

St. Maria Faustina Kowalska

Apostle of the Divine Mercy,
First Saint of the Third Millennium

Jesus said to St. Faustina: **“Let no sinner be afraid to approach Me”**. In Faustina’s “Diary”, Jesus invites each one of us to yield to His infinite mercy, to trust in His compassion and forgiveness. Great graces are promised to those who proclaim His great mercy.

“I shall protect them Myself at the hour of death, as My own glory. And even if the sins of the soul are as dark as night, when the sinner turns to My mercy, he renders Me the greatest praise, and becomes the glory of My Passion. When a soul praises My goodness, Satan trembles before it and flees to the very bottom of hell” (Diary, 378).

Christ is always knocking at the door of our hearts to remind us that if we have recourse to His Divine Mercy, He will free our souls from evil, restore our ability to love, and purify our intentions. Sin is our greatest tragedy since it leads us into the horrible reality of death and eternal condemnation. Trusting in Jesus, praying to Him, relying on Him—this is our one avenue of salvation. Jesus assures us that His wounded heart will not abandon us in the hour of death. It is never too late to renounce evil and start walking in the path of salvation. Having chosen Faustina, a simple, uneducated nun, who trusted Him boundlessly, Christ assigned her the critically important job of proclaiming His Merciful Love to the world: **“Today—Jesus told her—I am sending you with My mercy to the people of the whole world. It is not my desire to punish hurting mankind, but to heal it, press it to My merciful Heart** (Diary, 1588). **You are the secretary of My mercy. I have chosen you for that office in this and the next life** (Diary, 1605) (...) **to make known to souls the great mercy that I have in store for them, and to exhort them to trust in the**



bottomless depth of My mercy” (Diary, 1567).

The third of ten children, Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska was born into a pious peasant family in 1905, in Glogowiec, Poland. She was christened Helena. At the age of seven years, she first heard an interior call to the religious life. Thirteen years later she was to knock on many a convent door, before finally, on August 1, 1925, gaining admittance to the Convent of the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Warsaw, where she took the name Sister Maria Faustina. After a five-year-long novitiate in Cracow, she made her perpetual vows of chastity, poverty and unselfish love. Being a natural, cheerful person, Sister Faustina served as cook, gardener and doorkeeper at convents in Cracow, Pock and Vilnius. It was during these years that Jesus commissioned her to write her Diary. This extraordinary record reveals the depth and richness of her mystical life and union with God. She enjoyed great graces and a host of spiritual gifts: contemplative prayer, revelations, visions, prophecy, mystical espousals, invisible stigmata, the ability to read human souls, and a profound knowledge of the mystery of God’s mercy.

During her lifetime, Faustina was virtually unknown, even to many sisters of her congregation. Only a few of her superiors, her confessor, and spiritual director were ever aware of her visions and revelations. She died of tuberculosis, mystically united with Christ, at the age





St. Faustina's cell

of 33, on October 5, 1938, having been a religious for 13 years.

Faustina's mission to spread the message of divine mercy began on February 22, 1931. Having appeared to her in a vision, Christ commissioned her to paint an image of Him with red and pale rays radiating from His heart. The image was to bear the subscription: Jesus, I trust in You!

In her Diary Faustina writes: "I saw the Lord Jesus clothed in a white garment. (...) After a while, Jesus said to me: Paint an image according to the model you see, with the motto below: Jesus I trust in You. I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and then throughout the world" (47).

"I promise that the soul that venerates this image will not perish. I also promise victory over its enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of

death. I Myself will defend it as My own glory" (48).

When Faustina's spiritual director learned of her visions, he had her submit to a psychiatric assessment. Having determined the soundness of her mental faculties, he placed an artist under the saint's direction with a view to producing a true copy of her vision of the Merciful Savior.

Jesus asked Faustina that the first Sunday after Easter be declared Mercy Sunday, the "Feast of Divine Mercy," a day when His graces would flow in an extraordinary way to all those who asked for them. He told Faustina: "I desire that priests proclaim this great mercy of Mine toward the souls of sinners. Let no sinner be afraid to approach Me" (50).

