

# *Padre Pio Prayer Groups*

## **“FOLLOW THE PATH THAT GOD HAS CHOSEN FOR YOU”**

*Nine steps with Saint Pio of Pietrelcina*



CENTRO GRUPPI DI PREGHIERA DI PADRE PIO

## **Follow the path that God has chosen for you**

### **Nine steps with Saint Pio of Pietrelcina**

#### **Introduction**

A new beginning? When we talk about a conversion, we might wonder whether it is the case of beginning something for the very first time or going back to something we used to do in the past. These two options may seem to be either/or: during every Lent, and during every spiritual retreat we experience our weakness and the need to improve our life. If on one hand we realise there is still much to do to become perfect and thus it seems necessary to start all over again, on the other hand we cannot pretend that nothing has happened until then and above all, that God's grace has not played any role in our life.

To those who approach Padre Pio's life for the first time, we recommend a small book, that we call 'book level zero'. It was devised as a helpful means for all priests wanting to set up a Prayer Group or for those Groups which have recently begun to meet.

At the same time, it is recommended as a text for those who want to start it all again. It came about at a time of general uncertainty. We are still wondering if the pandemic, that we will remember for many years to come, has in fact been defeated – at least in its worst stage – and we still wonder whether the need we are currently feeling to start all our activities again soon has been weakened by the recent hardships.

However, despite our inner concerns, we cannot deny our desire to start all our activities again – starting from the spiritual ones, including the meetings with the Prayer Group which we belong to. This makes us feel alive again, as if ready to start a new life, bearing the marks of the wounds from the last few difficult years. At the same time we feel as if we have been purified of all excesses and useless things and habits, having discovered what really counts in our life. This is why this year we would like to recommend the use of this booklet, which will also be helpful to the Groups which are about to start their activities again, in view of living Padre Pio's spirituality with renewed effort and fidelity.

Unlike the classical formative texts offering a wide and thorough catechesis, we have chosen the sheet method combined by concepts. Each meeting is based on the Word of God (with a brief comment that I wrote), a letter from Padre Pio (drafted and updated by Fr Luciano Lotti) and then some references to the life of Prayer Groups (Leandro Cascavilla), to the environment in which Padre Pio lived his vocation (Marianna Iafelice) and to the various phases of his existence (Paolo Petracca Ciavarella).

I would like to thank all of those who have worked on the texts and editorial work and I invite all of you, spiritual assistants and responsible of the Groups, to consider these pages as a valuable aid for this year's catecheses.

Saint Paul proclaims the saving mystery of God, who sent His Son to tell His own story and to help men find their value within God's plan. We want to introduce Padre Pio in this perspective: he was a man who got to fully appreciate this great kind of love, and started telling others, prompting his spiritual sons and daughters to share in this mysterious encounter. Prayer Groups may want to begin with sharing their graces received by God so as to contemplate and help spread the Holy Spirit's work within the Church.

We shall start by celebrating Holy Mass, because in every difficult historical moment God should be remembered and thanked for his presence.

We shall endeavour to choose the path that God has prepared for each one of us, following Padre Pio's teaching. We shall distinguish and magnify within the Group the variety of gifts with which the Holy Spirit has endowed every member, for the salvation of the Church.

Let us be open to those who are searching God, so that through a simple prayer, made by the ones who wish to be poor in spirit, these meetings can bring us to shed a light of love in this world that desperately needs to find hope again.

16th June 2021, nineteenth anniversary of Padre Pio's Canonisation

Fr Franco Moscone  
General Director of Padre Pio's Prayer Groups  
Bishop of Manfredonia-Vieste-San Giovanni Rotondo



### ***First Step***

## **PADRE PIO’S LIFE, SEEN AS A WORK BY THE HOLY SPIRIT**

### **BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES**

*“And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.”*

(Mc 1,11)

After a long time that He spent leading an ordinary life, far from the crowds, Jesus went to John the Baptist as an observant Jew to fulfil his desire to be part of the people who were waiting for messianic times, new times of grace. It is exactly when he received Baptism, that the voice of the Father revealed him his mission as a “beloved”, and as a servant” who will conquer the world in the name of His Father by carrying the sins of the world on his shoulders.

The same applies to us: as we were baptised, we became His beloved, therefore we are also called not to judge the world, but to carry its weight. The weight of the world is its inability to see the love of the Father: injustice, oppression, wars, violence, tyranny. We are called to receive the Holy Spirit to be able to conquer the world in the name of the Father; so that humanity in its variety is open to its own diversity, so as to form harmony in plurality.

### **SPIRITUALITY**

It is not easy to tell you about all of Padre Pio’s life in one meeting. Rather than pointing out some of the details, I think it would be more appropriate to understand the important role that the Holy Spirit played on him, while leading him towards holiness. In this view, we are going to look at a letter that Padre Pio wrote to Raffaelina Cerase, which shows how he prompted his spiritual daughter to be aware of the fact that a life of faith requires both perseverance and loyalty.

### ***From a letter by Padre Pio to Raffaelina Cerase***

*Pietrelcina, 19th May 1914*

Beloved daughter of Jesus Christ,

May Jesus and Mary be always in your heart and may they make you holy.

By the repeated blows of his expert chisel and by his diligent polishing, the divine Artist prepares the blocks of stone which are intended to be part of the divine building. This is how the hymn of the Office for the Dedication of the Church goes, which all of our sweet mother the Catholic Church sings united, and we can testify that it is true.

for eternal glory can be considered as a stone destined for the erection of the eternal building. A mason who wants to build a house, will first and foremost clean up the stones that he will be using for the construction of the building; this he obtains by a series of blows of hammer and chisel. The Celestial Father acts in the same way with the elected souls that, since eternity, were destined by His supreme wisdom and providence to be part of the eternal building.

The soul that is destined to reign with Jesus Christ in eternal glory, must be shaped by the blows of hammer and chisel. But what are these blows of hammer and chisel by which the divine Artist prepares the stone, that is to say, the chosen soul? Dear sister, these strokes of chisel are the shadows, fears, temptations, spiritual torments and anxiety, with a dash of desolation and even of physical pain.

You had better be thankful then for the eternal Father’s endless mercy, for treating your soul in this way, for it means that it is destined to be saved. Well then, we can feel privileged for all the terms of endearment that the most loving of all fathers has shown towards us. Open your hearts to this heavenly Physician of souls and abandon yourself into His most holy





embrace with complete trust. He is treating you as a chosen one to follow Jesus closely up the Hill of Calvary and I notice this action of grace in you with joy and emotion. Be sure that all that is going on within your soul is according to the Lord's will and for this reason you must not be afraid of acting wrongly, in a word, of offending God.

...

If Jesus manifests Himself, thank Him; and if He remains hidden, thank Him just the same: it is all a trick of love. I earnestly hope that you will come to breathe your last breath with Jesus on the Cross and with Him softly exclaim: "Everything is accomplished"

...

May God bless you along with your sister and may He calm your anxiety. May He turn His merciful eyes upon you and console you through His compassion.

Fra Pio, Capuchin.

When we read the life of a saint, we admire his or her virtues, but it is necessary to take into account that these are instilled in human beings by the Holy Spirit, especially the theological ones. The action of the grace of the Father acts within man, raising him to communion with him through the various events of his life, purifying him as «gold in the crucible», making him capable to understand and love him in total loyalty. Padre Pio describes all this through an image taken from the Breviary, precisely from a hymn that was recited in the common dedication of the Church; Jesus is the divine Artist who frees the stones from all useless things to build the reign of God. During his whole life, Padre Pio will also be aware that the devil, called the divine artist of darkness by contrast, will hinder the action of God. A particular characteristic of his whole existence will be the faith he will always have in God, feeling as if he had been immersed in an ocean of fire.

## **GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO**

- ❖ Francesco Forgione was born in Pietrelcina in Vico Storto Valle on 25th May 1887. He is Grazio Forgione and Maria Giuseppa de Nunzio's fourth son
- ❖ In 1901, after a meeting with Fr Camillo of Sant'Elia in Pianisi, who was a capuchin friar in the Convent of Morcone, the young Francesco expressed the strong desire to become a friar, too. His parents enthusiastically accepted his vocation.
- ❖ Francesco Forgione was born in Pietrelcina in Vico Storto Valle on 25th May 1887. He is Grazio Forgione and Maria Giuseppa de Nunzio's fourth son.
- ❖ Francesco entered the convent on 6th January 1903 and on 22nd January of the following year he took his vows and became Fra' Pio.
- ❖ In the morning of the 10th of August 1910, Padre Pio was ordained a priest by monsignor Paolo Schinosi, Archbishop of Marcanopoli, in the chapel of Santa Maria in the cathedral of Benevento. On 14th August he celebrated his first Mass in the Mother Church of Pietrelcina.
- ❖ On 7th September 1910, in the family-run fields of Piana Romana, under the great elm where he used to pray, he received the first stigmata, which would disappear a year later.
- ❖ In 1915 Padre Pio was called for military service but, during his medical check up, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and sent back home.
- ❖ In February 1916, Padre Pio entered the religious community of Saint Anne in Foggia and, on 28th July of the same year, he was sent to San Giovanni Rotondo by his superior, Fr Paolino of Casacalenda, in the convent in which he would remain for the rest of his life.
- ❖ On 20th September 1918, in front of the Crucifix of the convent church of San Giovanni Rotondo, he received the stigmata on his hands, feet and side, signs of the Passion of Christ.
- ❖ In 1940 he started the project for his great worldly work, the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza (Home for the Relief of Suffering), which would open on 5th May 1956.
- ❖ In the early hours of 23rd September 1968, Padre Pio returned to the Father's house.



### **PADRE PIO’S WORLD: Pietrelcina, his birthplace**

Pietrelcina is a charming agricultural village near Benevento. It has very ancient origins, it already existed in 1100. The village, founded on good human and Christian traditions, is characterised by its narrow alleys and by its houses built with lean lime and hard and raw stone, resting directly on the rock. In fact, the whole village is perched on the “Morgione”, that rock at whose base flows the Pantaniello torrent.

Francesco Forgione was born here in Vico Storto Valle n.27 (today the house number is 32).

In Vico Storto Valle there is also the popular “torretta”, an isolated room of quadrangular shape and with a small window where Padre Pio has slept and prayed for a period of time during his permanence in Pietrelcina when he was a young priest, shuttling from here to Piana Romana, where his family had its fields.

### **CLOSE-UP ON PADRE PIO’S PRAYER GROUPS: The birth of the Prayer Groups**

Padre Pio has always prompted his spiritual sons and daughters to pray together. In his correspondence, he recommended – though in different places – that prayers and novenas for the same purpose be said. Between the two World Wars, he started prompting all the people who had gone to see him in San Giovanni Rotondo that when back in their home towns, they should gather to pray together with other faithful. During the Second World War, pope Pio XII invited all the believers to pray to the Lord together to end the conflict. After hearing the news, Padre Pio asked the doctor Guglielmo Sanguinetti to write to his spiritual sons and daughters to gather and pray together for the intentions of the Pope. This initiative, followed by other formal declarations later on, marked the beginning of the Prayer Groups.

