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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord Give You His Peace!

The month of February is dedicated to the Hidden Life of Jesus and offers us a more meaningful reflection of what the 'Hidden Life' means for us when Lent begins in March as it does this year, and we have the whole month of February to focus on the 'ordinariness' and 'no frills' life of Jesus. The whole month reflects His life lived in the daily routine of a human being; His life as infant, child, youngster, teenager and young adult all speak to us profoundly. The stages of natural growth and change He experienced were noticed by His relatives, neighbors, friends, but no one was aware of anything extraordinarily unusual. The King of kings, Lord of lords, God of creation, was 'hidden' among and within His own creation and no one really knew Him. St. John, in his Gospel account of the life of Jesus, tells us as much: *He was in the world, and the world came to be through Him, but the world did not know Him.* (John 1:10)

This 'Hidden Life' of the Divine-Eternal-God-with-us speaks volumes of the love only God can express and we, recipients of this awesome gift, are called to live our 'hidden lives', in response to that love, for all the world to see and give praise to God! Contradiction: hidden to be seen?! Not at all! The more we recede from the cacophony of sounds, confusion of images, and distortion of values that often an ailing world has to offer, the more people notice how much the same but really how truly different we are. This difference does not judge, condemn, or condone; it attempts to condition by presence and personal integrity and commitment a society in dire need of truth, hope, and a profound transforming love. It is with the 'violence' of a disarmed and open heart, rather than a clenched fist or categorical judgments that this is achieved.

In the Letter to Diognetus, an early writing of the Church, we read the following words addressed to the Christians immersed in the realities of daily life: *They (the Christians) cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs. They do not live in cities of their own; they do not use a peculiar form of speech; they do not follow an eccentric manner of life. This doctrine of theirs has not been discovered by the ingenuity or deep thought of inquisitive men, nor do they put forward a merely human teaching, as some people do. Yet, although they live in (any area of the world), as each man's lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living, at the same time they give proof of the remarkable and admittedly extraordinary constitution of their own (personal lives). They live in their own countries ... They have a share in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their (homeland), and yet for them every (homeland) is a foreign land. They marry, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring. They share their board with each other, but not their marriage bed. It is true that they are "in the flesh," but they do not live*

“according to the flesh”. They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require. They love all (people), and by all (people) are (questioned as to their integrity of life and credibility of words). (Ridiculed or condemned as useless or harmful to society’s values) yet they are brought to life. They are poor, and yet they make many rich; (many) are completely destitute, and yet they enjoy complete abundance. (Some) are dishonored, and in their very dishonor are glorified; (some may be) defamed, and are vindicated. They are reviled, and yet they bless; when they are affronted, they still pay due respect. When they do (or seek the) good, they are (criticized and/or) punished as evildoers; undergoing punishment (for the Gospel values they believe and live), they rejoice because they are brought to life...

The situation of the early Christians has been the fate of the Church down through the centuries. The methods and motives for persecuting the Family of Christ change. In fact, they become even more dangerous and deadly than previous ones because of their sophisticated and camouflaged subtleties. They seem to strengthen as times and technology advance. Through all this we, the Church, remain the same, steadfast in our faith in Jesus Christ and His Gospel! We are the same Spiritual Children of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina who see the world as God’s Theater of Redemption. We acknowledge life as a God-given gift that must be loved and defended at every stage of its development from conception to natural death. We believe that our citizenship is in heaven but that a good Catholic Christian is also a good citizen of this world. Our strength is in the Christ we acknowledge as Son of God and Prince of Peace, sent by the Father, in Whose Spirit we call God ‘Abba’. It is the ‘Good News’ of Him, in Whose Most Holy Name we boast, and in Whom we continue undaunted to proclaim with our lives the love, mercy, providence, forgiveness ... majesty of God. If we do not keep on ‘top of the situation’ and we begin to take our Faith and Baptismal Promises for granted, we risk losing everything. We are ‘Undercover Agents’ of the Almighty, who live in anonymity and seek through ‘grace-full persuasion’ to change the world as we allow God’s Spirit to transform us each day.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, who form his ‘Militia of Prayer’ in a secularized world, your lives are unique - ordinary lives lived in an extraordinary way - ‘hidden for all to see’ - remember the Letter to Diognetus above. As Catholics, we promise to ‘Live Jesus’, to live the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to let Him be our Guide. Do we make a personal conscious daily effort to let God’s Word and words in Scripture be our guide and the Most Holy Eucharist be our nourishment for life’s journey? Spiritual Children of Padre Pio make a personal choice to deepen and live their Baptismal life with greater commitment.

People, whether seriously or jokingly, have asked me at times, *What’s the good word for today?* My response is usually *Jesus, or God, or Love, or Mary*. There is always a ‘good word’ that we can keep in our heart and mind each day; a ‘word’ we can reflect on in the course of the day; a ‘word’ that ‘keeps us focused’ on what really matters. In prayer and reflection on God’s Word each day and what we learn of the spirit of Padre Pio through our readings concerning him, we form a ‘miniature’ Mystical Body of Christ. We are a ‘body’ of prayers, though diverse in personalities, responsibilities, activities, and so forth, we are one in Faith (*Pray*), Trust (*Hope*) and Universal Love (*Don’t Worry*). *Cor unum et anima una*.