Mercy Sunday is now celebrated in thousands of Catholic parishes across the United States. It has already been designated a liturgical Feast Day of the Catho-

lic Church in Poland. St. Faustina's Diary describes the promise Jesus made to those who solemnly participate in the Feast of Divine Mercy: ***"Whoever approaches the Fount of Life on this day will be granted complete remission of sins and punishment"*** (300).

"I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and a shelter for all souls, especially poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy will be opened. I will pour out an entire ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the Fount of My Mercy. The soul that goes to Confession and receives Holy Communion will obtain complete forgiveness of sins and a remission of all punishment. (...) Let no soul fear to approach Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. (...) Humanity will not enjoy peace until it turns to the Fount of My Mercy" (699).

On being asked by Faustina about the significance of the two rays in the image, Jesus replied: "The two rays denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water which makes souls righteous. The red ray stands for the Blood which is the life of souls. These two rays poured forth from the very depths of My tender mercy when My agonized Heart on the Cross was opened by the lance" (299).

Faustina's mission consisted in: reminding the world of God's merciful love towards every human being, even the greatest sinner; conveying new forms of devotion to the Divine Mercy; launching a great movement of devotees and apostles of Divine Mercy, who would lead people to a renewal of Christian life in the spirit of this devotion; i.e. in the gospel spirit of childlike confidence in God and love of neighbor.

Divine Mercy and St. Faustina's Diary

The essence of Christ's message to St. Faustina is that we are living in a time of mercy. The present age, more than any other in history, calls for a great outpouring of the mercy of God. As a result, the revelations to Faustina have become known as "The Message of Divine Mercy" with Jesus receiving the new title, "The Divine Mercy", not unlike His earlier title of "The Sacred Heart". Many times Jesus reveals to Faustina how deep His mercy is.

“I have opened My Heart as a living fountain of mercy. Let all souls draw life from it. Let them approach this sea of mercy with great trust. Sinners will attain justification, and the just will be strengthened in goodness. Whoever places his trust in My mercy will be filled with My divine peace at the hour of death” (1520).

“I am offering people a vessel with which they are to keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy. That vessel is this image bearing the subscription: Jesus, I trust in You” (327).

“I am Love and Mercy itself. When a soul approaches me with trust, I fill it with such an abundance of graces that it cannot contain them within itself, but radiates them to other souls” (1074).

Faustina’s Diary tells us that it is not enough to trust Jesus. We must show mercy to our neighbors in deed, in word, and in prayer (742). Jesus says to Faustina: *“If a soul does not exercise mercy in one way or another, it will not obtain My mercy on the Day of Judgment” (1317).*

“The Lord said to me, ‘It should be of no concern to you how anyone else acts; you are to be My living reflection, through love and mercy’. I answered, ‘Lord, but they often take advantage of my goodness.’ ‘That makes no difference, My daughter. That is no concern of yours. As for you, be always merciful toward other people, and especially toward sinners” (1446).

“Oh, how painful it is to Me that souls so seldom unite themselves to Me in Holy Communion. I wait for souls, and they



The old Lagiewniki convent where St. Faustina lived and died

are indifferent toward Me. I love them tenderly and sincerely, and they distrust Me. I want to lavish My graces on them, and they do not want to accept them. They treat Me as a dead object, whereas My Heart is full of love and mercy. In order that that you may know at least some of My pain, imagine the most tender of mothers who has great love for her children, while those children spurn her love. Consider her pain. No one is in a position to console her. This is but a pale image and likeness of My love” (1447).

Throughout the Diary we encounter magnificent prayers addressing God’s mercy, prayers that urge us to venerate God’s infinite mercy and compassion toward any soul that seeks to be joined with Him. *“Praise the Lord, my soul, for*

everything, and glorify His mercy, for His goodness is without end. Everything will pass, but His mercy is without limit or end. And although evil will attain its measure, in mercy there is no measure. Oh my God, even in the punishments You send down upon the earth I see the abyss of Your mercy, for by punishing us here on earth, You free us from eternal punishment. Rejoice, all you creatures, for you are closer to God in His infinite mercy than a babe is to its mother’s heart. O God, You are compassion itself for the greatest sinners who sincerely repent. The greater the sinner, the greater his right to God’s mercy” (423).

