

# 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!

*Most High, omnipotent, good Lord, to You praise, glory and honor and all benediction. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and there is no one worthy to mention You. St. Francis of Assisi thus begins the beautiful Canticle of the Creatures.*

Throughout the praises offered in the Canticle, *St. Francis of Assisi describes the gifts given by God to each as a means of praise.* (cfr. Writings of St. Francis, Ignatius Brady OFM)

The Canticle of Brother Sun, was written over a period of time. St. Francis began the Praise of the Creatures while at San Damiano. Others suggest that it might be possible for him to have been at Greccio. Either place inspired a beauty and depth of spirit of St. Francis in recognizing and praising the wonder of God. Regardless of his impaired physical health, St. Francis saw with the eyes of his heart and soul the beauty and majesty of the Creator in all His creation. A person in love cannot help but see only beauty in the beloved.

Francis was severely visually impaired. He was “legally blind”. Nonetheless, his physical condition could not keep his soul from making leaps and bounds to praise the Creator. There is no blindness when you see with the eyes of the heart.

In the Confessions of St. Augustine we read: *“Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.”*

Francis saw the greatness, beauty, power, love of God in all creation. He knew the Lord was with him. He praised God in the various elements of creation and encouraged those who heard the words of the Canticle to do likewise. Francis sensed the fragrance of the presence of God and yearned to be enveloped by His love. He hungered and thirsted for the Lord of creation and

experienced His simplicity and strengthening grace in the Eucharist – Sacrament of created things and human labor transformed by the Spirit into the very Real Presence of Christ Jesus. God touched his body with the ailments he bore till death, and they were transformed into so many gifts Francis offered to the Father. God touched Francis into Life in life's journey from time to eternity. His soul was set aflame by love of a fire that put the final touches on a man conformed now to the Christ who had commissioned him at San Damiano years before to *Rebuild my Church, for as you can see it is falling into ruin*. Francis bore the cross he was entrusted to bear with surrender and poetic acceptance. With total abandonment to the Will of the Father, he reconfirmed his own acceptance of God's will. He lived with full conviction a saying he was noted for: *Such is the good that awaits me, that all pain is a delight*. Seeking solace and rest at San Damiano, Francis went through challenging nights. He was alone in the dark, not able to see, bothered by the mice that ran all over him (cfr. Assisi Compilation). Francis began to feel a sense of self-pity. When morning came, he berated himself for having given in to such discouragement. Countering his self-pity, Francis' heart conceived the Canticle of the Creatures.

Francis could not see with his bodily eyes what he was praising. But he saw with his memory and the eyes of the heart. The memory and the heart see, remember, and recognize more deeply the beauty even of times when we questioned God's presence and love. The journey is the dream with all the pitfalls, failures, challenges, and successes. The memory of what Francis had experienced, seen and felt through his entire life was imprinted in his soul. He began to praise God. *God lights the day for our souls like Brother Sun brings light to our bodies. Even when the sky is cloudy and we cannot see the sun, we know he is there.* (cfr. Writings of St. Francis, Ignatius Brady OFM)

The Sun, that heralds a new day, shines through the blindness that darkens the view of his eyes. The view of the heart is strong and bright. *Praised be my Lord, by means of all Your creatures, and most especially by Sir Brother Sun, who makes the day, and illumines us by his light: for he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; and is a symbol of You, God most High.* Born after a night that was dark and discouraging, the Canticle explodes into a song of love, trust and total abandonment into God Whose light penetrates the darkness of a soul. He brings the soul to see from above the mystery of a love that enlightens even the darkest moments of any life open to the reality of the Creator's love. Things were beginning to come together again. In the midst of his spiritual darkness, Brother Sun was a powerful reminder and sign of hope. The brilliant sun of the heavens was a mere twinkle compared to the brilliance of the Son of God Whose Incarnation came to brighten the darkness of centuries of waiting, and millions passing to eternity wondering when...when would God finally keep His promise?

