

Woman of God, Do Not Lay Down Your Sword

Woman of God, do not lay down your sword. As in every generation before us, we are living in unprecedented times. We, you and I, were born for this moment, to be here right now, living through this pandemic, this political chaos, this civil unrest. God has prepared us our entire lives to be His Remnant in these times. We are called to “Armor Up” in the armor of God as given to us through the Sword of His Spirit, in His holy Word:

Ephesians 6:10-18

“Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able stand your ground and after you have done everything, to stand.

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always praying for all the Lord’s people.

Sisters, it is not the time to grow weary or complacent or faint. It is the time to Armor up and grab our swords.

I.

Have any of you ever experienced that gnawing feeling in the pit of your stomach for no reason? Perhaps it is accompanied by a phrase that repeats in your head. You pray over it and discern it is God’s whisper. This has happened many times to me over my life and I’ve learned to listen and to heed. It happened again beginning at the end of November, 2019. Our retreat team was preparing for the upcoming women’s retreat and I had discerned to be one of the four to give my personal witness. I’m ashamed to say that for a long time through that journey, I was a grumbling Hebrew in the desert at the moment when God whispered in my ear, “A hard time is coming.” “No kidding, Lord.” Was my initial response thinking He was referring to the witness I was about to give at the retreat. I was struggling with being open to being vulnerable and honest in my sin and how God was able to transform me to bring Him the glory from my situation. But that phrase, His whisper, would not leave me. In January, we heard of the Coronavirus and the whisper “a hard time is coming” continued to be heard louder in my soul. I had completed writing my witness and began to take more notice to what He was trying to prepare me for. Shifting in our world was coming and indeed a hard time was coming. The retreat over, I looked forward to a lazy spring of catching up on my life that had been put on hold for many months in preparation of the retreat and my talk. And still “a hard time is coming” being whispered to me over and over again. Urgently whispered. I began to prepare... water, food, chocolate, toilet paper, you know, all the essentials checked off and stored or hidden (the chocolate was for me not my family) in my pantry. When we, the entire world came to our desert moment and the hard time had arrived. COVID19 was in the world and the world was shut down for all but the essential to keep the minimum of society going and to bring healing to the very sick. God, in His mercy had been preparing me for a time such as this... a hard time that came.

Centerville shut down essentially. I was surrounded in my home by two of my daughters and my husband. Never. Ending. Human. Interaction. For my sisters who like me are at their very core are introverts, who need long periods of

peace and quiet and aloneness, to be surrounded by others 24/7 afraid of contracting a virus that is not visible to the human eye is indeed a very hard time.

Mass stopped. We were no longer allowed in the church during Mass nor to receive the Sacraments, no Eucharist. A dearth of grace normally given to God's people was extended throughout the world. But God in His wisdom and tender care, extended that grace to us through livestream of the daily Mass. He uses all things for our good and His glory, even those times when authorities feel that Mass is not essential in their quest to keep us safe. I remember participating in the Mass through streaming: the tears flowing freely and the yearning so deep in my heart that it physically hurt to not be present in person in the Mass. I thirsted for God...(Pause)... for the Living Water present in attending the Mass in person that would quench my thirst. A hard time.

Day after day, week after week, month after month.... Fear of the virus, fear of the civil unrest that naturally came after such a long period of people living in isolation instead of their normal lives, fear of the political chaos that we had been living through for many years regardless of which political party one was affiliated with. Fear that maybe we had gone too far from Him and He no longer heard us, and the crying out to Him daily, "Lord, do you not hear the groanings of your people. Please bring an end to this pandemic." But we know through His word in Psalm 34 that "the Lord Hears the cry of the poor. Blessed be the poor." So God's remnant put on His armor and went to battle for Him regardless of our fear and doubt. Knowing that He promises in Isaiah 41:10 that we are not to fear for He is with us. We are not to be anxiously looking about us for He is our God. He will strengthen us, surely, He will help us. Surely, He will uphold us with His mighty righteous right hand.

My sisters, I am here to share with you today how you too can armor up and trust that as part of His Remnant, He will never forsake you and your loved ones through these unprecedented times. We are at a Red Sea time, needing an Elijah moment and He is going to bring us and our world the healing we so desperately have been seeking for He, unlike Baal, is the One True God. So let's get our armor on and pick up our Swords and go about the business of healing our world through His strength and grace: one prayer, one hug, one act of kindness at a time being His feet and His hands, His eyes and ears, His Words....

II.

