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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

Good people at times forget that the spirit world and its influence in our life is not some archaic form of superstitious beliefs and practices. Modern human beings, even some good Catholics, believe in God, but have difficulty with angels and especially with the existence of satan and his cohorts. There are many who doubt the spirit world and the influence it can exert on us, nevertheless, they promote paranormal experiences, search for the supernatural, and yet cannot believe or accept the supernatural and its influence on our lives. Realities do not disappear just by closing our eyes. They are still there. When we refuse to look and see what is before us, especially if it is someone or something that can do us harm, we risk being overwhelmed and under another's control. God Himself permits things to happen, not to put us down, but rather to help us open our eyes and realize that we are most often challenged by those very powers many believe to be irrelevant, or worse, figments of the imagination or some relic from the past that is no longer significant in a 'progressive' and 'developed' age.

A rather powerful moment happened in the life of Padre Pio to a bishop who believed that 'modern man' should and could not believe certain occurrences were really from the 'other' world. A simple and rather rudimentary response to that attitude would be to consider the Communion of Saints. How does the Church Triumphant-Militant-Suffering relate with Herself among the blessed in Heaven, the redeemed on earth still striving to live fully God's will, and the souls in Purgatory awaiting the fullness of Life? Unless there is communication, how can there be 'communion', and vice versa; and if there is communication and communion, there must be 'contact'.

During the brief stay of Padre Pio at the friary in Foggia, satan entered the picture and caused a great sense of unease and concern, both for Padre Pio and for those who happened to visit at a certain hour. The evil one in the friary! Who would believe it!? Someone, a good person and shepherd of souls, did not believe the stories he heard concerning unusual happenings in the friary. He was rather emphatically convinced there could be a very natural explanation to what others considered supernatural occurrences. How easily we discredit what we cannot understand. *God's ways are not our ways.* Often God helps the good-intentioned person to learn a necessary lesson they will never forget. In the story you will read, no one was hurt, except Padre Pio who received the effects of his daily visitor that caused the disturbance in the

friary, and Monsignor's ego, which was quickly lowered to where God wanted it for his own spiritual good.

While at Foggia, Padre Pio suffered from the 'strange illness' that caused him extremely high fevers. At supper time Padre Pio, after community prayers, would go to his room without eating supper with the friars - the main meal in most friaries was at midday. One evening, as the friars were eating, they heard a strong explosive sound in Padre Pio's room that was directly above the dining room of the friary. When the friars went to ask Padre Pio if he needed any assistance he told the friars that he had not called anyone and that he needed no help. The following evenings however, the loud explosive noises continued around the same time. Everyone made their own conclusions regarding the strange happenings. When supper ended, the friars would go and spend some time with Padre Pio. They enjoyed his company, his humor, and the funny stories he told. No mention of the noises! So many nights! After the noises, when the friars went to Padre Pio's room, he would be soaked in perspiration, so much so that one friar remembered wringing enough water out of his clothing to fill a small bucket.

Even saints are challenged in many ways, and greatly more than we. Often, when we read accounts of the saints or hear about strange things that happen to holy people, there is a tendency to 'romanticize' the occurrence. There is nothing romantic about being visited by evil itself and being subject to its obsessive behavior. There is nothing pleasurable being subject to the external working of the evil one who might cause physical harm to some or terrorize others because of an ominous presence. Most of us are subject to the internal tensions and anxieties that temptations against the virtues and love of God cause. These are Satan's moments for the 'saints-in-the-making' who we are. Temptations are opportunities to grow in grace as well as possibilities of falling out of grace. Never be presumptuous about your inner strengths in the face of evil, or before those who seek to seduce you into things you know are contrary to conscience and all we profess as Catholic Christians. Remember, Satan rarely allures us directly with 'obvious' sins. Anyone trying to live a God-centered life would never willingly deprive themselves of grace, though they may succumb in moments of severe spiritual or physical weakness and stress. The evil one enters our lives with subtleties, either when we are most vulnerable during times of sadness, illness, loss, and so forth, or by making 'little things' seem harmless or insignificant. We dabble with the 'harmless' and 'insignificant' until we realize we have become so entangled in Satan's web that we have difficulty breaking loose. Thus, with a sense of discouragement, believing we have gone too far and cannot overcome what we have now recognized as harmful or even sinful - forgetting that *alone we can do nothing, but with God all things are possible* - we 'give up' and let ourselves be overwhelmed.

