

Padre Pio Prayer Groups
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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!
May He live in you.
May you always live in Him!

The first recorded words of Jesus in the Gospels set a scene that might leave some people a little perplexed. Jesus comes across acting like an arrogant adolescent. He seems to be asserting His independence now that the community considers this twelve year old boy a man. He appears to be doing "His own thing". His parents – Mary, His Mother and Joseph, His Messianic Father - anguished three days looking for Him. Eventually finding Him in the Temple, His Mother asks why...why did He remain in Jerusalem, why didn't He ask them, why did He allow them to feel such anguish? Jesus' response would probably make some parents quite annoyed, to say the least. Rather than apologize, His response is: Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house? (Luke 2: 49) It almost seems as though Jesus makes his parents' presence in His life insignificant. These must have been difficult words for His loving parents to hear. In any case, the Gospel tells us that He obediently went to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph and was subject to them (cfr. Luke 2: 51).

Some preachers have explained this episode with a spirituality that places the twelve year old Jesus already beginning His public ministry, or some other theological explanation. I would rather see the moment as a normal family situation concerning parents and adolescents; however, here we have something on which to reflect. This situation would help the members of the Holy Family to assess the role that each one in the family was called to fulfill, including Jesus, and they would fulfill their roles faithfully. Obedience would be the key word and virtue; this obedience was the fruit of a Love that no other family has ever or will ever experience.

Love helps us to hear those words, Why were you looking for Me?, in a totally different sense. These words are not as arrogant or as insubordinate as they may seem at first. Hidden within

the person of Jesus that everyone saw, was the majesty of the divinity that others would have to discover and either accept or reject over a period of thirty years. The Omniscient God Incarnate still needed to experience the learning process of human nature. The harmony of natures in Jesus would still be a mystery and also a difficulty at times for those who knew Him; while for Jesus both natures were in harmony and worked together.

One thing was certain: this unique solitary life had begun a journey among His own. And, as St. John tells us, His own did not receive Him (John 1: 11). We all reflected upon that fact several weeks ago when there was no room in the inn but a refuge used for animals, when Herod sought to kill rather than venerate the Infant King, when a secure homestead was a foreign country with foreign gods rather than the Great God of Israel His Father, and when return to familiar surroundings demanded that the family resettle in a town not their own. Why were (are) you looking for me? (Luke 2: 49) is a question that is constantly posed to us. Whom do we seek? What are we searching for in Jesus? Is He Who He really is for us, or have we made Him to our own image?!

From the very beginning many believed in His goodness but not in His God-ness. That He was a great human being was undeniable for many, but that He was God was denied by those of His own time as well as a group later on whose ideas continue even today - the Arians.

Arianism denied the divinity of Jesus the Christ. In so doing, everything He said and did could be reduced to a pick-and-choose relationship with Jesus. Since He is not divine, you are invited to follow his teaching but can also dissent or reject what He proposes as what leads to Eternal Life. He is reduced to someone no different than Buddha, Confucius, or even Ziggy in the comics. The absurdity of it all is overwhelming! Yet that is what so many, even among Catholics, seem to do. Jesus is a matter of opinion, a choice to be bartered with, a majority vote on issues of major importance, a guru that leads us into an anonymous mass of watered down expressions of religion without faith.

What I have just stated sounds harsh and even critical. Well, it is intended to be! Unless Jesus takes over our lives and we allow Him the first place in our hearts, thoughts, words and actions, anything we do as Christians just makes no sense.

Recently I read the following in a meditation book: Beware of your thoughts, they become your words. Beware of your words, they become your actions. Beware of your actions, they become your character. We were imprinted with the character of the Holy Spirit Who inspires us and urges us on to listen to Jesus and believe in Him as the Only-begotten Son of God, conceived by the Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered, died and rose from the dead. And Who now is with the Father in glory and Who will judge creation. How we allow that thought to take hold of our hearts will determine how we allow the character with which we have been sealed to take hold of our lives.