God's delay is not God's denial. What a beautiful testimony to the spirit of Francis. He was broken in body but not in his soul. His spirit soared to the heights in a hymn of praise that allowed all you heard it to experience in the simplicity of song the magnificence of the glory and love of God for all creation. The Love Francis experienced was a love offered in gratitude to the Giver of all good gifts.

The refrain during the Season of Advent is *Come, Lord Jesus!* These words also conclude the Book of Revelation and thus the entire body of Sacred Scripture. The story of the experiences, the hopes, the fears, the successes, the failures, the life of the People of God is always a time of great expectations. It is our story. It is the story of a people created and called to be uniquely a People of God. It is the story of a people whose millennial journey through time has experienced the awesome presence of a God always near and available to *carry us in the palm of His hands* (Isaiah 49: 16). The experiences of millennia of human history challenge our faith to believe *Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.* (Revelation 3: 20)

*Come, Lord Jesus* can also challenge our trust that He is a personal God truly interested in a world affected by so many troubling and devastating experiences. These may even challenge our acceptance of a God of Love Who truly cares for His creation. These thoughts and feelings are like the mice that ran all over Francis in his most vulnerable moments. We call, pray, plead, and God waits! All seems dark. We cannot see where to turn, but each day demands we keep moving forward in the light of the sun, while feeling the darkness of the spirit. We call on this God in many ways to *Come!* and to be with us, and to embrace us, and to love us, and to save us, and to give us new life forever. We call out *Come, Lord Jesus! Be my long-awaited Savior!* "You cannot hold back the dawn". Remember the words of Jesus to the disciples on the road to Emmaus on the first Easter morning: *Why are you downcast? Oh, how slow are you to believe. Was it not necessary that the Messiah experience all He did? Then He began to explain to them* (Luke 24: 25-27). He could say the same to us when we allow the Son of God not to shine in our hearts. This holds true for the darkest moments of life. This holds true for the dreary humdrum experiences that seem to affect enthusiasm. This is true for the unexpected failures. This holds true for any moment in our lives, maybe even life itself (?) for some, when the challenges overshadow hope. It is then, that like Francis, we see with the eyes of the heart of faith. Then it is we allow the Son of God to break through our spiritual darkness with a brightness that not even the sun can compare with.

It is at the beginning of time that the Eternal Father *comes* into the darkness and confusion of nothingness and breathes a Word of Life. The Father *comes* among the bands of wandering nomads and gathers them into a people peculiarly His own. The Father *comes* to an oppressed nation and powerfully liberates them from their slavery and makes them a people free to trustingly call upon Him. The Father *comes* at the various moments of an erring and sinful people, and He leads them back to a confident and adoring awareness of His presence in their midst. The Father *comes* into a world divided and troubled and He speaks His Word that enfleshes Itself in the natural order, so that nature can one day regain and experience its lost dignity as one created in the image and likeness of its Creator. And that Word is JESUS! The birth of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, illuminated the darkness of expectation or doubt with the brilliance of a revelation of God's mercy and forgiveness. The brilliance and splendor of the Son of God gives clarity of vision, clearness and depth of understanding, and transparency of life that enables the light of Christ to shine through and embrace the lives of others. Praise be You my Lord for our Brother, the Son of the Father, Whose enlightenment reveals, clarifies, and

glorifies the Father in His creation. They enrich others with the knowledge of the splendor they manifest in the light of the Son.

*Jesus is Word made flesh ... who came to his own, and his own did not receive him...but to as many as did receive Him, He gave them the power to become children of God (John 1: 11) born of the Spirit. And so we say, Come, Lord Jesus! Descend into time that we may ascend into eternity. Become one with us in creation so that one day we can share with you the eternal glory of our Creator.*

Jesus is the focal point of all humanity. Though billions of people still do not accept Jesus as Lord, Redeemer, God, still the entire world regulates its activities around the birth of this one life that came into history as an infant, and comes every moment into the hearts and lives of those who invoke Him with faith. His was a life of constant *coming into*. The Word made flesh became a creature that all creation might be restored to God through the Spirit.