### **OUR COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS**

Groups feel united to the other groups through prayer and the devotion to Padre Pio. This communion of spirit is made visible through four celebrations that are celebrated throughout the year, and these help to make our charism clear. The dates of these celebrations are:

- **7th October**, Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary → to celebrate the beginning of the common year;
- **22nd January**, anniversary of Padre Pio’s religious vestment, with the renewal of baptismal promises;
- **5th May**, anniversary of the foundation of Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza Hospital and Anniversary of the creation of St. Padre Pio's Prayer Groups
- **16th June**, commemoration of Padre Pio's canonization: Common prayer in spiritual union with Groups from all over the world.

#### **7TH OCTOBER**

#### **FEAST OF OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY**

#### **THE CEREMONY OF THE ROSARY HANDOUT**

In all the Groups all over the world the social year starts on 7th October with the delivery of the rosary. The Group Centre proposes a small liturgy based on the theme of the year and the celebration can take place within a single Group or in the diocese.



# The ceremony of the Rosary handout

7<sup>th</sup> october 2021

*The ceremony of the Rosary handout was established to unite us with Mary so that the Church can always enjoy her protection. On the 7th of October (or another day agreed with the Spiritual Assistant) the Group meets for a catechesis and for the Rosary ceremony. The rosaries are blessed and the commitment to the recitation of the Rosary is renewed.*

## Song

### **Psalm 100**

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.  
Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the Lord is God.  
It is he who made us, and we are his[a];  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

### ***A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians (Col 3, 12-17)***

Brothers and sisters:

Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one Body. And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

### ***Meditations from the writings of St. Padre Pio***

I must add a further word to what has already been said, namely, to suggest the suitable means for the attainment of Christian perfection. The apostle suggests two most powerful means, which are the constant study of God's law and the performance of all our actions for his glory.

As regards the first means, he writes to the Colossians: «Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God».

This apostle's doctrine is clear and does not need any comment. If the Christian is full of God's law which warns and teaches him to despise the world and its allurements, wealth and honours and all that prevents him from loving God, he will never fail no matter what adversities may befall him; he will endure everything steadfastly and perseveringly; he will readily forgive offences and give thanks to God for all things. [...]



As regards the other means of doing everything for God's glory, let us listen to the apostle's teaching: «Whatever you do, he says, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him».

By the faithful use of this simple means we do not merely keep far from any sin, but feel the continual urge to aim constantly at perfection.

**Short pause**

**BLESSING OF ROSARIES**

*We have come to the blessing of the rosary crowns that will accompany our pastoral journey. We renew our fidelity to Mary and our commitment in praying the Holy Rosary.*

We bless you, Father, because you have called us to meditate on the Birth, Death and Resurrection of your Son, to meditate on earthly life, waiting to contemplate him in eternity.

***Hail Mary, Blessed be Jesus Your beloved Son***

We bless you, our Brother and Lord Jesus Christ, you've chosen Mary your mother to show your face of peace and mercy to the world.

***Hail Mary, Blessed be Jesus Your beloved Son***

We bless you, Holy Spirit, through Saint Pio of Pietrelcina You give us the Holy Rosary to meditate on your great works for men and for our salvation.

***Hail Mary, Blessed be Jesus Your beloved Son***

**All:** O Virgin Mary, accept our good intentions to pray the Holy Rosary every day to remember your love with which you accompanied the life of your Son Jesus Christ and then to share His glory in heaven.

Saint Pio of Pietrelcina obtain for us from the Lord the holy perseverance in our purpose to pray the Holy Rosary daily, for our needs, for the Church and for the whole world.

Oh Lord, let the strength of Your spirit and Your Holy Blessing descend upon these holy wishes.  
You who live and reign for ever and ever

***Amen***

**Song to Our Lady**



## PADRE PIO PRAYER GROUPS

*"Follow the path that God has chosen for you"*

### *Second Step*

## **A SON WHO IS LESS UNWORTHY THAN SAINT FRANCESCO**

### **BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES**

*"A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher."*  
(Lc 6, 40)

There is nothing more useful than a master of life. Generally parents are masters of life, as well as someone in the family or an outsider who is charming, whom we look up to, and who instils in us the desire for a full life. In the Jewish religion there are the so-called "rabbis", who were teachers chosen for their testimony and as role-models. Jesus brings novelty in this, too: He chooses the ones He wants. He chooses the ones that other teachers would not choose, because they would not have been able to carry out their tasks. He chooses without any expectations. The disciples of Jesus will receive everything by this Sublime Teacher and, thanks to the Grace of the Holy Spirit, they will be able to be like Him.

We also have been chosen through Baptism, and we have to express our desire to be educated in his school, we want to ask the Holy Spirit to renew his work in us. We want to get ready for we need to be aware of the new orientation our life needs to take, from the human and the Christian perspective: we want to offer our lives like Jesus did, loving without any conditions and, above all, without any expectations.

### **SPIRITUALITY**

Padre Pio's vocation develops under the inspiration of the Franciscan spirituality. This represents the ideal environment for his reflective and particularly sensitive character. The affection of His fellow monks, which will surround him for the rest of his life, will be one of his points of strength and will support him in several difficult situations. For this reason, we are going to show you a letter in which Padre Pio compliments the archpriest's niece who has become an oblate and prompts her to go to Assisi, for a first-hand experience of San Francesco's spirituality.

The fraternity of the Third Order was founded in Pietrelcina; Padre Pio joyfully spoke about a place that was so dear to all Franciscans: the small church called "Portiuncola", in Assisi.

### **From a letter by Padre Pio to Graziella Pannullo**

*San Giovanni Rotondo 30th December 1921*

I hope that the day when you can taste a joy similar to that of Paradise is not far, and that will happen when you go to visit Assisi, which is the Franciscan town par excellence, a monument which speaks of the great love and infinite charity of our holy Father, Saint Francis. Yes, I hope that one day, in the not too distant future, you will prostrate right there, in the little church of the Portiuncola, that has become so dark with the passing of time. Throughout seven centuries of religious devotion, penitents have worn away its surface with their kisses. Mrs. Henrion was a pious admirer of Franciscan works; she tells us how all the kisses through time have made its rough walls as smooth as marble and alabaster, pulsating onto those walls one after the other, with a rhythm that well echoes that of their hearts of devoted pilgrims. Every single dark brick bears the story of thousands and thousands of souls, who leaned their heads right there, anxious and desperate, in total abandonment.

Pilgrims knee there instinctively, and in divine silence they experience the sweet feeling of a most peaceful blessing. They become part of the infinite echo of all the sweet prayers that preceded theirs, still resounding throughout the centuries, sharing in the same ardent love of the saints, in the holocaust of pure victims, and in the tears of redemption. Oh! How great, how sweet the divine dogma of the Communion of Saints in the Church of Jesus is! This truly is the door to eternal life, as it is written on the front wall of the little church of the Portiuncola. Padre Pio, capuchin

Faith needs to find the right places. There are some physical places, like a church where a saint has worked or it was his home or his monastery. We don't visit them like tourists, but to meditate on





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how much the work of God has influenced that person or that place with His goodness. The symbols we use in our faith can remain abstract, but they can also become “places” where we meet the Lord. A sacrament can be a cold rite or indeed the place where we meet the Lord. Equally the Church, as a community that gathers people in the name of Christ, is a symbol. The Prayer Group, with the charity and the spirit of faith which animates it, can be a symbol open to others and a means enabling its members to share their faith. It can become a place where the grace of God can be celebrated together.

### **GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO**

- ❖ In the first months of 1898, Giuseppa and Grazio Forgione, after realising that their son has been gifted with not indifferent endowments, decide to find a private tutor for little Francesco. Father Domenico Tizzano, a local teacher, starts teaching him and this is when Padre Pio’s basics for his spiritual education are laid.
- ❖ In January 1903, two years after meeting with Fr Camillo from Sant’Elia, Francesco leaves for the convent of Morcone, with four friends. This is where he begins his studies for the novitiate: “The pupils must be educated to priestly obedience, to a poor standard of living, to the spirit of self-sacrifice, so that they can get used to living according to the Crucified Christ”.
- ❖ After professing his simple vows, in 1904 Fra' Pio continues his studies in the convent of Sant'Elia in Pianisi, in the province of Campobasso. Here he asks to be sent to the Missions, but his request will not be accepted. He will therefore choose to be a missionary through his “ humble, fervent and constant prayer”.
- ❖ In October 1905, Padre Pio is temporarily transferred to the convent of San Marco la Catola in the province of Foggia, where Father Benedetto Nardella taught philosophy, sciences and Italian literature. A very strong filial relationship begins between the two, so that the young friar will choose him as his spiritual director.
- ❖ In April 1906 Padre Pio returns to Sant'Elia. In the following years, he is formed in the convent of Serracapriola in the province of Foggia (1907), where he studies theology under the guidance of Father Agostino from San Marco in Lamis.
- ❖ From 1908 he continues his theological studies in the province of Avellino, first in the convent of Montefusco, then in the convent of Gesualdo (1909).
- ❖ In 1910 he is ordained priest in the Cathedral of Pietrelcina. Due to his precarious health, he will live here almost permanently, until 1916. In Pietrelcina he is engaged in parish activities to help Fr Salvatore Pannullo.

### **PADRE PIO’S WORLD: the convent of Morcone**

Morcone is a small town at the foot of Mount Mucre. The Capuchins settled there on 17th May 1603, when they planted the cross for the construction of the convent. The young men who wanted to become friars were sent here. In fact, this was the place where they were formed to the fraternal and conventual life, according to the Capuchin charism.

Francesco Forgione, the future Padre Pio, arrived at this convent on 6th January 1903, welcomed by Fr Camillo of Sant’Elia in Pianisi. In fact, the young Fr Pio understood here that the cloister was the best place to serve the Lord, “under the flag of the Poverello di Assisi”, the poor from Assisi. Within its walls, the young friar humbly asked Jesus for the grace of being “a son less worthy than San Francesco”.

### **CLOSE-UP ON PADRE PIO’S PRAYER GROUPS: Purposes of Prayer Groups**

Prayer groups have a twofold purpose: they gather together to pray together, according to the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff and for the varied intentions that arise, and to engage in the service of charity for those who suffer, especially aimed at the Casa Solievo della Sofferenza.

The link with the Franciscan spirituality is expressed by a moderate lifestyle, attentive to the poverty, the respect for creation and the peace in every place and in every situation.



