

# Padre Pio Prayer Groups

National Office

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

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***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 fills us with Life and Love!***

During a very dark moment for the Church in France, the French Revolution had many priests and religious executed. Sixteen Carmelite nuns were taken to prison and ultimately condemned to death. The accusation was that they were 'Christian and religious. One of the nuns exclaimed, 'What joy! We die because we belong to Jesus Christ!' As the nuns arrived at the place of execution, they all began to sing hymns to God and Our Lady. The singing became fainter and fainter as each sister was beheaded before a cheering crowd. The last sister to be executed was the mother prioress, Sr. Teresa of St. Augustine, whose last words were: *Love is always victorious. Love can do all things.*

Their love for Jesus was rooted in His love for them and all of us. Grace is God's Life and Love. When we cooperate with God's grace and the power of love, His Love will strengthen our hearts and wills to effectively encounter whatever challenges may come our way, even death!

The Church's traditional celebration of the month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus encourages us to keep focused on His love. It is the Eternal Love of the Redeemer for humanity. This love is represented in images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is the Love we encounter in His Divine Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar. This Gift of the Eucharist has repeatedly been challenged from the time Jesus offered His Love and His very Self as 'Viaticum' ('food for the journey') for us, down to the present day.

The gospels recount how one day some adversaries of Jesus approached Him and said: *Teacher, we know that you are right in what you say and teach, and show deference to no one, but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth* (Luke 20: 21). The Gospels let us know what the attitude of many of the leaders of Israel was toward Jesus. It takes little if any imagination for one to recognize the deception with which these men thought they could entrap Jesus. They attempted to catch Him off guard by praising Him. Nonetheless, in this deceptive encounter, they pronounced a great truth: Jesus never lied; He spoke what He knew and believed and proclaimed it 'without gloss'!

Again, the scribes and chief priests sought to entrap Jesus with a question regarding paying the tax to the emperor. However, their question openly acknowledged that Jesus was a person of integrity whose bond was His word. Why, then, did they not listen to His words?! Why were they unable or unwilling to let those words touch their hearts and transform their lives?! Only they really knew what they were seeking so dearly that they refused words of eternal life (John 6: 69).

When challenged with the discourse on the body and blood of Jesus as real food for human beings, many of the disciples left Jesus. How much alike are we at times! We may not "walk away" bodily. However, there are many of our Catholics who walk away in their hearts! Then those who do not share our Eucharistic belief consider our adoration of the Eucharist as "archaic superstition, foolish charade, sinful form of pagan worship of things". People would rather not be challenged beyond themselves.

Security, comfort, convenience, and the like, set safe limits beyond which we fear to tread, or cautiously skirt, even when heaven is within our grasp. It's all faith. How can I be convinced if I do not believe? The Divine Presence makes the Church as the Church perpetuates this Mystery of our Redemption through the centuries re-presenting the Sacrifice of the Lamb of God on Calvary. We are made partakers in the sacrifice once for all offered on the Cross whose grace-filled effects continue to fulfill the hearts of those who *believe and are convinced* (John 6: 69). He is here, in the tabernacle, at Mass, at the Communion received, at Adoration. The words of Jesus challenge us to go beyond those limitations that confuse us and to enter a committed relationship with our Lord and Savior. *Believe in Jesus*, and you trust Him to be able to do what He tells you He can do. *Believe Jesus*, and you take Him at His word and accept to live what He tells you, everything He tells you, no matter how humanly impossible it may seem for a limited human mind to comprehend.

Jesus made it clear when He told the people: *I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty* (John 6: 35) ... *I am the bread of life ... This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die ... Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh ... unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you ... Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life* (John 6:50-55). The people understood quite well what Jesus was saying. They understood so well that *because of this many of His disciples turned back and no longer went about with Him* (John 6: 66). When Jesus asked His 'inner circle', the Apostles, if they wished to leave as well, Peter replied, *Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to know and believe that You are the Holy One of God* (John 6: 68-69).

*Lord, where can we go?! Words of eternal life! Know and believe!* (John 6: 68-69). How deeply these words of Peter enter the depths of our hearts. If Jesus is our Lord and Savior, then His words are true, thus we acknowledge and accept them without gloss, or do we?!

At the Last Supper Jesus took bread, broke it and said: *This is my body which is given for you* (Luke 22: 19); *He took a cup of wine saying: This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood* (Luke 22: 20). We cannot doubt the words or intent of the Lord. Bread and wine, 'overshadowed' by the Holy Spirit at the invocation of the priest repeating the words Jesus used at the Last Supper, and intending to fulfill the will of Jesus, *Do this in remembrance of me* (Luke 22: 19), truly become the living Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, sacramentally, yet no less truly present. Remember that even the Old Law and other peoples had their "bloody and un-bloody" sacrifices.

