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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you his peace!

The children of St. Francis of Assisi have always regarded Mary, the Mother of the Savior and Mother of God, as our Mother and Heavenly Queen. Her role in the History of our Salvation leaves no room to doubt why we Franciscans would consider her in such an exceptional and eminent way. Padre Pio's love for Our Lady could also be called legendary, because of the trust he placed in Her prayers and almighty intercession before God as Mother of His Son and Spouse of the Holy Spirit.

The month of October, dedicated to the Most Holy Rosary of our Blessed Mother, is the Church's way to have us reflect upon the gift of human life at all its stages. Our natural life, shared with us by God Himself in Jesus the Christ, is so intimately connected with the eternal that at times we can experience the supernatural in it. We can never hope to meaningfully enter the reality of what life is all about, unless we are willing to view it from the perspective of God. Because of Her intimate union with God through grace, Mary was able to do that at every moment, no matter how banal the moment could have seemed. We are the children of Mary. In Her we are sisters and brothers of the Christ; and in Him we are daughters and sons of God. Her place is infinitely less than that of God, but so eminently greater than ours, that we can look to Mary, our Blessed Mother, and see the type of Christian we are called to be. The journey of Mary with Jesus, celebrated in the prayerful recitation of the Rosary Mysteries, leads us into a dimension of the Spirit that makes our life more peaceful and meaningful. All we have to do is meditate, reflect, apply, PRAY the mysteries with love! All we have to do is look at Jesus through the eyes of His Mother and see ourselves there with Him in the message that mystery conveys.

Our Holy Father Pope St. John Paul II completed the life journey of the Rosary by offering the Luminous Mysteries as an addition to our meditations. Through the four sets of five decades, we journey through the life of the Savior with Mary as we reflect upon our beginnings, our responsibilities, our challenges or even defeats, and our ultimate triumph through God's grace. The journey of the Rosary that so many take each day is often taken in a rushed manner. We race through the words of the Hail Mary, that remind us of the Incarnation and Mary's central role in the whole Mystery and History of our Salvation. The Prayer of Praise and Trust in God that Jesus taught us, the Our Father, often fails to help us trust in an all-providing God and to

trust in our responsibility to open our hearts to one another as we ask God to open His Heart to us. The Doxology becomes a quick extension of the sign of the Cross, oftentimes with us forgetting that it is a prayer of total praise to the Father-Creator, Son-Redeemer and Holy Spirit-Sanctifier, Who loves us each day into life and without Whom we would not exist.

We live in an uncertain world. Our hearts beat rapidly when we hear what is happening around the world and in our own neighborhoods. Local violence of all kind, world terrorism, war among and within nations, skirmishes on all fronts, Christians being persecuted and martyred and their persecutors seemingly having the advantage, can easily lead even a good soul to discouragement. We begin to ask: Where are you God? Why aren't You doing something to stop this mayhem? Often the response is silence. Often the response is that given to Job: God poses the question and waits for us to realize the answer we always knew but were hesitant to admit. Our freedom and misuse of the great gift of free will has led us into situations that now frighten us. God's creation is good; we must learn how to live as his beloved children, whatever our religious background may be.

There is an answer! The answer is Jesus! His life speaks volumes, as Saint John reminds us at the conclusion of the Gospel he wrote. It does not take a theologian or philosopher to understand what the crowds of simple people easily understood when Jesus spoke. It does not take clever politicians or powerful corporate magnates to understand what the influential and powerful of Jesus' times were able to understand, so much so that they had to eliminate Him to continue, as they erroneously thought, to stay in power. It does not take the exaggerated bartering with God through His saints in a rambling repetition and recital of words that does not allow us to reflect on them as we ought. The Rosary is a repetitive recital of words and theological truths promoted by the Church. What makes it different from the rambling I just mentioned?

This prayer has its remote origin in those people of God who could not read but wanted to share in the prayer of the Church celebrated by the clergy and religious. The people gathered stones or knotted cords to number the psalms the religious would recite each day in their monasteries. They would recite the simple prayers that they had learned: the Creed that summarized their Catholic faith; the Our Father that followed the instruction of Jesus given in Scripture, that expressed their trust in God; the Doxology (Glory be) that praised God in Himself for all they received and sought in prayer; and the Hail Mary - at first only the first half was recited to reflect on the Incarnation and Mary's role in our salvation - to remember and praise the Highest Honor of our race, through Whom God chose, because of her total availability to His Will, to enter our history and fulfill His Promise of Redemption for a waiting world.

