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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

**The Lord give you His peace!**

Come, Lord Jesus! are the words that conclude the Book of Revelation and thus the entire body of Sacred Scripture. Sacred Scripture is the story of the experiences, the hopes, the fears, the successes, the failures, the life of the People of God. It is our story. It is the story of a people called to be uniquely a people of God. It is the story of a people whose millennial journey through time has experienced the awesome presence of a God always near and available to carry us in the palm of His hands. We call on this God in many ways to Come! and to be with us, and to embrace us, and to love us, and to save us, and to give us new life for ever.

We begin life's journey seeking His presence and support along the way, and we say, Come! We journey in the mystery of the moment that hides the future from us and we look for His enlightening Spirit, and we say, Come!. We encounter challenges and threats, and we seek His strength and protective guidance through these unexpected moments, and we say, Come! We enter the twilight years of life that lead us into the mysterious and yet so real realm of detachment from time as we prepare for eternity, and we call out, Come! We say, Come!, confidently, as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, Whom we invoke as Savior and Mediator. We call out COME, LORD JESUS! BE MY SAVIOR AND NOT MY JUDGE!

The very words with which the Scriptures end is the very spirit with which the Books of Sacred Scripture begin. The very words with which we begin our life when creative human love, cooperating with eternal wisdom through nature, awaits for us to come into this world, are the very words that we hope to hear when Love calls us to come into our heavenly home and our Father's loving embrace. The history of creation speaks about the God Who comes into our life. The history of humanity speaks of a God Who comes into creation as one of His own creatures. The history of the Church speaks to us of a God Who comes into the heart of those who believe, that they may rekindle a fire of faith, hope and love so that all the world can say with joy-filled anticipation, COME! COME, LORD JESUS, SAVE US!

It is at the beginning of time that the Eternal Father comes into the darkness and confusion of nothingness and breathes a Word of Life. The Father comes among the bands of wandering nomads and gathers them into a people peculiarly His own. The Father comes to an oppressed nation and powerfully liberates them from their slavery and makes them a people free to trustingly call upon Him. The Father comes at the various moments of an erring and sinful people, and He lead them back to a confident and adoring awareness of His presence in their midst. The Father comes into a world divided and troubled and He speaks His Word that enfleshes Itself in the natural order, so that nature can one day regain and experience its lost dignity as one created in the image and likeness of its Creator. And that Word is JESUS!

Jesus is that Word made flesh ... who came to his own, and his own did not receive him...but to as many as did receive Him, He gave them the power to become children of God...born of the Spirit. And so we say, Come, Lord Jesus! Descend into time that we may ascend into eternity. Become one with us in creation so that one day we can share with you the eternal glory of our Creator.

There is no comparison in nature that can adequately explain this wonderful, real, yet mysterious privilege, that all humanity has been given in Jesus. He is the focal point of all humanity. Though billions of people still do not accept Jesus as Lord, Redeemer, God, still the entire world regulates its activities around the birth of this one life that came into history as an infant, and comes every moment into the hearts and lives of those who invoke Him. His was that One Solitary Life that we read about at this time of year in greeting cards, hear about in sermons, and possibly reflect on in our quiet moments. His was a life of constant coming into. His was not a static life but one vitalized and kindled by the will to fulfill, in obedience to the Father, the eternal Vision set in motion the day of creation. It is in Him, the Word made flesh, that all creation is restored to God through the Spirit.

The Father's vision was that of a people united one with another in His love, called to be His children by the power of the Holy Spirit, and formed into a kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace. A dream is a subconscious desire that presents itself to our mind in symbols or scenes when our inhibitions are down. A vision is a conscious awareness of where we want to go and what we hope to achieve. God's vision is the will that God has for all creation. God's Will most assuredly will be fulfilled. It is our desire and our duty to be part of that vision that we may enter into the fulness of God's plan for all. Jesus is the One Who leads us to the Father.

