



*"Jesus is my hope, and the living source of my happiness"
Padre Pio Prayer Groups, pilgrims of hope*

FIRST SHRINE: THE PEOPLE ON THEIR WAY

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

From the First Letter of St Peter, the Apostle (2:4-10)

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

Jesus, who is the Word of the Father, builds the Christian community like a living temple. For the pious Jews the concept of 'God's people' was something rooted in the essence of their religiosity, but also of their social life. In the Old Testament, the Jews are 'the chosen people', those who have entered into a Covenant with God and are a sign of the uniqueness and majesty of this God in the world. God is not like idols who "have a mouth and do not speak, have ears and do not hear".

With the coming of Jesus into the world, He becomes the sign of this unique love, He is "the cornerstone", He who establishes a new Covenant. Believers are the chosen, "chosen race, priesthood royalty, holy nation" to proclaim the greatness of God and His triumph over evil.

The difference between believers and non-believers will be the awareness of being part of the 'people of God', constituted as such by the sacrifice of Jesus.

SPIRITUALITY

From a letter by Padre Pio to the Ventrella sisters (Epist. III, p. 563)

“Take heart, therefore, dearest daughters, be sweet and lovable to all, humble and courageous, pure and sincere in everything. What better desire can I have for you today, from this prison in which I find myself for your sanctification and mine? Be like little spiritual bees, bringing nothing to their hives but honey and wax. May your home be full of sweetness, peace, agreement, humility and piety as regards conversation. And given that your different states could necessitate my writing to you individually, despite your common goal. I will do so when necessary.

Soon after his arrival at San Giovanni Rotondo (September 1916) the guardian father, Fr. Paolino da Casacalenda, asked Padre Pio to follow a group of tertiaries in their formation. Padre Pio thus set his weekly reflections on the knowledge and meditation of the word of God. Unfortunately, after a few months, he had to leave San Giovanni Rotondo for a call to arms, so he continued to follow his spiritual daughters by correspondence, albeit from afar. Despite Padre Pio’s suffering, this letter will lead us in this catechesis and all of the following ones, because it contains what we might imagine was Padre Pio's first teaching to his spiritual daughters, set in an orderly way.



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The first thing he asks is that there be a life of communion among them: we are Church, a community which is founded on Christ Jesus, but which is not something static, but a construction that must be continually enriched like that beehive in which industrious bees produce wax and honey.

Praying and listening together

Every prayer is important before God, because He looks at the heart of man and knows how to go beyond the formulas and personal limitations. Padre Pio, however, taught us that a prayer might become like a monologue, because we talk to God, but do not know how to listen to Him. On this we have reflected at length in the previous training texts; let us just remember that to his daughters and spiritual children Padre Pio recommended meditation on the Word of God, because "in prayer it is we who speak with God, but in meditation it is He who speaks to us".

As Prayer Groups we lift up intercessory prayers both for ourselves and for others, and this is the centre of our spiritual life. This prayer, however, must be nourished by a Word that is listened to and meditated upon together, "like little bees", that is, driven by a desire to build the hive, which is the community just as the Lord tells us to build it.

The beehive and the industrious little bees who build the community with kindness and faith give us the image of a Church that shares in the anxieties of the present time, while spreading hope as well as feelings of communion and solidarity. These make Christians the people of God, as they take upon themselves the burdens of one another (cf. Gal 6:2).

Sharing the Word of God with others builds the community in the name of the Spirit; in the passage from the First Letter of St Peter that opened these reflections, believers are described as "the chosen race, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the people whom God has chosen for Himself to proclaim the marvellous works of the Spirit, who called you out of darkness into his admirable light". To be of the same lineage means to be one with others, to share the same blood. The same blood can easily be understood symbolically to describe the unity among believers, but care must be taken that this unity does not arise from sharing an ideal, a philosophy, or even the same religion. The only blood is that of Christ. St Peter added that 'we are the people that God has chosen to proclaim the marvellous works of His, as He called you out of darkness into his admirable light'.

You are the chosen race

Thinking of ourselves as the same body of which Christ is the head (as St Paul said) requires a constant sense of communion towards a unity that is in constant danger of being attacked by the thousand seductive ways of conceiving community. We need to be converted to those values that are Christ's own values, because - as Padre Pio said - he is the 'prototype'. Not infrequently do we experience temptations of the opposite sign, which lead us to shatter that unity in favour of our often extreme positions and preconceptions. Sometimes we identify values with forms and customs of the past. The Church of the apostles, the martyrs, St Francis or St John Bosco... they were a real Church, made up of people who best embodied the values of Christ and expressed them to the full by their way of being and their total adherence to the Gospel.

