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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

Among the various celebrations the Church observes during the month of October, three distinct occurrences stand out. They are the: Celebration of the Month of the Most Holy Rosary of Our Lady, Celebration of Pro Life Month, and the Solemnity of our Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi. As distinct and specific as each are, there is also a definite connection among them. The Rosary speaks of Christ's Incarnation as One infinitely different from all yet One Who is also totally human in all things but sin, and Whose life is experienced in the Rosary meditations through the eyes and heart of His Holy and Immaculate Mother Mary. The Pro Life Movement exalts and defends the Right to Life at all stages of its development from conception to natural death. The Christian aspect of Pro Life views the Incarnation of Christ as the highest motive to respect the dignity of human life since God Himself respected it in becoming one of His own creation. The Solemnity of St. Francis of Assisi celebrates the Poor Man of Assisi who sought to live life fully by living the Gospel. Gospel living seeks to Live Jesus in the reality of His Incarnation, without gloss. It also praises Mary as Mother of all Christians because Mother of the Christ. As Mother of all Christians She is also the Virgin made Church, as St. Francis of Assisi calls Her, who encourages us to accept every aspect of our human lives as we anticipate the fullness of Life with God. As a true son of St. Francis, our own Padre Pio not only lived this spiritual dimension and connection, but also offers his Spiritual Children the opportunity to do so as well through our participation in the Association of the Prayer Groups established in his name.

Often the experiences of life raise three basic questions in most people's hearts. The more chaotic the world around us seems to become, the more these questions gnaw away at our minds and hearts. The answers to them seem so simple and obvious that most often we do not even consider reflecting on them. Our Seraphic Father, St. Francis of Assisi, in his profound simplicity, took these queries as the challenging voice of God calling him to a greater and more meaningful awareness of life - his life. His response, in the light of his Catholic Christian Faith, made his life a magnet that still attracts millions of people to follow him. Since his 'conversion' eight hundred years ago until now, many have learned how to make life worth living because of his example. Faithful son of the Poverello of Assisi, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina lived the spirit of his Father and Founder in the twentieth century and helped others to confront, consider, and concur with these questions. What are they? Three simple words: Who? What? Where?

Who are You, Lord? Who am I? Were words Francis often prayed. Following the prayer of St. Augustine, who prayed, Lord that I may know You that I may myself, St. Francis discovers and tells us that we are who we are before God and nothing more. And I add to this: 'and nothing less'. Humbly we recognize that we are not the beginning and end of all we claim to be. We have our origins in Someone greater than ourselves. His love and benevolence calls each one of us 'to life'. If God were to stop for one instant to think of us and to love us, we would fall back into a meaningless state of nothingness - that's almost impossible to imagine! Nothing! Thus, with grateful humility we acknowledge the source of Life Who is Life Himself and place ourselves in His mercy. However, gratefully we remember we are also 'nothing less', that is, nothing less than a child of God created in God's image and called to share His Life with Him one day in the fullness of eternity. Thus, we place ourselves in God's love. This love Padre Pio celebrated in the Eucharist and offered those who assisted at his Mass the opportunity to enter the Mystery of God's Saving Love. Who am I? A child of God redeemed in the blood of Jesus!

What do I do with this knowledge? St. Francis realized that he had to detach himself from a life that was controlling him. He could not serve two masters and realized that the 'Master of Confusion' with three of his many children - pride, prestige, possessions - was controlling him. His father's boast at what his son would be in the merchant's trade; his popularity among the youth of Assisi and his 'fame' as ring-leader of the boisterous youth rabble of Assisi; his ease at acquiring whatever he desired whether from his father's largess in view of the hopes he nourished for Francis' future in the family business, or from Francis' own affability with people, capable of selling anything (he was a good businessman), were all positive realities that would make any young man satisfied and quite happy with the status quo of his life. Francis wanted more! His response was to strip himself of what blinded others and himself to the image of the Son of God who was nobler than we, and (who) made himself poor in this world (2 Celano 74). And, as he told Cardinal Ugolino, the Lord takes great pleasure in poverty... I possess a regal dignity and a distinguished nobility when I imitate the Lord who... became poor for our sake... (2 Celano 73). He renounced those things that hid the image of the Christ in his life. Padre Pio took people as they were, and led them, through the 'process' of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to a spiritual 'wholeness', and to living their lives committed to a growth in God's grace and decisive involvement in the external witness of their Faith.

