

# 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

email: pppgusa@gmail.com

December 2013

Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you his peace!

The race is on! The runners start early to fight their way through the crowds. They make enormous sacrifices to arrive before most others, and compete among the proven and best 'runners'. Hard earned money seems of little concern in order to achieve the goal. The use of plastic cards creates the illusion of self-sufficiency and being well-prepared to respond to obstacles. Possible ensuing financial difficulties are not even considered. Monetary value more than usefulness often dictates what is considered appropriate, and thus acquired. Though not all follow these and other similar criteria for the 'race to Christmas', often these are the elements of the preparation for many people. Even the timing is essential; the 'Christmas buying season' in many places begins after Labor Day in September, or near Halloween in October. The celebration of the Birth of Jesus at Bethlehem is so commercialized that even good, faith-filled people are affected by the cacophonous ads enticing people to 'buy things early to avoid the rush'. Even people involved in church matters for the holy-days become so taken up with what they are doing, that often they seem, to forget why they are doing it. We lose sight, albeit briefly, - priests and religious included - of 'the reason for the season', to use an old saying.

The gift buying, meals, family and friend visits, lights, trees, and everything else that is part of the 'Christmas spirit' are joyful and beautiful. They need not and should not be eliminated from our celebration of the birth of Jesus. There is a real reason to rejoice and *make a joyful noise unto the Lord!* (Psalm 100). What we must do, however, is to refocus our hearts to the purpose of it all. Then, what we do and how we do it will be done in a totally different spirit and from a totally different perspective. The rush may be there to save a few dollars in a financially trying time in our history, but we will be wise enough to understand that Jesus is the Center of the season and our lives. This will condition us to prepare, even very early in the season if circumstances demand, with a serenity and joy, giving of ourselves with love. Christmas of years ago was simpler, true, but still had its hustle and bustle. These will always be a part of any excitement and happiness. We should have the excitement of children without losing the focus of mature adults. Church and Family both play an integral part in the celebration of the Birthday of the Savior. By making Jesus the focus, not only do we express our gratitude to the Lord but we ourselves benefit spiritually from the graces that flow and the joy we share with others.

Padre Pio loved Christmas. The Christ Child was alive to him, and he saw Jesus in all the children with whom he loved to be and who were very comfortable and happy in his presence. The Christmas representation of the Manger Scene reminded our Padre Pio of the *sublime humility, and humble sublimity* (words of St. Francis of Assisi) of the Savior in His birth as a human being, equal to us in all things but sin. Padre Pio was genuinely moved when he looked at the Christmas Manger Scene. He wept at the thought of the Infant Jesus who emptied Himself out of love for all men and women, for whom He became human to redeem by His Passion-Death-Resurrection. Those who were near to Padre Pio for the celebration of Christmas said that his childlike joy and excitement were contagious. Those who saw him could feel the joy of the shepherds when they heard the announcement of the Angel: *I bring glad tidings of great joy for you: today is born a Savior in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord* (Luke 2: 10-11).

Faithful son of the Poverello of Assisi, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina had as his highest aim, foremost desire, and greatest intention to live the holy gospel in all things and through all things, to follow the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to retrace His footsteps completely. The eternal Lord helped him to achieve this by signing him with the sacred wounds of God's love for all humanity, the Sacred Stigmata. Though bearing the wounds of the Savior's Passion and Death, Padre Pio became like a child at heart when he reflected upon or celebrated the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the beginning of the journey that brought Jesus from the Crib to the Cross. The two can never really be separated. In Jesus, one inevitably leads to the other.

The simplicity and desire for concreteness in most of Padre Pio's life touched the great Mystery of the Incarnation with an overwhelming affection and joy. The Savior came alive in his heart as that same Lord came alive for him each time he celebrated the Eucharist. He sought to rekindle the spark of the Spirit's fire and enthusiasm in the hearts of the faithful who came to him. His character, at times brusque but always loving, sought to reach more incisively into the depths of the soul of all who asked his spiritual assistance. In the magnificent *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza* he constructed, we encounter a true *Home for the Relief of Suffering*, both physical and spiritual. This well-equipped and totally updated hospital is a concrete example of how the 'Incarnation' influences our lives to 'concretize' our faith and, like Jesus, to positively reach and be

involved in the lives of others. Caring for the 'whole person' and not just the symptoms of what is often sign of a deeper illness, makes the Casa a place that ever reminds people that *grace builds on nature* (St. Thomas Aquinas). The two together form the entire person. The birth of Jesus reminds us of the Creator Who began in time on earth as a creature that the creature might share in the timelessness of eternity the life of the Creator.

