

Since the year 2000, the second Sunday of Easter has been designated, 'Divine Mercy Sunday.' On this day we give thanks to, "the Father of mercies and God of all consolation."⁽¹⁾ A Father who is, ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy to all who call on him.⁽²⁾ Mother Church has always proclaimed this truth affirming that, apart from the mercy of God there is no other hope for the human race.⁽³⁾

Today we also remember, with special affection, two heroes of, 'The Divine Mercy.' First, the visionary and mystic, St. Faustina Kowalska, who was God's messenger of Mercy, and second, Pope St. John Paul II, who became God's apostle of Mercy. As Archbishop of Krakow, John Paul II had promoted Sr. Faustina's cause for sainthood as well as her writings. Later as Pope, it was John Paul II who instituted this feast in honour of God's infinite mercy on the same day that he declared Sr. Faustina a saint. Early in his pontificate John Paul II wrote an encyclical in praise of God's infinite mercy, entitled, 'Dives in Misericordia.' Providentially, it was on the vigil of this feast that God called him to his eternal reward and also it was on this feast day that he was canonised.

The 'Collect' of today's Mass speaks of the unique grace bestowed on us through Christ's merciful self-sacrifice:

God of everlasting mercy, who in the very recurrence of the paschal feast kindle the faith of the people you have made your own, increase, we pray, the grace you have bestowed, that all may grasp and rightly understand in what font they have been washed, by whose Spirit they have been reborn, by whose Blood they have been redeemed. ⁽⁴⁾

Only Divine Mercy can impose limitations on evil, defeating the tyranny of the wicked and the destructive power of selfishness and hate.⁽⁵⁾ Jesus, who is "...love and mercy personified,"⁽⁶⁾ communicated through Saint Faustina his desire that a feast in honour of his mercy to be instituted on the Second Sunday of Easter, following a novena of chaplets that would commence on Good Friday. "My daughter, [Jesus said,] ... 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."⁽⁷⁾

Speaking of his Divine Mercy, John Paul II states;

*"This is the Easter gift that the Church receives from the risen Christ and offers to humanity,"⁽⁸⁾
" ... in Christ and through Christ, God also becomes especially visible in His mercy... He Himself,
in a certain sense, is mercy."⁽⁹⁾*

Today's Gospel helps us to comprehend the mechanism by which this gift of Divine Mercy is imparted. For having commissioned his Apostles, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you,"⁽¹⁰⁾ and having breathed on them the gift of the Holy Spirit, the risen Jesus conferred on his apostles, and their descendants, his divine power to forgive sins.⁽¹¹⁾ "... If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."⁽¹²⁾ This gift of forgiving sin flows out from the wounds of Christ, especially his pierced side, and forms a wave of mercy that is poured out over all of humanity.⁽¹³⁾

So it is that St. Paul teaches, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation."⁽¹⁴⁾ 'Since Christ entrusted to his apostles the ministry of reconciliation, bishops who are their successors, and priests, the bishops' collaborators, continue to exercise this ministry. Indeed, bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins, 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.'⁽¹⁵⁾ 'In this way, Jesus' ministry of mercy and forgiveness remains with us.'⁽¹⁶⁾

But, what about those of us who are not priests and therefore do not have the authority to absolve sin? What are we to do?

By virtue of our baptism we too are sharers in the one priesthood of Christ.⁽¹⁷⁾ St. Peter's first letter proclaims that we are, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people."⁽¹⁸⁾ As sharers in the priesthood of Christ we must conform our will to his. Jesus came for the forgiveness of sin, and so we for our part must practice forgiveness, or like the hypocritical Pharisees, he will say to us on judgement day, "Woe to you... hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth."⁽¹⁹⁾

Directly following his teaching on prayer, (The Our Father,) Jesus says, "if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."⁽²⁰⁾ Our individual acts of forgiveness will not absolve the

offender of their sin, but if sincerely practiced such spiritual acts of mercy will bring about healing. And so St. Paul teaches, “ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.”⁽²¹⁾ Taken collectively, these individual acts of divine healing will build up a culture of mercy and forgiveness that will strengthen the Church, thereby building up the kingdom of God.

Today therefore, let us pledge ourselves to the service of Divine Mercy, praying with Sr. Faustina: “O Blood and Water, which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fount of Mercy for us, I trust in You.”⁽²²⁾

Notes:

- (1) 2 Cor 1:3
- (2) Psalm 86:5
- (3) John Paul II, 17/08/2002, Dedication of the shrine of Divine Mercy, No.1
- (4) Collect for the 2nd Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday - Roman Missal
- (5) Benedict xvi, 02/04/2008, Homily on the third anniversary of the death of Pope John Paul II
- (6) The Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul, p. 374
- (7) The Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul.
- (8) John Paul II, 22/04/2001, Divine Mercy Sunday, No.3
- (9) John Paul II, Dives in Misericordia, 1980
- (10) Jn 20:21
- (11) Catechism of the Catholic Church: No. 976
- (12) Jn 20:22
- (13) John Paul II, Divine Mercy Sunday Homily, No.4, April 22, 2001
- (14) 2 Cor 5:18 - [see also James 5:14-15]
- (15) Catechism of the Catholic Church: No. 1461.
- (16) Catechism of the Catholic Church: No. 1441
- (17) Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, n.14

- (18) 2 Cor 5:18) [see also James 5:14-15]
- (19) Matt 23:27
- (20) Matt 6:14-15
- (21) Eph 4:32
- (22) The Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul p187