

# Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you his peace!

Alleluia! He is Risen!

The joy of the Risen Lord be with all of you! Alleluia!

*I raise my eyes to the mountains. From where comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 121: 1-2) Who may go up to the mountain of the Lord? ...The clean of hand, the pure of heart ...they will receive blessings from the Lord. (Psalm 24: 3-05)* Mountains and hills play an important role throughout Scripture, from the very beginning of creation in the Book of Genesis to the 'new beginning' in the Book of Revelation.

The Old Testament often speaks of mountains and hills. On Mount Ararat - according to the centuries' old tradition - God initiated His covenant with all humanity through Noah, and promised never again to destroy all humankind. On Mount Moriah, God confirmed His covenant with Abraham, and promised him descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens. On Mount Sinai, God entered a covenant with Israel and clearly stipulated the conditions that would make them a people peculiarly His own, that they might Be holy for I your God am holy. On Mount Carmel, God manifested His majesty and glory to Elijah and encouraged and strengthened His prophet. Other mountains, other hills, perhaps less impressive, but nonetheless places and moments when the great God of Israel made His presence, power, and pleasure plainly known to His people. The 'heights' offered the spot where our ancestors in faith communed with God. Rising above the daily routine, moving beyond all things that distract and deter, they were able to encounter God more profoundly, and commune with God alone.

The New Testament also speaks of mountains and hills. The heights where Jesus preached powerful sermons, performed wondrous miracles, persuaded and encouraged His chosen followers to accept His call to follow in His footsteps ... and redeemed humanity. On the heights Jesus offers His 'circle of friends' opportunities to see the wonders of God and His own glory. Among these elevated areas are two memorable and important 'Mounts': Tabor (Transfiguration) and Calvary (Redemption).

A spiritual writer of the last century says that Mount Tabor and Mount Calvary help us to see The Glory in every Cross, and the Cross in every moment of Glory. On Mount Tabor a few chosen friends had a unique glimpse of Jesus that would strengthen them after the Resurrection; they were transformed by His transfiguration. On Mount Calvary all was fulfilled; the mission was complete; Jesus' own words, *When I am lifted up, I will call all people to Myself* (John 12: 32), would powerfully affect humanity after the Resurrection. The covenants of the Old Testament are reiterated and find their climactic fulfillment on Mount Calvary. The ultimate sacrifice, offered to the Father in the Blood of Christ His Incarnate Son, is our holocaust. Jesus the Christ is offered on the altar of the Cross and thus seals the Covenant with the Father forever for the sake of us all. On the Hill of Golgotha God invites His children to come and see how much *God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, so that all who believe in Him might have life everlasting* (John 3: 16). From the Cross Jesus sees the world and all times - past, present, future. He speaks to us. We see the Suffering Servant and recognize the King of Glory, the Christ; we acknowledge that His image through Baptism in His Blood makes us the Christian (the other Christ) each is called to be; and together we become the living Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, not a museum of saints but a home for sinners redeemed in the blood of Christ Jesus.

Hills and heights continue to be places where God makes His presence felt. Closer to our own time there is another 'hill' that attracted and still attracts people, even non-Catholics, to witness the power of God speaking to the simple and sincere of heart: the Gargano, in the Puglie region of Italy. Here, in the town of San Giovanni Rotondo, another person on the heights had his own awesome experience of God. That person is our Spiritual Father, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina. God called him to be a messenger of God's all-abiding love. Like Noah, he would be a sign of hope to a troubled world on the brink of auto-destruction. Like Abraham, he would be the 'Father' of a multitude of 'Spiritual Children' called to be 'powerhouses of prayer' in a secularized and hedonistic world that was quickly forgetting the presence of God and the power of prayer. Like Moses, he would stand before God and His People and intercede for them, especially when their actions merited the

justice of God's punishment. Like Elijah, he would see and commune with God alone, and thus strengthened be an instrument of divine graces for countless thousands over the years.

Signed with the marks of the Passion, Padre Pio, the Man of the Mountain, the Holy Man of the Heights, attracted all people to God and spoke so eloquently of the Glory of the Cross and the Cross in every moment of Glory. His participation in the Passion of Christ was God's means of leading thousands back to a more grace-filled life, and leading others back to God from whom they had distanced themselves. From Calvary, Jesus spoke to us about Himself, each one of us, and the New Family - the Church - born from His opened Side; from the Gargano, Padre Pio, speaks to all who come to him, of Christ, the Christian, and the Church. An image of Christ continues the sermon from the Cross and leads to the graces that flow from the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus.

