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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

### **The Lord Give You His Peace!**

*In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth ... God said, 'Let there be...' And so it happened. God looked at everything He had made, and He found it very good. (Genesis 1: 1-30)* Life is the first gift of God's Eternal Love. Goodness, of its very nature, cannot be contained. It must overflow limits set and reach out in all directions. Eternal Goodness offers the greatest gift of Himself: the gift of being. During a lifetime conditioned and limited by time, we who share the 'breath of God', His Holy Spirit, enter a journey that leads us from mystery to its fulfillment in eternity. In Christ Jesus we recognize Him Who is *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*. What seemingly begins as a merely natural process is now transformed into a 'Journey of Faith' that places us in a relationship with our Creator and eternal Life-giving Father, Who continues to 'breathe' His Holy Spirit into our hearts, because of the Redemptive Life-Death-Resurrection of His Incarnate Son, Jesus, Who made the Father 'real' for us.

*Men and women are on a journey of discovery which is humanly unstoppable - a search for the truth and a search for a person to whom they might entrust themselves. Christian faith comes to meet them, offering the concrete possibility of reaching the goal which they seek. (Pope John Paul II - Relationship Between Faith and Reason, Encyclical of September 14, 1998).* Life is that period of time we have been allotted to know, love, and serve our God both in Himself and in each other. We follow Jesus Who invites us to walk this journey of faith as 'pilgrims and strangers'. St. Francis of Assisi's 'Canticle of the Creatures' is his prayer of praise to God Who can be seen in all creation, and at every moment of life's journey. Many 'cradle Catholics' often take their Christianity too much for granted. There is a tendency to forget that external religious practices, to be authentic, must be an expression of the greater gift of the Faith to which they are called to be convinced and committed. Faith is not a list of dogmas to believe, but a Person to accept and follow. Faith, strengthened through Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium, accompanies and encourages life, in the midst of a world that hears the words of Jesus but often closes its heart to the message that must be personally accepted and lived to be effective and fruitful. Although we are all called to be saved, there is no such thing as 'global salvation'. Jesus died for all humanity and His redemption is once-for-all; it is 'global'

in that sense. However, it is the personal responsibility of each individual to cooperate with the graces he/she receives from the Redemptive Sacrificial Blood of Jesus poured out for us all, if that person hopes to be 'saved'.

Our journey of faith begins in the accounts of the Old Testament Scriptures with the call of Abraham, when he responded in faith to God's urging to leave Ur of the Chaldeans. Abraham may not have completely understood his unique relationship with God and the role he was called to fulfill, nonetheless he had all the necessary elements for faith. He promptly responded 'yes' to God's call, a divine call that more often than not turned Abraham's own plans upside down. Abraham was even ready to offer his only son to God, against all human logic and expectations for the future. Faith believes and gives one's self to God unconditionally. Even when God seems to be 'absent' from us, in faith we sense an unexplainable presence and strength leading us through and beyond the limits that our difficulties and doubts place in the way. It is this faith that becomes a power house working and welling up within us. It is this faith that becomes the very root of our daily life. Our life becomes an act of faith.

Faith reaches its fulfillment in the New Testament in the Son of God Who manifested Himself and proclaimed the kingdom of God. This proclamation of God's will and invitation to believe requires the same response as that of Abraham, our 'Father in Faith'. This acceptance is a decisive act of a loving will that moves our human minds to look beyond the expected human calculations and to trust totally in God. Faith is not an intellectual acceptance of a number of abstract facts. Faith is an unconditional acceptance of a person, God, as we have come to know Him in the Person of Jesus the Christ. Faith accepts God Who proposes His love for Christ Who died and was raised from the dead. Faith is obedience to God, communion with Him, openness to all God reveals *because He can neither deceive nor be deceived*. Faith opens our eyes to see life from the perspective of eternity and God's love. Faith becomes victory over the isolation we create in our lives when we close ourselves to the 'Other'. Faith helps us to gratefully accept life as a marvelous experience. Filled with challenges that may try us to the limit of our strength, life is supported, nourished, and ennobled by a faith that trusts in an ever-loving and all-providing God. From the very beginning of our existence, God calls each one of us from the nothingness of 'not being' to an existence that bursts into time and is ultimately transformed into the immortal gift of unending Life for all.