Where will all this lead me? St. Francis understood that by freeing his body he would free his soul. The heart indicated the way; the mind explained the process; the will made it happen. The whole person had to respond for Francis to become, by the working of God's grace in his life, the 'Seraphic Father', the 'Poverello of Assisi', a Man Marked with the Signs of our Salvation, one Crucified with Christ, who, poor in this world's assessment of the life he chose, continues to captivate the hearts of people. Even those not of the same religious background are inspired by his response to Life. This penniless vagabond became the Herald of the Great King. The world was his stepping stone to eternity with God, rather than the stumbling block it could have been, and is for so many. Francis poor and humble enters heaven rich in merit... The Lord looked favorably upon him and ... exalted him (Liturgy of the Hours). Padre Pio 'heralded' the love of God and indicated that nothing was too burdensome in view of heaven. He lived in the presence of heaven around him and did all that was possible to help others focus on eternity that awaits us rather than on the passing world around us. As St. John reminds the Church: Greater is the One within than the one who is in the world.

Padre Pio of Pietrelcina was a true son of St. Francis of Assisi. He desired to be a friar from his early years. He sought the austerity and detachment, but was always available for others. The same questions that Francis faced, and that we ponder so often at various stages in our journey, Padre Pio dealt with in himself and with the thousands that he counseled over the years of his ministry. Padre Pio's love for the Lord, as that of St. Francis of Assisi, was like a raging fire ablaze within him. This burning desire for the Lord transformed not only his heart but also his body with the Sacred Stigmata of the Savior. A love so intense for the Lord burned within him that the only possible consequence was his becoming a 'marked man' with the image of the One he loved. What 'marks' do we bear in our hearts and on our bodies?! Are they the marks of love?... or, are they the marks and scars of self-centered close-heartedness?

Francis was a 'free man' unshackled and liberated from his many 'masters' because of his trust in God's Providence, Love, and Mercy. Padre Pio sought to help people unshackle themselves so that they too could experience the liberating grace of God's love and be really free. How have we answered the three questions: Who, What, Where? How deep is our love for the Lord? How far are we willing to go, if necessary, to break bonds that are making us 'slaves' to a world that cries for real freedom - a liberating freedom? How determined are we to live lives that make creation our servant rather than our master? How convincing are our lives of the faith we profess with our lips in the Providence of God? How ready are we to look to heaven with joy-filled anticipation, and say Come, Lord Jesus!? We have all heard the amusing, but apparently true, saying: Everyone talks about heaven but no one is in a hurry to get there! Is heaven really real to me?! In view of all we Spiritual Children of Padre Pio say and believe about our Spiritual Guide and Father, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, are we ready to understand and live what his life teaches us about God, ourselves, and our relationship to others? Do I thank God for having created me, and do I see that Life is Worth Living? Jesus is The Life, and, like his Spiritual Father Francis of Assisi, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina sought to help a world gone wild and grown cold in the spirit, to Live Jesus. Just as St. Francis told his spiritual children to live the Gospel without gloss, so Padre Pio expects us all to live our Catholic Faith sincerely and maturely, with our hearts focused on heaven. How faithful are we to our Spiritual Father and Guide, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina?

Padre Pio is an awesome and marvelous gift God gave to the Church, and especially to all of us. As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio let us be grateful for all he is for us. He was a true Capuchin Franciscan whose personal austerity led others to set priorities in their lives and to be focused on Who and What really matters. Let us live as the redeemed people we are in the Love of Jesus Who died for us that we might have life in abundance. Padre Pio's life taught and continues to teach us this. Let us learn well and live more profoundly the spirit of the Association of the Prayer Groups that we may one day share in the glory promised all of God's faithful children.

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. Sario, O.F.M. Cap.
National Coordinator