

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

National Office

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

In the Sacred Heart of Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary,
may you enter the loving embrace of the Eternal Father
Whose Holy Spirit fills us with Life and Love!

In his account of the story of the Passion of Jesus, St. John the Evangelist writes: *The soldiers broke the legs of the men crucified with Jesus...when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. One of the soldiers thrust a lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out (This testimony has been given by an eyewitness and his testimony is true. He tells what he knows is true, so that you may believe.) These events took place for the fulfillment of Scripture: "Break none of his bones...They shall look on him, whom they have pierced".* (John 19: 32-37)

St. John pointed to the prophetic significance of this act saying that it fulfilled the words of Zechariah, *They shall look on him whom they have pierced* (Zech. 12:10). The implication of this act of the soldier is that it showed that the very last drops of Christ's Blood were shed for all humankind, as a sign of His infinite love...But even before this, during His public ministry, Christ had referred to this love of His for humanity, of His gentle and lowly heart, and invited all to share this love: *Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light* (Matt. 11:28-30)...While He was preaching, too, Christ had focused on the heart: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Matt. 5:8). He also spoke of how for those who believed in Him, His heart would become a fountain from which rivers of living water would flow (John 7:37-39).

Why did Christ focus on the heart in this way, both His own and that of others? Surely because the heart is universally recognized as the seat of the emotions, of human love. Although Jesus is God, He is also man, and since the Incarnation, since His taking human flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin at the Annunciation, He has had a real human body and a real human heart. Thus, in the devotion to Christ's Sacred Heart we have a way of expressing our particular love for Him as a real person, and not just an abstract religious figure.

The tragedy of humanity's inhumanity to the Eternal Loving Creator, and God's Loving Response, is perpetuated through the centuries in the awesome celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy. We hear Jesus' words and receive His precious Body and Blood. We see Him stripped with indignation, crowned with humiliation, nailed with weakness, humanly powerless. It was the soldier's lance that confirmed the death of Jesus. His death was certain. Heaven's covenant love for earth was fulfilled, and the work of Redemption was accomplished. The thrust of the centurion's lance was the people's last response to Love. That lance thrust into the Side and Heart of Jesus was the last attempt of satan's influence on humanity to destroy a Love that will reign eternal. In the Heart of Jesus, thrust open for us, we enter the Father's loving embrace and are reborn to Eternal Life.

If only those who crucified Jesus had come to truly know Him! They saw, heard, touched, and witnessed His many works. Opportunities were always available for the people to recognize, acknowledge and accept Jesus. *But they were restrained from recognizing Him* (Luke 24: 16). Even the disciples, when the Lord had risen and appeared to them, did not recognize the Risen Lord because of their sadness at hopes destroyed by Jesus' death (cfr. Luke 24: 18-24). Nevertheless, why would people - the crowds - blessed and assisted by Jesus not have opened their hearts in love to Him at that most solemn moment in His and their lives? Why do so many of us persist in not surrendering to Love? Any one of us can conjecture as to the response or offer an excuse. Let us remember that we too, as the Jews of Jesus' time, often cry out *Crucify Him* (Matthew 27: 22-23), *We have no King but Caesar* (John 19:15), not necessarily by our basic beliefs but by our daily actions. When the mob instigated and seduced by Jewish leaders and peer pressure cried out *Let His blood be on us and on our children* (Matthew 27: 25), they could never have realized how prophetic those words were. The Blood of Jesus was poured out on all humanity, not in condemnation, but in a loving bath of saving grace. When water and blood flowed from His wounded side the full act of loving acceptance of the Father's Will was accomplished. Centuries of anticipation

and preparation were now fulfilled. Confirming His “mission accomplished”, before Jesus commended His spirit into the hands of the Father (cfr. Luke 23: 46) from the Cross, He said: Now, *it is finished* (John 19:30)... *It is finished!* Older translations render these words: *It is consummated*. The term is so much more beautiful when we understand it not only as the accomplishment of the mission lovingly accepted by Jesus, but also as the total surrender of Jesus to humanity in a loving relationship - a “covenant love” as that of husband and wife - to the death, so that “New Life” would be born from this loving union of hearts. The Heart of the Creator united with the hearts of His creatures in an intimate spiritual espousal that brought to life the image of Christ, through grace, in all who accepted redemption and reconciliation in His Blood. The Church, born from the side of Christ, lives in the Christian, to continue, through the ages, the restoration of all humanity in Christ (cfr. Colossians 1: 15-20).

