

Prayer Groups of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina

Adapted from:
"The Operations of the Holy Spirit - Support to Prayer Groups 2019-2020"
from Padre Luciano Lotti

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The Feast of Fidelity

Canticle from the letter to to the Colossians (1, 3 12-20)

Let us give thanks to God*
the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has qualified us to share*
in the inheritance of the saints in light,

He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness*
and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,
in whom we have redemption,*
the forgiveness of sins.

Christ is the image of the invisible God,*
generated before every creature,
He is before all things*
and in him all things hold together.

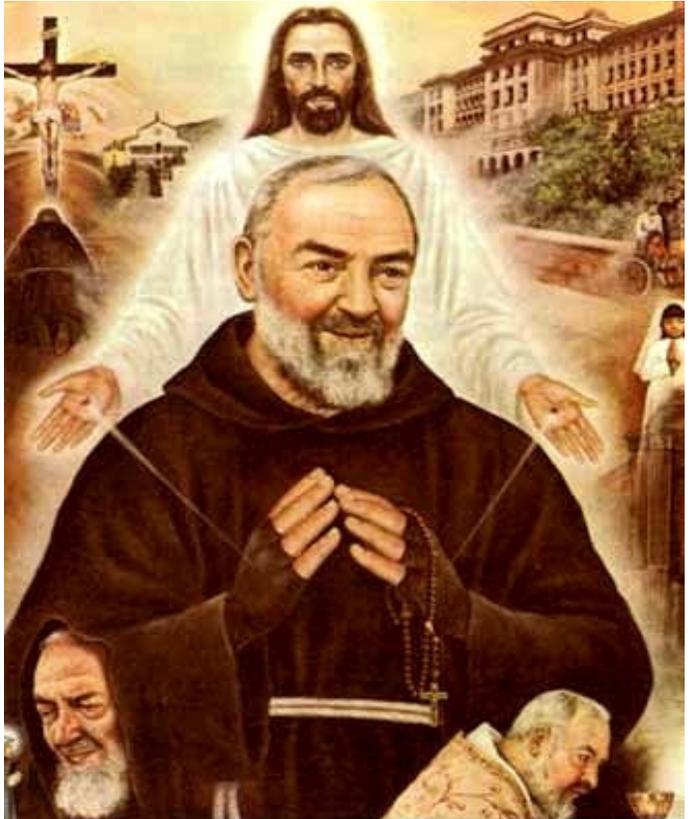
All things were created through him*
and for him:
in heaven and on earth, *
visible and invisible.

He is the head of the body, the Church;*
he is the beginning,
he firstborn from the dead,*
that in everything he might be pre-eminent.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, *
and through him to reconcile to himself all things,
making peace by the blood of his cross*
whether on earth or in heaven.

From the book of Revelation (2,25-28)

Hold on to what you have until I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; he will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like terracotta vessels, just as I have received authority from my Father and I will give him the morning star.



Catechesis

A Padre Pio group is often born after a trip to San Giovanni Rotondo: some have lived a profound experience of faith, others say they've had a particular grace and this is why most people try to reexperience together what happened there in their normal daily life,

Even when Padre Pio was alive, at times upon his suggestion, people started gatherings, praying together and encouraging each other to live their fidelity to the Lord as he had taught. After all, a prayer group is just that: you don't merely meet to pray, but you pass from prayer to life and from life to prayer.

The aim with which Padre Pio founded the prayer groups was precisely this: he wanted his spiritual children to live in a perspective of faith such as to desire that the new life, which started at their Baptism and revived during their pilgrimage to San Giovanni Rotondo, would then bring new fruit. According to the book of Revelation, the winner is the one who «perseveres until the end» in the works of God, and that for this reason he will have «authority over the nations»:

In St Augustin's words, «There is a kind of war, that man fights against himself, when he fights to stop lust, to curb avarice, to eliminate pride, to stifle ambition, to extinguish libido. If you undertake these struggles inwardly, you will not be won externally» (Sermon 9, 13).

For all these reasons, we ask our Groups to celebrate the «Feast of Fidelity» every year. Gathered together, under the guidance of the priest, they can meditate on the vocational choice of Padre Pio and then together renew their profession of faith, by engaging, and by encouraging each other to live the gospel with the same totality that Padre Pio has given us.

