

## Chapter One

### What Is Divine Mercy Sunday and Why Is It Important?

#### Q. 1. What is Divine Mercy Sunday?

Divine Mercy Sunday is now the title of the Second Sunday of the Easter season. It was named by Pope John Paul II at the canonization of St. Maria Faustina on April 30, 2000, and then officially decreed by the Vatican.

Pope John Paul II described Mercy Sunday:

"In a special way, it is the *Sunday of thanks-giving* for all goodness that God has shown us in the whole Easter mystery" (April 23, 1995). Here, he is underscoring the Church's understanding that Divine Mercy Sunday as the Octave Day of Easter brings us the fullness of Christ's Resurrection - pointing back to the first day of our celebration on Easter Sunday, and now to its fullness on the eighth day, the Octave.

Divine Mercy Sunday, then, can be seen as the convergence of all the mysteries and graces of Holy Week and Easter Week. It is like a multiexposure photograph of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and Easter Week. Or we can think of it as a converging lens that focuses the light of the Risen Christ into a radiant beam of merciful love and grace for the whole world. It combines both the first and eighth days of Easter, celebrating the great graces that are available to us through our Risen Lord's victory over sin, death, and the Evil One.

In fact, Our Lord revealed various revelations about His mercy to St. Faustina (whom you will learn more about later), including the flood of mercy which is available on this day "for all souls, especially for poor sinners":

On one occasion, I heard these words: **My daughter, tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy. I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and a 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 floodgates through which graces flow are opened. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or of angel, will be able to fathom it throughout all eternity. Everything that exists has come forth from the very depths of My most tender mercy. Every soul in its relation to Me will contemplate My love and mercy throughout eternity. The Feast of Mercy emerged from My very depths of tenderness. It is my desire that it be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. Mankind will not have peace until it turns**

**to the Fount of My Mercy** (*Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, 699*).

#### Q. 2. Why do we need Divine Mercy Sunday?

Your sins and my sins are the short answer!

Mercy Sunday brings us Our Lord's promise of an "ocean of graces" for souls, "especially for poor sinners." And each one of us, as a sinner, sorely needs these graces of the Risen Christ to wash away the misery of our sins. Even those of us who are striving for holiness need deeper conversion and renewal.

Look at it this way: sin is the problem; Divine Mercy is the answer; and now we have a special day on which to receive that mercy in great abundance. We would be foolish not to avail ourselves of God's generous offer.

#### Q. 3. What is the significance of the day being celebrated worldwide?

The significance of the worldwide celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday is that the graces promised by Our Lord aren't just for you and me - they are now made known and available to the whole world! No one is to be excluded. We are all sinners.

Remember that our Merciful Savior told St. Faustina: **"My daughter tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy"** (*Diary, 699*).

In His great love, God desires to "have mercy upon all" (Rom 11 :32).

Just as each of us needs Divine Mercy, so the whole world urgently needs it. God's Ten Commandments are constantly being broken. We live in an increasingly secularized society that ignores God and produces violence, hatred, wars, poverty, starvation, drug abuse, epidemics like AIDS, and legalized abortion.

With this global view in mind, we can plead for God's mercy on the whole world as we prepare for Mercy Sunday and then celebrate it ourselves.

#### Q. 4. What is the special meaning of the announcement about Divine Mercy Sunday coming at St. Faustina's canonization?

Not only was Sr. Maria Faustina Kowalska canonized on Mercy Sunday 2000, but there was a second "canonization" of sorts that day in St. Peter's Square.

The moment came when Pope John Paul II said in his canonization homily on April 30, 2000, "It is important that we accept the whole message that comes to us from the word of God on this Second Sunday of Easter, which from now on throughout the Church, will be called 'Divine Mercy Sunday.'"

By making this declaration about Mercy Sunday, the Holy Father put the Church's seal of approval on the whole Divine Mercy message and devotion! That is why he also emphasized during his homily that St. Faustina's canonization and this message of Divine Mercy is "God's gift to our time."

The pope said that this gift of mercy will be

particularly needed in the Third Millennium. And Mercy Sunday, as the main revelation that Jesus gave to St. Faustina, is the crowning of that gift of mercy for the whole world in our time!

**Q. 5. What graces can I receive on the day?**

Our Lord revealed to St. Faustina His desire to literally flood us with His graces on that day. Just consider and savor each of the promises and desires that He expressed about Mercy Sunday, which are recorded in the *Diary of St. Maria Faustina* in number 699 - the main passage about Mercy Sunday:

- **On that day the very depths of My tender Mercy are open.**
- **I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon souls who approach the Fount of My mercy [the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist].**
- **The soul that will go to Confession [beforehand] and receive Holy Communion [on that day] shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment.**
- **On that day all the divine floodgates through which graces flow are opened.**
- **Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet.**
- **My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or angel, will be able to fathom it throughout eternity.**
- **Every soul in its relation to Me will contemplate My love and mercy throughout all eternity.**
- **The Feast of Mercy emerged from My very depths of tenderness.**
- **It is My desire that it be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter.**
- **Mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of My Mercy.**

Now these promises and desires point to an amazing flood of graces that are available to us on Mercy Sunday! Do not limit your expectations - all the divine floodgates are open that day.

