

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

National Office

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you his peace!
May Jesus lead you through the mystery of His Passion and Death
to the joy of His Resurrection and our Renewed Life in Christ Jesus!

We continue our journey through the lenten season by prayer, fasting, acts of charity. Soon we will enter the joy of the Resurrection through our spiritual immersion into the mystery of the Passion and Death of Jesus. Easter joy begins with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. In Liturgy and spirit we enter, as it were, the week-long "Solemn Mass" - "a Living Eucharist" - of the Victim's total surrender of Himself to the Father's Will and the victory that ensues. Every day of Holy Week is another moment in that wonderful drama of our salvation. The stage is set in Jerusalem; the players are all in place; and Jesus, the central figure and Victim of Sacrifice, is knowingly participating wholeheartedly in the Father's Plan for all creation.

The holiest of all weeks - Holy Week - begins with the "Hosannas" of the populace. In a brief time, "Hosannas" are followed by the intrigue and betrayal of Jesus by His nearest and dearest friends, "hand-picked" by Himself. What ensues is choreographed by the religious leaders of His own nation and the foreign occupational forces. The protagonists play out their roles in the Governor's palace, in the streets of Jerusalem, and on Golgotha: "Hosannas" turn to "Crucify Him", jeering remarks ridiculing a dying man are thrown at Him. *The heavens proclaim the glory of God* (Psalm 19:1): the skies darken, the earth quakes, the curtain of the temple is torn from top to bottom, "signs" are everywhere. At His death, the bystanders, and those who before had added their jeers to the ridicule and curses of the others, return to their homes beating their breasts. Even a Roman centurion proclaims, *Truly this was the Son of God* (Mark 15:39). Before all this, however, the Drama of Calvary must peak in a tragic-bloody-humiliating manner when Jesus, nailed to a criminal's cross, is mockingly hailed as *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews* (John 19:19), that leads to a moment of desolation when He exclaims *My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?!* (Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46). Everything climaxes with the death of Jesus; a death that continues to proclaim love, compassion and forgiveness for all. As Jesus let His spirit render His body lifeless, conflicting sentiments were felt by all present. How true the statement that we in Christ are called to *trouble the comfortable and give comfort to the troubled* (Stephen Banks).

If everything ended there, what a tragedy it would be for us all! But, the story does not finish there! It cannot! Our story does not end on the Cross; our story as redeemed children of God finds its true beginning there. When Jesus cries: *Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit* (Luke 23:46), our life-blood is renewed and we again are offered the opportunity to be one with the God who became one with us. We are gifted with the *compassion of condescension*, as St. Leo the Great calls the moment of the Incarnation in the womb of our Blessed Mother Mary. The Incarnation of the Divine Word, Jesus the Christ, fulfills the reason for His earthly life in the Passion-Death-Resurrection of Jesus. And, we, redeemed in His Blood, are a people who profess and proclaim not only His Death and Resurrection, but our everlasting Life in Him! Saint Paul tells the community of Corinth: *If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty too is our preaching; empty, too, your faith...and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain...But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep...for in Christ, all shall be brought to life...so that God may be all in all.* (1 Corinthians 15: 13-28),

Each year all Christians throughout the world gather to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. The religious denomination does not matter. Every Christian is a true Christian only if he/she believes that Jesus was nailed to a cross and died, and on the third day rose from the dead. If one does not believe in the physical Resurrection of Jesus, he/she cannot really call him/herself a true Christian. Many non-Christian people admire all that Jesus said and did; they even seek to emulate His life. But, if one does not believe in the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, as Saint Paul says, life for that individual really has no personal meaning beyond the here and now moment of philanthropic or self-centered survival; as socially,

economically, and otherwise fulfilling as it might all seem. What way is this to live one's life! What kind of life can it be? Is it really living?! Is it not just a co-existence (albeit good, respectful, moral...) with the world and all the world proclaims? Why would anyone invest so much of him/herself in the world if all their endeavors and accomplishments ended with the soul's exit from the body? Unless our passage from life to Life is a reality we truly believe, and by which we live, as St. Paul tells us, we are more than dead and truly to be pitied (cfr. 1 Corinthians 15: 12-21).

We are children of the Resurrection. Our song is "Alleluia". St. Augustine says: *We are Easter people and Alleluia is our song!* The theater of Redemption is the world in which we live - God's gift of Creation - and Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer, is the Victim of humanity's ingratitude to Love Incarnate. Our hope, founded on faith in an impossible event, proclaims that the finality of death was conquered by the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus. He is alive and well! Life is worth living! Death has lost its sting! Death is no longer the "grim reaper" that destroys and reduces us to nothingness! In the Resurrection of Jesus, Death is the point of convergence of one's life, and the threshold of eternity. *Life is merely changed, not ended. And, when the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death, we gain an everlasting place in heaven* (Preface for Masses for the Deceased). Why do we Catholics, like the Corinthians who were reprimanded by St. Paul, fail so often to live as the redeemed people we are?

Our world and our own immediate society is impregnated with hatred, violence, terrorism, war, terminal illnesses, tragic lifestyles, deadly addictions, and more. This is a reality we cannot deny. But the world is the theater of Redemption. It is an enormous setting where all are protagonists of a marvelous story that has God Incarnate in the lead role, and the rest of us as understudies who seek to image God by the way we live. In this theater roles are exchanged often: sometimes we are among the central figures, other times we watch with hope-filled anticipation as the whole story of our salvation unravels before our eyes. What do our eyes see? Hopefully, we all recognize the Risen Lord Jesus, alive and well in our midst, as we seek to share in His Life following His words and example.