In 2018, the relics of St Padre Pio came to St Peter in Chains Cathedral in Cincinnati. A dear friend and I got ourselves up and down to Cincinnati that morning for the 7:30 right of reception and the veneration to follow. I was somewhat familiar with St Pio as he was one of my son's name saint. St Pio had also been greatly popularized in the late 90's and early Y2K by the New Age movement due to his publicized ability to bilocate. As those who heard my witness might remember, at that time I was very involved in the New Age Movement before giving it up to follow my traditional Catholic faith at my Lord's urging. I was familiar with St Pio, but that familiarity did not prepare me for being present that morning in 2018 to venerate his relics. I remember how cold the cathedral was when we first arrived. I remember how long the prayers lasted. I remember wondering what exactly I was doing there so early in the morning as those who know me will attest that I am most definitely not a morning person. Soon, the cathedral settled down to prayer and contemplation and gratitude for this moment to be with St Pio. My friend had encouraged me to bring a rosary, a medal, and other things to have St Pio bless. When it came time to go before his relics and to have him bless the few things I had brought, I got up and stood in the back of a very long line. Immediately, there was heat. A fire surging deep within me. I was so hot, so very hot. I looked around me and the people were all complaining of the heat. Fanning themselves... and I'm not just talking women of a certain age who are used to having moments of extreme heat. Old, young, middle age, men, women, children, all fanning and sweating and speaking of the heat. Meanwhile, those sitting in the pews were wrapped in coats and scarves as the cathedral was quite chilly. I knelt before him and asked him to bless the rosary and medal I had brought and sat back down in my pew. I was immediately cold again. I looked at Yvonne and asked had she felt that and she said yes, the heat was intense. So being the Protestant raised skeptic that I was to the saints, I jumped up with my big, old Bible and got back in line. Heat..... again..... I knelt before the relic of a handkerchief that had drops of his blood on it and raised my Bible to the relic to bless it. You can imagine what happened at that point, a little old biddy like myself lifting this heavy Bible, OT and NT combined, up to this little relic in

a glass frame with her arthritic fingers.... Yep, the relic started to tip over. I have to say that I have never seen men move so fast as those guards did when they grabbed that relic and prevented it from toppling over because my Bible had to be blessed by St Pio. It was a moment. As an aside, since having him bless my Bible, I am not able to use any other Bible. I've tried so that his Bible could stay nice and special. Nope, that is not his way..... it's that Bible which speaks to my soul and allows me to know what God is speaking to me. A blessing for sure. And thus began my devotion to St Pio.

I bring St Pio to our attention today, not only because I am very devoted to him and seek his guidance and prayer intentions regularly, but because this dear saint understands how we as people of God have felt these past months in isolation through social distancing, limiting contact with our loved ones, and enduring quarantine when we've become ill with the virus or have been exposed to it in spite of all of our precautions to stay healthy. You see, St Pio was also forced into isolation by the Vatican. In 1924 and again in 1931, the Vatican refused to allow him to appear in public and stripped him of performing all confessions and public Mass due to a fanatical following he had amassed of medical doctors, church authorities, and curiosity seekers regarding his bearing the five wounds of the stigmata. The authenticity of his stigmata was questioned and he was placed essentially in isolation. He was basically stripped of his flock, his family of parishioners with whom he loved very much. A very hard time, indeed, for St Pio.

Out of curiosity, how have you dealt with our current situation of isolation and living a life differently than you are used to? Have you grumbled through it, questioning why it is necessary? Questioning if your civil liberties have been violated? Been fearful of the change in life while holding on wistfully to memories of life as you knew it before COVID? Until recently when I left social media for good, I was on FB throughout this pandemic. It was a way, I thought that I could continue to connect with those I care about. Well, I can tell you unequivocally that the majority of people have not faced this pandemic with full trust in God and acceptance of any suffering they've encountered these months. Sadly, some have been dealt a harsher card than others in these times with the loss of dear ones to the virus or to the violence we find ourselves in as a country. I've seen very little true joy in this suffering. And, ashamedly, I include myself in the grumbler group. Interestingly, regarding his isolation, St Pio never complained. He bore His isolation much as he had lived his life: armored up in prayer and devotion to God offering up his suffering for his love of Jesus, stating "I have no wish whatsoever to have my cross lightened for it is a joy for me to suffer with Jesus." It is a joy for me to suffer with Jesus. Wow... Have you found your suffering during times such as these to be a joy? That we, my sisters, may learn to place total confidence in God that we might count it all joy is what Padre Pio is encouraging us in this time of chaos in all our lives. "Pray, hope and don't worry. Worry is useless. God is merciful and will hear your prayers," according to Padre Pio. Have you trusted God in these times with your whole heart to hear your prayers? Have you trusted Him in the good things you've experienced as well as the difficult times recently? Can you trust Him in your suffering, now?

A simple saint who on more than one occasion was attacked by Satan, Padre Pio knew how to put on his armor in the spiritual battle that every one of us from the moment of Eve in the garden when she had to answer the serpent who asked, "Did God really say not to eat the fruit of that tree?" until every moment of every day until the day of Christ's glorious return to gather His chosen, we each are warriors in this battle whether we are aware of it or not. I'd hazard to guess that you, like me are very aware of the battle we are in right now. Never, in our life times as I'm sure many before felt the same, has there been such evil running rampant and spirits of depression, fear, anger, rebellion are surrounding all of us around the world. This simple saint, Padre Pio, teaches us to armor up. Be faithful, be prayerful, be humble in frequently going to confession, partake of the Eucharist in person as often as you can, take up your rosary every single day, read Scripture, put on your scapulars and your holy medals, your St Benedict cross. Do not complain of the troubles of today nor live in fear of that which you cannot control. Rather, follow the footsteps of a humble saint who knew that God in His abundant mercy and steadfast love always hears the cries of His children. Our acceptance of our pain and suffering while offering it up to Him the Great Healer and our casting out fear in His name is a fragrant offering that is most pleasing to Him. So as most likely all the old biddies like myself in your lives have chastised you again and again, "Offer it up", my sisters. Put on your armor in this moment. And if you still are wondering how you are going to put on

His armor, then fall on your knees and ask Him for His discernment and His wisdom and His plan for you in this moment. For anytime you seek Him, it brings Him glory and is pleasing to Him. He desires us to be in prayer with Him continually. So seek Him now...

