

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.* (Col 3:16). The 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 honors and all that prevents him from loving God, he will never feel no matter what adversities may befall him; he will endure everything steadfastly and perseveringly; he will readily forgive offenses and give thanks to God for all things. The apostle, moreover, wants God's law and Jesus' doctrine to be and to dwell abundantly in us. Now all this cannot come about unless we apply ourselves to reading Holy Scripture and books dealing with divine things, or else listening to God's word as expounded by holy preachers, confessors, etc. Finally, the apostle wishes the Christian not to confine himself merely to knowing the divine law; he wants him to penetrate deeply into the meaning of it in order to be able to regulate his own life. None of this can take place without diligent application to meditation on God's law, which makes the Christian exult with joy and chant sweet psalms and hymns to God. The Christian who is striving for perfection will understand, then, how very necessary meditation is.

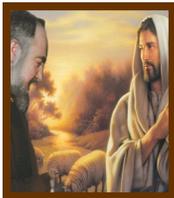
As regards the other means of doing everything for God's glory, let us listen to the apostles teaching: *whatever you do, he says, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.* (Col 3:17). By the faithful use of this simple means we do not merely keep far from any sin, but feel the continual urge to aim constantly at perfection.

I exhort you to impress this letter deeply on your mind and endeavor to apply its teaching in a practical way to your own conduct. The Lord is calling you to all this, so try not to let all my care of you be ineffective, letting Jesus' grace remain fruitless in your soul. I want you, moreover, to rejoice at all times, for the Lord's yoke is an agreeable one. You are glorifying the Lord by your life and He is pleased with you. Never leave any room for sadness in your heart, but this would be in conflict with the Holy Spirit poured out into your soul....

May the Lord bless you.

Fra Pio.

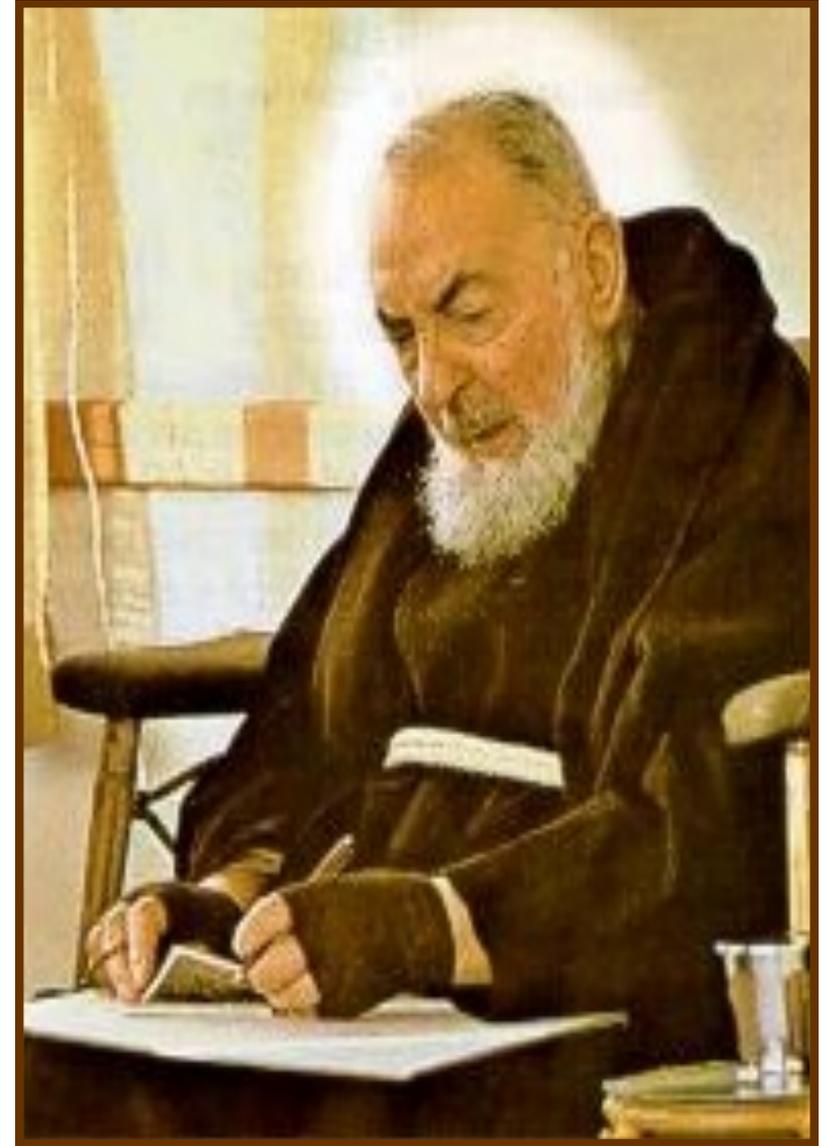
**Reminder:** The contents of this letter is specific between Raffaelina Cerase and Padre Pio. Someone else having similar problems may receive different answers from Padre Pio.



