

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

The more intimate and personal the experience we have, the less capable we are of expressing in words all that we feel. The following two paragraphs, taken from the correspondence of Padre Pio with Padre Benedetto, are so revealing, yet we will never be able to fathom all that he felt. As we prepare for the feast of Padre Pio, let the following words of our Father speak to your heart.

What can I tell you...? My God! What embarrassment and humiliation I suffer in being obliged to explain what you have done to this wretched creature! On the morning of the 20th of last month, in the choir, after I had celebrated Mass...absolute silence surrounded and invaded me. I was suddenly filled with great peace and abandonment...All this happened in a flash...I saw before me a mysterious person...his hands and feet and side were dripping blood. This sight terrified me and what I felt at that moment is indescribable. I thought I should die and really should have died if the Lord had not intervened and strengthened my heart which was about to burst out of my chest. The vision disappeared and I became aware that my hands, feet and side were dripping blood. Imagine the agony I experienced and continue to experience almost every day. The heart wound bleeds continually... I will raise my voice and will not stop imploring him (Jesus) until in his mercy he takes away, not the wound or the pain, which is impossible since I wish to be inebriated with pain, but these outward signs which cause me such embarrassment and unbearable humiliation.

(Letter of Padre Pio to Padre Benedetto, 22 October 1918)

Ah, my dear Father, what am I to do? I feel that I am really about to die, for I no longer have strength to go on living. My crucifixion still continues. My agony began some time ago and is becoming more and more heartrending...For how much longer is my "consummatum est" ("It is finished") to be deferred...I'll always pronounce my "fiat" ("Let it be") of resignation. (Letter of Padre Pio to Padre Benedetto, 13 November 1918)

It is not often that we are privileged to enter the heart of a saint. It is not often that we are privileged to peer into the depths of a soul "inebriated" with the eternal. We emulate the life we revere. We are privileged to be made sharers in the gifts of that life. The gifts are bestowed because of the love and willingness of that privileged soul to be a person for all people.

The words of Padre Pio we read above are taken from his letters addressed to Padre Benedetto shortly after Padre Pio received the visible Stigmata. They allow us to enter into the heart of our Father and Founder. After his daily unity with Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist, the reception of the visible Stigmata is the most intimate moment of his relationship with the Lord.

Through Baptism, Padre Pio became one with Jesus in the Spirit through the life of grace. In his Religious Profession, Padre Pio became one with Christ in his detachment from the world and its "ego", from its exclusive relationships and their confining demands, and from the material things and their possessive nature that keep one a slave to wants unfulfilled rather than encourage gratitude for gifts received. In his Priesthood, Padre Pio became one with the Mediator between God and Humanity that overflowed into a fruitful ministry that touched the hearts and lives of many. In this Sacrament, Padre Pio became one with Jesus in the Eucharist he celebrated. This mystical union of hearts between Jesus and Padre Pio continued during the course of his entire life.

Just as Padre Pio, we too are offered similar privileges and responsibilities according to our cooperation with grace and the Father's Will. The effectiveness of these moments is determined by our conviction and commitment to surrender to the One Who calls us to such privileges of intimacy with a God who trusts in us and is willing to share the depths of His goodness. We too share in the Baptismal character of all the faithful called to live the Gospel. We too are encouraged to live the spiritual detachment from the inflated ego, the unbridled passions of the senses and the slavery to material things. We too are expected to share in the priesthood of the faithful when, together with those ordained to the ministerial priesthood, we offer the perfect sacrifice that re-presents the one redeeming sacrifice of Jesus. At that moment we experience the effects of this sacrifice according to the intensity with which we surrender ourselves to the urging of the Spirit and the work of grace in our life.

The impression of the Stigmata on the body of Padre Pio is a personal, intimate and uniting experience. The "mysterious person" took Padre Pio through the mystical and the mysterious experiences of his life of prayer and contemplation. He impressed on Padre Pio's body an image "in the flesh" for the world to see. This image of the Savior's eternal love for all humanity in the five Wounds of His Sacred Passion and Death were Padre Pio's sign of God's favor for him and the responsibility entrusted to him for the sake of others. These outward signs of Jesus Crucified that Padre Pio bore visibly for 50 years (20 September 1918 - 20 September 1968), were a renewed reminder of God's love for His creation, a creation that had grown cold in its love and trust in God. The life of this "crucified" friar, whose mere presence served as a sign of contradiction to the world, was a call for everyone to look beyond the self-centeredness, violence, and materialism of those who so quickly relegate God to an outpost of the mind or who forget God altogether. Humanity all too soon forgets its past experiences of infidelity and the consequences they have on a world that lives without God as its guiding presence. This unique mystical experience of Padre Pio cannot be imitated at will by anyone.