**Q. 6. What about the indulgences for Divine Mercy Sunday? How can I receive an indulgence for myself or for a soul in purgatory?**

Bear with me since this answer is a little longer and more involved than most.

First, we need to make one thing clear: The extraordinary graces mentioned in the last answer, which are based on private revelations contained in St. Faustina's *Diary*, are not replaced by the indulgences that the Church has granted for the feast day. Rather, the plenary and partial indulgences provide the faithful with another

opportunity to receive graces on Mercy Sunday - either for oneself or a soul in purgatory. And this opportunity for graces is officially sanctioned by the Church.

To understand these graces, we must understand what an indulgence is. When we sin, we do not only offend God, but we also introduce a disorder into our life and the lives of other people. It's true that in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we receive forgiveness from God through the ministry of the Church when we repent, confess our sins, and do penance. Even so, some disorder due to our sins usually remains. And there are temporal consequences or punishments attached to that disorder. ("Temporal" simply means relating to our earthly life or existence.)

However, the good news is that Christ has given us the Church. As His Mystical Body, she has been granted the power to bind and loose in His name and to distribute graces from His superabundant treasury of merits - all flowing from His redemptive death. These treasures of redemption or indulgences are available to all the faithful and can be used to remit or take away the temporal punishment due to sin for ourselves or the deceased. Further these merits of redemption can be partial or plenary (complete).

We can turn now to the indulgences granted for the faithful who participate in Mercy Sunday, which was available for the first time on Divine Mercy Sunday 2003. . . The Holy Father granted the plenary and partial indulgences "motivated by an ardent desire to foster in Christians this devotion to Divine Mercy ... in the hope of offering great spiritual fruit to the faithful," the official decree said.

The Pope wanted the indulgences to be available on Divine Mercy Sunday "in order to impress deeply on the souls of the faithful the precepts and teachings of Christian faith" regarding the mercy of God, according to a 2002 Vatican announcement.

The indulgences are a further reminder of our Lord's mercy and our obligation to show mercy to our neighbor. "In this way, [the faithful] can foster a growing love for God and for their neighbor, and ... they in turn might be persuaded to show a prompt pardon to their brothers and sisters," the decree said.

In order to receive the plenary indulgence, the faithful must go to confession, receive the Eucharist, and offer prayers for the intentions of the Pope. Additionally, one must "with a soul totally detached from affection to any sin, even venial, participate in the pious practices undertaken in honor of Divine Mercy, or at least to recite in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament ... the Our Father, the Creed, and a pious invocation to the Merciful Lord Jesus," the decree said.

A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful who, at least with a contrite heart, pray to Jesus a legitimately approved invocation or prayer.

**Q. 7. Why should I go to confession beforehand?**

You should go beforehand in order to receive the best possible Holy Communion on Mercy Sunday. Sin is the only obstacle to our fervent reception of Holy Communion, and our sins can be wiped away by the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In fact, the very Gospel of the day itself has been for centuries John 20:19-31. This reading

describes the Risen Savior's institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is the Sacrament of Mercy, which Our Lord in St. Faustina's *Diary* calls the **tribunal of mercy** (1448) and the **fountain of My mercy** (1602). It is in the confessional that **the greatest miracles take place and are incessantly repeated** (1448), Jesus told her.

We should receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to the very day of Mercy Sunday for a couple of reasons. First, the purpose of Lent is to prepare us for Easter and Divine Mercy Sunday as the eighth day of thanksgiving for God's mercy - so we shouldn't wait until the last moment. Second, from a practical standpoint, going earlier is a way to be sensitive to the reality that there is usually a shortage of priests to hear everyone's confession on the day itself.

Q. 8. What about receiving Holy Communion on the day itself?

In receiving Holy Communion, we receive Jesus who is Mercy Incarnate. Receiving Him on Mercy Sunday is extra special because He has promised to give us so many graces. Remember - all the divine floodgates of His graces are open! Besides confession, we should prepare through prayer, recollection, and expectation, desiring to receive all that the Lord has to offer us.

Jesus told St. Faustina how much He desires to come to human hearts in the Holy Eucharist, but far too many of them are not well disposed to receive Him:

**I desire to unite Myself with human souls; My great delight is to unite Myself with souls. Know, my daughter, that when I come to a human heart in Holy Communion, My hands are full of all kinds of graces which I want to give to the soul. But souls do not even pay attention to Me; they leave Me to Myself and busy themselves with other things. Oh, how sad I am that souls do not recognize Love! They treat Me as a dead object** (*Diary, 1385*).

On Mercy Sunday, we should strive to receive the best Holy Communion of our lives - with the eyes of our soul fixed on Jesus. What an opportunity to grow in holiness!

