

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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The Lord give you his peace!

The late spring and summer months offer us opportunities to reflect on some beautiful Marian titles the Church celebrates:

- May: the **Immaculate Heart** of our Heavenly Mother, celebrated immediately after the Sacred Heart of Jesus, opens our hearts to remember the love of our Mother. *And she pondered all these things in Her Heart* (Luke 2: 19) are the words that remind us of our Mother's Heart that sees the image of Her Son Jesus in all of us. In Her Heart we feel the warmth of a love that trusted the impossible. Allowing God to become human, we through, with, and in Him enter an intimate relationship with the Father, thanks to our Mother's willingness to say "yes". She accompanies us with Her love closer to one another and to Jesus Her Son.

– May 31: **Visit to St. Elizabeth** recalls Mary, the full of grace, Who cannot hold for Herself the wonderful gift of God within but becomes an exceptional means ("Mediatrice") by whom God offers His saving grace to others. *Who am I that the Mother of my Lord should come to me* (Luke 1: 43), thus becomes the joyful expression of gratitude for Mary Who assists us in expressing in our hearts through Her "urgency" in bringing Her Son, the Son of God and our Redeemer "made one of us" to us.

– July 16: **Our Lady of Mount Carmel** speaks of Mary's patronage and love for all who wear Her sign of special protection, the Scapular. Children of Mary, whose lives bear a loving intimacy with Mary, will always have Her particular protection and almighty intercession before God. *O most beautiful Flower of Mount Carmel, Fruitful Vine, Splendor of Heaven, Blessed Mother of the Son of God, Immaculate Virgin, assist me in this my necessity. O Star of the Sea, help me and show me herein you are my Mother* (Prayer of St. Simon Stock, O.Carm.).

– August: **Our Lady of Angels, Feast of the Portiuncula**, "The Little Portion" is the place of Franciscan Beginnings, a Benedictine chapel honoring the Incarnation. It was "rented" to St. Francis by the children of St. Benedict, with the stipulation that when his Order had grown it was to be the Heart of the Franciscan Family. Here St. Francis received the Plenary Indulgence he requested from Jesus and approved by the Holy Father for those who visited and honored his encounter with Jesus and Mary in this sacred space who honor Jesus' Heavenly Mother. When Francis spoke of the Plenary Indulgence granted him, he said to the brothers and people: *I want to send you all to heaven*. We celebrate the "Little Portion" that speaks of our journey with Francis, through Jesus and Mary to our home.

There is another very special day dedicated to our Blessed Mother Mary we celebrate in August. It is the "crowning" moment of Her life's journey come to its eternal fulfillment, Mary's

Assumption, body and soul, into heaven. This is the “crowning” day of Her life when the First Daughter of Faith received the fullness of all any human being of faith could desire. The day celebrates the response of God to Mary’s act of total surrendering Faith when She responded “yes” to become the Mother of God’s Son. Catholics solemnize this day by participating in the Eucharist. We celebrate the fullness of life in Her resurrection and glorification with which God gifted Mary. Mary receives, “ahead of time”, the fullness of eternal life promised all God’s faithful children. Our Mother precedes us “Into God”. As we *receive the pledge of future glory* (the Eucharist), we too prepare to share with Mary “Into God” Who creates, redeems and sanctifies, for the fullness of eternal life at the end of the ages.

Socially, this is a month when many cram in the last few available weeks or days of summer vacation before getting back to the humdrum of daily life after Labor Day. Society, politics, and just the pace of diversified lifestyles often affect how people express their faith practices. The question of priorities can become rather muddled. Isn’t it interesting how we regulate our anticipation and joy by the calculation of days and weeks during the summer vacation period? This is a time when many forget that the whole person in body and soul - created by our Heavenly Father, redeemed by the Incarnate Son, sanctified by the Holy Spirit - is called to share one day in the fullness of redemption. It is as our Heavenly Mother shared in it ahead of time in view of Her Divine Maternity and Co-redeeming presence at the foot of the Savior’s Cross. Unfortunately, “life gets in the way” and we can even forget the deeper reason and meaning of values and beliefs we profess.