## PADRE PIO PRAYER GROUPS

*"Follow the path that God has chosen for you"*

### Third Step THE MERCY OF GOD

#### BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES

*"And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him". (Lc 15, 20)*

All monotheistic religions - based on their belief in one God only - agree on His most qualifying aspect: God is Merciful. In ancient languages this term refers to his inclination to act based "on his gut feelings", in other words it is a God that acts and judges "according to his heart, rather than his thoughts".

In the history of Israel, what is revealed about God is precisely his ability to be affectionate, caring, reassuring, always ready to offer new opportunities to his people. Throughout the history of salvation, God is exactly as Jesus says in his parables: it is a Father who runs towards his repentant son, throws himself at his neck and kisses him.

We too must learn to be like God the Father, who loves us always and despite our faults: we should never crush anyone, nor offend their dignity, we are never to upset a weak person, mortify anyone with our judgments, disrespect their image of children of God. God is merciful and he does not know what it would be like to be anything but Love. We are His creatures, and we want to testify this by walking our path in life, showing our awareness of His image in each one of us, by letting our lives announce His love for all humans alike.

#### SPIRITUALITY

God's mercy comes before human sin, it has its origins in creation and in the incarnation, which are the great signs through which we understand his merciful love. The Church - and in particular those who administer the sacrament of Reconciliation - are called to announce this love, to make it understood and to make it present and tangible through the sacraments. Man is called to give God a response made of love and availability to his grace.

#### From a letter by Padre Pio to fr Benedetto of San Marco in Lamis

*Pietrelcina, 2nd september 1911*

*Dear Father,*

*Jesus is still with me, He has not left me yet, for I am finding it increasingly easier to react to temptations and abandon myself to God's will, as I told you in my last letter. You can see, then Father, how tender and good Jesus is, no matter how bad and wicked I am! I wonder how I can ever correspond to such great mercy. How can I repay him for such great gifts? If you only knew how often in the past I have exchanged Jesus for some contemptible thing of this world! I can see something mysterious in myself: I continuously repent of the sins I have committed, I resolve continually to never commit them again, and yet, I must admit with bitter tears, that in spite of all this I am still very imperfect and it seems to me that I often offend the Lord. At times I am really in despair because it seems to me almost impossible that Jesus should forgive so many sins; again, more often than not, it seems impossible that Jesus should let me go astray. Oh, what on earth is this all about? I would be grateful if you could explain this to me. I can only say that all this occurs to me without realizing it, for I have by no means the will to offend God even to the slightest extent.*

*I also suffer greatly Father, when I see how people ignore Jesus, and what is worse, how they even insult Him, especially by some dreadful blasphemies. I had rather die, or at least become deaf rather than hear so many insults offered by men to God's respect.*

*I have prayed to the Lord as follows: Lord let me die rather than be present when people are offending you! Please recommend me to the Lord and ask Him for this grace on my behalf, should this be for his greater glory.*

*I have finished celebrating the Gregorian Masses. May I ask you to send me a small offering, because at the moment, for want of money, I am unable to get the medicines I need.*

*Do not cease to bless me at all times.*

*Yours*

*Fr Pio*

Many witnesses tell us about Padre Pio being very strict towards those who went to confession. It may be useful to go back to the origins of this behaviour, so that we can fully understand his message. First of all Padre Pio considered himself as a sinner, and he was aware of the great mercy of God; we may thus find it hard to understand why he claimed that he did not want to offend God in any way. This behaviour of his can be explained by the fact that he could feel the presence of the Lord in his life and therefore – compared to such perfection - he felt small and always imperfect. At the same time, God's presence was so intensely enriching him



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with His power, that he felt compelled to fight evil with all his strengths. He was aware that people did not fully appreciate that God's mercy was not only powerful in freeing them from sin, but also in making them free as to fully live their dignity of children of God.

### GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO

- ❖ August 4th, 1910 during Padre Pio's first mass, Father Agostino recalls the three pillars of the priestly mission: preaching, celebration and confession; almost prophetically he adds: «your health is not so good, so I suspect you will not be a preacher. I therefore wish you to become a great confessor».
- ❖ As early as 1910, Father Benedetto Nardella forbade the young friar to hear confessions and Padre Pio repeatedly insisted, asking for his permission: in a letter of April 1911 he wrote "I come then again to beg you, in the name of the parish priest, so that he may deign to grant me the said faculty to confess [...] I would like to point out that this faculty would embrace only the Easter precept ». The negative response of the spiritual father will come on April 12: this activity would cause "damage to his physical health, and disturbance to the peace of his soul".
- ❖ In the letter of March 4, 1912, Padre Pio will again see his request denied "not only because of your poor health, but also because I have to be sure of the necessary scientific capacity before authorizing someone to the sacred ministry", in fact, Father Benedict writes.
- ❖ On March 15, 1913 the young friar again begs his superior, "I come to ask you for permission to hear confessions, at least those of the sick. Rest assured that this will do no harm to my health ", but the spiritual father will answer him again "I cannot give you the faculty to confess because I do not know your scientific capacity in moral theology "(March 16, 1913).
- ❖ Starting in 1916, after arriving in San Giovanni Rotondo, Padre Pio began his apostolate of the confessional, which will reach men and women from all over the world. He will later say: "I tremble every time I have to go down to the confessional because I have to administer the blood of Christ there".
- ❖ In a letter dated June 3rd, 1919, Padre Pio wrote to his spiritual director: «I do not have a free minute: all the time is spent in freeing the brothers from the snares of Satan. Blessed be God".
- ❖ Since May 23rd, 1931, the Decree of the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office has kept Padre Pio away from the ministerial faculties except for the private celebration of Holy Mass. Only two years later, on July 16th, 1933, will he resume celebrating in the convent church.
- ❖ On March 19th, 1934 he was given the faculty to hear confessions again, but only those of men and on May 12th of the same year he was allowed to "hear the sacramental confessions utriusque sexus"- of the other gender.
- ❖ In 2015 Pope Francis indicated Saint Pio of Pietrelcina and Saint Leopoldo Mandic as role-models for all confessors, and on 6th February of the following year their bodies would be exhibited in Saint Peter's Square on the occasion of the Jubilee of Mercy.

### PADRE PIO'S WORLD: The convent of Foggia

Foggia is a city that has its origins in the 11th century, and its genesis is closely linked to the destruction of Arpi, a town located a few kilometers from the current city area. Padre Pio arrived at the convent in Sant'Anna, on February 17th, 1916, to spiritually assist Raffaelina Cerase, whose spiritual direction he had already undertaken by correspondence.

In fact this was the motivation devised by the then Provincial Father Benedetto, who decided that it was high time Padre Pio should go back to the convent, after he had stayed with his family in Pietrelcina, for health reasons, for too long. In Foggia, Padre Pio would not only dedicate to the direction of Donna Raffaelina, but he would hear many confessions, so much so that he would write: "A crowd of souls thirsty for Jesus will fall upon me, to make me put their hands in my hair". Thanks to the pages of the Diary of Father Nazareno of Arpaia, who was at the time the guardian in the Foggia convent, we also know that Padre Pio, in recent months, had been victim to a series of diabolical harassments.

### PADRE PIO PRAYER GROUPS

Prayer Groups are called to express themselves in a polite and merciful way towards everyone. This should be particularly so within families and church communities: may they be seeds of communion, striving - when necessary - to take a step back, in a constant endeavour to favour the common good. They are to warmly welcome their brothers and sisters, especially those who are wounded by difficult moral or social situations, making this their main characteristic.



### ***Fourth step***

#### **THE EUCHARIST, THE ALTAR AND THE VICTIM**

##### **BIBLICAL COMMENTS**

*"Then he said to them, "Those who want to be my disciples must deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow me". (Lc 9, 23)*

Through the Incarnation, the Word of God complies with the Father's will, it becomes human in all its essence, till His death on the cross.

It is in this faithful obedience that Jesus becomes the Eucharist, which can be considered as an act of thanksgiving, as it is through obedience that He fulfils the Father's loving care towards humanity. If we want to become Jesus' disciples, we want to surrender ourselves totally to Him who chose to become as an altar, giving Himself up for us, while we ourselves become victims of love with Him, for Him and in Him.

We shall live every day with love, we will choose to live all our daily chores with love, and in so doing we shall be pleasing the Father, just like Jesus did, becoming immaculate hosts of love, offered for the healing of the world.

##### **SPIRITUALITY**

The passage chosen to speak about Padre Pio's relationship with the most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist dates back to a particular period of his life: he is in Pietrelcina, prevented from returning to the convent due to a severe lung disease. His life is made up of prayer and study, with a small apostolate among the sick and in parish life. Padre Pio's mystical experience has become more and more intense and day after day he gets closer to God.

##### **From a letter by Padre Pio to fr Agostino of San Marco in Lamis**

*Pietrelcina, 3<sup>rd</sup> december 1912*

*My very dear Father, I should like to undress my chest for a moment and show you the wound which our tender Jesus has lovingly opened in this heart of mine!*

*My heart has found at last a Lover, so close to me that I am incapable of hurting him anymore. You already know this Lover. He is one who never gets angry with those who offend him. My heart carries in itself endless acts of His mercy towards me, while it is aware of how totally unworthy it is of these.*

*He has loved me and chosen me among many to be one of his favourites.*

*Whenever I ask him what I have done to deserve such consolations, he smiles and says repeatedly that nothing is refused to such an intercessor. In return he asks me for nothing but love, but do I not perhaps owe him this out of gratitude? Oh, my dear Father, if I could only make him happy just as he makes me happy! He is so much in love with my heart that he makes me burn with his divine fire, with the fire of his love. What is this fire that pervades my whole being? Dear Father, if Jesus makes us so happy on earth, what will heaven be like? I often ask myself if any people exist who do not feel their breast burning with divine fire, especially when they are close to him in the Blessed Sacrament. This seems impossible to me, especially in the case of a priest or a religious. Perhaps those who say they do not feel this fire do not notice it because their hearts are bigger. I resort to this kind interpretation of their words so as not to accuse them of shameful falsehood.*

...

*Dear Father, let us pray that the Lord may wish to dispel the dense clouds which are gathering on the horizon of the Church.*

*Fr Pio*

The Eucharist is the center and summit of Christian life, according to Sacrosanctum Concilium. Padre Pio often refers to this sacrament in his symbolism; from these images it is easy to understand how much the Eucharist really was the cornerstone and the direction of his existence. The altar is the sign of Jesus' sacrifice: the union of love that springs from the Eucharist pushes Padre Pio to lift himself up with Christ on that altar to be a victim offered to the benefit of all brothers and sisters.

His many references to the Eucharist are a sign of the depth of his mystical experience, and while they refer to his own person, they also hint to a possible itinerary for every Christian. First of all, Padre Pio teaches us how to place the Eucharist at the center of our existence, how to feel within ourselves the constant desire to encounter Jesus, how to choose him renouncing sin, how to surrender ourselves totally to Christ in the Eucharist so as to overcome temptation.