A Crown For A Gift

Christian literature of all times and in particular in Padre Pio's writings, are all filled with images that depict the human fight against evil in order to keep faithful to God. It was Origene, for example, who spoke of life as of battle where God's soldiers operate opposite to satan's hosts. This is what happened to Francesco Forgione, too, even before he started his novitiate: he found himself between two armies – this is exactly how he himself described it quite a few years later – and he had to fight against a giant, which clearly expresses the entity of the army of evil that was his enemy for years and years. His fight was always made sweeter by the promise he would receive a crown at the end of each battle, as well as one at the end of his life. In a note to Cleonice Morcaldi he wrote, "Life is but a fight, it is no use dreaming. If we are given a break, it is so that we can rest a while".

Jesus himself was well aware of this internal fight and used to say that only aggressive people would enter the kingdom of heaven. Saint Paul addressed the first Christians saying, "13 Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians, 6,13-17)

It is thus impossible to fight against sin with indifference, it is strictly necessary to be aware of the skills of the devil, who is excellent at lying and is an 'expert artist in darkness', according to Padre Pio. The latter was well aware of the importance of confiding in the Lord. He wrote: "If the Lord were not our shield and armour, we would be immediately transfixed by sins, all sorts of sins. This is why we must always keep to God, persevering in our exercises: this must be our constant endeavour." (Letters I, 411) He knew how to be a guide for souls, thanks to his personal experience, "I never stop thanking the Lord God for you, He is good towards all his creatures, even more so towards those who love Him with all themselves; He visits them in times of trial and pours down His celestial power onto their souls. This will be their armour and shield to fight off the attacks of the enemy and of misfortune. Long live Jesus in us, long live His Divine Mercy and His Providence!" (Letters II, 382)

These excerpts from his Letters tell us a great deal of Padre Pio's view on evil. During his formation he read all the main popular authors of his time. From the passages we have quoted, we are reminded of the teachings of Saint John of the Cross, who invited his readers to dress up their souls with the theological virtues. Another writer who mentioned the fight

against the devil was Lorenzo Scupoli. In his "Spiritual Fight" written in 1589. Above all, it is his personal experience what makes him want to invite his spiritual son and daughters to a kind of fidelity based essentially on the help that they should ask from Above.

.....Act Manfully, Act Courageously

Padre Pio would write, "The Lord is my strength, He is the sanity of my soul, He is my portion of eternity. In Him I hope, in Him I trust, and I shall not fear any evil", (Letters II,462). We cannot fully appreciate Padre Pio's own strength without considering his total trust in God's assistance. This is fundamental in Padre Pio, and he used to stress the fact the Lord gives us His strength in our weakest moments. He liked to exemplify this mentioning the biblical story of Samson. "What did God put all of Samson's strength? Didn't He put it in his hair, which is the weakest part of a man?" (Letters III, 749).

It should however be stressed that despite being aware of how essential the help of God was, Padre Pio knew that if he wanted to win over evil he had to engage in a proper fight. In a letter to a novice in Cesena, Padre Pio wrote, 'Be good, always; remember my weak teachings, as they are all according to the will of God. Be alert and vigilant and never fall asleep, as the enemy of your well-being is always around you and wishes to win you over. Let the strength of saints be your weapon, and put my recommendations into practice" (Letters IV, 391).

He would often finish his letters with the words taken from Psalm 26, "Confide in the Lord and act courageously".

If we were to summarise this, the strength needed to win against evil comes from heaven but man needs to add his own responsibility too. To Lucia Fiorentino Padre Pio wrote, 'Take comfort in the Lord and in the word of the authority that represents the Lord on earth and you shall receive what He gives to strong souls' (Letters III, 488).

