

# 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)

January 2014

Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

In this New Year of Grace 2014  
*May the heavenly Child look benevolently on your soul...*  
*And may the light that flooded the minds of the devout shepherds at Bethlehem*  
*enlighten your mind and also never abandon you ...*  
(Padre Pio to Padre Benedetto)

Several days after the celebration of the birth of Jesus, the Gospel accounts present the Holy Family's journey to Jerusalem when the boy Jesus was twelve years old. At twelve or thirteen, the young Jewish man undergoes a ceremony that makes him a *Bar-mitzvah* (*son of the commandment*). He is now expected to fulfill his religious responsibilities as any other male adult in Israel. The first recorded words of Jesus in the Gospels, most probably around the time of his Bar-mitzvah, set a scene that leave some a little perplexed. His words sound insensitive to the concerns and worries of his parents. They seem to lack delicacy towards his mother. He sounds somewhat like an arrogant adolescent. He seems to be asserting His independence in a rather un-caring and un-loving manner. He appears to be doing "His own thing".

His parents -Mary, His Mother and Joseph, His Messianic Father - anguished three days looking for Him. Eventually finding Him in the Temple, His Mother asks *why?...why* did He remain in Jerusalem, why didn't He ask or inform them of his desire to remain in Jerusalem, why did He allow them to feel such anguish? Jesus' response would probably annoy or even anger some parents, to say the least. Rather than apologize, His response is: *Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house?* (Luke 2: 49) These must have been confusing words for His loving parents to hear, nevertheless, the Gospel tells us that Jesus was truly a loving Son *and obediently went to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph and was obedient to them.* (Luke 2: 51) 'Obedience' is the key word and virtue. This obedience was the fruit of a Love that no other family has ever or will ever experience. This occurrence in the early life of the Holy Family helped each to assess the role they were to fulfill, including Jesus. They would fulfill their roles faithfully with great love and respect for each other.

Love helps us to hear those words, *Why were you looking for Me?* (Luke 2: 49), in a totally different sense. Hidden within the person of Jesus that everyone saw, was the majesty of the divinity that others would have to discover and ultimately either accept or reject when, after a thirty year preparation, Jesus began His ministry. The Omniscient God Incarnate still needed to experience the learning process of human nature. The harmony of natures in Jesus were a mystery, as well as a difficulty for those who followed closely and got to know Him more deeply. One thing was certain: this unique solitary life had begun a journey among His own, and, as St. John tells us, *His own did not receive Him* (John 1: 11). Circumstances were such that at the very beginning of his earthly life, when Mary was about to give birth in Bethlehem, *there was no room for them in the inn* (Luke 2: 7) but only a refuge used for animals. When wise men came from the east to venerate Him the local king, Herod, sought to kill Him. Safety for the Infant King demanded self-imposed exile in Egypt to insure a secure homestead as refugees/exiles in a foreign country surrounded by foreign gods rather than the Great God of Israel. Returning to familiar surroundings after their Egyptian sojourn the Holy Family settled in Israel with cautious prudence.

*Why were (are) you looking for me?* (Luke 2: 49) is a question that is constantly posed to us. Whom do we seek? What are we searching for in Jesus? Is He Who He really is for us? Do we want Jesus to be Jesus to each one of us? Do we respond to Jesus as we ought? ... Or, have we made Jesus and His message to our own image and desires?!

From the very beginning many believed in Jesus' goodness but not in His 'God-ness'. That He was a great human being was undeniable for many, but that He was God was denied by those, especially among the

religious and political leaders of Israel, whose ideas actually live on today in various ways. He was a great human being who 'rocked the boat' too much. He had become an uncomfortable person who had to be silenced. His words and example *gave comfort to the troubled and troubled the comfortable*. He truly was, and is, as Simeon had prophesied years before: *a sign of contradiction* (Luke 2: 34).

From the beginning of Christianity there were those who denied the divinity of Jesus, and the attitude and assertions continue today under various names, movements, political agendas, social standards, and so on. Everything Jesus said and did could thus be reduced to a pick-and-choose relationship with the Lord Jesus. Once the divinity of Jesus is put in question and, or worse, doubted, His words and life become great examples but nothing more. Jesus becomes no different than Buddha, Confucius, or even Ziggy in the comics. The absurdity of it all is overwhelming! Yet that is what so many, even Catholics, seem to do. Jesus is a matter of opinion, a choice to be bartered with, a majority vote on issues of major importance, a guru that leads us into an anonymous mass of watered down expressions of religion without faith. We become 'spiritual' people, but not 'religious' people. We become our own code of life at all levels! Absurd!

