

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!

What a wonderful world we live in, yet it can get so complicated and even frightening. The Act of Creation was majestic and simple. God spoke and everything came into being. The exact way is not really that important. What matters is the fact that Creation is the gift of God's overflowing love. All elements of God's creation worked in harmony with the will of the Creator. The elements we take for granted, in their pristine state formed a wonderful image and likeness of the Creator. Each element enhanced the wonder and magnificence of the One Who spoke them into existence with His original *let it be...* and so it is *world without end*.

The great gift and responsibility, requiring accountability, of human free will, disturbed for all time the harmony of creation. It can be regained, but not completely at one time. Now the restoration of spiritual and temporal harmony is the responsibility of each person created to the image and likeness of God. Jesus' Passion-Death-Resurrection redeemed all humanity for all ages. The promise of Redemption was fulfilled once-for-all. The gift of redemption continues by God to always be available. God entered humanity as human so that humanity could be restored in grace and harmony with God. Personal salvation however depends on the individual's cooperation with the grace of Calvary. God grants us all a lifetime to "get it right", and in *many and varied ways* (Hebrews 1: 1) God is there to assist us. But the ultimate decision is ours. *God created us without us, but He will not save us without us (St. Augustine)*.

In a world as beautiful as it was created to be, and as confusing as it seems to have become, we continue to strive, tripping along the way, to regain what we lost. God's mercy knows no limits. Nevertheless, we must never presume God will treat us as slaves who have no say in their own destiny, even if it concerns the eternal. God is with us all the way. God wills we be saved for eternity, not as puppets, but as informed and fully equipped to choose correctly, if that be our will. We are awesomely *made a little less than the angels* (Psalm 8: 5), with a wonderful and dangerous personal power to say "no" even to God. Creation itself speaks at every instant of God's concern and love for us. The experiences we go through in life happen. We can complain about the things we do not like or that seem to try us beyond our strength. Or, we can accept them as options for us to re-consider decisions we've made, thoughtless things we've done, and so on. We move forward eventually recognizing God's love, mercy and providence at every step. God will never abuse the great gift of freedom with which we have been blessed. The choice and decision is always ours.

The world has always had problematic times. That is what makes every moment exciting. That is what makes every experience and element of creation, if we desire, a wonderful experience of God. We learn from, and grow through and beyond the moment. Too many people like to just *hang on*. Faith and Hope keep us from falling into the situation of the Church of Laodicea found in the Book of Revelation: *Since you are neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of my mouth* (Revelation 3: 16) This rather crude statement was intended by the writer to convey how averse God is to attitudes of indifference to the wonderful gift of being. God does not create evil. God does however respect the freedom of each one of us, even when it affects someone in a way God, if we can use a human expression, would not desire

People like St. Francis of Assisi come on the scene at the right time in history. At the time many social, national, and religious matters were happening that challenged expressions of faith, moral conduct, the very setup of the social order, the relationship the Church had with the Her own children, and even Her dealings with the “powers that be” in the world. Nothing new! This happens rather regularly in history. Rather than offer opportunities to reflect and grow, many react and run. Remember the famous song that states: *Fools rush in where wise men fail to tread* (Alexander Pope). They usually bring an aspect of our relationship with God, Creation and others into view that begins a transforming journey within us.

St. Francis was a free spirit, who sought to live the Gospel Life in such a way as to encourage all people to believe in God and thus believe in themselves as well. The Canticle of the Creatures is an act of Faith St. Francis of Assisi puts into words for others to remember how everything works to lead us closer to a God Who is always with us. When St. Francis composed the Canticle of the Creatures, he was blind, in constant pain, and knew that his days were numbered. Yet his heart was filled with joy. The inner serenity and peace were here because he recognized all that God is and created. He saw with the eyes of the heart and understood that Brother Wind helps us to regain our composure by “shaking us up” from the lethargy of boredom, indifference, and discouragement. Once the air has been rid of all that could overburden us, we can now *walk swiftly with soft step* (St. Clare letter to St. Agnes of Prague) in the gentleness of the air that surrounds us wherever we go. The air we breathe, freed by the powerful wind of God’s Spirit, envelops us with God’s providence, refreshes us with God’s mercy, and restores us in God’s love. The wind changes the atmosphere of clutter, so the air may caress the soul and one’s very life with *new spirit and life* (cfr. Ezekiel 36: 26; Romans 8: 2).

The cloudy moments of uncertainty and discovery, the serene moments of fulfillment and joy sustain us. They offer the environment we need to move with ease, regardless of what surrounds us. We might consider the Wind of the Canticle as the powerful breath of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost Who “blew away” the fear that lingered in the hearts of the early Church. Once freed of all hindrance and with the vision before them made clear having had all obstacles “blown away”, the First Followers stood up and witnessed the Good News of God’s eternal and tremendous Love. Serenity came to all when the certainty of those shaken by the Spirit in the Upper Room shared their experience of Jesus to those who curiously awaited an explanation.

The winds of history often clear the air, as time also does in our own lives. Once *the Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather* (allows) *all creatures* (to) *find their sustenance* humanity can pick up again and rebuild.

