

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday) Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski April 11, 2021

A blessed Divine Mercy Sunday to you! You may wonder how Pope John Paul II came to proclaim this Sunday, the second Sunday of Easter, as Divine Mercy Sunday. Well, it all began in 1905 with the birth of Helena, the third child of pious Polish peasants, Stanley and Maryanne Kowalski. Since she was seven years old, Helena knew that she wanted to be a nun. Eventually, three years after being refused permission by her parents to join the convent, nineteen-year old Helena followed the calling she received in a vision of the suffering Jesus and took a train to Warsaw with the intent of becoming a nun. Refused admission to religious life at convent-after-convent, apparently due to her obvious poverty and limited education, Helena was finally given a chance and provisionally accepted into a convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. Two years later, Helena was clothed in the habit and received the religious name of Sister Maria Faustina of the Blessed Sacrament.

In 1931, Sister Faustina received the first of many visions of Jesus, clothed in white with red and white rays emanating from his heart. Such rays represent God's **mercy** and the water and blood that flowed from the crucified Jesus' pierced heart, as mentioned in the second reading. This image of the Divine Mercy of Jesus was accompanied with the inscription, "Jesus, I trust in You."

Sister Faustina led a short life; suffering from tuberculosis, she died in 1938. But with the aid of her confessor and her archbishop, devotion to Divine Mercy spread worldwide by the beginning of World War II. However, due to faulty translations of Polish into French and Italian, devotion to Divine Mercy was forbidden by the Vatican for almost two decades until Archbishop Karol Wojtyla, the future Saint Pope John Paul II, was instrumental in reversing the ban in 1978. In due course, he presided at the canonization of Saint Faustina, in the year 2000, at which he also declared this second Sunday of Easter to be known as Divine Mercy Sunday.

That's how this day came to be Divine Mercy Sunday but what is the message at the core of Divine Mercy?

The Divine Mercy message, as relayed by Saint Faustina, is as simple as **ABC**:

**A – Ask for His Mercy.** God wants us to approach Him in prayer constantly, repenting of our sins and asking Him to pour His mercy out upon us and upon the whole world.

**B – Be merciful.** God wants us to receive His mercy and let it flow through us to others. He wants us to be the conduit of his love and forgiveness; extending love and forgiveness to others just as He does to us.

**C – Completely trust in Jesus.** God wants us to know that all the graces of His mercy can only be received by our trust. The more we open, with trust, the door of our hearts and lives to Him, the more graces and mercy we can receive.

This message of Divine Mercy has been emphasized by the three most recent Popes:

- Saint Pope John Paul II, who reiterated the words of Jesus, as chronicled by Saint Faustina: "Humanity will never find peace until it turns with trust to the Divine Mercy."
- Pope Benedict XVI, who said "Mercy is, in reality, the core of the Gospel message; it is the name of God Himself, the face with which He reveals Himself in the Old Testament and fully in Jesus Christ, the Incarnation of creative and redemptive love. ."
- Pope Francis, who summarized the whole message of Divine Mercy with the title of his book, *The Name of God Is Mercy*.

Today's Gospel passage, in which Jesus appears to a doubting Thomas, is most fitting for Divine Mercy Sunday. Jesus showers his mercy, forgiveness and love on Thomas who responds with absolute trust in Jesus with his "all-in" reply of "My Lord and my God!"

But what about us? Are we "all-in?" Are we receptive to Jesus' Divine Mercy and place absolute trust in him? Are we able to be that conduit of God's mercy and forgiveness in the world today?

Those questions were weighing upon me when I came across a real-life example:

Easter Sunday, Mary and I, along with Lynne Everett, attended a premier showing of the movie, *The Ravine*, based upon the novel of the same name; a narrative about evil, and hope; mercy and forgiveness. The movie and book were inspired by the real-life story of a Kansas City couple whose best friend, a loving husband and father, murdered his wife and son and then committed suicide.

Chronicling the extreme grief of this couple when confronted with such a heinous act by a close friend, the movie forced me to face up to how difficult it can be for us, myself included, to show mercy and forgiveness when confronted with horror.

My personal reflection on the movie leads me to three conclusions:

1. That the **ABCs** of Divine Mercy are indispensable to me, to you and to the entire human race. We need to always:
  - **A – Ask for God's Mercy.**
  - **B – Be merciful.**
  - **C – Completely trust in Jesus.**
2. I also came to the realization that Saint Pope John Paul II was absolutely right: "Humanity will never find peace until it turns with trust to the Divine Mercy."
3. And, I finally understand the essence of the core message of Saint Faustina when I say and truly believe:

JESUS, I TRUST IN YOU!