

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good. In this regard, several sayings of Saint Paul will not surprise us: "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor. 5:14); "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel" (1 Co. 9:16)...The Gospel offers us the chance to live life on a higher plane, but with no less intensity: "Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others" (Aparecido Document, June 29, 2007)...Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! (The Joy of the Gospel, 9, 10) Joy, like goodness, can be "contagious". If only all could be "infected" with goodness and joy, fruits of a sincere relationship with the source of all goodness, joy, and LOVE!

Many people think that adoring stillness and the peace that ensues are the ultimate goal of our prayer life and relationship with God. But that is only half of the equation. Adoration of God alone, without allowing the experience to affect our lives in an operative way, is an offense to God rather than an act of love and praise. It is as though we expect God to make us "feel good", without our desire or attempt to "be good", and even "better". Pope Francis reminds us in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)* that goodness of its very nature goes beyond itself to touch others. Adoration must lead to an experience of God that compels us to move out to others, and vice versa - it is a "virtuous circle" of grace, gratitude and love.

In Sacred Scripture we read of the experiences persons had of God. The person was rapt up in the wonder, grandeur, awesomeness of the moment: Moses and the Burning Bush, Elijah and the Silent Whisper, the Apostles at the Transfiguration, Mary Magdalene at the Empty Tomb, the Early Church gathered at Olivet for the Ascension, and so with many other incidents. When the profound awe of the experience envelops these people, what does the Eternal One say? Go! Go to the people; Go to the other region; Go down the mountain into the reality of your ministry; Go tell my brothers I have risen; Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Go! Go! Go!

The act of adoring God should be an experience of God that compels us to "Go" and bring, now, with us, what we have experienced in our encounter with the Source of Life and Love. It is easy for us to forget that our faith is not a static appreciation of some theological or philosophical theory to reflect upon. It becomes easy to wallow in the silence of inertia, letting God, as it were, do all the work. If someone did that to us we would soon not bother with that individual for taking advantage of our good nature. Adoration is not a motionless expression of pious postures and religious platitudes intended to make people feel good. Our God is a God Who seeks to live in us and work in, with and through us...and also expecting us to be His image to all with whom we share life's journey in goodness, kindness, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, love.

At the beginning of the month dedicated to the Hidden Life of Jesus we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus and the Purification of Mary in the Temple. The spirit of this occurrence is capsulized in the words of Simeon to Mary and Joseph: *This Child is destined for the rise and fall of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed*; and to Mary he says, *and your soul also a sword shall pierce, so that the hearts of many may be laid bare* (Luke 2: 22-40). Simeon "sees" the faith of Israel fulfilled in this infant. His words of prayerful praise and gratitude envelop the Mother and Child in a prophecy that has begun its course to involve all creation. His personal experience of God's goodness to him urges him to touch the lives of others in prophecy and praise. Anna also cannot contain within herself the joy she experienced when she beheld

the Infant Jesus. She too shares her encounter with God with all whom she met. The adoring parents are reminded that the humility of the Incarnation and Birth must eventually lead to the selfless Love of the Cross if this Child is to fulfill His purpose for entering our human history. The life of Jesus, from the hovel of Bethlehem to the hill of Calvary, always has the Cross as a constant and faithful companion. The wood of the Crib that enfolds Him securely foreshadows the wood of the Cross that will hold him securely. So that when *I am lifted up, then I will draw all people to Myself* (John 12:32). The intimacy of the moment between the elderly “watchers” and the young parents inevitably leads Simeon and Anna to prophesy, Mary and Joseph to reflect and respond, and the Infant Jesus to continue to be the “humble sublimity and the sublime humility” that has already begun to change the course of time.

Scripture says that *He grew in size and strength, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him* (Luke, 2: 40). Jesus lived in eager anticipation of the fulfillment of the Father’s Will. Jesus’ ever-present intimacy and oneness with the immensity of God, His Father, did not keep Him in an ecstasy of a “glorious-do-nothing”. The years, months, weeks and days that led to that most solemn moment of His life, the acceptance of the Cross, the instrument of our salvation, were a profound preparation for that one Solemn Eucharist where Christ was and still is Priest and Victim. And we are victors with the Victim when we accept to live in the light of the shadow of His Cross. To truly share in the saving effects of the Passion-Death-Resurrection of Jesus, we must accept the “gift” of the Cross with gratitude and availability.