For our prayer not to fall into a meaningless repetition of words, we must take time to think and reflect. The mysteries are so beautiful. And, with the extra five mysteries suggested by our Holy Father Pope John Paul II, we have a complete cycle of contemplative images of Jesus through Mary's eyes and heart. They offer encouragement and hope to our lives. The secret to achieve this end is to take time to reflect on each mystery and repeat calmly the words we pray. In this way our inner self - our soul - encounters the harmony and balance in praying the

words that lead us to enter the mystery.

Prayer is being in the presence of and relating to God from the heart. Prayers, when recited as the instruments they are intended to be, achieve this goal. This is especially true for all of us whose minds are always so cluttered with everyday responsibilities and legitimate duties that become so difficult to put out of our minds for a brief time. Reflective, repetitive, rhythmic prayer can help us do that. Mechanically, that is what the Rosary is; but, spiritually, when prayed in this way, the Rosary also allows us to enter the mystery and truly see and be with Jesus, in the Spirit, through the eyes and heart of Mary. We are thus enabled to view the world and concerns we have from the perspective of a people redeemed in the Blood of Jesus, who travel on the road to Salvation through the mediacy of Mary. What greater safeguard and certitude could we ask for!? We see in the four sets of Mysteries our entire life set before us.

The Joyful Mysteries lead us into the mystery of life itself coming from God through the cooperation of his children: God Who loves us into life, Mary's acceptance of the challenge of the Divine Motherhood sets the tone for the sacredness of all life. The journey of caring to Elizabeth, the magnificence of birth even in the barrenness of a hovel, the fulfillment of one's duties toward God and the law, as well as the family difficulties that cause anxiety and pain until they are resolved, as in the finding of Jesus in the Temple and the gentle reprimand of His Mother, all speak of the beauty and mystery of life at its beginning and discovery stages.

The Luminous Mysteries enlighten our hearts to understand our mid-life experiences. We take our place in society, become one with God's people through our family and friends as we share in their joys and sorrows, offering our support and advice, transparently allowing others to see us as we are, and we fulfill our purpose in life by accepting to be and offer all that we can.

The Sorrowful Mysteries remind us of life's decline. There comes a time when we must "let go". The difficulty is there. The fear and the anguish are only human. But, we make the experience divine when we entrust ourselves to the Will of the Father, accept the burdens we cannot alleviate, seek to be humble, walk the journey set out for us, and ultimately recognize that we too are called to be another sign of God's fulfilling Plan for humanity as we "let go to let God" do as He wills, and trust in what lies beyond the barrier of physical death.

The Glorious Mysteries are those hope-filled reminders of a life without end where the One Who has gone before us has taken his place with God in a nature blessed by the Gift of the Holy Spirit, Whose Temple our bodies are that we may, like Mary, be taken one day to the fullness of life, body and soul, to share in the glory of God and all His angels and saints.

The Rosary is a power-packed prayer that helps us view our life from a totally different perspective than most people view life. Our own Padre Pio was never seen without his Rosary. His relationship with Mary was truly childlike and confident. He never doubted in her powerful intercession. The strength of Satan who fights against me is something terrible, but may God be praised, for he has placed the cause of my salvation in the hands of our heavenly Mother. Protected and guided by so tender a Mother, I will continue to fight as long as God

wills, full of confidence in this Mother and certain that I will never succumb (Letter to Padre Agostino, May 9, 1910). This same childlike confidence he expected and sought to instill in the hearts of all, especially in those who sought his guidance as his Spiritual Children. He advocated the Rosary, as the beautiful, powerful, and efficacious weapon, accessible to all, as a sure means of strength to overcome the power of Satan.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, we are reminded by our Statutes of the importance of the Rosary, prayerfully and reflectively recited at the monthly meeting. Five decades prayed well is worth more than fifteen or twenty decades "fitted in to our schedule". Prayer is not a matter of quantity, but of quality and intensity. The deeper we allow our souls to enter the mystery of Jesus, the greater our experience of His presence in our life will be. Through the Rosary, with the heart and eyes of Mary, we strive to see Jesus and His life, as it is, the life of our Redeemer, Savior, and God's Son, Who became our Brother at the moment he entrusted Mary to us from His Cross. How could we ever be discouraged when God is for us so intimately and lovingly!?

In this month of the Most Holy Rosary, journey with Jesus and Mary each day. Let this Blessed Chain of love-drenched prayers, like a garland of roses we bear in honor of Mary, be a source of strength and blessings for us all. May Almighty God bless you and your loved ones; Our Lady guide, guard, and protect you; and Padre Pio watch over each and every one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings
Fr. Francis A. Sariago, O.F.M. Cap.
National Coordinator