Q. 9. Why should the priest or deacon give his homily on Divine Mercy on that day?

The priest or deacon is called to give his homily on the Scripture readings of the day, and all the readings of the three cycles for that Sunday (A,B, and C) are on mercy. The Holy Father emphasized this very point in his homily at St. Faustina's canonization when he established Mercy Sunday for the whole Church.

The Responsorial Psalm 118 is a hymn to God's mercy. We have just seen that in the Gospel of the day, John 20:19-31, Jesus institutes the Sacrament of Reconciliation, one of the great Sacraments of Mercy. Also, in the same Gospel reading, St. Thomas professes "My Lord and My God!" This is

Thomas's great act of trust in Divine Mercy Incarnate after the Merciful Savior shows him the wounds of mercy in His hands and in His side.

When speaking to her about Mercy Sunday, Jesus also told St. Faustina about His desire that the priests preach on Divine Mercy on that day:

**No soul will be justified until it turns with confidence to My mercy, and this is why the first Sunday after Easter is to be the Feast of Mercy. On that day, priests are to tell everyone about My great and unfathomable mercy** (*Diary, 570*).

Q. 10. On Divine Mercy Sunday, should I venerate the Image of Jesus, The Divine Mercy?

Yes, the Image of Jesus, The Divine Mercy, is to be venerated on Mercy Sunday. It is to be given a place of honor in our churches and homes on this Sunday. Our Lord appeared to St. Faustina and then directed her to have this appearance of Himself as the Merciful Savior painted and then venerated publicly. He told her, **I want the Image to be solemnly blessed on the first Sunday after Easter, and I want it to be venerated publicly so that every soul may know about it** (*Diary, 341*).

In the Image, our Risen Savior has pale and red rays streaming from His side. These rays symbolize the Blood and Water that flowed from His side while He was on the cross. But, in His appearance to St. Faustina, they had been transformed into glorious rays, revealing a fount of healing graces for sinners who will turn to Him with trust. That is why the Image always bears the inscription: "Jesus, I trust in You!"

In the first entry of the *Diary*, which Jesus told St. Faustina to keep, she wrote a beautiful hymn about the Image. We could use it as part of our blessing of the Image on Mercy Sunday: Eternal Love, You command Your Sacred Image to be painted And reveal to us the inconceivable fount of mercy, You bless whoever approaches Your rays,  
And a soul all black will turn into snow.

O sweet Jesus, it is here You established the throne of Your mercy To bring joy and hope to sinful man.

From Your open Heart, as from a pure fount, Flows comfort to a repentant heart and soul. May praise and glory for this Image

Never cease to stream from man's soul.

May praise of God's mercy pour from every heart, Now and at every hour, and forever and ever.

In our churches and homes, we can venerate the Image of Jesus, The Divine Mercy, by gazing upon it in prayer and adoration. As signs of our love for Jesus, we can place candles and flowers before the Image. First and foremost, as we gaze upon our Merciful Savior in prayer, we can decide to trust in Him and to perform works of mercy - responding to the call to be merciful just as He has shown mercy to us.

Q. 11. What are the other key elements to the message and devotion?

In addition to the Holy Eucharist as the presence of Mercy Incarnate and the Sacrament of Reconciliation as the tribunal of mercy, we can point out special features of the devotions to The Divine Mercy

The *Image* of Jesus, The Divine Mercy, reminds us to be merciful and to trust in Jesus. We should venerate the Image by giving it a prominent place in our parish churches and in our homes. We can also carry the Image with us in the form of a prayercard.

The *Divine Mercy Chaplet* is a prayer of special power because it invokes the Passion of Jesus and extends the reality of the Mass for us. We plead for mercy not just for ourselves, but for the whole world. Our Lord recommends that we pray the Chaplet especially for the dying.

The *Novena to The Divine Mercy* focuses on the needs of the whole world and not just on our own personal needs, as we pray for a different group of souls on each of the nine days. It is like an echo of our solemn intercession for the whole Church and the world on Good Friday. We can pray the Novena at any time, but it is especially appropriate on the nine days before Mercy Sunday.

During the *Three O'clock Hour*, we are asked to commemorate the Hour of Great Mercy at three in the afternoon when Jesus died for our sins. We are asked to immerse ourselves in the Passion of Jesus by taking some time for prayer. This is a particularly appropriate time for praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet and the Novena.

## THE CHAPLET OF THE DIVINE MERCY

(to be recited on ordinary rosary beads)

Begin with:

**Our Father ..., Hail Mary ..., The Apostles' Creed.**

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.**

*(From the Diary of Saint Maria Faustina, 476)*

*With Ecclesiastical Approval*

*"Through the Chaplet you will obtain everything, if what you ask for will be compatible with My will" (Diary, 1731, see also 1541).*

*"By this novena [of chaplets, before the Feast of Mercy], I will grant every possible grace to souls" (Diary, 796).*

*"Even if a sinner were most hardened, if only once he will recite this chaplet, he will obtain grace from My infinite mercy" (Diary, 687).*

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