We are like the Israelites who kept the wounds of their years of slavery in Egypt open, even though their Passage through the Red Sea was an undeniable proof of the power and the credibility of their God. They continued to complain and expect God to do for them what they had the ability, in God's grace, to do for themselves. We have not let the wonderful effects of Jesus' Resurrection - our Passage from Death to Life - on that first Easter Sunday penetrate our hearts. We still have not lived our Exodus experience as profoundly as we ought. God leads and strengthens those who recognize and acknowledge their vulnerability, and who admit to their needy state without Him. God accompanies us from the mentality of self-centered individualism, to an open-hearted availability and acceptance of others. Like the Israelites of old, we would rather have the onions and garlic of bondage without challenge, rather than the challenge to be free and go beyond the barriers we set in our lives. The Resurrection of Jesus encourages us to look beyond our failures, to move courageously forward beyond our fears, to trust confidently and use well our God-given gifts, to believe in the Life Jesus came to give us.

To go beyond is eventually to enter the Land of Promise. We cannot continue to mix the straw of complacency and indifference with the mud of confusion and earthliness. This only fabricates bricks of slavery that erect walls that hinder our journey to God. We complacently build the cities of man, rather than struggle to build the City of God. A culture of death still pervades our society. Children of the Resurrection, freed in the Blood of Jesus, imbued with the gift of the Holy Spirit, Loved by the Father, we are called to freedom - a freedom the world does not understand and yet still attempts to create through power, prestige, possessions, and the like. The motto of many seems to be "leave me alone and in peace, and I'll accept anything". *No risk, no gain!* (Mother Francis Bachmann, foundress of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia). In Jesus there is no risk of loss, only gain; yet, often we opt for the slavery that stunts our spiritual growth and blinds us to the wonder and glory of the Resurrection that speaks to us of our dignity and freedom as redeemed children of God in Jesus through the Spirit.

Like the first followers who experienced the Savior's Passion and Death, we can allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the difficulties and delusions of life, or we can fix our gaze on the Risen Lord. Like the women who went to the tomb, we may love Jesus deeply, but feel and act as though He is still in the tomb. Their love could not separate them from Him, even in death. It was that loyalty, that fidelity, that offered them the gift of being the first to see the Resurrected Lord... and they kissed His feet and ran to tell the others. Eventually His love wins the hearts of those who sincerely seek Him, even through difficulty and failure.

The Cross was a fixed moment in time, whose effects would last eternally. There is a powerful phrase in the Passion account that many read and pass over: *from noon until three in the afternoon, there was darkness over all the earth* (Matthew 27:45). The evangelist reduces this horrific moment of humanity's ingratitude to its Creator to a determined amount of time. Thus, we are reminded that the powers of darkness can rule only for a time, but will never prevail forever. His Life and His Light will always have the advantage over death and darkness. *He is risen ... go quickly and tell His brethren 'He has risen from the dead and He precedes you ... you will see Him ...!* (Matthew 28: 6-7)

Fear not!, He has conquered death ... Have courage!, His Spirit within you can withstand all that surrounds you ... He is Risen! We never stand alone before the world because we are victors in the Victim, in Whose death we come alive.

Easter proclaims a message of liberation and long-lasting-Life. Easter is the day and the Season that continually reminds us that the Son will always cast His Light on us. The darkness of sin, cynicism, skepticism cannot keep the light of the Son of God from enlightening our lives and our world. The question is whether we will accept to bask in the Light of the Son, or remain in darkness. When we create room in our hearts for the Lord to enter, then the power of Easter can take us to heights never imagined.

In a letter to his Spiritual Daughter, Raffaelina Cerase, Padre Pio writes in greeting: *May the Holy Spirit fill your soul with His most holy gifts and make you holy. May the risen Jesus make you, too, feel a spark of His holy love and reveal more and more to you the mysteries of the Cross. May the sorrowful Virgin obtain for you from her most holy Son true and sincere love of the cross and may your soul be inebriated with it. Amen* (April 10, 1915).

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, we too are reminded that only through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives can we fathom something of the mystery of Christ's love for us. It is the Risen Jesus who teaches us the value of the Cross - you cannot separate the Victor from the Victim. The Cross without Christ is tyranny; Christ without the Cross is a lie (Servant of God, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen). In the midst of this redemptive journey is the silent, dignified and loving figure of Mary. She is always with us. She accompanies us to the very foot of the Cross of Jesus, where She, Mother of the Son of God, accepts us as Her children, in whom, imperfect though we be, She sees the image of Her Son and loves us. We love Her in return and in Her Immaculate Heart find a consoling and strengthening refuge that leads us in love closer to one another and to Jesus her Son. The co-redeeming presence of Mary, with a mother's love, offers Her Son to the Father for all of us according to the Father's Will and Design. In the name of all humanity, She, through Her unconditional surrender to the Father's Will at every moment of Her life, makes the sacrifice of Christ our own in His Sacred Divine-Human Nature. Her "yes" at Nazareth at the Annunciation reaches fulfillment in Her "yes" on Calvary at the fulfillment of the atoning death of Her Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

May Easter and the fifty days of Resurrection Joy help us to value all that God asks of us, so that through Mary to Jesus, in Whose Passion-Death-Glorious Resurrection we enter the Father's loving embrace, we may live virtuously, die piously, and achieve the fullness of the rewards of Eternal Life.

May God bless you; Our Lady guide, guard, and protect you; and Padre Pio watch over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care. May the Risen Lord inflame your hearts with love, and bless you and your loved ones with the gift of His Easter Peace and Joy.

Peace and Blessings in the Risen Lord,
Fr. Francis A. Sario, O.F.M. Cap.
National Coordinator