

# Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

*By repeated blows of the efficacious chisel ... the divine Artist prepares the blocks of stone which are intended to form part of the divine edifice...Every soul intended for eternal glory can very well be considered a stone destined for the building up of the eternal edifice. The soul that is destined to reign with Jesus Christ in eternal glory, then, must be remodeled by the blows of hammer and chisel. But what are these blows...by which the divine Artist prepares the stone, that is to say, the chosen soul? These strokes of the chisel are the shadows, fears, temptations, spiritual torments and agitation, with a dash of desolation and even physical pain. Than the infinite mercy of the eternal Father, then, for treating your soul in this way, for it is destined to be saved. (Letter to Raffaolina Cerase, 19 May 1914)*

What Padre Pio is talking about to Raffaolina in this letter, refers to her own difficulties and particularly her terminal illness. No one really desires pain, hardship, sickness, and the like, for itself. Battling the difficulties, unresolved issues, physical pain, the certainty of death due to illness or just the fear of death so many experience, are spiritual struggles we must contend with and learn to understand, before we can deal with them and learn how to “surrender” not to the circumstance, but to God’s direct or most likely indirect will. No one desires to “lose” to anyone or anything and allow them to overcome us. In any type of confrontation or conflict, no one wants to be on the losing side. “Surrender” is never the option unless no other alternative can be found. Then, one side surrenders hoping not to lose everything. There is hope that a “deal” can be reached in order to give dignity to the losing side. However, there are times when “surrendering” can actually help. We can compare it to a tug-of-war battle in which we hope to be strong enough to defeat the other side.

In a game of tug-of-war, teams gather with a decisiveness to pull the other team over the line of demarcation. Team members strategically position themselves on each side of a long rope. The referee gives the signal and the spectators on the sidelines begin to chant, “Pull! Pull! Pull!” The collective strength of each team pulling in opposite directions creates an incredible tension on the rope. Everyone tries to hang on during the intense struggle of back and forth movement. Inevitably someone’s hands start to feel raw and hot. Soon, that person’s strength wanes. Their arms throb, their knees start to buckle, and their feet begin to slide. The teammates try to hold out for as long as they can, but after a hard-fought struggle they are overpowered by the other team and yield to their strength. They have to give up and surrender the tug-of-war. Sometimes what the Good Lord asks of us may seem just like that tug-of-war.

Though we may feel at times that we are such a battle, and are losing ground, remember that God is pulling for us, not against us. When difficult times come into our lives, we often enter a spiritual tug-of-war with God. We view ourselves on one side of the rope attempting to take charge of our negative circumstances and control the outcome of what has happened. We want to “pull ourselves together” and pull life in the direction we think it should go. In circumstances as these often we imagine God as the unseen force on the other side of life’s rope, pulling us in a direction we don’t understand nor desire to go.

What should change our whole approach is the fact that: There is no tug-of-war with God. He is on the same side of the rope as we are! *If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own son, but delivered him over for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things?* (Romans 8:31-32).

God is for us. He is not playing a terrible power game with our lives. God will not yank or drag us over the line, nor rejoice when we feel crushed and defeated. Instead, God waits patiently and quietly for us to release our grip on the rope. He wants to pull for us as we struggle through life’s storms. Surrendering to God does not mean giving up. Spiritual surrender is giving over, not giving up, our life-line to the One who is already the victor., and with whom we are called to share the victory.

There is no one among us who has not gone through struggles and fears. Some of them may have been terrible, shattering, even life threatening. We have walked through the *valley of darkness* (Psalm 23) many times. They may have seemed so deep that we feared never being able to rise out of them. We sought God through prayer. We may have read God’s Word

to find where we were and where we were heading. We may have spent time with the Blessed Sacrament hoping for an inner voice to direct us. We may have prayed to Our Heavenly Mother or some Saint for a “miracle”, and still we felt overwhelmed. At times such as these, remember the words of St. Paul to the Colossians: *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you.* ( Colossians 3:15-16)

The key to that phrase is in the word “let”. If I will freely “let” Christ take over and give Him my burdens and cares, Christ, who is my peace, will take up the situation for me. Surrendering to Christ produces a oneness with Him and enables me to recognize that He is for me, not against me. There was a religious sister who, whenever she was in a difficult situation or would encounter another roadblock on her way, disappointment in her life, failure in an endeavor she had worked so long on, negative results in health exams, and the like, her response, with a smile, was always “Jesus, take over!” And He did! Rarely if ever did she express a sadness for herself from what we might consider negatives. Hers was a spirit of trust and gratitude. If only we could all be that way!