Advent begins the Year of Grace. We begin the re-presentation in our Liturgy of the whole history and mystery of our salvation in the life of Jesus and the Church. As we journey through the brief period of Advent, we anticipate our joy at the birth of the Savior at Bethlehem. There is no need for Him to come in opulence, power and comfort; He comes poor, helpless and placed in a manger. The total emptying of Himself for the sake of us all tells us that *He Comes* to make us rich in grace, strong in His Spirit, and joyful in His kingdom of justice, love and peace.

*Every child that comes into this world is God's gift to creation. What that child becomes is his/her gift to God.* We have probably heard these words before. We should consider them more intensely as we prepare for the birthday of Jesus the Christ, the King of Creation, the Incarnate Word of God. We pray for Him to come, do we recognize him? Is our vision clouded or even blinded by the glitz and cacophony of consumerism and materialism, and so many other "isms"? Or do we allow the Great God of the Universe to enlighten our minds and hearts as the Son of God makes clear the road from the Crib of Bethlehem to the Cross of Calvary to the Commission of Mt. Olivet in the warmth and love of the Holy Spirit that indicates us the way, for us to shine in Christ for others to recognize and follow the Son of God, Christ the Lord?

Padre Pio loved the feast of Christmas. The Incarnation in the womb of our Blessed Mother Mary of the Divine Word, the Son of God, and the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, was a reality that he lived every moment of his grace-filled life. His faith in Jesus was a vibrant acceptance and availability to the present as he sought to *Live Jesus* in Whom he believed not as born two thousand years ago, but as re-born every moment in his life. The Profession of Faith we make each time we recite the Creed was not for him merely a formula that reiterated a theological dogma or historical fact to be remembered. Jesus was not a past event to be spoken of with nostalgia, but a present reality, a fact, a person, to be lived in the present, Who led him, and leads us - to an eternal future of Life. Padre Pio gazed upon the mystery of the Incarnation at each Eucharist he celebrated and lived Jesus as His precious Body and Blood penetrated every fiber of his being. The whole story of the Birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, and the time that leads up

to it, is an opportunity for us to follow the example of Padre Pio and enter into the song of creation once again as we become players in the great symphony of life that God has written. Praise be You my Lord God for Brother Sun – and our Brother the Son of God - who brighten our day and show us the way that leads to You.

As spiritual Children of Padre Pio, have we allowed the precious Body and Blood of the Savior to flow through and take over every fiber of our being? Have we allowed the Lord to be enfleshed in our lives so that each Christmas we celebrate the Savior present and alive within and among us, and not just some past event? Do we say with Mary, Jesus= Mother, and with Jesus, *Your Will and not mine be done?* (Luke 22: 42) Have we sought to rekindle the vision that Padre Pio had for his Prayer Groups of a people united in prayer, sacrifice and service? Have we worked to make the vision grow into a fresh and vibrant presence of that Jesus Who makes Himself seen and known through us? Do we recognize our own incompleteness, vulnerability, and susceptibility so that we can share, support and encourage one another? Are we as enthused about our being Spiritual Children of Padre Pio and all that entails, as children are when Christmas comes around? Do we see the gift that we are to each other if we allow the spirit of our Father and Founder Padre Pio to lead us closer to Jesus and Mary?

Let us recognize the gift we are and are called to be. Let us become a joy-filled, life-giving, sister and brother in the family of Padre Pio=s Spiritual Children. For this intention and whatever ones you may hold most dear in your hearts, be assured that you and your loved ones will be remembered in a special way in all the Masses I celebrate during this holy season. 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. In the Name of Jesus I wish all of you a Spirit-filled Advent and a Holy and Happy Christmas Season. As you enter the new calendar year with all its expectations and uncertainties, may your hopes be fulfilled in a world renewed in Jesus and filled with His Spirit. *A Child is born to us! A Savior is given to us! Come, let us adore Him!*

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

***Come, Lord Jesus! Come, Prince of Peace!  
Blessed and Merry Christmas  
and a New Year 2025 filled with Peace and Blessings***