The Church has held on to the certainty of the words of Jesus and the awesome reality of His Divine Presence on our altars and in our tabernacles from the first time the early Church together with Mary and the Apostles gathered to 'break bread' in remembrance of Jesus. The Real Presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist is the center of our life. It is the Life-giving, Life-focusing, and Life-sustaining Gift of God for His Church.

All the Sacraments have their reason for being because of the Eucharist. This 'Center' is so essential for the world that our own beloved Padre Pio said: *It is easier for the earth to exist without the sun than without the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass!* Thus, we cannot exist without the Divine Presence in the Eucharist. Take God away for an instant and all ceases to be! God's 'place among us' is the tabernacle. Whatever the tabernacle looks like or is made of - great or simple, ornate or plain, in a cathedral or in a mission station in the thickest jungle - it is the unique dwelling place of God on earth. It is the point of encounter between heaven and earth. It is where Jesus calls and awaits his disciples to come to the feet of the Master. It is the 'magnet' that attracts the silent heart to come closer to the One hidden within, from where His embrace, words, touch are no less real than if they were offered by the historical Jesus walking the roads of Israel. The Tabernacle is *none other than the House of God and the Gate of Heaven* (Genesis 28: 17) where we encounter the majesty of God.

From within His earthly 'residence' Jesus repeats the words of Revelation: *I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me* (Revelation 3: 20). The door of His heart was opened on the Cross by the lance of a soldier so that our hearts - freely open to His invitation - might eagerly and easily enter into the embrace of Divine Love. This is our faith! This is a central truth of our Catholic Faith! Why do so many of the faithful 'excuse' themselves from celebrating the Eucharist? Why are many of our churches desolate and the Eucharist left alone? How much time, money, and even safety people invest to be able to have a mere glimpse of some social, political, even religious personality. How many sacrifices people are ready and willing to make, even at the cost of their own needs, to celebrate a creature like ourselves albeit talented and/or of some importance. Yet, spending time with our Creator-Redeemer-Sanctifier present in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is easily relegated to days on which there is an 'obligation' to assist at the Eucharist. And many on those days often are present as spectators and not participants. They keep looking at their watches because they have 'better' or 'more important' things to do?! From the time Jesus gave Himself to us in the Most Holy Eucharist, the tabernacle should have become for us a cathedra of truth, a school of divine teaching, a refuge for the needy, a source of joy for those in sorrow, a place where in the solitude and silence of our heart we look at Him and He looks at us and we are at peace in, with, and through *the One in Whom we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17: 28). It is from here that Jesus reveals Himself to all good and sincere souls, to hearts that are simple and fervent. He teaches us secrets kept from the proud and self-righteous: *I give you praise Father for You have kept these things from the learned and the clever and have revealed them to the merest children* (Matthew 11: 25). The wisdom of the Eucharist is the wisdom of the Cross, *a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles* (1 Corinthians 1: 23).

From the recesses of the tabernacle Jesus speaks to our heart. In the silence of those moments spent with Jesus, He invites us to STOP our frenetic pace and be silent, to LOOK at the mystery before our eyes or hidden within the tabernacle and gaze upon the Lord with our hearts, that we might hear and LISTEN to the voice that speaks to our inner being in whispers that break through and overwhelm the cacophony of the world and all its seductive and alluring invitations. The Eucharist speaks of the generosity and limitless love of God for all creation. The Eucharist calls us to be channels of God's love for others. The Eucharist speaks of the love of Jesus for His Heavenly Father. The Eucharist speaks of a 'divine emptying' for the redemption of a wayward and sinful humanity. The Eucharist speaks of the One Who makes reparation in Himself for those who cannot, and invites us all to accept the challenge to continue this act of reparatory love in our lives. The Eucharist speaks of one great act of Eternal Love continued in time until all signs and mysteries are revealed in the eternity of God. The Eucharist speaks of 'creation divinized' that makes holy those who celebrate and receive worthily.

