

# Padre Pio Prayer Groups

National Office

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

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The Lord give you His peace  
and lead you through the mystery of His Passion and Death  
to the joy of His Resurrection and our Renewed Life in Jesus!

We have come to the month that celebrates the essence of our Christian Faith: the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. As Lent comes to its climax, we enter more deeply the mystery of God's selfless love for us in Jesus. Lent is a gestation period that nurtures the new life about to be born in the Spirit through the blood of Jesus shed on the Cross. The unborn child within the confined world of the mother's body is oblivious to the greater world. As this new life grows, he/she eventually demands greater space. This new life, unaware of the essential change that is occurring, now enters the larger and more challenging arena of God's creation. The world that all of us encountered for the first time will become our constant point of reference until our time becomes eternity. It is an exciting and also dangerous journey we begin the moment we enter the world as an "independent" life.

Our world is filled with allurements that attract, seductions that entice, pleasures that satisfy momentarily, honors that praise only to raze the person when he/or she no longer accedes to the desires and whims of his/her flatterers. The world can also be quite dangerous and frightening when human beings do not treat each other with the dignity and respect of the children of God, whether in our cities, nations, or around the world. Yet, with all these and many other negatives we could mention, the world is still a sacred place blessed by God in His creation, and the theater of our redemption where a soul in love with God can be an effective presence and transforming element in God's hands. The beauty and magnificence of creation has been marred by our mismanagement and abuse, but never destroyed. God entered in covenant with humanity. God's Word is never sent without fulfilling the purpose for which the Word was sent (cfr. Isaiah 55:11). Be encouraged then also by the words of our beloved Padre Pio: *Pray, hope, and don't worry!* He also tells his spiritual children not to embarrass him, that is, we must live as the children of God we are and be a transforming presence in this world.

The core of our Christian Faith is the selfless love that Jesus is. He invites us to live as He did. We are invited to live the *core*, that is, the *heart*, of our Christian Faith. Who or What is the heart of our Christian Faith? Jesus! His Life and Love! His Sacred Heart pierced on the Cross out of love for us! His Blood shed as a sign of the depth of the emptying love that led Jesus to a total surrender for us! *No greater love has anyone than that of the person who gives his/her life for a*

*friend!* (John 15: 13) The total surrender of Jesus that we read about, and meditate on, and preach, is not always the total surrender we strive to imitate in our lives.

The last weeks of Lent offer the gospel accounts that go from the teachings of Jesus and his miracles to a chronological account of the last days of Jesus leading to His Passion and Death. The intrigue of his enemies, the frustration and sadness of Jesus before the close-mindedness of the Jews and His own chosen followers, even the betrayal of one of his select circle of friends, would have probably dissuaded anyone else from continuing the mission, much less accepting to die as a criminal, for such an ungrateful and obtuse people. But Jesus had a heart that saw only the fulfillment of the Father's Will in all this. Even the contradictions and outright persecutions were signs that had been prophesied centuries before to enforce, in the minds of all, the reality of the depth of God's selfless love for His people.

We may not be able to change world events, or even the events of our own nation, maybe not even the things that happen within the little world of our own family, but we can take steps to change what happens in our personal life and how we allow ourselves to affect the life of others. Jesus knew that *You are clean, but not all, for He knew his betrayer* (John 13: 11-13). He knew full well that He would affect the world through the little band of that motley crew He had chosen. He knew that His message would extend throughout the world till the end of time. He could also see that many would reject His message, and many too would use His Name to offend the dignity of human beings and use the gift of free will to reject God's Commandments and His own Law of Love of God, neighbor and oneself. I believe that Jesus' anguish and desolation on the Cross were in some ways increased by the awareness of how fruitless His selfless sacrificial love would be for so many who would reject it.

Scripture tells us of the history of humanity and how God's People came to know God and understand His Will for them. It is this Word of God that leads us through Lent to a better understanding of ourselves and our God. It is this Word of God that is the substance of the first part of the Eucharist we celebrate. The Word of God prepares us to understand the Sacrifice of the Cross re-presented in each celebration of the Mass. The Word of God reminds us that we are enlightened by His Wisdom. The Word of God challenges us to live what we read and hear. Jesus, the Word Incarnate, came to enflesh Himself in our world through us, that He might continue His redeeming work. It is the Word of God Incarnate that makes the road clear and the journey sure. His words, His actions, His Passion-Death-Resurrection are one powerful eternal act of love inviting us to share in the mystery, and to share with others what we have come to know and become in the Spirit - Jesus!