The bishop of Ariano Irpino, Msgr. D'Agostino, came to the friary for a brief visit and was to stay overnight. While there, the friars spoke about the strange and rather disconcerting happenings in the friary. His response was: 'Father Guardian, the Middle Ages are over, and you still believe in this nonsense?' Just like the apostle Thomas who had to see to believe, Monsignor would have to learn the hard way. The bell for supper rang and the friars and Monsignor went to the dining room. Silence was dispensed and all were eating and speaking with one another. At a certain moment there were loud trappings overhead, the prelude to the explosive sounds to

come. Everyone was silent and, as usual, after the trappings, came the terrible explosive noise. The bishop became so frightened that he wanted someone to sleep in the same room with him that night, and the following morning he left rather quickly never to return to that friary, a believer who needed no more proof of the power and the presence he previously doubted. Something we can all learn from the antics of the evil one is that he is persistent in his endeavors and consistent in his desire to destroy. If only the children of the light could be as persistent and consistent in God's ways, we would have nothing to fear from the adversary! Even good people often act like the bishop in the story. We categorize miracles and even the existence and role of Satan in life as mere matters of the past or pious myths to encourage the simple. To the theologically 'learned' and 'updated', these strange occurrences are caused by 'mass hysteria' or an individual's 'psychological imbalance'. *I thank You Father that You have hidden these things from the learned and the clever, and have revealed them to the merest children*, Jesus prayed. Simplicity and trust recognize what others fail to notice.

We believe in Life after life. Our faith speaks of the Resurrection of Jesus and our call to share Eternal Life with God one day. How can anyone doubt the existence and the influence that the world that awaits us with joyful anticipation and love, and the world that seeks to kidnap and destroy us eternally, have in the earthly journey of each one?! Padre Pio was an elect soul called to help a skeptic and cynical world rediscover its faith in a loving God. He sought to help people understand that the basic goodness in which humanity was created and from which it fell through Original Sin, was regained when Jesus redeemed us on Calvary. The Resurrection of Jesus confirms and fortifies our Faith in the Suffering Servant Who was born to die that we might be reborn to Life, and begin to restore the image of God to creation.

God's love in Jesus through the Spirit is poured out for us in the Eucharist when we become one in intimate Holy Communion with the Lord, and through the Sacrament of Reconciliation when we re-confirm our need for God's forgiving grace. Reconciled with God and our sisters and brothers on this journey, we continue *to make up in our own bodies what is lacking in the passion of Christ for the sake of His body, the Church*. Obedience to God's will, prayers, sacrifice and especially prayerful and penitential acts of reparation strengthen us. To make an offering of this kind each day can be demanding but it is fruitful and helps us in our encounters with what would distract us from our goal - Eternal Life. Encouraged by the spirit and only with the permission of their spiritual directors, some are called to make a total and unconditional surrender of themselves and every moment of their lives as an act of reparation. Thus, they enter more deeply into a relationship with Christ and His saving mission. To make a perpetual offering of ourselves, we must pray, consider, reflect, and seek guidance; God takes us at our word. Total surrender will undoubtedly receive divine loving support. Nonetheless, no promise of such a kind should be made without guidance. In either case, it is only when we surrender ourselves in loving trust of God, that we find the serenity and direction in life to meet any obstacle from either time or eternity, and become victorious with then One Who is the Way, Truth and Life.

