

DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

The Triumph of God's Love

Throughout the Bible God is characterized by a deep and abiding love for humanity, in particular those who respond to God's covenant invitation to live according to God's guidelines to create a community of justice, love and peace. This divine love is celebrated in a special way on the Sunday after Easter, which since 2000 has been identified as **Divine Mercy Sunday**. On this day, we celebrate God's unfathomable love and its constant yearning to forgive us for the ways in which we fail in our obligations of covenant life.

The recognition of God's loving mercy and forgiveness has been a constant in the Christian tradition, however there was never a formal liturgical celebration until Pope John Paul II designated this feast day. As he declared, "Divine Mercy is the Easter gift that the Church receives from the risen Christ and offers to humanity at the dawn of the third millennium."

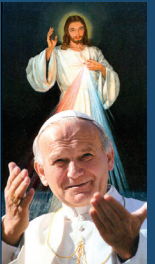
Although others had often advocated celebrating God's Mercy, Pope John Paul II was greatly influenced by the writings of a 20th century Polish nun, the mystic St. Faustina Kowalska. Born Helena Kowalska (1905–1938), she entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, became Sr. Maria Faustina and devoted her life to the message of God's mercy. She traced her spiritual experiences with Christ in her diary, *Divine Mercy in My Soul*.

For almost 40 years, Pope John Paul II championed Sr. Faustina's mission to promote God's mercy, which culminated both in her canonization and the establishment of this Feast of Mercy as Christ himself had told her:

"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 those souls who approach the fount of my mercy. The soul that will go to confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day all the divine flood-gates through which graces flow are opened"

(Faustina's Diary)



THE DIVINE MERCY IMAGE

Jesus King of Divine Mercy

On Sunday February 22, 1931, St. Faustina had a mystic experience of Jesus, clothed in a white garment with his right hand raised in blessing. His left hand was touching his garment near his heart, from where two large rays came forth, one red (symbolizing the blood which is our life) and the other pale (symbolizing the baptismal water that makes us Christians).

In 1934, with the help of Fr. Michael Sopocko, the painter Eugene Kazimierowski created the original Divine Mercy painting under St. Faustina's direction.

The painting, having miraculously survived World War II and the Soviet occupation thereafter, eventually was restored and hung in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Vilnius, Lithuania in 2005. The church is now known as the Shrine of Divine Mercy.

A subsequent painting of the Divine Mercy was created by artist Adolf Hyła who gave it to the Sisters of our Lady of Mercy in Poland in thanksgiving for the preservation of himself and his family during World War II. The sisters placed it over the tomb of St. Faustina at their convent in Lagiewniki where it can still be seen today. It is this rendering of the Divine Mercy and other variations of the Hyła painting that are most well known (as seen on the cover of this insert).

The image represents the graces of Divine Mercy poured out upon the world, especially through Baptism and the Eucharist. As Faustina gazed intently at him, he said to her, *"Paint an image according to the pattern you see with the signature: Jesus, I trust in you. I desire that this image be venerated throughout the world. By means of this image I shall grant many graces to souls. I want this image to be blessed on the first Sunday after Easter: that Sunday is to be the Feast of Mercy."*



The first Divine Mercy painting by Kazimierowski (1934) at the Divine Mercy Sanctuary in Vilnius, Lithuania

Faustina's Mission

St. Faustina's life-long dedication to God's mercy was the direct result of her mystic encounter with Jesus, who gave her this mission. "Today I am sending you with my mercy to the people of the whole world. Speak to the world about my mercy. Let all mankind recognize my unfathomable mercy. Let them have recourse to the fount of my mercy. Let them profit from the blood and water which gushed forth for them. Before I come as a just judge, I first open wide the doors of my mercy. One who refuses to pass through the doors of my mercy must pass through the doors of my justice. Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to my mercy."

THE DIVINE MERCY Chaplet Prayer

A chaplet is a form of Christian prayer which uses prayer beads. On September 13, 1935, in a mystic experience an inner voice taught St. Faustina to use her rosary beads and pray in this way for each of the five decades:

"First of all you will say one *Our Father*, and *Hail Mary*, and the *I believe in God*."

Then on the *Our Father* beads you will say the following words: *"Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world."*

On the *Hail Mary* beads you will say the following words: *"For the sake of His sorrowful Passion have mercy on us and on the whole world."*

In conclusion three times you will recite these words: *"Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world."*

(Faustina's Diary)

According to Faustina's visions recounted in her diary the aims of the chaplet's prayers for mercy are threefold: to obtain mercy, to trust in Christ's mercy, and to show mercy to others. In subsequent visions, Faustina learned that the prayers should be taught to all the people of the world. According to tradition, the chaplet may be said at any time, but it is said especially on Divine Mercy Sunday and Fridays at 3:00 PM.