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## Letter of Padre Pio: SPIRITUAL READING



# Letter of Padre Pio: SPIRITUAL READING

In letter 31, dated, 31 October 1914, Raffaolina Cerase writes the following to Padre Pio regarding spiritual reading: "holy Father, allow me to submit to you my poor opinion. The books you have suggested, such as the Way of Perfection, the Interior Castle, etc., seem to me, and this is really a fact, to be too refined for my coarse taste which is of this earth and far too material. What do you say to this? Speak to me."

The response Raffaolina receives from Padre Pio concerning spiritual reading is found in a letter dated 16 November 1914, wherein Padre Pio writes to Raffaolina the following:

Beloved daughter of Jesus,

May the grace and mercy and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with you all and make you ever more acceptable to God our Father. Amen.

I give thanks continually to God for you, as is my duty, for your continual increase in holiness and for the love of Jesus which is becoming more and more abundant in your heart.

This poor letter of mine will deal with what ought to be the life of one who is living in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is my intention to place before you an example, a model, so that when you look at this example or model you may be able to conform to it in all things, reproducing all its features, even the less important ones, in your own life. I am aware that my manner of speaking is not, unfortunately, what it ought to be. It is quite harsh and tiresome and precisely on this account I am afraid that I may not make my meaning clear. However, I fix my gaze on the One who moves me to speak and who is the source of wisdom and I earnestly hope that all will redound to His glory.

By a most wise order and a most singular love, our heavenly Father in His goodness makes it impossible for us to remove those bodily deformities which we inherit from nature our mother. If we give much thought and waste much time and effort in trying to correct our superficial bodily defects, even in arranging our hair so that not even a single hair remains out of place, tell me, then, what would we not do to rectify and drive far from us the physical deformities we bear in our bodies?

Unfortunately, we are never done trying to improve our appearance. Indeed, all our efforts are directed towards improving the body and making it more and more beautiful. Less attention is perhaps devoted to the soul, which we may have treated as a negligible quantity.

Well, then, if Providence has deprived us of our motive for neglecting spiritual things while we were busy improving our bodily life, God in his infinite wisdom has placed in

Man can consider himself from two points of view: in the state of prosperity and in that of adversity. The apostle wants him, when in a prosperous state, to be filled with mercy as opposed to hardheartedness, with kindness as opposed to a harsh external manner and as regards his own personal life he wants him to be full of humility as opposed to interior pride, to be unassuming rather than given to external show.

Turning to the state of the Christian in times of adversity, the same holy apostle (Cf. Col 3:12) wants him to show patience and to stifle all resentment either internal or external. He expects him to bear with all the vexatious behavior of others and to forgive them sincerely.

This great saint, however, sets greater store by love than by all the rest of the virtues and hence he recommends it most earnestly and expects it to be present in all we do, for Christian perfection consists in this alone: *Above all these, he says, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.* (Col 3:14).

Observe, then, that he is not satisfied with exhorting us to be patient, to bear with one another, which are in themselves fine virtues. No, he wants us to love, and with good reason, for it might well be that we bear patiently with the defects of those around us and even forgive them when they offend us, but all this may be of no value if it is done without love which is the queen of virtues and includes all the others.

Therefore, my dear sister, let us greatly esteem this virtue if we want the heavenly Father to show us mercy. Let us be very fond of charity and let us practice it. This is the virtue that makes us all children of the one Father who is in heaven. Let us love and practice charity, as this is our divine Master's precept. By this we shall be distinguished from the unbelievers by our loving and charitable behavior. In our love for charity, we must flee from even the shadow of anything that might dim its splendor. Yes, in loving this virtue, let us always bear in mind the great teaching of the apostle: *We are all members of Jesus Christ* (Cf. Eph 5:30) *who is the head of us all, the members of the body.* (Eph 4:15). We should show great love for one another, remembering that we have all been called to form a single body and that if we keep our love for one another, the beautiful peace of Jesus will invariably triumph joyfully in our hearts.

