fruitless His selfless sacrificial love would be for so many who would reject it.

The forty days of Lent are not an end that fulfills an annual penitential duty. Our Lenten journey only prepares and brings us to the beginning of another road. We arrive at the empty tomb on Easter Sunday and we begin the second walk that strengthens the bond of those who journey together and *who have seen the Lord*. Together, in the Easter gifts of Peace and Pardon, we confidently await to be empowered by the Paraclete, Whose grace we received as the first gift of the Resurrected Christ. On Pentecost Sunday, when the Church is expelled from the Upper Room by the force of the Eternal Breath of the Holy Spirit, the third and last quest begins, and continues until the end of time. This last journey, in the power of the Holy Spirit, seeks to embrace all women and men of good will, to open their hearts to the Resurrection and New Life in Jesus, until we arrive at the threshold that leads to the fullness of Life, in Jesus, through the Spirit, with the Father. We celebrate each year this extended Easter Season (Lent-Easter-Pentecost) as a period of personal penance and change of heart (Lent), community joy and mutual growth (Easter), and universal mission to fulfill till the end of time (Pentecost). From Easter through Pentecost, we learn how to look at the world with the eyes of the heart, and from the perspective of God. We acquire a renewed vision of creation ennobled and raised to a greater dignity by the Resurrection of Jesus and the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We are confirmed and strengthened as an *Alleluia People*; We *Praise the Lord* with our lives and we endeavor to make this Easter Joy contagious enough to envelope the whole of creation in the Father's life-giving Love in Jesus through the Spirit.

Our Father, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, lived this mystery everyday of his life, but never more than when he became a living image of the Crucified. He was Victor because he was a Victim - *Victor with Christ because a Victim with Christ*. So often we emphasize Padre Pio's imaging the person of the Crucified Jesus, but we forget that our Father also lived in the definite reality of Jesus' glorified Person, Who was always present to him. The Resurrection was a reality that Padre Pio sought to instill in the hearts of all who sought his ministry of healing of the soul through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or through God's graces bestowed through his intercession for those who sought healing of the body. Each healing responded to suffering souls who

bore the wounds of a marred human nature that sought to be made whole again and brought to new life through divine intervention. Padre Pio was an effective instrument in the plan of God for the Resurrection of the soul, Resurrection of the body, New Life in Jesus through God's grace.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, we approach Easter with the joy of the first disciples who received the commission to believe in the Resurrection and preach the *New Way* to everyone. Yielding to the Spirit's grace, let us be empowered with His gifts, that we may **Live Jesus** more credibly and intensely in the world and attract others to Him. Even though the world in which we live may often oppose the values and principles we profess as Catholics, let us be bearers of Easter joy and steadfast truth. Let the Resurrection of Jesus encourage us also to be a source of strength, truth, patience, and love for all our sisters and brothers. The witness we give the world and the effectiveness of our testimony depend on us and our cooperation with the trust God has entrusted to us.

We pray for the Church during this period of transition. We pray for Pope Benedict XIV. We pray for whomever God through the College of Cardinals will indicate as His choice to be Chief Shepherd of the Family of Christ, the Church. We pray for ourselves that we may be faithful God in Christ through the Holy Spirit to God's Will and all that makes us truly His Church and His Family redeemed in the Blood of Jesus. May this Easter Season be filled with Love, Peace, and Joy for all of you and your loved ones. May the Lord of New Life help us to live as His Alleluia People; may Our Lady guide, guard and protect us; may our Father, Padre Pio, look over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care. With a promise to keep all of you affectionately in my Easter Masses and Liturgies, I wish you and your dear ones a very Happy and Joyous Easter.

Peace and Blessings  
Fr. Francis A. Sariago, OFM Cap  
National Coordinator