

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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October 2013

Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

Padre Pio, following the example of the Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi, instilled a spirit that sought to seek peace in understanding rather than tranquility through aggression and war, justice in mercy rather than retribution through violent reprisal, availability to all rather than opinionated distance from those who do not share the same ideas and values. Padre Pio never shirked his civic duty, and freely spoke out when Catholic and Christian values were in jeopardy. He could easily be a patron saint of 'Civic Duty', because of his responses to issues that were affecting the lives of people who came or wrote to him about many facets of their daily lives. He did not let the opinions of others condition his personal conclusions and decisions, and he often kept silent when obedience demanded it of him. But when justice, mercy and charity were in danger, he spoke, and how! As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio we have a responsibility to follow the example of our Patron and Spiritual Guide.

As we celebrate the month dedicated to Respect for Life, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina stands out as one of the most conspicuous promoters of the dignity of life in the twentieth century. During his lifetime hundreds were attracted to this man who spoke outright about our Catholic Faith and its need to be lived today. He initiated the Prayer Groups as a way for men and women from all social levels to live more meaningfully, with lives centered on God, and with a purpose of being a means through whom God could touch the lives of others with His love and blessings. Thousands of Padre Pio's 'Spiritual Children' form this 'Militia of Prayer' as a 'Sign of Contradiction' in today's world. They proclaim all that we believe and live as Catholic Christians. They strive to do this without compromise of the values and principles of our Faith. As Catholics we are entrusted with a mission to be prophets of life and love in a world seriously impacted by a culture of death and violence. This culture and society often forgets the value of life and the dignity of each person. We are the People of God who courageously proclaim and promote the sanctity of life created in the image of the Creator.

The inspired Word of God, Holy Scripture, offers us encouragement and insights. We are agents of reform in our society and advocates of peace. We proclaim God's Love and Life. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul writes: *Take as a model of sound teaching... what you have heard me say, in faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the rich deposit of faith... be strong in the grace which is ours in Christ Jesus* (2Timothy 1:13-14; 2:1). *All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work* (2Timothy 3:16-17). *I charge you to preach the word... whether convenient or inconvenient - correcting, reproving, appealing - constantly teaching and never losing patience. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but, following their own desires, will surround themselves with teachers who tickle their ears. They will stop listening to the truth...* (2 Timothy 4:1-4). These powerful words, addressed to a young shepherd of souls, are words that bear significant weight for us today. We cannot be intimidated with the words and control that the powerful and influential of society seem at times to have. *The truth (must) set you free.*

At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus' question to the Apostles offers us an interesting consideration. Jesus asks the Apostles: *Who do people say that the Son of Man is?* While we obviously focus on the confession of Peter's faith as his response and the office of leadership in the Church entrusted to him in this Gospel passage, there is an interesting 'side-thought', quite relevant to us today. The response Jesus is given by the group is: *Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.*

This response of the group is timely for us at this moment in our national history. As a Church, as Roman Catholics, we are not a political caucus, but a people who pray. We are not civic activists, but people concerned about what happens to themselves and others. We are not social opportunists or congressional lobbyists, but people who speak with their lives what they believe in their hearts. Nonetheless, our faith conviction demands that we express openly what we believe a child of God is called to live, without compromising values and principles for the sake of convenience, comfort, camaraderie, and the like. Compassion encourages me to find ways to assist people in need, but it cannot demand that I permit or do evil for the sake of good. *The end does not justify the means.* We derive our strength and courage from knowing that *if God is for us who can be against us?* Thus, we must be, in the words of Jesus the night before He died, *consecrated in truth.*

In today's world, however, 'truth' seems to be 'relative'. There is a tendency to make the truth what we want it to be rather than what it 'truthfully' is. Words are used and expressions fabricated to convey messages which in effect often justify manipulating the truth. There are many 'truths' that believing people - of most religious denominations, not just Christians, let alone Catholics - hold sacred. There is the 'truth' of the sacredness of life from conception to natural death. There is the 'truth' of the sacredness of the human person whose dignity must never be abused in any way. There is the 'truth', inherent in nature itself and the complementary nature of both sexes, of the unique relationship in marriage of man and woman, in a total surrender to one another and open to new life from their intimate and

surrendering marital covenant love. There is the 'truth' of the 'cry of the poor' whose social challenges must never be condoned or justified for the sake of the whole and/or 'big business'. There is the 'truth' of the right of all people to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, that does not infringe and/or minimize or destroy that of another. There is the 'truth' of every person's right to a good life based on personal efforts and responsibility, rather than national, religious, racial, or any differentiating criteria that would be used to marginalize, alienate, or otherwise demean anyone. There is the 'truth' of God's right to be adored and honored in all creation, as His creatures respectfully and responsibly use the gifts entrusted to humanity with a sense of awe and co-responsibility among all people. We could list so many other 'truths' to keep in mind. Some people could object to those I mentioned and/or add many others. The list above is an example for us to recognize how public opinion, 'Gallop Polls', political correctness, ignorance, manipulation for personal interests, and so on, can easily present what we believe essential and a basic 'truth' to guide us, in a very ambiguous or even definitely false light. How we respond when our 'truths' are shaken or threatened with disregard or destruction is determined by the strength of our beliefs, particularly in Christ Who is Truth incarnate, and also in each one of us as each sincerely strives to be an authentic - 'true' - Christian, not just in name but in fact.

