

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

email: pppgusa@gmail.com

October 2014

Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

Writing about the state of his soul Padre Pio opens his heart in the following excerpts from his Letters to Padre Benedetto: *If it were not for the war which the devil wages against me continually, I should almost be in paradise, but I am in the hands of the devil who is trying to snatch me from the arms of Jesus. Dear God! What a war he is waging against me...Jesus will not measure his blood for the salvation of men...He will redeem by his holy love this most ungrateful of his creatures.* (20 December 1910) *The temptations with regard to my life in the world are those which trouble my heart and obscure my mind...Dear God! Even in ascending the altar I experience these attacks, but I have Jesus with me and what should I fear?* (19 March 1911) *Even in these days the enemy is making every effort to induce me to consent to his impious designs. In particular this evil spirit tries by all sorts of images to introduce into my mind impure thoughts and ideas of despair...I feel very weak in mind and body, Father, but I abandon myself in God's hands.* (9 April 1911)

Often we allow ourselves to be discouraged when we think we are making little or no progress in the spiritual life. We imagine that with one Confession, or one Communion received worthily, or some phenomenal retreat experience, and the like, we should no longer have to be 'divided' in our loyalties. One of the definitions of the word 'satan' is to cause 'division', 'confusion'. As long as there is life, we will experience what St. Paul states in his letter to the Romans: *For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want...I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.* (Romans 7:14-25) When we recognize, acknowledge, and face the 'enemy' straight on, God's grace comes to rescue and to strengthen us in the battle that ultimately leaves us stronger than when we entered the fray. The temptations of Padre Pio and his abandonment to the hands of God should be an example to help us in our daily struggle with virtue and vice.

Momentarily exchanging the roles of director and directee, Padre Pio writes to Padre Benedetto concerning spiritual trials: *God knows quite well the reason why he permits these feelings in his chosen ones. Even if no other purpose were served by this than the humiliation of these souls, it would already be quite a lot...It is true that he allows them to arrive at his frontiers so that in the combat the virtues may be practiced and strengthened. It is equally true that he allows the master-spies (venial sins and imperfections) to circulate freely in his kingdom, but this is merely to show us that without him we should be a prey for our enemies...Let us humble ourselves deeply, my dear Father, and confess that if God were not our breast-plate and our shield we should at once be pierced by every kind of sin. This is why we must invariably keep ourselves in God by persevering in our spiritual exercises and learning to serve God at our own expense.* (23 July 1917)

Challenges to our spiritual integrity seem to be common place with most of us at one time or another. When we have succumbed to temptation or are slowly 'losing ground' in the battle, and it seems as though the 'spirit of division' is winning, we may question God's presence. God is there with us to strengthen and uplift, but where are we in our relationship with God and His graces? The greatest obstacle we encounter often is our ego that refuses to recognize inadequacies, faults, sins, and the like, thus leaving us to act alone rather than seek the help available that God most lovingly and willingly offers those who ask it of Him.

During the celebration of the Eucharist there is a simple prayer that priests recite silently before inviting the people to prepare for the Eucharistic Prayer and Consecration. Some consider these few words an insignificant relic of the Tridentine Liturgy. Not at all! There is a powerful message conveyed by the words the priest prays. Before taking the bread and wine into his hands to consecrate them into the Body and Blood of the Savior, the celebrant of the Eucharist prays as he washes his fingers: *Lord, wash away my iniquity; cleanse me from my sin.*

This simple personal prayer allows the priest to see himself before God as ‘the’ sinner called to serve God’s people in the re-presentation of the one Sacrifice of Calvary. The priest does not stand apart praising his talents and spiritual attributes, but takes his place with all creation in need of salvation. At this moment, briefly, he stands alone, acknowledging his own personal need for forgiveness: *Lord, have mercy on me the sinner* (cfr. Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector - Luke 18: 9-14). What a powerful reminder! He too is a member of the People of God redeemed in the Blood of Jesus. He too is called to repentance. He too needs forgiveness from sin. He too must listen to and follow the Word of God he preaches and teaches. He too needs the strengthening relationship with Jesus that worthy reception of the Eucharist effects. He too is expected to cooperate with the graces the Lord sends to all His children to assist, strengthen and encourage them on their pilgrim journey. He too, as St. Augustine says about himself, is called to responsibility for those entrusted to his spiritual care, but he is also a Christian like those he serves, who himself needs to be shepherded by Christ in, with, and through the Church with his sisters and brothers, the People of God.