In the Eucharist, Padre Pio finds both the meaning of his existence and the great value of the cross which he embraces out of love; from this sacrament springs the power of charity which also unites him concretely to his brothers and sisters, promoting many good initiatives in their favour.





### **GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO**

- ❖ On Sunday, 14th August 1910, Padre Pio celebrated his first solemn mass in the Mother Church of Pietrelcina. During his years in the seminary, the young friar suffers from very high fevers which prevent him from nourishing himself except on Holy Communion: in a letter dated 29 March 1911 he writes to Father Benedetto: "my heart feels as if it is attracted by a superior strength before joining him [Jesus] in the morning in the Blessed Sacrament. I am so hungry and thirsty before receiving Him, that I feel as if was going to die breathless. As I cannot join him yet, I feel as if I am feverish, and I am then forced to go and eat his meat ».
- ❖ On September 8th, 1911, for the first time Padre Pio writes to Padre Benedetto that he has noticed on the palm of his hands "a red patch accompanied by a strong and acute pain" and also adds that "when I am close to Jesus in the blessed Sacrament, my heart starts beating very rapidly. At times I feel as if my heart is about to burst out of my chest ».
- ❖ From October to November 1911, Padre Pio resides in Venafrò. In the small convent of Molise, between 29th November and 1st December, he lives the mystical experience of ecstasies: every day, several times a day, the friar speaks with Jesus. His talks will be witnessed and transcribed by Father Agostino, who is present in those hours of conversation with the Lord.
- ❖ On June 28th, 1912, in an epistle addressed to Father Agostino, Padre Pio writes: "Then, last night, I spent the entire night with Jesus in his Passion. [...] I felt myself tightly bound to Jesus. I burned with a thousand flames, which made me live and die. Hence, I suffered, lived and died continuously».
- ❖ In 1915, in response to the insistent requests of his confessor Father Agostino, Padre Pio states in an epistle that he had already received heavenly visions in the years in which he lived in Sant'Elia, "if I am not mistaken, these must have begun not long after the novitiate "(October 10th, 1915)."
- ❖ On August 26th, 1917, Padre Pio was in Naples for military medical examinations. There are no chapels there and young soldiers are not allowed to go out. He will write to Father Agostino "I am very distressed that I cannot say Mass [...] what desolation without Jesus!".
- ❖ On 22nd September 1968, at 5 in the morning, Padre Pio celebrates his last mass in the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie. At the end of the celebration, in an attempt to get up, he staggers and falls into the arms of Father Bill who manages to support him with the help of the other brothers. Taken back to his cell, he will greet his spiritual children for the last time with the words: "My children, my children ...".

### **PADRE PIO'S WORLD: *The ecstasies of Venafrò***

Venafrò was an important Roman city, a transit route and connection between the Sannio and Campania, whose strategic importance is attested in the various eras. A place rich in history, the town is characterized by many churches with soaring bell towers, that determine the urban skyline. The Capuchin convent, built in 1573, when Padre Pio arrived accompanied by Father Benedetto, in the second half of October 1911, was intended as a place of study. Here, during the month and a half of his stay, the young friar experienced numerous ecstasies but also many diabolical oppressions, as Father Agostino of San Marco in Lamis tells us in his Diary. His food in this period consisted of the Eucharist alone. On 7th December 1911, Padre Pio, seriously got worse, and left Venafrò to go to Pietrelcina.

### **CLOSE-UP ON PADRE PIO'S PRAYER GROUPS: *A Eucharistic spirituality***

Sacramental life, and especially participation in the Eucharist, should be at the centre of our spirituality. From the very beginning, Eucharistic Adoration and community participation in the monthly Mass have been the main elements of our spirituality. Whenever possible, we should ask our spiritual director or the parish priest to take care of this meeting specifically for our human and spiritual formation. When this is not possible, we will participate in Mass and Adoration with the parish community, in the awareness that the charism of prayer must be carried out together, not in isolation from the community.

### **OUR COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS**

#### **22 January (Anniversary of the religious Dressing of Padre Pio) - The Day of Fidelity**

In line with the evangelical essence that characterizes the life of Padre Pio, all Groups commit themselves to a community celebration (for individual Groups or for dioceses) in which, always keeping to the theme of the year, baptismal promises are renewed, always equal in form, to commit ourselves to consistency and testimony.

This meeting can be a preamble to the upcoming Lenten period and can constitute the beginning of a journey of revision of personal and community life.



## ***The day of fidelity***

22 January 2022

Anniversary of the Religious Dressing of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina

*Every year our Prayer Groups are called to confirm their commitment of fidelity to the Gospels, following the spirituality of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, their founder.*

### ***THE RITE OF THE OATH OF FIDELITY***

*The rite of this commitment of fidelity is celebrated on the day we commemorate the dressing of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, January 22 (or another day agreed upon with the Spiritual Assistant). If Holy Mass is celebrated, this rite can be performed after the homily or before the final blessing.*

#### **Song**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

the Lord is with you.

**and with your spirit**

Let us open our spirit to his voice, and in remembrance of our Baptism and in prayer we show our gratitude to the Lord for the gift of faith.

**We give thanks to the Lord, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.**

Jesus says: “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness”. (John 12:46)

**Lord Jesus, our light, make it possible for us to walk in the light of your Word and live in the light of your friendship.**

#### *Psalm 91*

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.  
I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.  
He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day,  
nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.  
You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.

Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place-- the Most High, who is my refuge—  
no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.  
On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.



"Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name.

When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

**Amen**

O God, good and faithful, You create the existence of man and renew him, look with love at the people you have chosen and call incessantly new generations to establish their friendly relationship with You, so that, according to your promise, they can joyfully receive as a gift the dignity of children of God. For Christ our Lord.

### ***Meditations from the writings of St. Padre Pio***

Pray to this divine Lover for me; this beloved Spouse of our souls, that he may accomplish the work he began in me. [...] He has shown me that not only would he be my Saviour, my supreme Benefactor, but a devoted, sincere and faithful friend of my heart; eternal and infinite love, consolation, joy, comfort, my entire treasure.

[...] A sad but most sweet voice echoed in my poor heart; it was the warning of a loving Father who pointed out to his son, the dangers he would encounter in the struggle of life. It was the voice of a benevolent Father, who wanted his son's heart detached from infantile, innocent love; it was the voice of a loving Father who whispered in the ears and heart of the son in order to detach him totally from the clay, from mud, in order to jealously consecrate himself entirely to Him.

Ardently, with loving sighs, with inexplicable groanings, with sweet and suave words He called him to himself, to make him totally His.

[...] Where better could I serve you, O Lord, if not in the cloister, under the banner of Saint Francis of Assisi? And He, seeing my embarrassment, smiled at length, and that smile left an ineffable sweetness in my heart, so that sometimes I truly felt it so near, that I thought I saw His shadow. And my flesh, my entire being rejoiced in the Saviour, in my God.

### **The Renewal of Baptismal Promises**

*Where possible, those who have chosen to be part of the Prayer Group arrange themselves around the altar.*

Brothers and sisters, through Baptism, in Jesus's Passover we were buried with him in death to rise to new life. In various ways, the Lord has led us to learn about the spirituality of Padre Pio and to look at him as a model in following and imitating Christ poor and obedient to the Father. Following his example, we renew the promises of our Baptism, committing ourselves to recognise the voice of Jesus who calls us by name and invites us to follow Him.

Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth?

*I do*

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered death and was buried, rose again from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father?

*I do*

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting?

*I do*

God and Father of Jesus, who freed us from sin and made us to be reborn from water and from the Holy Spirit, through the intercession of St. Pio of Pietrelcina may He protect us with His grace, in the Lord Jesus, for eternal life.

**Amen**



## PADRE PIO PRAYER GROUPS

*"Follow the path that God has chosen for you"*

Let us invoke together the intercession of Mary Most Holy, of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina and of all the saints, so that with their help we can be persevering in our purposes:

|                                    |             |
|------------------------------------|-------------|
| Holy Mary, Mother of God           | pray for us |
| Saint Michael, Gabriel and Raphael | pray for u  |
| St. John the Baptist               | pray for us |
| St. Joseph                         | pray for us |
| Holy apostles and evangelists      | pray for us |
| St. Peter                          | pray for us |
| St. Paul                           | pray for us |
| St. Mary Magdalene                 | pray for us |
| Saint Benedict                     | pray for us |
| St. Dominic                        | pray for us |
| Saint Francis of Assisi            | pray for us |
| Saint Clare of Assisi              | pray for us |
| Saint Pio of Pietrelcina           | pray for us |
| St. John Paul II                   | pray for us |
| Saint Teresa of Calcutta           | pray for us |
| Saints of God                      | pray for us |

### FIDELITY COMMITMENT

Brothers and sisters, the Church invites us to live in the spirit of St. Pio of Pietrelcina, the charism of prayer and help to the suffering, living our fidelity to the Gospel to be salt of the earth and light of the world, we now publicly renew that commitment of fidelity that many times, on a personal level, we presented to Padre Pio, invoking his protection.

O Father, you have chosen and called us to be «nurseries of the faith, the fertile soil of love»,  
we commit, here in front of our community,  
to be ministers of prayer and service to the sufferings;  
to renounce sin with serious commitment;  
to grow in virtues, especially within our families;  
to share our journey in this Prayer Group,

following the spirituality of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina and the teachings of the Church.

We promise fidelity to the Pope, to our pastors and to the commitments we take on the common journey with the brothers and sisters of our Group.

In the footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi, we choose to welcome the needy, to support the poor and be loving and respectful of creation.

Virgin Mary, You who guided the journey of St. Pio of Pietrelcina, welcome our holy desires and accompany us on our journey towards holiness.

Amen.

### Our Father...

the Lord is with you

***and with your spirit***

May Almighty God, through Whom You we were born to a new life from the water and the Holy Spirit, bless you all, so that wherever you will be, you may be living members of his Church: in Christ Jesus our Lord.

***Amen***

May the Almighty God give you His peace: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.





### ***Fifth step***

## **THE CHARISM OF PRAYER**

### **BIBLICAL COMMENTS**

*"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed"* (Mc 1, 35)

One of the messages of the famous book "Tales of a Russian pilgrim" by Alexei Pentkovscij, is that prayer is not a moment during the day, but our whole life: every breath, every heartbeat is an encounter with God. In fact Jesus speaks to us of prayer as an encounter with the Father. When the apostles ask him to teach them how to pray, he recommends they should address to God with simple words, such as "our" Father. The life of Jesus is all about an encounter with the Father which starts in the morning in an intimate, secret relationship but which extends into the encounter with others, especially those in need. Where there is love, there is God; where there is a man who loves, there is an encounter with God. As disciples of Jesus, we seek the Face of God and we take strength and light through our encounter with him in personal and community prayer, while we never stop looking for him and getting people to meet him through mutual love.

