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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

Padre Pio is still at work fifty years plus after his entrance to eternity. Phone calls, emails, and letters arrive from all over the world from those who see our website requesting information about the Prayer Groups or asking for our prayers. New members to existing groups in their areas and/or others forming new groups inevitably ask what the Prayer Groups are all about. They ask specifics and what makes the Association of Padre Pio Prayer Groups different from other prayer groups. Some of the questions revolve around the 'spiritual practices', if dues are required for membership or to 'become a spiritual child', if anyone can be an affiliate or if there are restrictions regarding acceptance to the group, and so forth. Though there are things that we 'do', Padre Pio was deeply concerned on our inner attitude and disposition to the working of the Holy Spirit. He desired that his Spiritual Children be committed Catholic Christians whose inner spirit and character was expressed in their lives. It is the age old story of Faith and Good Works that cannot be separated from each other.

It is interesting how people respond to the fact that the Prayer Groups are Padre Pio's 'Family of Prayers'. Through a committed life of prayer and voluntary sacrifices, offered particularly in reparation for sin, with the assistance and under the spiritual direction of a Roman Catholic priest in good standing with the Church, under the leadership of a team dedicated to animating the group in spiritual and apostolic works, the Prayer Groups continue the vision of Padre Pio to renew the world in-with-through Christ Jesus. Gathering for Eucharist and Eucharistic Adoration, praying the Rosary, deepening the awareness, knowledge, and understanding of one's faith and the unique spirit of Padre Pio, as a monthly community practice of each Prayer Group, is edifying to some and intimidating to others. There are some who shy away from participating in this simple yet powerful 'Family of Padre Pio'. The demand for orthodoxy in prayer, personal spiritual direction, and respect and acceptance in other areas where the Magisterium must accompany the faithful with the wisdom of the ages in Scripture, Tradition, and Church teachings, seems too much for some to accept and too limiting for others who believe that quantity reflects quality. But, for thousands around the world, the Prayer Groups are a proven and sure way of being faithful to our Catholic Christian profession of faith and life.

We are an Association of the Faithful, recognized by the Church, with our own Delegate appointed by the Holy See, Monsignor Franco Moscone. Father Moscone, as he prefers to be called, is not only the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Manfredonia-Vieste-San Giovanni Rotondo, but as Delegate of the Holy See for the Works of Padre Pio he oversees the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza (Home for the Relief of Suffering), the Prayer Groups, and the Works of Padre Pio, and regularly reports to the Holy Father on the progress of the Groups around the world. We should always keep him in our prayers that God grant him the holiness and health to

fulfill his responsibilities, knowing that Our Lady and Padre Pio are interceding for him, as well as all of his sisters and brothers of the association of Padre Pio's Prayer Groups around the world.

Our Padre Pio Prayer Group Association is not an essential for entrance to eternal life, but for us who participate in the spirit of Padre Pio as affiliates of the Association, we all share in the spiritual benefits the Church grants us and the presence, promise and protective intercession of our Founder, St. Pio of Pietrelcina. Though God 'calls the shots', and Padre Pio knew this quite well, still it was Padre Pio who told us that he would watch over his spiritual children and wait at the gates of heaven until each last one of his Spiritual Children is welcomed to paradise. Exaggeration? Yes! But a way for Padre Pio to tell us of his deep love and care for all his Spiritual Children and his desire to see us in the Father's loving embrace with him.

