

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.

September for St. Francis of Assisi and for St. Pio of Pietrelcina was a powerful month for both “the Seraphic Father” and “the faithful spiritual son”. Both were signed with the gift of the Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ – St. Francis on the heights of Mount La Vera in Tuscany and St. Padre Pio in the stillness of the Choir of the original Church of Our Lady of Grace in San Giovanni Rotondo. Both bore their “gifts” with gratitude to Almighty God for this ultimate opportunity to be conformed to Christ even in His Passion and Death. This “conformity” with Christ leads to a share in the Resurrection-Glory. Sharing in the mystery of His Passion-Death, we carry the wounds of Christ in the depths of our hearts and the daily responsibilities of life. We make it clear that we joyfully accept the Father’s Will as we live in the mission of the Son.

The Franciscan Family has come to celebrate the last of the Franciscan Jubilees - the Transitus (Transitioning from time to eternity) of our Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi on October 3rd/4th. Francis prepared for the great journey invoking “Sister Bodily Death” to come and accompany him into the eternal praises of the Lord His God. Francis suffering terribly sang his anticipation of the “Great Encounter”. St. Pio of Pietrelcina for 50 years was a living image of the Crucified in a world quickly growing cold to the warmth of the love of God. Padre Pio passed in his room at 2:30 AM repeating "Jesus, Mary" . He peacefully awaited the Great Encounter, not of a lifetime but of Life!

Throughout his life Padre Pio of Pietrelcina spoke about bodily death with a striking combination of realism, longing, faith, and peace. For him, death was not simply the biological end of human existence. It was the passage from earthly life - which he often experienced spiritually as an “exile” - toward eternal communion with God. His words about death therefore cannot be understood apart from his profound love for Christ and his confidence in eternal life. Thus, while celebrating St Francis of Assisi in this Jubilee year of his death, the sisters and brothers of the Prayer Groups of Padre Pio also celebrate and reflect upon his spiritual son, St. Pio of Pietrelcina, and how he prepared for the great awakening to come after this cloudy walk of life. An earthly life overshadowed by the effects of the sin of our first parents awaited the Incarnate Son to brighten the way. Christ the Light healed the blindness and opened the eyes of the heart from the barriers of fear, confusion, discouragement, hatred, animosity, and so much more. Thus, conformed to Christ, Padre Pio bore the pain and confusion of his own sharing in the Passion-Death of Jesus. He encouraged the suffering souls that came to him to look beyond and see with the eyes of the heart and with certain faith the beauty and Love of the One hidden in the challenges they were experiencing.

One of the most striking aspects of Padre Pio’s thought is that he could speak of death with a serene awareness and joyful anticipation. The official Padre Pio records indicate that he referred to death as a “faithful friend”. This language is remarkable because death is ordinarily something human beings fear and resist. Padre Pio did not deny the natural seriousness of death, but his faith changed its meaning.

Death could become the doorway through which the soul finally reached the God whom he had loved throughout his earthly life.

In one of his letters, Padre Pio expressed this longing with extraordinary intensity: “I call her by day, I call her by night.” He was speaking of death. He describes this desire as something arising spontaneously from the depths of his soul. Yet this was not a desire for nonexistence. He was not longing simply to stop living. Rather, he longed to pass beyond the limitations of earthly existence and to enter the presence of God.

This distinction is essential. Padre Pio’s desire for death was ultimately a desire for God. In another passage, he speaks of being separated from God as living in exile and longs for the eternal homeland. He writes of wanting the passage of time to hurry because every passing day brings him closer to the “eternal Sun.” The imagery is significant: death is not presented as darkness swallowing the person into nothingness, but as the end of separation from divine light and encounter with the Origin and fullness of Life. In this Light we live, and move, and have our being for eternity.

Padre Pio could therefore say something that, outside a Christian spiritual context, sounds almost paradoxical: “What a terrible thing it is to live from the heart!” He immediately connects this with a mysterious spiritual death: dying continually, yet dying in such a way that one does not cease to live. His phrase “living by dying,” expresses one of the deepest themes of Christian spirituality. The death of the self-centered person becomes the beginning of a fuller life in God. Thus, St Pio of Pietrelcina could say with the words of his Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi: “such is the good that awaits me, that all pain is a delight”.

His letters reveal that his longing for bodily death was connected with the immense suffering he experienced during his earthly life. On 11 November 1914, while suffering from serious physical weakness he wrote to Padre Agostino. The official archive describes that in this letter he describes how he is being deeply oppressed by bodily infirmities. His longing for release was therefore not an abstract philosophical idea. It arose within the concrete reality of illness, suffering, spiritual struggle, and an intense desire for God.

In another letter, Padre Pio speaks with extraordinary frankness about the burden of mortal existence: “Alas, my Father, how hard this mortal life is.” He then describes earthly life as “cruel”, because it separates him from the fullness of divine love. He asks why he cannot finish this earthly existence and enter eternal rest. Yet he also recognizes that life remains a gift from God. Even while longing for heaven, he says that earthly life must be endured because God sustains it and cares for it. We are born to know, love, and serve God, thus living the purpose for our creation. No two persons are exactly alike, even in God’s will for us. St. Francis of Assisi said as he lay dying: “I have done what is mine to do, now you must discover what is yours”. My "personal" vocation within a "common" vocation I share with others : single, married, religious, priestly lives and so forth. Within this “common” vocation that many share, each person receives a specific calling – vocation within the vocation - suited to that person alone, no one else. No matter how similar vocations can seem, each one is suited by God to the person entrusted with the “nuance” that makes every vocation unique.