### **SPIRITUALITY**

It is very important that through fraternal meetings, formation, mission and the exercise of charity each ecclesial group lives and deepens its own charism. A great deal of attention must be paid, however, that the gift (the charisma) does not lead the group to be closed in itself, to experience wonderful things without sharing them with the Church.

Our Groups have the charisma of prayer and charity towards the sick, but it is necessary that we live these within an ecclesiastical community; at times - perhaps – our groups will have to give up some of their own projects; so that they can truly reach out towards others, they will have to be "less showy", not always will they be able to have "their own celebrations". At any given moment they will be persevering and consistent with their vocation, and will thus be able to play a living and active role as people of God, giving a concrete proof of the truth of their choices.

**From a letter by Padre Pio to Annita Rodote (Letters III, p. 63)**

*Pietrelcina, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1915*

*Most beloved daughter of Jesus,*

*May Jesus and Mary always be in your heart, and may they make you grow, more and more, in the beautiful virtue of charity which is the bond of Christian perfection. Amen.*

*I give heartfelt thanks to the heavenly Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, for the ever new graces with which He continues to enrich your soul. Oh, may he always be blessed by all His creatures. May the apostasy of many souls belonging to the sheepfold of Jesus Christ, come to an end once and for all. May God's reign come soon; may this most holy Father sanctify his Church; may he abundantly shower his mercy on those souls who have not known him up to now. May he destroy the reign of Satan and reveal, to the confusion of this infernal beast, all his evil snares; may he reveal to all slaves of this awful wretch, what a liar he is. May this most tender Father, enlighten the minds and touch the hearts of all men, so that those who are fervent may not become cooler or slow down on the path of salvation, that the lukewarm may become more fervent and those who have moved far from him may return. May he also dissipate and confuse all the wise minds of this world, so that they do not waste their time with wars and inhibit the propagation of His Reign. Finally, may this most holy Father banish all possible divisions in the Church, and prevent any other new ones from being created, so that there will be only one sheepfold and only one Shepherd. May he multiply a hundredfold the number of chosen souls; send us many saints and learned ministers and sanctify those we already possess. May He, through them, make fervour return into all Christians souls. May the number of Catholic missionaries increase, as we once again have reason to complain to the divine Master: "The Harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few".*

*Annita, don't ever forget to pray for these needs which I have set out. Thus, without your being either an apostle, nor a priest nor a missionary, you will gain that crown which the heavenly Father has prepared "ad aeterno" for them.*

...

*My heart is always with you in Jesus Christ.*

*Fr Pio*

Through prayer, all Christians live their relationship of trust, abandonment and obedience to the Lord; therefore when we speak of the "charisma" of prayer, we appreciate that Padre Pio was prompted by the Holy Spirit to recommend something more. In particular, in his writings and in his spiritual direction, Padre Pio recommended a



## PADRE PIO PRAYER GROUPS

*"Follow the path that God has chosen for you"*

prayer based on meditation on the Scriptures and spiritual books, which dispose the heart - as he says - not only to speak with God, but to listen to him. In this way, our prayer becomes a relationship. The rosary, especially when it is recited calmly and truly meditating on the mysteries, leads us to become a living part of this prayer, in which we learn to listen to God. We use the word "charisma" because our Prayer Groups are called to pray by listening to the Lord, but also to share our experience with the whole Church, playing an active part and presence in the liturgy, alongside those who are beginning or are starting to pray again.

### GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO

- ❖ In 1942 Guglielmo Sanguinetti let Padre Pio know about Pope Pius XII's wish to pray for the end of the Second World War. Padre Pio asks him to involve his spiritual children. This date is chosen as the moral foundation of the Prayer Groups
- ❖ In 1949, in the first issue of the magazine of the House for Relief of Suffering, we started talking about the *Groups of spiritual brothers* who "meet once or twice a month, attend Holy Mass, approach the Holy Sacraments, recite the Holy Rosary ... We would be delighted if these Groups multiplied, possibly under the guidance of a priest".
- ❖ On 7th July 1950, in an article in the magazine "La Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza", Guglielmo Sanguinetti for the first time uses the name "Prayer Groups" for the movement created around Padre Pio. It is curious to know that all the first groups were called "House for the Relief of Suffering", precisely to emphasize the link with the hospital that was being born.
- ❖ In 1951 the Prayer Groups Center was born and in the same year a first centralized planning of the life of the Groups was drafted
- ❖ In the second half of the 1950s, Father Giancarlo Setti is commissioned by Padre Pio to follow the life of the Groups now present in numerous Italian towns. Don Setti recounts that in confession Padre Pio said to him: "You take care of the Prayer Groups, I will take care of your soul".
- ❖ In 1960, the "Invitation to Prayer" is published, a guiding text of the Groups drawn up by Guglielmo Sanguinetti following the spiritual guidance of Padre Pio. It is approved by Monsignor Paolo Carta, bishop of Foggia.
- ❖ On May 5th, 1966, Monsignor Setti presents the organizational program of the Groups: "it is a program of prayer, it is a program of charity, it is a program of obedience to the Hierarchy, it is a program of perseverance" and, in relation to the many obstacles that in those years the Groups met, he concludes, "the Holy Church is our common Mother, to whom we owe the most absolute and devoted obedience".
- ❖ In 1968 the Holy See entrusts the leadership of the Groups to Father Carmelo of San Giovanni in Galdo: a decision taken in order to obtain official recognition of the movement
- ❖ On May 4th, 1986, Padre Pio's Prayer Groups are definitively recognized by the Vatican secretariat of state and regulated by a Statute approved and signed by the Secretary of State of His Holiness Pope John Paul II.
- ❖ Between 1978, the tenth anniversary of the death of the Father, and 2002, the canonization of Padre Pio, the number of Groups scattered all over the world increases considerably: almost a thousand new Groups are registered at the San Giovanni Rotondo Center.
- ❖ In 2012, thanks to the great work of the Secretary General Father Marciano Morra, the Secretary of State of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, authorises the new Regulations for the Prayer Groups.

### PADRE PIO'S WORLD: *The arrival in San Giovanni Rotondo*

On July 28th, 1916 Padre Pio, to escape the oppressive heat that gripped the city of Foggia and worsened his health, went up to San Giovanni Rotondo for the first time, accompanied by Father Paolino da Casacalenda. At the time of his arrival, San Giovanni Rotondo was still a small town in the Gargano region, "encrusted with history", perched 567 m above sea level, at the foot of Monte Calvo. Padre Pio settled here definitively on 4th September of that year. On 20th September 1918, while he was in prayer in the choir of the convent church, in front of the ancient wooden crucifix, received the gift of the visible stigmata. From that moment everything changed and San Giovanni Rotondo, from a remote and unknown town in the Gargano, became a constant destination for pilgrimages of faithful from all over the world.

### CLOSE-UP ON PADRE PIO'S PRAYER GROUPS: *Walk and pray together*

Groups live their charism, first of all by making their prayer a personal and constant choice, starting with the individual one and then living the community one. Together with the Eucharistic celebration and adoration, listening to the Word of God (individual and community), as well as an adequate formative path, will help the members of the Groups live their own spirituality and put it at the service of the community. For this reason, at least once a month the Groups will meet for a moment of catechesis under the guidance of their spiritual father.



## ***Sixth step***

### **PRAYER GROUPS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

#### **BIBLICAL COMMENTS**

*"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you" (Gv 15, 16)*

On the night of Maundy Thursday, when Jesus is in the Upper Room with His apostles, he tells them the secret of how they can keep in His presence: "Love one another, as I have loved you" (Jn 15). This secret has been cherished by the Church during all this time, and it has made it its founding point: we firmly believe in the presence of "Jesus in the midst". All the strength of the Church, all the fruits it has born come from mutual love. Being listened to by God and obtaining his Presence does not depend on being beautiful, good, capable and efficient, but on the ability to be in a mutual acceptance of diversity.

We are part of the Church not because "we choose" to be so, therefore with expectations to be met, but because "we are chosen" by God just as we are, loved by Him and by all our brothers and sisters.

Hence the strength and effectiveness of prayer and works of charity. Those who pray with love are certainly heard, and this will enable them to intercede to God's mercy with even more power.

#### **SPIRITUALITY**

"Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am among them". Catholics are encouraged to pray in a group or in a community, and this is not an optional or an extra thing. This kind of prayer makes sense as we are the Church, which is the mystical body of Christ. Our welcoming attitude towards our neighbours so that we can walk part of our path together is the sign that we are living prayer truthfully, and this leads us to a full relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

**From a letter written by Padre Pio to Antonietta Vona (Letters III, p. 846)**

*Pietrelcina, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1918*

*You should love the Lord first and foremost, and after that, I recommend you should love the Church dearly, which is his Bride as well as our tender mother. It is like a sweet dove which can lay her eggs and bear little doves from her Spouse. You should endeavour to thank God a hundred times every day for being a daughter of the Church. Rest your gaze on the Spouse and Bride, and say to her Bridegroom: "Ah, you are the Bridegroom of a beautiful Bride." And say to the Bride: "You are the Bride of a Bridegroom that is totally divine!". Have great compassion for the shepherds and the preachers of this Church and also for all those who care for souls. See, my daughter, how they are scattered on the face of the earth, there being no place on earth where they are not plentiful. Pray to God for them that, by saving themselves, they may fruitfully gain the salvation of many other souls, too. In this regard, I beseech you never to forget me when you are before Jesus, because He gives me a great desire never to forget your soul.*

*Fr Pio*

Love for the Church and veneration of the Supreme Pontiff are the two coordinates within which Padre Pio lives his spirituality and he would like his spiritual sons and daughters to live theirs in the very same way. To go against the teachings of the Church or to disrespect the Supreme Pontiff or one's own bishop meant, for Padre Pio, detaching oneself from him.

Since their inception, the Prayer Groups were followed by a priest, it was the necessary condition that Padre Pio wanted in order for them to be recognized. The presence of the spiritual director guarantees that prayer lived together is a gift and a service for the local church. It is not always possible to have a spiritual director who takes exclusive care of the Group or who celebrates the liturgies exclusively for the Group, but the important thing is that the members of the Group recognize themselves in a specific priest, appointed by the bishop, to help them live their own charisma at the service of the Church.

