

## **Divine Mercy Reflection for April 19, 2020**

### **Introduction**

There was a time in the Church when the liturgical calendar was so filled with special feast days and themes, that the real meaning of Sunday got buried and sometimes took second place. A major change was made to refocus on the central celebration.

Today is, first of all, and always, a Sunday. It is the commemoration of the day of the resurrection, the day when death was conquered, when suddenly that horrible suffering Jesus endured took on a meaning no one could have imagined. It had to be that way so that we could say today: Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? It is the day that brought to completion the meaning of the Son of God coming among us to share our humanity, so that we could have a share in his divinity and, therefore, his victory over death and sin.

It is also Divine Mercy Sunday. This will take nothing away from the celebration of the Lord's Day. In fact, it brings a special light on The Lord's Day. One of the opening prayers for Divine Mercy Sunday Mass begins: "Heavenly Father and God of Mercy, we no longer look for Jesus among the dead, for He is alive."

Divine Mercy is so many things, all of which have the power to transport us into the heart of the mystery of who God is, and who we are as His beloved creatures.

Before we enter more deeply into devotional prayer, let us reflect for a short while on the ways that the mercy of God lifts up fallen humanity and brings us into that glorious light of His resurrected presence:

Divine Mercy is a profound manner through which we experience God who is love

Divine Mercy Is Without Limit

Divine Mercy is a devotion: with its saints and a history of its development.

Divine Mercy is for right now. This is the time of Mercy.

Divine Mercy is a school of trust.

Divine Mercy is Medicine, both vaccine and antidote.

Divine Mercy is devotion to Jesus Christ

I won't number these, because there are likely many more and why would I want to put a number on the ways that God may show himself to us through his *infinite* mercy.

### **The Divine Quality of Love**

All of physical reality points to spiritual reality. In this sense, all of creation speaks of the glory of God. When Jesus says, in the book of Revelation, "Behold, I make all things new," he is pointing the entire created order towards the new creation, identified by the key event of his resurrection. This is the eighth day of creation, when all is being created anew.

In the same way that God's mercy and his love and his holiness are really one and the same quality of God, for God cannot be divided, this feast is not really separate from the celebration God's triumph over death on the day of the resurrection.

The catechism, in paragraph #1, identifies the first mercy, that God created us for blessing. What do you think, that somehow God was made greater by our arrival on the scene of creation?

The primary focus of the Divine Mercy devotion is the merciful love of God and the desire to let that love and mercy flow towards those in need of it. As he dedicated the Shrine of the Divine Mercy, Pope John Paul II referred to this when he said: "Apart from the mercy of God there is no other source of hope for mankind".

### **The Devotion of Divine Mercy**

This could be considered a day to celebrate Poland's contribution to our devotion to Divine Mercy. The saints are many who inspired Pope St. John Paul's devotion

to the merciful love of God for a broken world full of sinners, but the Polish ones stand out.

**St Faustina Kowalska**, born in the 1930s, received personal revelations from Jesus, who appeared to her and spoke to her about his great mercy, and asked her to record her revelations for the world. She wrote in her diary that, because the time of 3:00 pm corresponds to the hour at which Jesus died on the cross, that this hour is called the "Hour of Divine Mercy", that we should pray the Chaplet of Mercy and venerate the Divine Mercy image at that hour, which we will do.

Pope St John Paul is sometimes called the 'Mercy' Pope. He is the one who had a particular interest in Sr. Faustina's revelations. He is the one whose tremendously prophetic vision saw that there are no accidents of time in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. All of God's actions are 'Kairos' moments. They are the right deeds for the right situations and the right time.

The great pope calls mercy “the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer.” Pope Saint John Paul II truly lived out Christian mercy, and even visited his would-be assassin in prison to forgive him. He canonized Saint Faustina. He instituted Divine Mercy Sunday in 2000. He died on the evening of Divine Mercy Sunday in 2005, and was canonized a saint on Divine Mercy Sunday 9 years later.

Aspects of the devotion include:

1. The image and the prayer: Jesus, I trust in you.
2. Feast of Divine Mercy
3. The Chaplet of Divine Mercy
4. The Hour of Mercy
5. Works of mercy

## **Divine Mercy is Now**

Jesus says, you won't know the hour or the day of the coming of the Son of Man. Your job is to be ready. So, we don't need to fret about that. Our job is to be ready to receive his mercy in **our** being, at **this** time. In that sense, the time of mercy is always **now**. And yet, Pope St. John Paul seemed to have been given a prophetic insight that there is something about this time in history that is going to require a unique awareness of that merciful presence.

