

Padre Pio Prayer Groups

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Dear Spiritual Children and Friends of Padre Pio,

The Lord give you His peace!

Religious prejudice and bigotry are not new to the world. Modern technology has brought world events to an immediate presence before our senses. Today we hear of things that before we never knew or realized to what extent they were taking place. A great deal, but not all, of the negativity addressed towards religion and religious expressions is a reaction. Possibly, these attitudes and actions are a reaction of those who feel “betrayed” by the ones they considered “columns of faith”, and who did not respect the dignity of the persons who confided in them, nor live the life they professed as consecrated people of God dedicated to the Lord and ministry to God’s people.

One of the more notorious reactions we notice is disregard and desecration of places and objects of religion. Religious and devotional areas of various faith expressions continue to be targeted, and often even people are direct targets as well. Sacred places – churches, synagogues, mosques – are being vandalized and objects considered sacred by the faithful who frequent those places are being desecrated. This has happened at one time or another all over the world. However, it seems as though this disregard and outright desecration have escalated to a most dangerous degree. Disregard for the sacred, often is an outright persecution of the religious belief of people. It is true that “the squeaky wheel gets all the attention”, but it is also true that this “wheel” has been “squeaking” loudly and continuously so much and all over a greater part of the globe. It is not just a building or a haphazard act that affects some object. It is the core of a people being affected. Affect the people and you have touched the center of what makes them a people. When the belief in God as the Source of life and a people’s basic beliefs are no longer respected, the consequences can be devastating, and most often are.

Buildings or sacred objects might be abused or destroyed by a few, nevertheless it is symptomatic of what happens when people lose their sense of God. They forget their own dignity as a created being. And, when good people are silent, the “squeaky wheel” continues to condition the rest with its noise. How do we respond?! We should view what surrounds us from a different perspective, that is: believe and see God is alive and well; recognize God lives among us in His Word and Sacrament of His Eucharistic Real Presence. Matters begin to change. It is so easy to destroy in a few moments, but it takes lifetimes to restore the core that has been mutilated or destroyed by hatred, ignorance, indifference.

The Church is attempting to revive our Roman Catholic conviction and commitment in the gift Jesus left us of Himself the night before He died. *I have longed to eat this Passover meal with you* (Luke 22: 15). *Do this in memory of me* (Luke 22: 19). *As long as you do this, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes* (1 Corinthians 11: 26-28). The revival of belief is necessary, but the obvious segue must be to “profess what we believe as Catholics; believe what we profess as Catholics, and live totally what we profess to believe to be truly Catholic” (These words are a paraphrase of part of the ordination prayer for deacons, priests and bishops).

The present and future are not bleak. There is more than a glimmer of hope. We have to be able to open the eyes of our hearts to see and rejoice. The thousands of young people who hunger for greater awareness and meaning in their lives challenge us to let them see our faith. Maybe it is a faith coming alive once again because we recognize their youthful and hope-filled faith in what has always been the center of our Catholic expression of Christianity. *Let your light shine before all so that they may see* (Matthew 5: 16) this re-invigorated faith in the core of who we are as Catholic Christians. This “core” is not just for the young adults who seem to truly be searching for greater meaning in a confused world. Millions of them have and are discovering/re-discovering the awesome and spiritually energizing power of the Eucharist. Neither can it be in those “negotiating” with God at the end of their life’s journey, “just in case” God is real. (Many good “believing” people are “banking on God just in case”. Why not just say: *I do believe. Help my unbelief* [Mark 9: 23-25]). For what a poll is worth, it is said that more than half of Roman Catholics do not believe in the Eucharistic Presence. Exaggeration?! Total lie?! Who knows? However, it is a reality presented as true that must be dealt with by Roman Catholics.

All Catholics, like anyone who seeks to inspire another, are apostles of active faith called to preach by their lives. People believe what they see, before they see what they believe. They will recognize the presence and power of the Presence when they see us

as an extension of that “Presence”. What do others see in our “faith” expression? Is it some vague dogma we “must believe” or is it a personal convinced committed surrender to One Who is with each one of us always and becomes part of us, even biologically for about 10 minutes, when we consume Him that we might be consumed by Him to become truly one with Him.

Consider our non-Catholic and even non-Christian sisters and brothers who manifest an interest in the Catholic Church. Many will tell you that with all the difficulties in the Church – *we are not a museum of saints but a hospital for sinners* (Morton Kelsey) or *we are a field hospital after battle* (Pope Francis) - ultimately it is the Eucharist and Sacramental Life of the Church, traced back to Christ and His Apostles, that attracts and welcomes them “Home”. The wounded Christ helps us to recognize our own wounds and vulnerability. As we touch His wounds and know ours, the healing process begins with the treatment of the Word and the medicine of His Most Precious Body and Blood offered to us each time we enter the Eucharist. We must participate in the Eucharist and become one with Christ, not just sit in the stands and applaud others.

The hidden power of the Eucharist can change hearts and thus even the course of world events!