#### **GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO**

- ❖ On September 24th, 1975, the Groups were in Rome for their third International Convention. At the end they attended the general audience given by Pope Paul VI who said, "Padre Pio, among the many good and great things he did, has generated this crowd, this plentiful river of persons dedicated to prayer; following his example and in the hope of his spiritual help, they live their Christian lives sharing in prayers, charity, poverty of spirit and in the energy of the Christian creed".
- ❖ On June 25th, 1978 shortly before his death, Paul VI, during an audience at the sacred College of Cardinals, declared "fervent prayer centers and groups have blossomed. They are small cells of



## PADRE PIO PRAYER GROUPS

*"Follow the path that God has chosen for you"*

ecclesiastical life, often discreet or even ignored, which diffuse the vitalizing oxygen of spiritual heights into our world".

- ❖ On 1st October 1983, John Paul II met the Prayer Groups in Rome, in the Nervi hall: "you who join the Prayer Groups intend to cooperate in the attainment of the Kingdom of God according to the teaching of Jesus as synthesised in the "Pater Noster": *Adveniat regnum tuum!* What characterizes your cooperation is the awareness that the first indispensable tool for the expansion of the kingdom of God in souls is continuous, humble and devoted prayer ».
- ❖ May 23rd, 1987 John Paul II was on a pastoral visit to Puglia. In San Giovanni Rotondo he met the sick, the doctors of the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza and the Prayer Groups.
- ❖ On 29 September 1990, John Paul II once more met the Prayer Groups: «follow the example of Padre Pio; imitate his constant search for intimacy with the Lord, as this is the only secret of spiritual life. Like him, follow the path of authentic conversion, voluntary penance, and trustworthy abandonment in Providence ».
- ❖ On May 2nd, 1999, the day of the beatification of Padre Pio, John Paul II states in his homily: « by meeting Padre Pio directly or indirectly, many people have rediscovered their faith; Prayer Groups have multiplied in every corner of the world at his school ».
- ❖ On June 16th, 2002, the day of Padre Pio's canonization in St. Peter's Square, once again John Paul II stated: "the ultimate reason for the apostolic efficacy of Padre Pio, the profound root of so much spiritual fruitfulness is found in the intimate and constant union with God of which the long hours spent in prayer were eloquent testimonies. [...] This fundamental characteristic of his spirituality continues in the "Prayer Groups" he founded, which offer both the Church and society the formidable contribution of incessant and trusting prayer. Padre Pio united prayer with an intense charitable activity, of which the "Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza" is an extraordinary expression. Prayer and charity: this is the very concrete synthesis of Padre Pio's teachings, which today everyone is recommended to follow».
- ❖ On June 21st, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI arrived on a pastoral visit to San Giovanni Rotondo. On this occasion he said: "Dear friends, Capuchin Friars Minor, members of the Prayer Groups and all faithful, you are the heirs of Padre Pio and the spiritual legacy he left you is holiness".
- ❖ On 6th February 2016 on the occasion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, the Jubilee of Padre Pio's Prayer Groups, Pope Francis said in St Peter's Square: I thank you for your commitment, I encourage you, so that the Prayer Groups are "Centres of mercy": centres that are always open and active, which with the humble power of prayer provide the light of God to the world and the energy of love for the Church".
- ❖ On March 17th, 2018 Pope Francis, on a pastoral visit to Pietrelcina and San Giovanni Rotondo, said: "Prayer is a gesture of love, it is being with God and bringing him the life of the world: it is an indispensable work of spiritual mercy. If we do not entrust our brothers and our situations to the Lord, who will do it? who will intercede, who will knock on God's heart asking Him to open the door of mercy to all humanity in need? This is why Padre Pio bequeathed the Prayer Groups to us ».

### **PADRE PIO'S WORLD: *Pray in communion with the Holy Father***

One of the first clear dates relating to all Padre Pio Prayer Groups goes back to 1948. The following year groups of brothers were meeting once or twice a month to pray the Holy Rosary together. When Padre Pio decided to follow Pope Pius XII's recommendations to pray as a community, 'group' was the one word that prevailed over many others, such as "army of prayers and penitents", "religious array", "Fraternal community". Padre Pio was prompt in his reply to the Pontiff's heartfelt appeal, and thought of Prayer Groups as of a sort of 'scaffolding' holding up the whole structure, a constant and continuous support, through prayer, for Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza. They started working on the official constitution of such groups in August 1950; through collective prayer and under the guidance of a priest, with the approval of the bishop, the groups served as a model, whose purpose was to care for the spiritual formation and growth of all the members of the Group, so that they would become role models in Christian life.

### **CLOSE-UP ON PADRE PIO'S PRAYER GROUPS:**

The approval of a new Prayer Group rests with the *Director General of the Prayer Groups*, who issues a certificate through the International Centre of Prayer Groups in San Giovanni Rotondo.

The conditions for the establishment of a new group are as follows:

- the presence of a priest as the spiritual assistant of the Group;
- a specific church where the Group meets (a parish church would be preferable);
- an adequate preparation time agreed with the spiritual director and with the regional or diocese coordinator
- the approval of the Bishop of the same diocese.





### **Seventh step**

## **CASA SOLLIEVO AND THE CHARISM OF CHARITY**

*"And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed."*  
(Mc 6, 56)

### **BIBLICAL COMMENTS**

The Evangelist John reminds us in his letter that "God is love" (1 Jn 4). When the Church speaks of Charity, it refers first and foremost to God; in fact even before something to be done, Charity is something to be. God is Charity, for this reason he is love for everyone, especially for the most needy, the sick, the poor, all sinners. Jesus was the revelation of God's charity, and for this reason, full of the Holy Spirit, he showed himself to be patient especially in the long hours of his Passion until death on the Cross.

Through His saving love, we are filled with the love of God. We thus want to make sure that anyone who meets us, who touches us, crosses our gaze, can rejoice in the Lord. May nobody find us detached from their wounded history. Charity is God. Our works are our way to show God's presence close to everyone in need.

### **SPIRITUALITY**

Prayer and charity are a dual essence of one same being, the person of Christ who is intimately linked to the Father. Jesus expresses this bond in prayer and in always obeying his will. At the same time, Jesus receives the Holy Spirit and chooses to live his mission as a perfect gift of charity towards his brothers and sisters. Following Jesus means living prayer and charity together, without any distinctions or organizational devices, but in the light of the Spirit who opens our hearts to holiness and guides us on the path of Love for God and for our brothers and sisters.

**From a letter by Padre Pio to Fr Benedetto of San Marco in Lamis** (*Letters I, p. 517*)

*Pietrelcina, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1914*

*My very dear Father,*

*May our Lord be always in your heart to sanctify you.*

...

*I no sooner begin to pray than my heart is filled with a fire of love. This fire does not resemble any fire on this lowly earth. It is a delicate and very gentle flame which consumes without causing any pain. It is so sweet and delightful that it satisfies my spirit to the point of insatiability. Dear God! This is a wonderful thing for me, something I will perhaps never understand until I get to heaven.*

...

*Deep down in my soul, it seems to me, God has poured out many graces of compassion for the sufferings of others, especially with regard to the poor and needy. The immense pity I experience at the sight of a poor man gives rise deep down in my soul to a most vehement desire to help him, and if I were to follow the dictates of my will I should be driven to strip myself even of my clothing to cover him.*

*When I know that a person is afflicted in soul or body, what would I not do to have the Lord relieve him of his sufferings. Willingly I would take upon myself all of his afflictions in order to see him saved, and I would even hand over to him the benefits of such sufferings if the Lord would allow it.*

*I see quite clearly that this is a most singular favour from God because, in the past, although by divine mercy I never neglected helping those in need, I had little or no pity in a natural way for their sufferings.*

...

*Please pray for the one who intercedes with the Lord on your behalf, always and incessantly although by feeble prayers.*

*Your son*

*Fr Pio*

Casa Sollievo was Padre Pio's answer to a concrete need, that of restoring good healthy standards. At that time they were dramatically poor indeed. Two things should be noted: the first is that Padre Pio's charitable action had its origins in his bond of love with God. After an ecstasy he felt drawn to give himself totally to



the needy, even to get undressed for their benefit. But there is a second very important aspect: "This is the work of providence," says Padre Pio on the day of the inauguration. Casa Sollievo is thus to be seen as a sign of God's concern for people.

The commitment that Padre Pio entrusts to the Prayer Groups to support this hospital with prayer and charity, arises precisely from the desire to give at all times, despite the changed health and social situations, a visible and constant sign of divine providence.

#### **GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO**

- ❖ Already in the early 1920s, Padre Pio turned his attention towards the weak and the sick and through his intervention in 1925 a first small hospital, the San Francesco hospital, was inaugurated in the centre of San Giovanni Rotondo – however it closed a few years later.
- ❖ On January 9th, 1940 at 4:30 pm in the Sanvico-Sanguinetti house, the first committee for the construction of the Clinic wanted by Padre Pio was established: Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza becomes a concrete dream, to be built with the help of the Divine Providence and through the work of the many devotees and benefactors already linked to it.
- ❖ On May 19th, 1947, the first blow with a pickaxe marked the beginning of the works. 300 workers were involved in the construction of the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, which slowly rose white and majestic on the mountain adjacent to the small convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Many men and women who had come from afar supported Padre Pio in the realization of this project
- ❖ In 1954 the Outpatient Clinic was inaugurated, including the Emergency Department, the Clinical Analysis Laboratory, General Medicine, Dentistry and Pediatrics.
- ❖ Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza was inaugurated on May 5th, 1956, blessed by Cardinal Lercaro. Padre Pio defined it as "the creature that the Divine Providence, has created, with your own aid". The presence of the Prayer Groups is strongly felt, they are referred to as "the pillars of the building", to which the Father entrusts his work
- ❖ In 1971 Casa Sollievo is classified as a Provincial Hospital and in 1980 as a Regional Hospital, thus becoming part of the National Health System.
- ❖ In 1991 the Ministry of Health assigned the Hospital of Padre Pio the title of I.R.C.C.S. (Institute of Hospitalization and Scientific Care) in the field of "genetic and hereditary diseases", this recognition was extended in 2012 to "innovative therapies and regenerative medicine".
- ❖ In 2001, the Mendel-House Relief Institute, founded by Luigi Gedda, was inaugurated in Rome. It is a multifunctional unit whose mission is "to study, diagnose and prevent rare diseases".
- ❖ In 2002, a few hundred meters from the hospital, the "John Paul II" Outpatient Clinic was inaugurated
- ❖ The ISBReMIT Research Center was inaugurated in 2015, an institute for Stem Cell Biology, Regenerative Medicine and Innovative Therapies, which completed the idea of relief from suffering that San Pio had thought when, on May 5, 1957, he hoped for the birth of "an intercontinental study center".

#### **PADRE PIO'S WORLD: *Casa Sollievo and the charisma of Charity***

After the experience of the small 'San Francesco' Civil Hospital inaugurated in 1925 and closed later on due to the earthquakes of 1937 and the heavy rains of 1940 which further damaged the building, Padre Pio had the idea of building a new and greater hospital. In July 1946, the first commission of technicians and friends of Padre Pio met in the convent to discuss the site and the project of the Opera. On 5th October of that same year, the joint-stock company was set up under the name of Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza.