Who do people say I am? The 'people' give a list of prophets' names. Among the various names, they listed even Jesus, as though He were just another prophet vying for position among the other 'wonder-workers' of the Old Testament. When we allow our desires to rule our minds, even the 'truth' can be misread, misunderstood, and misleading. To allow ourselves to be guided by polls and opinions is to chance letting 'the blind lead the blind', possibly having both 'fall into the same ditch'. The 'Gallop Poll' the apostles took among the crowds that followed the Master only prove once again that public opinion is never totally correct nor necessarily true. Often those who seek our approval, selection and/or election in political campaigns, forget the 'truth' and for the sake of expediency and election, will sell out the 'truth' basic to all people, and 'tickle ears with novelty' that raises false hopes, and ultimately, if implemented, destroy the dignity of the human person in one degree or another. People will often look for what they want to see. They hope and believe based on desire rather than 'truth', and not the basic value of one's beliefs, but the immediate convenience it will offer. Not only is this dangerous it can be deadly.

We are a nation conceived in liberty. Liberty, not license! A Democratic Republic is one that offers the right to govern ourselves through our elected officials, but has no right to contradict the basic principles and values that protect and elevate the dignity of every human being. Every one, including non-believers in a 'formal' God of some religious expression, is a child of God. Even so called atheists - that is, those who do not believe in any God - still have a sense of respect and dignity for the human person, otherwise they go against themselves. Conscience, the 'inner voice' guiding the mind and heart of every human being, accuses us every time we seek to justify as right what we know to be wrong. *The one who excuses himself usually accuses himself.* Where have our basic values gone? The values and principles, rooted in the acceptance and belief in a Supreme Being regardless of one's religious affiliation, were the standards that guided the foundation of our nation. We were entrusted by God with the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and with all that flows from these.

Catholic Christians cannot be intimidated nor allow themselves to be confused by false promises, by the very ones who should be professing values that uplift the human person. Compromising the basic values in which we believe will undoubtedly erode and destroy respect for the individual, including infants in the womb, couples seeking a meaningful relationship in marriage, those seeking to better their life in a country not their own by birth, and so on. It is time to re-evaluate our commitment in Faith to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Public opinion, majority vote, or deceptive terminology must not alter the basic principle that *life is sacred from conception to natural death, and must be treated as such until the Author of Life calls us from time to eternity.*

Political correctness, public opinion, majority vote, 'Gallop Polls', and the like, are very informative. They help us to understand the difficulties, fears, dangers, hopes, and so much more that Christ's Gospel must confront when permissiveness and indifference appeal to a vocal group. Our conviction and personal commitment to the Faith courageously stands up, stands out, stands for all that it means to be a Catholic Christian, and is not intimidated by criticism or threats aimed at undermining the Church's presence and values in our society today.

Spiritual Children of Padre Pio realize that a true relationship with God through meditative and devotional prayer opens the heart to God's Word, celebration of the Eucharist and reception of Holy Communion makes us *live no longer I, but Christ lives in me* (Galatians 2:20), and the regular common sharing of our Catholic Christian values fosters personal awareness of the world around us and growth in a more determined response to the challenges society offers us. John, in his letter to the Churches says at the end of one: *My children, beware of idols!* (1 John 5:21). Let us be aware of those whom we set up as 'the answer' and whose appealing promises we set above our God-given values. Let us not worship the *false idols* whose voices *tickle our ears with novelty* and fill our hearts with false promises, and expect our souls in return.

Our founder and spiritual father Padre Pio never shirked his responsibility as an Italian citizen. He was interested in all that happened to his people. He spoke respectfully and openly about the issues that faced his nation. Political leaders would often seek him out to speak with him; he was a man *without guile*, who spoke as he saw and believed. He spoke respectfully, tactfully (Padre Pio's tact could be rather 'forceful' at times), but always truthfully. We, as Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, cannot let 'factual incorrections' and/or indifference condition our hearts with disinterest, our minds with erroneous opinions, and our actions with empty promises. At every moment, and in all circumstances, the proof of our spiritual growth and maturity is measured by our convictions, commitment to them, coherence in living them, and elimination of any compromise of fundamental values of our faith. Even within the limited area of our own particular Prayer Group this must be the case. *If you cannot be faithful in little things, who will entrust you with greater?* These are Jesus' words, not mine! We must be *consecrated in the truth*. Jesus and His Word must be the Truth that guides us on the Way that leads us to the Life Who is God.

In this month of the Most Holy Rosary, may the life of Jesus, prayed and reflected through the eyes and Immaculate Heart of Mary, be a reminder of the sanctity of life and the holiness to which we are all called, by living our ordinary lives with Jesus and Mary to accompany us on our earthly journey. My God bless you; may Our Lady, guide, guard, and protect you; and may Padre Pio watch over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

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