One of the beautiful aspects of our Association can be noted in the uniqueness of each individual who helps form the magnificent mosaic of the Spiritual Children of Padre Pio. Each person brings their distinctive personality to the Group and asks that the Spirit of God lead them to deepen their relationship with God and others. There are times when this uniqueness might develop into a personal elitism that seeks to dominate

rather than participate and share. As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, let us be open to the Word and listen to what God is saying to us. Let us bring what we become in the Spirit to the world in which we live, not shouting or judging or anything of that sort. We live 'hidden' where we are so that others may not be intimidated by our enthusiasm but be encouraged and supported in seeking the same simple yet effective road to holiness. Padre Pio said about his Groups of Pray-ers: *I neither call them to me nor do I send them away;* and to those who wished to be numbered among his Spiritual Children he would say: *I accept you willingly as my spiritual children, on the condition that you always be good and not give bad example before God and man, that you be examples of a good Christian life. Otherwise I also know how to use the whip.*

May God bless you; Our Lady guide, guard, and protect you, and Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, our Spiritual Father and Guide, 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 – The following is a translation of the words of the Archbishop of Bologna, Italy. He appreciates the presence and "ministry" of the Padre Pio Prayer Groups and offers encouraging and challenging words to consider. I have added this to our monthly reflection as an opportunity for all to recognize how the Prayer Groups are seen by the some ordinaries. The local bishops who know Padre Pio, recognize the Prayer Groups as spiritual powerhouses in their dioceses.

PADRE PIO AND THE PRAYER GROUPS - Witnesses of the Gospel spirituality

Nurseries of faith, beacons of love in whom Christ is present everytime we are united through Prayer and Holy Eucharist, under the guidance of their Shepherds and Spiritual Directors. It is Prayer that is the unifying force of all good souls, which moves the world, renews conscience, which sustains the "House" which comforts the suffering, which cures the sick, which sanctifies work, which elevates medical assistance, which gives moral strength and Christian resignation to human suffering, which brings a smile and the blessing of God on weakness and frailty. (Padre Pio)

Prayer Groups ministers of consolation – teaching of Most Reverend Monsignor Matteo Zuppi Metropolitan Archbishop of Bologna

Prayer groups represent the soul of Pastoral life and are an instrument of evangelization: From the beginning of his mandate Pope Francis called for evangelizing our suburbs, he asked us to go out of our small communities inviting us to approach our neighbour in a more intimate and personal way, advising us always to speak the truth, but in a way that reaches the heart. Today those who are far away from Jesus, face their own suffering in a more tragic manner feeling lost and useless to the point of thinking; that life is over and so it is better to end it once and for all. How can Prayer Groups evangelize this tragic reality? They must present themselves as places to accompany, to invite and above all to support the sorrowful journey, the Prayer groups must become places of true consolation, they cannot simply say "I pray for you" they must also show care and closeness. One must combat the idea of uselessness which is born in the mind of those who suffer and combat it, with the strength a Christian has: the strength of the heart. We must carry friendship which we like and have amongst us in moments of prayer, outside of the Church. Men who know how to pray but above all how much to care, because to pray means to wish others well and prayer is the highest level of a Christian.

There exists so much suffering in solitude that it becomes unbearable. Our objective is to change this suffering making it lighter; there is no need for many gestures of many words: suffering needs the presence and not words. Let us abandon talks of convenience and carry to the suffering our hearts, the Word of God, prayer. You must be ministers of consolation. Let us seek to envelope love, beauty and sensitive to who is nearby in solitude and suffering. With our prayers we begin to give hope, we begin "Holy Resignation" which is not to content ourselves but to abandon oneself to someone, we begin not to give up but to accept not being able to do everything, accepting our limitations, and to leave to God because we are certain He will help. Prayer nourishes us and is the nourishment of the Word, Prayer, and Communion. Prayer Groups must not only pray but must invite others to pray, they must carry prayer of consolation to who is lonely, they must show leadership and be a Shepherd's crook to those who are crossing the valley of darkness. They must give hope. Who suffers wants someone to be close to them and truly care about them. All of us have the power to win over solitude. All of us know Padre Pio was an outspoken man, very direct and used to avoid trivial and superficial things. He used to send chatty men and women out of the Confessional. We like Padre Pio must transmit true consolation through prayer, correction, visit, to be close and caring. We must live the Gospel with joy. We must write in the heart of our neighbor the most beautiful (truth): *Jesus loves you.*

In truth I say to you; if two of you on earth will agree to ask for anything, My Father who is in heaven shall grant it to them. Because where there are two or three united in My name I Am amongst them. (Mt 18, 19-20)

Meditations on Prayer Groups - Reflection of Padre Pio - In the Groups, when my children unite in prayer, it is Jesus in the midst of them, there will be the Mother of Jesus, even I will be present in spirit and united in prayer. Remember that communal prayer is a powerful weapon in the hands of the Church and the faithful. Alone a weak man can do very little but if he unites with another man and more men, prayer becomes a power. A soul which prays alone when it invokes God, is weaker than if more souls unite together in prayer. They form a formidable force, consolidated and empowered by Christ.

Reflection of Giovanni Gigliozzi Live your prayer group, you are yeast, live around your priest and Bishop. Be true Apostles in your Parish. The group is not a small orchard, give, be generous with all, in your environment, in your families. The value which Padre Pio wanted to give to the Prayer Groups is eminently a spiritual value: to dilate the impetus of love which comes from Padre Pio, who is a priest of Christ, spreading it in all frequented environments.