When we let go of the rope to God, He picks it up on our behalf. Our burdens are His and our cares are in His hands. He makes known what we need to know and guides us in the direction we need to go. God knows what is best and right for us, better than we know ourselves. He knows what it will take to accomplish His good and perfect will in our lives. Let go! Let God do what is best and right. The outcome will be beyond your best imagining.

The choice to surrender is an intentional one. It’s the deliberate act of releasing our lives, hearts, and circumstances to God and asking Him to take over all control. Often what we do however is to use the words of surrendering as a bargaining chip when seeking for God’s help. We suggest an outcome and then offer up a temporary version of agreeing to God’s purpose. How often have we thought, “God, get me out of this situation and I will do (fill in the blank)”. But this isn’t surrender, and it certainly isn’t a way to experience the freedom of entering into God’s strength and love. It’s a halfhearted negotiation. Real surrender is allowing God to be God on his terms, not ours.

The most powerful picture of surrender is found in Jesus, hanging on the cross. His nail-pierced hands are open as he says, *Father, into your hands I commit my spirit* (Luke 23:46). Jesus did not give up when he died on the cross. He gave himself over to the will of the Father.

Living in surrender is a continual process. Learning to give our cares and concerns over to God, letting go of the rope is not a one-time decision that settles things once and for all. Every single day, we have to consciously decide to give the outcomes, choices, and people in our lives over to God.

What difficulties have become fierce competitors on the other end of your rope? What heartache or trial weighs on you so much that even the strength of your desire for a different outcome is no match for its might? If you allow the pull of temptation to enter that swirl of uncertainty, you will soon lose your footing. What holds you back from letting go ... from letting God take your end of the rope?

As children, we’re taught to never trust a stranger. Spiritually speaking, many people never learn to trust God because God often is a “stranger” to us. There are a many ways to be introduced to God, but these most often have little to do with actually developing a personal relationship with God. Just take the time to consider any person in your life that you genuinely trust. Most probably this person is someone you know well. To come to this trust, you have invested significant time and care getting to know and build a relationship with that person. This is how you and I also learn to trust God—we must get to know him intimately.

God already knows each one of us very well. God loved us into life. God loves us each day because God made us. We have to take the time to get to know Him and His love and His will. We are given the opportunity to know Him deeply and dearly through His Word made flesh through the “yes” of Mary, the highest honor of our race. Jesus is the declaration of who God is and what God wants us to know about Him first and His great love for us. The Eucharist is His Divine Presence that waits for us so He can strengthen our relationship with Him at Mass, at Adoration, and also at our daily tasks when we remember the Lord who consumed us as we consumed Him.

There is great delight in reading and rereading the words of someone who knows and loves us so much that the person is willing to write it down and proclaim it to us. Sacred Scripture is a love letter God has delivered to us. From start to finish, God’s words reveal why we can depend on and trust God. We must read it, cherish it, and hide it away in our hearts. Learn it, live it, and let God prove himself to us, who so often fail to see God right there with us. If you are willing to do that, He will not be a stranger and your personal relationship will grow to be one of deep and abiding trust in God. Our surrender will be effective and fruitful only when we trust the One to whom we are surrendering.

The best way to experience peace and serenity in our life and in the various storms we encounter, we must surrender our expectations. We all need to take a second look at our expectations and willingly lay them down before the Lord. In fact, it must be part of our deliberate act of surrender.

When our struggles, our storms, force us to struggle and strain, we are tempted to hold on to what we are familiar with even when it creates misery or exhausts us. Faith requires that we open our fists and let God take our expectations. But once God is included, literally anything can happen! Expect a ride you will never forget, but one that will give you more than you could ever have hoped for or imagined.

Today I want to encourage and prod you to start moving your feet towards Jesus. He is on the same side of your rope ... and on the other side of the storm. Let us not forget the Holy Souls in Purgatory whom we remember especially this month of November, but whom we should remember every day of our lives. *Remember, they were where we are; we will be* (through the mercy of God) *where they are*. They live in the certainty of glory because they were willing to let go and let God take over.

May God bless you; may 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 Co-ordinator