



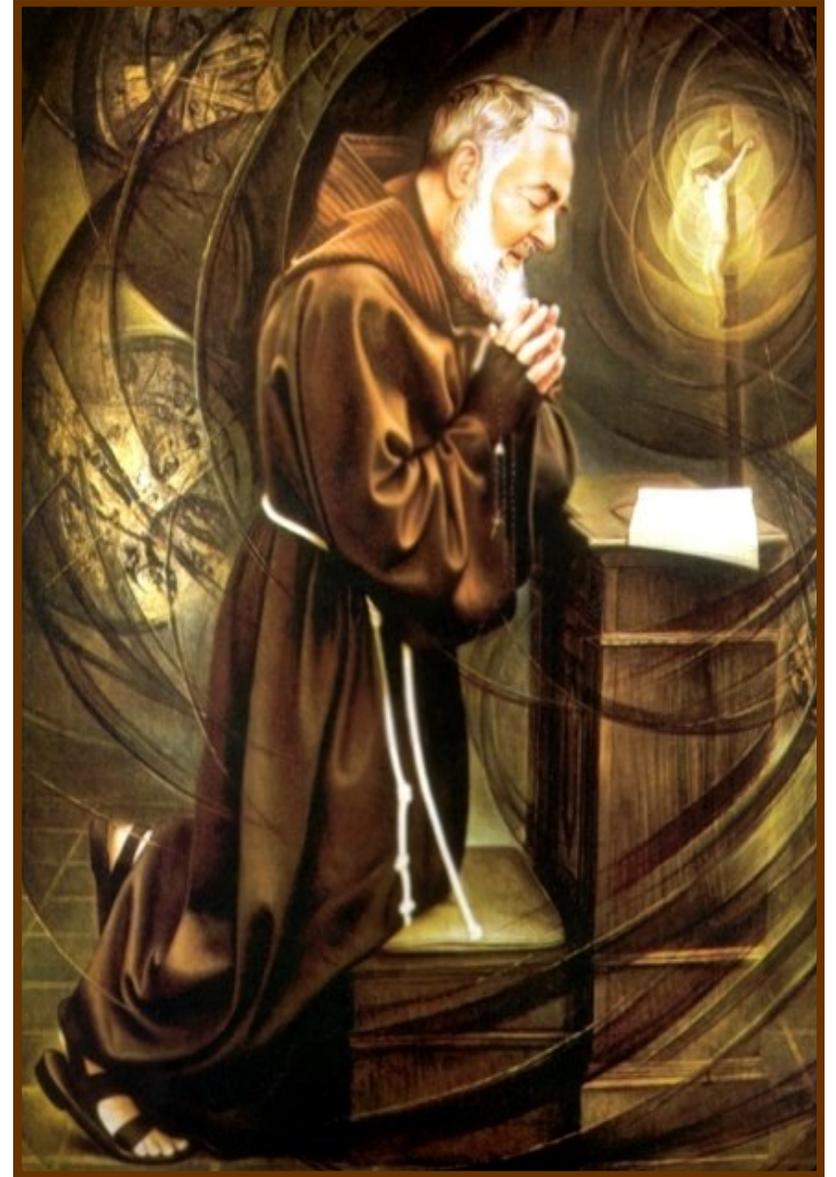
Until the little birds have full-grown wings,  
they look at the horizon from the tree-tops  
and they prudently stay still and quiet in their nests,  
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## Padre Pio and Spiritual Formation

Article 1

### The Return To God



# Padre Pio and Spiritual Formation

Padre Pio described his spiritual director, Padre Benedetto Nardella, as the man who "formed" him. Here are some of Padre Benedetto's teachings on the Christian life.

## Article 1

### The Return To God

By all means enjoy this happiness that Jesus Christ has given you; this comes as a result of your return to the arms of the good Father, after the degradation and bitterness that comes as a result of sin; it is the feast He always gives to his poor, poor repentant children.

