

# 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)

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

Peace and Blessings in the Risen Savior!

We have entered the month of sun, flowers, cool evening breezes and warm sunny days. It is a month that speaks to us of new life and new horizons that await our discovery. May prepares us for the warmer months of summer and the opportunity that many will take advantage of to rest and relax from the ordinary routine of work, school and home related chores. The month of May seems to bring to completion the kaleidoscope of floral arrangements that God has placed in nature for 'exodus' from the winter doldrums. The budding plants, the growing crops, the emerging animals from their winter hibernation, people walking and children playing in the open air, all these things and more the month of May offers for our reflection and enjoyment. Is it any wonder then that the Church should dedicate this month in particular to Our Heavenly Mother Mary? May is the month of Mary, bright shining star in God's heaven whose mere name brings warmth, joy, hope and a sense of new life and courage.

With all these beautiful things in mind, we look back and realize that May buds forth after the cold and death of winter, after the doldrums of long nights and short days, after the storms and chaotic weather of early spring, at the point when human patience is worn thin because of a lethargy the winter season brings about finally penetrating the soul to make one ask the question: "when is it all going to change?" Somewhat exaggerated, but nonetheless true regarding how so many feel before the life-enriching sunshine and warmth of the spring and summer months.

The birth of Mary, and her appearance on the scene of creation, is similar to the light and warmth of lengthening days and forthcoming natural beauty. All of God's creation had gone through the cycles of birth, growth, decline and agony. It was as though nature was rejecting all the gifts it had received. Something had to happen! Someone was needed who would begin a reversal of the process! It was a Return to the Future! What was necessary was someone who would allow the process to bring humanity to its original innocence so that it could once again inherit the ultimate gift of eternal life. The Father would do this through Jesus by His Spirit, but it would be Mary who would speak in the name of all humanity allowing The Plan to take form on the Stage of Redemption that our world is.

Genesis tells us that at the beginning there was nothing, and God's Word brought all into being, separating light from darkness, creating the changing days and seasons, and creating a diversity of life that would praise His love, originality and eternal wisdom. The greatest of all to give Him glory, as we are told by Saint Irenaeus, was the creation of man and woman. It was to this one, unique, and yet diverse image of the Eternal One that humanity was entrusted with the covenant and awesome privilege and responsibility of making God's love known till the end of time.

Scripture tells us how often God's People would disrespect and break this covenant. Scripture tells us of God's repeated merciful forgiveness of His People when they asked pardon. Scripture tells us of The People's obstinacy to the point of even eliminating the messengers sent by God to remind them of the covenant and the promise, and to encourage them to keep their agreement with God. Scripture tells us of the innumerable times God promised to be with His People to protect them. Through all these moments, whether directly prophesied or implied through strong figures who played an essential role in the History of the People of Israel, Mary stands out as a Sign of Hope to a waiting world.

Mary is the Dawn of our salvation that promises the rising of the Son of God. She is the Woman Whose Seed would crush the head of the deceiving serpent who led creation away from a loving God. Mary is the New Eve of a life without end. Mary, like the revered Miriam the sister of Moses, walks with her people through the desert of history's chaotic events to the promised land of God's Eternal Life. Mary, like Judith who single-handedly eliminated the enemy of God's People, protects her children on their journey through life. Mary, like Queen Esther in Babylon, places herself before the Great King and Her People to intercede for them. Mary, like the Prophetess Deborah who counseled and protected the People of God, counsels, enlightens and directs God's children through the many ways God has permitted that she be present to the world. Mary, like the little cloud seen by Elijah promising a refreshing and invigorating rain to the land of Israel parched

and lifeless because of The People's idolatrous ways, brings a downpour of God's graces, refreshing peace, and new life in Jesus Her Son to a People parched by the uncontrolled passions of a seductive and secularized world that deplete the wonderful reserve of God's blessings and graces. Mary is the young woman from Nazareth, betrothed to Joseph the carpenter, to whom the Angel Gabriel was sent asking that she accept the Father's challenging offer to be the Mother of His Son, thus allowing the process of humanity's Reconciliation to begin.

