

JMJ CHS

For any of you who are still not that familiar with the *Divine Mercy* devotion, a little review might be in order. Back in the 1930s, in Poland, Jesus appeared to a nun named Faustina Kowalska. She might be considered another one of those “unlikely candidates”, pretty much a nobody within the walls of her convent. Nevertheless, God chose her to be his *Secretary of Divine Mercy*. The result of their encounters, Jesus and Faustina, consists of...

– A book, called *Divine Mercy in My Soul*, which contains the messages given to Faustina. It's been a best seller for many years. There is also the *Divine Mercy Novena*, where we focused on praying last week, for all kinds of people who might need God's mercy. The last category, finished up just on Friday, was to pray for the *Lukewarm*. Jesus had some strong opinions about people who are lukewarm in their Faith. You'll find that in the Book of Revelation.

– Then there is the *Divine Mercy Image* which is now one of the most recognized pictures of Jesus in the world. The signature associated with this image is *Jesus I trust in You*. or, in Polish, *Jesu Ufam Tobie*.

– And most famously, *The Chaplet of Divine Mercy* which we are encouraged to say daily, ideally at 3 o'clock, the *Hour of Mercy*, when Jesus died on the cross. We say the Chaplet on our rosary beads. Takes about 12 minutes. We will sing it this afternoon in the 3 o'clock hour as part of our annual Divine Mercy devotion.

Pope John Paul II, being from Poland and living during World War II, and then the Cold War, naturally had a personal interest in the apparitions and promoted the devotion, which includes establishing today, the second Sunday of Easter, as *Divine Mercy Sunday*. And he was the one who moved for the canonization of Faustina, who is, incidentally, one of the saints of our altar. We have brought her relic out today. And by the way, I would also like to mention that there is a Detroit connection to the Divine Mercy. The Felician Sisters of Livonia were the first to transcribe the messages from Polish into English. Also, the headquarters of the Divine Mercy is in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. The custodians are the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception - MIC for short.

The Divine Mercy messages were a great consolation to the people of Poland who suffered much in World War II. They had the first holy cards that invited them and encouraged them to pray for mercy, and they were ultimately given what they asked for, the war came to an end, and the rebuilding process began. And certainly one of the great gifts of mercy that came to Poland was the election of their native son, Carol Wojtya as pope. St. John Paul II. This certainly was a great part of the healing of the Polish people after suffering for so long at the hands of the Nazis and then the communist regime of Stalin.

This concept of Divine Mercy is certainly nothing new to our times. It goes all the way back to the beginning. After the fall of Adam and Eve, the relationship between God and man was fractured. Immediately, however, God promised a redeemer, one who would *crush the head of the serpent* and restore the relationship between God and man. In the many intervening years leading up to that Messiah, there were many examples of God showing mercy to his wayward people.

But, you can't talk about mercy without talking about justice. They are two sides of the same coin. Justice is when we get what we deserve. And mercy is when we don't get what we deserve. And there is one scripture passage from the Book of Judith in the Old Testament which says something very interesting, and that is that in the end, *mercy triumphs over judgment*. God wants to be merciful. And he wants us to know that while He has many fine qualities, mercy is His Greatest Attribute.

One analogy that I like to use, which I learned in the seminary in philosophy class, is that the famous Greek thinker Aristotle spoke about there being models out there, in the cosmos, of the various types of positive qualities, or attributes, that we might find down here on the earthly plane. He called them The FORMS. So, if there's perfect kindness that is practiced by someone here in the world, there is a *Form*, or model of it somewhere, out there, in the universe. If there is perfect humility, lived out, by someone, somewhere in the world, there would necessarily be a *Form* of it somewhere out there, in the cosmos. If there is perfect wisdom, exhibited by somebody down here..... well, you get the idea. (I was actually thinking of Mother Teresa as I wrote out these comments.)

But I remember our philosophy professor used the example of a judge. Now we typically imagine judges as people who, we at least hope, will have supreme knowledge of the law, along with perfect wisdom, patience, insight, powers of discernment, and that they will ultimately render a just decision, but will also find a way to be..... merciful. But there is always a balance between those two things on the scales of justice. If I am the offender, and I stand before the judge, I would most certainly hope that the scales tip in my favor and that the judge will be merciful to me, even though I might be totally deserving of a harsh sentence. And so, if this judge is perfectly just and merciful, Aristotle would again say that there is a Form of that somewhere out there in the universe. We, of course, now recognize that Form, as God. Perfectly just, but also perfectly merciful. It's a paradox. And the messages of the *Divine Mercy* help us to better understand God's greatest attribute. Faustina's book, *Divine Mercy in My Soul*, is on many people's bookshelf, right next to the Bible.

We are living in "interesting" times. And more and more people, I think, are beginning to pay attention. It seems that whenever things turn sour in our world, people tend to fall to their knees.

But history shows that this lasts only a short time, and then people soon return to their old ways. They return to their...lukewarmness.

But I think the events of the last few years are different and we might ask if we have begun to change on some level. Are we more devout than we were before the plague? Have we collectively learned anything as a result of being disciplined during that terrible time? I would hopefully say, yes. Discipline has its effect. At least for some, some of the time.

Our second reading today comes from St. Peter. Despite his shaky beginnings, I believe that he eventually became a wise, patient, gracious, just, and merciful shepherd, our first Pope. But he had to endure many humbling lessons along the way, before he could claim the title of God's representative on earth.

That passage from 1 Peter Chapter 1 has a personal meaning for me. I was mysteriously led to it many years ago where it served as a means of explaining to me, personally, a difficult time that I was going through. It was a sad, confusing, and very unpleasant phase of my life, when God was disciplining and preparing me for a future still unknown to me. I came to eventually label it as a kind of spiritual Boot Camp, or more theologically, my own personal *dark night of the soul*.

The translation from my personal Bible was a little bit different than the one we read today. One little phrase was added that you will not find in many Bibles. "*And now, for a little while, if need be, you are made sorrowful by various trials, so that....*" you might become more patient, gracious, humble, fill in the blank. I didn't know at that time what God had in store for my future, but He did. So He was preparing me...for this. Preaching and being a priest.

Could it possibly be that the whole world needs to read Peter's letter, so as to help everyone recognize, in our trials, that God is doing something special. Something actually very merciful?

Well I hope that we, the people, will eventually learn from history, from St. Faustina's messages, and will call out to God, asking for mercy. And not only for ourselves and our loved ones, but also for others, including those we don't even know, or those we don't even like. This would be an act of mercy on our part, for the world we live in. And, that's exactly what our novena was all about. We here, lukewarm as we may sometimes be, prayed for those out there.

Scripture says that God disciplines those he loves, and I do believe He loves His world. All of His creation. Thus I believe he will allow various trials both natural and unnatural, to force people to think about things they don't really want to think about. Perhaps to fall to their knees, and plead for mercy. And to be saved.

~Fr. John