February 21st: Memorial of Saint Peter Damian, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Gospel text (*Mk* 9:14-29): As Jesus came down from the mountain with Peter, James, John and approached the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and scribes arguing with them. Immediately on seeing him, the whole crowd was utterly amazed. They ran up to him and greeted him. He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I have brought to you my son possessed by a mute spirit. Wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive it out, but they were unable to do so."

He said to them in reply, "O faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you? Bring him to me." They brought the boy to him. And when he saw him, the spirit immediately threw the boy into convulsions. As he fell to the ground, he began to roll around and foam at the mouth. Then he questioned his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" He replied, "Since childhood. It has often thrown him into fire and into water to kill him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "'If you can!' Everything is possible to one who has faith." Then the boy's father cried out, "I do believe, help my unbelief!"

Jesus, on seeing a crowd rapidly gathering, rebuked the unclean spirit and said to it, "Mute and deaf spirit, I command you: come out of him and never enter him again!" Shouting and throwing the boy into convulsions, it came out. He became like a corpse, which caused many to say, "He is dead!" But Jesus took him by the hand, raised him, and he stood up. When he entered the house, his disciples asked him in private, "Why could we not drive the spirit out?" He said to them, "This kind can only come out through prayer."

"Everything is possible to one who has faith"

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Today we celebrate Saint Peter Damian (1007–1072), monk, reformer, and Doctor of the Church, whose life was a burning witness of penance, prayer, and unwavering love for the truth. In today's Gospel passage, Jesus laments: "O faithless generation, how long will I be with you?" (Mk 9:19). This cry resounds powerfully in the mission of Peter Damian, who fought against the spiritual lukewarmness of his time with a life of austerity and a prophetic word.

The Gospel scene presents a boy possessed, a symbol of a humanity torn apart by evil, incapable of freeing itself by its own strength. The boy's father cries out: "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us" (Mk 9:22). Jesus responds with a radical invitation to faith: "Everything is possible to one who has faith" (Mk 9:23). Saint Peter Damian lived this faith with intensity, convinced that the renewal of the Church required the deep conversion of each soul. His monastic life, marked by fasting, silence, and prayer, was a constant plea: "I do believe, help my unbelief!" (Mk 9:24). He called the hermit's cell "the place where God converses with men."

He did not separate contemplation from action: from the solitude of the hermitage of Fonte Avellana he wrote letters and treatises in defense of ecclesial discipline, unafraid to denounce sin both within and outside the clergy. As Pope Leo XIV would say: "Consistency of life is a concrete way of contributing to the improvement of society."

Jesus teaches that "this kind can only come out through prayer" (Mk 9:29). Saint Peter Damian understood that without interior struggle, without the cross, there is no renewal: "O blessed Cross," he exclaims, "the faith of the patriarchs venerates you, the prophecies of the prophets proclaim you, the judging senate of the Apostles honors you, the victorious army of the martyrs, and the countless multitudes of all the saints."

Today, his witness challenges us: do we live the faith as a burning fire or as mere routine? Do we pray with our souls, or only with our lips?