The body has become for so many solely an object of pleasure. Not just during the summer months, but all year round. The media and other means of communication we always have within our reach bombard us with information of all types. Often material presented to us misrepresents and often degrades the human body rendering it an object of hedonistic pleasure. Rather than offering the body the respect it deserves as the Temple of God’s Presence, the physical means for the Creator to become intimately one with His creature, it becomes only an object. We often forget the “other essential half” of the human being – body and soul – both called to an eternal life

We lose sight of the fact that the body and soul cannot be separated in this life without destroying the person’s ability to continue on life’s journey with all the spiritual and material help that God affords us. Aware of this and with the help of God and many friends, Padre Pio fulfilled a dream he had always held in his heart. He called his dream the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza - House for the Relief of Suffering. He wanted the Casa to be founded on love lived by all who were part of its life, residents as well as staff. The health of the whole person, body as well as soul, must be the goal of those entrusted with the gift of healing.

On the first anniversary of the Casa, in May of 1957, Padre Pio delineated its character by saying: *This work, if it were only to relieve physical suffering, would only be a model clinic, realized through the extraordinary and generous means of your charity. But it is to be an effective reminder of God’s love through the charity of others...and a place where those who suffer live in the love of God through a wise acceptance of their suffering and a serene meditation on their destiny in Him. This dream was also an awareness that went beyond human physical pain, which he personally understood so well. He realized that when the soul is ill, the body suffers as well, and often, because of the spiritual infirmity, the body cannot heal.*

A faithful son of our Seraphic Father, Padre Pio most assuredly had before his eyes the example of Saint Francis of Assisi who saw bodily infirmities as gifts that God offers for the health of the soul. Chapter 25 of the Little Flowers of Saint Francis relates how souls would return to God when the loving care of St. Francis would cleanse the sores of the lepers. *Their innermost being – the souls - of the lepers were touched, their bodies were healed, they sought forgiveness for any wrongdoing because of the kindness and selflessness they had received, and so not only their bodies but their souls as well were healed completely.*

Our modern world has “rediscovered the wheel” in the holistic medicine it has been proposing these past several decades. God’s Incarnate Word, Jesus, spoke about healing the whole person – body and soul - 2000 years ago. We are still fumbling around trying to achieve that God-given gift of spiritual and physical wholeness. He already gave us the way!

Pope Pius XII, in a telegram celebrating its inauguration, said that the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza took into *consideration the whole human person, body and soul, because bodily pain pervades the entire person, and reaches the remotest areas of the person’s moral being.* The Holy Father invited the health care givers to be, as Padre Pio envisioned, *God’s auxiliaries,* concerned in preparing a way for the intervention of grace in the life of the sick and infirm.

In a telegram sent to the Minister General of the Capuchin Order in the 1950's, professor Paul White wrote these words regarding Padre Pio and the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza: *This clinic, more than all the others in the world, seems most indicated for the study of the relationship there is between the spirit and sickness; here, more than any other place, the study of mind (and I would prefer the expression ‘heart and soul’) over matter can make great progress.*

Padre Pio had a practical approach to a real problem for San Giovanni Rotondo at the time. San Giovanni Rotondo was a remote town, with little and poor health care facilities. He realized that faith without works is just nice talk but with no substance. When we speak about “salvation”, we must remember that the whole person must be saved. Each one of us is entirely God’s creation, not just a part of us.

Although this letter seems to center on the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, I believe that we can bring the example it offers through Padre Pio’s words to any facet of our life. The spiritual realm we like to be absorbed in through our Mass, Rosary and pious discussions are not the end of the journey but the beginning of a road that indicates the direction we should follow. Prayer allows us to enter into an awareness of God’s presence so that we can see more clearly where God is directing us in our life. God’s Spirit directs us towards those areas of family life, religious life, professional life, manual labor, intellectual endeavors, relaxation, recreation, and so on. We are called to see the body as the soul’s intimate companion that offers us opportunities to tangibly experience God in thought, word and deed, and convey them to others.

When we treat our bodies with respect and love, we begin to notice how things change. We are changed within. We begin to see the people, places and things around us in a totally renewed and positive way. *The eye is the window of the soul* (cfr. Matthew 6: 22-24). How we recognize with the heart often determines what we see with our eyes. Body and soul work together.

