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You may be familiar with St. Padre Pio's famous saying, *Pray, Hope, and don't worry*. You may have seen or heard this phrase before, but did not know that it is from this famous 20th century Italian monk and stigmatic. Padre Pio, as a living saint, knew more than his share of what for a normal person would be anxiety provoking situations. He was persecuted, slandered, mocked, belittled, and accused of indecency by his own Church; he was even banned by the Vatican for celebrating public Masses. Even though he was a sought-after confessor, spiritual advisor, and wonder worker, he spent years in silence, saying only private masses and receiving no visitors. Many years later, in 1933 he was allowed to function publicly as a priest, and right before his death in the mid 1960's he was formally cleared of all accusations. Padre Pio has much to teach us of the meaning of *Pray, Hope, and don't worry*, adding, *worry is useless. God is merciful and will hear your prayer*. Padre Pio also says elsewhere, *Do not worry over things that generate preoccupation, derangement, and anxiety. One thing is necessary: to lift up your spirit and love God*.

Pray, Hope, and don't worry, in a nutshell, is the major theme for this morning's Epistle and Gospel. We are told we *cannot serve two masters*, because we will be divided against ourselves. As our Lord has said elsewhere, *a house divided against itself cannot stand*. We are reminded to *be not*

anxious for your life, and this is no rare teaching of Christ, for he repeats, *be not anxious*, and *take no anxious thought*, five times throughout the Gospels. Yet, we know well, that for us this is all easier said than done. We are told in the Gospel we *cannot serve two masters*; St. Paul, in the Epistle, thinks of the two masters as the Old Testament Law and the Cross of Christ. St. Paul insists that the Cross of Christ symbolizes the new master we must serve because it transcends and overcomes the Old Law. Therefore, we must follow his example, and glory only in the Cross of Christ. And this is in keeping with the teaching of Our Lord, for throughout the Gospels, He teaches that we must make a choice, either for the Old Law of Sin and Death or for Himself. We must serve either, God, or *Mammon*. *Mammon* means *money* or *earthly riches*. *Mammon* is related to all lesser goods which can possess and rule our lives. Christ insists all through the Gospels that we must make a choice. We must choose either God or Mammon, we must be either sheep or goats, figs or thistles, following either the Father, or the world, walking either the narrow road, or the broad road. As one theologian used to tell his students, *Don't be an amphibian, half in one world and half in another. Do not touch Christianity unless you are willing to seek the kingdom of heaven first. I promise you a miserable existence if you seek it second.*¹

¹ Attributed to Henry Drummond. [The Interpreter's Bible: Matthew Mark](#), Pg. 323.

Too often, much of the anxiety we experience comes from trying to *serve two masters*, God and Mammon. We intend to be Christ's sheep but are more often goats. We try to worship God with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength, but cannot free ourselves from our love of money, worship of earthly riches and comforts. This alone can be anxiety provoking, but we must not let ourselves fall into the enemy's trick of worrying over whether we are truly seeking the Kingdom of God, or if what we think is the Kingdom of God is just a mirage. Nor must we doubt our place in that Kingdom, for there is no such thing as low self-worth or second-class citizens in the Kingdom of God. It is in seeking the Kingdom of God, in choosing the right from the wrong, the greater from the lesser, the figs from the thistles, and the narrow road from the broad road, that we learn to practice the art of prayer, the ultimate exercise in faith and hope.

Pray, Hope, and don't worry. According to the scriptures hope is an action of faith, as the writer to the Hebrews reminds us, *faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* Jesus has made some interesting comments in the Gospels about faith, these past two Sundays. Last Sunday, we heard Him say to the Samaritan leper who stopped to thank Him, *thy faith hath made thee whole*, just as He said before to the woman with the issue of blood in the Gospel of Mark. What does Jesus mean by this? He does not mean that we can only be healed, or have our prayers answered if we are of heroic faith. For the people who

were healed in the Gospels and received the accolade from Christ, *thy faith hath made thee whole, or great is thy faith*, possess the faith and hope as of a little child. They revealed childlike faith and trust in Jesus Christ, not receiving only physical healing by Him, but spiritual healing as well in the forgiveness of their sins. Our Lord teaches us to have the faith and hope of a little child, when He took up a child so long ago into His lap and said to His disciples, *except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*. We must not confuse Christ when He says in this morning's Gospel, *O ye of little faith*, great faith in our Lord's eyes is simple childlike faith, little faith, is clouded about with the kind of anxiety caused by our sins and worldliness.

Pray, Hope, and don't worry. Worry is useless. God is merciful and will hear your prayer. Do not worry over things that generate preoccupation, derangement, and anxiety. One thing is necessary: to lift up your spirit and love God. Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment? What better words are there to a world stricken with anxiety. Yet we recognize, as Padre Pio recognized, that for some people worry and anxiety is uncontrollable. It seems to be a facet or feature of our fallen natures. Still, we may heed the truth to *pray, hope, and don't worry*. Christ nor Padre Pio offers an easy, quick fix to the anxieties of life, but instead remind us

continually to continue praying, to be people of hope, to continue seeking the Kingdom of God, and above all to continually lift up our spirits and love to God in childlike faith and simplicity.

A prayer I pray for each one of us, O Most loving Father, who willest us to give thanks for all things, to dread nothing but the loss of thee, and to cast all our care on thee, who carest for us; Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, and grant that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from us the light of that love which is immortal, and which thou hast manifested unto us in thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.