We Catholics have always had a special place in our hearts for Mary. Misunderstood by so many not of our expression of faith, and unfortunately today misunderstood by so many of our own Catholics, Mary continues to stand with us before the Father at the right hand of her Son, interceding for a sinful humanity obstinate in its self-centered determination to be self-sufficiently indifferent to the Father's vital place in the course of all human endeavors. Mary is the silent partner with Jesus throughout all Scripture. Her silence demands that we focus on Jesus, the Word Incarnate, Whom she gave to humanity. But, at the same time, tradition and history speak of a Mother Who refuses to "stay home" when her children are in danger, and whose presence and revelations throughout history shake the very foundations of life itself calling us to Prayer, Penance, and Peace with God and one another. It is at this point that many good people shake their heads at the thought of visions, apparitions, revelations and the like. Is it because they do not believe in them; then what of those we read about in Sacred Scripture? Are they all bogus, or myths, or hallucinations? Have we become so "intelligent" that the simplicity of God's approach through Mary cannot be understood or accepted? Has science so taken over our lives that faith seems no longer just childlike but childish and even foolish? *Only the fool says that there is no God!* (Psalm 14) And, only the fool sets limits on God's ability to speak in a language and manner we can understand! For the sake of reason, we become unreasonable! For the sake of scientific proof, we close ourselves to eternal truth!

Since Our Lady's first recorded appearance to the modern world at Guadalupe, Mexico, Our Mother Mary has been the most traveled member of heaven. She it is who seems to be sent to every corner of the world to speak with the children of God. It is easier to speak with "Mom". She, who gave birth to us in Jesus, knows us well. She it is whose words caress, inform, warn, plead, promise,...and at times must even threaten in the name of God, the Father. Mary is the Mother Whose love for all her children, entrusted to her by Jesus on Calvary at the foot of the Cross, never leaves us alone. The hundreds of apparitions of Mary tell us of heaven's urgency for us to listen to the message: Guadalupe, La Salette, Lourdes, Fatima, Paris, just to name a few known apparitions that are followed by many. Except for Guadalupe, all of Mary's appearances to the world came to warn, plead, and promise...and still we continue to close our ears and hearts to our Mother's plea!

Our own Spiritual Father and Founder, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, had a profound childlike devotion and love for Our Lady. His devotion always led his spiritual children to Jesus through Mary. Mary is the necessary channel of the Mystical Body that leads us to Jesus and that channels God's graces to us. Mary's place in the work of salvation and sanctification of God's People, though important and decisive, is always subordinate to that of the salvation given us in Jesus. The bond between Mary and the redeeming work of Jesus could be noticed in Padre Pio's letters to his spiritual daughters. Often he wrote of Mary as the Mother of Jesus and our Mother, and always associated Mary with Jesus' salvific work; the following excerpts taken from some letters are just a few examples: *Jesus and Mary, together with his foster father, assist and console you... Jesus and Mary always be in your heart... Jesus and Mary be always with you, free you from the bad tactics of the evil spirit and console you in all your afflictions... Jesus and Mary reign in your heart and make you taste the sweetness that waits for you in the eternal and blessed dwelling... Jesus and Mary make you holy... Jesus and the most holy Virgin make you worthy of eternal glory.*

Padre Pio delighted in using the image of the pilot of the ship and the star of the sea in referring to the union between Jesus and Mary as they guide souls through the tempest-tossed waves of the world securely traveling to their desired port of salvation. Mary is Jesus' companion in our salvation story and as Mother of the Christ, she is also Mother of the Christian. With Christ as our Brother as well as Savior, Padre Pio firmly believed that Jesus could refuse nothing His Mother requested on behalf of her children. It was always that childlike confidence that made Mary be alive in his heart and in his life so that she was a constant presence encouraging him, smiling upon him, protecting him, leading him always closer to Jesus Her Son, the One Whose image he had become in bearing the wounds of our salvation in Christ.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, how do we express our love and devotion for our heavenly Mother? Do we keep her alive in our heart and prayers? Is she a constant companion with us on our daily journeys and responsibilities? Or, have we relegated her to the archives of some archaic form of superstitious devotion that no longer has meaning for us? Have we become like those who think that in honoring the Mother we do a disservice to the Son, and maybe even degrade His importance in the life of faith? How can a Son not honor and love those who love His Mother?!

In a world filled with violence, terrorism, disrespect for human life, disregard for the sanctity of marriage and the bond between man and woman as co-creators with God; in a world where we hear of children who have lost respect for the wisdom of the elders and where the adults abuse the innocence of youth; in a Church suffering from the infidelity of some of its members and criticized by factions who seek to reduce the Church more to a political entity rather than a family of faith...the image of a loving and understanding Mother Whose Heart can rock the throne of God Himself because of His love for Her, His Daughter, Mother and Spouse, should fill us with hope and joy. The world, with all its problems is still the Stage of Redemption. The Church with all her problems is still growing in leaps and bounds because of the Truth, in

spite of the difficulties, that is so evident as Her Treasure of Faith. And, Mary is Mother of both: Mother of the New Creation and Mother of the Church. Let us love Her with all our heart and never forget to invoke her motherly intercession. Through Her Immaculate Heart may we be led into the Sacred Heart of Her Son and become the saints we are called to be.

May God bless you; our Lady guide, guard, and protect you; and may Padre Pio watch over us, his spiritual children, with loving care.

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