St. Faustina reminds us of the meaning of the Eucharist and the Holy Trinity. *“Jesus, when (...) in Holy Communion (...) You (...) condescend to dwell in the little heaven of my heart, I try to keep You company throughout the day. I do not leave You alone for a moment, even though I am in the company of other people or those entrusted to my care. My heart is always united to Him. When I sleep, I offer Him every beat of my heart. When I am awake, I immerse myself in Him in silence. On awaking, I make a brief act of adoration to the Holy Trinity and thank God for allowing me to live yet another day, that the mystery of the incarnation of His Son may once more be repeated in me, and once again His sorrowful Passion may unfold before my eyes. I try to make it easier for Jesus to pass through me to other souls. I go everywhere with Jesus. His presence accompanies me everywhere” (486).*





How to pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy?

- Our Father...
- Hail Mary...
- I Believe in God...

On the large beads:

- Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ for our sins and those of the whole world.

On the small beads:

- For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world. (10 times)

In conclusion:

- Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world (3 times)
- Jesus, I trust in You (3 times)

The Chaplet of Divine Mercy

On September 13, 1935, Sister Faustina had a terrible vision of a destroying Angel (“the agent of divine wrath”) about to strike some place on the planet. She began praying, begging him to put off the punishment until the world did penance. At first, her pleas seemed in vain, but presently she saw the Holy Trinity and felt the power of Christ’s grace in her soul. Again she began to plead for the world in words that welled up out of the silence of her soul:

“Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ for our sins and those of the whole world; for the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us” (475).

Her prayer was answered and the angel was prevented from carrying out the chastisement. The following morning, Sister Faustina heard these interior words: *“Every time you enter the chapel, start reciting the prayer which I taught you yesterday”* (476).

Later, she was instructed in the recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy: “This prayer will serve to appease My wrath. You will recite it for nine days, on the beads of the rosary, in the following manner: 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 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” (476).

Jesus Himself tells us why it is so important to recite this prayer: “Recite the chaplet unceasingly that I have taught you. Whoever recites it will receive great mercy at the hour of death. Priests will recommend it to sinners as their last hope of salvation. Even in the case of the most hardened sinner, if he were to recite this chaplet only once, he would receive grace from My infinite mercy. I desire that the

whole world know My infinite mercy. I desire to grant unimaginable graces to those souls that trust in My mercy” (687).

“Oh, what great graces I will grant to souls that say this chaplet; the very depths of My tender mercy are stirred for the sake of those who say the chaplet” (848). *“At the hour of their death, I defend as My own glory every soul that will say this chaplet; or when others say it for a dying person, the indulgence is the same”* (811).

“Through the chaplet you will obtain everything, if what you ask is compatible with My will” (1731).

After Faustina’s death, the message of God’s mercy began to spread throughout the world. However, owing to the political situation prevailing in Poland during and after the war, the Church found it difficult to verify the authenticity of Faustina’s writings. As a result, the Vatican was forced to impose a temporary ban on the spreading of the revelations. Eventually, however, the writings were subjected to a thorough scrutiny. Since then, scholars and theologians have been staggered by the ability of a simple nun, with barely two winters of formal education, to write so profoundly and so clearly on the mystical life. Her writings were found to be entirely free of theological error. They are now numbered among the masterpieces of mystical literature.



The old chapel housing the tomb of Saint Faustina



Lagiewniki – the Capital City of Divine Mercy

The chief purpose of Holy Father's pilgrimage to Poland on August 2002 was to visit the Shrine of Divine Mercy in Cracow-Lagiewniki. At the Eucharistic celebration, John Paul II dedicated a new church, solemnly entrusted the world to the Divine Mercy, and declared Lagiewniki to be the capital city of Divine Mercy. After all, had not Jesus promised that "the spark preparing the world for His final coming" (Diary, 1732) would fly forth from here?

