

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!

We have been elevated to the supernatural state, redeemed and saved, and we are destined for Eternity with God, "co-eternity". We need to consider death not as the end of everything. It is not the end. It is not ruin. It is not the fatal conclusion. It is the transition to co-eternity. If we consider ourselves to be passing through this world, if we act as though we are temporary, if we aspire to what is Up Above, if we set our lives up based on the Beyond, if we base our existence on the afterlife, then everything comes into order, everything becomes balanced, everything is oriented, everything is fed in hope. If we think of tomorrow as the next future to prepare for, then one of the most important virtues of spirituality comes into play: that of Hope. Hope, not as poetic rhetoric, not as a change of mood and also not as an evasion that allows for non-commitment, but as what it is: the second theological virtue which is infused like a seed during Baptism. (words of Bl. Carlo Acutis, a 15 yr. old adolescent, a "millennial", who died of leukemia in the prime of life) A theologian could not have spoken so eloquently of considering the ultimate instant in life to Life: Death!

Pain and suffering have always been 'problems' for human beings. We all know they are facts of life *from whom no one can escape* (cfr *Canticle of the Creatures* of St. Francis of Assisi). Experience helps us to think we know about suffering and pain. However, what many are convinced, "beyond a doubt", regarding death and dying, eclipses when the moment approaches. Death is the mystery we will understand only when we experience it. When we do experience it, we probably will not be able to tell anyone else about it. How we view "tomorrow" determines who or what we prepare our hearts for at that moment. Even a fifteen year old adolescent, filled with faith, hope, and love for life, can look forward to Up Above and "Co-Eternity" with God. What happens is that as time passes we begin to forget, if we ever really tried to remember, that we are created by and for God to live with Him forever?

Even souls of the deceased who appeared to those persons still on earth, including those who appeared to Padre Pio, never told anyone what death was like. If God permitted the encounter, they usually stated who they were, why they had appeared, asked prayers for their quick liberation from Purgatory, or had a message for the recipient. Even Sacred Scripture that relates the accounts of several persons being raised from the dead in the Old Testament by Elijah, in the New Testament by Jesus Himself, Peter, John, and Paul, never offers any insight as to their experience. The ultimate act of Faith in time is the resignation and acceptance of letting go of life to gain Life. Perhaps this is the reason those with no faith or whose faith is mere formality, social expression, moral responsibility, and the like, approach the "nothingness" of their belief with despair. The Hope of those who await the encounter with the Creator Who calls to life and calls to Life fills even a sinful but struggling person with fear, yes, but trust in the mercy and compassion of the One Who knows the struggle of life because He became one of His

creatures. Faith leads to Hope and Hope to trusting repentance in the One *Who came not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Him.* (John 3: 17)

One of the more well-known of Padre Pio's spiritual daughters from the first years of his priesthood was Raffaelina Cerase. There is a volume of correspondence between Padre Pio and Raffaelina filled with intense counsels concerning the spiritual life and her personal journey of faith. Raffaelina writes openly and Padre Pio responds without hesitation and rather extensively. Raffaelina entered into her relationship with Padre Pio late in life. She knew him briefly before she was diagnosed with an incurable illness that ultimately accompanied her to eternity. She was assisted in her passing by Padre Agostino, Padre Pio's spiritual director. Padre Pio guided her and assisted her in her sufferings and pain through his prayers and letters. She was profoundly devoted and an obedient spiritual daughter. During her trials and sufferings, Padre Pio writes: *Let us be consoled when we find ourselves continually oppressed by suffering. Let us thank the divine mercy which makes us sharers in the Passion and Death of our Divine Master. Until we are able to say: 'This Christian is another Christ,' do not let us pause in our ascent of the Hill of Calvary. Let us remember, when we are suffering torment, when we are attacked by satan, that after Calvary comes Tabor, so that we may not yield to his promptings.* (Letter of September 19, 1914)

In the Book of Job we read: *O that my words were written down! ... O that they were engraved on a rock forever! But as for me, I know my Vindicator lives ... Whom I myself shall see: my own eyes, not another's, shall behold him, and from my flesh I shall see God; my inmost being is consumed with longing.* (Job 19: 23-26). Though he expresses an initial acceptance of his condition, his situation overpowers him. His friends, who come to console Job, end up accusing him of some wrongdoing towards God that merit his suffering. At that point, Job questions God's actions. God poses questions for Job's reflection and response. Ultimately, Job reconfirms his unconditional faith in God. We know from the story what Job has to say about pain, suffering, and death. He was raked with pain and suffering to the point of cursing the day he was born: *Let the day perish in which I was born. Let that day be darkness!* (Job 3: 3-4) In the end, the suffering and pain that challenged his faith and perseverance help him acknowledge that pain and death are not a tragedy for the innocent, but a challenge to grow beyond the 'comfort zone' one creates, into an authentic act of faith and trust in God. God, Father and Creator, knows us personally; God cares and provides for each one.

