

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

National Office

St. Francis of Assisi Friary

1901 Prior Road, Wilmington, Delaware 19809

tel: (302) 798-1454 fax: (302) 798-3360 website: pppg.org email: pppgusa@gmail.com

Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

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The Lord give you His peace!

Padre Pio opens his heart in the following excerpts from his Letters to Padre Benedetto. *If it were not for the war which the devil wages against me continually, I should almost be in paradise, but I am in the hands of the devil who is trying to snatch me from the arms of Jesus. Dear God! What a war he is waging against me...Jesus will not measure his blood for the salvation of men...He will redeem by his holy love this most ungrateful of his creatures. (20 December 1910) The temptations with regard to my life in the world are those which trouble my heart and obscure my mind. Dear God! Even in ascending the altar I experience these attacks, but I have Jesus with me and what should I fear? (19 March 1911) Even in these days the enemy is making every effort to induce me to consent to his impious designs. In particular this evil spirit tries by all sorts of images to introduce into my mind impure thoughts and ideas of despair...I feel very weak in mind and body, Father, but I abandon myself in God's hands. (9 April 1911)*

Often we allow ourselves to be discouraged when we think we are making little or no progress in the spiritual life. We imagine that with one Confession, or one Communion received worthily, or some phenomenal retreat experience, and the like, we should no longer have to be 'divided' in our loyalties. One of the definitions of the word 'satan' is to cause 'division', 'confusion'. As long as there is life, we will experience what St. Paul states in his letter to the Romans: *For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want...I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. (Romans 7:14-25)* When we recognize, acknowledge, and face the 'enemy' straight on, God's grace comes to rescue and to strengthen us in the battle that ultimately leaves us stronger than when we entered the fray. The temptations of Padre Pio and his abandonment to the hand of God should be an example to help us in our daily struggle with virtue and vice. Momentarily exchanging the roles of director and directee, Padre Pio writes to Padre Benedetto concerning spiritual trials. *God knows quite well the reason why he permits these feelings in his chosen ones. Even if no other purpose were served by this than the humiliation of these souls, it would already be quite a lot. It is true that he allows them to arrive at his frontiers so that in the combat the virtues may be practiced and strengthened. It is equally true that he allows the master-spies (venial sins and imperfections) to circulate freely in his kingdom, but this is merely to show us that without him we should be a prey for our enemies. Let us humble ourselves deeply, my dear Father, and confess that if God were not our breast-plate and our shield we should at once be pierced by every kind of sin. This is why we must invariably keep ourselves in God by persevering in our spiritual exercises and learning to serve God at our own expense. (23 July 1917)*

Challenges to our spiritual integrity seem to be common place with most of us at one time or another. When we have succumbed to temptation or are slowly 'losing ground' in our spiritual battle, and it seems as though the 'spirit of division' is winning, we may question God's presence. God is there to strengthen and uplift us (God's response to St. Catherine of Siena in her temptations thinking herself "alone"). But, where are we in our relationship with God and His graces? The greatest obstacle we encounter often is ourselves. Our ego, that self-centeredness so prevalent in most of us, refuses to recognize inadequacies, faults, sins, and the like. We are left to act alone – on our own strength as it were - rather than seek the help available that God most lovingly and willingly offers those who ask it of Him.

During the celebration of the Eucharist there is a simple prayer that priests recite silently. It is prayed right before inviting the people to prepare with him to enter the heart of the Eucharist, the Consecration and Communion. Some consider these few words an insignificant "relic" of the traditional Latin Liturgy. Not at all! The message conveyed by the priest's brief prayer is penetrating and powerful. Before taking the bread and wine into his hands to consecrate them into the Body and Blood of the Savior, the celebrant of the Eucharist washes his fingers and prays: *Lord, wash away my iniquity; cleanse me from my sin* (Psalm 51: 2).

