

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!

Good people at times forget that the spirit world and its influence in our life is not some archaic form of superstitious beliefs and practices. Realities do not disappear just by closing our eyes. They are still there. We acknowledge what we may not or do not understand and, if it is disconcerting in any way, we do not deny it, but we remember: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble* (Psalm 46: 1).

There was a well-known professor who taught at Propaganda Fide in Rome in the 1960's. He contended that there are really no, or extremely few, "real" atheists. His position was that most atheists are "practical" ones. That is, they eliminate the idea or belief in a Supreme Being and even the spirit world in their lives. With no one above them and no unseen presence to guide, correct, and so on, personal moral responsibility and any sense of guilt for wrong doing is eliminated in their minds. That person can fool him/herself and possibly others. Nevertheless, the time arrives when the truth is revealed. Closed eyes are opened. What a revelation! In most cases we can say "thank God for ignorance". Even Jesus prayed for the ignorant: *Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing* (Luke 23: 34). Only God knows the heart. Judgment is God's and no other's.

In any case, believing is standing for something or someone. We all do that in one way or another. There is a saying that states: *Those who stand for nothing fall for anything*. This quote attributed to Alexander Hamilton conveys a powerful message about the importance of having strong beliefs and values in life. The Do-It-Yourself "spirituality" doesn't seem to be as effective as once thought. *Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?* (Isaiah 40: 26). God gives us answers to our questions, usually by asking a better question for us to answer (cfr. Book of Job). The youth and young adults today seem to hearing these questions in their hearts. They are asking and searching for spiritual substance in their lives. They are searching for God and a direction in life in which to believe and hope. The process has "taken off". The need is urgent, and they realize it. God Himself allows us to fall prey to our insistent challenging of God's truth, not to put us down. When we come up with the answer, and it's the correct one, then *our hearts are restless until they rest in You* (St. Augustine, *Confessions*). The restlessness is what spurs us and the discovery is what keeps us "running towards Him".

We are most often challenged by those very powers many believe to be irrelevant, especially regarding the spirit world and spiritual life. *Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 18: 3). *Only a fool would say, "There is no God!"* (Psalm 14: 1). Even people of faith can learn lessons when they believe only what they can "touch" with their senses. The real "sense" is in the spirit that makes the world and our life "make sense".

A rather powerful moment happened in the life of Padre Pio to a bishop who believed that 'modern man' should and could not believe certain occurrences were really from the 'other' world. Church teaching and millennial belief should have been enough for him. It wasn't! Just consider the Communion of Saints. How does the Church Triumphant-Militant-Suffering relate within Herself among the blessed in Heaven, the redeemed on earth still striving to live fully God's will, and the souls in Purgatory awaiting the fullness of Life? When there is communication, there is 'communion'. It follows that if there is communication and communion, there must be 'contact'. If there is contact then both sides are real!

At the friary in Foggia where Padre Pio was at the time, an uninvited and unwanted guest, satan, entered the picture. It caused a great sense of unease and concern for everyone. The evil one in the friary! Who would believe it!? Someone, a good person and shepherd of souls, did not believe the stories he heard concerning unusual happenings there. There had to be a natural explanation. How easily we discredit what we cannot understand. *God's ways are not our ways* (Isaiah 55: 8-9). Often God helps the good-intentioned skeptic to learn an unforgettable and necessary lesson.

A Bishop came to the friary for a brief visit and was to stay overnight. The friars spoke about strange and rather disconcerting happenings in the friary. His response was: 'Father Guardian, the Middle Ages are over, and you still believe in this nonsense?' Thomas the Apostle had to see to believe, and Monsignor would have to learn a lesson he never forgot. The bell for supper rang and the friars and Monsignor went to the dining room. Silence was dispensed and all were eating and speaking with one another. Padre Pio had been dispensed from the evening meal and was in his room above the dining room of the friary. At a certain moment loud stomping was heard overhead. It was the prelude to the explosive sounds to come. Everyone was silent and, as usual, after the stomping came the terrible explosive noise. The friars, somewhat used to the strange happenings with Padre Pio, went to ask the Padre if he needed any assistance. He told the friars that he hadn't called and needed no help.