The Bread of Life is still in the Dust is a sad yet beautiful and thought-provoking story. There may have been a reference to this in one of the circulars of years ago. In the story, 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. These can never be replaced because of their ancient historical value (the diocese goes back to the early middle ages in Italy). Nevertheless, the people were devastated over the heinous disregard for the precious gift of the Eucharist. Yes! They were more saddened at the desecration of the Eucharist than the loss of valuable historic and artistic treasures.

The people were steeped in their ancient and popular devotions. Though proud of their history and traditions, they were fully modern in their immersion in the realities of everyday life in the twentieth century. They 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! They continue the life of Christ Who continues to be crucified each day by those who refuse to recognize God’s presence as real and accept His love and mercy.

Saddened, hurt, offended, angry, nevertheless the people were immediately ready to pick up the 'pieces'. The first of the 'pieces' were those of the 'strewn' Body of Christ. This Gift of Jesus Himself was 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! So often we 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!* (rf. Genesis 28:17) How easy it is for us to assist at liturgies for their social, artistic, educational, 'entertaining', traditional, devotional value, and so on, rather than for the most essential: He Is Here! We so often fail to realize that the 'frame' only indicates a work of art but is not the 'masterpiece'. The 'masterpiece' is the very Presence of God calling us to a greater relationship with Him so that we can become ever more the One Whom we receive. He is the One Who consumes us as we consume Him (rf. John 6: 48-59). He is the One Who looks at us as we gaze upon Him (rf. 2 Corinthians 3: 18).

Did you ever look at the Blessed Sacrament and see with your mind (or better with your heart) the Face of Jesus looking at you with a pleasant, kind, serene, smiling look that penetrates your very heart? Did you ever take time to be alone with Jesus before the Tabernacle and imagine looking into His eyes to see what He sees in your eyes? These are simple practices that can be so wonderful! The Real Presence becomes truly "real" and not just some theological statement that "makes us Catholic"

Once the Eucharist is the center of our worship, then the family of the Church - local, diocesan, national, 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. Others do not see the relevance of the Eucharist as the Center of Catholic life. They contend it tends to separate us from other Christian denominations. The people of the devastated church mentioned above, because of their faith, were shaken into a reality that possibly some had 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 and even "lost"!

The vandalism actually brought the people of the town and the parish closer together. It is the story of Calvary's rejection of Jesus. This "rejection" is unfortunately repeated so

often in many areas of our modern world. 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* (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 for truly this man was the Son of God* (John 19: 35).

Occurrences as happened in that Italian town still happen, even in our own nation. 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 to those who refuse or are unable because of their personal religious traditions, to acknowledge the Presence, becomes a beacon of light that attracts all people in one way or another. The response is as varied as those who approach It either as 'mystery' or just a 'Catholic practice or superstition'. Even those who do not believe as we regarding the Real Presence, still admire those who *believe the impossible* (cf Luke 1: 37; Matthew 19: 26) 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 in that 'oneness' ("at-one-ment") with Christ that others are able to see the effects of the Eucharist.

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, and Who he himself is called to become by vocation more profoundly every day. The faithful nourish their priests with their holiness and sinfulness, joys and sorrows, successes and failures, faith and doubt. Thus, the compassion and love of the Savior showered on the people through the priest makes the Eucharist they share and receive an effective sign of Jesus' Presence in their lives. The Eucharist calls them to greater intimacy with Him.

If the priest is not 'Eucharistic', how can we expect our people to become more than just traditionally and devotionally 'aware' of what they have been told the Blessed Sacrament is? If our priests do not show adoring love and reverence for the Mystery they confect at the altar, how can the faithful be expected to see beyond the signs of bread and wine? When priests see themselves in each celebration of the Eucharist as an "alter Christus" 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 they offer and the Sacrament they share as baptized Catholic children of God.

There can be no meal without sacrifice. To eat anything, it must die to nourish. The Eucharist is Sacrifice and Sacrament. 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. They too are enveloped by the effects of God's love that comes to us through the Eucharist. They are not merely, as mentioned above, bystanders but fully active participants.

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 called 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), and Whose love is infinite in time and all-embracing. In light of this, every facet of priestly life, even the seemingly banal, makes sense and is eternally rewarding. Pray for priests and priestly vocations.

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 gives Life so other might fully live. The priest becomes the Eucharist, that through the life-giving flow of graces that others receive according to their own cooperation with grace, they may live the Jesus they receive and allow His light to shine through them in this world filled with so many shadows and dangerously blinding and alluring 'lights'.

In his letter of February 23, 1915 to his spiritual daughter, Raffaelina 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 and adore in adoration and reparation the awesome gift of Jesus' 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 was ordained to be 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, continue to receive them lovingly as Her sons as Jesus asked of Her for John on Calvary. May priests lovingly embrace our Blessed Mother as their Mother through Whom they may more easily encounter and follow Her Son, Whose image they are called to be.

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 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, and your loved ones, with loving care.

Peace and Blessings

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