This simple personal prayer reminds the priest to recognize himself before God as 'the' sinner called to serve God's people in the re-presentation of the one Sacrifice of Calvary. The priest does not stand apart praising his talents and spiritual attributes. He takes his place with all creation in need of salvation. At this moment, briefly, he stands alone, acknowledging his own personal need for forgiveness: *Lord, have mercy on me the sinner* (cfr. Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector - Luke 18: 9-14). What a powerful reminder! He too is a member of the People of God redeemed in the Blood of Jesus. He too is called to repentance. He too needs forgiveness from sin. He too must listen to and follow the Word of God he preaches and teaches. He too needs the strengthening relationship with Jesus that worthy reception of the Eucharist effects. He too is expected to cooperate with the graces the Lord sends to all His children to assist, strengthen and encourage them on their pilgrim journey. He too, as St. Augustine says about himself, is called to responsibility for those entrusted to his spiritual care, but he is also a Christian like those he serves. He also needs to be shepherded by Christ in, with and through the Church along with his sisters and brothers, the People of God. *For you I am a bishop, with you after all, I am a Christian. The first is the name of an office undertaken, the second a name of grace; that one means danger, this one salvation.* (St. Augustine, Sermon on the Anniversary of his Ordination).

The prayer and the simple act of washing his fingers open the mind and heart of the celebrant to the call for personal integrity. The holiness of the priest does not add or detract from the effects of the Eucharist on those who worthily and willingly participate in the celebration. The need for spiritual and natural 'wholeness', however, is essential for the effects of the Eucharist to continue to transform the life of the priest. He, as all of us, must grow in the image of the Christ. The 'wholeness' mentioned before, by its very nature, requires an ongoing process of deepening one's spiritual life.

Integrity - wholeness - is a key attribute for any human being, regardless of religious affiliation. Integrity is admired even by those who do not hold the same opinion or belief. It is an attribute that conveys a sense of trust and transparency of life. A person of integrity may have faults or character traits that are not always socially the best, but is honest and straightforward. Integrity of character seeks to live in the truth and to be honest with God, one's self, and others. A person of integrity is, as Scripture tells us: *'Yes' when it is 'yes' and 'No' when it is 'no'* (Matthew

5: 37). This attribute is an essential element in the life of one called to serve God and His People in the ordained ministry, as well as for all baptized in the family of God in Jesus. Priests are a 'sign', among others, that God offers His People to accompany them through life to Life. The People of God are signs to each other (all the faithful, including the clergy). How can there ever be harmony among the family of God unless all: *Believe what we say, say what we believe, and live what we believe* (admonition given to those being ordained deacon, priest, or bishop).

Those whom we encounter in life must see us as a people of faith in Jesus. The faith can only be recognized in the external acts that accompany it. Our hearts should be like the Heart of Jesus on the Cross, open wide to invite all to enter our fraternal and loving embrace. When the 'doors of our hearts' are closed, we invite the 'spirit of confusion' to enter. It can penetrate any door locked because of prejudice, rancor, hatred, and the like. Once that spirit enters, we literally begin to feel the attacks of the one who knows his time is limited. Don't fear! Invoke the holy names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Surrender your fear, anger, dislike, hopefully not hatred but that as well, everything to God's love, mercy, and providence. Enter the love of God and remember Scripture ... *charity covers a multitude of sins* (Proverbs 10: 12). *Where there is love, there is God* (cfr. Hymn Ubi Charitas) Where there is God, there is no longer room for anything or anyone to cause havoc to our spiritual serenity and joy. *Nothing is impossible with God!* (Luke 1: 37) *And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. **God is love**. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them"* (1 John 4: 16) At this point, you can even laugh in the face of satan who loses power over you. Live in Love, live in God, and *all else will be given you besides* (Matthew 6: 33) ... even the ability to overcome our most difficult opponent, ourselves.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, we too must acknowledge our personal responsibility for our actions and be accountable before the Lord. The spiritual 'wholeness' we yearn for depends on our honesty with God, ourselves and others. It is not just the priest because he is an ordained minister, but it is every person who, because he/she is a child of God Who is Eternal Truth, must live fully the image in which each was created. *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.* (Genesis 2: 26) God's revealed Word tells us, at the very beginning of our Sacred History, of this marvelous sharing the very life of God entrusted to us. Humanity has journeyed through the centuries seeking to reestablish the integrity of this gift we had lost. Jesus offers us the means to achieve this goal through His Eucharist. The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus offers us over and over again the means to be intimately one with the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul writes: *In Him we have redemption by His blood, the forgiveness of transgressions as a plan for the fullness of times, to restore all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth.* (Ephesians 1: 10) - Redemption through forgiveness leading to fullness ('wholeness') and total restoration ('integrity') in Christ.

