

A Time of Suffering and Rejoicing!

(A spiritual response to the Coronavirus pandemic)

In these hours, in which the world is caught in the fears and the throes of the coronavirus, anxious questions rise up in our hearts. It is not only the civil order of the world and society which is disturbed, it may even seem that our perennial staff of comfort and protection, our faith, is somehow falling short! Public masses have been canceled everywhere in our country and around the world; it is not possible to receive the Blessed Sacrament. Even the Sacrament of Confession has been shut down. Where are we to turn for help?

Of course, we know that *“Our help is in the Name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth!”* (Ps 124:8). But in this painful hour, it is those who love the Lord the most who are most tried, for they are deprived of the consolation and strength of the sacraments. We cannot even visit our Lord present in the tabernacles of our churches! How, then, under these circumstances are we to understand the ways of God? How are we to respond? How can we maintain our spiritual life and nourish our souls with the grace of God? It is like a time of persecution or exile, where even the public practice of our religion is denied to us!

In this letter, I propose to answer in depth these questions, assuring you that these trials are a tremendous hour of grace. To help you understand this, we need to consider two things! First, we need to renew our faith and trust in Divine Providence

God’s merciful love is everlasting and inexhaustible – it is present even when He calls His People to task for their sins, even when He punishes us, He does so in order to bring us back to Himself in love. *“I will not give vent to my blazing anger, I will not destroy Ephraim again; For I am God and not man, the Holy One present among you; I will not let the flames consume you”* (Hos 11:9). This is why He causes Israel to wander forty years in the desert, so that He could cleanse Israel, His bride, from her many sins: Therefore, He declared, *“I will allure her, and will lead her into the desert and I will speak to her heart”* (Hos 2:16a). He will teach her how to love, *“and on that day she shall call me: ‘My husband’!”* (Hos 2:16b).

Every trial He sends His people is to help us beyond our infidelities and sins, so that we return to Him with our whole hearts. Even while the world is far from God in sin, there is always a holy remnant He wants to make more holy; it is they who by prayer and sacrifice bring back peace and grace to the world. Moses during the exile (13th Cent. BC), Tobit during the exile to Nineveh (9th Century BC) and Daniel during the Babylonian Exile (6th Century BC) were all types of Christ, who identified with sinners and besought the Divine mercy in behalf of the World. This is why God responds: *“I will espouse you to me forever: I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the LORD”* (Hos 2:21-22).

Imitating Mary in times of Trial

First off, let us look to and imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary, who, when confronted by the inscrutable signs of divine providence, interiorly bowed to God’s unfathomable will and guarded all these things in her heart pondering them (cf. Lk 2:51). Together with her, we have the certitude, which St. Paul expresses in these words: *“We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose”* (Rom 8:28). How often in the spiritual life (and so also in the sacramental life!) does God hide himself, thus demanding great renunciations on our part and perseverance in bearing an incomprehensible abandonment which befalls us? Yet, does He not act in this way, so that by this cleansing, He can lead us into an even deeper union with Himself?

How must the Jewish exiles, as they were being led off into Babylonian exile through the rubble and column of smoke ascending from their beloved and desolate Jerusalem, had thought themselves

afflicted and abandoned by God. Nevertheless, it was precisely they who had been chosen by God as a holy remnant! It was they whom He had chosen to purify, preserve and prosper the People of God. *"Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves?'"* (Heb 12:5). Did Jesus Himself not feel abandoned by his Father upon the Cross? Indeed, he did, and that very abandonment was most intense center and heart of His work of Redemption, without which we would not be perfectly redeemed!

Union with Christ!

It is crucial to our spiritual equilibrium and spiritual well-being to recall and understand in faith such sufferings, such feelings of divine abandonment. Jesus is the very Son of God. In His very being He is inseparably one with the Father: *"The Father and I are one"* (Jn 10:30). Jesus is, at the same time, also one with us: *"I am with you always, until the end of the age"* (Mt 28:20). Moreover, He has promised and given us *"another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you"* (Jn 14:16-17). This presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in us is real; it is not some vague metaphorical abstraction. Rather, it is more real that the physical world around us, while, at the same time, it is a supernatural mystery beyond natural knowledge. Further, it is a participation in His own union with the Father, for He prayed efficaciously for us: *"I pray ... for those who will believe in Me ... that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us"* (Jn 17:20).