What I have just stated sounds harsh and even critical. It is intended to be! Unless Jesus takes over our lives and we allow Him the first place in our hearts, thoughts, words and actions, anything we do just makes no sense. We might have the name 'Christian', but not the underlying force of the Spirit to 'Live Jesus' every moment. It would be wise to remember these words: *Watch your thoughts; they become words. Watch your words; they become actions. Watch your actions; they become habits. Watch your habits; they become character. Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.* (Lao-Tze) We were imprinted with the character of the Holy Spirit Who inspires us and urges us to listen to Jesus and believe in Him as the Only-begotten Son of God, conceived by the Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered, died and rose from the dead. And Who now is with the Father in glory and Who will judge creation. How we allow that thought to take hold of our hearts will determine how we allow the character with which we have been sealed to take hold of our lives ... and what direction our lives are taking.

St. Francis de Sales reminds us that *we will steer safely through every storm as long as our heart is right, our intention fervent, our courage steadfast, and our trust fixed firmly on God*. Is not this what our Father and Founder, Padre Pio, reminds us as his spiritual children? We are beacons of prayer shedding the light of faith wherever we gather for adoration, prayer, and reflection. Our celebration of the Eucharist and our Eucharistic Adoration keep our hearts reconfirmed in our belief in Jesus as God enfleshed in humanity, raising our frail nature to a level that offers it a share in the divine. Our prayer maintains our intentions alive and encourages us to move forward on faith's journey. Our group and/or personal reflections remind us of and rekindle within us our trust in God on Whom we now have firmly fixed our gaze so as never to lose sight of Him.

*Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house?* (Luke 2: 49) This question came from One Who was so present to the Father that He could not imagine anyone not realizing that the Temple was where He would naturally be. Where are we naturally, with our minds, hearts, desires...? While never leaving any practice of fraternity, Padre Pio was always known to be in the Presence of Him Who was his Life. His life in fraternity with his Capuchin brothers exuded the divine, not just because of the Stigmata and other spiritual gifts, but because his demeanor spoke of someone who firmly believed in the Presence of God everywhere. He believed the One Whom he served. He believed in Him as God-Man, and he believed Him, His every word, precisely because he believed He is God enfleshed in nature. This natural composure of Padre Pio was the magnet that attracted so many to him, even those with whom he had to be stern or firm.

Though this seems to belabor the issue, it is necessary to emphasize it. Why? Because many believing Christians have distorted the image of Jesus to fit their own needs and wants. This is so evident even now when religious rights and values are affected by governmental policies and legislation. Jesus is seen and revered as the 'holy mascot' of some religious organization rather than the Divine Son of God in Whose name we live, and move, and have our being. Padre Pio encourages us to live in Jesus. As faithful members of the Prayer Groups of Padre Pio we can be an effective presence through word and example to a world that has so many other blinding lights and cacophonous sounds to distract, distort, and even destroy the gifts that God has entrusted to us.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, do we acknowledge, not just intellectually but truly, emotionally, decisively, Jesus as Lord, Savior ... as God? Do we seek Him out in the Temple of our Tabernacles, at the Altars of the Eucharist, in the Wisdom of His Word that we read or hear every week or even every day? Have we allowed the heresy of Arius, that denied the divinity of Christ, and that has subtly continued in our society today in many ways, to enter our own lives, rendering Jesus and his words relative, optional, a question of majority vote?

When our beloved Founder celebrated Mass he was transfixed into a living image of the One he offered. When Padre Pio heard the sins of God's prodigal children, one could immediately recognize the image of the loving Father and Jesus the Brother Whose compassion and concern were always available to forgive and lift up, even if at times with strong manners. When Padre Pio encountered those in any need, or friends who arrived to

spend some quality time with him, it was always an experience of God-centered good humor and pleasant company. When Jesus is present to us, when the One Whom we are searching out is felt deeply in our hearts, and our lives are lived as though He were there walking, talking, crying, laughing, praying, struggling ... with us, then it is that we are becoming more like the spiritual children of our beloved Father and Founder.

*Did you not know where I had to be?* Sometimes our searching takes us all over. We run from one place to another; we look for miracles rather than the mystery; we listen for prophecies rather than His inspired Word ... hoping to find the One Whom we already possess but as yet have not been able to recognize. The great and awesome God of Creation, hidden within the frail, vulnerable nature of His creation is waiting for us to let His transforming grace lead us forward as heralds of the Great King Whom we know, serve, love and adore.

When we adore Him, then it is that we acknowledge Him as Lord and God. In acknowledging the awesome presence that is both sublime and humble, then it is that we take our stand against the hidden response of today's world to the message of Jesus. The spirit of the world, and *he who is in the world* (1 John 4: 4) seek to render the life and words of Jesus irrelevant, ineffective, sometimes even absurd. The New Year of Grace 2014 offers us the opportunity and challenge to witness to our Christian sisters and brothers who have minimized the importance of the teaching of Christ, and to those who do not know Christ to see Him in our lives.

Let us live in such a way that the Eternal One is no longer a pious theory to decipher but a Living Reality Who gives our life meaning and direction. Then it is that we can say with St. Paul: *It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me* (Galatians 2: 20).

May Jesus, Our Lord and God, bless each and every one of you throughout this New Year 2014; Our Lady and Good St. Joseph guide, guard and protect you; and our Father 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 Director