The Guardian of the friary in Foggia asked Padre Pio to pray that the phenomena causing the friars and guests to be frightened cease. The unusual sounds ceased in the friary. Like it or not, Satan must obey the One greater than he. There is no equal to God! Who is like God! No one but God alone! The evil one cannot destroy the grace of God and our love for Jesus and Mary unless we allow him to do so. That is, unless we allow ourselves to be seduced by his empty promises, as he sought to seduce Jesus after His forty day fast in the desert. It is the nature of evil to live in the loneliness of pride, the chaos of hatred, and the limitless darkness of willful separation from Eternal Goodness and Love. The Father Who creates life, the Son Who redeems life, and the Holy Spirit Who guides through life, calls and journeys with us from life to Life. God invites us into a relationship with the Most Blessed Trinity where we, as ones redeemed, live in love and light. When we consider how close God is to each one of us and how intensely God desires to be with us, how could we ever, willfully, allow ourselves to listen to one who leads to division, darkness, and death?! Do not be afraid! If *God is for us* - and with us - *who can be against us*; who can prevail!?

To his spiritual daughter, Annita Rodote, Padre Pio writes: *The fury of Satan, by which you sometimes feel yourself to be threatened, must neither frighten nor surprise you at all. As you know, he persecutes to death all those who do not wish to listen to his dreadful insinuations, and his hate increases all the more, in accordance with the extent to which he sees his hope of possessing the souls in order to make them his ... Continue to pay no attention to him; fortify yourself with prayer, humility and unlimited trust in divine help. Abandon yourself, as a beloved daughter of the heavenly Father, in His most loving arms ... (Satan) is powerless against the soul that places all its trust in God alone ... God will never permit you to be tempted beyond your strength ... A soul who felt its weakness and had recourse to God for help, has never fallen ... Trust, therefore, Annita, and take heart.* (27 April 1915)

In a letter to another spiritual daughter, Assunta di Tomaso, Padre Pio writes: *Live tranquilly and resigned in everything to the will of heaven. Jesus loves you with a most singular care ... Take heart and do not fear the gloomy wrath of Lucifer. Always remember this, that it is a good sign when the enemy makes an uproar and roars around your will, as this shows he is not within you. Courage ... There is no need to fear when we can say with determination, even if without feeling, 'Long live Jesus!'* (8 November 1916)

And finally, in a letter to the spiritual daughter, Erminia Gargani, Padre Pio writes: *Live tranquilly abandoned more and more in the arms of divine mercy and do not fear the evil designs of the enemy. He is powerless against the children of God, his every attempt will be defeated.* (5 February 1923)

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio we are called to be the Militia of Prayer strengthening those who pray that they may be an encouragement and strength for others. The world has grown so much smaller thanks to all the advancements in science, technology, the media, travel, and so on. We are the pray-ers who see what cannot be seen as the only answer to a world full of questions who thinks it can respond to itself with all the answers. The only answer is JESUS, with the almighty intercessor of humanity, our Heavenly Mother Mary. So much is happening in the world, the Church, our nation, our own personal lives. Much is good, but so much more leaves us questioning and maybe afraid of what tomorrow will bring. The evil one lurks in our world as his last stand before his ultimate defeat. We are not defeatists but victors with the Victim. We believe in a power that is capable of first transforming each one of us and then, with so many individuals working in unison, affecting the world with the power of Jesus rather than the momentary effects of the spirit of division.

This letter was intended in a totally different direction. When it was finally begun, there seemed to be a need to reinforce the fact of the existence of evil. We cannot intellectually convince ourselves that evil and its effects are non-existent, as the Bishop in the occurrence above did. When you refuse to recognize the cliff you are walking towards, eventually you fall to serious injury or death. Though grammatically incorrect, where

and when possible the words referring to satan will never be capitalized. The personification of evil does not deserve to be glamorized or honored, even by capitalizing the name or titles given the evil one. We must always focus on the love and goodness of the eternal One - God Father-Son-Holy Spirit. What Padre Pio told his spiritual daughters in the above mentioned letters, he says to us: know you are weak and have recourse to God for help; live tranquilly and resigned in everything to the will of heaven; and abandon yourself in the arms of divine mercy. Simply put: PRAY, HOPE, AND DON'T WORRY!

In this month of the Holy Rosary we look to Jesus with the eyes of His Most Blessed Mother and ours, Mary, for strength and consolation. We celebrate the Holy Angels God has given as our guides and protectors who are always with us, battling for us and with us against all that is evil. We gratefully thank God for the gift of life that offers us the way to know, love, and serve Him here, until we achieve the *full stature of Christ* and enter the fullness of Life.

My 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