So long as it lasts don't worry about the future. What you have read is unfortunately true but I repeat you must not think at the present moment about what grace has reserved for you. On feast days we do not think about ordinary day life, nor do we sadden our thoughts with the vision of the work and anguish of ferial days. In springtime we do not think of the winter. If there are flowers we look at the flowers, if there is snow we look at the snow. You will cope with the trial when it comes. Now God wants you to experience all the sweetness of his company and all the happiness there is in loving him.

You tell me that the tears you shed for your sins and for the sufferings of Jesus gives you joy and you cannot understand how anyone can think of them without tears and a gentle feeling of compassion. Indeed if the aridities announced in books make you sad, you cannot believe that you will ever be so insensible as to experience them. My daughter, you will know what the future is like when it comes and you will see that it is just as possible as the present time. Right now enjoy and thank Jesus for his caresses.

Drink in the milk and honey, declaring that you will never again abandon Him.

### Spiritual Programme

It is very profitable to establish a programme of prayer, action and religious practices in the first years of devout life.

You can draw it up together with your Confessor explaining to him the family requirements and your duties. Devotion must not become an obstacle for your domestic occupations. You will dedicate your free time to God.



**You cannot always stay in the cradle or in the arms of your mother.**

So long as you don't frighten yourself with premature struggles, grace keeps down all enemies and you think you have them victoriously under control. No, my dear daughter, sooner or later they could revive and disconcert you with a lively surprise.

Don't throw yourself self-confidently into opportunities, negotiations, conversations, etc. For a young girl reticence with people of either sex is always a good thing.

## **The Mystical Ladder**

Did you ever climb a ladder all at once? And how then could you imitate someone who reached the top progressively? Continue also to go up and you will reach the top. The arms to cling with are humility and trust in God; the feet are calm and resolution. Haste and desertion are always dangerous because they trip us up and make us fall.

## **Sentimental Tears**

I praise your tears, but I must tell you in all truth that they are not the gift of tears spoken of in certain mystics. At the beginning of the spiritual life the abundance of grace makes it sweet to feel sorrow for one's sins and the sufferings of Jesus and helping our sentiments it is possible to cry whenever we want. That's all.

When you have advanced spiritually, you will see clearly that you now cry out of self-love rather than for the suffering caused to the Supreme God.

## **Leave God And The Ego Gains Ground**

Leave God and the ego gains ground; but you must not worry too much but instead resign yourself to following the way that everyone takes.

You cannot always stay in the cradle or in the arms of your mother and if walking is difficult in the beginning, it is nevertheless good for you and necessary. You accuse your mother of being heartless when she begins to leave you to yourself?

You find difficulty in meditating and in everything else! This is not surprising. The sacrifice of doing your duty and your good will are equivalent to giving to God what you can, and the beginning of your value and merit. At first God's gentleness did everything and let you imagine it was your doing. Now He wants you to exercise your strength as a woman to feel a bit the meaning of virtue and earning future glory to his satisfaction. Is it not an honor that Jesus treats you as one who has left childhood behind and capable of doing something?

Therefore, take courage and go on! If you sometimes feel too tired, you can tell Him confidently: Jesus carry me for a bit in your arms.

All prayers are good. Apart from the Rosary I have no preference for any formula of vocal prayer. Choose some prayers that are to your taste or that please your religious sense and recite them methodically. Whilst you are in this state of fervor I do not think it opportune to do the daily examination of conscience, nor is it necessary. At the beginning of divine love there is no anxiety; it is enough to feel anxiety before confession.

Any priest can give direction to the new lovers of God just as any arm is suitable and sufficient to carry a tranquil and smiling child; it is the turbulent children who require a maternal arm that is more skilful and patient.

It is therefore not yet a question of choice. So you can be satisfied with your present guide.

## **Discretion In Zeal**

You are right. Defects and sins are too horrible. To your freshly revived eyes, purified by tears of penance, offences to God are insufferable, but I beg you to moderate your zeal. It is not for you to act as a judge or teacher for others, especially with adults and those with more experience than yourself.

You can speak to all of God's goodness and of the joy of finding him again, but at the right time and in the right place and if you see that your exhortations are not accepted it is better to keep quiet. Above all, don't look as if you approved of evil whatever you do and don't make passionate reproaches.

