

# Padre Pio Prayer Groups

National Office

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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!

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 opening words of this letter. Our own Seraphic Father Saint Francis of Assisi made these words his own particular blessing. And 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 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.

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* (Judith 15). 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.

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* (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. God's mercy revealed Himself as one like us, concealed in human nature. He became one of us, with us, for us that we might later share in His Life.

St. John tells us that those who accepted Him would *become the children of God* (John 1: 12; Galatians 3: 26). 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. We are created to be an overflowing extension of God's eternal love and life. 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 epitome 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 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 and 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* (cfr. Genesis 14: 18; Hebrews 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.

Jesus is the *Promised One* God offered our first parents in the Garden of Eden (cfr. Genesis 3: 14-15) . 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* (cfr. John 1: 1-18) when Mary says *Yes* to the Father's invitation for her to be humanity's spokesperson and Mother in 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. One wood reminds us of the doors closed to that young life; the other wood reminds us of the Doors opened for all to enter Life. The Father's mercy revealed in His Son Jesus invites us to enter the open Heart of Christ to experience the Father's loving embrace.

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 read, but become. It would be consoling and pleasant to remain in the nostalgia 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. But, it is when we hear the Man, the Master, who summons us to *Follow Me* (cfr. Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17; Luke 9:23; John 12:26 and more), 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 Gide). We must leave the security of sight to travel in the light of trusting faith that leads where God wills.

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, a will that provides for all who trust in Him and leads through ways often never imagined but always fruitful for those who let Him be their Forerunner, Scout and Guide.

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 and mercy 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 to them in Jesus Whom we have met and seek to become more deeply each day.

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 as the twentieth century copy of the Christ Child. Yet, 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 would experience an intimacy with God unequalled by others. As he entered the peace of God in his early years, he was led quite soon to the God of peace. That God Who asks that we seek not the feeling of God but the God Who excels all feeling; this God asks that we enter the mystery. 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 gentle 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

May we all experience God's blessings, Our Lady's protection and Padre Pio's loving care for all his Spiritual Children. As we begin the new year, please allow me to conclude this circular letter with the following prayer:

Jesus, be a guiding star before you.  
Be a soothing wake behind you.  
Be a rolling path below you.  
Be a flaming hope within you.  
Be all things - now and forever  
for you, with you, in you and through you  
Jesus, be Jesus to me!

May you and your loved ones know the living presence and loving providence of our Great and Loving God!

Blessed and Happy New Year 2016!

Peace and Blessings  
Happy and Blessed New Year 2006  
Fr. Francis A. Sariago, O.F.M. Cap.  
National Coordinator