*Grace builds on nature.* The ability to allow the senses to take over and enliven the heart and soul makes our experience of/with God even more exciting. Not just the intellect, but the whole person enters this intimate relationship with the Eternal One. And God enters a relationship with humanity taking on every aspect of human life except sin.

Pride seduced freedom at the very beginning of human history when our first parents opted to seek self interests rather than the will of their Father Creator. From that moment, human history became a quest to regain what was lost: harmony, serenity, peace. Harmony became enmeshed in the mechanism of compromise, connivance, convenience, and all that clouds our vision of the road traced out for us by the One Who calls us to Himself. Serenity was shaken by the inner struggles of insecurity, indifference, indolence and all that keeps our hopes from encouraging us to move forward to grow in the gifts bestowed on us by our Creator. Peace became the unfulfilled dream of those who were challenged daily by fearful anxiety, dominant arrogance, blind ambition. The world has not been the same ever since that fateful moment. And thus began the quest to regain what was lost! Pride is overcome by humility. Humility lives in the truth. Truth offers us the liberating experience of being transparent. Transparency allows us to trust and also to see others as pilgrims with us on the same journey. Thus, opening our heart to the other, we have found the eternal Other in our life as well ... in LOVE INCARNATE, JESUS!

We are reminded that: *Life begins as the quest of the child for the man, and ends as the quest of the man for the child* (Laurens Van der Post) ... the childlike person hidden within each one of us crying out to be set free. We search for the Child Who alone can help us find what we 'misaid along the road': harmony with God, ourselves and all creation; serenity before the challenges we face in the certitude that all works out for those who trust in God; and peace of heart and love that see the image of the Child we seek in all people. Serenity (peace), integrity (transparency) and love (acceptance/surrender) ultimately lead to Joy - the Joy of Christmas, the Joy of the new-born Child.

Centuries before the birth of Jesus, the people of Israel heard the prophet Isaiah promise: *Many peoples shall come...they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again* (Isaiah 2: 1-5). How can our Christmas Message be happy and uplifting when all around us we hear of scandals in religious and political arenas, job downsizing, economic insecurity, division in families, violence in the streets, terrorism around the world, international instability with threats of conflicts that could have devastating effects for the whole world, and much more? We cannot let our hearts be overwhelmed by actions of hatred and violence that often occur, or by the tragedies that afflict our lives. Where there is life there is hope, and where there is hope there is peace, even in the midst of confusion and pain. Life is still the journey worth living and it is beautiful because ... *God so loved the world that he sent us his only Son so that whoever believes in Him would have life and have it in abundance* (John 3:16). *Who (or what) can separate us from the love of God* (Romans 8: 38-39) ... *In Him we are more than conquerors* (Romans 8: 37). We must search for the answer in the responses given at Jesus' Birth to heaven's call: the *shepherds went in haste to see what had been told them* (Luke 2: 1); the Magi followed the star (see Matthew 2: 1-12). As spiritual children of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, we are challenged to live a joyful trust at all times in the Father Who loves His children passionately, and has manifested that love in the Birth, by the power of the Holy Spirit, of Jesus, the Son of Mary.

God's 'Star of Truth', His inspired Word, enlightens and indicates the way to follow that we might fulfill our basic desire to rediscover the child within us. In that Word we recognize and accept the Child Who alone can restore us to our initial innocence, regardless of how deep we may have fallen, or how far we may have gone astray. With the simplicity of the shepherds we hurry in a faith that blossoms into Hope; this hope enables us to recognize Love Incarnate and be convinced in a Presence that can and will envelop us with His Eternal Love. Now that we have *seen and touched the Holy One of God* (1John1), we know that no matter what happens around us, *greater is the One within than he who is in the world.* (1John4:4)

A beautiful photo so often shone at Christmastime portrays Padre Pio dressed in priestly vestments carrying the image of the Infant Jesus. Looking at his eyes one senses that Padre Pio sees more than just a statue. Padre Pio seems totally enveloped by the moment. It is as though the statue of the Christ Child becomes a living infant for him there and then. Though this thought is a pious conjecture, nevertheless, with childlike vision, when we reverence the Christmas Creches in our homes, churches, or wherever they may be displayed, we also should allow our hearts the joy of seeing the Infant Jesus 'alive', with arms outstretched, desiring to embrace all who recognize and accept Him. The poor conditions of Bethlehem, and the indifference this most holy of families encountered in its own 'hometown', are a reminder of the words: *There was no room for them in the inn* (Luke 2: 7), and *He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him* (John 1: 11). The newborn King Whose birth we prepare for and celebrate in faith, can be found alive in the hearts of everyone of us. He is there waiting for us to rediscover and awaken His Presence within ourselves.

