

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,

June 2025

Alleluia! Christ is Risen, Alleluia! Christ is truly Risen. Alleluia!
In the Sacred Heart of Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary,
may you enter the loving embrace of the Eternal Father
Whose Holy Spirit was sent on the early Church
And fills us with Life and Love
and gives us His peace!

On the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary of Pompei, 8 May 2025, a new chapter in the life of the Church began. For 12 years, Pope Francis, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, shepherded the Church. After the period of mourning and the funeral, the cardinals prepared to enter Conclave. In two days, and five ballots, the Holy Spirit and they elected Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, of the Order of St. Augustine, to the responsibility of Vicar of Christ, Successor to St. Peter. In the sandals of St. Peter, Pope Leo XIV, the name by which Cardinal Prevost will be known, assumed the helm of the Ship of St. Peter. As so many Pontiffs before him, the Holy Father will now be the one, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, his particular counselors, and the prayers and obedience of the Church, to steer us through the rough and often turbulent waters of a world that at times seems to have gone wild.

The future of the Church can and will come, even today, only from the strength of those who have deep roots and who live on the basis of the sheer fullness of their faith. It will not come from those who just offer formulas. It will not come from those who always choose only the comfortable path - those who avoid the passion of faith, and declare everything that makes demands on man, everything that is painful, and forces him to sacrifice himself, to be wrong and obsolete, mere tyranny and legalism. Let us put it positively: The future of the Church, as always, will be decisively influenced yet again by the saints. That is, by the people who perceive more than rhetoric that is just 'modern'. ('The Church in the Year Two Thousand', 1970, Joseph Ratzinger)

Not too long ago, there was a question as to whether the Creed recited at Mass begin with "I believe" or "We believe". It might seem insignificant. It really is not. There is a nuance of difference that conveys a definite message. The Faith the Church/churches profess is the same but different. "I believe" is an expression of personal acceptance, understanding and commitment. The "we believe" is made up of many "I believe-ers", each of whom may have a "tweaked" version of what each believes. Thus, the "I believe" of the Nicene Creed is a personal acknowledgement of acceptance of all decided at Nicea concerning the "Catholic" Church and Her beliefs, especially concerning the Trinity and Christ and His teachings. So, each one, at the moment of the Profession, professes in their own name what they believe, and together the individual joins others and becomes the "we". It may sound/read convoluted but it is essential, unity through pluriformity.

Faith is not merely a noun. It is an exciting and active verb. Faith is not solely a matter of believing with the mind. Faith is an active profession of one's conviction. It is an ongoing 'development' in life of what is proclaimed with the lips. Unfortunately, the personal conviction of faith can become exhaustingly explained in sermons and writings, instead of witnessing the beauty of this Faith "in action".

Faith leads us into a realm we could never enter were it not for this gift, the "gift" of Faith received at Baptism. Faith helps us to see with the heart what our senses cannot perceive. Faith helps us to know without seeing that Someone greater than ourselves is the life-giving Source that creates as an overflowing presence(s) of His Eternal Love. Coming from Love Who is "The Other" (God Father, Son, Holy Spirit) it follows that Eternal Love will not destroy anything created in His own image and likeness. We are created as an overflowing of that Eternal Love.

If then we are called to share the Life of God, it follows that we are created for and called to Holiness. Holiness too is not a word that indicates some very limited, and at times mistaken, explanation of what it means to be *in the world but not of the world* (cfr. John 17: 16). Holiness too is an action word (verb). It indicates a definite direction one takes towards the becoming what we were created to be: to be one with God for all eternity; in other words to be saints!

Be holy because I am holy (Leviticus 11:44; 19:2). *As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect and conduct, for it is written, 'Be holy because I am holy'. Now, if you invoke as Father him who judges impartially according to each one's works, conduct yourselves with reverence during the time of your sojourning, realizing that you were ransomed ... with the precious blood of Christ as of a spotless unblemished lamb.* (1 Peter 1: 15-19) *You are not in the flesh, on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you ... But if Christ is in you ... the spirit is alive because of righteousness ... if you live ... by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body ... For those led by the Spirit of God are children of God ... and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may be glorified with him.* (Romans 8: 9-17)

St. Peter and St. Paul, the great columns of our Faith, whose solemnity we celebrate this month dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, speak so simply in their letters to the faithful. They remind us all, the faithful, who we are and how we are to let our lives enter the open door of the Father's Love for us - the Sacred Heart of Jesus His Son. The pierced Heart of Jesus is the Door to Life thrown wide open on Calvary for all by the lance of the centurion. That pierced Heart offers us access into the loving embrace of our Heavenly Father. That is where we 'find' holiness, and how we 'become' holy. Nevertheless, there are a number of ways we imagine holiness and strive to 'be' or 'become' holy.

