

## DIVINE MERCY (2009)

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

19 April 2009

Helena Kowalska came into the world in the year 1905 as the fourth child of a poor but devout family of farmers in central Poland. She had only three years of education and at age sixteen left home to work as a household servant in order to help support her struggling parents in the village.

Helena had felt the call to religious life from an early age and despite her parents' initial opposition, she was eventually accepted into the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Warsaw where she received the name Sr. Maria Faustyna. For 13 years, she lived the life of a simple religious, serving at various times as cook, gardener and porter in a number of the congregation's houses. She diligently fulfilled all of her duties in humility and faithfully observed the order's Rule of Life. She was a quiet person, but yet pleasant, full of goodness and selfless love for others. Her whole life, she wanted to become a saint and, as she said in her own words, "to love [Jesus] with a love so great as no one had ever before loved Him."<sup>1</sup> Nothing about her unpretentious exterior life in the convent hinted at the rich mystical life that she live interiorly.

On February 22, 1931, Our Lord appeared to her to tell of His infinite and fathomless Divine Mercy and that He wanted to make her His apostle of mercy. Jesus told her: "I am sending you with My Mercy to all mankind. I do not want to punish wretched mankind, but rather I desire to heal, drawing it close to my merciful heart." (Diary 1588) "You are the secretary of My Mercy; I chose you for this purpose in this life and in the next,"<sup>2</sup> so that you would let souls know the great mercy I have for them, and that I implore them to find trust in the abyss of my mercy."<sup>3</sup>

Over the course of seven years, until her death in 1938, Jesus appeared to St. Faustyna many times conveying to her His specific wishes about how he wished a new devotion to His Divine Mercy to become known throughout all the world. The first way by which Jesus wished this to be done was by means of an image that He asked Faustyna to have painted, an image that reflected how He had first appeared to her with rays of red and white light emanating from His most merciful heart. He also wished that the Church observe a special feast day to honor His great mercy and asked that it be celebrated on this day, the first Sunday after Easter as the culmination of a novena to His Divine Mercy. Jesus also dictated to Faustyna a special devotional prayer, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, which He wished people to pray as a means of imploring God's mercy and staving off His wrath.

In a vision that took place in 1937, Jesus asked that people especially remember the hour of His death—3:00 in the afternoon—as the Hour of Mercy, telling Faustyna: "Whenever you hear the clock strike three in the afternoon, plunge your entire self into my mercy, praising it and giving it glory; call upon its omnipotent power for the whole world, and especially for poor sinners, because it was at that hour that it was opened wide for all souls."<sup>4</sup>

Lastly, Jesus asked that people not only cultivate these devotions themselves but requested that they also spread them to many other souls. And for those that do this, He

promised a special grace. “I will shelter souls, which spread devotion to my mercy, through their entire life as a mother tenderly cares for her infant, and at the hour of death, I will not be their Judge, but their merciful Savior.”<sup>5</sup>

Since Faustyna’s death, many people have come to know this devotion to Divine Mercy, and the image, which Jesus had once asked Faustyna to paint, is now widely known throughout the world, even by many, who do not even know its origin. It has called down countless graces for many souls, but it is really only a new form of something that had always been a part of the Church’s teaching. His mercy has always been an essential truth of the faith, for the Church was born from the opened side of Christ on the Cross, when He poured out every last drop of His blood as a gift of divine mercy for us. That’s why each time we gaze up on the crucifix, we also see an image of God’s Divine Mercy. And that’s why Jesus asked St. Faustyna to remember the hour of His death as the hour of Divine Mercy.

But because Christians had so often forgotten this, Christ wished to once again remind a world permeated by sin and vice, that His mercy is even more powerful and penetrating. He wanted us to know that instead of the wrathful God people that people have made of Him, He is rather a God, who waits lovingly with outstretched arms, just as He does here in this image of the Sacred Heart. That’s why the devotions that he gave to us through St. Faustyna have given so many people consolation and hope after a life ridden with vice and sin.

This new devotion to God’s mercy is a beautiful and powerful spiritual aid for us but we mustn’t forget that it is only a devotion. The greatest expression of His mercy, which has been with us since the beginning of the Church is the sacrament of confession, for every time you enter the confessional you kneel before His Throne of Mercy. It is, therefore, no coincidence that today on the Feast of Divine Mercy we hear the gospel account of how Jesus appeared to the apostles in the Upper Room in a manner very much as He appeared to St. Faustyna. “He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”<sup>6</sup> And it was on that evening in the Upper Room, that Christ instituted the sacrament of His Mercy, through which any and all sins can be wiped away and thrown into the abyss of His Mercy, which consumes all in His infinite love for us.

One week ago, we observed the memory of Our Lord’s Passion and Death, which opened for us the treasures of His Mercy and today we conclude the great novena, which we began on that day. I can’t speak for Fr. Anthony but during this past Lent I heard many very good confessions. The graces of forgiveness and God’s Divine Mercy flowed abundantly here at St. Peter’s. Unfortunately, this great gift of God’s mercy is neglected by so many Catholics today.

Jesus’ supreme act of love was His saving sacrifice of the Cross, when the treasury of His Divine Mercy was opened up. That sacrifice took place once for all time, but the greatest means by which Christ left us to draw from this bottomless sea of His mercy was the sacrament of confession. No longer should anyone despair that they have lived a life of sin. Instead, turn to Christ with your heart and plunge into the font of His abundant mercy. He is waiting for you. All that you have to do is to turn to Him and say as if your entire life depended on it: “Jesus, I trust in Thee. Forgive me.”

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<sup>1</sup> Św. s.M. Faustyna Kowalska, *Dzienniczek*, tranl. Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC (Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów: Warszawa, 1993), 1372.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 1605.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 1567.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 1572.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 1075.

<sup>6</sup> John 20:22-23.