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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

The Eucharist makes the Church; the Church makes the Eucharist (Henri de Lubac, S.J.). The Church of the Eucharist (Encyclical, Bl. John Paul, II). These two expressions remind us of the intimate relationship that exists between the Eucharist and the Church. Without the Eucharist there is no Church. Without the Church there is no Eucharist. We celebrate the Eucharist from the rising of the sun unto its setting (Psalm 113,3). The Psalmist's words are re-echoed in the words of the Prophet Malachi, My name will be great among the nations from the rising to the setting of the sun; In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name (Malachi 1:11). The Eucharist, celebrated over the whole world, is the fulfillment of this prophecy. The Eucharist is an act of God's love for us in Jesus through the operation of the Holy Spirit, re-presenting the Sacrifice of Calvary until the end of time. Entering the mystery of the Eucharist, we acknowledge the limitless love of God for all his children, and our redemption in the blood of Christ.

The Old Covenant, its history and prophets, encouraged the faithful People of God to live in hope. The supreme act of worship, established by God with Moses and the People of Israel, was a continual reminder for Israel of the presence of the Eternal One in their midst and his care for them, for His mercy endures forever. (Psalm 136). The sacrifices Israel offered re-affirmed the Covenant between God and His People. They acknowledged the supremacy of the God of Abraham over them, and in turn believed that the 'People of the Covenant' would always have the protection of God. They did not fear destruction by their adversaries because who is there like the Lord our God (Psalm 113,5), Who promised that I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing (Genesis 12,2). The faithful Jews found strength and hope in these promising words during the tragic periods of their history. Nonetheless, they could not imagine the far reaching meaning of Malachi's prophecy, and how it would be fulfilled for all ages. Only those who heard, followed, and accepted the words of Jesus would understand more deeply, and realize that the Old Covenant was now perfected and transformed by the New Covenant in the Blood of Christ.

Their faith, our faith, is the Faith of the Church, the People of God, the New Israel, redeemed in the Blood of the One Great Lamb of God, sacrificed on the altar of the Cross. By his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin (Gaudium et Spes 22). Totally one with humanity, yet fully God, the sacrifice of Jesus was accepted and confirmed by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit on the First Day of the Week, after the Great Sabbath. The Resurrection of Jesus the Christ not only confirms His life and redeeming death, but raises our frail nature so that the glory and majesty of His Ascension animates us to keep our hearts raised high with joyful hope for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is with us still in the Eucharist, and will come again in all His glory.

The Faith of the Church has always been challenged by the world in which the Church exists. Contrary ideologies from outside the Church have always affected but never really weakened Her resolve. In fact, aggressive, offensive, and oppressive tactics from outside have challenged the Church through the centuries, but they served as a source of reflection, renewal, and reform, not the Church's destruction. The transforming power of grace, experienced through the Church's many trials, have been its strength. Contrary positions and negative criticisms to Gospel values, centuries-old and well-proven Traditions, and the official teaching of the Magisterium of the Church will always demand an examination of conscience in truth and humility. Reform is from within; revolt is from without. Reform demands a constant re-examination and honest acknowledgment of failures and faults, as well as successes and virtues. Focusing only on the negatives, without any concrete response to correct them, can weaken the image of the Church in the modern world and also affect the personal strength of conviction of the faithful. Our confidence comes from the words of Scripture, Greater is the One within you than the one who is in world (1 John 4:4).

A great early Christian writer, Tertullian, wrote, The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. Many Christians, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, have suffered and still suffer terrible physical and ideological trials because of their faith in Christ. The trials and tribulations affect lives, property, and human rights. Christians in many areas of the world are tragically attacked; many have lost everything, even their lives, rather than compromise their faith. Their 'martyrdom' encourages us to accept our own martyrdom; ours is different than theirs, but no less efficacious. The 'martyrdom' most of us will face is the martyrdom of being confronted by a society that often, with belligerence or subtle sophistries, challenges the very root of our faith in Christ and the values we hold as God-given. This daily martyrdom demands: a simple and unshakable faith in all Jesus taught and all that Jesus is; trust in the promise of Jesus, I am with you all days even to the end of the age (Matthew 28: 20); availability to respond with wholehearted commitment to the Gospel Message, you are my friends if you do what I command you (John 15:14); and an apostolic heart that preaches with our life rather than our words the Christ Whom we have come to know and believe. Remember the words of St. Peter: To whom shall we go, Lord, you have the words of eternal life (John 6:68) And trust!

