

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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May the Lord grant you all the precious gift of His peace.

The Ventrella Family was on good terms with the Capuchin Friars of the local Friary. With the arrival of Padre Pio the relationship improved and the visits became more frequent. A friend informed them that a friar reputed to be a saint was coming to the friary. The Ventrella sisters immediately went to the friary to meet him. Their first attempt at meeting Padre Pio was not successful. Encouraged however by Father Paolino of Casacalenda they returned the following day and their desire was satisfied. Their comment later was: *We understood we were before a religious of exceptional virtue: The goodness that transpired from his face and his limpid countenance immediately made an impression on our hearts. We were attracted to him by an indescribable force and almost every day we went to him to recommend ourselves to his prayers and to ask his advice.*

The Ventrella Sisters became recipients of a number of Padre Pio's correspondence and spiritual advice. The following excerpts are from the first letter we have that Padre Pio wrote, as he himself stated, to all four Ventrella Sisters. The letter is dated 3 December 1916 and it is addressed to the Ventrella Sisters Paolina, Vittorina, Elena and Filomena.

Happy are we who, contrary to our every merit, are already on the hill of Calvary by divine mercy. We have already been made worthy to follow the heavenly Master; we have already been numbered among that blessed group of chosen souls, and all this through a special act of divine mercy on the part of the heavenly Father. Let us not allow the blessed group to disappear from sight, but let us always keep ourselves tightly united to them, fearing neither the weight of the cross we have to carry, the long journey to be made, nor the steep hill we must climb.

Happy are we - this is the bold claim at the heart of the few lines of Padre Pio above. It is worth lingering over. Happiness, in the Christian spiritual tradition, is not a fleeting emotion but a deep, grace-rooted condition. To say *happy are we who are already on the hill of Calvary* is to say something paradoxical, even shocking. Calvary is not a place of comfort, triumph, or earthly joy. It is the place of suffering, surrender, and the total self-gift of Christ. Yet his words insist that those who find themselves there - those who have been drawn into the mystery of Christ's Passion - are blessed beyond measure. And this blessing is not earned. It is not the fruit of our merit, discipline, or holiness. It is pure mercy.

Padre Pio's words remind us to be **grateful for unmerited grace**. He emphasizes that we are "contrary to our every merit" already placed on Calvary. This is a profoundly Franciscan insight. St. Francis himself never saw his vocation as something he achieved; he saw it as something God *did* in him. The hill of Calvary is not climbed by human strength. It is entered by divine invitation. To be "already on the hill" is to be already participating in the saving work of Christ, already drawn into the intimacy of His suffering love. This is not a future hope but a present reality.

Gratitude leads to **the dignity of discipleship**. We “have already been made worthy to follow the heavenly Master.” Again, the emphasis is on divine action. We are *made* worthy. Christ Himself confers the dignity of discipleship. He calls, He chooses, He equips. The text echoes the Gospel truth that Christ’s call precedes our response. “You did not choose me,” Jesus says, “but I chose you.” To be numbered among the “blessed group of chosen souls” is to be part of the communion of saints - not merely those in heaven, but all those on earth who walk the path of Christ with sincerity and surrender.

This “blessed group of chosen souls” is not a spiritual elite. It is the community of those who have said yes to the cross. It is the Church in its deepest identity: the Body of Christ, united in His Passion and Resurrection. We are urged not to lose sight of this group, not to drift away from the communion of those who walk with Christ. There is a warning we must keep alive here: **discipleship is not automatic**. A true disciple is always vigilant, faithful, and intentionally in union with the community of believers. The spiritual journey is long, the cross is heavy, and the hill is steep. Without the support of the blessed group - without the communion of saints, the fraternity of believers, the companionship of Christ - we risk losing heart.

The faithful disciple then becomes a “son/daughter of **exhortation**”. We become like Barnabas in the Acts of the Apostles, who was called a “son of encouragement”. As those called to encourage others, we are entrusted to be “Pilgrims of Hope”. By perseverance, courage, and unity we do our part in building up the People of God. “Let us not allow the blessed group to disappear from sight.” This is a call to spiritual focus. In a world full of distractions, temptations, and competing narratives, it is easy to lose sight of the path of Christ. Padre Pio’s words urge us to keep our eyes fixed on the community of those who walk with Him. This is not merely a social or institutional reality; it is a mystical one. To remain united to the blessed group is to remain united to Christ Himself.

The exhortation continues: “Let us always keep ourselves tightly united to them.” This is a call to fraternity, to communion, to shared suffering and shared hope. The Christian journey is not solitary. Even Christ did not carry His cross alone; Simon of Cyrene was pressed into service. The saints do not walk alone; they walk in communion. As the Capuchin Franciscan that Padre Pio is, the tradition, especially emphasized, is the importance of brotherhood in the spiritual life. The cross is carried together. The hill is climbed together. The journey is made together.

Every journey is going to meet some obstacle or challenge. Padre Pio mentions three obstacles: **the weight of the cross, the long journey, the steep hill**. These are not metaphors for minor inconveniences. They are symbols of the real demands of discipleship: sacrifice, endurance, humility, and the willingness to suffer for love. The cross is heavy because love is costly. The journey is long because conversion is life-long. The hill is steep because holiness requires ascent - an upward movement toward God that challenges our comfort, pride, and self-reliance.