When Padre Pio writes "act manly", this might sound like an anti-feminist encouragement. However this must be put into the context of the mentality of the time. Padre Pio was not anti-feminist at all, on the contrary, he admired women and knew their ability to sacrifice themselves. Nevertheless he used the expressions known at that time. In his letter to Erminia Gargani, he writes, 'Come on, then, you are not a little girl any more and should not act like a woman either; you need to have a 'manly heart', which means a firm soul, that knows how to stick to the will of God both in life and in death, serving and loving Him above all things; do not fear your limits nor any other obstacle you may find on your way' (Letters III, 749) We can see here how he liked to play with words. In another letter, written to Margherita Tresca, he quotes. Well known expression taken from the Bible, "spin a bit every day, spin during the day in the very rapid ray of light, and spin during the night at the light of a lamp amid all your lack of power and your sterility. The sage man praises the strong woman, "Her fingers, says he, know how to use the spinning wheel" Letters III, 174)

The Strength of The Holy Spirit

When one is persevering in prayer, this inevitably brings on a growth in their spiritual life, because the Lord acts directly in us, while we grow in our confidence in Him. In Padre Pio's view, one should not limit to requesting the Lord's help, but we should learn how to contemplate, too, just like Our Lady did. This is the action of Holy Spirit in us, aimed at our sanctification. "Many lukewarm souls never became fervent, many faithfuls did not grow in their fervour; and many sinful souls never became penitent, despite hearing stories about the Divine Grace narrated by souls who are in love with Heaven. Therefore never cease to let others know in a loud voice of all the marvellous work of the Lord in you" (Letters II,509).

Padre Pio was quite an expert of souls; he knew that even rigorous people could not win against evil by themselves. His favourite and recommended tools were such as certain penitential choices, continuous efforts in dominating one's temperament, distancing from certain occasions. However no real results could be attained unless the soul abandoned itself up completely in the hands of the Lord. The fight against evil would eventually configure into a positive good result and that would be God's opportunity given to walk down the path of conversion. We enjoy reading Padre Pio's reply to Cleonice Morcaldi. She writes, 'I am sad because I offended Jesus'. To this Padre Pio replicates, 'Bring this pain in your heart forever. Love it. And ask for as much grace as the weight of your sin'. Cleonice goes on and asks, "Did the Lord love me while I was being nasty to Him?'

He replies, 'He always loves. But there exist two different kinds of love, complacent love and compassionate love.'

'I know Jesus meets his delights in humans. Is this true for the good and just ones only?', she asks again.

'Jesus came for sinners, not for the innocent'.

'Yes, that's right, I remember the example of Magdalene'.

An infinite trust in the Lord is what brought Alberto Del fante to his conversion. This is what he tells us happened: 'Only Padre Pio could see what a sort of black hole my life was before getting to know him. Today, thanks to God and to Padre Pio, that black hole is back to being a radiating spot, even more luminous than the sun itself, while my heart is inundated by an incredible joy which makes me truly and deeply happy. I can say that ever since I met Padre Pio i was born again, because I found God and the peace of heart at the same time. Now i know exactly what the grace of God means!'. (Alberto Del Fante, in P. FORTUNATO DE MARZIO, My memories of Padre Pio, 86).

Padre Pio knew that God showed the way to conversion to sinners through the requests of their friends or brothers, and so he used to pray for others and ask for prayers for him. He would write to Assunta Di Tommaso, "Live fully in the celestial love that you have been practising, look after your soul and love mine, too, pray the Divine Mercy for me as i do the same for you. All yours in Jesus" (Letters 420)

We can thus understand the deep meaning of today's celebration for the Feast of Fidelity: we endeavour to live faith personally and at the same time we engage in a spiritual union with our brothers and sisters in the Prayer Groups around the world and we ask for them for the same spirit of conversion and the same perseverance in replying to God.

Let us be aware of this: the missionary Church needs faithful souls living and witnessing their faith. If we took a look at all of Padre Pio's writings throughout his life, they all show very deep and meaningful points. At the same time they are quite simple, there were no complex theological discussions, he haven't given big conferences like the ones we do today. Yet, people were drawn to God: his easy words did not mean to solve big theological questions, but his life was intrinsically tied to Jesus' life, so much so that many saw in him a representation of the Jesus on the Crucifix.

Prayer to Saint Pio of Monsignor Vincenzo D'Addario

Almighty God, you gave San Pio of Pietrelcina, capuchin priest,
the great privilege of participating in a unique way in the passion of Your Son,
grant me, through his intercession the grace of... (STATE INTENTION)
which I ardently desire;
and above all grant me the grace of living in conformity with the death of Jesus
to merit one day the glory of the Resurrection

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