Again, I repeat, Jesus intends that this His presence in us must not be some vague abstract reality, or merely some kind of residual effect of having sanctifying grace within us. It is impossible to have grace in our souls, without simultaneously being a living temple in which God dwells personally and intimately: *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him"* (Jn 14:23). He wants to remain in us in His very being as the GOD-Man,... and He accomplishes this in and through the Holy Eucharist. *"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give, is My flesh for the life of the world. ... 'He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me, and I in him'"* (Jn 6:51-52. 57).

In Jesus' Last Supper discourse, recorded in John's Gospel, He reveals to us more fully what He intends to accomplish in us through the Bread of Life, His very Body and Blood. *"Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me"* (Jn 15:4). The lifeblood of the branches is sap of the trunk. We, by the Holy Eucharist, are grafted into Christ; His very lifeblood becomes our lifeblood, and it flows in us constantly, not just for a few minutes. Barring a horrible fall into mortal sin, we are permanently united to Christ in and through the Eucharist, a union which leads to and continues in eternal life. In the Old Testament the patriarchs, prophets and saints already had faith in the Messiah; Christ's grace was already vivifying them in virtue of their hope in His coming. However, they did not have His Body and Blood, as we do; they did not have a share in His priesthood and so an intimate union with Christ in His sacrifice, as we do through the sacraments. As the author of Hebrews declares: *"All these died according to faith, not having received the promises, but beholding them afar off, and saluting them, and confessing that they are pilgrims and strangers on the earth"* (Heb 11:1).

By Baptism, we share in Christ's life, we have been incorporated into Him as members of His living Body, which is the Church. Together with Baptism the Sacraments of Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist are called the sacraments of incorporation into Christ. They make us living members of Christ's Body in a real and existential way. This existential truth is a mystery of faith which goes

beyond a mere ‘feeling good’. What is more, with the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation – which are sacraments of the *beginning* and *maturity* of our membership in Christ – an indelible character, a share in Christ’s divinity is impressed upon our soul; these sacramental characters empower us to share always in Christ’s priestly sacrifice.

This time of deep isolation and affective loneliness, which we are now suffering through the closing of our churches, is a time for deep pondering in the grace of the Holy Spirit, so that we take stock of what we really are in Christ, and so take heart! His Kingdom is being formed within us. So, even though we are suffering, we should still rejoice inwardly. Did not Jesus say: “*When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world?*” (Jn 16:21).

The Communion of Saints in the Catechism of the Catholic Church

The full truth of our being in Christ, in many ways, is infinitely greater than anything we can conceive. This truth is brought home to us in a special way in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Let us look at the section on the “communion of saints!” There we read – and I shall cite several paragraphs, which you should ponder and assimilate completely, for they reveal what we are in Christ and assure us that we, having immediate existential contact with Christ, also are united with one another, especially in our good works and gifts of grace. Therefore, we have every reason for perpetual joy. It is with this awareness that St. Paul declares: “*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy Spirit*” (Rom 14:17). Habitual, sad and lugubrious thoughts, fears and anxieties are not from the Holy Spirit, they are not from God! Communion is about our union in love, this is what the Communion of saints means:

CCC 947: Since all the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the others.... We must therefore believe that there exists a communion of goods in the Church. But the most important member is Christ, since he is the head.... Therefore, the riches of Christ are communicated to all the members, through the sacraments.¹ “As this Church is governed by one and the same Spirit, all the goods she has received necessarily become a common fund.”²

This is the great news of “Catholic communism!” This means that every good work and grace, every prayer and every sacrament received in the history of salvation, not only belongs to the individual who performed it or received it,... Rather they all belong to the Mystical Body of Christ, and therefore, they belong to all the members. This awesome truth is not difficult to understand. There is no good, meritorious and holy work that is accomplished by any creature in isolation. To merit is to cooperate with Jesus Christ, “*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1Tim 2:5). Hence, our good works are our cooperation with Jesus Christ, who is their principal cause. Jesus wants both to intensify His union with us and to deepen our knowledge and awareness of this truth in faith, through the liturgy, especially in and through the Eucharist.