The Stigmata of Padre Pio, investigated, examined, tested over the course of his life, were accepted and recognized by the Church and by the millions whose lives were transformed by God's grace through the ministry of this "Prisoner of the Gargano". God's love and wonders did not make him a "prisoner". The love he offered to others, the love he received from others, the Love that sought to be visibly enfolded in his life for others, all contributed to making Padre Pio an enduring "image of the Crucified on the mount", and a veritable "prisoner" who never left his home, so that all the world could see. He was like the bronze serpent Moses

raised for the Israelites to look on - lest they die - and be healed of the venom of the serpents that had bit them. The venom of the serpent that has bitten and poisoned so many of God's elect down through the centuries continues its murderous mission as he seeks to infect the lives of good people who sincerely search for and desire the Lord in their lives. Often their search leads in the wrong direction because they *look for love in all the wrong places*, as a song of earlier years sings. Padre Pio and the image of the Crucified he became for the world indicated the direction to follow.

He is - need I say it? - the crucified friar of Mount Gargano. His presence - even after his earthly death - attracts millions who come to see, hear, touch and be renewed in the Spirit. His presence on the Gargano was and still remains a powerful reminder of the One Who from the Mount of Golgotha opened the gates of heaven for all who accept the living waters of grace gained for those who look upon Him and are cleansed in His Precious Blood poured out for us. Golgotha continues in the dedicated lives of faithful Christians and is epitomized in the celebration of the Passion-Death-Resurrection of Jesus in the Eucharist. We become one with the Savior, and as we gaze upon the Lord we see ourselves imaged in His eyes and resting in the depths of His Sacred Heart. The "Crucified of the Gargano" in his words, in his spirit, in his ministry, in his suffering, in his prayers, in The Life that shines through his human life, was and still remains a powerful reminder and aid in life's journey for those who come to know him.

We have a tendency to glamorize the lives of the saints. We enjoy reading biographies that emphasize the special preternatural gifts they were granted (levitation, reading hearts, bilocation, and so forth). We talk about the wonders God did through them, but do we admire the humanity that struggled each day to be faithful to God Who worked through them? We like having spiritually "fuzzy feelings" when we read their lives, but do we reflect upon what their lives say to us and how we are called to imitate what we celebrate? We talk about their lives with others at religious meetings, but do we emulate their lives in such a way that others see the values we preach lived in our own lives? The highest praise is imitation! There is often a real lack of substance in our devotion to the saints.

Padre Pio, when asked if the Stigmata hurt him, responded in his straightforward manner, that they were not given to him as jewelry. Our spiritual association is not a piece of religious jewelry to be admired, but a commitment to be lived. Every spiritual gift expects a response. As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, we carry on the Christian's mission to be Heralds of the Lord's goodness to the world. Our appreciation and devotion for Padre Pio must inevitably lead us to emulate his virtues and to live the counsels he offered in his role as guide and father of his Spiritual Children. The life of the "Crucified Prisoner of the Gargano" proclaimed God's love to the world. His lasting example challenges those who seek him out to live the values of prayer, sacrifice, reconciliation, charity and love that he expounded. The Cross of Jesus made us one again in the Blood of the Savior. The wounds of Padre Pio challenge us to remember the Cross, our banner of salvation, and to live our life more deeply in the Father's Will as did our Savior.

The month of September is imbued with the mystery of the Cross. In September we celebrate the triumph of the Cross (14 September), Our Lady of Sorrows (15 September), and the Stigmata of Saint Francis of Assisi (17 September). Together with these, this month we remember the anniversary of Padre Pio's reception of the visible Stigmata (20 September 1918). And, finally, this month we celebrate the anniversary of his death (23 September 1968), a day we dare say could be called by us the "Triumph of his Cross". Fifty years of bearing the wounds of Christ were fifty years of living in mystery the Life that led him each day to the fullness of God's Life. When the veil of time split in two, he entered the eternal embrace of the

Father, of Whose Son he had been the eminent image for the world of the twentieth century. He was a “sign of contradiction” for a world that had become so self-sufficient that it had forgotten its Author and its Ultimate Goal.

May we, as Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, treasure the example and words our Father and Founder left us. May the image of the Crucified Savior become more alive and meaningful to us through the image of his privileged servant Padre Pio. May the Feast we celebrate this month of Padre Pio’s triumph over life into Life be a calming and reassuring reality for us to consider as we continue our earthly journey. May his words be indicators that help us find our way through the crossroads of life, especially when the choices offered us seem deceiving and dangerous. May we rejoice in the Lord for the gift He gave the Church and the world in Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, Image of the Crucified and Prisoner of Love on the Gargano.

May God bless you; Our Lady guide, guard, and protect you; and Padre Pio watch over you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings,
Fr. Francis A. Sariago, O.F.M. Cap.
National Coordinator