

# Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

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The Lord give you His peace!

Adoration of God alone, without allowing the experience to affect our lives in an operative way, is an offense to God rather than an act of love and praise. It is as though we expect God to make us “feel good”, without our desire or attempt to “be good”. Goodness of its very nature goes beyond itself to touch others. Adoration must lead to an experience of God that compels us to move out to others, and vice versa - it is a “virtuous circle” of grace, gratitude and love.

Sacred Scripture presents us with many instances of people who have personally unique experiences of encounters with the Divine One, with God. The person is wrapped up in the wonder, grandeur, awesomeness of the Presence: Moses and the Burning Bush, Elijah and the Silent Whisper, the Apostles at the Transfiguration, Mary Magdalene at the Empty Tomb, the Early Church gathered at Olivet for the Ascension, and so many other incidents. When the profound awe of the experience envelops them, what does the Eternal One say? Go! Go to the people; Go to the other region; Go down the mountain into the reality of your ministry; Go tell my brothers I have risen; *Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28: 19-20).

Adoring God should compel us to “Go” and bring, now (!), with us, what we have experienced in our encounter with the Source of Life and Love. It is easy to forget that faith is not a static appreciation of some theological or philosophical theory to reflect upon. It is easy to wallow in the silence of inertia, letting God, as it were, do all the work.- If someone did that to us we would soon not bother with them for taking advantage of our good nature. - Adoration is not a motionless expression of pious postures and religious platitudes intended to make people feel good. Our God is a God Who seeks to live in us and work in, with and through us, and thus affect the lives of others.

The spirit of the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus and the Purification of Mary in the Temple, celebrated at the beginning of this month, is summarized in the words of Simeon to Mary and Joseph: *This Child is destined for the rise and fall of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed;* and to Mary he says, *and your soul also a sword shall pierce, so that the hearts of many may be laid bare* (Luke 2: 22-40). Simeon’s words are a projection into the future. The adoring parents are reminded that the humility of the Incarnation and Birth must eventually lead to the selfless Love of the Cross if this Child is to fulfill His purpose for entering creation

and human history. The life of Jesus, from the hovel of Bethlehem to the hill of Calvary, always has the Cross as a constant and faithful companion. The wood of the Crib that enfolds Him securely foreshadows the wood of the Cross that will hold him stably. So that *when I am lifted up, then I will draw all people to Myself* (John 12: 32).

*As He grew in size and strength, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him* (Luke, 2: 40), Jesus lived in eager anticipation of the fulfillment of the Father's Will. Jesus' ever-present oneness with the immensity of God did not keep Him in an ecstasy of a "glorious-do-nothing". The years, months, weeks and days that led to the most solemn moment of His life, the acceptance of the Cross, the instrument of our redemption, were a profound preparation for that one Solemn Eucharist where Christ still is Priest and Victim. We are victors with the Victim when we accept to live in the light of the shadow of the His Cross. To be truly incorporated into the saving effects of Jesus' Passion-Death-Resurrection, we must accept the "gift" of the Cross with gratitude and availability.

Gratitude and availability of this type do not come quickly or easily. Human nature seeks to evade and/or avoid anything that challenges it to go beyond the natural tendencies for survival and pleasure. Just think how people seek to beautify their bodies for a short span of years, and will undergo dangerous surgery, questionable drugs, or painful, lengthy, stressful aerobic programs, oftentimes engaging costly "qualified trainers". On the other hand, when it comes to our spiritual life, the health of our souls, and our growth in grace, we look for ways to cut corners. We even call the traditional centuries-old proven practices "old-fashioned", "outdated", "no longer of relevance to a modern and intellectually advanced society", such as we deem ourselves to be. For a Christian, there seems to be something intrinsically wrong with this kind of reasoning.

Next month we begin our yearly pilgrimage from ashes to the empty tomb. The words spoken over us on Ash Wednesday, *Remember you are dust and to dust you return*, and *Repent and believe the Gospel* are a wakeup call for all of us. They remind us what we are without God, and how we are to become the message with which we are entrusted to proclaim. The journey begins next month. Every endeavor demands planning before the execution of what we plan. Prayerfully, piously and prudently we begin to exercise our bodies and spirits to grow up and out of our spiritual lethargy and from whatever else may overburden our minds and hearts. We must also exorcise our life from whatever may distance us from the Source of all good - God. This preparation we do now to be prepared for the more intense journey of Lent.