Padre Pio was not one who rejected earthly life; he lived it fully and we could say “in the view of millions”. The tension of suffering was real and he expressed it in truth. But his joyful trust in the Hope God instilled in his life because of his faith offered him the ability to live in the “perfect joy of St. Francis”. His spirituality contains a tension: he longs intensely for heaven, but he accepts whatever God asks of him on earth. Life is difficult, sometimes painfully so (He was silenced by the Church for some time, questioned by his own brothers, obsessed by the evil one by beatings, hideous forms, and so much more.), but life always remains God’s gift and the only means available for a heaven-bound journey.

Consequently, the Christian response is not to seize death but to surrender oneself to Life/life and divine providence.

This surrender can be seen in Padre Pio's understanding of death as sacrifice. Speaking of his own spiritual condition, he wrote: "now, thanks be to Heaven, the victim has already ascended the altar of holocausts and is willingly laying itself upon it." The imagery is profoundly sacrificial. Death is understood through Christ's Passion: the Christian does not merely suffer death but can offer his life to God in union with Christ. (Remember the words of Jesus: "I have the power to lay it(life) down and the power to take it up again.") This is especially meaningful because Padre Pio's physical existence was itself marked by his identification with the suffering Christ. In his account of receiving the stigmata 20 September 1918, he described an overwhelming experience in which he felt that he was dying. He wrote that his heart seemed ready to fail and that he would have died if the Lord had not intervened to sustain him. His bodily suffering therefore became, in his spirituality, a participation in Christ's Passion rather than merely an unfortunate physical condition.

For Padre Pio, bodily death was not isolated from the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. Christian hope depends upon the conviction that death does not have the final word. Padre Pio emphasized the Resurrection as the decisive Christian answer to death: Christ, by dying and rising, transforms death from an absolute ending into a passage toward life. Padre Pio's own approach to death must be understood within precisely this faith.

There is also something deeply human in Padre Pio's words. He did not pretend that death was emotionally easy. His spirituality does not erase the seriousness of suffering, physical weakness, or the fear associated with mortality. Instead, faith gives these realities a larger horizon. The body dies, but the person is destined for God. The earthly pilgrimage ends, but the homeland remains.

This helps us understand why Padre Pio could call death a friend. Death itself is not the object of his deepest desire. GOD IS AND ALWAYS WILL BE! Death becomes "friendly" because, in his understanding, it removes the final barrier between the soul and its eternal destiny. His longing for death is therefore best understood as longing for complete union with God. He is true son of his Spiritual Father, St. Francis of Assisi, who called on "Sister Bodily Death" to accompany him home.

Padre Pio's words challenge us to reconsider our own attitude toward mortality. Modern culture often tries to hide death, postpone thinking about it, or speak about it indirectly. Padre Pio does the opposite. He confronts death openly, but he does so through hope. His message is not that earthly life is worthless. It is that earthly life is a pilgrimage. We are here temporarily, and our ultimate destination is God.

Our beloved St. Padre Pio died on 23 September 1968, after a lifetime in which suffering, prayer, and devotion had prepared him for the moment he had so often contemplated. The official account of his life describes him dying as he had lived, holding his Rosary, invoking the names of Jesus and Mary. His attitude toward bodily death therefore was not merely something he spoke or wrote about. It became the conclusion of his earthly pilgrimage.

His words leave us with a profound Christian paradox: we should value life as God's gift while remaining detached from it. We should accept the body and care for it while remembering that bodily existence is temporary. We should not seek death for its own sake, but prepare ourselves for the eternal life to which death can lead.

Padre Pio of Pietrelcina teaches that death ultimately has no victory of "nothingness" over life. It was the final passage of a soul toward the One whom Padre Pio had loved throughout his entire existence.

His famous longing to “live” after dying expresses the heart of his spirituality. By his words and actions we were taught: death is transformed by love, suffering is transformed by faith, and earthly existence finds its final meaning in the hope of eternal communion with God.

Eight hundred years have transpired since the passing of the Poverello of Assisi. In our own times, his faithful son, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, continued the legacy of the Seraphic Father. St. Francis had a hope-filled relationship with life and death. Eight hundred years later - in our own time - his faithful spiritual son Padre Pio of Pietrelcina teaches us that the same relationship continues in all who accept life as a gift and death as the ultimate encounter with Life Himself. GOD!

This reflection was not intended to be somber or frightening. The saints to whom we pray - St. Pio of Pietrelcina included – remind us by their lives and deaths that we have an eternal glorious future awaiting us with God. "Pray, hope, don't worry!" We PRAY to grow in our relationship with God; we HOPE always reaching for what the heart desires because of the Faith we have through prayer; thus, we DO NOT WORRY because the God with Whom and to Whom we pray takes us by the hand and leads us to Himself.

Dear sisters and brothers of the Prayer Groups of Padre Pio, and even those who follow each month but are not formerly associated with the Groups, you are all in prayer. May God bless you, Our Lady guide-guard-protect you as She leads you to Her Son Jesus, and Good St. Joseph protect you on life's journey. You are all in my prayers and Masses.

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