This one experience of the bishop was enough. He became so frightened that he wanted someone to sleep in the same room with him that night. The following morning, he left rather early, without taking leave of the friars. He never returned to that friary. He quickly became a "believer". He needed no more proof of the power and the presence "of the medieval superstitions" he previously doubted. The following evenings however, the loud explosive noises continued around the same time. Everyone made their own conclusions. When supper ended, the friars would go and spend some time with Padre Pio. They enjoyed his company, his humor, and the funny stories he told. No mention of the noises! So many nights! After the

noises, when the friars went to Padre Pio's room, he would be soaked in perspiration, so much so that one friar remembered wringing enough water out of his clothing to fill a small bucket.

Padre Pio's notoriety always aroused suspicions, doubts, outright disbelief, as well as admiration, veneration, and the acclaim of "saint". The Church, always a prudent Mother, must keep an eye on anything that might distort the purity of the Faith, especially when extraordinary matters affect the normal life of the faithful: Pope St. John XXIII, in response to various situations at the time revolving around Padre Pio and the Sacraments, sent an Apostolic Visitor to investigate allegations brought about Padre Pio. There was always someone who had a "question" or "problem" to resolve regarding the "Stigmatist of the Gargano". Padre Pio was always gracious with everyone. He was no different with this official representative of the Church. The Monsignor sent as the Visitor (an investigator for the Church) gave a rather questionable evaluation of Padre Pio. Nothing canonically or socially inappropriate was reported in the actions of the Padre. But, the Visitor raised strong difficulties which caused concern in Church circles. Only on his deathbed did Monsignor admit that the "difficulties" raised, and negative report regarding Padre Pio, were fabricated. They were not true. Why Lord?!

A powerful statement in the Passion account of Jesus according to St. Matthew is *Jesus remained silent* (Matthew 26: 63). Padre Pio remained silent and waited for the truth to set him free of the lies and heartache caused by the reports and/or doubts raised about him. In God's time and way, the truth will be shouted from the housetops.

These two rather lengthy anecdotes about Padre Pio remind us that even saints are challenged in many ways. Often, when we read accounts of the saints or hear about strange things that happen to holy people, there is a tendency to 'romanticize' the occurrence. There is nothing romantic about being visited by evil itself and being subject to its obsessive behavior. There is nothing pleasurable being subject to the external working of the evil one who might cause physical harm to some or terrorize others because of an ominous presence. There is nothing pleasant about being judged unjustly and having doubt planted in the hearts and minds of people questioning someone's integrity. Pride and prominence can so easily seek applause even to the detriment of a saint's good name. *If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* (John 8: 31-32).

Most of us are subject to the internal tensions and anxieties that temptations against the virtues and love of God cause. These are satan's permitted challenging moments. Remember, we are all 'saints-in-the-making', and it takes only a lifetime to achieve our goal, with God's help. Temptations are either opportunities to grow in grace, or possibilities of falling out of grace. Never be presumptuous about your inner strengths in the face of evil, or before those who seek to seduce you into things you know are contrary to conscience and all we profess as Catholic Christians. Remember, satan rarely allures us directly with the 'obvious' sins. Anyone trying to live a God-centered life would never willingly deprive themselves of grace, though they may succumb in moments of severe spiritual or physical weakness and stress. Never

forget: *You, little children, are from God and have overcome them* (the allurements of the evil one), *because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world* (1 John: 4, 4).

The evil one enters our lives with subtleties, either when we are most vulnerable during times of sadness, illness, loss, and the like, or by making 'little things' seem harmless or insignificant. We dabble with the 'harmless' and 'insignificant' until we realize we have become so entangled in satan's web that we have difficulty breaking loose. Thus, with a sense of discouragement, believing we have gone too far and cannot overcome what we have now recognized as harmful or even sinful, we 'give up' and let ourselves be overwhelmed. Remember: *With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God* (Mark 10: 27).

Something we can all learn from the antics of the evil one is that he is persistent in his endeavors and consistent in his desire to destroy. The children of the light "fight fire with fire" (fire of evil with the Fire of God's Love). We must be as persistent and consistent in God's ways. *If God is for us who can be against us?* (Romans 8: 31). Trusting in God's gracious gifts, with the added and necessary presence of our Mother Mary and St. Joseph called "Terror of Demons" to intercede for us, there is nothing to fear from the adversary!