This is like our prayer life, Jesus teaches us to say “*Our Father, give us this day our daily bread!*” Prayer is never simply about “me”, it is always about “us”. This “us” is the “we” who are united and have become one in Christ, all members of His Body the Church. Just for the record, therefore, I claim a share in every good work you have every done throughout your life, indeed in all the good works of the Apostles, Patriarch, saints and martyrs, including, yes, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Homily on the Apostles Creed*, nr. 10.

² *Roman Catechism* by St. Pius V. I, 10, 24.

Indeed, Christ is my Head, and I am part of his Body. For this reason, St. John Eudes was overwhelmed with two interrelated thoughts in considering the Sacred Heart of Jesus:

The Sacred Heart of Jesus, whether considered in His Divinity or in His humanity, is more ardently enkindled with love for His Father, loving Him infinitely more at any given moment, than all the hearts of angels and saints can love him throughout all eternity.

[Jesus, the Son of God] willed to be our Head and chose us as His members. He has associated us with Himself in His ineffable love [for the Father]. He has given us, as a result, the power to love the Father with the [very] same love with which He loves [the Father], with a love eternal, boundless and infinite.³

St. John Eudes, then made it easy for us, by suggesting a prayer we might recite. Its style may be a little antiquated, but its theology is perennial, so you would do well to assimilate the truth and express it in your own intimate and personal way: Become one with Jesus in your prayers to the Father!

O my Savior, I give myself to You to unite myself to Your eternal, boundless, and infinite love for Your Almighty Father. O adorable Father, I offer You all the eternal, boundless, and infinite love of Your Son Jesus as a love which is mine. Just as our lovable Savior says to us: “As the Father hath loved Me, I also love you” (Jn 15:9), I may say to You: “O Divine Father, I love You, even as Your Son loves You.”⁴

Now all that St. John Eudes affirms is contained in the article of the Faith, the Communion of Saints. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in the following paragraph shows that the original meaning did not begin with *persons* (‘sancti’ in Latin), but with *things* – “*Sancta Sanctorum*“, namely, is a neuter noun in Latin; it refers to all the means and divine graces, which unite us!

CCC 948 The term “communion of saints“ therefore has two closely linked meanings: communion in holy things (*sancta*)“ and “among holy persons (*sancti*).“ *Sancta sanctis!* (“God’s holy gifts for God’s holy people“) is proclaimed by the celebrant in most Eastern liturgies during the elevation of the holy Gifts before the distribution of communion. The faithful (*sancti*) are fed by Christ’s holy body and blood (*sancta*) to grow in the communion of the Holy Spirit (*koinonia*) and to communicate it to the world.

Then focusing on the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, the Church teaches:

CCC 950 Communion of the **sacraments**. “The fruit of **all** the sacraments belongs to **all** the faithful. **All** the sacraments are sacred links uniting the faithful with one another and binding them to Jesus Christ, and above all Baptism, the gate by which we enter into the Church. The communion of saints must be understood as the communion of the sacraments.... The name ‘communion’ can be applied to all of them, for they unite us to God.... But this name is better suited to the Eucharist than to any other, because it is primarily the Eucharist that brings this communion about.”⁵

Through the communion in sacred things, especially the sacraments, we are flooded with divine grace, which vitally expresses itself in the virtue of charity. What matters – now and always – as St. Paul teaches is “*faith working through charity*“ (Gal 5:6).

CCC 953 Communion in charity. In the *sanctorum communio*, “None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself“ (Rom 14,7) “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and

³ St. John Eudes. *The Sacred Heart of Jesus*. Kennedy, NY, 1946. p. 2-3.

⁴ St. John Eudes. *The Sacred Heart of Jesus*. Kennedy, NY, 1946. p. 3.

⁵ Roman Catechism 1, 10, 24.

individually members of it“ (1 Cor 12:26-27).“ “Charity does not insist on its own way“(1 Cor 13:5; cf. 10:24). In this solidarity with all men, living or dead, which is founded on the communion of saints, the least of our acts done in charity redounds to the profit of all. Every sin harms this communion.