During the Advent Season, in the silence of faith, we journey with Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. In the joy of great expectations we hurry to the stable with the Shepherds. In undaunted hope we follow the heavenly guide with the Wise Men bearing the gift of ourselves. Let all fears be dispelled, all hope rekindled, all love blossom new in our hearts. The Child of

Bethlehem blessed our history becoming one with us that we might again be one with Him. It was at that birth that heaven sang: *Glory to God in high heaven, peace on earth to those on whom His favor rests* (Luke 2: 1-14)

The world into which the God of creation chose to en flesh Himself is still the stage of the greatest act of His Eternal Love. Life to be, Freedom in responsibility, and Redemption to eternal life in Jesus are still God's loving and impartial gifts to all. Stewards of creation, we are invested with the awesome trust of the Father. We make His presence and providence a reality in our world grown cold and indifferent to what really matters - Love! Just as at Bethlehem on that first Christmas night, we, like Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds, experience the promise fulfilled and our hope rekindled. We become his earthly messengers of the eternal love that not even human tragedy can destroy. Goodness is still alive in the hearts of God's children, and this love is celebrated each year at Christmas.

Christmas is a time for us to look with the childlike eyes of wonder at the mystery fulfilled and to enjoy the love made present in the poverty of Bethlehem. It is a time to bask in the light of a treasure greater than any we could imagine. To see the Infant Jesus and recognize the God of Creation, the Savior of humanity, the King of kings and Lord of lords, is to allow the tepidity and even the coldness of life's demands and burdens to be dispelled, and us to be warmed by the Child of Bethlehem. The Lord hidden in His Word and Sacrament is made visible in so many ways, and most especially in the Divine Presence and Saving Sacrifice of the Eucharist. The child within is reborn and we experience the newness and the joy of life.

Each day is a new experience of that eternal unfolding love prepared for by the prophets, made visible at Bethlehem and Calvary. The unfolding of this magnificent mystery will continue until history's time becomes eternal life. Each day we re-present the mysteries of salvation in the Eucharist, and each year we celebrate the unfolding of that One Solitary Life that is the focal point of human history - Jesus. Life is our journey; Heaven our quest; and Jesus our Companion. We begin life setting out in the zest and vigor of childhood and youth; we are challenged and usually 'peak' through middle age; we gradually lose our 'spring' as time progresses ... but, our faith - as was that of Mary and Joseph who believed the mystery and so experienced the miracle of His birth - allows us to see each moment as a wonderful endowment that makes the journey itself the gift, and the destination that much more desirable.

Jesus' wooden manger for a cradle at Bethlehem began the journey that led to his total surrender for us on the rough wood of the Cross on Calvary. The Crib and the Cross can never be separated. His total emptying as God at Bethlehem and total emptying as Man on Calvary is the whole story of One born to die that we may share in the fullness of Life.

May the Child of Bethlehem help us to celebrate His Birth with joy. As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina let us bring His light, joy, and hope to all whom we encounter on life's journey. Warmed by the love and humility of the Christ Child, may we find the 'child within' who helps us to see the beauty of this world in all its wonder and majesty, and the love of its Creator in all His Humility. *Come, let us adore Him* in His Eucharistic presence. With Mary and Joseph let us bask in the light of his splendor, and with love and total surrender entrust ourselves to Him Who abandoned Himself for us.

Be assured that all of you, my sisters and brothers who form the Family of the Padre Pio Prayer Groups and all your loved ones, will be remembered in a special way - I pray for all of you each day - in the Masses and prayers I am privileged to offer the Loving Majesty of God during the holy days celebrating His Birth at Bethlehem. Please remember me in your prayers that I may be the priest and religious the Lord wants me to be, and that I may fulfill my ministry with/for you according to His Will. Thank you for your continued kindness and patience with me.

May the Peace, Joy, Blessings ... and Love of this Season fill your hearts and those of your loved ones. May Our Lady, Good St. Joseph, and our beloved Padre Pio guide, guard, and protect you.

Blessed and Merry Christmas and Happy New Year lived in the Father's Will to all!

Peace and Blessings in the Christ Child  
Fr. Francis A. Sariago, O.F.M. Cap.  
National Coordinator