The forty days of Lent are not an end that fulfills an annual penitential duty. Our Lenten journey only prepares and brings us to the beginning of another road. We arrive at the empty tomb on Easter Sunday and we begin the second walk that strengthens the bond of those who journey together and *who have seen the Lord*. (John 20: 25) Together, in the Easter gifts of Peace and Pardon, we confidently await to be empowered by the Paraclete. We received the Grace of the Holy Spirit as the first gift of the Resurrected Christ. On Pentecost Sunday, when the Church is expelled from the Upper Room by the force of the Eternal Breath of the Holy Spirit, the third and

last quest begins, and continues until the end of time. This last journey, in the power of the Holy Spirit, seeks to embrace all women and men of good will. The Holy Spirit opens their hearts to the Resurrection and New Life in Jesus. This quest continues until we arrive at the threshold that leads to the fullness of Life, in Jesus, through the Spirit, with the Father.

We celebrate each year this extended Easter Season (Lent-Easter-Pentecost) as a period of personal penance and change of heart (Lent), community joy and mutual growth (Easter), and universal mission to fulfill till the end of time (Pentecost). From Easter through Pentecost, we learn how to look at the world with the eyes of the heart, and from the perspective of God. We acquire a renewed vision of creation ennobled and raised to a greater dignity by the Resurrection of Jesus and the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We are confirmed and strengthened as an *Alleluia People* (St. Augustine); We *Praise the Lord* with our lives and we endeavor to make this Easter Joy contagious enough to envelope the whole of creation in the Father's life-giving Love in Jesus through the Spirit.

Our Father, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, lived this mystery every day of his life, but never more than when he became a living image of the Crucified. He was a Victor because he was a Victim - *Victor with Christ because a Victim with Christ*. So often we emphasize Padre Pio's imaging the person of the Crucified Jesus, but we forget that Padre Pio also lived in the definite reality of Jesus' glorified Person, Who was always present to him. Even when Padre Pio felt the "aloneness" of the many dark nights of the spirit, he knew he was not alone but entering once again a "desolation" sharing with that of Jesus in Gethsemane and on Calvary. The Resurrection was a reality that Padre Pio sought to instill in the hearts of all who sought his ministry of healing of the soul through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or through God's graces bestowed through his intercession for those who sought healing of the body. Each healing responded to suffering souls who bore the wounds of a marred human nature that sought to be made whole again and brought to new life through divine intervention. Padre Pio was an effective instrument in the plan of God for the Resurrection of the soul, Resurrection of the body, New Life in Jesus through God's grace.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, we approach Easter with the joy of the first disciples who received the commission to believe in the Resurrection and preach the *New Way* to everyone. Yielding to the Spirit's grace, let us be empowered with His gifts, that we may **Live Jesus** more credibly and intensely in the world and attract others to Him. Even though the world in which we live may often oppose the values and principles we profess as Catholics, let us be bearers of Easter joy and Its Eternal Truth with the conviction and intrepid faith of those who *saw, heard, touched Him* (1 John 1:1). Let the Resurrection of Jesus encourage us also to be a source of strength, truth, patience, and love for our sisters and brothers who profess to be practicing Catholics but who vehemently oppose the fundamental beliefs of our Faith, and/or contradict or refute the Magisterium (Holy Father and Bishops united with Him) of the Church. The witness we give the world and the effectiveness of our testimony depend on us and our cooperation with the Truth and trust God has entrusted to us in His Holy Spirit.

May the Easter Season be filled with Love, Peace, and Joy for all of you and your loved ones. May the Lord of New Life help you to live as His *Alleluia People*; may Our Lady and good St. Joseph guide, guard and protect you; may our Father, Padre Pio, look over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care. With a promise to keep all of you affectionately in my Easter Masses and Liturgies, I wish you and your dear ones a very Happy and Joyous Easter.

***Christ is Risen! He is truly risen! Alleluia!***

Peace and Blessings

Fr. Francis A. Sariago, O.F.M. Cap.

National Coordinator