

# Padre Pio Prayer Groups

National Office

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

November 2022

The Lord give you His peace!

Even through nature God often speaks to us about life's journey. The Winter Season, soon to be upon us, is announced by days that grow ever shorter and the sun that seems to take its time offering us its light and warmth each day. It is a good time for us to reflect on certain basic realities that we often place at the margin of our mind. Yet, these truths are a fact of our human life and a fact of Eternal Life: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. The first two are certain, and the last two are "either-or", either one or the other.

There was a time when these *Four Last Things*, as they are called, were an indisputable theme for at least some Sundays of November, and always during any Retreat or Mission. They were intended not so much to frighten us into submission to God's Will, as much as to make us realize that we cannot hide from the inevitable. Thus, we should strive to know, reflect, and decide, through our understanding of these *Four Last Things*, what course we will take in life. Once we follow through with our decision, life becomes more peaceful and the going more certain.

October is *Respect for Life Month*. November is the month of the Holy and Suffering Souls in Purgatory. We are encouraged to reflect not only death and dying, but on the ultimate purpose for being born, Eternal Life with God. The Holy Souls remind us that God's Providence goes beyond time. The infinite Goodness and Love of God provides for the sincere of heart, who have ended their earthly existence and are called to Eternal Life, but not yet ready to share the fullness of eternal happiness. The difference between the two is that October offers us opportunities to reflect upon the gift of our natural lives, while November presents us, both through the season of late Autumn as well as through our Scriptural and Liturgical Calendars, with encouragement to consider the Life we are called to share with those who have gone before us after our journey on earth is complete. The changing seasons present a tapestry of our ever-changing life. Death and rebirth to new life are constants in nature. Why, then, are so many good, believing, devout people hesitant to reflect upon life, death, and eternal rebirth in our own personal lives? We are willing to mention it about others, but always seem to leave ourselves out of the picture. *Everyone speaks about heaven, but no one seems in a hurry to get there.*

Jesus, before dying on the Cross, said: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.* (Luke 23: 46) These words were the last human expression of Jesus' total trust in the Father's love. Before pronouncing them, Jesus wanted everyone to know that He had been faithful to the Father's Will

and had fulfilled everything that was expected of Him. He said: *It is completed (consummated)*. (John 19: 30) This *completeness* expressed the fact that Jesus' entire life was lived in view of the Life that He and the Father share with the Holy Spirit. Yet, while He always lived the Life of the Father and the Holy Spirit, His days on earth were charged with the routine duties of any other human being, plus the particular responsibilities of a Carpenter turned Rabbi. Christ's life, as the Word-made-flesh, is the mystery of Life with God to life also in time returning to Life in God in a never-ending faithful acceptance of the Father's Will!

Jesus often spoke of the Kingdom of God and the Life to come. But He never seemed to dwell on death. Jesus' focus was to assist others to recognize their dignity as children of God and understand how to live as God's People. God's People are on a journey, as pilgrims and strangers on earth, the vestibule to eternity, our true destination. The Lord opened minds and hearts to understand who we are expected to be, and how we are expected to live to be assured of our sharing in the Eternal Life of God. This "Life" begins in time and is fulfilled in eternity; there's no other way. Our world with all of its technology and entertainment distracts us from the stark realities that never seem to hit home until we are either sick, or advanced in years, or maybe are undergoing some life-threatening experience. Why does it take us so long to focus on the obvious to recognize with the eyes of faith the full picture God offers us?

Our Seraphic Father Saint Francis of Assisi, when he was told that he would die in a short span of days, composed a stanza to his *Canticle of the Creatures*. He was inspired to write: *Praise be you my Lord God for Sister Bodily Death from whom no one can escape*. He sang of Death and spoke of that solemn moment as a loving family member. He praised God for offering us this wonderful companion for our journey. It would be interesting to take a poll - an honest poll - to see how many of us really consider Death as a friend whose arrival we anticipate and whom we accept as a gift from God for which we ought to be joyfully grateful!

