

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

*The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord let his face shine upon you,
and be gracious to you!
The Lord look upon you kindly
and give you peace!*

In the beginning God ... (Genesis 1: 1). What a magnificent statement! What a powerful reminder with which to begin God's Holy Word! These powerful, incisive, and awe-filled words begin the whole of Sacred Scripture. They express the faith of the children of Abraham, and the faith of those who reverence Abraham as *The Father of Faith*. They express faith in the One Who is the foundation of all life. The universe and everything in it depends on its origin in and from God. We have some understanding of why we exist and where we are going when we recognize and accept creation in the light of God's Divine Plan. His "Plan" envelops the "nothingness" from which all is created and continues in being through God's infinite love, to the "Plan's" fulfillment in a *new heaven and a new earth* (Revelation 21: 1) *so that God may be all in all* (1 Corinthians 15:28).

In the beginning God always takes the initiative. *In the beginning God* loves us into life! *In the beginning God* walks with humanity and challenges humanity to greatness. *In the beginning God* calls and recalls humanity to a deeper loving relationship with Him. *In the beginning God* offers a Promise of re-establishment in grace. *In the beginning God* call us to life. *In the beginning God* enters our unique personal existence through Word and Sacrament. *In the beginning God* sets us on the journey that leads to Him. *In the beginning God* Who became a man and shared in our humanity, offers us a lifetime to share in His Divinity forever.

In the beginning God took the initiative to liberate His people. The Lord God, Almighty Liberator of the People of Israel, spoke to Moses, the Shepherd of Israel who led God's people into freedom. God told Moses to instruct Aaron, that as High Priest, he should bless the People of Israel in the Name of their God - with the blessing used at the beginning of this letter. Our own Seraphic Father Saint Francis of Assisi made these words his own particular blessing. The Church offers us this blessing as the first words of the Scriptures that begin the calendar year, eight days after the birthday of Jesus. Each year God's blessing is invoked on all the Church on the same day we honor Mary as the Great Mother of God. Through Mary we received Jesus, and in Jesus we receive the Father's blessings in His Holy Spirit at work in our hearts until the end of the ages. All because *In the beginning God* loved us enough to "take time out of eternity" to enter human history that we might enter one day the fullness of Life.

The thought and image of our Blessed Mother introduces us into a new yearly experience of events that will speak to us profoundly about ourselves and our relationship with God and one another. Our Mother Mary is *the highest honor of our race* (cfr. Judith 13). Like the great Judith of the Old Testament who fearlessly lead and liberated her people and of whom these words were first spoken, Mary is afforded the highest honor, and precedes and far surpasses us in faith. Her availability and courage make her the eminent model for all Christians. Through her divine maternity, she gives humanity our Redeemer, in Whose Death and Resurrection we are liberated from the shackles of sin and fear and are made able to live in the freedom of God's grace, and in the light of God's love. *In the beginning God* "dreamt" of Mary and She became the epitome of all any human being could desire.

On the last day of the calendar year we are reminded that every end is a new beginning. In the Gospel for that day, the Apostle John reminds us that: *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...He came to His own and His own did not receive Him...To as many as did receive Him, He empowered to become the children of God...those begotten not by human means, but by God* (cfr. John 1). The Eternal Word entered a profound relationship with humanity at His Conception in the virginal womb of Mary. The people of Israel continued to pray for and expect the God of vindication who would reveal His power and subdue their enemies. The Word, however, entered our reality as a simple human being, subject to all the experiences of time and human nature, except sin. His identity

would be so concealed that He would be rejected by many, and ultimately give an untimely death by execution.

St. John tells us that those who accepted Him would *become the children of God* (cfr. John 1). This adoption in the Spirit allows us to say *Abba, Father* (Romans 8: 15). The Father sees in us an image of His Son. Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, accepted the mission entrusted to Him by the Father to enter creation and lead us back to our original purpose. *In the beginning God* (Genesis 1: 1) ... We are created to be an overflowing extension of God's eternal love and life ... From the beginning! And, since goodness of its very nature seeks to extend itself, and since God is the essence of goodness, then the extension of His goodness is found in creation, and we are the image in this world of the kaleidoscope of God's unique yet varied image. If we only recognized and appreciated the dignity in which we were created and the majesty to which we are called! The more we exemplify in our lives the life of the Master, the more we realize this dignity and majesty in our own life. One of the purposes of the liturgy is to introduce us regularly into the experience of God through His Word and Sacrament so that we grow in our knowledge and love of God and thus accept to live more meaningful lives.

It is interesting how brief the liturgical season of Advent /Christmas is. Advent preparation lasts no more than four weeks, and the Christmas celebration of the infancy and childhood of Jesus may last three weeks. No sooner do the Wise Men leave the house where they offer their gifts - symbolizing love, prayer, and sacrifice - to the Child Jesus, when the liturgy introduces us to the wilderness of the Baptist's desert where in the Jordan River Jesus begins His journey to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the City of the Most High, where God's Temple speaks of His mysterious presence among His People. Jerusalem is where Jesus makes His Father's Presence known and seen in Him, the Word-made-flesh. Jerusalem is the *City of Peace* (Gen. 14:18; Heb. 7:2) where the Prince of Peace enters, is proclaimed, rejected, and crucified. As the journey to Jerusalem begins for Jesus, we too journey with the Infant and the Man; the Child of hope and the Man of Fulfillment; the Infant who flees in exile to safety and the Man Who confounds his enemies; the Infant who needs protection and the Man Whose miracles marvel those who benefit from them. We become one in prayer and reflection - one in the Spirit - with our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. *In the beginning God ...* and we journey with Him, our God-made-man, as we strive to collaborate in His Plan to save us.

