



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, 8th 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.