It is these truths that we need to keep in mind, both in season and out of season. That is, when we can go to Mass, and when we cannot go to Mass. We live and practice this communion of saints at every Mass, for do we not at the end of the preface, which actually initiates the Eucharist Prayer, beg that our voices be united with the angels in the singing of their hymn of praise, the “Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus?” The angels are united with Christ, our eternal High Priest, whose sacrifice is eternally present before the Father, where He intercedes for us always. His eternal priesthood has universal extension over all times. While we may not now be able to be present physically at Mass, in union with the angels and saints, we are united with Christ. There is a consoling verse in Revelations which refers to our names being written in “*the book of life of the Lamb, which was slain from the beginning of the world*“ (Rev 13:8 Douay Rheims version). The efficacy of Christ’s, the Lamb’s sacrifice, is everywhere present from the beginning to the end of the world, even to those who cannot participate in its liturgical celebration. It is like an infinite spring of living water. We can never drink it dry; that is why, the greatest thing we can do in life is to participate in it as often as possible. We can, moreover, participate in it most efficaciously when we are physically present at Holy Mass, but we can participate in it also intentionally, when we unite our hearts spiritually with Christ, our Priest, our sacrifice our Bread of Life.

Other Practices we may do to keep ‘spiritually fit’!

Observing the Sabbath demands public worship and lived witness

What are some of the practical things we can do to deepen and strengthen our spiritual life, at this point in time, when we cannot even participate at Mass on Sunday? *First of all*, recall that the Third Commandment, “*Remember, thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath*“, requires that we sanctify the Lord’s Day, that is, Sunday. This law comes directly from God, and the Church cannot dispense anyone from its fulfillment. This day, therefore, should be dedicated to worship, prayer and works of charity, beginning with our own families. Now, since there is no better way to office Divine Worship publicly than by participating at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Church, in her maternal authority and solicitude, has imposed the positive obligation upon the Faithful to assist at Holy Mass, if at all reasonably possible, on Sundays and holy days of obligation. Presently, even though we cannot fulfill this *positive* precept of the Church, we are still obliged by the Third Commandment to sanctify the Lord’s Day. In itself, this entails an obligation of public worship. Therefore, in our prayers and spiritual reading we should, at least, unite our hearts with all the faithful on earth and the saints in heaven. Moreover, in the measure possible, we are morally obliged to join with others for a time of prayer and worship. The virtue of religion, which St. Thomas Aquinas says is the greatest of the moral virtues after the theological virtues, is about the public veneration we owe to God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.

There are many ways in which we could can go about this. But clearly, the most perfect way was given in Divine Revelation. Historically, in the Old Testament, this entailed: 1) the celebration of the word in the synagogues, and 2) the temple sacrifices. These are reproduced in a certain way in the New Testament liturgy of the Mass in the Church: 1) the liturgy of the Word; and 2) the renewal of Christ’s paschal Sacrifice in the Eucharist. One of the easiest ways to unite ourselves to this mystery, when we can’t get to Mass, would be to take the daily missal and go through the first part of the Mass, doing the penitential rite and the liturgy of the Word. Using especially the readings for the Sunday Mass, we should take time in silence to ponder their meaning, both in itself and practically for our own lives.

This could fittingly include a time of discussion about the Word of God in the family. We should not be in a hurry; a half an hour for this part of the prayer meeting is certainly not exaggerated!

After this ‘mini-liturgy’ of the Word of God, we could profess our faith with the Creed and make intercessions, as they do at Mass. In lieu of the Eucharistic Prayer, which only a priest can offer, we should give some expression to our worship and adoration, whereby we can also commemorate the Paschal Mystery. We may simply read the Eucharistic Prayer (Eucharistic Prayer IV would be especially fitting, due to its narrational style, which reflects the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus in John 17). Readings from the Last Supper account of St. John (chapter 13-17) would be very fitting. To this end, one could also watch holy Mass on the TV or listen to a broadcast on the Radio. Litanies of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of Jesus the High Priest or of the Precious Blood could also help focus us on the sacrifice and death of Jesus.