Until World War II, the Convent of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Cracow-Lagiewniki remained a private institution, serving the sisters and those entrusted to their care. Today, it houses the sanctuary of the Divine Mercy with its famous, grace-working image of the Merciful Jesus, and the relics of Sister Faustina. Thousands of pilgrims regularly converge on this spot from all over the world. Here the message of mercy is proclaimed. Prayers are offered up for God's mercy for the world. Acts of mercy are rendered to those in need. Here also apostles of God's Mercy receive their spiritual formation.

The Mercy Message

The message of mercy is simply this: that God loves us, all of us, no matter how great our sins. He wants us to turn to Him so that He may bless us. He wants us to recognize His mercy and allow it to flow through us to others. In this way, all will come to share in His joy. To repeat: it's as simple as **ABC**: **A**sk for His Mercy. God wants us to approach Him, repent of our sins, and ask for His Mercy. **B**e Mer-

ciful. God wants us to receive His mercy and let it flow through us to others. **C**ompletely Trust. God wants us to know that the graces of His mercy are dependent upon our trust.

The Canonization of Sister Faustina

On the first Sunday after Easter, April 18, 1993, at St. Peter's Square in Rome, Pope John Paul II declared Sister Faustina a member of the community of the blessed. She was canonized in the Jubilee Year 2000 on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 30th. She is, therefore, the first saint of the Third Millennium.

In his canonization Mass homily, the Holy Father pointed out that by Divine Providence, the life of this humble daughter of Poland was inextricably linked with the history of the recently ended 20th century. "In fact, it was between the First and Second World Wars that Christ entrusted His message of mercy to her. Those who remember, who witnessed or participated in the events of those years and the horrible sufferings they caused for millions of people, know well how necessary was the message of mercy (...). What will the years ahead bring us? What will man's future on earth be like? We are not given to know. However, it is certain that in addition to new progress there will unfortunately be no lack of painful experiences. But the light of divine mercy, which the Lord wished to return to the world through Sister Faustina's charism, will illumine the way for the men and women of the third millennium.

"Sister Faustina's canonization has a particular eloquence: by this act I intend today to pass this message on to the new

millennium. I pass it on to all people, so that they will learn to know even better the true face of God and the true face of their brethren. (...) Sister Faustina Kowalska wrote in her Diary: *'I feel tremendous pain when I see the sufferings of my neighbors. All my neighbors' sufferings reverberate in my own heart; I carry their anguish in my heart in such a way that it even physically destroys me. I would like all their sorrows to fall upon me, in order to relieve my neighbor'* (Diary, 365). This is the degree of compassion to which love leads, when it takes the love of God as its measure! (...) It is this love which must inspire humanity today, if it is to face the crisis of the meaning of life, the challenges of the most diverse needs and, especially, the duty to defend the dignity of every human person. Thus the message of divine mercy is also implicitly a message about the value of every human being. Each person is precious in God's eyes; Christ gave his life for each one; to everyone the Father gives his Spirit and offers intimacy (...) This consoling message is addressed, above all, to those who, afflicted by a particularly harsh trial or crushed by the weight of the sins they committed, have lost all confidence in life and are tempted to give in to despair. To them the gentle face of Christ is offered; those rays from his heart touch them and shine upon them, warm them, show them the way, and fill them with hope. How many souls have been consoled by the prayer Jesus, I trust in you, which Providence intimated through Sister Faustina! This simple act of abandonment to Jesus dispels the thickest clouds and lets a ray of light penetrate every life. *"Jezu, ufam tobie"* (...) And you, Faustina, a gift of God to our time, a gift from the land of Poland to the whole Church, obtain for us an awareness of the depth of divine mercy; help us to have a living experience of it and to bear witness to it among our brothers and sisters. May your message of light and hope spread throughout the world, spurring sinners to conversion, calming rivalries and hatred, and opening individuals and nations to the practice of brotherhood. Today, fixing our gaze with you on the face of the risen Christ, let us make our own your prayer of trusting abandonment and say with firm hope: Christ Jesus, I trust in you! *Jezu, ufam tobie!*" (Homily of the Holy Father, 30 April 2000).

Robert Kasza ●