The Cross thus becomes a symbol of our prayer life. The vertical beam reminds us of our relationship through faith and prayer with God. We raise our hearts and minds to the One from Whom all creation comes. The horizontal beam reminds us of our common bond with all who share life with us and with whom we have a particular relationship as children of the One Great God. The point where the two meet and find balance forms the Cross on which Christ hung calling us to Himself and reminding us that *There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends* (John 15:13). Thus, unless our relationship with God spreads to encourage us to touch others with the love we have received from God, our prayer is only partially effective, and bears little fruit. God’s goodness in us must lead us to bring it to others. That is where the balance of the two beams is found and there, in the middle, is Jesus.

Gratitude and availability of this type do not come quickly nor easily. Human nature seeks to evade and/or avoid anything that challenges it to go beyond the natural tendencies for survival and pleasure. Just think how people seek to beautify their bodies for a short span of years, and will undergo dangerous surgery, questionable drugs, or painful, lengthy, stressful aerobic programs, oftentimes engaging costly “qualified trainers”. On the other hand, when it comes to our spiritual life, the health of our souls, and our growth in grace, we look for ways to cut corners. We even call the traditional centuries-old proven practices “old-fashioned”, “out-dated”, “no longer of relevance to a modern and intellectually advanced society”, such as we deem ourselves to be. For a Christian, there seems to be something intrinsically wrong with this kind of reasoning.

Since every person coming into this world is a totally new creation of God’s infinite love, no two persons are ever exactly alike. The basic characteristics to all human beings are employed in myriads of nuances that determine the person’s personality and character, and the direction in life, and often for eternity, that person has decided to take. Every child born has: eyes to see, ears to hear, mouth to speak, hands to touch, feet to walk, mind to think, and heart to extend itself. What determines our course is: On what do those eyes gaze? To what do those ears listen? What words emanate from the mouth as an expression of what the mind thinks and the heart desires? How and to whom do those hands reach out? Where do those feet go? What thoughts are harbored and fostered in the mind? And, Whom, what and how does the heart love? We are that child who seeks to grow into a holiness and integrity that only God’s grace can produce. How can we accomplish this task? It is a lifetime daily journey. Like a piece of marble in the hands of the sculptor, or cloth in the hands of a tailor, or plant in the hands of the gardener, we must allow ourselves to be chiseled into a work of art, cut, shaped and put together into the proper garment suited to us, and nurtured and nourished to grow into the new life we were created to be.

It is through our senses that our act of adoration becomes an experience that transforms as it challenges. The Apostle Saint John tells us: *This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched ... What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you so that you may share this life with us* (1 John 1:1-3). Our senses cooperate to allow the heart to experience God as it adores Him, and to enfold the experience in our response to one another, as we allow it to transform us.

Giovanni Gigliozzi, to the Bologna Congress of the Prayer Groups on 25 April 1960, said the following to the assembled groups: *You must daily live your Prayer Group. Be leaven! Your lives must be guided by your priests and Bishops. Be true apostles in your parishes. The group is not a small closed orchard; it is not a little garden to be jealously protected. Give! Be generous with everybody in your environment and families. The value which Padre Pio desired to give to the Prayers Groups is, above all, a spiritual one; to extend the vehemence of love which comes from Padre Pio, a priest of Christ. Spread it throughout the environment you frequent.*

Six years later, only two before his death, Padre Pio, speaking of prayer, said: *Prayer is the unique strength of all good souls, it moves the world, renews consciences, sustains the “Casa”, comforts the suffering, heals the sick, sanctifies labor, raises up healthcare assistance, gives moral strength and Christian resignation to human suffering, it overflows*

with the smile and blessing of God on all sluggishness and weakness. (5 May 1966)

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, let us take to heart the words of Padre Pio and Giovanni Gigliozzi. We must always remember that prayer is a strength and leaven that transforms those who pray with their heart and life. True prayer is never a personal static experience but one that of its very nature throws open the heart of the one who prays to allow all to enter into an embrace of universal brother/sisterhood. Pray with God's Holy Word, particularly the Gospels where Jesus speaks to us with His life. Let the Word en flesh Himself, as it were, in your lives ever more deeply, so that it is *no longer I who live but Christ lives in me* (Galatians 2:20). Let the Word be the strength and source of your prayer.

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

Peace and Blessings

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National Coordinator