We become what/whom we eat! (Do we allow Jesus to 'take over'? Do we become Jesus in our thoughts, words, actions?!) The Eucharist is a Presence that quietly and powerfully intercedes on our behalf, to be our help, our comfort, and our life. Regardless of our indifference, ingratitude, inconsistency, disregard, disrespect, difficulties, doubts, even 'practical' denial of His Presence, He is still there and with us. What is so wonderful is that He, our Lord and Savior, JESUS, never tires of our company, or waiting for it, even if we respond for only a fleeting moment, or even turn a deaf ear to His loving invitation *to come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and rest a while* (Mark 6:31).

Padre Pio writes to his spiritual daughter Rafaelina Cerase: *His immense love, that same love that induced Him to leave the bosom of His Eternal Father in order to come on earth and take upon Himself our fragility and our debts and satisfy the divine justice for us, found an admirable means in which He showed His exceedingly great love for us ... In His own name and ours He asked Him (the Father) also: 'Give us this day, Father, our daily bread'. But what bread is this? In Jesus' request here, failing a better interpretation, I recognize primarily the Eucharist. Oh, the exceeding humility of the Man-God! ... He is the love and delight of the eternal Parent* (February 23, 1915).

We encounter this love and delight of the Eternal Father in the tabernacle. In the Tabernacle:

- Jesus seems inert, non responsive, insensitive to the pains, sufferings, hopes and dreams of those who come to Him so that we may open our hearts to trust in God's time Who sees all as present and knows the needs that will fulfill our lives and set us free from what controls us.

- Jesus is hidden in the Eucharist, without physical beauty or great splendor, that we might appreciate better a hidden and humble life, rather than be boastful and inconsiderate of others because of some talents and treasures we may have received.

- Jesus lives in the solitude and silence that we might come to appreciate and love moments of quiet and recollection that offer us greater opportunities to hear the voice of God with our hearts above the noise of a world that seems afraid to hear the 'whisper within'. *Be still. Know that I am God* (Psalm 46).

- Jesus is obedient, gentle, and meek, where He suffers silently from our apparent lack of faith, our indifference to His words and promises, possibly even our doubt concerning His Presence 'really' there. Here, He just waits for us, inviting us with His silent presence, radiating a grace that loves us into goodness and attempts to make us aware of a power beyond the mere human. This 'power' reminds us *that greater is the one within you than the one who is in the world* (1 John 4:4), *therefore, take courage, I have conquered the world* (John 16: 33).

When the Eucharist becomes the center of our life, we conquer the world, because of Him Whom we have become in the Spirit. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of the Love of the Father and the Son. Jesus gave this Gift to the early Church after His Ascension. He continues to give us that same Gift each time we ask the Father in Jesus' Name. He challenges us to love, and to love concretely - not just to love all humanity, that's easy!, but to love the one next to me, who may challenge me to grow. It is only when we raise our love above the merely human and begin to see things from God's perspective. Then it is that we can hope to begin to love not as an emotion for pleasure, but in an effective way of life that can transform the lives of people.

Love is the determining factor of life/Life, and the essence of that Love we have in the Eucharist. In his letter to Padre Agostino (December 3, 1912), Padre Pio writes: *My heart has found at last a Lover so attached to me that I am incapable of hurting him any more...He is one who is never angry with those who offend him...He has loved me...He smiles and says repeatedly that nothing is refused...In return he asks me for nothing but love...What is this fire that pervades my whole being?... Dear Father, if Jesus makes us so happy on earth, what will heaven be like?... I often ask myself if any people exist who do not feel their breast burning with divine fire, especially when they are close to him in the Blessed Sacrament.* As Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio, do we understand what Padre Pio is saying? He tells us of a love so real, especially the love He experiences when in the Divine Presence, whether celebrating the Eucharist or during Eucharistic Adoration, that it affects his body as well as his soul. Love is real! It is not a figment of our pious imagination! Love is possible and even necessary to be lived before our life can be said to be fulfilled.

In the Blessed Sacrament, central element of all we are as Roman Catholics and associates of the Padre Pio Prayer Groups, we encounter the Mystery and Miracle of Selfless and Transforming Love, Jesus. His Love leads us, enlivens our spirits, enlightens our minds, encourages and enthuses our hearts, entrusts us with His mission, envelops us with His Spirit, and consumes us in a purifying Love that introduces us into the fullness of Life.

Adore the Heart of Jesus, pierced for love of humanity! Acclaim Jesus, Lord and Savior, *who thirsts* ( John 19: 28) for our love in return. Realize this Love is for all - men, women, children. It is not sentimentality but total faith, hope, and trust in Love Incarnate. St. Augustine in his Confessions says it so powerfully and beautifully of a soul who has finally lost itself and found himself in God: *Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you*

*they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.*

May 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, and your loved ones, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings

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

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