Even good people often act like the bishop in the story. We categorize miracles and even the existence and role of satan in life as mere matters of the past or pious myths to encourage the simple. To some learned ones, these strange occurrences are caused by 'mass hysteria' or an individual's 'psychological imbalance'. *I thank You Father that You have hidden these things from the learned and the clever, and have revealed them to the merest children*, Jesus prayed (Matthew 11: 25). A child is never ashamed to find comfort and strength in the love of his/her parent. God is our Father!

Simplicity and trust recognize what others fail to notice. We believe in Life after life. Our faith speaks of the Resurrection of Jesus and our call to share Eternal Life with God one day. How can anyone doubt the existence and the influence of the world that awaits us with joyful anticipation and love? How much must we be cautious while journeying in the world that seeks to kidnap and destroy us eternally!

Padre Pio was an elect soul called to help a skeptic and cynical world rediscover its faith in a loving God. He sought to help people understand the basic goodness in which humanity was created. The world fell out of grace through Original Sin. Jesus regained that grace by redeeming us on the Cross of Calvary. The Resurrection of Jesus confirms and fortifies our Faith in the Suffering Servant. He was born to die that we might be reborn to Life.

God's love in Jesus through the Spirit is poured out for us in the Eucharist when we are intimately one with Jesus in Holy Communion. We experience the intimacy of God's Mercy through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We re-confirm our need for God's forgiving grace, "owning" our sins before God and receiving the merciful forgiveness of His Love. Reconciled with God and our sisters and brothers on this journey, we continue to *make up in our own*

bodies what is lacking in the passion of Christ for the sake of His body, the Church (Colossians 1: 24).

Obedience to God's will, prayers, sacrifice and especially prayerful and penitential acts of reparation strengthen us. This daily offering is fruitful and strengthens us when we are distracted from our goal, Eternal Life. Encouraged by the Spirit and only with the permission of their spiritual directors, some are called to make a total and unconditional surrender of themselves and every moment of their lives as an act of reparation. No one should make such an offering without the express permission of their Spiritual Director.

To make a perpetual offering of ourselves, we must pray, consider, reflect, and seek guidance. God takes us at our word. Total surrender will undoubtedly receive divine loving support. Nonetheless, no promise of such a kind should be made without guidance. In either case, it is only when we surrender ourselves in loving trust of God to God, that we find the serenity and direction in life to meet any obstacle from either time or eternity. Thus, we become victorious with the One *Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life* (John 14: 6).

The Guardian of the friary in Foggia asked Padre Pio to pray that the phenomena causing the friars and guests to be frightened cease. The unusual sounds ceased in the friary. Like it or not, satan must obey the One greater than he. There is no equal to God! Who is like God?! No one but God alone! The evil one cannot destroy the grace of God and our love for Jesus and Mary unless we allow him to do so. That is, unless we allow ourselves to be seduced by his empty promises. It is the nature of evil to live in the loneliness of pride, the chaos of hatred, and the limitless darkness of willful separation from Eternal Goodness and Love, and entrap others as well.

The Father Who creates life, the Son Who redeems life, and the Holy Spirit Who guides through life, calls and journeys with us from life to Life. God invites us into a relationship with the Most Blessed Trinity where we, the redeemed, live in love and light. When we consider how close God is to each one of us and how intensely God desires to be with us, how could we ever, willfully, allow ourselves to listen to one who leads to division, darkness, and death?! Do not be afraid! *If God is for us - and with us - who can be against us; who can prevail!?* (cfr. Romans 8: 31)

To his spiritual daughter, Annita Rodote, Padre Pio writes: *The fury of satan, by which you sometimes feel yourself to be threatened, must neither frighten nor surprise you at all. As you know, he persecutes to death all those who do not wish to listen to his dreadful insinuations, and his hate increases all the more, in accordance with the extent to which he sees his hope of possessing the souls in order to make them his ... Continue to pay no attention to him; fortify yourself with prayer, humility and unlimited trust in divine help. Abandon yourself, as a beloved daughter of the heavenly Father, in His most loving arms ... (satan) is powerless against the soul that places all its trust in God alone ... God will never permit you to be tempted beyond your strength ... You tell me you feel weak in the face of this strong enemy of yours. Well take comfort in our most sweet Lord, as you should know that the soul's greatest misery is when it*

does not feel weak, but feels strong; when it trusts in itself; when it is over-confident. Oh! If only all souls could experience such a holy weakness ... A soul who felt its weakness and had recourse to God for help, has never fallen ... Trust, therefore, Annita, and take heart. (27 April 1915)

