

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you his peace!

What overwhelming joy, what deep humbling reverence and appreciation there must have been in the heart of Padre Pio on August 10, 1910. His religious life had already been an uphill climb for various reasons due to his health. At one time he even wondered if the Order would permit him to be ordained. His health was more than questionable, but his spirit and total availability to the will of God expressed through the Church and his superiors was undeniable. Thus, in the Cathedral of Benevento, August 10, 1910, the Bishop imposed his hands on Fra Pio of Pietrelcina's head and invoked the Holy Spirit's power, and from that day until the end of time he will be known as *Padre* Pio. Thus *Father* Pio began his journey as the spiritual Father of millions of souls who would find their way closer or back to God, and some would discover the hidden God Whom they had not yet known.

Another part of the ordination ceremony - after the laying on of hands by the bishop - is the anointing of the hands and the consignment of the Paten with the bread and the Chalice filled with wine. As Padre Pio's hands were anointed the prayer recited reminded him that he was to sanctify the Christian people and offer a holy sacrifice to God. As Padre Pio was presented with the Paten and the Chalice, the prayer recited reminded him to be aware of the mystery he would celebrate and to conform his life to the cross of the Lord. These were ritual reminders necessary for the Sacrament being conferred, but already lived in the spirit by the one being ordained. His life, from this point onward, would be one of total conformity to that of the Savior. Not only the celebration of his Mass, but his very life would be a living sacrifice offered for the sake of the Christian people and all of God's children; he would soon become a living outward image of the mystery he offered.

The fervor of Padre Pio and the depth of his love for the Mass and the Eucharist can be noted in his Letter to Padre Benedetto, September 8, 1911: *When I am close to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament my heart throbs so violently that it seems to me at times that it must burst out of my chest...Sometimes at the altar my whole body burns in an indescribable manner. My face in particular seems to go on fire.* Again, he writes in another Letter to Padre Benedetto, July 27, 1918: *During my Mass in the morning I was touched by a living breath...I felt completely shaken, filled with extreme terror and I almost passed away. This was followed by a total calm such as I had never before experienced ... caused ... by something which I felt touching me in the deepest recesses of my soul.*

Psychologists would and actually do have comments regarding expressions and experiences such as these. Most times they are not laudatory. Psychology would say that these are words of some neurotic or psychotic who has begun to live in a dream world created by his own delusions. How does the old adage go: *For those with faith, no explanation is necessary; for those without faith, no explanation is possible!* This is the judgmental and skeptical world in which we live today; we have closed our eyes to the miracles around us and so cannot understand the mystery of God's presence.

The years, the struggles, but above all the character and peace of the man, have proven such evaluations unfounded and erroneous in the case of Padre Pio. There was total balance in his life, and yet a mysticism that brought him from earth to heaven in a transport of love that none of us could ever imagine.

The hands anointed with Sacred Chrism on his ordination day would be *anointed* for all to see with the imprint of the wounds of Christ's love for humanity. Those hands were raised in blessing and brought healing and peace of mind, heart, and soul to all who were privileged to be able to open their heart to him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. His hands exuded blood everyday. The wounds were seen briefly during the celebration of the Mass and were an undoubtable sign of the exceptional privilege and awesome responsibility conferred on Padre Pio. The Paschal Mystery was visibly represented in his body, and for fifty years those who assisted at his Mass were transported to Calvary in a loving experience they would forever remember.

The bread and wine becoming the Body and Blood of the Savior through the power of the Holy Spirit and mystically

separated for us in the Sacrament of His Passion and Death, were signs of the body and blood of the person who was offering the Sacrifice of the Mass and who visibly became one with the One offered. He became victim with the Eternal Victim, so that through the continuation of the mystery made visible in his body, Padre Pio could be a re-kindling presence of God's love for humanity for millions through the years. It was not just bread and wine that were consecrated, but a life totally consecrated to and with Jesus the Savior to the Father in the Holy Spirit for the Church and the whole world. The hours of prayer before and the hours of ministry after, as well as his own personal time spent with his Capuchin brothers, were all a continuation of the living Gospel he was called to be. He was God's *Good News* that God had not abandoned His People, and in Padre Pio - as in so many holy ones through the centuries - the Eternal God was making His Love felt for all willing to open their eyes and their hearts to recognize it.