Since every person coming into the world is a totally new creation of God's infinite love, no two persons are ever exactly alike. The basic characteristics of all human beings are employed in myriads of nuances that determine the person's personality and character, and the direction in life, and often for eternity, that person has decided to take. Every child born has: eyes to see, ears to hear, mouth to speak, hands to touch, feet to walk, mind to think, and heart to extend itself. What determines our course is: On what do those eyes gaze? To what do those ears listen? What words emanate from the mouth as an expression of what the mind thinks and the heart desires? How and to whom do those hands reach out? Where do those feet go? What

thoughts are harbored and fostered in the mind? And, whom, what, and how does the heart love? We are that child who seeks to grow into a holiness and integrity that only God's grace can produce. How can we accomplish this task? It is life's daily journey. Like a piece of marble in the hands of the sculptor, or cloth in the hands of a tailor, or plant in the hands of the gardener, we must allow ourselves to be chiseled into a work of art, cut, shaped and put together into the proper garment suited to us, and nurtured and nourished to grow into the new life we were created to be.

It is through our senses that our act of adoration becomes an experience that transforms as it challenges. The Apostle Saint John tells us: *This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched. What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you so that you may share this life with us* (1 John 1:1-3). Our senses cooperate to allow the heart to experience God as it adores Him, and to en flesh the experience in our response to one another, as we allow it to transform us.

The opportune time of this "quiet" month lends itself to assist us to consider the extreme importance of repentance that leads to reconciliation, elements, and goal of the spiritual journey beginning next month. Repentance and reconciliation chisel away at the rough and unseemly areas of our life, reflection and prayer reshape our mind and heart to be focused in the proper direction, and the Eucharist and God's graces that flow from the Sacraments nourish and nurture us into a spiritually healthy child of God. Most people find the process demanding. Once they have begun, and begin to experience the effects, they love the results: patience, compassion, kindness, forgiveness, mercy, prayerful spirit, serene presence with the sacred, and so much more when God and we are in harmony.

In his letters to Padre Benedetto, Padre Pio speaks of his own spiritual struggles. He speaks of the difficulties he faced regarding fidelity and virtue. He speaks of the distress of a soul that sincerely seeks God, but is weighed down by a nature that seems to always be in rebellion. Even the saints are human! Not even Padre Pio was privileged to be exempt from temptations against God's love. Even he had to walk the way of prayer, sacrifice, and daily conversion. The torment of his human passions and a feeling of spiritual dryness all compounded to make every good act he sought to do seem useless and fruitless. What a torment! But he knew in his heart that God was with him. He felt the vulnerability of nature. He acknowledged his fear at the possibility of giving in to the seductions of his heart and mind. He feared the open physical combat that satan waged on him to break his spirit. Yet, in all this, he never faltered. His body felt the pressure and his mind experienced the fear, but his heart and soul, centered on God, never acceded to satan's wiles. His continued spiritual strength came from a deep spirit of prayer, a selfless sense of personal sacrifice, and a committed charity and love.

While it is true that Padre Pio was a unique person endowed with extraordinary gifts from God, still his experiences of vulnerability, temptation, spiritual dryness, and so on, were very real and are no different from those that many endure in their own lives. The intensity may differ from person to person according to the depth of his/her relationship with God, but the reality is no

less real, nor are the means offered by Scripture and the Church no less necessary, affective and effective.

This month of the Hidden Life of Jesus offers an opportunity, as the hidden years of the Savior did for Him, that is, to prepare for the ultimate journey. For Jesus it was to the Cross for our redemption. For us it is through the Cross for our restoration in grace. February is the month we “size up” the situation and keep our “daily opponent” in full view. With an intensified commitment to grow in virtue, we respond with conviction of faith and trust in God’s mercy and providence to begin our yearly journey of personal renewal and spiritual growth.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, let us seek the strength that comes from our faith in Jesus and the direction that God’s Word offers us. Like our Spiritual Father, we acknowledge our difficulties and failures, and trustingly forge ahead seeking God’s help and making use of all the wonderful instruments God and the Church offer for our peace and growth. Even Jesus was tested. His words remind us of the directness and forcefulness with which we should respond when evil makes itself felt in our lives: *Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God ; You shall not put the Lord your God to the test; and Away with you, Satan! You shall do homage to the Lord your God, Him alone shall you adore* (Matthew 4: 1-11).

Jesus lived in intimate union with the Father while on earth, yet, like all human beings, He was tested in the choices He had to make. The Spirit-filled expression of Israel’s faith gave strength to the Savior. Remember all the good that the Lord has done for us. Turn to Him for the determination and commitment necessary to begin and profitably continue this yearly journey of renewal. God’s Word reminds, encourages, strengthens, promises, directs and ultimately is victorious for the one who lets God lead.

May God bless you; Our Lady and good St. Joseph guide, guard, and protect you; and may Padre Pio bless each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings

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National Coordinator