

Divine Mercy Sunday April 7/8, 2018

In October 2008 my wife Janis and I traveled to Krakow Poland on pilgrimage and we were blessed to be able to visit the original Shrine of Divine mercy. Three Popes have visited the shrine and millions of pilgrims from around the world continue to visit it every year. We saw the tomb of St. Faustina, we saw the tiny cell where she lived as a religious sister, we saw the brass door bell that she answered when Jesus first appeared to her in the guise of a poor street person. We went into the huge basilica, which was designed to resemble a boat, and has a 77-meter high observation tower that resembles a mast. In the lower level of the basilica we were allowed to celebrate Mass in Faustina's chapel we venerated a relic of the saint.

St. Faustina was canonized by JPII at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome on Mercy Sunday the year 2000. She was the first new saint of the third millennium.

On almost every occasion that Saint Pope John Paul II spoke of St. Faustina, or about the Divine Mercy message and devotion, he stressed

that this is a remedy especially suited to meet the critical needs of our age. In a world in which, at times, darkness seems to be enveloping almost everything, a world now full to overflowing with apostasy, the persecution of Christians, the breakdown of the family, the exploitation of the poor, the murder of unborn children, the horrors of ethnic cleansing and international terrorism, where indeed, if not to the Divine Mercy and compassion, can the world turn to find refuge and the light of hope? The theologian Robert Stackpole has this to say about the Divine Mercy revelation:

“As the human race wanders further and further away from its Savior, He has not abandoned it to its fate, nor failed to find new ways to bring His lost sheep home. Every aspect of the Divine Mercy message and devotion that He fashioned proclaims loud and clear the same gospel message: God is not just waiting patiently for the world to come back to him! Rather his Mercy always takes the initiative—without any merit or deserving on our part—and seeks us out and finds us.

The image of the Divine Mercy revealed to Sr. Faustina is a vivid expression of the gospel message. Everything about this Image speaks of the risen Lord taking the initiative, and seeking out the lost and the broken hearted with the rays of his merciful love. In this Image Christ is shown walking toward the viewer, coming to find us; the rays of merciful love flowing from His heart spread out to embrace the viewer, and his hand is raised with a blessing of peace even before we ask for it. In an age in which the visual image—whether through television, films of the computer screen—has become the most powerful medium of communication, Jesus Christ has fashioned for us an image of Himself that awakens our trust in Him and calms our fears. As He once said to St. Faustina (entry 1485) ‘Be not afraid of your savior, o sinful soul. I make the first move to come to you, for I know that by yourself you are unable to lift yourself to me.’”

The Feast of Mercy proclaims this same gospel message. It is not a new feast. According to St. Augustine, St Gregory Nazianzen, and the Apostolic Constitutions, the early Church celebrated the Sunday after

Easter, or Octave Day of Easter, as a great feast day. It was a rounding out of the eight days of Easter celebrations, and a day that St. Augustine is reported to have called "the compendium of the days of mercy." In other words the day the Church gives thanks to God for His merciful love shining through all the great acts by which He won our salvation, especially the Cross and Resurrection of his Son. The Octave Sunday is meant to be a day of "Thanksgiving for the goodness God has shown man in the whole Easter mystery." For this reason, the opening prayer, Psalms, and the lessons appointed for this Sunday already proclaim the message of Mercy, and did not need to be changed for the institution of the Feast. The whole of Mercy Sunday is meant to manifest Jesus Christ, reaching out to sinful humanity with his prevenient, unmerited Mercy. As he said to St. Faustina "I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of my tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon souls who approach the fountain of my mercy."

This level of grace, this Divine Mercy is not only meant to be received with trust: it is also to be shared with love. The practice of the works of mercy, both spiritual and corporal, are the goal and fruit of this devotion, as well as a gospel command; “be merciful even as your Father is merciful.” (LK, 6:36). We have so many opportunities to show mercy to each other-- in our collaborations and in our conflicts: showing patience in the checkout line, smiling to others when we may not really feel like it. St. Faustina knew very well that it is only hearts that have been transformed by the mercy of Jesus Christ that are fully equipped to share it with other, and so she prayed constantly for the gift of a merciful heart.

Here is the divine remedy for a world full of cold hearts and broken hearts: the merciful Heart of Jesus, which can transform human hearts so that they become ‘living reflections’ of his own. With approximately one billion people living in the most abject material poverty, and billions more living under the reign of false and oppressive ideologies, surely the time is right for the advent of a worldwide apostolate of Mercy, fashioned by Christ’s own Merciful heart. Often we are like Thomas in

today's gospel, we hesitate to trust the Lord when we most need him.

So let's listen again to the earnest plea of St. Pope John Paul II, who

asked the faithful on Mercy Sunday, 1995, to "trust the Lord and be

Apostles of Divine Mercy, and follow the invitations of St. Faustina.

May this continue to be the millennium of Divine mercy. St. Faustina

pray for us!