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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

**The Lord give you His peace!**

Behold I am with you always, until the end of the age. (Matthew 28: 20) (The disciples) went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs. (Mark 16: 20)

The Lord continues to be with us. The Eucharist is His Real Presence. The Mass we participate in is our entering the mystery that challenges us to continue the Lord's ministry until the end of the age.

The beginning of the Mass, from the moment we sign ourselves with the sign of our salvation in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the beginning of an extraordinary spiritual journey. We journey through a mystical experience of our salvation history. We live those moments of the Mass with Jesus throughout His Passion-Death-Resurrection-Glorification. As the early followers of Jesus did, we listen to and reflect on the words of our ancestors in faith. As the first disciples did, we listen to and learn from the words of Jesus. And the power of the Holy Spirit Who will remind you of all that I said. Thus, we grow in the strength that will empower us to go forth and be 'heralds of the Great King'.

Our Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi introduced himself as the 'Herald of the Great King' when confronted by a band of robbers. The robbers beat, stripped, and threw St. Francis into a ditch, considering him a lunatic and of little worth. They could not understand the freedom and joy that Francis had encountered when he allowed Jesus to 'take over' his life. The Eucharist, celebrated well and received with the appropriate spiritual dispositions, empowers us in the same way to be free to 'be Christ' and proclaim Him to all the world.

We become 'heralds of the Great King' who are asked not only to bear a message to others in words but to become the message in action, fearless of any opposition we might receive, for the sake of the Name. Human nature influences that

reception. In fact, we sense a growing aversion in many areas of our world to Christ and His message. There are those who seek to follow Him with a sincere heart. There are those who follow the image they have created in their own likeness that responds to their personal situations rather than His Word. And then there are those who stand in opposition to Him, even going so far as to proclaim they are acting in His name.

Those who seek to foster a love for the Gospel, the Church, and our Catholic Christian values and traditions often find themselves facing the same dilemmas the first followers and all sincere seekers of Truth have faced down through the centuries. St. Francis of Assisi and so many other sincere seekers of God's will encountered difficulties and dangers because of this. These children of God who seek to do God's will and live in His Truth are beaten with barrages of negativity and harsh words; they are stripped of integrity by slander, false accusations, or even by embellishing the truth for the sake of destroying the reputation of the innocent, and then they are left on the road of indifference or in a ditch of despair alone to fend for themselves with their physical, and sometimes spiritual strength depleted. That would be the sad case were not these faithful ones united with the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. The truth is that we find strength in our weaknesses, as St. Paul reminds us when speaking of his own vulnerabilities and defects. One of the great Fathers of the early Church, Tertullian, stated: The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church. What greater 'martyrdom' is there than the 'witness' of bearing with patience, trust, and forgiveness, an 'ongoing death'. This "ongoing death" seeks to destroy the soul over the course of days, weeks, months and perhaps years! What greater amount of 'blood' can we shed than the 'lifeblood' of our time, talents and even treasures spent in the daily practice of our faith and its defense against the power of the one who is in the world'. The 'one in the world' is always at work insidiously in the minds and hearts of those who proclaim a 'heaven on earth' and a god created to one's own image!

Once we have received the Lord in the Eucharist at Mass, it seems as though everything precipitates so quickly that we have little time to spend with the Lord. The brief words and quick dismissal, Go, the Mass is ended or perhaps, translating the words literally, Go, it is sent, are an urgent commission entrusted to all who participated (and the key word is 'participated') in the Eucharist. Christ sends us out, as He did with His disciples when He ascended to the Father, to bring to others what we have seen with our own eyes, heard with our own ears, and touched - Jesus. The commission is urgent; thus the dismissal is immediate. We have celebrated the mysteries of our salvation. We have re-presented the Passion-Death-Resurrection-Glorification of the Savior. We have actively participated in the Mass - we are witnesses to all this. There is no time to waste. We must be out and about with the Lord and proclaim Him with our lives! At the very beginning of the Acts of the Apostles we read: (Jesus said to His disciples) you will be witnesses in

Jerusalem ... and to the ends of the earth ... As (the disciples) were looking on, he was lifted up ... from their sight. While they were looking intently at the sky ... suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? (cfr. Acts 1: 1-12).