When will this reconciliation with God, and the restoration and perfection of the Covenant, in the Blood of Jesus, be fully completed by God’s children? How can we ever hope to be reinstated in the grace humanity had before the Fall? What can we do to become victorious in and with the Victim of Calvary? Where can we go to find these answers? Why do we hesitate to respond accordingly once we have found the answers we seek?

We hesitate because we are afraid to let go of our false securities that we have raised like walls to keep difficulties out of our lives. However, we forget that those same walls that keep bad things out often keep good things from entering into our lives as well. We can go into the abyss of our hearts to rediscover the deepest desires that lie there waiting to be acknowledged. We must accept Jesus totally - not solely “believe in Him” but “believe Him”, and “Live Jesus”. We must begin in the “Now”, so that the Kingdom of God may be revealed in our lives, and thus be extended by us to others. Once we willingly do all this, we will be able to recognize God at work around, within, and through us. God is always at work fulfilling His Will; He invites us to share in this wonderful experience. Our participation in the restoration and re-creation of all things in, with, and through Jesus is a magnificent gift of the Father’s Love to us, and a sign of God’s trust in our ability to cooperate with His grace.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus, pierced out of love for humanity, is a symbol and a reality that helps us to remember, celebrate, and believe Who Jesus is throughout the celebrations of the Church Year. The Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus encapsulates all the other celebrations. The image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the image of the love of Christ that answers the question “Why?” concerning any facet of Jesus’ Life-Death-Resurrection. Why was Jesus promised to humanity? Love! Why was Jesus born? Love! Why did Jesus preach, teach, heal, raise the dead? Love! Why was Jesus betrayed, tortured and executed? Love! Why did Jesus rise from the dead? To show that Love can never be destroyed; it can only be muffled for a time, maybe even a lifetime, but never destroyed! Why did Jesus ascend to the Father? To show that Love trusts His own enough to entrust to them His Mission of continuing to fulfill the Will of the Father, through His Mystical Body the Church, in order that *In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of His Body, the Church* (Colossians 1: 24). Why did Jesus send the Holy Spirit? So that Uncreated Love could be seen and received, that it might spread like a ravenous fire to enkindle the hearts of others with a burning desire to consume all people with the same ardent passion to “Live and Love Jesus”. As the walls of fear and confusion are pulled down, the hopes of God’s people are rekindled, encouraged, and raised up to spread the message of God’s Love to all creation.

The Human Heart of Jesus pierced by the soldier’s lance tells us much about Jesus: Jesus is Faith revealed, Hope fulfilled, and Love alive! If God enfleshed His Love in Jesus, how can we continue to camouflage our love. Christians cannot be satisfied with a second-rate love that compromises life values for the sake of convenience. Christians are active responsible participants in life. Though God accepts the little we give and can multiply it infinitely, when it comes to love, it is “All or Nothing”! Anything in-between is a “cheap shot” we take at the immensity of total emptying that Jesus offered the Father for us, and a contempt for the gift of His Holy Spirit. Jesus teaches us by His Life, at all its stages, that our love can be lived in the ordinary experiences of every day. Our everyday life is filled with success and failure, virtue and vice, friendship and animosity, grace and sin. Our weak and broken love is mended, renewed, and strengthened each time we allow the Spirit of God to work within us.

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of the Love of the Father and the Son. Jesus gave this Gift to the Apostles and disciples gathered in the Upper Room on Easter Sunday, then to all the early Church after His Ascension. He continues to give us that same Gift - the Gift of the Spirit, the Paraclete, the Advocate - each time we ask the Father in Jesus’ Name. The Spirit of God, alive in our hearts, encourages us to live in His Love and to share it with others. He challenges us to love, and to love concretely - not just to love all humanity, that’s easy!, but to love the one next to me, who may challenge me to grow. Jesus assures us that this, and only this, is the way to everlasting life with God. It is only when we raise our love above the merely human and begin to see things from God’s perspective, that we can ever hope to begin to love not as an emotion for pleasure, but in an effective way that can change the lives of people. Whether it is love of God, love of self, or love of neighbor, it is “love”, human or divine - more preferably both - that dictates the way we conduct our lives. Emotions play a great part in our concept of love, but love is foremost an act of the will that seeks to fulfill the deepest desires for which the heart yearns. Jesus willed to fulfill the Father’s Divine Will in dying and rising for us so that we could share in His Divine Life. The Sacred Heart of Jesus reminds us of this Tremendous Love and Lover. Love is the determining factor of life/Life.