The Eucharist Padre Pio celebrated was a re-presentation of that tragic and triumphant day when we were redeemed by Jesus and in Whose Resurrection we would be able to look beyond death to Life. Padre Pio was often seen by those assisting at his Mass as no longer himself but as the image of Christ. The priest is not his own. The priest becomes, spiritually, Christ. The Mass is not the priest's. When the priest celebrates Mass, it is Christ Jesus, gloriously present in, with, and through the Father and Holy Spirit, Who renews that grace-filled moment of Eternal Love that transforms those present, according to their own preparation and participation. According to each one's personal cooperation with God's grace, we are mystically transformed into a living image of Jesus ... who more, who less.

Through Padre Pio, especially at his Mass, Christ became present to the Christian. Those present were led to a more profound awareness of the image of Christ they bore through Baptism. Each Eucharist they received encouraged them to live their spiritual life more intensely. Life in the spirit affected life in the world so that their daily lives would be different from then on. Christ lived in and through them. The Christian once again was reminded of his/her dignity. As St. Leo the Great reminded the faithful in one of his sermons: *O, Christian, be mindful of your dignity!* (Christmas Sermon) Encountering Padre Pio with faith was truly a moment of Resurrection and New Life. The dignity of the Christian was made so obvious that one felt powerless to resist; and those who did usually surrendered later to the prompting of the Spirit. God's powerful works could transform the hardest of hearts, even if at times Padre Pio had to be 'rough' with the soul.

The individuals who came seeking personal 'graces', 'favors', 'miracles' left Padre Pio's presence aware of a greater reality of which they were a part - the Church. The Christ present in each Christian was the Christ they now sought out in their sister or brother. Seeking out the other leads to a bonding in faith and love that builds up the Church of which they are a particular and defined expression. The Prayer Groups of Padre Pio are those sisters and brothers who individually have encountered Christ through Padre Pio and now seek to keep alive the graces and strengthen the 'covenant' that has been formed in and among them, through Padre Pio's example, with Jesus.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio we follow the Lord Jesus on the Way of the Cross, but we must never forget that the Cross and the Resurrection are one. Easter joy is one with Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Resurrection Sunday of New Life in the Risen Lord. Each of those days celebrates the joy of the Resurrection: *Glory in the Cross and the Cross in every moment of Glory!* We must never separate the Cross from that wonderful moment of which St. Paul says: *If Christ has not been raised from the dead our faith is in vain* (1 Corinthians 15: 14). Though we focus so often on Padre Pio and his wounds, let us never forget that his message is God's Love and Life. The wounds of the Passion that Padre Pio bore are intended to help us reflect on the eternal love of God for us in Jesus through the Spirit. Padre Pio's wounds are a visible reminder of that One Great Sacrifice, never repeated, but always re-presented on the altar by Christ through the priest, for the Christian, who in Him is the Church - a Resurrection People. All are invited to ascend the 'heights' of the altar in the spirit and be washed in the Blood of Christ. The example and words of Padre Pio inspire us: in him we see the Christ; through him we acknowledge we are Christian - faulty but image nonetheless of Christ; and with him we accept our role in this world to be the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, a Sign of Contradiction, that prods us in this world to look beyond ourselves and the world that has hold of us. We as Spiritual Children of Padre Pio are, as St. Augustine calls Christians, an 'Alleluia People'. We do not stop at the Cross, we go beyond. Our Priest-Victim now reigns victorious ... and we with Him! Alleluia!

On Resurrection Sunday we must roll back the stone of those many things that we have allowed to close us in on ourselves and shut us out from the light and life God has entrusted to us. God and we roll that boulder away together. We peer into the empty tomb. We recognize Who Jesus is; He is the Christ. We recognize who we are; we are the Christian. We recognize what we have become in Christ; we are the Church - the living Body of Christ, alive in a world desperately in need of God's messengers and message of Easter Peace and Joy. When we accept our moment in life and believe in the Lord's Resurrection, ignorance gives way to knowledge, fear to courage and strength, prejudice to impartiality and tolerance, pride to humility, indifference to concern, over-indulgence to self-control, hypocrisy to sincerity, discouragement to hope, doubt to faith, and hatred to love, because ... *You can't hold back the dawn!* And the Resurrection of Jesus is the New Dawn bringing the Light of Christ to all willing to accept Him.

May the light of Christ's Resurrection shine in your life that we might have life, and have it in abundance. Our God lives

and journeys with each one of us that we might reach life's goal: Eternal Life. May the Risen Lord Jesus shower you and your loved ones with peace, joy and abundant blessings for a Happy Easter; may Mary, Mother of the Redeemer and our Mother, help you to live with Jesus in the light of the New Life His Resurrection offers each one of us; and may Padre Pio watch over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care. With a promise to keep all of you affectionately in my Easter Masses and Liturgies, I wish you and your dear ones a very Happy and Joyous Easter.

Peace and Blessings

Fr. Francis A. Sariago, O.F.M. Cap.

National Coordinator