In writing to his spiritual daughter, Erminia Gargani, in a letter dated, 23 April 1918, Padre Pio writes: *Live tranquilly, always, as regards your spirit, because God reigns there Supreme King. Always keep present in your mind, this truly excellent lesson which deserves to be understood well: this present life is given to us in order to acquire the eternal, and due to a lack of reflection, we base our affections on that which pertains to this world through which we are passing, so that when we have to leave it, we are frightened and agitated. Believe me, in order to live happily while on pilgrimage we must keep before our eyes the hope of arriving at our Homeland where we will stay for eternity, and in the meantime we should believe this*

*firmly. Because given that it is God who calls us to Himself, He watches how we make our way to Him, and will never permit anything to happen to us that is not for a greater good. He knows what we are, and He will extend His paternal hand to us while we are going through rough stretches, so that nothing will prevent us from running quickly to Him. But in order to receive this grace we must have total confidence in Him.*

Padre Pio speaks so simply and directly to Erminia Gargani, as well as to each of us, his Spiritual Children. The Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, are a 'Militia of Prayer'. *In unity there is strength.* We believe in the power of prayer and the strength and endurance created by a deep relationship with God. *If God is for us, who can be against us?* The greatest witness we can give others flows from living in the Presence of God. Truly convinced of this, we must be tranquil and at peace within ourselves because God is in control. Fear and agitation are signs that we may have forgotten Jesus' reminder to His own: *worry cannot add one moment to your life span.* Thus we journey together, focused on the Lord Who calls us to share Life in our Eternal Homeland *after having sought to restore all things in Christ* during our earthly pilgrimage. Each step we take is a step forward surrendering ourselves unconditionally to the ever-loving providence of God, Who never leaves His children unaided.

Padre Pio continues: *Do not anticipate the problems of this life with apprehension, but rather, with a perfect hope that God, to Whom you belong, will free us from them accordingly. He has defended you up to now. Simply hold on tightly to the hand of His divine providence and He will help you in all events, and when you are unable to walk, He will lead you, don't worry. Why should you fear when you belong to this God who strongly assured us: 'We know that in everything God works for the good with those who love Him (Romans 8:28). Don't think about tomorrow's events, because the same Heavenly Father Who takes care of you today, will do the same tomorrow and forever... Live tranquilly...remove from your imagination that which upsets you and often say to our Lord: 'Oh God, You are my God and I will trust in You. You will assist me and be my refuge, and I will fear nothing', because not only are you with Him, but you are in Him and He is within you....*

Pope John Paul II tells us that men and women are on a journey of discovery in search for the truth and a person. Words like these sound like some philosophical theme until we examine our hearts and realize how true and meaningful they are for our lives. Padre Pio tells us that in search of the One Who is the Truth, Jesus, we cannot allow ourselves to be distracted and risk deviating from the course. Anticipating problems is a lack of trust more than a prudent calculation. We worry so much about things that often never happen. There is a rather humorous saying that can fit the bill for so many: *Don't tell me that worry doesn't do any good. I know better. The things I worry about never happen.* (Anonymous). Our Spiritual Father and Guide tells us: *Pray, hope, and don't worry.* Have we ever taken time to reflect on the simplicity and depth of these words? When he tells Erminia to *hold on tightly to the hand of His divine providence* he is verifying for her the fact that *He will lead you, so don't worry.*

Every life has its disconcerting events and fears. Even the greatest of saints had their difficulties. Many went through moments of spiritual darkness and dryness. They continued to believe and hope in God, encouraging and empowering others to be joy-filled in the midst of their challenges as well as their successes, while they themselves cried out to their 'absent' and Loving God who asked that they pass through the desolation of the Cross. Padre Pio, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Pope John Paul II, and many others whose lives we have come to know more intimately now that they have entered eternity, went through these moments. Faith and life walk hand-in-hand. It is our Faith that strengthens our spirit and nourishes our life. Jesus reminds us: *It is the spirit that gives life ... The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.* (John 6:63) When we allow the Spirit of Faith to fill our minds and hearts, when we accept the words of Jesus in truth, when we live today where God and we encounter one another ... we live in hope, free from fear, trusting in divine providence that clears all intimidating imaginings from our minds and hearts. Peace, joy, and serenity become a reality. And, they become 'contagious' for those whom we encounter.

Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, live every moment of life fully! We know that the spirit of reparatory prayer, encouraged by Padre Pio, implies that we pass through some sort of crucible as a way of becoming one with the Suffering Servant Who became One with us. Let us be grateful to God for the life He has called us to live, and make our prayer the one Padre Pio offered Erminia Gargani: *You are my God...I trust in You...be my refuge...I fear nothing...*(for I seek to be in You and You are within me).

May God bless you; my Our Lady guide, guard, and protect you; and may Padre Pio look upon each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings

Fr. Francis A. Sario, O.F.M. Cap.

National Coordinator