

Father O'Connor's Homily for 24 April 2022
Second Sunday of Easter-C
Divine Mercy Sunday

Acts of the Apostles 5: 12-16
Revelation 1: 9-11a, 12-13, 17-19
John 20: 19-31

This Sunday after Easter is called "Divine Mercy Sunday" and it is a gift to us from Saint Pope John Paul II. In the year 2000, he canonized Sister Faustina who had promoted the Divine Mercy devotion in a big way.

Saint Faustina was baptized Helena Kowalska in 1905 in Poland. Helena was the third oldest of ten children. Her parents were very devout Catholics. They were also very poor people so, at the age of 16, Helena took a job as a maidservant to bring some more income to her family.

When she was 19 years old she had a vision of Jesus at the scourging at the pillar. Jesus looked at Helena and said, "I have been calling you to become a religious sister. What's keeping you?" And so at the age of 20 she entered the convent.

In the convent Helena Kowalska was known as Sister Faustina. She worked in the garden, cooked meals, answered the door and welcomed visitors. She contracted tuberculosis, and at the age of 33 she died. Sister Faustina had a great devotion to the mercy of God, and she draws us to a greater awareness of and appreciation for God's mercy.

The picture in the sanctuary this weekend, and the shrine in the back of the church, are a depiction of Jesus as He appeared to Saint Faustina. Jesus is clothed in white and raising his right hand in a gesture of blessing. White and red rays shine from His heart, signifying the water and blood that flowed from Christ's heart at the crucifixion, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. And the caption: "Jesus, I trust in you."

Pope John Paul II said that this devotion to the Lord's Divine Mercy has at its core the preciousness of every human life in God's eyes. God sent His Divine Son Jesus to die for the sins of every single human being that has ever lived or that ever will live.

Have you ever wondered, "Will I go to heaven one day?" I think we have all wondered this. With God's grace, with God's mercy, that is what God intends. But I need to ask myself, "Am I using the grace that God gives me every day to turn away from my sins and to grow in holiness? Or am I just putting the whole thing off?"

The Gospel today tells us about Jesus visiting the apostles in that upper room on that first Easter Sunday evening. They had locked the doors out of fear. But Jesus comes right through and says, “Peace be with you.” And then He says to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”

He gave them, and has given us, a Sacrament – the Sacrament of Penance, Confession, Reconciliation. I not only hear Confessions, I also go to Confession. It is a regular part of my life because I am a sinner and I need God’s mercy. To be a good confessor for others I need to be a good penitent too.

Is God’s offer of mercy in the Sacrament of Penance a regular part of your life? [Confessions are heard each week at Saint Joseph Church on Thursday evenings following the 7:00 PM Mass until 8:30 PM, and on Saturday mornings from 11:00 AM until 12:00 Noon.]

Here are some common excuses for not going to Confession:

“I don’t do anything that’s so bad. I haven’t robbed any banks. I haven’t murdered anyone. I’m a good person!” REALLY??? Well, if that is what you are thinking, this sounds a lot like the sin of pride – claiming that you don’t have any sins and, therefore, you don’t have any need for God’s mercy.

Or perhaps thinking that you don’t need the Sacrament of Penance because God is going to forgive you anyway. That sounds a lot like the sin of presumption – presuming upon God’s mercy. [What if you seriously offended someone close to you and afterwards decided that there was no need to tell them you were sorry because they always forgive you anyway?]

Or maybe afraid to go to Confession because you think that your sins are too great and that God could never forgive you. Well, that sounds like despair – thinking that your life is without any hope of salvation.

But look at the cross: His arms are wide open for everyone!

And so, am I ready to accept His Divine Mercy? Notice, I say “accept” His mercy and not “deserve” His mercy. Why? Because if we deserved it, it wouldn’t be mercy, now would it?

A consoling message of Divine Mercy is something that Saint Faustina said that Our Lord had revealed to her: that He comes to every single person before they die, offering them the grace of final repentance.

Now the person can accept that grace or refuse that grace, but that is how much Jesus wants us to go to heaven.

This message offers some consolation to any of us who have family members or friends who seem to have died unprepared: that the Lord was there with them in those last moments, offering His merciful grace of final repentance.

When Pope Francis was hearing Confessions as a priest and bishop in Argentina, he would often say to people who were scrupulous or despairing: “Go in peace. And let yourself be mercied by God.” I love that line: “Let yourself be mercied by God.”

On this Divine Mercy Sunday, I, a fellow sinner, encourage you to open your heart to Him, because His heart is wide open to every single one of us.

“Go in peace. And let yourself be mercied by God.”

And as Saint Faustina taught us to pray, “Merciful Jesus, I trust in you!”