

SUNDAY OF DIVINE MERCY

St. Faustina of Poland is a well-known apostle of Divine Mercy. On the 30th of April, 2000, at 10:00 AM on the Second Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday, the Feast requested by Jesus of St. Faustina), His Holiness Pope St. John Paul II celebrated the Eucharist in Saint Peter's Square and proceeded to the canonization of Blessed Sister Faustina Kowalska. Saint Faustina invites us by the witness of her life to keep our Faith and Hope fixed on God the Father, rich in mercy, Who saved us by the precious Blood of His Son. During her short life, the Lord Jesus assigned to St. Faustina three basic tasks: 1. to pray for souls, entrusting them to God's incomprehensible Mercy; 2. to tell the world about God's generous Mercy; 3. to start a new movement in the Church focusing on God's Mercy. At the canonization of St. Faustina, Pope St. John Paul II said: "The cross, even after the Resurrection of the Son of God, speaks, and never ceases to speak, of God the Father, Who is absolutely faithful to His eternal love for man. ... Believing in this love means believing in mercy." The Lord of Divine Mercy, a painting of Jesus based on the vision given to St. Faustina Kowalska, shows Jesus raising his right hand in a gesture of blessing, with His left hand on his heart from which gush forth two rays, one red and one white. The picture contains the message, "Jesus, I trust in You!". The rays streaming out have symbolic meaning: red for the Blood of Jesus, which is the life of souls and white for the water of Baptism which justifies souls. — The whole image is symbolic of the mercy, forgiveness, and love of God.

The readings for this Sunday are about God's Divine Mercy, the necessity for trusting Faith, and our need for God's forgiveness of sins. The Response for today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 118), is "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; His Love [mercy] is everlasting!" In the first section of that Psalm, we repeat three times, "His mercy endures forever." God revealed His mercy to the world, first and foremost, by sending His only begotten Son to become our Savior and Lord by His suffering, death, and Resurrection. Divine Mercy is offered to us in the Holy Mass, the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the celebration of each of the Sacraments.

The first reading, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, stresses the corporal acts of mercy practiced by the early Christian community before the Jews and the Romans started their persecutions. Practicing the sharing love, compassion, and mercy of God which Jesus taught, this witnessing community derived its strength from community prayer, "the Breaking of the Bread," and the apostles' teaching, read at the worship service. The second reading, taken from John's first Letter, deals with practicing both corporal and spiritual works of mercy by obeying God's Old Testament Ten Commandments and focusing on

Jesus' commandment of loving others as He loves us with selfless, sacrificial, agape love. Loving others as Jesus loves us also demands that we treat others with God's mercy and compassion. In today's Gospel, as we recall Jesus' appearance to the Apostles on that first Easter evening, we are vividly reminded of the Sacrament of Reconciliation – the power to forgive sins which Our Lord gave to His Apostles — “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (Jn 20:23).

We need to accept God's invitation to celebrate and practice mercy. One way the Church celebrates God's mercy throughout the year is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” So, we see that all of us are to be reconcilers and mediators, becoming channels to one another of the Risen Lord's peace and forgiveness. Finding time for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is another good way to receive Divine Mercy. The Gospel command, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful,” requires that we show mercy to our fellow human beings always and everywhere. We radiate God's mercy to others by our corporal and spiritual works of mercy, by our kind and supportive words, and by our prayers for all our brothers and sisters.

We need to ask God for the Faith that culminates in self-surrender to Him and leads us to serve those we encounter with love. Living Faith enables us to see the risen Lord in everyone and gives us the willingness to render to each one our loving service. It was this Faith in the Lord and obedience to His missionary command that prompted St. Thomas to travel to India to preach the Gospel among the Hindus, to establish seven Christian communities (known later as “St. Thomas Christians”), and eventually to suffer martyrdom. The Fathers of the Church prescribe the following traditional means to grow in the living, dynamic Faith of St. Thomas the Apostle. a) We must come to know Jesus personally and intimately through our daily, meditative reading of the Bible. b) We must strengthen our Faith by the power of the Holy Spirit through our personal and communal prayer. c) We must share in the Divine life of Jesus by frequenting the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa) presents it this way: “If we pray, we will believe; if we believe, we will love; if we love, we will serve. Only then do we put our love of God into action.”

Like St. Thomas, let us use our skepticism to help us grow in Faith. It is our genuine doubts about the doctrines of our religion that encourage us to study these doctrines more closely and thus to grow in our Faith. This will naturally lead us to a personal encounter with Jesus through our prayer, study of the Word of God, and frequenting of the Sacraments. However, we must never forget the fact that our Faith is not our own doing but is a gift from

God. Hence, we need to augment our Faith every day by prayer so that we may join St. Thomas in his proclamation: “My Lord and my God.”

Let us have the courage of our Christian convictions to share our Faith as St. Thomas did, and to recognize the “nail marks.” We are not to keep the gift of Faith locked in our hearts, but to share it with our children, our families and our neighbors, always remembering the words, “Every believer in this world must become a spark of Christ’s light,” spoken by Pope St. John XXIII. “We all have scars from our own Good Fridays that remain, long after our own experiences of resurrection. Our ‘nail marks’ remind us that all pain and grief, all ridicule and suffering, are transformed into healing and peace in the love of God that we receive from and extend to others. The “nail marks” of Jesus are all around us in the lives of those living out their own Calvarys. Jesus calls us to be willing to place ourselves in the pain and struggle of others and bring the joy and peace of Easter into hearts, entombed in winter cold and darkness.”