Those who see the Church solely as a human institution professing and promoting noble values will always criticize and judge the Church using the values of the world as the measure. The *sensus fidelium* ('sense of the faithful') or *sensus fidei fidelium* ('sense of the faith of the faithful') is a reality recognized and joyfully celebrated by the Church since its beginning. The sense of faith must be our guide during the more challenging moments we encounter. Unless we believe with the Church, we will never be able to raise our hearts and Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3: 2), and rise above the merely human. The personal profession of faith each one proclaims - 'I believe', not 'we believe' - manifests the integrity of our religion and thus the credibility of all we preach in the name of Jesus the Christ. Believe in the Church! Believe with the Church! Believe the Church! ... who is the Mystical Body of Christ and always speaks the Truth that comes from God through the work of the Holy Spirit, when in union with the Holy Father, its Chief Shepherd, the Vicar of Christ on earth.

Padre Pio, great lover of the Eucharist and the Church, recognized both the spiritual strength the Eucharist instills in those who celebrate it and receive it worthily, and the incisive and effective presence of faith-filled laity in the Church. Is this not one of the reasons for the establishment of the Prayer Groups - faithful filled with the Eucharist presence of Christ who 'make a difference' in the world? Padre Pio was one with Christ in the Eucharist. Those who assisted at Padre Pio's Mass recalled an experience that changed many lives. They became living witnesses to others of their faith after having assisted at the Mass of Padre Pio.

Padre Pio never viewed the Eucharist as just another pious devotion. The Eucharistic celebration is neither merely a prayer nor a pious devotion among others. The liturgy of the Eucharist is the action of the people of God by which they continually re-confirm their acceptance of the New Covenant in the Blood of Christ and,

with the words of the people of Israel, they cry out 'Amen', We will do everything the Lord has said (Exodus 19:8). Sharing in the un-bloody Sacrifice of the Altar, we Catholic Christians, new Israel and People of God, enter the Covenant with God in the Blood of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, and each personally binds him/herself to be the Lord's inheritance in this world. Scripture clearly teaches that Israel is your people and your inheritance (Deuteronomy. 9:29).

The New Israel is the Lord's inheritance, and the Eucharist confirms this each time it is offered. The Eucharist is Christ; Christ is the Church; the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ in all its members. The Eucharist was a Real Presence for Padre Pio, a presence that overwhelmed him with love for the One Whose love is not loved, to repeat the words of Saint Francis of Assisi. The solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, celebrated as a compendium of love that summarizes in one solemnity all the solemnities of Easter time (Sacred Triduum, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost, Blessed Trinity, Body of Christ), is the image of God's incarnate love for humanity. His side, pierced by the lance of the centurion, is the doorway thrown open for us to enter into the Father's loving embrace. The Eucharist and the Sacred Heart speak of God's love, mercy, and providence available to all who approach the Altar of Sacrifice and Tabernacle in faith.

While Padre Pio was at prayer, the Savior spoke to the depths of his heart and Padre Pio shared the message with his spiritual director, Padre Agostino: Listen, my Father, to the justified complaints from our most sweet Jesus: 'With what ingratitude is my love for men repaid! I should be less offended by them if I had loved them less. I myself want to stop loving them, but, alas! My heart is made to love! Weak and cowardly men make no effort in their wickedness. The souls for whom I have a special predilection fail me, when put to the test the weak give way to discouragement and despair, while the strong are relaxing by degrees. They leave me alone by night, alone by day in the churches. They no longer care about the Sacrament of the altar. Hardly anyone speaks of the Sacrament of love, and even those who do speak, speak alas, with great indifference and coldness. My heart is forgotten. Nobody thinks anymore of my love and I am continually grieved ... many people who act hypocritically and betray me by sacrilegious communions, trampling under foot the light and strength which I give them continually' (Letter to Padre Agostino, 12 March 1913).