Aware of the reality and our personal involvement in the mystery of death, how often we Christians may feel like Job. We question, "negotiate" with, blame God for the 'bad' things that happen to others as well as to us. Nevertheless, the Christian is enlightened by the assurance of the Faith that proclaims Jesus lived, was sacrificed to death for all humanity, and arose to Life. St. Paul himself reminds the community of Rome: *And hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly ... While we were still sinners, Christ died for us ... We have been justified by His blood ... We even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation.* (Romans 5: 5-11) This is the great God to Whom we entrust ourselves and all those who have gone before us. With unselfish love we offer ourselves to God Who is for us, for me, for every child of His Creation. It is this God Who has given us the most excellent means to enter His loving embrace with joyful anticipation - Jesus. And Jesus establishes a perpetual means to keep that promise and pledge alive - the Eucharist.

Jesus said: *I am the living bread come down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.* (John 6: 51) When we gather around

the Eucharist, sacrifice and sacrament of the Lord Jesus Christ, we reaffirm our faith in Life. We encounter death and dying with serenity and even joy. We let go of a lifetime of false securities. 'Poor in the things of this world, we are rich in those of heaven'. With the freedom of the children of God, we break the shackles of the responsibilities and affairs that seem so important in this life. We remember that *We have here no lasting city, but we seek one that is to come.* (Hebrews 13: 14). We speak of ourselves *to be strangers and pilgrims on earth ... seeking a homeland* (Hebrews 11: 13). We accept everything as a gift that we may offer each moment of life as a 'gift' for others to share with us. We see, as did Saint Francis of Assisi, everything in creation as intimately related to us because of God and so can even call on *Sister Bodily Death from whom no human can escape* with the trust and acceptance of Francis' *Canticle of the Creatures*, where St. Francis added these words praising God in 'Sister Bodily Death' shortly before his own death.

In the Eucharist we discover the source and pledge of Life. The Eucharist is our defiance of death. In the Eucharist our concerns and confusions are clarified, our discouragements and despair are dispelled, our faults are forgiven, our self-centeredness becomes love that welcomes all into a disarmed heart. How much more can we say about the Eucharist, 'heaven on earth', that we are privileged to possess, celebrate, and 'become' when our hearts and souls prepare for the encounter!

The month of November is dedicated to the souls who live their "co-eternity": the Saints in glory and the Souls in God's Mercy in Purgatory who are saved but await the fullness of eternal glory. Our Christian Charity and Catholic teaching remind us that these souls are always in need of our assistance through prayer and sacrifice. Padre Pio himself always advocated the prayer of Reparation through sacrifice for ourselves and for the Souls in Purgatory. We become 'victims' with Jesus, the Victim for our Salvation.

The Eucharist is 'communion'. Isn't that what we call it - Holy Communion? Death is separation and detachment, but the Death-Resurrection of Jesus in the Eucharist re-presented at every Liturgy, binds us to Christ and one another, and fills us with the graces of God's Love and Life. The Eucharist is Communion and Life! The Eucharist introduces us to acknowledge death as the mystery of Life it really is. The Eucharistic Lord embraces all who celebrate the Lamb Sacrificed and shared in the Paschal Mystery of the Passion-Death-Resurrection of Jesus. Thus, Eternal Life becomes the destination of all who 'Live Jesus' in time, and pass through the doorway of death into 'timelessness'.

The Eucharist is 'sacrifice'. The word 'sacrifice' means to 'make sacred'. When we unite ourselves and our lives to that of Jesus, we become the one we offer. The more we enter the 'sacrifice' with Jesus, the more we are assured of a share in His everlasting Life. Thus *life is not ended but transformed* (Preface I for the Dead).