To fulfill God's vision for us, we must be passionate about His Plan, cooperate with one another and with God's Will, make use of the particular talents entrusted to us for the good of all, live in the Spirit that animates our lives, and live in the Love of God and one another. There can be no hesitation when we are driven by the Spirit of God. There can be no compromise, when we profess eternal values. There can be no "passing the buck" or "lame excuses" when we embrace a vision that leads us ever forward in life and upward to God. The vision God had for His creation was not many words but one operative Word, Whose life filled this world with a Spirit that ever enkindles in the hearts of people of good will a yearning and love for God so deeply that all creation calls out, COME! COME, LORD!

Advent begins the Year of Grace. We begin the re-presentation in our Liturgy of the whole history and mystery of our salvation in the life of Jesus and the Church. As we journey through the brief period of Advent, we anticipate our joy at the birth of the Savior at Bethlehem. There is no need for Him to come in opulence, power and comfort. He comes poor, helpless and placed in a manger. The total emptying of Himself for the sake of us all tells us that He Comes to make us rich in grace, strong in His Spirit, and joyful in His kingdom of justice, love and peace.

Every child that comes into this world is God's gift to creation. What that child becomes is his/her gift to God. We have probably heard these words before. We should consider them more intensely as we prepare for the birthday of Jesus the Christ, the King of Creation, the Incarnate Word of God. We pray for Him to come, but what do we do when He is with us?

Padre Pio loved the feast of Christmas. The Incarnation in the womb of our Blessed Mother Mary of the Divine Word, the Son of God, and the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, was a reality that Padre Pio lived every moment of his grace-filled life. His faith in Jesus was a vibrant acceptance and availability to the present as he sought to Live Jesus in Whom he believed not as born two thousands years ago, but as re-born every moment in his life. The Profession of Faith we make each time we recite the Creed was not for him merely a formula that reiterated a theological dogma or historical fact to be remembered. Jesus was not a past event to be spoken of with nostalgia, but a present reality, a fact, a person, to be lived in the present, Who led him, and leads us - to an eternal future of Life. Padre Pio gazed upon the mystery of the Incarnation at each Eucharist he celebrated and lived Jesus as His precious Body and Blood penetrated every fiber of his being. The whole story of the Birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, and the time that leads up to it, is an opportunity for us to follow the example of Padre Pio and enter into the song of creation once again as we become players in the great symphony of life that God has written.

As spiritual Children of Padre Pio, have we allowed the precious Body and Blood of the Savior to flow through and take over every fiber of our being? Have we allowed the Lord to be enfleshed in our lives so that each Christmas we celebrate the Savior present and alive within and among us, and not just some past event? Do we say with Mary, Jesus' Mother, and with Jesus, Your Will and not mine be done? Have we sought to rekindle the vision that Padre Pio had for his Prayer Groups of a people united in prayer, sacrifice and service? Have we worked to make the vision grow into a fresh and vibrant presence of that Jesus Who makes Himself seen and known through us? Do we recognize our own incompleteness, vulnerability, and susceptibility so that we can share, support and encourage one another? Are we as enthused about our being Spiritual Children of Padre Pio and all that entails, as children are when Christmas comes around? Do we see the gift that we are to each other if we allow the spirit of our Father and Founder Padre Pio to lead us closer to Jesus and Mary?

Christmas is a time for gift-giving. It is a time for gift-receiving. Let us recognize the gift we are and are called to be. Let us become a joy-filled, life-giving, sister and brother in the family of Padre Pio's Spiritual Children. For this intention and whatever ones you may hold most dear in your hearts, be assured that you and your loved ones will be remembered in a special way in all the Masses I celebrate during this holy season. May God bless you; Our Lady guide, guard and protect you; and Padre Pio watch over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

In the Name of Jesus I wish all of you a Spirit-filled Advent and a Holy and Happy Christmas Season. As you enter the new calendar year with all its expectations and uncertainties, may your hopes be fulfilled in a world renewed in Jesus and filled with His Spirit. A Child is born to us! A Savior is given to us! Come, let us adore Him!

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