The thousands who have accepted the challenge of the Padre Pio Prayer Groups, have come to know, slowly but surely, what it means to be a Spiritual Child of Padre Pio. Padre Pio himself accepted those who asked to be his spiritual children but emphasized that they should not embarrass him or he would come after them. Padre Pio took seriously the request to be accepted as his spiritual child. He expected the recipient of his approval to enter this spiritual relationship seriously. The following few citations from a letter of Padre Pio to the Campanile Sisters, dated 25 May 1918, can offer a few suggestions he himself offers us through his correspondence to his spiritual daughters. (NB-Italics are Padre Pio's words, the rest is a reflection)

- *'I will be with him in trouble' (Psalm 90: 15). May this loving Lord continue to possess your heart, rendering it holy to the degree established in eternity.* - The Lord seeks to possess our hearts. The thoughts and desires of our lives, if directed by God and to God, can bring us nothing less than a true sense of fulfillment, and thus serenity and peace, no matter what is happening around us - SURRENDER TO GOD AND BECOME A VICTOR WITH THE VICTIM.

- *Do not fear the storm that roars about your spirit. Because to the same degree the winter is severe, the spring will be more beautiful and more rich with flowers, and the harvest will be more abundant.* - Fear and discouragement are probably the most powerful 'tools' of satan. But Love, rooted in God's love for us, is the most powerful experience of all. Love is really the force that conditions our decisions to respond or not to God Who calls and invites through the experiences of life and His own direct intervention through those interior 'voices', attractions, and desires we feel. If God is truly in our hearts and minds, even though we may at times falter as vulnerable human beings, God is with us and we need fear nothing around us. The greater the challenges we sustain for the sake of all we believe as children of God redeemed in the blood of Jesus, the greater the spiritual benefits that make all the actions of our lives more fruitful and effective - LOVE GOD WITH YOUR WHOLE BEING.

- *Whatever the tempter says and does, God is accomplishing His admirable plans in you, which is your complete, total, and full transformation in Him. ... don't believe the murmurings and shadows of the enemy, and hold firmly to the truths contained in this declaration which I make you in full authority as your director and in absolute certainty of conscience. To fear being lost in the arms of divine goodness, is stronger than the fear of a child held tightly in the arms of its mother. Banish all fears and worries which are permitted by infinite love...* - Why do we hesitate to surrender ourselves to the will of God? Why do we not trust God totally? Fears and worries, though we all experience them at times, should be eliminated from our hearts because if God is for us, who can be against us? The spirit of evil will always attack us at our most vulnerable

spot. Where is yours? Know it. When you feel that you are being overwhelmed, remember that the Lord is in the depths of your heart holding you up and leading you through the challenge (This was an experience of St. Catherine of Siena and of which she wrote about herself in a moment of serious temptations). *Go to Him! Open your heart! Ask for help! And be at peace!* - TRUST GOD TOTALLY.

- *That contraction and expansion which follow each other, and which you feel with the tip of the spirit, is born from love that urges and love that attracts. Therefore, live calmly, and that very succession of various feelings in your spirit, which results from the lack of total possession of the object that causes the interior martyrdom, causing the soul to suffer agonies, see that you bear it in peace ...* - The 'ups-and-downs' we go through in our spiritual journey, and whose effects we notice in our daily lives, are a fact of life that teaches us much about ourselves. The third, seventh, and ninth Stations of the Cross reflect on the falls of Jesus on His way to Calvary. Can we expect to be any better than our Savior? We are going to have good moments and questionable or even bad moments. Be grateful for the first and learn from the second. There are no useless moments for those who place themselves in the arms of Divine Mercy and Love - SERENITY AND GRATITUDE.

- *Be patient in bearing your imperfections, if you hold your perfection dear to your heart.* - Very little need be said here. Be patient with God as God is patient with you; and in God, be patient with yourself and others. Remember the dandelion?! What was considered a weed and torn up and thrown away is now cultivated and served as a delicacy in many eateries. Be patient with the 'weeds' of your life. They may be just the 'spiritual delicacy' you will learn to love and grow with and through. It is good to have affirming friends; we need them. But, it is better to also have critics and even those we are not too keen on being with; they tell us without speaking a lot about ourselves. We can learn much about how much more we must progress on the journey to spiritual wholeness through these - PATIENCE.