I must add a further word to what has already been said, namely, to suggest a 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.

one and the other, endeavors in every way and makes use of every means to harm others. These are the vices which when present in the heart offend those around us. Anyone who wants to show himself worthy of his vocation should guard against them.

I also said that we can offend others externally by our speech and this can happen especially in three ways: firstly, by blasphemy, either by rebelling against God in offensive terms, or against our neighbor by harsh and unpleasant words, curses and the like; secondly, by impure language which reveals the nasty fire that burns in the heart and is inclined to spread and affect everyone else; thirdly, by lying. This gives birth to deceit, perjury and a thousand other kinds of roguery which are damaging to others.

The Christian must beware of all these vices if he intends to live according to the spirit of Jesus Christ. Now all these vices and all these sins make up the old man, the earthly man, the carnal man. The apostle wants the Christian to strip himself precisely of this man: *seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices.* (Col 3:9). The Christian, then, who has died and risen again with Christ by baptism, must invariably strive to renew and improve himself by contemplating the eternal truths and the will of God. In a word, he must endeavor all the time to reproduce in himself the image of the Lord who created him.

Christian perfection obliges us to all this and the apostle exhorts us to act in this way, telling us with great wisdom that *we have put on the new nature which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.* (Ibid. 3:10). But what is this new nature to which the apostle is referring here? It is our nature made holy by baptism which, according to the principles of sanctification, must live *in righteousness and in true holiness.* (Cf. Lk 1:75).

We Christians are therefore images of God twice over, by nature and by grace. By nature we are endowed with intelligence, memory and will; by grace we are made holy through our baptism which imprints on our souls the beautiful image of God. Yes, my dear, sanctifying grace impresses the image of God upon us in such a way that we ourselves become divine by participation, and as St. Peter puts it so beautifully: *We become partakers of the divine nature.* (2 Pet 1:4).

See then, my dear sister, how great a dignity is ours. However, we are great on condition that we preserve sanctifying grace and, alas, how wretched we become when we lose that grace. I was about to say that our wretchedness places us on a lower level even than the beasts who roam the countryside. All is canceled when sin enters in.

Get to work, then, O Christian. Remember that by baptism you cast off the old nature and put on the new. You have already followed me in considering all that goes to make up the old nature, the carnal, earthly nature. Have patience a little longer and follow me now in considering what goes to make up the new nature, the spiritual, supernatural nature.

our hands all the necessary means for the embellishment of our souls, even after we have disfigured them by sin. The soul's cooperation with divine grace is all that is required to enable it to develop, to reach such a degree of splendor and beauty as to attract, not so much the loving and astonished gaze of the Angels, but the gaze of God Himself, according to the testimony of Holy Scripture: *the king, that is, God, will desire your beauty.* (Ps 45:11).

In introducing you here to the model of the true Christian, my guide will be my beloved apostle St. Paul. His sayings, all filled with heavenly wisdom, entrance me. They fill my heart with heavenly dew and take my soul out of itself. I cannot read his letters without experiencing a fragrance which spreads all through my soul, a fragrance that reaches the very apex of my spirit.

May God be blessed forever, for He alone knows how to bring about these marvels in a soul that always resisted Him, a soul that was the receptacle of an infinite amount of filth. He willed to make me an example of grace and He is pleased to hold me up to sinners as a model, so that none may despair. Let sinners, then, fix their gaze on me, the greatest sinner of all, and let them hope in God.

Fix your attention, then, you sinners, on me, the most wretched of all and be encouraged not to despair of being saved, for the Lord has not only pardoned my sins but has been pleased to enrich me with more precious graces. But dear God, where is my mind taking me?...

But let us return to the subject I mentioned. In order to understand each other it should be observed that we have a twofold life. We have a natural life received from Adam through procreation and which is therefore an earthly and corruptible life filled with base passions and love of self. The other life is a supernatural one received from Jesus at baptism and therefore a spiritual, heavenly life by which we practice virtue. Baptism brings about a real transformation in us. We died to sin and are grafted onto Jesus Christ in such a way as to live by His very life. At our baptism we receive sanctifying grace which gives us life, a completely heavenly life, making us children of God, brothers of Christ and heirs to heaven.

Now if baptism causes every Christian to die to the first life and rise up to the second, it is the duty of each Christian to seek the things of heaven and not to care about the things of this earth. The apostle St. Paul suggests this to the Colossians: *If then, says this great saint, you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.* (Col 3:1).