Jesus is the *Promised One* God offered our first parents in the Garden of Eden. He is *The One Anticipated* for centuries in the words of the prophets and the hearts of the people. He is *The One Who bursts into time from eternity* when Mary says *Yes* (cfr. Luke 1: 26-38) to the Father's invitation for her to be humanity's spokesperson and Mother of His and her Son. The fulfillment of the Father's promise and Jesus' mission reaches its climax during those few years that lead to the wood of the Cross at Calvary, prefigured in the wood of the manger at Bethlehem. One wood embraces the Infant; the other receives the Man. One wood protects the Infant; the other wood raises the Man in ignominy and glory. One wood makes people wonder in joy at the Infant; the other wood makes people responsible for their lives before the Man. One wood speaks of the beginning of a life; the other wood cries out about the beginning of Life and its fulfillment. One wood reminds us of the doors closed to that young life waiting to be born at Bethlehem; the other wood reminds us of the Doors opened for all to enter Life.

We have celebrated a brief yet powerful season. Like the introduction or preface to a good story, we have been introduced into a life that we must not only learn about, but become. It would be consoling and pleasant to remain in the nostalgia of the story of the intimacy of the Infancy of Jesus. The intimacy of the Family of Nazareth speaks of normal challenges of daily life that we all encounter in one way or another. Nonetheless, it is when we hear the Man, the Master, who summons us to *Follow Me* (Matthew 4: 19), that our life begins to have purpose and fulfillment. It is when we leave the comfort and security of the past that we begin to see new horizons and achieve greater goals than we had ever imagined. *One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore* (Andre' Gid). We must leave the security of sight to travel in the light of trusting faith that leads where God wills. *In the beginning God* calls us to walk by faith and not by sight, trusting Him.

The beginning of the calendar year is always surrounded with the idea of new beginnings. We see the new year as an opportunity to *clean the slate and begin all over again*. We could attempt this, but it is really impossible to do. No matter how much we may try to put past things out of our minds, they are still with us, either in our thoughts or in the circumstances of our life. Who we are depends greatly on where we have come from. And where we go depends on how we build and learn from past experiences. We cannot remain in the past. We cannot allow ourselves to be walled into a nostalgic reminiscing of historical facts. We are called to forge forward into God's will. God's will provides for all who trust in Him. God's will leads through ways often never imagined but always fruitful for those who let God be Forerunner, Scout and Guide. *In the beginning God* is always with us.

Dag Hammarskjold, Secretary General of the U.N. who died a number of years ago in a plane accident, offers us a very timely thought: *We die on the day when our lives cease to be illumined by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of a wonder, the source of which is beyond reason*. The Source is the Father Who illumines us through His Spirit as we wonder at the magnificence of the mystery revealed in Jesus His Son. We no longer wander through life aimlessly, but are lead by faith in that same Spirit. How can anyone just sit back and not be excited about the numerous possibilities God offers us each day! God calls us to proclaim His goodness with our lives and to be His heralds of hope. We are called to

enkindle hope in a world that often lives in shallowness. The world seduced by the ancient serpent - the spirit of division and confusion with whom Jesus contended His entire life and with whom the Body of Christ contends till the end of the ages - cries out for that hope and love that we can make known in Jesus.

Our Father and Founder, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina loved the mystery of the Incarnation. A true son of the Poverello of Assisi, Padre Pio also experienced the gentleness and love of the Christmas celebrations. The Infant Jesus for him was the young lamb of sacrifice prepared by the Father whose holocaust would be accepted for all humanity. Padre Pio's simplicity, humility, innocence, love were all images of the spiritual child he was - the twentieth century copy of the Christ Child. Nevertheless, just like the Gospels who lead us so quickly from the infancy into the adult life of Jesus, so also was Padre Pio's life. From his earliest years he experienced an intimacy with God unequalled by most people of his time. As he experienced the peace of God in his early years, he was led quite soon to the experience the God of peace. This same God asks that we seek not the feeling of God but the God Who excels all feeling. Our God asks that we enter the mystery, and trust that *In the beginning God* gifts us with the transforming miracles of His love that we often fail to recognize. For fifty years and more Padre Pio lived in the mystery that enfolds and protects with love and truth, but does not always caress with feeling. Padre Pio extended the possibility of sharing with him in becoming Christ to the world to all those who accepted to be his faithful Spiritual Children. As a new calendar year begins, let us pick up the challenge once again and be true Spiritual Children of our Founder and Father Padre Pio of Pietrelcina. *In the beginning God*, through our commitment to the spirit of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina as members of the Prayer Groups challenged us to grow more deeply in our prayer ;life and relationship with Him. Now, at the beginning of this calendar year, let us renew our commitment and be the Spiritual Children of Padre Pio.

May the New Year 2015 be a year of Peace, Joy, and Love. May God bless us all and our loves ones; may Our Blessed Mother keep us in Her Immaculate Heart; and may Padre Pio protect all his Spiritual Children with loving care. *In the beginning God!* is with us, as well as at the middle, and end of our lives. May we never lose sight of Him and always remain with Him Who seeks to remain always with us.

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

Happy and Blessed New Year 2015