Death is life's constant companion, whether we want to accept it or not. Each day we come closer to eternity. This is a fact of life as well as our faith that we cannot deny, evade, or avoid. The Church - loving, wise and prudent Mother that she is - takes advantage of this time of year to invite us to reflect on the continuation of life beyond bodily death. Seen in the light of faith and God's grace, it is that solemn moment into which an entire life converges as it responds to God's call. When we are called home, the soul bursts into eternity with an explosion of surrendering trust, into the all-embracing hands of the Father. It should be a hope-filled reality to anticipate with serenity and total abandonment in God's eternal and loving providence.

Even the particular November devotion to the Holy Souls in Purgatory, as well as the daily remembrance at Mass and in the Liturgy of the Hours of all the faithful departed, are reminders that life never ends. Physical death is only the point of God's transforming love that makes us capable of entering the eternal realm of the Spirit. The Holy Souls are those who await with certitude their entrance into Heaven. The souls we remember are persons who journeyed on earth, as we do now, immersed in the world's realities: joys, successes, allurements, confusion, uncertainties, grace-filled moments, sinful moments, and the like. Many are our relatives, friends, and possibly some who may have considered us - or maybe we have considered them -

enemies, or at least unlovable. Remember: the one considered not worthy of love (and no Christian should consider another that way) is the one who needs love the most! In eternity all animosity is canceled for those who are saved. Even those awaiting heaven in Purgatory are certain of the glory to be theirs. Enemies in life are intimately one with us in God when they enter Life. Thus, they can see us only in God's love. We must do likewise, from now! Heaven, or even Hell, does not happen "then", everything has its beginnings "now"!

Continuing our journey on earth, we do well to keep before us the image of our Father and Founder Padre Pio who lived in constant union with God. Nevertheless, he was always aware of the needs, both material as well as spiritual, of those still journeying in this world. The *Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza* is a magnificent and shining example of Padre Pio's desire to minister as servant to those who suffer. He also offered others the opportunity to share in his ministry. He sought to alleviate pain and postpone death when and where it was possible. Nevertheless, his desire was for the sick and infirm to be healed not just in body but also and above all in the soul. He envisioned a holistic approach to medicine, before it was even considered on the large scale that it is today. The good Padre realized that many spiritual, physical and psychological difficulties are the product of a tormented soul. One of the great fears is the fear that life is useless and meaningless. There is the fear of the abruptness of life's end, or the uncertainty of what awaits, if anything, after we "cease to be". Even basically good and faithful people pose these questions at one time or another. They have moments when they question the futility of their actions, the monotony of their daily work or professions, the lack of real interest and boredom in anything substantial, an inability to understand the purpose of life that seems so short, and on and on. Thoughts like these lead to anxieties, and a fear of death that seems to cut short our chance *to make everything right*.

The Church encourages us always, but especially in November, to remember that Purgatory is a place of God's Love, Mercy and Providence. Even after death, God will not be outdone in providing all the means necessary to bring the sincere of heart to Himself. The month of the Holy Souls reminds us of this and offers us the hope that heaven is ours for the taking. Washed in the Blood of Jesus, we become heirs with Him to Eternal Life. Our prayers for the Holy Souls unite us to those who passed from time to eternity. With our prayers we assist the Suffering Souls in Purgatory, and they in turn pray for us, the Militant Souls on Earth. We form, with the Church Triumphant in Heaven, the Communion of Saints composed of wayfarers journeying to our true Home in Heaven. We support and assist one another until we pass from time to encounter one another in eternity.