The wind – Brother Wind – clears the way for rebuilding, restoring, and reforming to begin. Then, in the serenity of the air of clarity and the strength that surrounds us, we can see our way. The clouds of momentary distraction, difficulty, or delay give way to the serenity of clarity, conviction, commitment, and we find ourselves praising the “Gusts of Brother Wind” that cleared the way for us to see with the eyes of the heart as well as the body. Again, with the words of an old song: *I can see clearly now, the rain has gone* (Johnny Nash). The Wind of time and nature have moved turbulence beyond us that we might regain the serenity of praising the Lord Who permits what often we fail or refuse to understand, but Whose eternal love knows, sees, and permits for the good of all.

Seeing himself weak and an invalid, Francis confided to some friars that he had fallen into self-pity. He soon regained his composure. The lack of eyesight helped develop in him a deeper insight. He saw with the eyes of the heart the wonder and beauty of creation. With the heart, Francis saw not just creation’s earthly splendor but more powerfully and profoundly it spoke eloquently of the Creator.

He remembered the God Who called him to *Go rebuild My Church, for as you can see it is falling into ruin* (voice of the Crucifix at San Damiano). Now, as he lay dying and bore the external sign of God’s “stamp of approval”, the stigmata, he realized his oneness with Christ was granted him. Conformed to Christ, Francis bore the external signs of Jesus’ obedience to the Father’s Will. Francis let go of melancholy and sadness and broke into a hymn of praise that he asked the brothers to write down. *Praise be to You my Lord*, were the words of a soul already living an experience that soon would be eternal. He saw creation now from another perspective, not from “below” but from “above”. The breath of God’s voice that spoke at San Damiano, was the gentle breeze that caressed his ailing body and joyful heart. The Wind of God’s power had cleared the way for the whisper of God’s presence, as with Elijah the prophet, to enrapture Francis in a presence of ecstasy.

The Canticle could go from the heights of the heavens to the Theater of Redemption, the created earth: *Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven. You formed them clear and precious and beautiful*. This was the perspective from above. Now he turned his gaze to the planet on which we live: *Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through which you give sustenance to Your creatures*. This begins the perspective from below the heavens.

The story of Creation in the Book of Genesis (Chapter 1) speaks of each one of us, and not some remote happening eons ago. We are born and continue life through God’s love for us as His image and likeness. We forever give witness to the truth of God, from Whom, through Whom, and In Whom everything has its being.

In the Story of Creation we find the various stages of human history, creation, election, sin, and salvation. These elements make up “pre-history” (“prequel”) of our salvation. Christians read a fundamental message in the story of creation. God is the Creator of all that is and conversely all that exists is either God or God’s, thus it is all created by God. From this fact (truth) can be deduced the radical goodness of the world, its reliability, hope for the future. God is one with all He created, new heaven and new earth, He is *the One Who loves all that lives* (Wisdom 26:

1). Day by day He brings all things to their final perfection. All Christians can see themselves before God Who continues the work of creation, and they can be profoundly optimistic that *God saw what He made and saw that it was very good* (Genesis 1: 31)

The Breath of God that brought order to chaos. The breath of God that gave existence to all things, is the Breath of God that makes a clump of dirt a Child of God. Brother Wind recalls the breath of God that hovered over the emptiness at the beginning of creation. His living and life-giving breath began an eternal process of perfection. We look forward to the *new heaven and new earth* (Revelation 21: 1) proclaimed in the final Book of Sacred Scripture.

Our own St. Padre Pio sought to dispel all misgivings from the hearts of his directees. Some got so wrapped up in the difficulties of their lives that they needed someone to help them re-focus. Each person was and is unique in their makeup. Not even identical twins are identical. The uniqueness of each human life over the millennia of earth's history speaks of the varied experiences similar but never the same of us all. The powerful Breath of God's Spirit, subtly but ever so faithfully and forcefully opens the way for us to see beyond the clouds of uncertainty, that we might bask in the light of the serenity of God's grace. Let's read and heed the words Padre Pio writes to Erminia Gargani:

Beware of complaining of being miserable and unhappy, because besides the fact that many expressions are unseemly for a servant of God, they also arise from an excessively dejected soul, and are nothing but impatience and resentment. Make a particular effort to practice sweetness and submission to the will of God, not only in extraordinary matters, but even in the little things that occur daily. And, if you should fail in this, humble yourself, make a new proposition, get up, and continue on your way.

Abandon yourself in his paternal arms like a child who, in order to grow, eats what his father prepares every day, hoping he will not let him go without food in proportion to his appetite and needs.

May God see to it that you produce mature fruit, and when you have done so, may God preserve you from the wind that makes the fruit fall to the ground, where indiscreet beasts devour it. This desire must be within you. You must never cease to desire objects and means by which to make further progress. These desirers are the flowers of the tree of your intentions; the leaves will be the frequent recognition of your weakness, which preserves both good works and good desires. (Padre Pio to Erminia Gargani, 27 January 1918)

The desire must be within you (above quoted letter). May the desire to praise God in all His creation be apparent in our lives. May the Eternal Wind of God's Holy Spirit, the Living Breath eternally present with the Father and the Son, rid us of all that clutters our souls. Refreshed with the air of newness and hope may we be a life-giving presence to others. This Jubilee Year 2025 continues with many opportunities to grow in the Spirit of the Lord and His holy operation. Called to be Pilgrims of Hope, pray that you too may be an Instruments of God's Peace and Blessings to everyone.

May our Heavenly Mother Mary and good St. Joseph guide, guard, and protect all of you. May our beloved Padre Pio of Pietrelcina's words – *Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry* – be a battle cry in our spiritual warfare for all to find hope in Jesus the Christ.

Peace and Blessings,
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National Director