## **Divine Mercy is a School of Trust**

The most sad passage in the 700 pages of the Catholic Church is in paragraph 397, where it says, "Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command. **All subsequent sin** would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.

What are you going to trust to get through this crisis. Will it be Netflix and YouTube, as many are proposing?

Fr. Michael Gaitley, some will know as today's writer and speaker about the mercy of God, says that Adam and Eve hid themselves rather than turn back to God and run to him. They had a distorted image of God who would take vengeance against them rather than shower them with his mercy. This distorted image of God has been passed on to us. Fr. Gaitley describes all of Salvation history since then as God's 'School of Trust', God healing the wound in us, so we will trust him and so he can save us.

Dr Tim Gray of the Augustine Institute says somewhat the same thing: "The heart of all rebellion against God, is a disordered vision of God that turns him into a master who seeks to oppress us ... Christ shows us that obedience does not lead to slavery but rather the obedience of the children is the path to authentic freedom."

King David had to go to the school of trust. He went pretty much as far from God as a human can go without leaving God completely. His great psalm of repentance begins: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. In your

compassion, blot out my offenses. O wash me more and more from my guilt, and cleanse me from all my sins. My offenses truly I know them. My sin is always before me. Against you, you alone have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight. David receives permission to return to God through mercy.

In the bible, mercy has different names. It is the same as his steadfast love or his loving kindness or his grace and mercy or his covenant faithfulness. We can trust in God because he is eternally faithful and true even when we are not.

### **Divine Mercy Has no Limits**

The mercy of God makes up for EVERY failure. Mercy transcends all losses, all sins. A full understanding of how deep His mercy goes is really not possible. However, we must try to appreciate how much was lost at the fall of Adam and Eve and the loss of Paradise. This was no little thing. Our spiritual DNA has been damaged and we carry that stain with us.

The 17th century poet, John Milton, wrote Paradise Lost. It made a deep impression on me to read his description of the war in heaven when Lucifer, the angel of light, and one third of all the angels, rebelled against God. Then he and all of them are thrown down from heaven with such force that Lucifer loses consciousness. He is the first to wake up and sees the place to which they have come, the burning sulphur and total desolation.

Milton describes the first thought of Lucifer/Satan/the devil. His first thought was of great sadness because of what he had lost- heaven and the vision of God always before them. But quickly that is gone and he only has anger, not because God threw him down but because God never told the angels of his power to do just that. He realized that he had been fighting a losing battle. Knowing he could not fight God directly, he resolved to undermine the intimacy and loving relationship between God and creation. He totally rejected the possibility of mercy, and is in a constant war against God, through us, trying desperately to get us to do the same.

Perhaps Milton was inspired by Jesus himself, who warns his disciples when dealing with demons: "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning." (Luke 10:18) Jesus knows how far those angels fell. They placed themselves outside of God's mercy, not because it is limited but because they refused it.

But God's plan of salvation from that fate is for us. In this octave of Easter we have many profound reminders of this truth. "Let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again; for forgiveness has risen from the grave" ***St. John Chrysostom***

### **Divine Mercy is Medicine**

The medical labs of the world are looking for a vaccine and a cure. Even with the combined technology and medical know how of the entire world working together, we feel almost powerless. How can this little virus be so powerful that we can't defeat it at will with our human ingenuity and technology.

A reporter was permitted to visit two New York hospitals. He reports that Dr. Michael P. Jones, who runs the physician resident program for the emergency departments at the hospitals he visited, sent his young doctors an email last month asking them to go out of their way to comfort the Covid-19 patients: "Take a few moments if you can to talk about patients' families, their lives, their dreams. Ask if there is a loved one you can call. And lastly, two very difficult things: Hold your patient's hand for a minute as they near death or pass, and ask your entire team to stop for five or 10 seconds, bow your heads, state the patient's name, and ask for silence. This helps us retain our humanity in times of such crisis and gives our patients' families some solace that they were treated with dignity."

It is a beautiful sentiment the doctor is offering. He is recognizing the human need for compassion in the middle of the chaos. What's missing? God, of course, the one who is the source of all courage for the sick and the dying, and consolation for those who suffer loss. Of course the world needs a vaccine and a treatment. But first of all, the world needs to turn to God who, in his mercy, binds up broken

hearts, from whom all healing comes and, most of all, who has shown his glory through his victory over death.