St. Francis de Sales reminds us: we will steer safely through every storm as long as our heart is right, our intention fervent, our courage steadfast, and our trust fixed firmly on God. Is not this

what our own Founder, Padre Pio, reminds us as his spiritual children? We are beacons of prayer shedding the light of faith wherever we gather for adoration, prayer and reflection. Our adoration and Eucharist keep our hearts reconfirmed in our belief in Jesus as God enfleshed in humanity, raising our frail nature to a level that offers it a share in the divine. Our prayer maintains our intentions alive and encourages us to move forward on faith's journey. Our group and/or personal reflections remind us of and rekindle within us our trust in God on Whom we now have firmly fixed our gaze so as never to lose sight of Him.

Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house? (Luke 2: 49) This question came from One Who was so present to the Father that He could not imagine anyone not realizing that the Temple was where He would naturally be. Where are we naturally, with our minds, hearts, desires..?

While never leaving any practice of fraternity, our Padre Pio was always known to be in the Presence. His life, lived with the friars, was one that exuded the divine, not just because of the Stigmata and other spiritual gifts, but because his demeanor spoke of someone who firmly believed. He believed the One Whom he served. He believed in Him as God-Man, and he believed Him, His every word, precisely because he believed He is God enfleshed in nature. This natural composure of Padre Pio was the magnet that attracted so many to him, even those with whom he had to be stern or firm.

It may seem strange that I belabor this issue, but I truly believe that it is necessary. Many believing Christians have distorted the image of Jesus to fit their own needs. Jesus is seen and revered as the holy mascot of some religious organization rather than the Divine Son of God in Whose Name we live, and move, and have our being. In the Name of Jesus we seek to fulfill the spirit of Padre Pio for the Prayer Groups to bring more light through our prayer and good Catholic example to a world that has so many other blinding lights and cacophonous sounds to distract, distort, and even destroy the gifts that God has entrusted to us.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, do we acknowledge Jesus as Lord, Savior...as God? Do we seek Him out in the Temple of our Tabernacles, at the Altars of the Eucharist, in the Wisdom of His Word that we read or hear every week? Have we allowed the heresy of Arius, that denied the divinity of Christ, and that has subtly continued in our society today in many ways, to enter our own lives, rendering Jesus and his words relative, optional, a question of majority vote?

When Jesus is present to us, when the One Whom we are searching out is felt deeply in our hearts, and our lives are lived as though He were there walking, talking, crying, laughing, praying, struggling ... with us, then it is that we are becoming more like the spiritual children of our beloved Padre Pio.

Did you not know where I had to be? Sometimes our searching takes us all over. We run from one place to another. We look for miracles rather than the mystery. we listen for prophecies rather than His inspired Word...hoping to find the One Whom we already possess but as yet have not been able to recognize. The great and awesome God of Creation, hidden within the

frail, vulnerable nature of His creation is waiting for us to let His transforming grace lead us forward as heralds of the Great King Whom we know, serve, love and adore.

When we adore Him, then it is that we acknowledge Him as Lord and God. Then it is that we take our stand against the hidden heresy of Arianism still alive in our world today. Then it is that we witness to those Christian sisters and brothers who have minimized the importance of the teaching of Christ as the message of God. Then it is that the Eternal One is no longer a pious theory to decipher but a Living Reality Who gives our life meaning and direction. Then it is that we can say with St. Paul: Though he was in the form of God...he emptied himself...and was known to be of human estate...God highly exalted him...So that at Jesus' name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father: JESUS CHRIST IS LORD! (Philippians 2: 6-7)

May Jesus, Our Lord and God, bless each and every one of you throughout this year, Our Lady guide, guard and protect you, and Padre Pio watch over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

May you and your loved ones know the Living Presence and Providence of our Great and Loving God!

Blessed and Happy New Year 2017!

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