

Padre Pio Prayer Groups
National Office
St. Francis of Assisi
1901 Prior Road
Wilmington, Delaware 19809

tel: (302) 798-1454 fax: (302) 798-3360 website: pppg.org email: pppgusa@gmail.com

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you his peace!

In the Consecration of every Eucharistic Liturgy we hear the words of Jesus: This is my Body which will be given up for you...This is the cup of My Blood...it will be shed for you and for all...Do this in memory of me. These words repeated with the power of the Holy Spirit's transforming grace, make present for us the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Savior - His Real Presence. The 'Presence' we celebrate and receive conveys the words Jesus spoke the night before He died. They confer for us the re-presentation of the Lord's Passion-Death-Resurrection we celebrate. They commission us to do as He did. To become 'Eucharist' is to celebrate the joyful experience of our Redemption in Christ. We personally share in the sacrifice that offers Himself, the Bread of Life and the Cup of Eternal Salvation. We become active participants in the Sacred Meal. There can be no meal without something (Someone) being 'destroyed' for the sake of the other. The 'destruction' - the 'sacrifice', 'making sacred' - is a mystical experience. Although spiritual it is no less real and effective for the one who consumes the Sacrificial Offerings. Natural elements are offered and sanctified so that the life of grace may be restored and strengthened in those who receive the Eucharist worthily.

Within a few days of the same month, September, but seven centuries apart, two men of the Church, Francis of Assisi - Father of a multitude of spiritual children - and Padre Pio of Pietrelcina - a worthy son of the Poverello of Assisi filled with the spirit of his father, received a unique privilege from God. In an awe-inspiring manner, they were given the visible marks of the wounds of the Passion of the Savior on their hands, feet, and side. Our Seraphic Father bore the wounds until he died two years after he received them (September 17th). Padre Pio bore the wounds for fifty years to the day after he received them (September 20th). The 'gift' was entrusted to them by God so that they might be a living sign of the central aspect of the Eucharist they celebrated as faithful children of the Church.

While in prayer on La Verna, St. Francis of Assisi received this message from an angel: I have come to admonish and encourage you to prepare yourself to receive in all patience and humility that which God will give and do to you...Francis replied: I am ready to bear patiently whatsoever my Lord shall be pleased to do to me...Then he prayed: O Lord Jesus Christ, two graces do I ask of You before I die; the first, that in my lifetime I may feel, as far as possible, both in my soul and body, that pain which You, sweet Lord, endured in the hour of Your most bitter Passion; the second, that I may feel in my heart as much as possible of that excess of love by which You, O

Son of God, were inflamed to suffer so cruel a Passion for us sinners (Little Flowers, 3rd Consideration on the Stigmata).

Seven centuries later, a Capuchin Franciscan son of St. Francis of Assisi, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, wrote to Padre Agostino: Because I am happier than ever when I am suffering... I would ask Jesus to send me all the sorrows of men. But I do not do so because I am afraid of being too selfish by desiring the better part, which is suffering. When we suffer, Jesus is closer to us. (Letter to Padre Agostino, 16 April 1912). Oh, how wonderful it is to be a victim of divine love! (Letter to P. Agostino, 26 August 1912)... Did I not tell you that Jesus wants me to suffer without any consolation? Has he not asked me and chosen me to be one of his victims? ... Jesus has really made me understand the full significance of being a victim. It is necessary, dear Father, to reach the 'Consummatum est' ('it is finished') and 'In manus tuas' ('into your hands'). (Letter to P. Agostino 5 November 1912)... At long last, thanks be to God, the victim has now mounted the altar of sacrifice and of his own accord quietly lies down upon it. (Letter to Padre Agostino, 27 February 1916).

The Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi and his spiritual son St. Pio of Pietrelcina sought to make their lives a living 'Eucharist' - with, through, and in Christ. We too are called to live the Eucharist. God gives us wonderful gifts in life, and asks that we bring them to the altar of sacrifice as an act of praise and thanksgiving, thus making them an extension of the Eucharist we celebrate. Together with the pleasing gifts of life and productive and effective talents we have, let us remember that God often allows other 'gifts' to be bestowed upon us by nature, circumstance, or even His direct Will. These 'gifts' make us more obviously images of the Suffering Servant and Son of God, offered on the altar to be consumed by the faithful and to be consumed by His Eternal Love. Suffering, pain, crosses of all types, work, annoyance, monotony, are 'gifts' that we present together with the bread and wine on the altar to be transformed into a living sacrifice of praise pleasing to God. We bring all we have and all we are and present it together with the Sacrifice of the Son to the Father in the Holy Spirit. Everything in life, consecrated by our daily Eucharist, takes on a significance that transforms the merely human into a participation in the divine. Nature by grace is elevated to share in the life of the One Who became human that we might become one with Him.

