

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!

No one is born a saint but he/she has a lifetime to become one. Saints are creatures whose human nature is elevated by grace. It strengthens and perfects us day-by-day when we trust and cooperate with this divine gift. God's Grace and graces are offered us that we might become what we were created to be; that we might recover what was lost when our First Parents placed their will before the Will of our Father and Creator. The saint is the person who has taken the *narrow road* (Matthew 17: 13-14) and allows the action of grace to transform his/her soul and thus re-creates the person *in the image and likeness of God* (Genesis 1: 26-27). We may have heard the saying, *What I am is God's gift to me. What I become is my gift to God* (Eleanor Powell)...and ...*God and I together can do the impossible* (rf. Luke 1: 37) Without God we can do nothing of true worth that is everlasting in its effects.

Supernatural grace perfects and does not destroy nature. Thus it is vital that our lives be rooted in the working of grace and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Before any of us can ever hope to be an example of virtue, we must become that *perfect person come to full stature in Christ* (Ephesians 4: 13) in the ordinary daily matters of living. The Spiritual Children of Padre Pio accept to 'Live Jesus', to allow Jesus, the Christ, to be manifest in their words and deeds, and especially in their personal character and external demeanor.

Health, culture, character, environment all contribute to this process. God's grace does not destroy a person's right and ability to act on his/her own initiative. Grace does not take away free will. God would never reduce us to mere robots. Grace respects the character and the will of each and every individual. We are the ones who accept or reject the challenge to allow the love God has for us to take hold of our lives. We are the ones who decide to live in *holy fear* (Proverbs 19: 23) of offending God. This 'fear' is not the uncontrolled anxiety of being condemned by an Eternal Just Judge. It is a 'fear' of wounding the love of a Compassionate and Loving God Who brought us into being, died for us, and calls us to an ever more intimate relationship with Him. This 'fear' of ourselves and trust in Him helps us to recognize the daily miracles of grace around us, as we yearn for that time when we will see Him in the reality of the Eternal Life promised His faithful children.

An Italian psychologist, speaking of the humanity of the saints, wrote: *The soul of the saints is not like the Dead Sea whose waters are never agitated by so much as a breeze, and in which*

there is no sign of life. The soul of the saint resembles rather the Sea of Genesareth (Sea of Galilee) that has terrible storms and can be calmed only by the hand of the Master. Saints had their ups and downs, delusions and difficulties, weaknesses and temptations. They also had their faults, like those that Saint Alphonsus Liguori speaks of when he says that he would consider himself a happy man if he could be freed from these faults a quarter of an hour before dying.

Remember that not all the saints were as innocent as we are told was Saint Aloysius Gonzaga. Consider St. Mary Magdalen (*from whom seven demons were expelled*-rf. Luke 8:2), St. Mary of Egypt (*whose notoriety as a woman of loose morals was proverbial in her area of the world*-Proverbs 2: 16 allusions in biography), St. Margaret of Cortona (*who was a kept woman*), St. Paul (*who was rather violent*), St. Augustine (*whose Confessions speak of the soul of a young intellectual controlled by his passions*), St. Francis Borgia (*about whom the philosopher Leibnitz remarked regarding the ingenious method Francis used to overcome his exaggerated love for wine*). Even St. Vincent de Paul, the loving Father of Charity, had a very grouchy character and was subject to anger. Everyone knows that this was also the case with St. Francis de Sales. Even our spiritual Guide and Father, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, strong and gentle, without any false shades of some prefabricated sanctity, presented as 'impeccable' in character to his admirers and defenders, is authentically and surprisingly very human. His childhood pranks attest to his humanity in process. His needs and trials as a religious are all signs of a nature challenged by circumstance or directly by God.

Unless God and God's Will is in the equation, we cannot hope to succeed in life as destined by God's love. *What are you looking for?* (John 1: 35-42) is the question Jesus asked the disciples who followed Him after the Baptist indicated Jesus as the Lamb of God. The "For Whom are you looking" eventually becomes "What are you looking for?" If I am seeking a life of fulfillment in God's Will and eternal life with God, then I must set priorities, no matter how demanding they may seem.