This past September, I began again as I had in my past to have dreams which felt real. Some were reassuring and some were disturbing to me. I passed it off as stress from all the chaos we have all been dealing with in our lives this past year. But the dreams continued sporadically. I contacted a mentor of mine and told her of one of my dreams, one of the beautiful ones, to see what she thought. She quoted Joel 3:1 to me: Then afterward, I will pour out my Spirit upon all mankind. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy; your old shall dream dreams and your young shall see visions. First, I want to say that as with many women, I found it interesting that God was putting me, a young 59, in the old people category. But there we have it, you can't even hide your age from God. Secondly, I realized that these types of dreams were from God and He was telling me something in this way, so like His whispers, I need to take heed. I share this with you to encourage you to believe that in this life we are in spiritual warfare. Evil is real and it will come for you if given the chance. I know this as a few weeks ago, I had another dream. Praise God, I remember very few of the specifics as to how I got to where I was, but I know it must have been frightening for suddenly I found myself in my dream standing before Satan. Those around me bowing down to him. I stood there amazed at his beauty. He was a shining light of brightness. One might mistake him for a saint or an angel except for the fact that his eyes were a burning red. It was the only sign that I had as to who he was. Immediately, I said to him, "Oh no, I'm not even going to stand before you." And just like that it felt as if I was slammed back into my body and I was wide awake in my bed and shaking uncontrollably. Immediately grabbing my rosary on my bedstand and putting on my armor. First my sword, the Word of God, reminding myself of those passages that have brought me comfort over the years and are His promises. I will not leave you nor forsake you. I will walk through the valley of the shadow of death with you. Do not fear evil for I am with you. Then I grabbed my shield of faith and began to pray the prayers I know for protection. St Michael the Archangel defend me in battle. Be my protection.... Hail Mary full of grace pray for me. Calling out to St Joseph, St Padre Pio and St Benedict to pray for me and for my family and for our protection. With my helmet firmly on my head knowing that I am saved by the blood of the Lamb and He knows I am His and He calls me by name. The breast plate of righteousness protecting my heart from the sin of bowing to evil even in a dream. The girdle of truth wrapped around my waist so that I can recognize satan as who he is, the father of lies and I can plant my feet firmly in His shoes of peace knowing that My God was there with me in the deep of the night in my bedroom guarding me from what I had witnessed in my dream and He was not a God of chaos and disorder but of peace. His perfect love would cast out all my fear in that moment. I wondered the next morning and prayed for an answer as to why I would be made to stand in front of satan. I came to realize that God wanted me to understand that satan and the occult are ever present in our world right now. They appear as light and beauty; as those things we know are wrong but are widely accepted by others. Even as those things masquerading as "Christian" or "Catholic" or acceptable to God until we digger deeper and realize that they are not from Him at all. Sometimes one must look closely to recognize what is not from God and what is from God. Frequently, we must be armored up to discern the difference. He calls us to put on his armor and not be deceived by satan's lies. Do not be overcome by evil, my sisters, rather overcome evil with good.

III.

My sisters, Listen to these words from Michelle McClain Walters from her book Esther Anointing, "Can you imagine an all female army-women marching in complete synchronization with the cadence of the Holy Spirit, moving together in unity with distinction and dignity to advance the kingdom of God?" We are at that time, here and now. This is the time God has called us to... a time of a worldwide pandemic with no certainty as to when it might end.... A time of political upheaval and civil unrest.... A time when those around us are influenced by spirits of fear and anger and rebellion and depression. Many of us have been experiencing these things in our own lives day in and day out for many, many days. Today I am telling you to follow the path of beloved St Padre Pio. He knew that there was power in the name of Jesus. He knew that by armoring up and putting our focus on Jesus and our joy in everything happening to us both easy and hard, God will break every chain, every strong hold formed against God's army. Dear ones, we are that army. You and I. We are called to call on the power of Jesus' name to break every chain, to rid our land of every altar set up to other gods and to Blow the trumpet in Zion so that every heart will awaken to God's love. Dear sister of God, do not lay down your sword. Pick it up and wield it with His steadfast love and tender mercy in the strength of your faith. Know

His Word, Partake of His most Holy Eucharist, Go to Confession, Pray.... And know in the very depth of your soul that God is pleased with what He sees in you, you, His beloved daughter of His army. Amen and amen.

Play song Break Every Chain