Imitate the example of Jesus who is kind and patient. He sees everything, hears everything and keeps silent about everything. Did He not keep silent with you also for many years?

You cannot understand how they can offend so good a God. Take a look at your past life and you will easily understand.

I sympathize with your astonishment, my son. When your eyes open to the light all of a sudden they are dazzled and it is not possible to see clearly even ourselves. But you will get used to this beautiful sun and you will see the others as well as yourself.

## **Moderation With Penance**

You don't feel mortifications and you would like to make a great many, but you must go carefully and follow the advice of your Confessor.

You say you cannot agree with so much restraint from your guide, as if the saints had not done long and hard penances.

With your spiritual enthusiasm and the exuberance of grace, you think you can imitate the examples of penance that the Church points out for our admiration, but believe me if you continue you will not be able to resist. In the height of fervor you do not feel the suffering and it seems as if the body does not suffer damage, even if you exaggerate, but in reality it suffers damage, and before long you would collapse.

Perhaps our Lord will grant you the grace as He has done for some chosen people to live and thrive on martyrdom and to feel a gentle joy in suffering; but you must not expect it and much less must you think you actually have it.

Therefore be docile.

Because the Church is divine and also very prudent. It imposes fasting only at the age of twenty one; and this is so that the tender age is not injured by deprivation. And you want to wear yourself out so young?

I would like you to not fast for the time being, but would be happy to know you are always strong in resisting snacks between meals. This mortification does not damage your health and serves to make you exercise patience.

Let us not even mention hair-shirts, etc. Perhaps the time will come. When? I will not say so as not to sadden your haste.

If you wish to sanctify yourself quickly begin by not wanting what you want, but what obedience wants.

## **Moderation In The Desire To Love**

To have too much desire to love and to want too much to feel love are obstacles to feeling and enjoying love. You are like a child who, out of greed, not only does not taste the food but runs the risk of suffocating and I correct you, spiritual child, for this craving which you have mentioned to me. The one who runs gets tired, while the one who walks with regularity goes a long way.

Our Lord does not like disorder or haste. He lives in peace and therefore tranquility.

Too much reading is a hindrance, therefore I disapprove of your reading whole volumes in a few days. You must read to meditate and by meditating feed your soul.

Put aside works of deep mysticism, because the time to read them is not yet ripe. Content yourself for the moment with *Preparation for Death* by Saint Alfonso dei Liguori (1696-1787), and *The Way to Paradise* (probably *The Ladder to Paradise* by Saint John Climacus, +649) and similar books.

No hair-shirts, just put one round your head, that is round your own good sense.

## **The Steps Of The Spiritual Path**

Until the little birds have full-grown wings, they look at the horizon from the tree-tops and they prudently stay still and quiet in their nests, content with the maternal care and protection.

You want to fly like the Saints? If you knew, my daughter, how far the Saints had to go to walk, suffer and languish before rising to those sublime heights that you have read about!

Enjoy calmly this gentle new grace and do not bother to aspire for higher gifts. After milk comes bread, then the fast, after the difficulties and the anguish of the desert and finally you will be able to hope for the exuberant delights of the promised land. I say "hope," because it is not certain that God wants to give in this life the sublime joys of his love to all those who have served Him faithfully; often after the trials are over, He crowns his chosen ones straight away in Paradise, without giving them the expected joys on earth.

## **Equilibrium**

The grace of new fervour brings with it love of isolation and withdrawal from company. This tendency therefore does not surprise me and I encourage you to love solitude, mother of recollection; nevertheless excesses must be avoided at all costs. There are those who urged by an interior inspiration isolate themselves too much and almost show with their singularity a sort of disapproval of the conduct of others; and there are those who for fear of appearing singular and being criticized, give themselves up without regard or caution to their former carefree sociability.

You must not imitate either of these. Be affable without being dissipated; gentle but firm in your resolution to serve our Lord more diligently.

Do not be afraid that amiable and fraternal conversation harms devotion. The effort to be agreeable is charitable and charity is always precious. Besides speaking and taking recreation does not prevent you to continue with your secret conversation with Love.

## **Reticence**

The passions sleep but are not dead. Therefore you cannot and must not light-heartedly trust yourself.