- Holiness is a life lived in the Spirit, Who leads and transforms us according to His will.
- Holiness is the exclusive characteristic of God, of His very essence that becomes, or better to say should become, ours as well from the moment that God gave Himself to us, took us to Himself, made us His own, transforms us, and raised us that *we might be holy and unblemished before Him* (Ephesians 1:4) *... to equip the holy ones for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ ...* (Ephesians 4: 12)
- Holiness is allowing oneself to be possessed by the Master within us and permit Him to transform our lives and our minds and hearts, and thus possess a share in the very Life of God. *You are gods, all of you sons of the Most High.* (Psalms 82:6) Jesus answered, *'Is it not written in your law, 'I said, 'You are gods?''... can you say that the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world blasphemes because I have said, 'I am the Son of God?'* (John 10: 34 - 36)

- Holiness is commitment, decisiveness, initiative, divine action that envelops us in love and introduces our minds and hearts to the true image of the world in which we live.
- Holiness is a divine offer for us to enrich our relationship with God and be open to God's transforming grace.
- Holiness knowingly accepts the Mystery of the One Who calls. It is a participation in the immensity of God's gifts and love graciously placed at our disposal.
- Holiness is being what we were created to be.
- Holiness is willingly allowing all to happen in our life, through the fruits of our works consecrated by our free will offering to God of all we are and have.
- Holiness is actively accepting and fulfilling whatever leads us to live in the mystery of God,... and so much more.

The saints have always been the fonts and origins of renewal during the good times and during the difficult times of history, particularly that of the Church. Every age has dire need for saints. Their lives, words, actions show people how to live Gospel values in the world today. For this grace we must never stop imploring God. As we implore the saints' presence, prayers and protection, let us not forget that we are all called to be saints. Canonized saints are few compared to the billions of Catholic Christians who have lived down through the centuries, as well as other people whom God's love has opened the life of heaven for them to share.

The holiness and 'sainthood' of which we speak is our life of conformity to God's will in all things, at all times, in all ways, because God wills it. When we pray Thy will be done, most probably we do not really reflect on the impact the realization of those words would have on our life. Yet, that is what God-loving people strive to achieve for an entire life! To live in the will of 'The Other' Who is God, is to live what God wills, to live in His love, and thus to be holy, different, *not to conform to this world but to be transformed by the renewal of your mind* (Romans 12:1-2). We can offer the age in which we live this most valid witness of the authenticity of our Faith and the ever-present power of the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of those available to His prompting. Holiness does not necessarily change what a person does, but it most definitely changes or enhances why and how the person does it.

To his spiritual daughter, Raffaelina Cerase, Padre Pio writes: *Holiness means getting above ourselves. It means perfect mastery of all our passions. It means having real and continual contempt for ourselves and for the things of the world to the point of preferring poverty rather than wealth, humiliation rather than glory, suffering rather than pleasure. Holiness means loving our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. In this connection holiness means loving those who curse us, who hate and persecute us, and even doing good to them. Holiness means living humbly, being disinterested, prudent, just, patient, kind, chaste, meek, diligent, carrying out one's duties for no other reason than that of pleasing God and receiving from Him alone the reward we deserve. Briefly, Raffaelina, holiness contains in itself the power to transform a man into God, according to the language of the holy books.* (December 30, 1915)

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio we should all be intent on becoming saints. Padre Pio founded the Prayer Groups for the personal sanctification of its members. The Prayer Groups are challenged to enter a personal and deeper relationship with God. They are called to be faithful to the Church that they might be a 'leaven' in the world to help it rise to the full stature of the children of God: *until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature adulthood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Ephesians 4: 13) The Prayer Groups are to be a 'light' to enlighten those who walk in the darkness of disorientation, difficulty, doubt and so much more that inhibits one from recognizing the presence of a good and loving God in their life.

