

# Padre Pio Prayer Groups

National Office

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

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The Lord give you His peace!

In a letter, dated January 1985, entitled, *The Bread of Life is still in the Dust*, a bishop writes to a pastor of his diocese in Italy. The parish priest has just had his church vandalized, precious vessels stolen, and the Blessed Sacrament thrown all over the pavement of the church. This was not the first instance of profanation of the Eucharist and a church building in that diocese. The people and their priests were deeply saddened. They were sorry for the building having been vandalized and various gold and silver vessels and reliquaries taken, which can never be replaced because of their ancient historical value (the diocese goes back to the early middle ages in Italy), but they were devastated over the heinous disregard for the precious gift of the Eucharist. This people, steeped in their ancient and popular traditions yet fully modern in their immersion in the realities of the twentieth century, gathered around their priest and bishop to lament their violation, to support their shepherds, to pray for the perpetrators, and to implore God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. 'Eucharistic People' are capable of so much!

Saddened, hurt, offended, angry, the people were immediately ready to pick up the 'pieces'. The first of the 'pieces' were those of the 'strewn' Body of Christ, the Gift of Jesus Himself, blasphemously discarded for the sake of a few baubles the thieves could possibly gain from the sale of the vessels to other unscrupulous individuals such as they. How we allow ourselves to get sidetracked by the glitz and glitter of things around us, and so often fail to recognize the true treasures that God is offering! How easy it is for us to enter a Church building and forget that this is none other than the *House of God and the Gate of Heaven!* (Genesis 28: 17) How easy it is for us to assist at liturgies for their social, artistic, educational, 'entertaining', traditional value, and fail to realize that the 'frame' only indicates but is not the 'masterpiece'. The 'masterpiece' is the very Presence of God calling us to a greater relationship with Him so that we may continue to achieve that *full stature of Christ* (Ephesians 4: 13) we were created to reach. We are gifted with life that we might become, according to our cooperation with God's grace, more the image of Christ in our world. We live in a world that has ears to hear but does not listen, and eyes to see but refuses to recognize (cfr Matthew 13: 14-38) God in our midst.

Once the Eucharist is the center of our worship, then the family of the Church - local, diocesan, universal - can begin to strengthen its unity with the shepherds of the Church. It is *the Eucharist that makes the Church as the Church makes the Eucharist* (Vatican II). Some have relegated the Eucharist to a pious devotion rather than a reality to be lived. The Eucharist is a miracle that cannot be seen, thus it is a deeper mystery that must be lived to recognize the reality and experience the transforming effects for those who are illumined by faith.

Some do not see the relevance of the Eucharist as the Center of “catholic” (universal) life because in their eyes it tends to separate us from other Christian denominations, and it does. The Eucharist is the Center of Catholic Life inviting others into a deeper awareness of eternal truth. The people of that devastated church mentioned above, because of their faith, were shaken into a reality that some may have forgotten. The sight of the Eucharist thrown on the floor in a predominantly Catholic country and very Catholic area was a stark reminder to all of how delicate our faith is and how easily it can be abused. The vandalism actually brought the people of the city and the parish closer together. It is the story of Calvary all over again. Jesus had to be abused and disregarded once again, so that those who loved Him, even lukewarmly, could be rekindled in their love for Him and for one another because of Him. The Eucharist is Calvary re-lived for all to *look upon Him Whom they have thrust* (cfr. Zechariah 12: 10), so that *when I am lifted up I will call all people to myself* (John 12: 32). And those who look may, with John and the centurion on Calvary say: *The one who speaks knows that it is true* (John 19: 35) for *truly this man was the Son of God*. (Matthew 27: 54)

The sacrilegious incident which took place several decades ago in Italy, continues to speak to the heart. We are quite aware, or perhaps not, that, sadly, incidents like have been taking place more frequently around the world. What makes it worse is that they happen not only in non-Christian countries, but in Christian and even so-called Catholic countries. The Eucharist, a *Sign of Contradiction* (cfr Luke 2:34; Acts 28:22) for those who refuse or are unable because of their personal religious traditions, to acknowledge the Divine Presence, becomes a beacon of light that attracts all people in one way or another to listen to the words of Christ and respond. The response is as varied as those who approach it. The Eucharist is either a ‘mystery’ to be accepted and lived or just a ‘Catholic practice and/or superstition’. Even those who do not believe as we regarding the Real Presence, still admire those who *believe the impossible* and live that belief. Those who consume the Lord in the Eucharist allow themselves to be consumed by Him so the two become one. It is this ‘oneness’ with Christ that manifests itself to others. Without necessarily understanding fully, they observe the effects the Eucharist produces in those who celebrate and receive with loving faith.

