

FROM THE PASTOR'S



Second Sunday of Easter - Divine Mercy Sunday March 30, 2008 A

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER ALSO DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

In our liturgical calendar this Sunday has two titles:

Second Sunday of Easter
Divine Mercy Sunday

For those of you not familiar with Divine Mercy devotion and the person God used to spread it, the following will be helpful.

Faustina Kowalska was a Polish nun, born in 1905 and died in 1938 at the age of 33. During her lifetime she had a number of mystical experiences during which the Lord, Jesus appeared to her and spoke to her about the mercy that was filling His heart and he wanted to pour it out to the world.

Divine Mercy Sunday

When the late Pope John Paul decided to create a Feast around Divine Mercy, he chose the Sunday after Easter. In this way the feast is connected to the Mercy Jesus showed to sinners on Good Friday. Also, this Sunday each year we listen to a beautiful gospel which speaks of Jesus' Mercy for his friends who abandoned him in his hour of greatest need.

The following article on this new devotion in our church was written by Ludmila Grygiel and it appeared in the *Columbia*, a Knights of Columbus magazine. Ludmila writes:

Through the mediation of St. Faustine Kowalska (1905-38), Jesus has given us a teaching on God's Mercy, and a new form of devotion known as the Divine Mercy. The devotion centers on veneration of the image of the merciful Jesus. The image was described by the Lord to Sister Faustina, and then painted by her. The Divine Mercy devotion includes recitation of the *Chaplet of Divine Mercy*, celebration of the feast of Divine Mercy the first Sunday after Easter, and keeping holy the hour of Christ's death.

On Sept. 13, 1935, in Vilnius (now the capital of Lithuania), Jesus "dictated" the words of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy to Sister Faustina. It is important to know that this took place after a vision of an angel, "the executor of Divine wrath," during which the mystic nun, terrified, began to "implore God for the world with

words heard interiorly." this was recorded in her diary, *Divine Mercy in My Soul* (I, 196-097) [Stockbridge, Mass.: Marians of the Immaculate Conception, 2001; subsequent quotes are also from this source]. The next day Christ taught Sister Faustina to pray the chaplet, which she called "the prayer that serves to appease the wrath of God" (I, 197).

Spiritual and Material Gains

The chaplet is by design a prayer to be offered in community by a group. Its purpose is to implore mercy not only for the one who is reciting it but those for whom it is being recited; to implore mercy not only for us but for the whole world. It is an act of love toward all sinners who are in need.

On one occasion, when Sister Faustina was confiding to Jesus her ardent desire that all mankind turn with trust and confidence to Divine Mercy, the Lord said to her: "By saying the Chaplet, you bring all of humanity closer to me" (II, 281). These words reflect the dynamic reality of the action of Divine Mercy and the motivation behind Christ's request. The prayer that is lifted up to God the Father is in a certain sense a "reminder" to him of his Son's painful passion. It is because of Christ's suffering and death that man can ask and, by right, have confidence that God will hear him. One who prays the Chaplet of Divine Mercy uses one of the strongest means possible for presenting his petition to God. As with any prayer or devotion, the efficacy of the chaplet is dependent upon the confidence, the perseverance and the conformity to the will of God with which it is prayed.

Christ often suggested the chaplet as a prayer to obtain the grace of a holy death; those who are dying can obtain that grace both when they themselves pray and when someone else prays for them.

Sister Faustina herself experienced often the efficacy of this prayer, particularly during her last hospitalization. Jesus assured her more than once that through perseverance and trust, one could obtain all things in prayer: both spiritual benefits, such as conversion and salvation, and prosperity in temporal matters, such as the end of a drought or storm. The only condition was that what was asked must conform to the divine will (VI, 93).

Meditation on Christ's Passion

Christ's passion referenced in the Chaplet of Divine Mercy constitutes the essence of another related devotion, namely meditation on his death at 3 p.m., "the hour of great mercy for the whole world." Christ instructed Sister Faustina: "At 3 o'clock in the afternoon implore my mercy, especially for sinners and, for just a brief moment, immerse yourself in my passion, particularly in my abandonment at my death" (IV, 59). It should be noted that, according to Christ's explanation, the meditation on his passion must not be a meditation only on his physical suffering, but also on his spiritual torments, "mortal sadness," and agonizing experience of having been abandoned by God the Father.

For the Church, the high point of veneration of the Divine Mercy is the feast day, celebrated on the first Sunday of Easter. The choice of the first Sunday after Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday highlights the interconnectedness of the work of mercy and that of Christ's redemption, the most powerful act of his mercy. The image of Christ as the Divine Mercy is the image of the resurrected Jesus, and it constitutes a particular illustration of the Gospel reading that Sunday on Jesus' appearance to his disciples.

Divine Mercy Sunday is a joyous feast for Catholics who hope to rise and live eternally with the resurrected Christ. The celebration of the feast includes almost all forms of devotion, including public veneration of the image of Divine Mercy, recitation of the chaplet and homilies on the theme of mercy. At the same time, these devotions are part of the Church's sacramental life.

The importance of trust, the indispensable condition for proper and effective prayer, cannot be overemphasized. An attitude of trust must be the primary characteristic of those devoted to Divine Mercy.

