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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

Creation speaks to us of God. The human mind, through experience, can come to know there is a God, but it is faith that opens our hearts, souls, and minds to deepen our knowledge and awareness of the magnificence of our Creator, our Redeemer, and the ever-present Advocate-Guide-Sanctifier. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are known to us and we enter an intimate relationship with this sublime Trinity through God's revelation of Himself through Jesus in the Spirit. Thus, Faith responds to Revelation.

We read God's Word in Scripture and recognize His work and attributes in Creation. Faith leads us to accept and live the message God speaks to us. Thus *Sacred Scripture requires faith as a response to revelation*. God calls us to faith, and this call of God is through creation. It is a response in time directed toward eternity. Believing is accepting God as creator, liberator, protector, savior. Belief is recognizing Jesus through His death and resurrection: *This Jesus, God raised from the dead. And we are all witnesses to this ... therefore, let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus Whom you crucified.* (Acts 2: 32, 36)

Father Pellegrino - known as the "Jack-of-all-Trades" in a book recounting his time spent with Padre Pio - tells us that Padre Pio continually encouraged him to update himself in theology, but, at the same time reminded him that faith did not depend solely on theological study. In fact, the story is told how one afternoon, after having finished hearing the women's confessions, Father Pellegrino hurried to the library of the friary intent on immersing himself into various theological volumes to deepen his knowledge of matters his professors had suggested he study more deeply. To get to the library, he had to pass through the friars' choir where the crucifix of the stigmata was located. Padre Pio was there in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Father Pellegrino, not to waste time, hurried through the choir without giving thought to the fact that he was running past the Blessed Sacrament. Padre Pio called out to him immediately: *Will you at least genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament?!* He turned around and made a genuflection, even if only for formality's sake, because he was in a hurry and did not want another reprimand. Once in the library Father Pellegrino began his "research" of the texts he planned on reviewing. As he began his reading, he could hear his professors saying to him: *You need Padre Pio to open that head of yours to understand these sacred things.* He enjoyed the solitude and was happy to be alone, without distractions, when, all of a sudden, Padre Pio arrived. *What are you doing?*, he said.

Father Pellegrino told Padre Pio that after all the reprimands he had given him he had decided to study theology more intently. Padre Pio responded, *When did I ever tell you that the study of theology would help you grow in faith?! If that were the case, all theologians would be rich in faith, while we know that some of them do not even believe in fresh water.* Looking at all the books that Father Pellegrino had placed before him, Padre Pio told him that he resembled a "Don Quixote of theology". Father Pellegrino understood. He put the books back, and with head down, went to his room to read another book: **Jesus Crucified**. He had been corrected again, but he was happy; he had learned the meaning of true knowledge and had also made Padre Pio smile.

Padre Pio was aware of the spiritual difficulties his brothers went through. He had his own to endure as well. He found his comfort and solace only in God, and sought always to encourage others to trust. We have one of many such examples in a letter to one of his spiritual daughters, Assunta di Tomaso: *I am extremely sorry to hear you are experiencing such a harsh spiritual struggle. Take heart, my daughter, Jesus will not leave you without comfort or reward. I am with you up the hill to Calvary. Try to look after your health and get well soon.* (undated letter)

Padre Pio knew quite well what the Church taught concerning the attributes of God. He studied the sacred texts, theology manuals, and continually meditated on Sacred Scripture. But he did not limit himself to study. His motto was: *In books we search for God, in prayer we find Him.* The core of his meditation was the love of God the Father Who sacrificed His only begotten Son for the salvation of all humanity. In Christ and in Christ Crucified there is salvation.

The depth of Padre Pio's faith in Christ Crucified urged him to write to his spiritual daughter Maria Gargani, who was suffering immensely: *My daughter, I could not be pleased with you if I did not see you so tested. Take heart, bless the hand that afflicts you for the sole purpose of sanctifying you and rendering you similar to His only begotten Son. Don't believe that the Lord is irritated with you and therefore subjects you to such harsh trials. You would be greatly mistaken in this. The Lord wants to test your fidelity; he wants to inebriate you with the cross of His Son; He wants to purify you; he wants to increase your palm and your crown. Remember and keep well impressed in your mind that Calvary is the hill of the saints but remember that after having climbed Calvary, the cross having been erected and you having died on it, you immediately ascend another mount, called Tabor, the heavenly Jerusalem.* (8 September 1916)

