

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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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!

If Padre Pio had not been a priest, his presence in the world would probably not have been noticed as much. He would have been as he had always desired: *a poor friar who prays*. For God's glory and the religious benefit of millions over the fifty plus years of Padre Pio's ministry, his desire was not to be fulfilled as he envisioned it.

Instead, his priestly ordination and his celebration of the Eucharist literally upset and "rearranged" what seemed to have been the set course of his own and others' lives. His celebration of Mass captured the attention of the world. It wound up even regulating the timetable of busses and hotels. Padre Pio's Mass was unique. Each time he celebrated the Eucharist, one could see with the eyes of the body what one already knew and had seen with the eyes of the heart: the Eucharist was the center of Padre Pio's life. *It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me* (Galatians 2: 20). These words of St. Paul were enfleshed in the person of Padre Pio.

Padre Pio was led gradually into an awareness of the Father's Will for him, and the role that the priesthood would have in his life. We call Jesus the Priest, the Victim, and the Altar. Padre Pio was a priest who lived in the person of Christ; he became a victim called to expiate for others as well as for himself the outrages committed against God's love; and he was an Altar through which the Father would manifest His love for all his children.

Just as Jesus prayed his Priestly Prayer the night before he died, Padre Pio would pray those same words for all his spiritual children: *Father, all those you gave me I would have in my company where I am to see this glory of mine ...* (John 17: 24). He accepted the awesome privilege and responsibility of his priesthood. His commitment would lead him through his own Via Dolorosa, supported and encouraged by the Eucharist and his love and devotion for the Mother of the Lord and Our Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

When Padre Pio was forbidden to celebrate public Mass, hear Confessions, preach in public, or in any other way be publicly visible, his Eucharistic life intensified. His Masses lasted longer and he could be seen to have become one with the Victim he offered. Humanly the burdens and confusion of life bore down on him, but spiritually he lived in the serenity of the just, and Jesus was his strength and consolation. The Mass for Padre Pio was the daily tension suffered in the effort to identify his total self-giving with the Son of God's self-giving on Calvary. It was the scene in which his mission to co-redeem reached its height. It was the Paschal Mystery that Jesus reminded us of in "Padre Pio's Mass".

When the restrictions were lifted and Padre Pio resumed his schedule, crowds would get up in the middle of the night so that they could rush to have a prime place at his Mass. That Mass that seemed to reconcile souls, made them forget evil, made them feel the joy of being brothers and sisters, all pilgrims on the same journey. It made them feel that life was worth living because it can renew itself everyday in the abundant love of Jesus. In a letter addressed to Maria Gargani, Padre Pio reminds her and us that the Eucharist is the source and means of perfection. The Mass is a life-giving experience for all who enter the mystery with faith and love. Through the Eucharist we discover all we need to assist us in overcoming ourselves and all that hinders our forward movement in grace.

The Holy Eucharist is a great means through which we aspire to perfection. But we must receive it with the desire and intention of removing from the heart all that is displeasing to Him with whom we wish to dwell ... You must try to continually overcome yourself in those daily struggles that the Lord presents to you. And these efforts must extend also to the constant exercise of correcting your defects, acquiring virtue and in doing good. Do all I have told you ... Do not

scatter the seed in the garden of others, but cultivate your own well. Do not desire to be anything but what you are: concentrate on perfecting yourself and on carrying the crosses either small or large, that you will encounter on your journey to heaven ... Each one loves according to his own tastes, few, however, live according to their duty and the will of the Lord. (Letter to Maria Gargani, 27 July 1917). Padre Pio is telling Maria and us that the Eucharist is the source of all we require to live in *the will of the Lord*, and thus achieve that perfection in the Lord we all seek.

In this month dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the symbol of the Lord's heart is offered for our reflection. We think of the heart as the center of our affections and desires. We talk about the heart when we love someone. When life leaves someone, we say that the heart has stopped. The Eucharist is the Heart of Christ that continues to beat down through the centuries with love for us. That heart, pierced by a lance, is the door, opened wide, inviting us into the Father's embrace. It is this doorway we enter every time we celebrate Mass and hear God's Word and receive His Eucharistic Presence.

It is obvious why Padre Pio would place as an essential for his Spiritual Children and his Prayer Groups the need to spend time in adoration before the Eucharist, and to assist at Mass and receive Holy Communion. Yes, I wrote "Holy Communion". The "Eucharist" (giving thanks) is what we do and "Holy Communion" (intimate relationship) is what happens when we receive worthily the precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus in the Eucharist. This union with Jesus allows us not only to enter the Heart of Christ but it also allows us to experience the Father's love and the strength and power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us reflect upon these two testimonies offered by those who attended the Mass of Padre Pio: *Father*, (Priest speaking to the Guardian of the Friary of Our Lady of Grace), *while Padre Pio was celebrating, I wanted to meditate on Holy Mass, and I can say that, in my 22 years as a priest, I have never meditated in such a recollected manner, nor attended a Mass celebrated with such devotion, as that which was celebrated this morning. I say this because I feel it in the depth of my soul and without any exaggeration whatsoever...* (Bavarian priest) *For me, San Giovanni Rotondo is a second Assisi, and attending the Mass of Padre Pio, I saw Jesus Christ on earth come to life again after twenty centuries.* As you can notice, to the human eye, Padre Pio lived a very methodic life centered on the cell and the choir. The Eucharist made his life take on a whole exciting dimension for those privileged to assist at "the Mass of Padre Pio". "His" Mass was the Mass of Jesus where Padre Pio immersed himself into the reality of the celebration of the One Whom he was ordained to become every more profoundly. Those who assisted with faith were often privileged to "see" beyond the human and recognize the "divine" hidden in the simple friar who just wanted to be "a poor friar who prays".

My dear brothers and sisters, Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, let us not take lightly the wonderful gift that has been entrusted to us. Many people were heard to say that during the Mass celebrated by Padre Pio, they believed they saw the face of Christ. It is no wonder! We too are called to let Christ be seen in our lives. When our lives become more Eucharistic, and we make the celebration of the Mass a daily focal point rather than just a weekly occurrence, our lives will be more centered on Jesus, our hearts will find peace in the midst of life's unexpected happenings, others will be led closer to God, and so much more.

The aspiration offered to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, *Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto Thine!* should be a plea that emerges from the depths of our hearts. This brief prayer will never fully become a reality until Christ becomes one with us in the Eucharist. The sublimity of the humility of Christ and the humility we find in that sublimity (to paraphrase a comment of St. Francis of Assisi), should fill us with such awe when we are before the Blessed Sacrament. A God Who humbles Himself to become one of His creatures so that His creatures may one day share more fully in His divine glory is so pronounced in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. He is Presence and Food. He is Companion and Viaticum. Let us entrust ourselves to the Lord, that we may grow in our love for His Eucharistic Presence. We pray that Our Lady, First Tabernacle and First Monstrance may help us live as she lived, bearing the Lord within us and presenting Him, by the way we live, to those whom we encounter on our journey through life. May Padre Pio be with us, his Spiritual Children, as we strive to make our lives a daily living Eucharist - "giving of thanks" to God - as was his life.

I pray that God will bless each and everyone of you and your loved ones and ask a remembrance in your prayers for me and the ministry with which I have been entrusted as National Coordinator of the Padre Pio Prayer Groups throughout the USA. And, 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.

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