- *Remember that this is an important point for the erection of the great spiritual building. If you want this building to be erected quickly, and that it be majestic, do your utmost to bear your imperfections patiently, remember what eternal truth tells us: 'In your patience you will possess your soul' (Luke 21:19), and this possession is all the more sure, in accordance with one's resignation and patience.* - Resignation is not negative; it is extremely positive. As St. John Marie Vianney tells us, 'We have nothing of our own but our will...that we can make an offering of it (to God)'. We do not have to give up our will but give it over and conform it to the Will to God. We can offer our wills each day to be in accord with God's. Once we do that, all things are seen in the light of that daily offering that makes resignation the fruit of our free will offering, and patience as the gift we receive for trusting in 'God's timing' for everything - JOYFUL RESIGNATION TO GOD'S WILL.

- *When you are unable to take big steps on the path on which He has placed us, be content with small steps, patiently waiting until you have the legs to run, or better still, until the butterfly sprouts wings to fly...* - God does not expect us to achieve the ultimate goal from the very beginning. The journey is also the gift and cause for joy, the reward, the 'sign'. Our growth in God's graces are not measured by the quantity of prayers and works, but by the intensity with which we live our trusting consecration to God's will. When we offer ourselves through the loving intercession of our Heavenly Mother Mary, we have an advocate and intercessor that assists and supports us on the way - REFLECT BEFORE ACTING AND PACE YOURSELF IN ALL THINGS.

- *Lovingly humble yourself before God and men, because God speaks to those who are humble.* - It takes a mature adult to be humble. Humility looks at oneself from the perspective of God, and thus sees others as companions on the journey, rather than contenders for prestige, power, possessions, and so on. We are all beloved children of God, redeemed in the blood of Christ, who must live life in harmony with God and one another to achieve salvation - HUMILITY: 'YOU ARE WHAT YOU ARE BEFORE GOD AND NOTHING MORE' (St. Francis of Assisi).

- *God will fill your vessel with His balm when He sees it empty to the perfumes of the world, and the more you humble yourself the more he will exalt you.* - When we rid ourselves of self-centeredness, self-seeking, self-righteousness, self-sufficiency, and make God the center of our lives, the source of all goodness, and the One who provides for the essentials we seek, our lives change. As St. John says to the early Church: Beware of idols (beware of the I-dolls) - GOD FIRST.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, we can see from these few lines that Padre Pio offers his spiritual daughters, words that can be and are in fact directed to us as well. It is very easy to reduce our participation in the Prayer Groups to reciting a few prayers, attending Mass and spending some time before the Blessed Sacrament once a month. That bare minimum is intended to encourage us so that when we leave the monthly gathering, we are motivated to continue personally each day, or as often as possible, what we have done together, and also open our hearts to the needs of others. As God's grace fills our lives and actions, and we are less conformed to the world and more transformed by God's love, we begin to affect the world in which we live. We live in very difficult and trying times. The faith is being challenged in the hearts of many because of the faults and sins of those who are supposed to be examples of uprightness. The world suffers from violence, terrorism, financial instability, natural disasters that affect the lives of millions. International peace and security are shaken. Our own national scene leaves many discouraged and frightened. People are losing confidence in their elected officials, and even in some religious leaders, just to list a few things you already know and by which you may be affected in some way. We have the secret to overcome and not be overcome by 'the one who is in the world'!

The capitalized words at the end of each quote above of the letter of Padre Pio to the Campanile Sisters suggest a virtue or attitude that can make our hearts and spirits more attuned to the spiritual direction Padre Pio offers the Campanile Sisters. These spiritual values can condition each one of us. Thus, cooperating with and transformed by God's grace, we can confidently expect to 'be Christ' and His Good News to this wonderful but troubled world! In the serenity and peace only God can give let us be grateful that we can raise our hearts and voices to God who hears the cry of the poor. Our prayer should be: *Father of love...Help us to know your will and to do it with courage and faith.*

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