In a letter to another spiritual daughter, Assunta di Tomaso, Padre Pio writes: *Live tranquilly and resigned in everything to the will of heaven. Jesus loves you with a most singular care ... Take heart and do not fear the gloomy wrath of lucifer. Always remember this, that it is a good sign when the enemy makes an uproar and roars around your will, as this shows he is not within you. Courage ... There is no need to fear when we can say with determination, even if without feeling, 'Long live Jesus!'* (8 November 1916)

And finally, in a letter to the spiritual daughter, Erminia Gargani, Padre Pio writes: *Live tranquilly abandoned more and more in the arms of divine mercy and do not fear the evil designs of the enemy. He is powerless against the children of God, his every attempt will be defeated.* (5 February 1923)

Spiritual Children of Padre Pio are a Militia of Prayer who strengthen those who pray that they may be an encouragement and strength for others. The world has grown so much smaller thanks to all the advancements in science, technology, the media, travel, and so on...and so much more susceptible to the dangers hidden in all the good humankind has achieved. We are in a world full of questions. Seek wise and faith-filled counsel from people of proven faith and integrity. Let us not forget the saying: *One who has himself/herself as counselor is being counseled by a fool* (paraphrase of words of Abraham Lincoln). *Greater is the One within us than the one who is in the world* (1 John 4:4). Find strength in this truth and trust.

The only answer is JESUS, with the almighty intercessor of humanity, our Heavenly Mother Mary. In this month of the Holy Rosary, we celebrate Mary Who journeys with Her Son Jesus at every moment and stage of His life on earth and that of the Early Church until She is taken to Heaven. Let our Mother Mary travel with you at every stage and moment of life: the joy-filled, the exciting and revealing, the challenging and sad, the glorious and eternal. Experience the marvel of Faith that transforms the ordinary, even the difficult moments, into an exciting experience of the power of God's sublime and peace-filled presence through the love and presence of Mary.

What Padre Pio told his spiritual daughters in the above mentioned letters, he says to us: *know you are weak and have recourse to God for help; live tranquilly and resigned in everything to the will of heaven; and abandon yourself in the arms of divine mercy.* Simply put: PRAY, HOPE, AND DON'T WORRY!

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

Peace and Blessings

Fr. Francis A. Sariego, O.F.M. Cap.
National Coordinator

NB – Every now and then someone will call or email concerned that they hadn't received the monthly letter and prayer calendar. It is wonderful that many of you look forward to it. However, let me repeat what so many times I have written or responded by phone or cell. These letters and daily thoughts of Padre Pio and devotional prayers and practices that are sent all of you ARE NOT NECESSARY FOR THE MONTHLY GATHERINGS OF THE PADRE PIO PRAYER GROUPS. YOU MAY USE, COPY, IGNORE THEM AS YOU SEE FIT. If have done this for a good number of years to offer material if you might be at a loss of what to speak about. Remember that Padre Pio wanted the Groups to grow in their Faith in Jesus, the Church and their own Catholic Christian life. My monthly aides are just that, "aides", if necessary. You might even wish to read the daily quotes or prayers. The only "must" is what you have in the words of Padre Pio: Eucharist, Mary, Catholic Faith sharing with a priest/deacon. This concession is made because of the difficulty in being able to have a priest who can be free when the Prayer Group meets.

Padre Pio made it quite clear what he expected of his Prayer Groups from the beginning. The simplicity of the gathering at least once a month that creates unity and strength in prayer and presence as intercessors and apostles in a world so much in need of Christ and His Teachings. You can find the history of the Prayer Groups in most lives written about Padre Pio, or a brief presentation on this website.

These letters and calendar were begun as a response to many in the beginning of my ministry among you who called me asking what to do and speak about at the monthly meetings. These monthly mailings became a spiritual exercise for me to reflect upon the good Padre and also reflect myself on various spiritual matters that could be helpful for my own spiritual growth as a brother Capuchin with Padre Pio as well as a Catholic. Until time becomes eternity, I am still in need of not lingering lazily on the road but being and doing all necessary to keep my own spirit and vocation alive and well. Things like this are a help.

It is always a pleasure doing these writings. It "transports" me in the mind and heart to San Giovanni or whatever place I may be referring to speaking of Padre Pio. So THANK YOU TO ALL OF YOU for offering me this much needy service for myself, that I hope can be of service to any or all of you.