In passing, I would also like to note a great side benefit that the coronavirus lockdown affords us; the restoration of the home as a place of prayer! In the Liturgy of the Hours the reading for Night Prayer on Saturday evening is an exhortation:

Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and YOU shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Dt 6:4-7)

Lived faith that inspires our actions and conversation is the focal point of this text. One of the greatest omissions on the part of parents over the past seventy years has been that they have largely ceded the education of their children to the “professionals“, to the Church and State. The education of children is not only an inalienable right, but it is equally an inalienable duty of parents, which cannot be turned over or surrendered to anyone else, at least, with respect to its most essential task, which is the communication of faith. This is because this essential task consists principally in the **lived practice and witness** to the presence of God in our lives.⁶ You can’t delegate this to someone else, you really have to do and live it yourselves! Note, true witness is spontaneous and habitual comportment in our lives; therefore, it is present in some way in all that we do and think. Unless, the faith becomes a natural, spontaneous part of our daily lives, it will cease, more and more, to be any real part of our lives. An indication of this is the statistic is that only 39% of Catholics go to Church every Sunday; while a mere 19% of those between 21 and 29 years of age go to Mass weekly.⁷ This very probably indicates that religion has not played a significant role/influence in their family life. Such are the dour consequence of a lack of living witness. It is not enough to have the faith hidden deep in our hearts; morally speaking, it must be expressed outwardly and publically, yes, beginning in the family.⁸

Many – otherwise nominally ‘Catholic’ homes – are, in fact, a desert with regard to the palpable presence, the living expression of religious faith. In this way, they effectively become strong candidates for a divine chastisement, since they practically serve other gods! For people really talk about *what* is important to them to the people *who* are important to them! Such individuals, such a

⁶ Clearly, many aspects of education and training can be carried out in an ancillary by the Church and State. This is indicated by the fact that parish priests have a strict obligation to preach to Gospel, to teach the faith, to the faithful. Yet, even this is principally a help to the parents, so that they can fulfill their mission towards their children from earliest age onwards.

⁷ Already lost in this disheartening statistic is that 33% of this age group, which grew up in Catholic homes, no longer identify themselves as Catholic

⁸ Another interesting statistic. While more than 50% of marriages end in divorce, the statistical frequency of divorce among spouses who, 1) go to Church on Sunday; 2) pray together during the week; and 3) speak about their faith to one another, drops to less than one in eleven hundred marriages!

culture, like Jerusalem of old, need a life threatening “shaking up!” to wake them up, for without it, their prospects for eternal life are greatly threatened. In this scenario, who does not see that a world health crisis (like our present coronavirus) – is itself an expression of divine mercy? Take the case of Moses’ intercession before God. Scarcely had Moses brought them out of Egypt, at the very moment Moses was receiving the Divine Law, the people down in camp were worshipping the golden calf and giving themselves up to their hedonistic sensuality! God told Moses to stand aside, so that HE could give free vent to wrath by destroying them. He offered to make a new people out of Moses and his descendents! Only Moses’ intercessions – as a type of Christ – placated the Lord wrath (cf. Ex 32:11ff). This is celebrated in Ps 106:23 which declares: “He would have decreed their destruction, had not Moses, the chosen leader, withstood Him in the breach to turn back His destroying anger.” This constitutes, moreover, an earnest reminder to the faith, that times of chastisement and abandon, are simultaneously a time for interceding and offering reparation for the sins of all mankind, especially within the Church!

The Rosary, a chain of salvation full of vital links

The recitation of the **family rosary** is also a highly recommended activity that could help us fulfill our Sunday obligation, when Mass is not possible. Most positive in this regard is the fact that the Rosary celebrates all the mysteries of the life of Christ in the Gospels and therefore, recall the fullness of our salvation. At the same time, as a memorized, ‘rote exercise’ it does not suffice alone our need and obligation to give living, joyful witness to the faith. This, as noted, is only then authentic, if it spontaneously influences our life style and conversation in an habitual manner. And this needs to take place in the home. Otherwise, we can paradoxically say a lot of prayers without their content pouring over into open, lived human experience and interaction with one another.

Divine Office of Psalms – a School of Prayer and the Healing of our Humanity

For those, who already have the Divine Office, they could intensify this practice. The psalms are the prayers of the people of God from all ages, expressing all human emotions, addressing every divine concern and human need. Indeed, they are the prayer of Christ and of his Mystical Body. St. Theotonius, one of the co-founders of the Order of Canons Regular of the Holy Cross, in addition to the 70-plus psalms they recited every day together in the Divine Office, also recited the whole book of 150 psalms by heart daily, as he went through his various tasks.

