

# Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord grant you his peace!

We Americans are reminded of our beginnings during the month of July. On the Fourth of July we celebrate our independence from foreign rule, and the beginning of a free nation that for more than two centuries has influenced the world and attracted many, even our enemies, to envy the gifts God has bestowed upon our people. The courage and strength of conviction of our founding ancestors is celebrated each year. Our national joy is expressed in concerts, games, elaborate firework displays, political talks on the qualities of our nation and the benefits of being an American, and so much more.

Something we fail to remember is that the independence we celebrate came at a great price. Independence brought with it then, and still does today, the joy of freedom and liberty, but also the responsibility and accountability for those who continue today as our ancestors back then, to forge a national destiny. We forget that independence from tyranny and despotic control should lead us to a greater awareness and dependence on God, and to a trusting and loving interdependence on one another. Oh! ... if only it were so!

Our nation was formed by people of various religious backgrounds. A common bond was their belief in a Supreme Being Who is the Source of all life. They each revered that God and sought to live as they believed that God was directing them. They were of various religious and theistic expressions (including Catholic). The reasons for seceding from the British rule of the era and for placing their lives and their future on the line for the fundamental values they sought for themselves and their compatriots, can be found not only in the basic yearning of every human being to be free, but also in the inspired Word of God that so powerfully expresses the yearnings of the human heart.

How can we as a people continue to turn our backs on God's millennial dialogue with humanity encouraging us to trust in God and live in the light of His will? How can so many of our elected leaders be so blind to the core values on which our nation was founded, and deliberate and decide as they do for the sake of pleasing the electorate and/or for political correctness? How can the voice of the many keep silent while the voice of the noisy few overpowers reason and truth, sometimes to the point of obvious absurdity and most often obscenity? How can we as Christians allow what is ours by our baptismal character to be covered over by the screams, slogans, lobbying, political and economic machinations - just to mention a few - of those who would reduce moral value and reason to a majority vote rather than a decision based on principles that are found in the heart of every human being?

We have reduced liberty to license, freedom to unbridled pleasure, truth to a majority opinion, values and principles to social convenience and politically correct responses. The louder the scream the more attention it gets. It is no longer reason and principle, founded on one's core beliefs, that condition dialogue and decisions. What seems to rule at times is the cacophonous noise of those who would honor a nation with their lips but not live the values on which it was founded.

The God-given principles of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, found in our Declaration of Independence, can be found throughout Sacred Scripture and particularly in the Gospel we profess as Christians. The sanctity of life is promised in a world that often preaches the death of God and proposes death (abortion, euthanasia, executions, war, and much more) as a way to a better life (?!), when Jesus says: *I have come that they may have Life and have it in abundance.* The liberty of the children of God, promised to God's Chosen People and offered to us in abundance through the Passion-Death-Resurrection of Jesus, is only available when we are willing to see life and our relationship with God, others, and ourselves in truth: *And the truth will set you free.* The pursuit of happiness, that is a fundamental desire for all people everywhere, can only be achieved when our hearts are in harmony with what we believe and live, and not necessarily when everything seems to be going well and easy; Jesus himself, the night before he died, sang and

prayed: *I pray that my joy may be theirs and that their joy may be complete.*

What we revere as a Founding Document is reduced to nothing more than an old sheet of parchment, unless we take the words of our Founding Ancestors to heart. Taking them to heart we have our own Catholic Christian faith to enhance the social and political message, and sustain and encourage us. As Catholics, we have much to offer our nation, regardless of the response we hear or receive from many who would have it otherwise, and seek to muffle our voice or silence us altogether.

The world is very similar to our own bodies. The body attempts to expel or protect itself against any element that attacks it in any way from within or from without. The world in which we live, often treats our Catholic Christian principles as elements to be totally expelled or perhaps even destroyed, or from which it must at the least be definitely protected. The values we Catholics profess and are expected to live are targeted by politicians and special interest groups throughout the country as elements alien to our national interest and/or detrimental to the free expression of our people. There could be nothing more erroneous. Our Catholic Christian faith, if it is lived with conviction, commitment and courage, can bring balance, meaning, fulfillment and happiness to a confused society.