We, as Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, are called to continue his unique vocation, not of sacramental priesthood but of Christian Victimhood. It is a hard word to say and even more difficult to want to accept as a *vocation*. Actually, it is the *call* of every baptized Christian. We are all called to offer ourselves to the Father in Jesus through the Holy Spirit and to allow God to enfold His magnificent and almighty presence in the frailty of our vulnerable human nature. In each one of us that presence is seen in a myriad of ways. As diverse as we are in personalities, that is how diverse are the ways that God makes Himself known and seen through us who are available to the transforming presence of His Holy Spirit.

Not all Prayer Group members are ordained to the ministerial priesthood, but all are incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ, His Church, and share in the priesthood of the faithful conferred on us through Baptism. While the priest offers the bread that becomes the Body of the Savior, all of us raise our hands in offering the daily responsibilities of life. Our work, our relationships, our hopes, our dreams, all we are, created in God's image, we offer each day. While the priest offers the wine in the chalice that becomes the Blood of Christ, we offer our sufferings, our fears, our hardships. With the priest we offer not only the gifts he consecrates but the very gift of ourselves together with the Victim of Calvary re-presented at the altar of Sacrifice and the Table of the Lord.

Just as the bread and wine are signs of our work and toil, and nourishment for our bodies, they are greater spiritual symbols. They symbolize unity: the unity of the bread from many grains, the unity of the wine from many grapes. They symbolize human toil and sacrifice: the grain ground into flour to make the bread, the grapes pressed into wine. They symbolize the transforming power of God for a life totally dedicated to God. Just as the heat of the oven bakes the flour mixed with water into bread, so does the Holy Spirit kindle in us the heat of excitement, enthusiasm, joy at being an image of Christ and unites us to our sisters and brothers. Just as time and the elements transform the grape juice into an intoxicating liquid, so does the Spirit transform the misunderstanding and difficulties of life into moments that bring us growth and understanding, patience and resignation, serenity and peace.

Not just our hands, but our whole bodies are anointed when we allow ourselves to be available to the working of God's Spirit. The Sacred Chrism of Baptism anointed us to be members of Christ the priest, prophet and king. Like Padre Pio, our Father and Founder, we are called to offer sacrifice, be a sacrifice, and share the benefits of the sacrifice. Sacrifice means *to make sacred* or *to make holy*. On the day of his ordination, Padre Pio accepted a unique and yet common call that he enfolded by God's grace in a most overwhelming and marvelous way. We too, as Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, in a lesser, but no less effective manner, are called to do likewise, not by Padre Pio's example only, but above all because of the words of Jesus Himself: *Father, I pray for them ... consecrate them in truth ...who would be my disciple must follow in my footsteps.*

The remembrance of Padre Pio's ordination in Benevento Cathedral, August 10, 1910, is a vivid reminder of the *Sacrifice* of the Mass we are called to offer becoming victim with the Victim that we may be victors with the Victor. It is a reminder of the Sacrament of the *Eucharist* we are called to receive often becoming a living sign of thanksgiving to God ever present among and within us. It is a reminder of the *Communion* we are called to share with all God's children, beginning with our family in Christ and extending our disarmed hands and hearts out to all the world.

Padre Pio's love for Our Heavenly Mother must have entered his heart at his ordination. It was for him, and should be for us a reminder that, like Mary, we must allow the Holy Spirit to anoint us with His presence. We must allow Him to enter the recesses of our hearts. Thus the image of Christ may be born within us so that we might offer Him in and with our lives, as Mary did at Bethlehem, Nazareth, Capharnaum,...CALVARY, to the whole world. Padre Pio's ordination and words to Padre Benedetto remind us that like Mary, we are called to be Tabernacles and Monstrances of the one Saving Lord, Whose Holy Spirit has anointed us to continue the wonderful mystery of our salvation with our priests in, with, and for the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. The Mass is Christ; the Church is Christ; we are the Church, therefore, we must become the Mass we celebrate and offer our lives each day in union with the Sacrifice of Jesus, the Christ.

May the Lord bless you and your loved ones; 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 Coordinator