Here, we need to point out, the proper recitation of the psalms is not only a form of praying well; on a deeper level it is a school of spiritual formation in which we are assimilated to Christ. How important this is, since chastisements befall the People of God, when their hearts become alienated from God through worldly attachments, the wisdom of the world and the prudence of the flesh. The *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours* explains this most important pedagogy:

108. Those who pray the psalms in the liturgy of the hours do so not so much in their own name as in the name of the entire Body of Christ. This consideration does away with the problem of a possible discrepancy between personal feelings and the sentiments a psalm is expressing: for example, when a person feels sad and the psalm is one of joy or when a person feels happy and the psalm is one of mourning. Such a problem is readily solved in private prayer, which allows for the choice of a psalm suited to personal feelings. The Divine Office, however, is not private; the cycle of psalms is public, in the name of the Church, even for those who may be reciting an hour alone. Those who pray the psalms in the name of the Church nevertheless can always find a reason for joy or sadness, for the saying of the Apostle applies in this case also: “Rejoice with the joyful and weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15). **In this way human frailty, wounded by self-love, is**

healed in proportion to the love that makes the heart match the voice that prays the psalms.

This truth is easily overseen! When we give our humanity to Christ to pray the Office with him, and He in and through us, we not only pray, but our entire humanity is reformed by our conformity with him in praying thus. I may not feel good personally on a certain occasion (maybe I am sick, I have lost my job, a friend has died) but I give myself to Christ in reciting the psalms and discipline myself to share His joy or sorrow according to the content of the psalm I am reciting with Jesus and the Church. For example: *“I rejoiced at the things that were said to me: We shall go into the house of the Lord.”* (Ps 121:1). Or again, I am personally very happy at a given moment, but turning to the Divine Office, I will recite a psalm of sorrow with Jesus and make the effort to share in His sorrow. Again, an example: *“Dumb and silent before the wicked, I refrained from any speech. But my sorrow increased; my heart smoldered within me.”* (Ps 39:3-4). The fruit of this habitual exercise is not only prayer, but my humanity is changed; I am no longer dominated by my passions, emotions and sensuality. With Christ and in His power and grace, I have reclaimed the proper dominion over myself, I am now again Lord over my passions and temptations. Through this proper and engaged recitation of the psalms in moral, psychological unity with Christ, I become a man a greater and greater virtue!

“Lectio Divina”, a school in spiritual reading and in holy contemplation

Lectio divina, the prayerful, reflective reading of Sacred Scripture brings about similarly great and abundant blessings. The Church offers a plenary indulgence for a half an hour of such spiritual reading. St. Padre Pio assures us that this kind of spiritual reading is more beneficial than meditation or the recitation of privately formed prayers. He explains that ‘meditations’ and such ‘prayers’ as commonly understood are the fruits of our own thinking; but when we do spiritual reading with a spirit of surrender and openness, the Holy Spirit guides and nourishes us with greater liberty with His lights and graces.

All of these prayerful activities are fittingly combined with spiritual communions, whereby we worship Jesus, spiritually present to us, and ask him to renew and deepen His presence and grace within us. Of course, we can make spiritual communions throughout the day – there is no limit to the number of times we can renew our love for our Eucharistic Lord. Thus, this practice becomes a Eucharistic way of walking perpetually in the presence of God, which is the deepest and most necessary practice in the spiritual life. Along these same lines, do not hesitate to ask your Guardian Angel to go and participate at Mass around the world, to go, worship and honor Christ in the tabernacles of the word – and join with him in these acts of love and adoration.

Above all, let us keep “our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before Him He endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken His seat at the right of the throne of God” (Heb 12:1). Doing the will of the Father was Jesus’ daily bread (cf. Jn 4:32ff). Doing His Father’s will was His ambition, strength and joy; may it also be ours so that we advance through life’s many trials in peaceful surrender, filled with joy, knowing that He loved us first, and is preparing for us to share in His victory. “For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor 4:17-18).

May the Lord, His Angels, and Mary, Queen of the Angels and Mother of the Church, give you the graces that will help you to persevere with faith, hope, and fidelity during this time of trial and testing.

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