What about the heavy crosses of life? - serious illness, total immobility, advanced age, and ultimately death. Sister Death, as St. Francis called her, is a friend that calls on us all. Our faith and hope in Jesus prepares each one of us for that most beautiful moment in life when Sister Death helps us to 'celebrate' our personal 'Mass' ('to be sent') that will unite us in an intimacy with Christ that is ours alone. Every child of God, redeemed in the blood of Christ, can become this Eucharist that renders praise and glory to God in Jesus through the Holy Spirit. This 'sacrifice' transforms a human life and makes it more profoundly one with that of Christ. The mystery of the 'victim soul' is seen in this transforming experience. The priest who offers the Sacrifice as well as being Altar and Lamb of Sacrifice, can sing his consummatum est and in manus tuas confidently. Unless we accept to be the Suffering Servant, and accept to share in the ministry of the Eternal Victim, how can we expect to share in the victory of the Victor over sin and death? The sacrifice of Christ is complete when our whole being - our vulnerable humanity, our body affected by time and nature - becomes the altar on which the rough wood of our personal cross is implanted impartially and unconditionally, and is accepted with selfless love.

'Victim' is a word we can understand in numerous ways. There are those who are 'victims' of their own doing, who could easily live serene and pleasant lives but decidedly perpetuate the conditions that make life difficult for them. There are victims of circumstance who are born challenged either socially, religiously, physically, economically... There are those 'victims' who need constant affirmation and thus seek to excite concern for themselves from others, thus creating unexpected 'victims' of others. There are those 'victim souls' who have offered themselves to God as God wills or permits, or who have accepted with inner peace, resignation and joy whatever God allows to befall them. They exemplify the power of faith and grace effectively operating in their trusting souls; they are an encouragement and example for all who are privileged to know them. Then there are the consecrated 'Victim Souls' who accept to become one with the One Whom they hold, consecrate and offer; these offer themselves with the Sacrificial Lamb and accept from God all that He asks of them because they are called to be Other Christs in all things; their celebration of the Eucharist is not consigned to a mere hour a day but they Live Jesus until they offer and receive Him again.

What St. Francis of Assisi and St. Pio of Pietrelcina both accomplished was a work of grace that has a lot to teach us. They both sought to understand the Eucharist more profoundly each day by living God's Word and preparing their hearts in prayer and reflection. They both celebrated the Eucharist, not as something they had to 'fit into their busy schedule' but as the encounter with Someone Who made their life meaningful and all they did effective in God's sight. They lived the Eucharist beyond the moment of the liturgical celebration. They remembered the words, When I am lifted up I will call all people to Myself, thus the Lord was lifted up every moment of their day. Jesus in them could lead souls to the loving embrace of the Father. Understand-Celebrate-Live...and 'Become' the One offered, who emptied himself and took on the form of a slave...he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross (Philippians 2: 6-11). Thus we are reminded of the necessity to become 'victims' with Christ by sanctifying all we are and have.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, how do we live the Mass, this awesome 'gift' of the Eucharist? Let us remember that a form of prayer that Padre Pio encouraged his spiritual children to offer was the prayer of reparation, as well as intercessory prayer. 'Reparation' presumes that one is available and willing to make up for what is lacking in the passion of Christ, for the sake of His Body, the Church (Colossians 1, 24). This 'lack' in the passion of Christ does not diminish the eternal effects of the one Sacrifice of Christ offered on Calvary, but reminds us that every Christian continues the ministry of Christ until the end of time. For priests this is accomplished in a more eminent manner because of the ministerial priesthood they share with Christ. What a wonderful privilege we are given to 'complete' the sacrifice of Christ! What trust! What responsibility! Even should the Father accept us at our word in becoming 'victim', this 'sharing with Christ' should not cause apprehension in anyone. The one whom God elects is also given all that is necessary to fulfill the mission entrusted to them.

Let us always be prepared in mind, heart, and will. The moment will come when each one of us will 'celebrate' our 'personal Mass', when we become the ultimate gift of our lives offered to God for eternity. When that moment arrives, let us muster all the faith within, all the love and acceptance we have expressed in words, so that we can repeat with conviction and joy: 'Now I

am truly a Eucharist with Christ!' Authentic Eucharistic devotion must absolutely bring us to this totally unifying moment of our lives with the One Who Alone must be the Center of all life - Christ! To be a priest, as well as any Catholic, goes far beyond just celebrating and participating in the ritual of the Mass. Until we live the Mass we celebrate, we are doing a dis-service to ourselves and even more to the trust God has placed in us, calling us to be the image of His Son as ordained priests, and the image of His Son as those who bear the name 'Christian' through Baptism.

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.

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

PS - There is an important letter concerning the International Database in the link of From the Desk of the Coordinator. The date of the letter is August 2017. Please read it, and respond as soon as possible.

CORRECTION:

The full address with corrected zip code for Central Headquarters for the Padre Pio Prayer Groups is the following:

Centro Gruppi di Preghiera di San Pio da Pietrelcina
Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza
Viale Cappuccini 172
71013 S. Giovanni Rotondo FG

I apologize for the inconvenience if your communications to San Giovanni may have take a little longer because of the incorrect zip. This just reminds me that when I attempt to hurry, I am destined to forget something or make mistakes. Thank you for your understanding.
