

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!

The Fathers of the Church maintained that human beings stand at the point of intersection between two gravitational fields. First, there is the force of gravity which pulls us down - towards selfishness, falsehood and evil; the gravity which diminishes us and distances us from the heights of God. On the other hand, there is the gravitational force of God's love: the fact that we are loved by God and respond in love attracts us upwards. (We find ourselves) between this twofold gravitational force; everything depends on our escaping the gravitational field of evil and becoming free to be attracted completely by the gravitational force of God ... (Pope Benedict XVI)

The more we respond to this force that attracts upward to God, the more we are encouraged to look up and beyond the things that so often easily attract and even seduce us here on earth. We are human beings, created to live in and love God's creation. However, life here is a journey and not the end of all our desires. When we build on the bridge, rather than cross over it, life becomes precarious and the thought of the future can be disconcerting and frightening. When we allow ourselves to be 'grasped by God', life changes immensely, though the circumstances we encounter may remain the same. The more intimate and personal the experience we have, the less capable we are of expressing in words all that we feel.

Padre Pio not only had a profound relationship with God and His holy ones, but also received signs of God's unbounded love and trust in this man who was a living image of the Passion of the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, for over fifty years. 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 our hearts.

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. These gifts are bestowed because of the love and willingness of that privileged soul to be available as God's "prophet" for all people. The words of Padre Pio taken from his letters addressed to Padre Benedetto shortly after Padre Pio received the visible Stigmata, allow us to enter into the heart of our Father and Founder in the most intimate moment of his relationship with the Lord, after that of the Eucharist.

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". He was detached from the world's 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. This overflowed into a fruitful ministry that touched the hearts and lives of many. Sacramentally he became one with Jesus in the Eucharist he celebrated in a mystical union of hearts that continued for the entire course of his life.

God offers us as well privileges and responsibilities. Their effectiveness is determined by our conviction and commitment to surrender to the One Who calls us to such a privileged position. 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 sacrifice of Jesus. We experience the effects of the Eucharistic 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 Eucharist is that intimate moment when heaven and earth are united in the person of Jesus on Calvary. We become one with Christ mystically through the sacrament; His very person runs through our veins through the sacrament signs we receive. The

transformation, however, is not necessarily externally a visible image of the Crucified and Glorified Savior.

The impression of the Stigmata on the body of Padre Pio is a personal, intimate, and uniting experience. Though hesitant out of obedience and as well as for the sake of humility, the signs were physically visible for all to see. The "mysterious person" took Padre Pio through the mystical-mysterious experiences of his life of prayer and contemplation, and impressed on his body an image, enfleshed for the world to see, of the Savior's eternal love for all humanity. The 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. Why? Creation had grown cold in its love and trust in God. (Some things just never change! Look at us today!) The life of this "crucified" friar served as a sign of contradiction to the world. His presence 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. They seem to forget God altogether. Humanity all too soon forgets its past experiences. The infidelities of the past and their consequences on creation manifest a world that seems to desire to live without God as its guiding presence.

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 enfleshed in his life for others, all contributed in making Padre Pio an enduring "image of the Crucified on the mount". San Giovanni Rotondo had become his permanent home. He never left San Giovanni, once obedience put him there, and God sealed the agreement with the stigmata. He was a veritable "prisoner of the Gargano" for all the world to 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 bitten 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 it seeks to infect the lives of good people. The more they sincerely search for and desire the Lord in their lives, the more they feel the dangers of the venom of a society gone wild.

Padre Pio is 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 in San Giovanni Rotondo was and still remains a powerful reminder of the One Who from Mount Calvary opened the gates of heaven for all who would 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. 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 talk about Padre Pio, we reflect on his life and words at our meetings and Masses. Do we emulate his life and teachings so that others see the values we preach lived in our own lives? There is often a real lack of substance in our devotion to Padre Pio. The highest praise is imitation! Even Jesus reminded those who followed *Not all who saw Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of Heaven* (Matthew 7:21). We must not only be nourished by the Lord's precious Body and Blood in the Eucharist, but we must also nourish others with the Lord we have received. It is not enough to believe in what we profess, but we must also be believable by our way of life. That is what Padre Pio meant when he told those seeking to be his spiritual children not to embarrass him. He expected them all to be faithful.

Padre Pio, when asked if the Stigmata hurt him, responded in his straightforward manner, that they were not given to him as ornaments. 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. Padre Pio's lasting example challenges those who seek him out, to live the values of prayer, sacrifice, reconciliation, reparation, 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.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, treasure the example and words our Father and Founder left us. Let the image of the Crucified Savior become more alive and meaningful to you through the image of his privileged servant Padre Pio. Celebrating the feast of St. Pio of Pietrelcina this month of September let it be a remembrance of his triumph over life and his passage into Life. May it reassure us of the reality of his love and intercession for all who continue their earthly journey with him as their special protector and guide. Our Father's example, life, and words serve as "indicators" on the road. They assist us to find our way through the crossroads of life we encounter, especially when the choices offered are enticing, alluring, seductive, yet we know them in faith to be deceiving and dangerous. With such an example and intercessor as St. Pio of Pietrelcina rejoice in the Lord for the gift God gave the Church and the world in our good Padre, Image of the Crucified and beacon of light and hope from the heights of Mount Gargano.

May God bless you; Our Lady and good St. Joseph 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