On May 16th, 1947, the first stone was laid and two days later work began on the excavation of the mountain where the foundations of the Clinic would take place. It was inaugurated on May 5th, 1956, at the end of nine years of shipbuilding works, with 300 beds.

#### **CLOSE-UP ON PADRE PIO'S PRAYER GROUPS: *Casa Sollievo, our common home***

The Prayer Groups are sensitive to the needs of the local Church, supporting - as far as possible - also charitable initiatives of an economic nature. The link with Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, explicitly wanted by Padre Pio, will be expressed in concrete help of charity, particularly on the occasion of the founding day of May 5th, which will be lived in each Group with due solemnity. For this reason since the month of April it is necessary to organize how to live it in the best way, together with the various parish communities.



## ***Eight step***

### **OUR LADY' INTERCESSION**

#### **BIBLICAL COMMENTS**

*"Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!". And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home." (Jn 19, 27)*

Mary of Nazareth is a Jewish girl who is part of Jesus' story from day one. It is thanks to her "Yes" that the Word of God can take flesh in her womb; it is thanks to her humanity, made of firmness and tenderness at the same time, that the baby Jesus can grow up; it is thanks to her faith in God that the young Jesus is able to decide to leave everything and follow the Father's plan; it is thanks to her patience and her wisdom that she is able to encourage Jesus to live his Passion and death on the Cross, with total and extreme dedication.

Mary of Nazareth will become the Mother of the Church by the will of her Son himself, on the cross. He hands her over to each one of us. The Mother of God has been an unsurpassed mother with Jesus, and she is "promoted" to continue her work as a mother for each one of us, as well as for the whole Church. Her ability to intercede must not be relegated to the simple "postwoman" of prayer intentions, but to her ability to help us make us pleasing to the Father, while we are carrying out His plan of salvation.

#### **SPIRITUALITY**

As you are probably aware, Mary, Mother of the Church, is a title attributed to Mary in a solemn form by Paul VI. Padre Pio experiences this motherhood, it is not a simple devotion, he realizes that the Virgin really helps him get to know and understand Christ, particularly in the liturgy. His loving expressions towards Our Lady are a clear example of a relationship that is not abstract at all, but which plays a very concrete part in his existence.

**From a letter by Padre Pio to Fr Agostino** (*Letters I, p.*)

*Pietrelcina, 1st May 1912*

*My very dear Father,*

*Oh, the lovely month of May! It is the most beautiful month of the year. Yes, dear Father, how well this month speaks about the tenderness and beauty of Mary! When I think of the innumerable benefits received from our dear Mother, I am ashamed of myself, for I have never sufficiently appreciated her heart and her hand which have bestowed endless benefits upon me with so much love. What troubles me most is that in exchange for the affectionate care of this Mother of ours, I have kept on offending her.*

*How often I have confided to this Mother the painful anxieties that troubled my heart! And how often has she consoled me! But what did my gratitude consist of? .. In my greatest sufferings it seems to me that I no longer have a mother on this earth but a very compassionate one in heaven. However many times, when my heart was feeling at peace again, I forgot all about this almost entirely. I have even forgotten my duty of gratitude towards this blessed heavenly Mother!*

*For me the month of May is a month of graces and this year I am praying that I am granted just two. The first, is that she should take me to herself, or else, I can go on living, while all the consolations of this world be changed into sufferings for me if she will only prevent me from seeing the wicked faces of those people whom I shall not mention... The other grace I desire is that she obtains for me... you know what I mean dear Father.*

*I don't dare ask Her for this latter grace, because if this were to displease her, she would then hide her lovely face from me again as she has done on other occasions in the past.*



*Poor dear Mother, you love me so much! I observed it once more at the dawn of this beautiful month. What great care she took to accompany me to the altar this morning. It seemed to me that she had nothing else to think about except myself, as she filled my whole heart with sentiments of holy love.*

*I felt as if I had a mysterious fire burning in my heart, which I could not make sense of. I felt the need to put ice on it, and quench this fire which was consuming me.*

*I wish I had a voice strong enough to invite all sinners in the world to love Our Lady. But since this is not within my power, I have prayed and will pray my dear Angel to perform this task for me.*

*Pray for me and give your blessings often to*

*Your poor disciple,*

*Fr Pio*

Maria was Padre Pio's teacher of life. He attributed graces to her when someone went to thank him for a sudden recovery or for an extraordinary help from heaven. Our Lady consoled him in the most difficult moments and helped him to fully live his Eucharists.

He used to have his Rosary in his hands all the time. Padre Pio would call it 'a weapon' and on more than one occasion he reiterated: all prayers are good, but the graces I get with the holy rosary, I don't get with the other prayers. Among the virtues of Maria, Padre Pio emphasized her ability to make herself small in front of God's plan: commenting on the Magnificat, he affirmed that the words "he looked at the humility of his servant" had to be understood as the total annihilation of Mary.

"The Lord - Padre Pio explained - looked at His servant and appreciated the complete negation of her own self".

### **GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO**

- ❖ **Madonna della Libera.** The 'feast of the Madonnella' celebrated in Pietrelcina was always remembered by Padre Pio with great pleasure: his confrere friar Modestino, said that one day, having arrived in San Giovanni Rotondo, he decided to attend Padre Pio's Mass - as the Father himself had asked him to do whenever he was passing through the Gargano town - but on that occasion Padre Pio invited him to leave immediately for Pietrelcina, since the Feast of the Madonna della Libera would be celebrated the next day.
- ❖ **Virgin of the Rosary.** Padre Pio was very fond of the Madonna of Pompei (near Naples) to which he frequently turned to in his prayers. Back in 1915 he asked Our Lady of all graces that he could die in order to get closer to the Kingdom of Heaven. He waited many years: on 19th September 1968, a spiritual son visiting San Giovanni Rotondo gave Padre Pio a bouquet of red roses; the Father thanked him and extracted a rose from the bunch. He asked him to take it to the Madonna of Pompei as a sign of thanks for the grace that he was soon going to receive from her: a few days later Padre Pio would in fact return to the Father's House.
- ❖ **Immaculate Virgin.** This feast shows the great and strong bond that Padre Pio had with his "mother". It is curious to know that in the last years of his life, being no longer able to read the Missal, Padre Pio was given permission to always recite the same function. He chose precisely the Holy Mass of the Immaculate Conception, as he knew it by heart. In 1965, on the occasion of the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Padre Pio asked one of his spiritual daughters to bring, in his name and in the name of the patients of Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, a floral tribute at the foot of the statue of the Immaculate Conception in Piazza di Spagna, in Rome.
- ❖ **Our Lady of the Poor.** In 1933 Padre Pio heard about the Marian apparitions of the Virgin of the Poor in Banneux, Belgium. He said a few days later "I want a Madonna of the Poor for the House, since the Virgin of the Poor has come to relieve suffering, I want a statue for the House for Relief of Suffering". On 21st September 1968 he reiterated: «Do not forget about the statue





of the Virgin of the Poor. Get in touch with Banneux... It is for my sick children of the House. It is so much needed. And her place is here ».

- ❖ Our Lady of Fatima. In 1959 there was the Peregrinatio Mariae of the Madonna of Fatima in Italy and on 5th August it stopped in San Giovanni Rotondo. Padre Pio, seriously ill, said: "My dear mother, you came to Italy and I got sick, and now you are going away but I am still sick." Immediately he felt reinvigorated and healed. As a sign of thanks, through one of his spiritual children, he sent a bronze crucifix and the gold rosary that was placed on the hands of the pilgrim statue in Fatima.
- ❖ Our Lady of All Graces is the patron saint of San Giovanni Rotondo. Since 1916 and for the rest of his life, Padre Pio prayed at her feet in the small Capuchin convent dedicated to her.
- ❖ Our Lady of Loreto. Padre Pio never visited the Holy House of Loreto and yet, Father Remigio da Cavedine, who was its guardian for many years, testified: «at nine o'clock every evening I prayed the rosary in the Holy House. The exact moment in which I started praying, I saw Padre Pio arrive, and he would stay there for the whole time till the end of prayer ».
- ❖ Our Lady of the seven veils. From February to September 1916 Padre Pio stayed in the convent of Sant'Anna, in Foggia. Every day he took short walks to the ancient convent, to pray at the foot of the Madonna dei Sette Veli. (Our Lady of the Seven Veils).

### **PADRE PIO'S WORLD: *The Marian shrines***

Padre Pio's devotion to the Madonna originated in his childhood and was linked to the image of the Madonna della Libera that is venerated in Pietrelcina. In his life he was linked to many other Marian sanctuaries, such as Loreto or Montevergine. There are many testimonies of his devotion to the Virgin of Grace, venerated in the convent of San Giovanni Rotondo and to Our Lady of Seven Veils of the city of Foggia. In his Letters he often recommended that his spiritual daughters made the three novenas to Our Lady of Pompei. To this sanctuary he went on pilgrimage for the first time as a boy and on other occasions as a priest. On September 20, 1968, a spiritual son from Naples bought many roses to adorn the altar on the occasion of the anniversary of the stigmatization and brought a bouquet to him in his cell. Padre Pio took a rose and asked him to take it the next day to Pompei to the sanctuary of the Madonna, where it is still kept as his last homage to the Virgin before dying.

### **CLOSE-UP ON PADRE PIO'S PRAYER GROUPS: *The holy rosary, "Padre Pio's weapon"***

Devotion to the Virgin Mary was considered as essential in the life of all Prayer Groups. Padre Pio referred to Our Lady as to "our dear mother" and she guided him into living the Eucharist more fully. The holy rosary is one of the fundamental prayers of the spirituality of the Groups. For this reason in their spiritual growth, the members of the Prayer Groups make it a point to "contemplate Christ with the eyes of Mary", according to the teachings of Pope John Paul II.

### **OUR COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS**

#### **May 5 (anniversary of the foundation of "Casa Sollievo" and Groups)**

##### **Feast day of the foundation**

The date of the foundation of Casa Sollievo is chosen as the ideal date of the birth of the Prayer Groups too. This is because in the speech of the first anniversary from the inauguration of the Hospital, Padre Pio officially mentioned the link between Casa Sollievo and the Groups.

On this occasion it would be nice to promote the official collection of donations from all the Prayer Groups in the world to the benefit of Casa Sollievo.