When Pope Pius XII urged groups of Catholics to gather in prayer, it was not to form a devotional group of individuals who are aloof from the world's realities, and are immersed in the good feelings of a personal religious high. He wanted pray-ers who wanted to make a difference in the world. He realized that when the soul is in harmony with God and people are in harmony with each other, peace, order and the progress that follows are inevitable. Faith that is merely theoretical or solely personal is worth little if anything. Jesus reminds us that we are called to be aware of our sister and brother in all areas of life. He even praises the one who gives his own life for the sake of another. ***There is no self-centeredness in true Catholicism. There is no silent cowering behind prayerful words empty of loving deeds in Catholicism. There is no "passing the buck" in Catholicism.*** We are called to be a people who live with our feet well grounded in the realities of life, and with our hearts and souls centered in God Who leads us to live more deeply the morals and values that are a fruit of them.

Padre Pio took up the torch of Pope Pius XII and established the Prayer Groups. He realized that only those who are centered on God and God's will can truly make a difference in this society in which we live. We are not an association whose members get lost in pious practices that "make them feel good". We are men and women who accept the challenge to be a people called to live in the freedom and the joy of the children of God, in a world hungering to see Him.

The human life we live is a gift from God through our parents. Life is God's gift in creation and we, as Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, proclaim the Life of grace that is offered us in Jesus. This Life makes life worth living. The Prayer Groups proclaim, protect, promote and profess all means that encourage and support others in loving life to the full and defending it at all stages from conception to natural death.

Ours is a call to stand up as a liberated people. We are liberated in Christ from those things that have kept us prisoners of our own egos and made us unable to live out the potential God's grace has instilled in each one of us. We are liberated from the fears that make us look for safety, political correctness, or popularity, rather than truth. As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio we can not compromise values that we know and believe as God-given and inspired, that come to us through His Word in Scripture, our Tradition, and the teaching of the Magisterium, as well as a spirit-filled common sense (that is not always so common). Freed from our own shackles of security, comfort, indifference, compromise, fear, convenience, relativism, and the like, we are called to be a liberating force for others, without retreating from the front lines.

Pleasure is confused with joy. As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, we know that the joy of new Life comes after the sadness of Calvary. Easter Sunday came only after Good Friday. The joy we experience is fruit of an inner peace and serenity that flows from within those whose lives are in harmony with God. Padre Pio's message of sacrifice was one that seeks to help us find peace as we find God more intensely, regardless of what may be happening around us..

As you can see, this month dedicated to the Precious Blood of Jesus brings a number of thoughts to mind. Our own independence was won at the price of the blood of many people on both sides of the battle line. We American Catholics, Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, have as a Founder, a man who greatly respected our country. He himself commented that God blesses the United States of Americas because of the good that we, collectively and singularly, are known to do for others, even those on the political scene who are considered 'enemies'. He himself became world-known in great part thanks to the American GI's coming home from the war who had met Padre Pio in San Giovanni Rotondo. As Americans, we have a certain connection with Padre Pio. We should feel honored to strive to live up to Padre Pio's respect and trust in the good he stated we Americans, regardless of religious affiliation, continue to do throughout the world for the sake of those in need.

The Prayer Groups were established to set in motion a revolution, a revolution of prayer and goodness. This revolution would not overthrow political systems, convert religious expressions, transform society, or even change people, violently with the sword, but by the power of prayer and good example. This may sound like Utopia in our modern world. People are still looking, hungering for something more than what they have. They hunger for something that can fill them with life, liberty and happiness. We can be God's instruments of peace and transformation if we take our role seriously as Spiritual Children of Padre Pio - as Roman Catholic Christians! My sisters and brothers, *let us begin, for up to now we have done so little* (Words of St. Francis to his friars).

Wishing everyone a great summer and a Happy Independence Day for the Fourth of July, I invoke the blessings of God and the particular protection of the Immaculate Conception, Patroness of our nation, on our beloved country, people and leaders.

May the Lord bless you; Our Lady guide, guard, and protect you; and Padre Pio watch each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings

Fr. Francis A. Sariago, O.F.M. Cap.

National Co-ordinator