Our Padre Pio Prayer Groups and all Catholics in this month of August honor Mary in her Assumption. We praise and thank God for raising Mary to share beforehand in the gifts of the Resurrection of her Son. Her Assumption is a reminder of the promise God made to all His children in Jesus through the Spirit.

As members of the Prayer Groups, we are called to hear that Spirit and live in the Word that challenges us to grow. Some thoughts to consider might be the following: Do we care properly both physically and spiritually for our bodies as the Temples they are of the Holy Spirit? Do we have a healthy respect for ourselves and who we are and what we are about? Do we respectfully treat one another as members of the one family of God's children, who gather to honor the example and spirit of Padre Pio? Do we regulate our time in such a way that our pious practices do not take us from our God-given family, social, religious, and the like, responsibilities? Do we realize that everything has its place in God's plan? Do we see the world as the theater of salvation? Do we realize that the world, as bad as things can seem, is not evil in itself, because it was created by God, but that the evil we see is the effect of how human beings misuse and abuse the wonderful gift with which they have been entrusted? I have posed these questions because I have noticed that often spiritual zeal can condition people to act in ways that are not in keeping with sound judgment.

Our Holy Father Pope Francis has much to say about these matters in his Encyclical, *Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home*. If you read the encyclical, read it without political bias or prejudice. His words are the words of a Father, a Shepherd, a Religious Leader concerned for the welfare of his family, flock, and Church. Our Rule has always stated, in whichever of the Franciscan Rules we profess, to always *be subject to the Holy Father of the Roman Church and his legitimately elected successors* (Approved Rule). There will always be a variety of opinions, and that is good. However, we have an obligation to not only hear the words and look at the situations presented, but also, to listen to the message and see with our bodily eyes and the eyes of our hearts what is being proposed. The integrity of creation and the integrity of creatures' response to what their Creator has entrusted to them is essential. God's love awaits our acceptance of responsibility and accountability for all creation: world in general, relationships among nations and peoples, and even our own personal worlds. Our bodies are created in the image and likeness of God. We are endowed with God's love, life, and the awesome gift of free will. We are an essential part of our *Common Home* of the *Laudato Si'*, of Pope Francis. We too are called to *Care* bodily and spiritually for the person God created in His own image and likeness.

Our whole person - body and soul - is destined for eternity. Mary's acceptance of the Father's Will made Her the First Disciple and the Mother of the Christ and thus Mother of the Christian. Acceptance of the Father's invitation to be Mother of the Messiah introduced Mary to all Her other privileges. The ultimate privilege of Mary is Her participating fully in the Resurrection, ahead of time, as Queen of Heaven and all Creation. The *Word was made Flesh* (John 1: 14) in Her and of Her. The Eucharist is made 'Flesh' through the words of the priest, as well as in each one who receives Him.

Mary's Assumption reminds us of the dignity and glory to which we, Her children, are called. Let the Eucharist be our pledge of future glory, as it was for our Father and Founder Padre Pio. Thus, the Mass we celebrate and offer with the priest will be a sun that irradiates blessings and joys on us and on all whom we encounter. It will become for us, as one of our Capuchin Saints, Saint Lawrence of Brindisi, said: *The Mass is my heaven on earth*. Oh, that it could be so for us! Oh, that our bodies could become more deeply, as was the body of our Blessed Mother, Tabernacles that "house" the Lord when we receive Him in Holy Communion, and Monstrances

that manifest Him to all whom we encounter when the goodness and holiness of Jesus irradiate in our lives to all whom we encounter!

What a privilege! How beautiful we are?! Jesus was human and divine. The beauty of the physical was determined by the transparency of the divine/spiritual. Let our light shine before all! Our bodies and lives, in collaboration with grace, are the "privileged vehicles" Jesus has chosen to touch the lives of others. We are one with all creation, each in the manner God intended. With God's help and in God's Will, respecting our own dignity and that of others, we will achieve the "perfection" to which we are called.

With every best wish for you as summer continues that it may be a time of physical and spiritual restoration, relaxation, and peace for you and all your loved ones. Please remember me in your prayers that I may fulfill my ministry among you as God wills.

May God bless you, Our Lady and good St. Joseph guide, guard, and protect you, and Padre Pio watch over you, his Spiritual Children, and your families, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings

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

National Coordinator