

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

Many of the venerable religious Orders of the Church number among their sisters and brothers delightful 'characters' whose words, example and 'antics' have become proverbial and legendary. Our own Capuchin Franciscan Province of the Sacred Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi has several of these memorable friars. One was a lay brother who came from Sicily to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. When young men came seeking admission to the Order in our Province often they would meet Brother Emmanuel in one of our friaries. He would inevitably ask: *Why have you come? Have you come for vocation, vacation, or to eat?!* He was not among the designated formation personnel, nor was he trying to be difficult with these aspirants to our life. He loved his religious vocation and wanted anyone else seeking to become brother with him in our Capuchin Family to reflect on the beauty of our life in response to God's call and their true motives for seeking entrance

Why did you come? Did you come for vocation, vacation, or to eat? As simple as it sounds, the question really does hit the heart of the matter. Many religious communities would have these words, *Why have you come?* posted on many of the doorways of their formation houses as a constant reminder to reflect on what led their aspirants – and possibly as a reminder to the more “weathered” members of the community - to that particular religious community. The question could be asked of all of us, regardless of the life we have chosen to lead. Unless God and God's will is in the equation, we cannot hope to succeed in life as we were destined by God's love. *What are you looking for?* was the question Jesus Himself asked the disciples who followed Him after the Baptist pointed Him out as the *Lamb of God*

Before the Ascension, St. Peter, conversing with the resurrected Jesus, looked at the disciple Jesus loved. *Peter asked Jesus, “What about him, Lord?” Jesus replied, “If I want him to remain until I return, what is that to you? As for you, follow me.” So the rumor spread among the community of believers[a] that this disciple wouldn't die. But that isn't what Jesus said at all. He only said, “If I want him to remain until I return, what is that to you?”* (John 21: 21-23). We have all responded to a call. And, we must be concerned about the sincerity of our response and our faithfulness to it, not so curious about others that we forget to *discover what is (y)ours to do* (St. Francis to brothers at the time of his death)

Nevertheless, there are those whose choice becomes a real burden to so many because they have come either 'to eat' or for 'vacation'. It may seem rather caustic and judgmental, but it must be said. When God calls, if you believe that God is calling, the response must be total in

every way and joyful. *God loves a cheerful giver* (2 Corinthians 9). Most often we have to work towards the totality of the response, but the heart must be focused on that goal and centered on the Lord, not on ourselves or issues and agendas.

Those who come 'to eat' are not necessarily looking for three square meals a day, although in some cases and countries that is definitely the case, higher social status with all the amenities. These are those who have wants they have transformed into needs. They come expecting to receive with no real intention of giving themselves in response to their call to serve.

Those who come for 'vacation' soon find that any walk of life has enough demands that the idea of a life's 'vacation' is soon dispelled. Whether it be religious life, married life, celibate life, and/or any other profession or job, stark reality strikes anyone expecting others to do everything while he/she reaps the benefits. Every life suffers with malcontents. These become busy bodies, or even worse. *For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat. We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies.* (2 Thessalonians 3: 10-14)

Malcontents can cause dissent, mischief, outright rebellion, and the like. Not accepting their own limitations, they target others. It does not matter what life we believe we are called to live, when we do not enter with wholehearted commitment and enthusiasm, eventually it leads to frustration, irresponsibility, infidelity, and often inner chaos.

Those who come for 'vocation' have heard God calling in the depths of their hearts. They recognize their own unworthiness. Yet, believing that it is God's will, aware of their own faults and sins, they respond wholeheartedly and strive every day to recommit themselves to faithfulness in the life they have accepted. They cheerfully advance through the joys and struggles, the successes and failures. Trust in obedience is key!

The one great asset in all this is obedience: obedience to God directly, or to God indirectly as He speaks to us through others. Obedience is still a virtue! It is a virtue whose name means 'to listen to'. Thus, 'obedience' is not a servile slavish succumbing to another's arbitrary demands, but a prudent attentive awareness to another's desires.

The spirit of 'individualism', and 'doing my own thing', are attitudes today, among all age groups, which make obedience seem anachronistic. It seems as though our spirit of independence and freedom have made us forget that the strength of a church, a nation, a family is based on the integrity of each member and an interdependence based on love. No longer does this central aspect of the life of Jesus the Lord and Master seem relevant to our society.

It is true that certain explanations of the excellence of obedience were centered on a distorted understanding and presentation of 'blind obedience'. All God's children are encouraged as well as expected to be open and obedient to God's Word and Will. How much more for those called ('vocation') to a life of greater intimacy with the Lord as 'bridge-builders' between God and His People? How much more for those called to serve Christ hidden in the vast masses of humanity loving them untiringly as the 'other Christ' each priest/religious - and for that, any Christian - is

called to be? Without obedience, how can any of us expect to be a living image of the savior who *became obedient to death, and to death on a cross* (Philippians 2:8-9)

Christ became obedient (Philippians 2: 8) ... Jesus was obedient to the Father. *My food is to do the will of Him Who sent me* (John 5:30). *Christ, though Son, learned obedience from what He suffered* (Hebrews 5:8). Since the obedience of Jesus, which He learned at such a high price, was so meritorious to our salvation, how much more must we as Christians realize obedience as essential to our relationship with God! We, the Mystical Body of Christ, cannot expect to be given different standards than our Head, Jesus, was given by His Father, God

- Jesus was obedient to the **Law of God**: He fulfilled all the religious practices: every year He went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Luke 2:41); He paid the Temple tax (Matthew 17: 24-27); He fulfilled the responsibility of synagogue prayer on the Sabbath *as he was in the habit of doing* (Luke 4:16; Mark 1:21).

