

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

National Office

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

October 2024

The Lord give you His peace

The Franciscan Families are celebrating a series of centenaries regarding St. Francis of Assisi. On September 17th of this year we celebrated the 800th anniversary of St. Francis receiving the Stigmata. This painful gift, unexpected answer to a prayer St. Francis prayed for many years, marked him with the visible and painful wounds of the Passion of Jesus.

The reception of the Stigmata is not only the third of the first three centenaries, but also, and more so, the “pivotal” experience of his journey into God. What follows in our celebrations for two more years are the Canticle of the Creatures (1225) and then the Transitus (Death) of St. Francis (1226).

There seems to be a progression from Confirmation of a Rule of Life (1223), to the visible representation of the Birth of Jesus at Greccio. Basically and quite meditatively simply put, we journey from confirmation of a Life (Gospel Life), based on the Condescension of Compassion of God Who is the Good News Incarnate born at Bethlehem and represented in tangible form at Greccio, to the Spiritual and Physical Conformity of Francis to Jesus in the reception of the Stigmata. St. Francis reached the visible heights of conformity to Jesus at La Verna in 1224.

Physically exhausted and seriously ill, St. Francis “explodes” into a hymn of Praise and Joy in the Canticle of the Creatures (1225). Unable to “do”, St. Francis can truly “be” the Troubadour of the Great King who now filled with the joy of fulfillment sings the Praises of Creation in and of a God Who became one with us that we might share the fullness of God’s life for eternity. The Canticle Year (2025) celebrates the Franciscan awareness of the Goodness of God and our call to make the whole world aware of the Goodness of the God of Creation. All the earth and what is in and around and beyond it, called into existence by God, praise and glorify God each according to their own nature.

Inanimate creatures, living things, and human beings form a part of this Hymn of Praise. All have by nature of its being the ability to manifest a joy for being present by the Creator’s Will. Human beings are uniquely mentioned for their ability to be like God in offering the mercy of forgiveness in imitation of God’s merciful love, and the ability to live life fully in view of the fullness of life that we seek in God’s grace. All these celebrations deal with life, the dignity of

life, any existence or life, from creation/conception and as divine gifts exist until the Creator calls each to the *New Heaven and New Earth* (Revelation 21:1) promised.

The Canticle of the Creatures celebrates life. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina stands out as one of the most conspicuous promoters of the dignity of life in the twentieth century. During his lifetime hundreds were attracted to this man who spoke outright about our Catholic Faith and its need to be lived today. He initiated the Prayer Groups as a way for men and women from all social levels to live a more meaningful life centered on God and with a purpose of touching the lives of others. Thousands of his 'Spiritual Children' form this 'Militia of Prayer' as a 'Sign of Contradiction' in today's world. The Groups proclaim all that we believe and live as Catholic Christians. We stand as prophets of life and love in a world so impacted by a culture of death and violence. Culture and society often forget the value of life and dignity of each person. It is imperative that we courageously take a stand for the sake of the God-given dignity and values bestowed and entrusted to us by the very fact we are alive.

Following the example of our Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi, Padre Pio, through the Prayer Groups, sought to instill a spirit in his devotees and followers who understood a holiness that went beyond the merely external, no matter how unique and marvelous. He desired that they...

- seek peace in understanding rather than tranquility through aggression and war,
- justice in mercy rather than retribution in violent reprisal,
- availability to all rather than opinionated distance from those who do not share the same ideas and values.

Padre Pio never shirked his civic duty. He freely spoke out when Catholic and Christian values were in jeopardy. He could easily be a patron saint of 'Civic Duty'. He never hesitated to respond to issues that were affecting the daily lives of people who came or wrote to him about their daily lives. He did not let the opinions of others condition his personal conclusions and decisions. Often he kept silent when obedience demanded it of him. But when justice, mercy and charity were in danger, he spoke, and how! As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio we have a responsibility to follow the example of our Patron and Spiritual Guide.

Paul, the Apostle, and Mark, the Evangelist, offer us insights that we might be elements of reform in our society and be true Advocates of Peace and Proclaimers of God's Love and Life.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul writes: *Take as a model of sound teaching... what you have heard me say, in faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the rich deposit of faith ...be strong in the grace which is ours in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2:1). All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). I charge you to preach the word...whether convenient or inconvenient - correcting, reproving, appealing - constantly teaching and never losing patience. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but, following their own desires, will surround themselves with teachers who tickle their ears. They will stop listening to the truth... (2 Timothy 4:1-4).* These

powerful words, addressed to a young shepherd of souls, are words that bear significant weight for us today.

Mark, in turn, offers us an interesting nuance to consider. The Gospel account according to Mark speaks of Jesus' question to His disciples at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asks His disciples: *Who do people say that the Son of Man is?* The response He is given by the group is: *Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.* But when He pointedly asks: *But who do you say that I am?*, Peter, without hesitation, proclaims to Jesus: *You are the Christ* (cfr. Mark 27-35). Jesus praises this response and entrusts Peter with the leadership of the Church.