Padre Pio had various experiences with the mystery of human death and the Holy Souls. When one lives in the light of eternity, every moment is a precious occasion to grow in grace. From the time he was old enough to understand, we are told that Padre Pio had mystical experiences. Eternity and Heaven were realities that he thought everyone experienced. When he discovered that his was a privilege, he kept his experiences to himself and to the director of his soul. Eventually even these personal moments were known by many. The profound relationship with God Who was always so real to him, urged him to seek to instill in others this deep conviction and trust in God. Padre Pio taught his Spiritual Children to accept the reality and constant

companion that death is, but to focus on life so that through the Eucharist, Our Lady, the Church, and one another we might strengthen our spirit to walk firmly and decisively toward our destiny with God. As a true son of Saint Francis of Assisi, even our beloved Padre Pio was able to anticipate Sister Death with awareness and serene resignation to Her arrival. She gently accompanied him to the embrace of Jesus and Mary.

It is recounted that the night of his death, Padre Pio made an unusual request of Father Alessio Parente, who had been close to him for a number of years. He asked Father Alessio to say his Mass for him the next morning, that is, the Mass that Padre Pio usually celebrated. Father Alessio could not imagine why the request. A few hours later, when Padre Pio peacefully gave up his spirit pronouncing the names of Jesus and Mary, Father Alessio understood. Even to the end, Padre Pio was fully aware and accepting of the Father's Will. Serenely pronouncing the names of *Jesus, Mary* was the crowning moment of a life fully lived in the continual "yes" that Mary once offered to allow God to enter history as one of us. Padre Pio's "yes" was a constant acceptance for the Father to use him as He saw fit. He had celebrated his last Eucharist entering the mystery of the Passion-Death-Resurrection of the Jesus he was called to be an image of throughout his entire life. He had been surrounded by thousands of his Spiritual Children gathered in San Giovanni Rotondo for the fiftieth anniversary of the reception of the visible stigmata, (September 20, 1918-1968) only three days before he died. Several hours later, no longer in mystery, but experiencing the transforming miracle of God's love, he saw in truth the Object of his desires for so many years. Death was truly the loving *Sister* who finally took him home!

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, let us follow his example. Let us take the wonderful gift of life that has been entrusted to us and live it fully and joyfully. The burdens we may be asked to bear help us to set all things in perspective. We live, as Scripture tells us, *as pilgrims and strangers*, (1 Peter 2: 11) grateful for all we have, and can achieve for God's glory and the good of our souls. We trust Divine Providence in our needs. We eagerly anticipate our ultimate encounter with our Loving God. We are created to share in God's Life with our sisters and brothers in faith when we've run life's course. The finish line is only the beginning!

Allow me to share this simple prayer as a final reflection: *Praise be you my Lord for Sister Bodily Death from whom no one can escape. Be praised my Lord because the sobering thought of our passage from time into eternity allows us to put all things and situations into a grace-filled perspective. May the thought of the Holy Souls in Purgatory encourage us to remember your mercy, love, and providence that we may never fear in life, even in those moments when we seem to lose our way. You, Father, call us to life; in Jesus, You give us hope; and in the Holy Spirit, you strengthen us on our journey. May Mary, Mother of all Your children, those who already live in glory, we who are still in journey here on earth, and those awaiting Your call who are in heaven's vestibule, lead us ever closer to one another and to You our Lord and God. Mary, our Mother, we are Totus Tuus, that you may help us to become All His!*

Let us always remember to pray for the Holy Souls of the Faithful Departed that they rest in peace and come quickly to the joys they so intensely desire. Invoking our heavenly Mother's intercession, we ask

that she, Mother and Queen of the Holy Souls and of all God's children, pray for them, and pray for us who are still on life's journey.

I wish also all of you a very Happy Thanksgiving. In the midst of our personal difficulties, or the problems and fears that we as a nation experience, there is a God who cares for us. Give thanks to God for being God! Give thanks to God for His love! Give thanks to God for having created you so that you could know, love, serve Him here and share eternity with Him! *Give thanks to God for He is good; His love is everlasting!* (Psalm 118). The exclamation points are signs of imperatives that, if lived, can transform our lives. *Be Grateful!*

May God bless you; Our Lady and good St. Joseph guide, guard and protect you and your loved ones; and Padre Pio, our Father and Founder, look over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings

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

National Coordinator

**Happy Thanksgiving 2022**