

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

National Office

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

*May the Infant Jesus grant your heart the Peace you desire.
May His Star enlighten your mind with the splendor of His Truth.
May His Love consume your heart so that it beats solely for Him. (P. Pio)*

His mercy endures forever (Psalm 136). God's mercy is limitless. God's mercy and love are His judgment and sentence. God's mercy was manifest from the beginning of creation. The mere fact that God loved and loves us into life is an eternal sign of God's mercy. Throughout salvation history God has shown His mercy to His people, even when, because of our unfaithfulness, we have deserved the contrary. The apostle John reminds us in the Gospel he wrote: *God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him* (John 3: 16).

We celebrate God's eternal love and mercy throughout the year in our liturgies, beginning with the Season of Advent. Advent introduces us to the eternal, immortal, undivided, and supreme God, *Who did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave coming in human likeness. Found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross* (Philippians 2: 6-8). Before we speak of his incarnation and birth (*coming in human likeness...found human*), we already focus on his death (*he humbled himself obedient to death*). We cannot separate the Crib of Bethlehem from the Cross of Calvary. The two are inseparable!

The people of Israel, centuries before the birth of Jesus, heard the prophet Isaiah promise: *Many peoples shall come...they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again* (Isaiah 2: 1-5). The night Jesus was born into our history...*There was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in high heaven, peace on earth to those on whom His favor rests* (Luke 2: 1-14). A promise of old and a proclamation the night it was fulfilled ... and continues to be completed more fully in the Christ Who continues His journey through time in those who acclaim Him Lord and Savior. However, we are not always aware of the progress of the prophecy of Isaiah and the proclamation of the angels. Why!?

For thousands escaping persecution and certain death for their belief in Christ Jesus, for others held hostage in their own countries by repressive regimes and governments, for millions whose poverty threatens their lives every day, for the homeless, marginalized, poor of any kind, for Christians of various denominations including Roman Catholic who are being challenged to either live their faith with commitment or lose the rights provided them by the fact of their human dignity, and much more you can add yourselves, these wonderful words of hope and joy might seem only empty promises and false illusions. We look around us and see the escalation of violence in many areas of our great nation. We must not let our hearts be overwhelmed by actions of hatred and violence that often occur, or by the tragedies that affect our lives. Where there is life there is hope, and where there is hope there is peace, even in the midst of confusion and pain. Life is still the journey worth living. Life is beautiful because God Himself chose to dwell with His own creatures that we in turn, at one moment appointed by God, might live with Him for eternity.

The world into which the God of creation chose to enfold Himself is still the stage of the greatest act of His Eternal Love. Life to be, Freedom in responsibility, and Redemption to eternal life in Jesus are still God's loving and impartial gifts to all. We are stewards of creation invested with the awesome trust of Father God. We make His presence and providence a reality in our world grown cold and indifferent to what really matters - Love! Just as at Bethlehem on that first Christmas night, we, like Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds, experience the promise fulfilled and our hope rekindled. We become his earthly messengers - *angels* (the word means *messenger*) - of the eternal love that not even human tragedy can destroy. Goodness is still alive in the hearts of God's children. This love is celebrated each year at Christmas when love made Himself visible becoming one with us.

For the spirit of this season of love, life and light to take hold of our hearts, we are challenged to rediscover the child within us. The "child" we seek is simple, trusting, creative, spontaneous, joy-filled, caring ... loving. Often that person we seek has been covered and hidden, over the years, by compromising values, cautious acceptance rather than immediate and

surrendering trust in God's will, confusion rather than faith in eternal truths, and/or all around care-lessness regarding the sacredness of every moment of life. The Advent Season reminds us to help that person to come out again into the wonder and joy of living in the light of God's love.