This prayer and the simple act of washing his fingers open the mind and heart of the celebrant to the call for personal holiness and integrity. The holiness of the priest does not add or detract from the effects of the Eucharist on those who worthily and willingly participate in the celebration. The need for spiritual and natural ‘wholeness’, however, is essential for the effects of the Eucharist to continue to transform the life of the priest, that he grow in the image of the Christ. This ‘wholeness’, by its very nature, requires an ongoing process of deepening one’s spiritual life.

Integrity - wholeness - is a key attribute for any human being, regardless of religious affiliation. Integrity is admired even by those who do not hold the same opinion or belief. It is an attribute that conveys a sense of trust and transparency of life. A person of integrity may have faults or character traits that are not always socially the best, but is honest and straightforward. Integrity of character seeks to live in the truth and to be honest with God, one’s self, and others. A person of integrity is, as Scripture tells us: *‘Yes’ when it is ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ when it is ‘No’*. (cfr. Matthew 5:37) This attribute is an essential element in the life of one called to serve God and His People in the ordained ministry. We priests are a ‘sign’, among others, that God offers His People to accompany them through life to Life. If we lack this expression in our ministry, how can the children of God whom we serve see harmony between what we say and what we do? This division gives an open door for the ‘spirit of confusion’ to enter in and begin to cause havoc.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, we too must acknowledge our personal responsibility for sin and be accountable before the Lord. The spiritual ‘wholeness’ we yearn for depends on the honesty we live with God, ourselves and others. It is not just the priest because he is an ordained minister, but it is every person who, because he/she is a child of God Who is Eternal Truth, must live fully the image in which each was created. *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.* (Genesis 2: 26) God’s revealed Word tells us, at the very beginning of our Sacred History, of this marvelous sharing the very life of God entrusted to us, and how humanity has journeyed through the centuries seeking to reestablish the integrity of this gift we had lost. Jesus offers us the means to achieve this goal through His Eucharist that allows us once again to be intimately one with the Father, through Him, in the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul writes: *In Him we have redemption by His blood, the forgiveness of transgressions...as a plan for the fullness of times, to restore all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth.* (Ephesians 1: 10) - Redemption through forgiveness leading to fullness (‘wholeness’) and total restoration (‘integrity’) in Christ.

The times in which we - the Church - live require that we reflect on the integrity of our own faith and how we live it each day. Perhaps we should reflect on our brothers and sisters in the faith who are suffering persecution and horrendous death - especially in the Middle East and Africa - rather than deny they are of Christ! What the media does not tell us, we have heard and seen through other reputable and truthful means. The images may repulse or even frighten us, but we must acknowledge them and remember - vividly if that is what it takes - what the Faith means to so many sisters and brothers in the Faith: torture and death. Yet, of us, all that God is asking, at the moment, is faithfulness to the Christ of Whom we are supposed to be an image! Do we conform in our actions to what we preach with our lips? Do we live the Eucharist and believe that Christ is TRULY among us in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, and within us when we receive Holy Communion? Is the Mass my participation in the Mystery of Calvary? Do I realize that no matter ‘how good I am’ I, with my sisters and brothers, though at different stages and intensity, need forgiveness as well as anyone else? Do I realize that the priest is human, and therefore subject to human frailty, but is also an “alter Christus” (another Christ), who alone can confect and administer to us the precious Body and Blood of Jesus in the Eucharist, thus deserving our prayers and support that he always be faithful? As faithful Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, do we pray for good and holy vocations to the priesthood and religious life? Do we foster and encourage vocations in our families? Let us never forget: Without the priest there is no Eucharist; without the Eucharist there is no Life. Our beloved Padre Pio reminds us: *It would be easier for the world to survive without the sun than to survive without the Holy Mass.*

This month is dedicated to the life of Jesus as seen through the eyes of His Mother Mary, celebrated in the prayer of the Most Holy the Rosary, and also to our Respect for Life at all stages from conception to natural death. We celebrate the ‘wholeness’ of Jesus’ life at every moment of His earthly existence, embraced and shared by the ‘Woman’ whose ‘yes’ initiated the immediate fulfillment of the Father’s Plan of salvation for all humanity. He invites us to pray for every life that has a part in the same ‘time-sharing’ that Jesus accepted to share with us. ‘Integrity’ of life is not an option, but an

imperative we must strive for until we achieve the perfection that is ours in eternity.

May God bless you; Our Lady guide, guard, and protect you; and may 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 Coordinator