Padre Pio took up the biblical concept of "election" to indicate not only a new life, far from sin and projected towards the future, but also to convey the awareness that being Church means no longer being our own, enslaved to a point of view or self-reference, but we are to be victims offered for the brothers and sisters who walk with us. He wrote to Raffaelina Cerase: " The fact of having been chosen, having been elected among innumerable others and knowing that without any merit on our part, this choice, this election was decided by God from all eternity *"ante mundi constitutionem"* [before the foundation of the world] for the sole reason that we might be His in time and in eternity, is such a great and at the same time such an enchanting mystery that the soul, even though it understands so little of all this, cannot but melt away with love" (Epist. II, p. 197).



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Royal Priesthood

Padre Pio's words help us to read into the experience of being the chosen people, considering that, as Church, we are the new people of God. Through baptism, once more each of us is made free from the slavery of Egypt and receives the Promised Land as a pledge. The sacraments go beyond the manna of the desert or the crossing of the Red Sea, they are the sign of a presence of God in us, which is renewed every day with the gift of the Spirit.

All of us, in fact, just like the Jews are called to give our response of faith. However, while their unity was guaranteed by the priesthood of Aaron, St Peter said that we are "Kingly priesthood" because where two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, He, the high and eternal Priest is with us."

It will not be a different way of praying or animated celebrations that will qualify us as Padre Pio Prayer Groups. It is clear that regular appointments and a well assisted liturgy are a commitment for us and a sign for the community; but giving our specific nature as Prayer Groups to the Church means bringing out that unity in the Spirit which must be the basis of all prayer, of every prayer. From the Second Vatican Council in Lumen Gentium - "God willed to sanctify and save men not individually and without any bond between them, but wanted to make them one people, who recognise him according to the truth and serve him in holiness" (LG, 9). In the Church we must be a visible sign of this people in which the Spirit is at work, shouting "Abba, Father".

It is thus necessary that when we begin to pray, we are aware that only together with the community, we become one body, and will be able to celebrate our faith with that 'royal priesthood' of which St Peter spoke.

Holy nation

The Jewish people was a sign of God's holiness and fruitfulness in the midst of other peoples. This people was not an unidentified mass; the various biblical narratives of Exodus, the book of Judges and two Books of Kings present us with praiseworthy figures, later summarised in the pages of the Sirach. There emerges in these books the profound faith of this people devoted to being God's people in among the Pagans. As was already the case with the great Fathers of the Bible, we too are often invited by the Holy Father to be present in our time and in the society in which we live, through our life choices and our actions.

We shall not stop our commitment nor refrain our loyalty because of the various forms of protagonism and self-reference that just as in the past still give a distorted image of our communities. When done with truth and honesty, praying together is appreciated by the Lord. Prayer caused the Lord to appoint David, Paul, Barabbas and even to save an innocent, when uttered by Daniel's mouth.

Together we are the holy nation, together we are the community that the Spirit offers to our society, not for a revival of useless fundamentalism, but to be truly and concretely the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

The Shrine of Unity and Fraternity

We might want to wonder at this point if we are really willing to gather our lives together. Some questions for your community life are suggested here, to which we are invited to come back to consider during this pastoral year.

Do we discuss together the value of the Word of God in our lives even when read by others? Are we willing to accept that others may say a word to us as an opportunity for conversion for each of us? We often use the word 'community on the road'. What can be the signs that indicate a positive change in our Prayer Group? Do we really feel part of the community?



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7 OCTOBER - FEAST OF THE MADONNA DEL ROSARIO

The ceremony of the handing over of the rosaries

On the seventh of October the social year begins for all the Groups of the world with the handing over of the rosary beads. The Group Centre proposes a small liturgy based on the theme of the year, and the celebration can take place at individual Group level or in every diocese.

Let us practise the meditated recitation of the holy rosary accompanied by moments of silence. Sometimes it is thought that evangelical texts and writings by devout authors are necessary every time, but then no time is given to silence. In the Christian tradition, the enunciation of the mystery is in itself a synthesis of the Gospel passage. We can either leave out the enunciation of the mystery or not read the Gospel and then pause for silence to allow time to think and listen to the Lord.

PRAYER

ACT OF ENTRUSTMENT TO ST. PIO OF PIETRELCINA

O glorious St. Pio of Pietrelcina,
the saint of this new millennium,
you are our friend,
consoler of our soul and help of us sinners.

You understand us so well
for you know what it means to suffer.
To you we entrust our well-being
and that of our loved ones; To you we entrust our spirit
that we may be able to endure the pains
we carry in our heart;
To you we entrust the request
of presenting our souls to the Virgin of Grace
to obtain eternal salvation from the Lord;
To you we entrust our plea of intercession
to obtain from the Divine Goodness the grace...
which we so ardently desire.

Welcome us under your protection,
defend us from the snares of evil
and above all intercede for us before the Most High
so that through the forgiveness of sins
we may persevere in doing good.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

3 Glory be to the Father...

HYMN