According to a recent Gallup Poll released last month, levels of stress, anger and worry among Americans are at the highest levels in a decade, and Americans are among the most stressed people in the world. I feel like even just saying the word "stress" causes stress. About 55% of U.S. respondents said they'd felt stress "a lot of the day" before, compared with just 35% worldwide. About 45% of Americans said they felt "a lot" of worry the day before the survey, compared with a global average of 39%. About 22% of Americans said they felt "a lot" of anger the day before, which was the same as the global average.

And I guess what's fascinating is that we're living at a time when we're the most technologically advanced, well-educated, most "socially sophisticated" and "connected" culture, and yet we're experiencing more stress, anger, and worry than ever before. And since polls are not always accurate and people are not always honest with pollsters, I personally believe that the percentages are probably worse than what Gallup is reporting. And I have no doubt that this is all exacerbated by a world that is dominated and increasingly distracted by social media, screens, Iphones, Ipads, etc. While those things are not intrinsically evil,

I have no doubt we're living in an age of constant distraction that is feeding all of our stress, anger, and worry.

While the Gallup poll alluded to certain factors possibly contributing to or affecting the data, the survey itself really didn't identify any specific causes of the uptick in stress, anger, and worry among Americans. Obviously, there are probably many factors contributing to these numbers, but I would argue that one of the main causes of this recent uptick in stress, worry, and anger is a ***serious lack of peace—peace in our minds and peace in our hearts***. Personally I have no doubt that a lack of inner peace within the soul leads to an increase in stress, worry, and anger.

In light of our highly stressed, increasingly worried, and seemingly angry culture, our Lord Jesus, the Son of the Living God, speaks these powerful words to us in today's Gospel: "***Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid***."

To be clear, the peace that our merciful Savior gives us is a Heavenly peace that surpasses anything the world could offer us. It's a

peace that the world cannot give or take away. The Church understands peace to be so much more than merely the absence of conflict or aggression, but rather an infusion of God's constant strength and interior serenity. Peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and it's the presence of sanctifying grace, the divine life, within the soul that gives great calm, confidence, and certainty. St. Augustine of Hippo defined peace as the "tranquility of order" and this most certainly applies to a soul that is united to God. A soul that ***truly puts God first in every way*** is a soul at peace. The peace that Christ offers us is a peace that can be enjoyed ***even in the midst of great suffering and conflict.*** This is the power of the gift of peace that our Lord Jesus so eagerly wants to give us.

If our understanding of peace is narrowly limited to the absence of conflict, then we're never going have any peace in this life because if we think we can live this earthly life without any conflict, suffering, pain, sadness, or difficulty, then we're deluding ourselves. To somehow think we're "never" going to suffer in this life is the height of wishful thinking that is not rooted in objective reality. To have such a false expectation

about the nature of this temporary, earthly life will certainly lead to a great lack of inner peace.

Brothers and sisters, where are we lacking peace in our lives? Is there a lack of peace in our minds and hearts? If so, why? Am I struggling in my relationship with the Lord? Am I experiencing great fear, doubt, worry, and anxiety? Is there a lack of peace in our family, with my spouse, my children, my grandchildren, my siblings, my parents, my cousins, etc. Is there a lack of peace at work with my boss or my co-workers? Is there a lack of peace with my friends? Maybe there's a lack of peace at school with my classmates or teachers?

Wherever we are in our life, whatever we're going through, struggling with, or experiencing, our Lord Jesus wants to break through all of the noise, fear, doubt, and distraction and say: "***Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.***" Brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus, out of His unconditional love for each and every one of us wants to give us peace. ***Let me repeat that***: Christ is so eager to give us

His peace. And Christ wants to give us peace in our hearts and minds so that we can be peacemakers and bring peace into every area of our life!

Practically speaking, how does Christ give us His peace? He seeks to give us peace in many ways, but first and foremost, we can only receive the fullness of the Heavenly peace we seek if we're united to Christ in an authentic personal relationship ***in and through*** His Catholic Church. Christ gives us peace ***through*** His Church, which ***He*** founded on the Apostles and gave divine authority through the Holy Spirit to teach and sanctify in His name, as we just heard in today's Gospel! Our Lord Jesus gives us peace through His Church's teachings, which come to us from the Magisterium, the official teaching authority of the Church which Christ established in order to give us peace of mind and heart on the most difficult and complex doctrinal and moral issues.

Our Lord gives us peace through His 7 sacraments, most especially through the Most Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The sacraments are the best ways to encounter Christ and receive His peace. Our Savior gives us peace through prayer, which St. Padre Pio defined as the oxygen of the soul. Are we praying? And if we are, are

we praying as we should and are we praying enough? Christ gives us peace through good spiritual reading, whether it's the lives of the saints or a great book on Catholic theology or spirituality. Good spiritual reading nourishes and strengthens the soul and is certainly an important avenue for receiving the peace that Christ wants to give us. Our Lord gives us peace through spiritual direction and the authentically good spiritual counsel of others.

Divine peace comes from entrusting everything the Lord. In fact, I just saw a good post on Facebook this morning by my home parish in Easton, St. Jane's and it said: "Stress comes from trying to do it all on our own. Peace comes from putting it all in God's hands." That is so true. Personally, I can testify that the more things I entrust to our Lord, the more peace I enjoy in life. Lastly, all of these avenues through which the Lord gives us His peace are intended to help us grow in holiness, that intimacy with Christ that results in a life of love and virtue. Brothers and sisters, holiness breeds peace. Love and virtue foster peace. Mercy and forgiveness bring peace.

Brothers and sisters, we don't need more stress, worry, and anger in our lives and in our culture—we need more peace. Lord Jesus, as we prepare to receive you in the Most Holy Eucharist, we humbly ask You to give us Your peace—a Heavenly peace that the world cannot give or take away. Amen.