Years before Padre Pio wrote these words to Maria Gargani, Padre Benedetto wrote to Padre Pio: *It consoles me to hear that the storms are increasing because this is a sign that God's kingdom is being established within you. Temptations are a sure sign of divine favor and the fact that you fear them is the clearest proof that you do not yield to them. Keep cheerful then and do not be discouraged. The more violently the enemy attacks you the more you must abandon yourself to the Lord, confident that he will never allow you to be overcome, according to the words: 'God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it'. (1 Corinthians 10: 13) ... Is not the goodness of our God beyond all our imaginings? Isn't he more concerned than we are for our salvation? When we think of his love for us and his zeal for our well-being, we must remain calm and never doubt that he will always protect us with fatherly care against all our enemies.* (Padre Benedetto to Padre Pio 28 October 1910)

Serenity in the midst of trouble is a wonderful witness of a faith that continues to trust in the love of an eternally-loving, ever-present and all-providing God. Reason may help us to know that God exists, but it is our faith that leads us into a relationship with life-giving Love. It is this Love that fills the hearts of those who search for Him. It is this Love that is mysterious in His nature but accessible through His works. It is this Love that we seek to know and understand more during life's journey so that when time meets eternity in death we can joyfully, trustingly, and lovingly "let go" and let this Eternal Love embrace us with a fullness we could never have imagined. This Love, Who is God, the Father-Creator, the Only-Begotten-Son-Redeemer, the Holy Spirit-Advocate-Sanctifier, can be studied about in books, discussed with others to deepen our human knowledge, but can be personally known, loved and lived only when we abandon ourselves to that Love and surrender to His Infinite Will.

As he did with Father Pellegrino, Padre Pio reminds us to go beyond just trying to learn about many spiritual things, but to become imbued and inflamed by the Spirit of God that leads us beyond the knowledge of facts, even spiritual ones. Spirituality is not reading and knowing the writings of all the mystics, or knowing the prophecies of all the visionaries, though they may be interesting, helpful or even necessary for us to know. Yet, though Padre Pio was privileged to have insights from God regarding future events, he still directed souls to live holy lives in the present and to trust God in all things, and resign themselves to His most Holy Will. Facts only accumulate with other facts whether theological,

spiritual, or what have you. The *book* that makes all others more understandable is the *book* of Christ Crucified. Reading that *book* and learning its message well increases faith, rekindles hope, and leads us into a transforming intimacy with Eternal Love and the Source of Life.

Trust God unconditionally. Believe God is Who God is. Abandon yourselves to God's loving providence and accept all that God permits to come your way. The excerpts of the letters of Padre Pio to his spiritual daughters and that of Padre Benedetto to Padre Pio quoted above, enforce our need to recognize, even in our sufferings and pain, whether spiritual or physical, God's way of purifying us. This purification leads us to a more transparent relationship with God and our neighbor because in God we have become transparent to ourselves. We have come to know ourselves better because we see ourselves in the knowledge we have of God.

St. Francis of Assisi says: *You are who you are before God and nothing more.* We can know God more deeply through prayer, meditation, God's Word, and celebrating and receiving the Eucharist often and worthily. The Eucharist strengthens our faith, focuses our vision, clarifies our reasoning, confirms our trust in God's will - direct or indirect - calms our fears, establishes inner peace and serenity, generates inner joy.

The *process* becomes more intense, as we seek to respond to God's will without reserve. God calls and challenges us to go beyond the limitations caused by our fears, hesitation, caution, or perhaps even our indifference or spiritual lethargy. What God asks of us is based on what God knows about us. Let us remember that God sees the *whole picture*, while we see only the *now*. True faith enkindles our hope in the One in Whom we responsibly commit ourselves to risk all the world holds dear - power, prestige, possessions. We let go of fearful caution, we *ride the wave* of God's will, and we experience the exciting fulfillment of all God wants us to be.

The Spiritual Children of Padre Pio know from the example of our Father and Guide how necessary it is to enter the mystery of Christ Crucified before we can recognize the miracles of grace that surround us. All too often people go in search of extraordinary expressions of God's Love yet fail to see and acknowledge the magnificence of God's presence at work every moment, especially in the daily responsibilities, where, with God's grace, we go beyond our limitations and fears. Human reason and logic tell us to be careful, think things out, take time. Do not be overcome by fear of failure. Do not accept mediocrity and lukewarmness. Believe, trust, and act without hesitation in the Name of God Who strengthens and assists all who surrender to His will.

Padre Pio's famous saying clinches it all: *Pray, hope, and don't worry!* Prayer acknowledges God as the source of all good, thus, believing God is Who He says He is. We cannot help but hope in the One Who loves us. Thus, knowing that God makes all things work for the good of those who love Him, and since we strive to love Him, then *don't worry!* ... because God is on your side ... *if God is for us, then who can be against us?*

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

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.

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