Not too many years ago, a friend was on a ventilator in intensive care at Rockyview hospital. She had H1N1, and we thought surely, with the best of medical equipment and care she would recover, but she did not. She always said that St. Catherine of Sienna had led her into the Catholic Church through the Eucharist. We celebrated a spiritual communion with our friend. Her eyes sparkled with joy as we prayed for her and with her. She did not recover, and now we pray with confidence that God's mercy has brought her into His beatific presence, which she will share with him for all eternity.

Fear is our greatest enemy. Fear that we are missing something. Fear that we can't trust God. Psalm 27 begins: "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid?" Paul tells the Roman Church: With God on our side, who can be against us? Nothing can separate us from the love of God. (Rom 8:31) Divine Mercy is the antidote to all fear and anxiety.

St. Augustine became quite troubled by the evil he saw in the world. How could God's mercy extend to all those people who seemed to him to be quite far from God. He meditated on it like this (paraphrasing): I considered how I would look at people if Augustine was God. What I came to realize was that if God was Augustine and Augustine was God, I could never forgive Augustine for the things he had done and the sin he had committed. I had to let God be God and Augustine be Augustine in order to receive his mercy.

Because of original sin, our awareness of sin is darkened. So mercy sheds light into that darkness. Is this going to be comfortable or feel good. No, it's not. But it's necessary. No doctor can perform surgery without seeing where the tumor is. In God's merciful plan of salvation, Jesus Christ IS that light.

Men may deprive me of property and honour; sickness may take away my strength and other means of serving You; I may even lose Your grace by sin; but

never, never will I lose my hope in You. I will cherish it unto that dreadful moment when all hell will be unchained to snatch my soul away. "No one has hoped in the Lord and has been confounded - **St. Claude de la Colombiere**

### **Divine Mercy is Devotion to Jesus Christ**

Everyone says the world will be different when this is over. It may be that we won't like some of those things about the new world. But Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever," (Heb 13:8) will not change. "His mercy endures forever." (Psalm 136)

I remember praying the rosary with my family, in particular with my mother for the souls in Purgatory. My first adult devotion that I took really seriously though, was the Jesus prayer. I had read *The Way of a Pilgrim*, a story about a peasant who travelled Russian on foot in search of the answer the question about what St. Paul meant where he says, "Pray without ceasing, giving thanks to God in all circumstances." (1 Thess 5:17) He was taught the Jesus prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." (Luke 18:13) It is Jesus himself who is the mercy of God to heal us from our sins.

Paul tells the Ephesians with confidence: "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ, raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus..." (Eph 2:5)

If a man finds it very hard to forgive injuries, let him look at a Crucifix, and think that Christ shed all His Blood for him, and not only forgave His enemies, but even prayed His Heavenly Father to forgive them also: **Saint Philip Neri**

Peter had grown with the Lord. He had been called Satan by Jesus. He had denied the Lord three times. Yet all that is in the past when he proclaims, "Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:3)

Keep close to the Catholic Church at all times, for the Church alone can give you true peace, since she alone possesses Jesus, the true Prince of Peace, in the Blessed Sacrament - ***St. Padre Pio***

### **Divine Mercy Calls Us Back to the Source**

I think you know that when you make a photocopy, then use the copy to make the next copy, and that copy to make the next, that sooner or later, the best qualities of the original are gradually (lost-not just lost but damaged)When an imperfect copy is made, it repeats that imperfection. When other faults are included, they add up until the copy of the copy of the copy no longer resembles the original.

You and I must go back to the originator of mercy. That is our task, we who have come here today, even virtually, to bask in the original and life restoring mercy of God, in this time of great need, and be restored to the original glory of the garden.

The prayer of consecration to Mary includes this line: "If I fall, please lead me back to Jesus. Wash me in the blood and water that flow from his pierced side and help me never to lose my trust in this fountain of mercy." I don't pray it that way. I have stopped saying, "If I fall." I know I can only pray honestly, "When I fall ... because I have fallen, through my own fault ... please lead me back to Jesus. Wash me in the blood and water that flowed from his pierced side, not the blood and water that flowed from his side on the cross onto that Roman soldier, and which is poured into the chalice at the altar - it is in that blood and water that we are washed clean and are healed.

For the sake of his sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world. We need it. The world needs it. God is ready to give it. When our Lord asks each of us, "Where are you?" will we answer, like Adam, "I was afraid, so I hid." or will we say, as we are being invited to today and every moment of our lives, "Jesus, I trust in you."