The various devotional and religious practices requested of those who are affiliates of the Association of the Prayer Groups of Padre Pio are rather minimal. The monthly Mass, Rosary, Adoration, Faith sharing and Discussion and whatever else a Prayer Group has decided upon for their monthly gathering are a basic minimum. They are intended to be an encouragement for all. Nonetheless, these practices are only beginnings. Each member should feel the desire, according to their personal vocation (single, married, professional, laborer, and so on) to continue with the devotional practices that keep their souls focused on the Lord. Daily spiritual reading and personal reflection daily, if possible, help the soul to be centered every day. Immersed in the spiritual matters, while totally involved in what is our daily life and responsibilities, helps keep a balance that fosters serenity, balance, and peace of soul, even in the midst of those unexpected “left turns” in life.

Holiness is not relegated to a once-a-month gathering of a few hours. Holiness is a lifetime experience that reaches its fullness only when God calls us to enter eternity. Earthly life is the preparation for Eternal Life. We must strive to progress, even if ever so slowly, to grow in our relationship with God and live in His grace. If we fail to move forward and upward, we will definitely backslide quickly beyond the point from which we had begun. The going gets more demanding each time we have to ‘begin again’.

Get rid of mediocrity! Mediocrity and lukewarmness are similar attributes of those who care less about things, and thus are careless about their spiritual growth. How we are within ourselves usually determines how we interact with others and live our lives. The spirit and the body form the one person. How the spirit grows will influence how the body (person) acts. When we are mediocre and tepid in our spiritual life and to those ‘things’ that pertain to our eternal salvation, then the matter is serious. In the Book of Revelation, the Lord speaks to the Church of Laodicea saying: *Because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of my mouth.* (Revelation 3: 16)

For those who cooperate and collaborate with the working of the Holy Spirit, He will fill that soul with spiritual fruits and gifts that flow from God’s loving and abundant grace. When the Spirit is within a person, how can anyone sit back and not allow the power of God and God’s Holy Spirit to excite, encourage and enable the person to let go and let God?! Let the enthusiasm of the promise encourage our will to will what God wills, no more, no less. Power will envelop you!

The word ‘enthusiasm’ itself easily refers to the power of the Holy Spirit. Two Greek words form the essence of the word: ‘en’= in, and ‘theos’ = God, thus enthusiasm deals with ‘the God within’, the God within each one of us. How can anyone remain spiritually lethargic when God and His graces are working within us! Although particular conditions and circumstances may impede certain physical actions, no one can hold back a heart enthused from being open to God in His Spirit!

Holiness is not unattainable. Holiness is a ‘universal call’ challenging everyone. Holiness is not ‘things to do’ or ‘words to say’, though they are all helpful and necessary. Holiness is a Person: GOD! Jesus has shown us the loving face of God. St. John reminds us: *God so loved the world that He sent His Son ... not to condemn the world but that the world should be saved through Him* (John 3: 16) Let us follow the example of the holy ones we honor and venerate. Padre Pio and all the saints, Our Blessed Mother and Jesus Himself, all tell us through word and example, that no matter what we do and say to help us keep on the road to holiness only one essential thing is required that is infallible and always successful ... to do the will of God ... *to do whatever He tells you* (John 14: 23). The will of God is that we be holy: *Be holy, because I, your God, am holy* (1 Peter 1: 16).

In the Universal Prayer attributed to Pope Clement XI we read: *Lord, I will whatever You will, I will it because You will it, I will it in the way you will it, I will it for as long as You will it.* There are no conditions, reservations, fine print clauses, or anything at all that might compromise the totality of the fulfillment of God's Most Holy Will in our life. If that is our prayer, each day, and we are faithful to that prayer, the obvious result must be that we are one with God's will, one with God's grace, and, it follows, HOLY! To be 'holy' is to Live God's Will without gloss, as St. Francis of Assisi told his brothers who accepted to live the life of the friars as a response to God's call. We are all 'saints in progress'. We are rough pieces of material in the hands of the Master Who will fashion us into the best work we can become. *He is the potter; we are the clay* (Isaiah 64: 8). Let Him fashion as He wills. *Anything that comes from the hands of God is holy and pleasing in His sight* (cfr. Ephesians 1: 4-6). So, cooperate trustingly and totally with His grace and designs and you will become what you would never have imagined, and more. May our heart's desire be: *Father, Your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven!* (Matthew 6: 10)

As we seek to become the saints we were destined to be, I pray that God bless you; Our Lady and good St. Joseph guide, guard, and protect you; and Padre Pio watch over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be a constant reminder of God's Extravagant Love for us, and through Jesus' obedience even to death, may we live the Father's Will to Life Eternal.

Peace and Blessings

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

National Coordinator