One of our brothers years ago would ask the candidates he met: *Why did you come? Did you come for vocation, for vacation, or to eat?* Brother was simply reminding the young men that 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). When the heart is focused and centered on the Lord, the journey begun will have its goal achieved. The answer to that simple question demands a total surrender to the One Who calls to whatever state in life.

Obedience to God may be directly from God, or indirectly as He speaks to us through others. In both cases obedience to the call is still a virtue. Thus, 'obedience' is not a servile slavish succumbing to another's arbitrary demands. Obedience is a prudent attentive awareness to another's desires. The word is translated 'to listen to'. We hear and "listen to" God who invites us to accept His invitation to "follow Me".

The spirit of 'individualism', and 'doing my own thing', are attitudes today, among all age groups. It makes obedience seem anachronistic. Our spirit of independence and freedom can affect the strength of a church, nation, family when independence diminishes our

interdependence based on love. All are expected to be open and obedient to God's Word and Will. More is expected for those called ('vocation') to a life of greater intimacy with the Lord as 'bridge builders' between God and His People. This is true also for those called to serve Christ hidden in the vast masses of humanity. Without obedience, how can any of us expect to be a living image of the Savior who *became obedient to death, and death on a cross* (Philippians 2:8-9)?

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). The obedience of Jesus was fulfilled on the Cross to the last drop of His Precious Blood. This act of His obedient surrender to the Father's Will redeemed us. As Christians do we 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, received!

- Jesus was obedient to the **Law of God**: 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 never entered 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 responded to the legitimate authority of His people when it contradicted the authority of the Father, to His parents when they questioned his remaining in Jerusalem unknown to them (Luke 2: 4), to the religious leaders when they accused Him of violating the Sabbath (Mark 2: 23), to 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**: *He was obedient to them* (Luke 2:51).

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* (23 August 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 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. He was 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 repeats to us now. All of us are 'sons/daughters 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 only command of Jesus that has been faithfully kept uninterruptedly for two thousand years by His priests as ministers and the People of God by participation in the Mystery. The Eucharist is the continued act of thanksgiving the Church offers through the centuries of Jesus' act of total obedience unto death for the life of us all. It is in this obedience that we priests, and all the faithful, will become one with the *Name above every other Name* (Philippians 2: 9).

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio each is called out from among the people (*ek-klesia - church - a people called out* – cf Romans 1: 6) Clergy and lay alike, are sent to be with all whom they encounter, as one who stands in the breach between time and eternity. Some by ordination, others by Baptism, but all are called to follow Jesus and act in His Name. 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.*

Be directed and molded by the action of God's grace. Through our personal faith commitment, the task of overcoming our own weaknesses takes shape and progresses. Our life is slowly lifted up to greater heights as our mind and heart are more in harmony with God and His holy Will.

God is a jealous God (Leviticus 24: 14-16)! God does not want other things to disrupt the loving relationship He has established between Himself and His creation. He knows we can become that *new wine in new wineskins* (Matthew 9: 16-17) that Jesus challenges us to become. The saints we revere and honor all tell us that it is not only possible but necessary. How we accomplish this task is easier than we might imagine. Among the many 'things' we could do, I can think of three that are essential:

Abandon yourself to the working of the Holy Spirit.

Be committed to your own conversion.

Be an enemy to duplicity. Remember that You are what you are before God and nothing more (St. Francis of Assisi), and I like to add 'nothing less than a child of God called to eternal life'.

Years before Vatican Council II and its reminder of our Universal Call to Holiness, Padre Pio wrote to Erminia Gargani (January 27, 1918): *I have never ceased, nor will I cease to pray to the most sweet God that He may be pleased to accomplish His holy work in you; that is, that you may have a strong desire and intention to reach perfection in the Christian life; a desire which you must love and nurture tenderly in your heart, as the work of the Holy Spirit, and a spark of His divine fire.*

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, let us accept the gift of our humanity with gratefulness; our difficulties, burdens, challenges, and even our sins as traveling companions on the road of life who help us keep our feet well grounded in reality, so that we can yearn and strive for where our heart is directed - Life with God in Heaven. And let us all become saints, through obedience to God's Will and Word. It takes only a lifetime, and God will be with us all the way!

May God bless you; Our Lady and good St. Joseph guide, guard, and protect you; and Padre Pio, our Spiritual Guide and Father, watch over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings

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

National Coordinator