Yes, the Christian is raised up in Jesus at baptism. He is lifted up to a supernatural life and acquires the splendid hope of occupying a heavenly throne in glory. What an honor! His vocation demands that he aspire continually to the home of the blessed and consider himself as a pilgrim in this land of exile. The Christian vocation, I say, requires that we do not attach our hearts to this miserable world. The good Christian who really follows his vocation directs all his attention, all his study to securing eternal possession. He must look on the things of this world below in such a way as to esteem and appreciate only those which help him to obtain eternal things and must despise all things which do not help him to obtain what is eternal.

The Christian who has forgotten his true vocation and who is merely a Christian in name, a worldly Christian, judges things quite differently. His judgment is the exact opposite to that of the Christian worthy of the name who lives according to the spirit of Jesus Christ. The former judges things from the point of view of their capacity to satisfy his vanity and his passions. The latter, on the other hand, invariably judges them in relations to eternal things.

Hence, the one that is a Christian merely in name, the Christian in high society, sets a great value on honors, wealth, fleeting things, comforts and all that this wretched world has to offer. O foolish man, enter into yourself and remember that by your baptism you renounced the world and are dead to it. The Holy Spirit tells you so by the mouth of St. Paul: *You have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.* (Col 3:3).

Remember, foolish one, that the life of those who live according to the spirit of Jesus will not always remain hidden and unknown. Remember what it will be in the future in the Lord's day: *When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.* (Col 3:4). *Beloved*, wrote St. John, the favorite apostle, for the comfort of the faithful, *we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.* (1 Jn 3:2).

Is the certainty of such boundless glory, O foolish one, not sufficient to make you enter into yourself and come to your senses, to live the rest of your life according to your vocation?

The life mapped out for the Christian by the apostle consists in stripping oneself of the vices of the old man, that is to say, the man of this world, and in clothing oneself in the virtues which Jesus Christ taught. As regards stripping oneself of the vices he tells us: *Put to death therefore what is earthly in you.* (Col 3:5). The Christian sanctified by baptism is not exempt from the rebellion of the senses and passions; hence the impelling need to mortify our passions as long as we live.

The holy apostle himself suffered considerable interior distress from the rebellion of his senses and passions, which led him to utter the following complaint: *I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin,* (Rom 7:25), that is, the law of concupiscence. It is as though he intended to say: "I am mentally subject to God's law, but my flesh is subject to the law of sin." This is to be said for the spiritual consolation of many unfortunate people who experience the sharp conflict within themselves to which a hot temper or lustful desires give rise. They do not want to feel or to harbor those impulses, that ill feeling towards others, those vivid pictures presented by their imagination, those sensual promptings. Poor things! Quite involuntarily these feelings surge up and produce a conflict within them, so that in the act of wanting to do something right they feel violently impelled towards something wrong.

Among them are some who think they are offending God when they feel this violent interior inclination to evil. Take heart, you chosen souls, for in this there is no sin, since the holy apostle himself, a chosen instrument (Acts 9:15), experienced this dreadful conflict within himself: *When I intend to do good, he says, I find within me a power which inclines me to evil.* (Cf. Rom 7:16 ff.) Even when carnal impulses are violently felt, there can be no sin when the will does not consent to them.

The sensual passions are the most enticing and they find an outlet in a great many different acts, which the apostle enumerates: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, lust and avarice. (Cf. Gal 5:19). The last named gains such mastery over the soul infected by it that it becomes the idol of that soul to which it sacrifices everything else. St. Paul refers to those in the grip of these vices as *sons of unbelief*, (Col 3:6), because these things more than anything else blind a man and make him more readily lose sight of eternal possessions. Only those who have had this sad experience themselves can confirm the truth of what we are saying.

Over and above the vices of the senses, the good Christian must beware of those vices which offend others either by interior acts or by his speech. The vices which lead us to offend our neighbor by interior acts, according to the same apostle, are: anger, wrath and malice. (Cf. Rom 2:8; Col 3:8). Anger is a moral passion which also exists in good people and in itself it is not sinful. But if we do not know how to control it, it becomes sinful, as happens when we are angry with someone who does not deserve it, or before we have reason to be angry, or in matters which do not justify our anger. The apostle warns us to refrain from this type of anger. On the same subject St. James tells us: *Let every man be slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God.* (Jas 1:19 – 20). Resentment is an offshoot of anger. It is present when a person considers others unworthy to possess what they have and would like to see them humiliated and disgraced by punishment. Malice, which proceeds from