

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

We often can recognize ourselves in the Church's prayers for God's People who journey in time towards eternal life. We pray for ourselves and especially for the one whom the Eternal Father has appointed Father and Shepherd of Christ's Family, Vicar of Christ Jesus, and voice of the Spirit's prompting for God's People. Many, down through the ages, like our Holy Father Francis today, stand in the waters of life's calm as well as turbulent currents and actively participate in all our experiences encouraging, supporting, interceding for us. They share in the ministry of Jesus - Jeshua of Nazareth, God's Son and our Savior.

Moses, the great leader of Israel, a nation in formation, was called to eternity before Israel's entrance into the Promised Land. He saw the Land from a distance. Moses appointed Joshua, his faithful assistant, as his successor and leader of the People of God. Joshua's name means *the Lord is salvation*, and he truly was a saving presence that directed by his example as well as by his words. God worked wonders through Joshua, and the People were reaffirmed in their faith and encouraged in confronting the continued challenges they had to face to achieve the ultimate goal set before them by God. In the Church, we too have "Joshuas" whom the Lord calls to continue a work of re-affirmation and encouragement for all God's People in the universal call and mission to holiness. Padre Pio was a living example of the mission and ministry of Jesus. Like Joshua, he accepted the awesome privilege and responsibility of entering the calm and turbulent waters of the Church and the society of his century. He stood, priestly bearer of the Ark of the New Covenant - the Eucharist he celebrated and that he became each day - in the overwhelming waters of today's religious and philosophical ideologies, seductive allurements of a hedonistic society, basic agnosticism or total disregard for God and Jesus' Gospel to humanity, moral relativism lacking basic values or principles that flow from God's law, and so forth. His presence, his prayer, and the power of God working through him, often stemmed the tide that would have otherwise destroyed so many souls.

The first obstacle the freed slaves of Egypt had to face was the Red Sea. Moses split the Sea and the Israelites passed on dry land. But, having passed through the Red Sea, the People wandered in the desert for forty years. Finally, as they approached the Promised Land, another barrier lay before them. It had to be overcome before they could enter their new and definitive home as free children of the One Great God. The success of their endeavor depended on overcoming this obstacle. Knowledge of the great wonders God worked so His People could achieve their goal would reach the neighboring towns and cities. All would know that Israel was back in Canaan after more than four centuries of exile and slavery; they were there to stay in fulfillment of God's Promise. But the obstacle had to be overcome first.

The second obstacle was the Jordan River. Like the Red Sea of forty years before, the River was the line of demarcation between hopeful dreams and fulfillment. They had to face the present challenge and meet it head on. Following the command of the Lord God of Israel, *Joshua commanded the priests of the People who were walking before Israel to come to a halt at the edge of the Jordan River. Then, he said: The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the earth will precede you into the Jordan. When the soles of the feet of the priests carrying the Ark of the Lord...touch the water of the Jordan, it will cease to flow... No sooner had the priestly bearers of the Ark waded into the waters,...then the waters flowing from upstream halted...while those flowing downstream...disappeared entirely. Thus the people crossed ... the priests carrying the Ark remained motionless on dry ground in the bed of the Jordan ...(and) remained in the bed of the Jordan until everything had been done that the Lord had commanded Joshua to tell the People.* (cfr. Joshua 3; 4: 1-10). Their mission was to stand firm until all the people had crossed over.

God took the initiative to save His People and it was God Who promised to get them to its fulfillment. God keeps His word, but, since *God gives us life without our help but will not save us without our cooperation*, we must do our part as well. The People were assembled with the Promised Land just within their reach, across the Jordan. Thousands of people ready, after forty years of hope-filled wandering through the desert, to settle down. Many experienced and hardened warriors, defenders of Israel from the enemy nations that assailed them during their desert trek, dreamt of enjoying a quiet and productive home and family life without having to put their lives on the line every day to protect Israel from unfriendly peoples seeking their destruction. There were the families dreaming of stability for their children and for a plot of land they could cultivate to make the desert flourish. Then there were the youth - young men and women - who had known only a nomadic life of uncertainty and looked forward to all the opportunities that the young hope for in a more structured life: security, family, friendship, love, and all the rest. Nothing happened! There was one thing that had to be done! They had to cross the Jordan! How often in life do we stand and look ahead of us desiring what is within our reach, but are always hesitant or afraid to take the step and pass over the obstacle to the other side.