In his letter to Padre Agostino (December 3, 1912), Padre Pio writes: *My heart has found at last a Lover so attached to me that I am incapable of hurting him any more...He is one who is never angry with those who offend him...He has loved me...He smiles and says repeatedly that nothing is refused...In return he asks me for nothing but love...What is this fire that pervades my whole being?...Dear Father, if Jesus makes us so happy on earth, what will heaven be like?...I often ask myself if any people exist who do not feel their breast burning with divine fire, especially when they are close to him in the Blessed Sacrament...When I consider his affability I am completely consoled...I cannot help abandoning myself to this tenderness, this happiness...I trust Jesus so completely that even if I were to see hell open before me and find myself on the brink of the abyss, I should not lose confidence. I should not despair but continue to trust in him. Such is the extent to which his meekness inspires me.*

As Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio, do we understand what Padre Pio is saying? He tells us of a love so real that it affects his body as well as his soul. Love is real! It is not a figment of our pious imagination! Love is possible and even necessary to be lived before our life can be said to be fulfilled. In the Blessed Sacrament, central element of all we are as Roman Catholics and Padre Pio Prayer Groups, we encounter the Mystery and Miracle of Selfless and Transforming Love. Jesus' Love leads us, enlivens our spirits, enlightens our minds, encourages and enthuses our hearts, entrusts us with His mission, envelops us with His Spirit, and consumes us in a purifying Love that introduces us into the fullness of Life. Adore the Heart of Jesus, pierced for love of humanity! Acclaim Jesus, "Lord and Savior", who thirsts (cfr. John 19: 28) for our love in return. Realize that this is a love for all - men, women, children; it is not sentimentality but total faith, hope, and trust in Love Incarnate. Nothing is ever accomplished in fact without it first being in the heart and/or mind. If we are to be faithful to the Spirit of God and also to the spirit of our Association, we must love one another in fact and stop just speaking about it (cfr. James 2; 14-26 when St. James speaks of faith and works; and 1 John 3: 18-19). Jesus Himself gave this all-embracing commandment to us the night before He died, the night He left us the Sacrament of His Love, the Eucharist: *This is my commandment, That you love one another* (John 15: 17). All else profits us nothing: *Love is man's origin, love is his constant calling, love is his fulfillment in heaven* (Marriage III Preface).

There are so many ways for us to creatively live out our spiritual journey effectively in a secular world. Our secularized world often calls itself "spiritual" but has lost sight of the "sacred". We can begin living our heaven on earth, in spite of the "hellish" experiences that may come our way, allowing the "sacred" to overshadow us with the Spirit. We are "pilgrims and strangers". As any pilgrim, we expect the unexpected. The pilgrim is never discouraged to the point of despair, disillusioned to the point of defeat. The pilgrim sees every event and circumstance as another step in the journey, another experience of the sacred, another unfolding mystery that speaks of God.

In the spirit of our Father and Founder, Padre Pio, let us take that first step on our daily pilgrim journey. As Saint Francis of Assisi said to his first followers as he lay dying, *I have done my part, now you must do yours*. We are our Jesus' "backup plan". He expects us to continue his mission to make Him and His Gospel come alive in the world. Spiritual Children of Padre Pio move forward on this pilgrim journey. Through Padre Pio's intercession and spiritual presence in our hearts we will touch the lives of many according to how we live our own lives. May our Heavenly Mother Mary accompany us on this journey. May She lead all people to Our Lord Jesus Christ Her Son. With Mary as "pilgrim mother" on the journey with us, let us live and accept the challenge to join the "band of Gospel pilgrims" who journey through life to 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. In the Love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I pray that Jesus bestow on all of you and your loved ones...

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