In the Eucharist we believe and 'see' what non-believers can not even imagine. Our faith in the Eucharist is itself a gift that permits the eyes of the heart to penetrate material appearances and see-believe-receive the divine. The liturgy is the Church's way of fulfilling the command of Jesus, Do this in memory of Me. The 'action of the people' ('liturgy'), is the Church's way of maintaining the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist for the sake of His Mystical Body the Church who need and desire His Presence, and as 'viaticum' for the Christian's journey through life to Life. The Eucharist is the greatest sign of faith in Christ: 'my' faith and 'our' faith. My personal profession of faith united with that of my sisters and brothers in Christ's redeeming Sacrifice, allows the 'I' of a personal commitment to be a 'we' of communal profession made visible by the intermingling of our lives - All the believers were one in heart and mind (Acts 4:32) . Those who see us will speak of the Christian as the early non-Christian community spoke of our ancestors in the Faith: See how they love one another (Tertullian Apology 39.6). Their concrete tangible love was rooted in an unshakable faith in God's Word and trust in the Eucharist they celebrated, that empowered them to spiritually become an effective presence of the Christ they offered and received.

I/We believe that the Eucharist is the real and effective re-presentation of the Sacrifice of Calvary. I/We believe that Jesus is truly present after the consecration of the Mass under the appearances of bread and wine. I/We believe that the Eucharist re-presents the Mystery of Faith that nourishes our souls for life's journey. I/We believe that a day without the Eucharist is like a day without the Sun - a day without the Eucharist is a day without the Son of God who seeks an ever-greater relationship and intimacy with us. I/We believe that the Eucharist, Mystery of Faith, is a more understandable reality than the meaningless actions of a world gone awry seeking fulfillment in itself. I/We believe the Eucharist offers the opportunity to live heaven

on earth really and not solely metaphorically. I/We believe the Eucharist to be the center of all life because it is God-with-us, the focal point of all creation. I/We believe that the Eucharist irradiates power and blessings so that even non-believers sense an unexplainable presence when they are before the Eucharist. The Church draws Her life from the Eucharist (John Paul II, Ecclesia de Eucharistia), a life we, the Church, communicate to others.

God, who has bestowed so many benefits on us, is satisfied with such a very insignificant gift as that of our will. Let us offer it to him along with the divine Master Himself in that most sublime prayer, the 'Our Father': 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'... The total offering of our will is unfortunately very difficult ... Well, then, His immense love, that same love that induced Him to leave the bosom of His eternal Father in order to come on earth and take upon Himself our fragility and our debts and satisfy the divine justice for us, found an admirable means in which He showed us His exceedingly great love for us. What means was this? Oh, for the love of heaven let us understand what our good Master asked the Father immediately after He had offered our will to Him. In His own name and in ours He asked also: 'Give us this day, Father, our daily bread'. But what bread is this? In Jesus' request here, failing a better interpretation, I recognize primarily the Eucharist. O, the exceeding humility of this Man-God! (Letter to Raffaelina Cerase, 23 February 1915)

The 'will' that Padre Pio mentions is our human will that personally responds to the question Jesus made to his followers when some left because He spoke of eating His Body and drinking His blood; Do you also want to leave?(John 6:67). The gift of our 'will' says with the man whose boy the apostles could not heal, I believe, Lord, help my unbelief (Mark 9:24). The humility of Christ in the Eucharist urges us to respond, To whom shall we go, Lord, You have the words of eternal life (John 6:68). O sublime humility, O humble sublimity! (St. Francis of Assisi).

Take note again of Padre Pio's words: My dear daughter, I think that the Holy Eucharist is a great means through which to aspire to perfection. But we must receive it with the desire and intention of removing from the heart all that is displeasing to Him with whom we wish to dwell (Letter to Maria Gargani, 27 July 1917).

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio lets us re-confirm our love for the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus. Participate more deeply at Mass. Prepare well for Mass and spend some time in thanksgiving after you have received the Lord in the Eucharist. Remember the value of silence so that you might hear God Who speaks to our hearts, especially after we have received Him. Make frequent acts of Spiritual Communion, especially on days that you cannot assist at Mass. As a Group of Prayers, in the name of Padre Pio, bring the Christ you received into the world of the occupations and duties for which you are responsible. Let the Eucharist so shine in your life that whoever sees you sees an image of Jesus. In the Eucharist, Who is Christ, be faithful to Christ and His Church! Be what you see and receive what you are! (Saint Augustine)

May God bless you; Our Lady guide, guard, and protect you; and may Padre Pio watch over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be a constant reminder for you of God's Extravagant Love for us.

Peace and Blessings

Fr. Francis A. Sariago, O.F.M Cap.

National Coordinator