Christmas is a time for us to look with the eyes of wonder at the mystery fulfilled and to enjoy the love made present in the poverty of Bethlehem. It is a time to bask in the light of a treasure greater than any we could imagine. To see the Infant Jesus and recognize the God of Creation, the Savior of humanity, the King of kings and Lord of lords is to allow the tepidity and even the coldness of life's demands and burdens to be rekindled and lightened by the One Whose birth we celebrate in time as we await His return in glory. The Lord hidden in His Word and Sacrament is made visible in so many ways in the sisters and brothers we encounter on our journey. The child within is reborn and we experience the newness and joy of life. Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, whose love for the Infant of Bethlehem is so obvious in that famous photo of him carrying the statuette of the Infant Jesus for others to venerate, celebrate this wonderful re-discovery and joy ... and live it!

Just a short number of years ago we entered the Third Millennium. Centuries, and probably eons, lay before humanity. Each day is a new experience of that eternal unfolding love prepared for by the prophets, made visible at Bethlehem and Calvary, and that will continue until history's time becomes eternal life. Each day we re-present the mysteries of salvation in the Eucharist and each year we celebrate the unfolding of that One Solitary Life that is the focal point of human history - Jesus. Our Faith is strengthened, our hope renewed and our hearts filled with childlike wonder and joy in Christ. Not even the terrible fears that have been controlling much of the world and its people these past years can destroy the hope and joy Advent and Christmas offer. Why? The reason is simple but must be believed and accepted to lift us up: *Greater is the One within you than the one who is in the world* (1 John 4:4).

Advent invites us to begin a renewed journey with Christ as we celebrate his birth among us. Life is our journey. We set out in the zest and vigor of childhood and youth; we are tested through middle age; we lose our spring as time progresses...but, our faith - as was that of Mary and Joseph who believed the mystery and so experienced the miracle of his birth - allows us to see each moment as a wonderful endowment that makes the journey itself the gift, and the destination that much more desirable. Life's journey finds meaning even through the anomalies and heartbreaks we may experience, because of the One Who loves us. His birth in the wooden stable at Bethlehem that led to his total surrender for us on the rough wood of the Cross on Calvary, made His life the reason for our being. Because of Him and His journey with us, we start each new day confident that all things work together for the good of those who love God and are loved by Him.

Let us make these words of Padre Pio in a letter to Raffaolina Cerase be an encouragement to us as we end a year and look forward, in God's Will, to the next. *May the divine Spirit come down into your heart and fill it entirely with heavenly charisms. How good our God is, who lavished so many graces upon us and loves us so dearly although we do not deserve it. May he be forever blessed by all creatures. At the opening of the sacred novena in honor of the holy Child Jesus, I felt my soul being born, as it were, to a new life. My heart felt too small to contain the heavenly favors, and my soul seemed to disintegrate in the presence of this God, who took human flesh for our sake. How can we help loving him more and more ardently? Oh, let us draw near to the Child Jesus with hearts free from sin, that we may discover how sweet and delightful it is to love him. I will never fail to pray to this divine Child for all men, and much more will I pray during these holy days. I will pray especially for you and for all those whom you have so much at heart. I will ask him to give you a share of those charisms he has poured out and continues to pour out into my own soul.*

Advent is a time of great expectations. Expectations and hopes fulfilled in Jesus born for us at Bethlehem. We continue living in the joy of this fulfilled promise. As our Spiritual Father and Founder states - *How good God is who lavished so many graces upon us and loves us so dearly.* The new liturgical year of grace we anticipate preparing for the birth of Christ in time reminds us of the life we live as an anticipation for our ultimate and eternal encounter with Christ for all eternity.

You will all be remembered in my prayers and Masses during the Christmas Season. Please keep me in your prayers as well.

May God bless you; Our Lady and Good St. Joseph guide, guard, and protect you and your loved ones; and may Padre Pio watch over you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

***Have a Happy and Blessed Christmas - 2015,
and
Happy New Year - 2016***

Peace and Blessings in the Christ Child
Fr. Francis A. Sariego, O.F.M. Cap.
National Coordinator