Not the confession of faith, nor the commission given Peter to shepherd the Church, nor the authority to bind or loose interests us here. What I would like to reflect on with you is something I feel very timely for us at this moment in our national history.

- We are not a political caucus, but a people who pray.
- We are not civic activists, but a people who are concerned about consequences to others of decisions made.
- We are not social opportunists or congressional lobbyists,
- We are a people who speak with their lives what they believe in their hearts.

Our faith conviction demands that we express openly what we believe. We are children of God called to live, without compromising values and principles for the sake of convenience, comfort, camaraderie, and the like. Compassion encourages me to find ways to assist people in need, but it cannot demand that I permit or do evil for the sake of good. *The end does not justify the means.* We derive our strength and courage from knowing that *if God is for us who can be against us?* (Romans 8: 31-33)

Thus, we must, in the words of Jesus the night before He died, *be consecrated in truth* (cfr John 17: 19). 'Truth' seems to be a 'relative issue'. We make the truth what we want it to be rather than what it is. Words are used and expressions fabricated to convey messages which justify manipulating the truth. There are many 'truths' that believing people - of most religious denominations, not just Christians, let alone Catholics - hold sacred. There is the 'truth'

- of the sacredness of life from conception to natural death.
- of the sacredness of the human person whose dignity must never be abused in any way.
- inherent in nature itself and the complementary nature of both sexes,
- of the unique relationship in marriage of man and woman, in a total surrender to one another and open to new life
- of the 'cry of the poor' whose social challenges must never be condoned or justified for the sake of the whole and 'big business'.
- of the right of all people to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, that does not infringe and/or minimize or destroy that of another.

- of every person's right to a good life based on personal efforts and responsibility, rather than national, religious, racial, and other, criteria.
- of God's right to be adored and honored in all creation, respectfully and responsibly with a sense of awe, and co-responsibility among all people.

We could list so many other 'truths' to keep in mind. Some people could object to those I mentioned and/or add many others. I listed these as an example in order for us to recognize how public opinion, 'Gallop Polls', political correctness, ignorance, manipulation for personal interests can so easily present these 'truths' and others in a false light and questionable importance.

Who do people say I am? When we allow our desires to rule our minds, even the 'truth' can be misread, misunderstood, and misleading. Guided by polls and opinions is to chance letting 'the blind lead the blind' into the same ditch'. The 'Gallop Poll' the apostles took only proves once again that public opinion is never totally correct nor necessarily true. The value of life demands we not sell out the 'truth' basic to all people, and *tickle ears with novelty* (2 Timothy 4:3) that raises false hopes, and might even destroy the dignity of the human person in one degree or another. Padre Pio sought for his Spiritual Children to see with faith, to act in truth: *Pray, hope, and don't worry*. All three expressions are actions and not pious platitudes.

We are a nation conceived in liberty. Liberty, not license! Even non-believers - that is, those who do not believe in any God - still have a sense of respect and dignity for the human person, otherwise they go against themselves. Conscience accuses us every time we seek to justify as right what we know to be wrong. *The one who excuses himself usually accuses himself*. Where have our basic values gone?

Catholic Christians cannot be intimidated nor allow themselves to be confused by false promises. We must re-evaluate our commitment in Faith to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Public opinion, majority vote, or deceptive terminology must not alter the basic principle that *life is sacred from conception to natural death*.

Christ's Gospel must be our Sign of Contradiction lived each day. It is our conviction and personal commitment to the Faith. Our Faith demands we courageously stand up, stand out, stand for all that it means to be a Catholic Christian.

Spiritual Children of Padre Pio realize that a true relationship with God through meditative and devotional prayer opens our heart to God's Word, celebration of the Eucharist and reception of Holy Communion makes us *live no longer I, but Christ lives in me* (Galatians 2:20), and common sharing of our Catholic Christian values fosters personal awareness of the world around us and growth in a more determined response to the challenges society offers us. Let us remember St. John, in his letter to the Churches: *My children, beware of idols!* (1 John 5:21). Let us be aware of those whom we set up as 'the answer', our 'I-dolls of truth' and whose appealing promises we set above our God-given values.

Padre Pio never shirked his responsibility as an Italian citizen. He spoke respectfully and openly about the issues that faced his nation. Political leaders would often seek him out to speak with him. He spoke respectfully, tactfully (Padre Pio's tact could be rather 'forceful' at times), but always truthfully. Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, cannot let 'factual incorrections' and/or indifference condition our hearts with disinterest, our minds with erroneous opinions, and our actions with promises to dispel our economic, social, national fears. If you are confused, seek the truth, evaluate the material, judge for yourself, and courageously decide before God the direction you will take. We sing our Canticum of the Creatures by beginning to sing of God's goodness in calling us to life and entrusting the development of this world into our hands. Only this way might we see clearly the beauty and awesome splendor of the world and universe that envelopes us and of which we have been assigned as stewards (cfr. Genesis 1:28; Genesis 2:15; and others).

My God bless you; may Our Lady and good St. Joseph, guide, guard, and protect you; and may our beloved 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.

National Coordinator