Living the Mercy Message

That having been said, however, the cult of Divine Mercy has one overriding characteristic: the attitude of the faithful as practitioners of mercy. The devotional practices are of less importance than the constant, daily practice of mercy. Through action, words and prayer, we must become people filled with mercy. Jesus reiterated the evangelical warning: "If a soul does not, in some way, practice mercy, it will not receive my mercy on the day of judgment" (IV, 57).

One who is truly devoted to Divine Mercy "must fulfill at least one act of mercy a day" (III, 430). This can be simply saying a prayer for someone in need of God's mercy. The devotion does not require a particular

kind of charitable activity. More than an exterior action, it calls for spiritual maturity, a trusting abandonment to God rather than a program of good works. Devotion to Divine Mercy is a powerful instrument for the formation of Christians. That is why we strive to bring the message of Divine Mercy and devotion to Christ as Divine Mercy to the whole world.

God's Mercy Stronger than his Justice

The Divine Mercy message shows a new relationship between justice and mercy, a relationship between justice and mercy, a relationship that emerges directly from the scandal of Christ's crucifixion. Christ does not negate the concept of justice; rather, he changes it. He said to his disciples, "If your justice does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20).

On the cross, mercy prevailed over justice. On the cross, Jesus broke the vicious cycle of sin and punishment that kept the sinner from hoping for salvation and finding his way to happiness in eternity. From Christ's death on the cross to the end of time, "mercy triumphs over justice" (Jas 2:13). From this point on, people have the right to ask for God's forgiveness and be confident that God will always forgive them. In fact, God continues to assure us, "I did not allot only a certain number of pardons" (V, 90).

Man's evil deeds will never be able to diminish God's willingness to forgive him. There is one condition, though: We trust in God's mercy and not by fear of being punished by him. The man who learns mercy from God changes both himself and the world in which he lives. This is the challenge for us Christians in a world where evil seemingly surpasses all limits. For this very reason, we must never despair or allow ourselves to be passive observers of the chaos around us. Instead, what we see must convince us of the world's desperate need for Divine Mercy.

In the 1930's, Christ spoke to Sister Faustina words that are just as true now at the start of the 21st century: "Tell suffering humanity to snuggle close to my merciful heart and I will fill it with peace" (III, 20). It would not be incorrect then, that while we work for justice and peace we must work above all for mercy.

One Woman's Experience of Divine Mercy.

In the same issue of *Colombia*, Elizabeth Ficocelli, shared with readers her experience of God's mercy.

Just when everything was falling into place so perfectly, the unthinkable happened, and I committed the most regrettable sin of my life. In a moment of weakness largely attributed to many sleepless nights

with a newborn, I raged against my 4-year-old. For a few fleeting seconds, I wanted to hurt him - and I did. Horrified, my world turned upside down. I was shocked and devastated at my unbridled outburst, and filled with deep shame and regret. How could this have happened, I dismayed, now, during the holiest time of year?

Even the forgiveness of my husband and son could not console me. I wondered how I could ever face God after what I had done, but I knew it was imperative. So, with heavy heart, I went to confession. My heart was broken and it seemed no penance could ever be enough to take away my pain.

As I was leaving the confessional, however, an amazing thing happened. The moment I opened the door, I felt a sudden and very tangible sensation as if someone were pouring a bucket of water over the top of me. I felt washed clean, tingling all the way down to my toes and at the same moment feather-light, like the weight of the world had just been lifted off my shoulders. I had never experienced anything like this before.

Instantly, I recognized that I had just received a gift from God - I was experiencing firsthand his Divine Mercy. God saw how broken, humbled and genuinely contrite I was, and he was welcoming me back with open arms - me, a poor sinner, who could not forgive myself.

The words of Jesus, as given to St. Faustina, held new meaning for me: "Know, my daughter, that My Heart is mercy itself. From this sea of mercy graces pour out upon the whole world. No souls that come to Me depart without being comforted. All misery vanishes in My Mercy..."

This incredible experience has taught me some very important lessons.

- I am acutely aware now of how frail I am - how frail we all are - and how quickly salvation can be jeopardized.
- I also understand in a new and meaningful way that God's forgiveness, regardless of the sins we commit, is ours simply for the asking.
- God has revealed to me how light can come from darkness. Sharing my story with others has helped many return to confession and experience Divine Mercy for themselves.

Although it has been eight years since my "confession miracle," the memory of it is as fresh in my mind—and my body—as if it happened yesterday. I know today that every time I receive the sacrament of reconciliation, I am granted that same unconditional and Divine Mercy, even if I only experience it with the eyes of faith.

The message of Divine Mercy is and always will be a special part of our family. The image of our Lord with those red and white rays streaming from his heart is displayed in our home and it is why the last words on our children's lips during their nightly prayers are "Jesus, I trust in you."

The above story shows us the wonderful gift we have available to us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

**Join us in praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy
and attending Benediction of the
Blessed Sacrament on this beautiful
Feast of Divine Mercy Sunday. Today between 3:00
and 4:00 PM in the church.**

Jesus promised to pour out an ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of His mercy. By receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Sacrament of the Eucharist on this feast day, Jesus promised complete forgiveness of sins and their punishment. Reconciliation may be made either 20 days before or 20 days following Divine Mercy Sunday.

Have a blessed week,