It was not until the priests carrying the Ark got their feet wet that the Jordan stopped in its course. Until those who were the shepherds and leaders of Israel, carrying the sign of the very presence of God with them, entered the waters first, nothing happened. They had to get their feet wet! This act showed Israel that they believed with their lives that God was with them, and their faith in His Promise would make the miracle happen. And it did! Our lives have so many Jordan Rivers that we have to wade through at low tide with difficulty, or maybe, because we cannot fight the strong currents of a raging river, need someone who can help us cross over on dry ground in the more demanding and challenging times. Each experience requires an act of faith and trust that God will again work His miracle for us. All we have to do is trust and “get our feet wet”. And, there is always a Joshua present to indicate the way.

Human beings have conquered the sky and probed the depths of space. Nevertheless, there are many problems which endanger our existence: pollution, natural disasters, tragedies caused by human error, attempts on human life and freedom, attacks against the family, social injustice, intolerance due to prejudice of any kind (race, color, religious belief, culture, ideology, and the like). Like the waters of the Red Sea or the Jordan River, they threaten to overwhelm us and even destroy us, unless someone continues to hold back the waters. Jesus came to give meaning to life and strength to all who would accept to “Live Jesus” and be a counter-cultural prophetic presence in the world of today. Living the Gospel, they live the example of Jesus and they stand in the river bed for us all to pass over safely.

Padre Pio was a living example of Gospel love. Like Joshua who continued the mission of Moses as leader and protector of Israel, Padre Pio, imprinted with the marks of Jesus and commissioned with His Spirit to stand before the People as a leader and protector in our troubled world, sought every way possible to instill hope, encouraging all to wade into the waters of everyday demands, and to trust in God’s powerful Providence and his loving care and protection: *I ardently love everyone, he said, I cannot be at peace; I am worn out and extremely saddened, in deepest desolation and the greatest of anguish, because of not being able to bring all of my fellow men to God* (to Padre Benedetto, 1919). He was willing to go to any length for those whom he accepted as his Spiritual Children and all those in any way entrusted to his prayers and concern: *Each day I say to the Lord: if, in order to give you a little extra glory on earth, it is necessary for me to suffer in hell, send me as you like!*” (Negrisolo-Castello-Manelli, “Padre Pio nella sua interiorita”, ed. San Paolo 1998, pg. 164).

We are the Spiritual Children of Padre Pio. He was a man of action as well as of prayer. His prayer made him aware of the needs of his sisters and brothers in the world, and he brought their needs back to his prayer. He lived a “virtuous circle” that continually went from earth to heaven and back. His prayer was concrete and effective. Whether it transformed interiorly or produced results exteriorly, Padre Pio was a man always “in the thick of it”. We are his Militia of Prayer in and for the Church and the world. We consider it an honor to associate ourselves with his memory. We speak of him. We pray to him. We call on his powerful intercession in our needs.

There is so much that many of the Groups and individual associates do to make the name of Padre Pio known and loved, but do we follow his example? Are we willing to take the step that enters the waters of uncertainty each day and trust in Divine Providence? Are we willing to forget ourselves for the sake of another and give some of our time, talents or even treasure to make someone in need realize that they are not alone? Like the priests in the Jordan River who not only got their feet wet so the waters would separate for Israel to pass through, but also stayed in the river bed until everyone had passed over, are we willing to witness our faith and trust in God to encourage others to do the same, especially those whose faith may be shaky?

Padre Pio was willing to suffer even hell for the sake of God’s glory and the good of souls; are we willing to accept anything from God for the sake of His glory and the salvation of even one soul? Do we remember that part of the Spirit of the Association of the Padre Pio Prayer Groups is that of sharing in the suffering of Christ in a concrete way when and where necessary, or possible? Let’s remember these words of our Spiritual Father and Founder: *I will ask the Lord to let me remain at the Threshold of Paradise and I will not enter until the last of my spiritual children has entered.* He knew this was not a realistic option but a heartfelt willingness, nonetheless, to express the depth of his love and desire to give of himself entirely, without reserve. As Spiritual Children have we permitted that spirit to take over and direct our lives? As we celebrate the Feast of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, our Padre Pio, this month (September 23), let us remember that words come cheap, but a true sign of admiration (and/or veneration) is imitation.

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. Sariego, O.F.M. Cap.

National Coordinator