The times in which we (the Church, the People of God) live, require that we reflect on the integrity of our own faith and how we act upon it each day. Do we conform our actions to what we preach with our lips? Do we live the Eucharist with Christ truly among us. Do we realize that, though briefly biologically, the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of the Eucharistic Lord is "one with us", when we are consumed by the One Whom we consume, and become briefly whom we consume? Is my presence at Mass a participation in the Mystery of Calvary? Do I realize that no matter 'how good I am' I, with my sisters and brothers, though at different stages and intensity, need forgiveness as well as anyone else? Do I realize that the priest is human, and therefore subject to human frailty, but that he is also an *alter Christus*, who alone can confect and administer to us the precious Body and Blood of Jesus in the Eucharist, and thus needs and deserves our prayers and support? As faithful Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, do we pray for good and holy vocations to the priesthood and religious life? Do we foster and encourage vocations in our families? Let us never forget: *Without the priest there is no Eucharist; without*

the Eucharist there is no Church; without the Eucharist there is no Life. (cfr. Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI). *It would be easier for the world to survive without the sun than to do so without the Holy Mass* (Padre Pio). The Eucharist is Life!

Life is the ultimate gift given to each one by God. However, there is another life we celebrate in a special way this month. October celebrates the life of Jesus as seen through the eyes of His Mother Mary in the Rosary. As we remember the Life of Son and Mother, we are encouraged to Pray and Respect Life at all its stages from conception to natural death. The 'wholeness' of Jesus' life at every moment of His earthly existence was embraced and shared by the 'Woman'. She is the 'Woman' of Scripture, the 'Woman of prophecy, the 'Woman' of history, Mary. Mary's 'yes' to the impossible initiated the immediate fulfillment of the Father's plan of salvation for all the living, that is, for all humanity. Life is as unique a gift as the person to whom it is entrusted. It is so unique that there are no two persons "exactly alike", not even "identical twins". Let us pray for every life gifted with the same 'time-sharing' Jesus shared with us.

True "perfection" is having fulfilled the purpose for our creation. We are created *to achieve the full stature of Christ* (Ephesians 4: 13). 'Integrity' of life is not an option, but an imperative we must strive for until we achieve the perfection that is ours in eternity. Don't be discouraged! It only takes a lifetime, but no less than a lifetime! Padre Pio and his Spiritual Director Padre Benedetto both remind us that our journey is both wonderful and challenging. *Pray, hope, and don't worry!* (Padre Pio) When we believe, trust, and surrender to God's Will everything works for God and our good.

Pray the Rosary lovingly and daily. Celebrate the life of Jesus with gratitude and surrender to the God Who became one with us so we could become one with Him. With our Mother Mary see and hear Jesus, Her Only-Begotten Son, our Brother, our Lord, our Savior, our GOD! Become one with the mysteries you pray. Celebrate life! Your life! Every moment and experience, even the challenging ones! Jesus, Mary, and good St. Joseph guide us across the bridge of life to our heavenly home. Let the Rosary, beloved prayer of Padre Pio, be a spiritual, intimate and real sharing in the life and love of Jesus through Mary.

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

Peace and Blessings
Fr. Francis A. Sariago, OFM Cap
National Coordinator