- Jesus was obedient to **legitimate authority**. He did not enter into political debate with Pilate, He only affirmed: *You would have no authority if it were not given to you from above* (John 19:11). However, Jesus also confronted the legitimate authority of His people when it contradicted the authority of the Father: His parents when they questioned his remaining in Jerusalem unknown to them (Luke 2: 41...); the religious leaders when they accused Him of violating the Sabbath (Mark 2: 23...); the leaders of the people when He accused them of hypocrisy(Matthew 23) - in this regard however He added to His accusation of them *Do as they say but do not do as they do* (Matthew 23: 3).

- Jesus was obedient to His **parents** for thirty years, as we are told in the Gospels: *He was obedient to them* (Luke2:51)

All Priests, when they respond affirmatively to the call to be ordained, reiterate their obedience to the authority of the Church ordaining them and to all legitimate ecclesiastical authority. They place their hands in the hands of the ordaining prelate and promise obedience. If the priest is not obedient, eventually the souls he is called to shepherd will soon go astray, or at the least be misguided. Obedience is a sharing in the responsibility of feeding and tending God's flock, not *fleeing and milking them* as St. Anthony of Padua warned the clergy to whom he was speaking. We ourselves are tended and fed with the spiritual gifts of Sacred Scripture, Tradition, the Sacraments, the Magisterium of the Church.

Nevertheless, not just ordained priests but all baptized Catholics, all God's People, are called to be obedient to the voice of the One Who speaks to the heart, the soul, the person. The voice of God comes in various ways to all. Sometimes it is evident. Other times we are offered time to consider, question, decide. In each case, we are responsible for the destiny our choice decides to make. We know what is "not negotiable" either by nature or by law. We also know what offers us a choice. "To listen" and to respond is the essence of acting obediently, when we accept to do anything commanded that is not sinful.

In writing to the Campanile Sisters, Padre Pio writes: *Be content with obedience, which is never an easy matter for a soul which has chosen God as its portion, and resign yourself for now... Always humble yourself lovingly before God and men, because God speaks to those who truly*

have a humble heart before him, and he enriches it with his gifts (23August 1918). Obey despite the interior conflict, and without being comforted by obedience. Jesus' obedience in the Garden and on the Cross was marked by immense conflict, and he knew no relief; but he obeyed up to the point where he complained to the apostles and to his Father, and his obedience was excellent and all the more beautiful ... Keep cheerful then, and don't by any means doubt (undated).

Padre Pio's words to the Campanile Sisters are so powerfully expressed in Padre Pio's own life. The incident took place in 1931 and is edited briefly here. The excerpt is taken from the section entitled "serious measures are taken". It is from the English translation of the book *Padre Pio of Pietrelcina 'everybody's Cyrenean'*. *On the evening of 9 June 1931, the Father Guardian of San Giovanni Rotondo received a letter from Rome in which it was suggested 'if necessary' to convince Padre Pio that 'he must submit himself, docilely, to the serious measures and that he does all he can to persuade others also, if need be. Thank God, Padre Pio never needed to be exhorted to obey; he observed every word readily and in a docile manner. The 'serious measures'(23 May 1931) were the following: Padre Pio was to be deprived of all priestly exercises, except that of celebrating Holy Mass, which he could celebrate, not in the church, but in the private chapel inside the Friary, without the participation of anyone...I absolutely had to inform Padre Pio of the order...after vespers, when Padre Pio was, as usual, in the choir praying, I called him to the parlor and told him of the Holy Office's Decree...raising his eyes to heaven he said: 'May the will of God be done!' Then he covered his eyes with his hands, bowed his head and didn't breathe another word... Subsequently, Padre Pio did not make even the slightest complaint during the two years of this harsh trial. He was, as usual, docile, humble, obedient and patient with everyone. Those few who tried to comfort him in some way, never heard a complaint or slightest criticism against authority; for him it was God's will*

Padre Pio's extraordinary gifts from the very beginning of his religious life until his death in 1968, were the source of his many spiritual joys but also caused him many heartaches: misunderstood, rashly judged, slandered, silenced in everything but the private celebration of Mass. These are but a few generalizations to remember how intensely he lived the words he wrote to the Campanile Sisters and that he personally lived with such trusting composure. We are all 'children of obedience' called *to be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy* (Leviticus 19: 2), *to be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Matthew 5: 48), so that he can *do this as a remembrance of me* (Luke 22:19). The Eucharist ultimate seal of grace calling us to enter the Sacrifice and become a 'sacrament' of God's loving presence and grace for others in Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Uninterrupted for two thousand years by His priests and people, the 'obedience of the Cross' leads to the glory of new life – *Per Crucem ad Lucem (Through the Cross to the Light* – Pope St. Paul VI)). It is in this obedience that priests and faithful become one with the *Name above every other Name* (Philippians 2: 9)

Remember the words Padre Po would respond when he accepted someone who requested to be his spiritual child: *Do not embarrass me!* Infidelity to one's promises of faith commitment, he considered an embarrassment. Of course! One is elated at being a spiritual child accepted by the person himself, and then does as they please rather than what they promised. The commitment is not "legal" or "canonical". It could be considered more demanding because it

was articulated by one willingly binding themselves without reserve to what is not demanded either by the Church or the Gospels. Obedience is not an imposition but as a desire fulfilled and ever-fulfilling daily.

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio let us pray for all God's people. Whether Padre Pio Prayer Groups members or the baptized faithful-at-large, we pray that following the example of good shepherds we may grow in holiness through obedience to God's Will and God's Word in the Church. One of Padre Pio's maxims for us to remember says it so simply: *Where there is no obedience there is no virtue, where there is no virtue there is no good, where there is no good there is no love, where there is no love there is no God, and where there is no God there is no Paradise*

May God bless you; Our Lady and good St. Joseph guide, guard, and protect you; and our Spiritual; Father 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, O.F.M. Cap.

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