Our pastors and all priests - priests and bishops - are called to make the Eucharist *come alive* by their life of dedication and commitment. The priest is called to be a Eucharist who nourishes his people with the very Lord with whom he nourishes himself. The priest, *in persona Christi*, celebrates the mystery of the Passion-Death-Resurrection of Christ. He offers the Christ he celebrates in the Eucharist to the faithful. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, they strive to *grow into the full stature of Christ* (Ephesians 4: 13) every day. The people are a source of spiritual nourishment for their priests. The holiness and sinfulness, joys and sorrows, successes and failures, faith and doubts, offer countless opportunities for the priests to offer them the compassion and love of the Savior. Thus, the Eucharist that priest and faithful both share becomes an effective sign of Jesus' Presence in their lives calling them to greater intimacy with their *Lord and God* (cfr John 20: 28).

If the priest is not 'Eucharistic', how can we expect our people to become more than just traditionally and devotionally 'aware' of what (Who) they have been told the Blessed Sacrament is? If our priests do not show adoring love and reverence for the Mystery they have the awesome privilege of celebrating and offering, how can we expect the faithful to see beyond the signs of bread and wine? When we priests see ourselves in each celebration of the Eucharist as Christ re-presenting His Passion-Death-Resurrection, the People of God participating in the celebration are taken up in and with the mystery. They too experience more clearly and profoundly their priestly role in the Sacrifice we offer and the Table we share. When the priest lives the Eucharist he celebrates, the people to whom he ministers notice the grace of the sacrament working in, with, and through him. The people thus are enveloped by the effects of God's love that comes to us through the Eucharist that makes all of us not simply bystanders but participants in the great and awesome Mystery of Redemption.

Because of today's society, the priest is often bogged down with administrative responsibilities and other ministerial duties over and above what would normally be asked and expected. It is in the Eucharist celebrated with attention and devotion that he once again can find the perspective from which to view all he is asked to do, as well as who he is asked to be. It is from the perspective of the Lamb of God Whose compassion is selfless, Whose giving is total *even to death and death on a cross* (Philippians 2: 8), Whose love is infinite in time and all-embracing, that every facet of priestly life, even the seemingly banal, makes sense and is eternally rewarding. Once the priest sees himself, with all his faults and sins, loved by Jesus, the Victim offered once for all on Calvary and repeatedly re-presented for all in the Eucharist in every Mass, his life is changed and so are the lives of those whom he serves. *The Priest is Not His*

*Own* is the title of one of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen's books of many years ago. No truer words could ever be written! Until the priest lives for the other, he can never be the Other that offers "Life, the Living One" so that others may live.

The priest becomes the Eucharist. He is a weak, flawed, faulty, yet effective instrument of a life-giving flow of graces for those who participate in the "mysteries". They grow in the gifts of God according to their own cooperation with grace. They are empowered to live the Jesus they receive. His light thus shines through them in a world filled with so many shadows and dangerously blinding and alluring 'lights'.

In his letter of February 23, 1915 to his spiritual daughter, Raffaolina Cerase, Padre Pio writes: (Jesus') *immense love, that same love that induced Him to leave the bosom of His eternal Father in order to come to 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 Him also: 'Give us this day, Father, our daily bread'... What bread is this? In Jesus' request here, failing a better interpretation, I recognize primarily the Eucharist. Oh, the exceeding humility of this Man-God! He is one with the Father, He is the love and delight of the eternal Parent. Although He knew that everything He would do on earth would be pleasing and would be ratified by His Father in heaven, He asked leave to remain with us! ... How exceedingly the Son loves us and at the same time what excessive humility is His in asking the Father to allow Him to remain with us until the end of the world! ... the Father ... permits this beloved Son of His to remain among us, to be the target of fresh insults every day!*

As Spiritual Children of Padre Pio, our Father reminds us to revere in adoration and reparation the awesome gift of His Presence in the Eucharist. He himself experienced the overwhelming feeling of being called to the ministerial priesthood and need for prayers to be the priest he was ordained to be. He became the visible image of the One the priest becomes - *another Christ*. Let us pray for all priests, that the Eucharist may be the Center of their lives and that Mary, Mother of the Eternal High Priest, may continue to receive them lovingly as Her sons, as Jesus asked of Her for John on Calvary. And may priests lovingly embrace Her as their Mother through Whom they may more easily encounter and follow Her Son. Let us pray for all the faithful, especially ourselves, that we may grow in our love for the Great Prisoner of the Tabernacle and find comfort and solace in the quiet moments we spend before Him, and in the community moments when we celebrate His love with the Eucharistic community-the Church.

May God bless you; Our Lady and good St. Joseph guide, guard, and protect you; and Padre Pio watch over each one of you, his Spiritual Children, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings

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

National Coordinator