Yet Padre Pio is insistent that we should not fear these obstacles. Why (?), because divine mercy has already placed us on Calvary. The grace that brought us there will sustain us there. The Father who chose us will strengthen us. The Master we follow has already walked the path before us. The blessed group surrounds us. We are not alone, and we are not without grace.

From all this Padre Pio presents a profoundly hopeful picture. He acknowledges the difficulty of the Christian journey but frames it within the larger reality of divine mercy and communal support. The cross is heavy, but it is carried with Christ. The journey is long, but it is traveled with the saints. The hill is steep, but it leads to resurrection.

All the above implies that what we seek is **identity, an identity that conforms us to Christ**. “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me”. To be on Calvary is to be a disciple. To be a disciple is to be chosen. To be chosen is to be loved. And to be loved is to be called into the mystery of Christ’s saving work. This is not a burden but a privilege. It is not a punishment but a gift. It is not a tragedy but a participation in the greatest act of love the world has ever known.

Thus, the passage invites us to embrace our place on Calvary with gratitude, courage, and unity. It calls us to recognize the mercy that has brought us there, the dignity that has been bestowed upon us, and the community that surrounds us. It urges us to persevere, to remain faithful, and to trust that the God who began this work in us will bring it to completion.

Then Padre Pio continues:

Let us take courage at the consoling thought that, after the climb to Calvary, we will ascend even higher without any effort on our part, to the Holy Mount of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. By the divine goodness we are already half way up the mount of suffering, because we are absolutely determined to serve and love this divine goodness well. Courage, therefore, let us always be more steadfast with a strong hope.

Padre Pio’s words to the Ventrella Sisters offer a deeply Christian reflection on suffering, perseverance, and hope. Although the passage acknowledges the painful reality of the “climb to Calvary,” its central message is not one of despair but of confidence in God. Suffering is presented as a stage in a larger spiritual journey whose final destination is “the Holy Mount of God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” In this way, Padre Pio places earthly trials within the perspective of eternal life.

The image of Calvary is particularly significant. For Christians, Calvary represents Christ’s Passion, the ultimate expression of His love and self-giving. By referring to the “climb to Calvary,” Padre Pio suggests that suffering can become a participation in Christ’s own journey. The Christian does not suffer simply for the sake of suffering; rather, suffering can become meaningful when it is united with Christ and endured in faith. The image also reminds us that Calvary is not the end. Christ’s Passion leads to the Resurrection, and this gives Christian suffering a horizon of hope.

This is why Padre Pio immediately follows the image of Calvary with the promise that “we will ascend even higher” to the heavenly Jerusalem. His language expresses a profound trust in divine providence. He emphasizes that the final ascent will occur “without any effort on our part,” pointing to the grace and goodness of God. Salvation is ultimately God’s gift, not something that human beings can achieve by their own strength. The Christian’s task is to remain faithful and receptive to that grace. Cooperating with grace keeps us always responding “yes” to the Will of the Father.

There is another important idea Padre Pio offers that can be found in the statement that “we are absolutely determined to serve and love this divine goodness well.” Padre Pio connects hope with a concrete decision to love and serve God. Christian hope is therefore not passive optimism. It requires commitment, fidelity, and perseverance. The Sisters are encouraged to remain faithful even when circumstances are difficult because their love for God gives meaning and direction to their struggles. The phrase “we are already half way up the mount of suffering” is also striking. Padre Pio does not minimize the difficulty of the journey, but he encourages the Sisters by reminding them that they have already made progress. Their determination itself is evidence of God’s grace at work in them. This perspective can be comforting during periods of hardship: instead of focusing only on how much farther one must go, it is possible to recognize how far one has already traveled with God.

The ultimate emotional strength Padre Pio calls for can be found in the words *let us always be more steadfast with a strong hope*. This repeated call to “Courage” gives the passage its strength. Padre Pio knows that suffering can weaken the human spirit, so he responds by urging steadfastness and “a strong hope.” Hope becomes the virtue that enables Christians to continue when they cannot yet see the outcome of their trials. His message is ultimately one of trust: Calvary may be painful, but it is not the final destination.

For the Ventrella Sisters, Padre Pio’s words served as both consolation and encouragement. He invites them to see their suffering not as meaningless hardship but as part of a journey toward God. The passage teaches that faith does not deny pain; instead, it transforms the way pain is understood. With love for God, perseverance, and confidence in His goodness, the Christian can face suffering courageously, trusting that beyond Calvary lays the heavenly Jerusalem.

May Jesus our Lord and God, Mary our Heavenly Mother, Joseph the silent presence of strength and faith-filled balance, and Padre Pio our spiritual guide in time guide, guard, and protect us on our journey up the hill and beyond. The Father calls, the Spirit enlivens and strengthens, and the Son reminds us that where He was (earth-time) we are and are called to be where He is (eternity with God-heaven). When doubts, difficulties, disillusionment, and the like get in the way, let us remember “with God all things are possible”. God wants us with Him and will stop at nothing to help get us there. All we have to do is listen to God and live the Father’s Will.

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