The Eucharist is a 'pledge of future glory'. Each time we celebrate the Eucharist and receive the Body and Blood of Christ we share, according to our cooperation with God's grace, in the mystery of 'heaven on earth'. We live in mystery the Life we are called to share in the fullness of its reality. In faith, we live in hope - the pledge - of sharing in God's eternal Love. *For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance* (Romans 8:24).

In writing to Padre Agostino, Padre Pio writes: *The soul will not enter into its eternal rest until it is lost forever in that vast ocean of goodness where it will know what God knows, love what He loves and will only enjoy what is a joy to him. O my Jesus, I will live and hope and silence will be my strength as long as this life lasts.* (September 18, 1915)

To Padre Benedetto, Padre Pio writes: *To love God is the consequence of all awareness in active faith, into whose promises the soul plunges to be refreshed and to abandon itself to repose in sweet hope ... to induce further hunger and thirst and need of God. But may His will be done, I repeat continually and I long for nothing else but the perfect fulfillment of this will in the precise manner He demands, generously and firmly.* (June 19, 1918) *I am ready for anything, I strive to prepare myself for anything that may come ... O Way, Truth and Life, give me what my soul needs ... I have no more hope in anything except in the One Who is the Life, the Truth and the Way. I ask everything of Him and to Him I abandon myself since He has been and is everything to me.* (August 21, 1918)

Padre Pio offers his Spiritual Children the way to live life and anticipate eternity. We are to get 'lost (or better 'found') forever in that vast ocean of goodness' Who is Jesus in His word and particularly in the Eucharist. As we consume the Victim, we are consumed and are 'lost' to this world and found in Him, living already the 'pledge of future glory'. The spiritual effect of hope then fills our hearts and our minds with the assurance of God's presence so that we can have a greater inner peace and serenity. Strengthened inwardly, we are empowered to confront challenges, bear burdens, eliminate enemies through Christian love, entrust ourselves totally and unreservedly to God Who has been and is everything. Should these not be our attitudes in life, especially during a month that speaks of our need to Respect life at all its stages from conception to natural death and to anticipate with *joyful expectation the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Prayer after the Our Father at Mass) Who calls us and leads us to Life through the common experience of bodily death!?

The thought of the Holy Souls in Purgatory should help us celebrate God's mercy and the Life He promises we will share with Him. Praying for the Holy Souls should help us reflect more deeply on the mystery of the Communion of Saints that we are part of 'in hope', as the Pilgrim People of God, journeying through the desert of time till we cross the waters that separate us from our true Home. The month of the Holy Souls is also the last month of the Church year. November leads us into the beginning of a new liturgical year. Every end signals a new beginning! Too often we think only of the fact of dying, and physically 'being no more'. This is not Catholic ... not Christian! Jesus is Life ... even His Death celebrates the newness of Life! Christianity believes and lives The Life - Christ! The Catholic professes to be an 'original' Christian, thus one who lives Christ.

Let us reflect again upon words from Carlo, a most gifted young man who knew how to live and so was always serenely and joyfully ready to let go to enter "co-eternity" with God: *We often talk about here, there, up, down. This way of thinking and speaking relativizes everything. Since we are immersed in the here, we relate everything in time and space which enslaves us, which conditions us. If we free ourselves from these chains, if we become accustomed to that which is Up Above, if we gain confidence with the Beyond, if we consider life to be a trampoline towards Eternity, then death becomes a transition. It becomes a door. It becomes an in-between. It loses its drama. It loses its fatality. It loses its definitiveness. Exorcise death. Spiritualize death. Sanctify death. This is the secret. Then we will not think about, and we will not speak about, and we will not measure it in absolute terms, in terms of no return, of total destruction, but we will see death in the light, in the warmth and in the victory of the Risen Christ.* (Bl. Carlo Acutis)

A Spiritual Child of Padre Pio, a Christian, a Catholic, a person committed to a deeper relationship with God through prayer-sacrifice-acts of charity, professes by the mere fact of these elements to live in hope, a *hope that does not delude*. (cfr Romans 5:2) It is a 'vision' of fulfillment yet to be possessed, but already available to those who 'Live Jesus'. Let us all remember this when we pray for the Holy Souls. "Hope allows us to possess in our hearts what we as yet do not possess in our hands" We live

joyfully in mystery what we at one definitive instant in our life will live in the fullness of truth revealed. May the reality of death not shake us, but strengthen our trust in God Who calls us to life, and leads us from life to Life.

May God bless you; may Our Lady and good St. Joseph guide, guard, and protect you; and may Padre Pio look upon 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