

Gospel: Jn 20: 19-31

On October 5, 1938, at the young age of 33, Sister, now Saint Faustina passed into eternal life. She'd had only three years of education. So hers had been the humblest tasks in the convent, usually in the kitchen or garden, tasks which she gladly performed. On February 22, 1931, Our Lord appeared to her, bringing with Him a wonderful message of Mercy for all mankind. He told 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, first in your chapel, and throughout the world." (Diary 47) And that's the image displayed before the altar, today. Jesus added, "I promise that the soul that will venerate 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." (Diary 48).

Although our Lord told St. Faustina "I desire that this image be venerated" we must remember that by itself an image is merely a painting, no matter how beautiful and expressive. Yet, it can point us to the mysteries of the faith and dispose us to grasp and receive what it represents, in this case, Divine Mercy. It is thus a vessel, not the source, a reminder, not the reality. The reality is the merciful fountain of grace flowing from the pierced Heart of Christ on the Cross. (I have to admit, I couldn't have said it better myself, so I stole this paragraph and some of the other lines in this homily from the internet.)

Over the next seven years she continued to receive revelations from our Lord Jesus. He asked Sr. Faustina to record these experiences, which are known today as the Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, and the words contained within are God's loving message of Divine Mercy. On September 13, 1935 Jesus instructed Saint Faustina how to pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Regarding the chaplet, Jesus said "When they say the Chaplet in the presence of the dying, I will stand between My Father and the dying not as the just judge but as the Merciful Savior."(Diary 1541)

And how appropriate, it is that Divine Mercy Sunday would be celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter, a day on which the Gospel tells us of the institution of the sacrament of Penance (or if you prefer, Reconciliation or Confession)! I've heard the Holy Eucharist referred to as the Sacrament of God's love; then Penance must be the Sacrament of his mercy. It fulfills the prophecy of Jeremiah, "I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:34b). That's what happens in Confession. God, not the priest, absolves us of our sins, not merely forgives them. He treats them as though they never happened. Sadly, many of us, myself included, do not avail ourselves of this sacrament of his mercy as often as we should.

God's love for each person knows no bounds, and no sin, no matter how horrible, will separate us from God and His love when we turn to Him in confidence, with contrition and the intent to amend our lives and seek his mercy. God desires our salvation, even more than we desire it ourselves. He took upon Himself the punishment for our sins, suffering the most horrible death ever devised by mankind, death on a cross. However, God gave us freedom, freedom to turn to him as did the Prodigal Son and he will be

waiting for us and welcome us back, or we can turn our backs on him and his mercy to what will be our everlasting sorrow.

Pope John Paul II strove to live and teach the message of Divine Mercy. He described Divine Mercy as the answer to the world's problems and God's message for the new millennium. He beatified and then in the year 2000 canonized Sr. Maria Faustina Kowalska, and he did it in Rome, not in Poland, to underscore that Divine Mercy is for the entire world.

One day Jesus said to St. Faustina, "Humanity will never find peace until it turns with trust to Divine Mercy". (Diary 132) Although our Lord's message to St. Faustina was to pray for Divine Mercy, there is a catch. We are expected to be merciful as well. Jesus told the Saint, "Yes, the first Sunday after Easter is the Feast of Mercy, but there must also be deeds of mercy, which are to arise out of love for me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to absolve yourself from it." (Diary 742). This should not come as a surprise to any of us. Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving servant who refused to forgive a much smaller debt than his master had forgiven him. It concludes, "Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt". And the clincher, "So will my heavenly father do to you unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart." Jesus also said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy". And remember the line from the Our Father, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us". It seems pretty clear to me. As well as asking for his mercy, you and I are to be instruments of God's mercy in our world.