At the end of Mass the celebrant conveys the same command to us. It is as though he were saying: 'You have celebrated the sacred mysteries of our salvation; you have entered the 'inner circle' of the Great King'; you have been privileged with His message and His Spirit to inform and remind you. The Victim is sacrificed, our offering is sent and received by the Father. The sacred communion that empowers those who receive worthily has been received and consumed ... What are you waiting for? Don't stand around. It's time to go and be the One we received. Drive out the demons of ill will by the spirit of goodness and compassion. Speak the new language of Christ's command of love that can be understood by anyone regardless of ethnic origin. Deal with the deadly serpents of verbal and physical persecution for the 'sake of the Name. Know that I am with you all days even to the end of the age. Don't fear the deadly poison of a world that insidiously attempts to corrupt mind and heart with seductive enticements and glittering allurements. Lay hands of compassion and understanding on those who have grown ill through lives that are weak, those who have possibly given up ... be their strength in Jesus.

Do not forfeit what divine authority confers on you. Put on the garment of holiness, gird yourself with the belt of chastity. Let Christ be your helmet, let the cross on your forehead be your unfailing protection. Your breastplate should be the knowledge of God that he himself has given you. Keep burning continually the sweet-smelling incense of prayer. Take up the sword of the Spirit. Let your heart be an altar. Then, with full confidence in God, present your body for sacrifice. God desires not death, but faith. God thirsts not for blood, but for self-surrender. God is appeased not by slaughter but by the offering of your free will. (Saint Peter Chrysologus, Sermo 108)

Padre Pio, known for his hours in the confessional and the profound intensity with which he celebrated and became one with the Eucharistic Mystery was also a man deeply imbued with the sense of the here and now. His heart was always in heaven, but his feet were firmly grounded in the reality of his day. The spiritual world he so vividly exemplified in his prayer, confessional and spiritual direction ministry, and even in the external signs of a uniquely blessed life, did not make him 'gaze at the heavens' without recognizing his sisters and brothers who journeyed with

less apparent 'gifts' as he. The stories about his 'earthiness' and practical approach to issues are numerous. Just to mention a few:

1) Padre Pio was the 'mid-wife' for many pregnancies. Not only did he pray for happy deliveries, but often he would 'bless' the child that still was only a future possibility, that he saw as fact, and this to the astonished joy of the 'parents-to-be'.

2) Then there was the young man who wanted to know if he should marry the 'girl of his dreams' but for whom he was having second thoughts because her family seemed to be somewhat difficult. Our good Padre reminded the young man that he had already responded to his own vocation and could not decide for him. The strength and counsel of Padre Pio helped the young man understand that life is what we make of it with the help of God, and that he convinced of his love for her and hers for him, should not be afraid to marry her as long as God was part of the equation. The young man married and lived a happy life to the young 'girl-of-his-dreams'.

3) We cannot forget the great Work of Padre Pio that still manifests his deep concern for the sick and suffering, the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza! Our 'headquarters' for the Padre Pio Prayer Groups still reminds us today that the whole person must be healed if the healing is to be complete. It was Padre Pio's concern for the needs of the sick and infirm, and also for the needs of the then 'town' of San Giovanni Rotondo, that made this dream a reality, a reality that has ramifications around the world.

Spiritual Children of Padre Pio do not use prayer, personal sacrifice, and even charitable giving as an excuse to keep aloof from the realities of life. Our Eucharist is celebrated sacramentally everyday at the altar, and then continued in the streets and our homes through our daily activities. Once we've received the sacramental Jesus and allowed the grace of His Spirit to flow through our veins, we must Go, the Mass is ended ... It is (or we are) sent, to bring others to lead the whole world into the mystery of God's love in the Sacrifice and Sacrament of Jesus the Christ. The Eucharist is not just a goal to be reached but also a starting point that leads to greater heights in, with, and for God and His People. The priest who acts in the person of Christ accompanies us as one of God's People, and prays with and for us as one set aside to intercede as a 'mediator' between the divine and the

human. He too is called to be victim with the Victim that he too, with all those entrusted to his ministry, may share in the Victory of the Eucharist that fills the world with the Real Presence of an awesome God Who invites us to an intimate relationship with Him and then delegates us to be Eucharist, to be an act of thanksgiving in God, to all.

Continue to pray for all priests and those contemplating the priesthood. Pray that we priests live according to the Heart of the Savior in Whose person 'we live, and move, and have our being'. Pray that we may be willing 'victims', if the Lord should ask that grace of us, that others with and through us may experience the victory promised by the One Who said: I have conquered the world. Do not be afraid ... Greater is the one within you than the one in the world ... Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

May the Eternal High Priest, Jesus, show you His Most Sacred Heart, pierced by the centurion's lance that you may enter the open doorway leading to the Father's loving embrace. May Mary, Mother of the Redeemer keep you in the depths of Her Immaculate Heart. And may Padre Pio watch over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings  
Fr. Francis A. Sario, O.F.M. Cap.  
National Coordinator