## **Feast of Charity**

### **Day for Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza**

May 5, 2022

*The Feast of Charity was established to link more closely the Prayer Groups of Padre Pio with Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, the earthly work desired by our Founder. On May 5 (or another day agreed with the Spiritual Assistant) the Group meets to pray together with the Holy Mass, inserting prayer intentions for the Casa Sollievo and the Prayer Groups. The Eucharistic Celebration could end with the reading of the "Prayer for the Home Relief of Suffering"*

#### **THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL**

- For **Padre Pio's Prayer Groups** to follow the teachings of Jesus's living prayer and charity together, always enlightened by the Holy Spirit who opens our hearts to holiness and guides us on the path of Love for God and for our brothers and sisters. Let us pray
- For **Padre Pio's Prayer Groups**, so that they may be examples of fidelity to the Gospel and to the Church and to recognize Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza as a spiritual reference. Let us pray
- For **Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza**, work of Providence, so that it may be a sign of God's concern for people. Let us pray

#### **AT THE END OF THE HOLY MASS**

### **PRAYER FOR CASA SOLLIEVO DELLA SOFFERENZA (Home for the Relief of Suffering)**

O holy and glorious God,  
so full of love for your children  
that you sent your Son  
to give us life and salvation,  
we thank you because the Holy Spirit,  
poured out on the Church by Jesus  
continues to bring forth brothers and sisters  
who put their own existence at the service  
of the poor, the suffering and the needy,  
following the example of Christ.

Through the intercession of Padre Pio,  
who carried the signs of Jesus' love on his body,  
grant to his Work,  
the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza,  
the grace to be faithful to the charisma of its founder,  
so that each one can bring  
your love to the bed of the sick:  
make of the Casa a temple of life,  
guiding hearts to loyalty and transparency in their actions.

Instill feelings of gratitude and love  
in the Prayer Groups and in the devotees of Padre Pio  
so that even today they may be the sign of that Providence  
which wanted this work as a testimony  
to all of the boundless  
trust in the Love and Mercy of God.



## **Feast of Charity**

### **Day for Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza**

May 5, 2022

On May 5, 1956, Padre Pio inaugurated Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, the hospital that he himself defined on that occasion as "the creature that Providence, aided by you, has created".

Strongly felt was the presence of the Prayer Groups, "the pillars of the building", to which the Father entrusted his work, asking them to take care of it with prayer and charitable actions.

This is why the inauguration date of Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza was chosen as a symbolic date that marks the birth of the Prayer Groups.

On this day, groups from all over the world celebrate the Feast of Charity. It would be nice if, to commemorate their union with the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, they also promoted an official collection for the benefit of the Opera di San Pio.

This year, the charitable help of all groups will go to Casa Zeni, a small "creature" of the Opera of San Pio da Pietrelcina, built to welcome the families of children hospitalized in the Pediatric Oncology ward.

The structure is located in front of the "Giovanni Paolo II" Outpatient Clinic and contains 12 rooms, a games room and a common entertainment area.

The service, completely free, represents a support base and a point of reference for all the families who stay there to allow them to live in an atmosphere of friendship and solidarity.

May 5 may be a day for everyone that remembers our foundations: prayer and charity. Prayer for those in need, for those in suffering; Charity towards Casa Sollievo, a work that unifies and calls groups from all over the world to the attention of the sick and suffering.



## ***Ninth step***

### **THE PRAYER GROUPS - THEIR ORGANIZATION AND MISSION**

#### **BIBLICAL COMMENTS**

*"Jesus said: Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. (Mt 10, 16)*

Every lover recognizes that it is difficult to keep one's love story hidden. Faith is a story; the story of an encounter between man and God, that takes place for each one of us. A story of love and salvation that cannot be kept hidden: every line of our face, every word, every gesture speaks of our faith. It is often the case that someone's story stems from another story that was once heard or listened to, which in turn generates the saving event for others. Together they appear as one single story, made up like a chain of many links. Every Christian carries in his heart the joy of seeing that his own history has been able to bring someone else to their encounter with God. The story of one's faith can be personal but most times it involves the whole community, too.

For us to bear witness in an efficient way so as to involve and enthuse others, we must follow what the Gospel teaches us, by being well organized and aware that we want to be part of a project of evangelization, thoughtful in taking care of the ways and timings of our neighbours. We are sent like sheep to make wolves meek; like snakes, we are sent not so much to talk, as to observe and be patient; like doves, full of tenderness and purity of soul, we are to convince not with threats, but charming them with our innocence.

#### **SPIRITUALITY**

The organizational structure of ecclesial groups and associations varies according to their aims and their own statutes. All the Groups are called to live in particular reverence of the Word of God, respect for the teachings of the magisterium and ecclesial communion. Those responsible at the various levels live their service in this direction; therefore it is important to avoid those critical issues that arise from personalism, self-reference and disobedience to the ecclesiastical magisterium.

#### **From Padre Pio's speech for the tenth anniversary of the Casa Sollievo**

*5<sup>th</sup> May 1966*

*My dear children of Italy and the world, to all of you, near and far, peace and blessings from the Lord.*

*In speaking to you on this solemn and memorable day, my soul is greatly moved by the Divine Providence which for the past ten years, has been so utterly generous towards the "Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza".*

*My heartfelt thoughts and thanks also go to those who from the very first instant have collaborated in the implementation of this Work and now from Heaven, where they went to receive the reward for their generous charity, continue to offer spiritual assistance to the "Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza".*

*But my mind and paternal thoughts are addressed in a very special way to the Prayer Groups, who are now widespread in the world and present here today, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the "Casa" and for their second International Convention.*

*Next to "Casa di Sollievo", these groups are at the frontline of this little city of charity, nurseries of faith, hubs of love, where Christ himself is present whenever they meet to pray and share the Eucharistic Agape, under the guidance of their Shepherds and spiritual Directors.*

*Prayer is the force that unites all good souls and moves the world, it revives our consciences, it sustains our "Casa", it comforts all those who are suffering, it heals the sick, it sanctifies our work, it elevates all forms of medical assistance, it gives moral strength and Christian resignation to human suffering, it spreads God's smile and the blessings upon every weakness and frailty.*

*Pray as much as you can, my children, pray always, without ever getting tired, because it is to prayer that I entrust this Work, which stems from God's will and which will continue to grow thanks to the help of the Divine Providence and the spiritual and charitable contribution of all souls who support it through their prayers.*

*May the Almighty and Merciful Lord, who accepts for Himself every benefit gained by the suffering brothers, reward you with His superabundant measure.*

*As a pledge of spiritual gratitude and thankfulness I offer for all of you my daily prayer and suffering, the remembrance in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, in which I present you before the Throne of Divine Majesty, imploring graces and blessings for everyone; especially for the sick in the "Casa Sollievo" and for all the sick in the world spiritually united in one family by the bonds of pain and charity. I recommend to each and all of them that they bear their suffering in a Christian way, in union with the sufferings of Jesus and the Holy Virgin.*





## PADRE PIO PRAYER GROUPS

*"Follow the path that God has chosen for you"*

*Padre Pio was a concrete person who knew the human soul well, our stubbornness and the vainglory that are often harboured in the people who attended church more frequently. For this reason, from the beginning he wanted a priest to lead the Prayer Groups (the first to be named was Don Giancarlo Setti). Padre Pio never gave much importance to the organizational aspects of the Groups, he only asked that they be characterized by great fidelity to the Gospel and to the Church and that Casa Sollievo be their spiritual reference.*

Padre Pio was a concrete person who knew the human soul well, his stubbornness and the vainglory that often harbored precisely in the people who attended church. For this reason, from the beginning he wanted a priest to animate the Prayer Groups (the first to be named was Don Giancarlo Setti). Padre Pio never gave much importance to the organizational aspects of the Groups, he only asked that they be characterized by great fidelity to the Gospel and to the Church and that Casa Sollievo be their spiritual reference.

### GETTING TO KNOW PADRE PIO

- ❖ In 1956 the first International Conference of Prayer Groups was organized in Loreto. There were groups from various nations led by Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro.
- ❖ On 19 September 1959, under the presidency of Cardinal Lercaro, the National Convention was held in Catania. On this occasion the Groups consecrated themselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
- ❖ In September 1967, San Giovanni Rotondo hosted the new National Convention of Prayer Groups, organized to celebrate Padre Pio's 80th birthday.
- ❖ The second International Convention took place between 19 and 22 September 1968 in San Giovanni Rotondo. Gherardo Leone wrote: "Strangely enough, this convention has providentially become like a farewell to its founder, fixed on the eve of his death".
- ❖ On 24th September 1975, the third international conference was held in Rome, followed by the audience of Pope Paul VI in St. Peter's Square.
- ❖ On September 16th, 1977 during the 19th Eucharistic Congress, the Groups met in Pescara on the occasion of the day of suffering. Cardinal Giovanni Colombo presided over this initiative.
- ❖ On 27th August 1983, Monsignor Riccardo Ruotolo, president of the Work of Padre Pio and general manager of the Groups, presided over the first national convention of US groups at the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in New Jersey (USA).
- ❖ On 17th September 1980, in Rome the fourth International Conference was organized with Concelebration in St. Peter's and meeting with Pope John Paul II in the Paul VI room
- ❖ On September 21st, 1987, the National Convention led by Cardinal Corrado Ursi took place in San Giovanni Rotondo, on the occasion of the departure of the Peregrinatio Mariae of Our Lady of Fatima, promoted by the Movement of Padre Pio's Prayer Groups.

### PADRE PIO'S WORLD: *The Rosary, the legacy of Padre Pio*

For Pope Pius XII, the Rosary was "more of a divine than human" origin, and if Pope Leone XIII had written 11 encyclicals on the Rosary, Pope Benedict XIV stated: "This form of prayer is wonderfully suited to nourish and arouse both charity and virtue in all souls".

Padre Pio in his immense devotion towards Our Lady defined the Rosary chaplet as "the weapon", in fact he used to say that, through the recitation of the Holy Rosary, Our Lady had rejected not even one grace he had asked of Her. Many of his brothers testified that Padre Pio would recite more than 34 in one day and when they asked him: "*Father, how can you say so many?*". He replied: "*Do not worry, this is not asked of you*".

A few days before Padre Pio's death, a spiritual son of his asked: «*Father, what would you like to tell us?*», He replied: «*Love Our Lady and get everyone to love Her. Pray the rosary, never forget to say it. Recite it as often as you can*».

### CLOSE-UP ON PADRE PIO'S PRAYER GROUPS:: *The structure of the Prayer Groups*

The organizational structure of the Groups is essential and can be known in detail by reading the Statute and the Rules. There are two essential points of reference: the International Center of Prayer Groups which is responsible for the entire organizational part (appointments, approval of the Conferences, etc.), which is at the service of the Director General and his council (composed of the two vice presidents and by the general secretary, who is the person dedicated to follow the Groups). The other point of reference for the Groups is the diocese bishop, on whom the Groups legally depend; it is up to him to approve their founding and follow them directly or through a diocese coordinator.

### *June 16 - (anniversary of the canonization of Padre Pio) Feast of communion*

On June 16, anniversary of the canonization of Padre Pio, Prayer Groups from all over the world join together spiritually in prayer and communion of intentions.