



Divine Mercy Sunday - God's love encounters our misery



On Divine Mercy Sunday, the Church calls us to celebrate the mercy of God, to trust in the divine mercy, and to renew our commitment to showing mercy to others

By Christopher Wells

Each year on the Octave Day of Easter, the Church observes Divine Mercy Sunday. The title “of Divine Mercy” to the Second Sunday of Easter in the year 2000, when Pope St John Paul II canonized St Faustina Kowalska, the most notable advocate of the devotion

Divine Mercy Sunday is enriched by a plenary indulgence (see below) so that experiencing the gift of the Father’s mercy, the faithful might partake to a greater degree in the gift of the consolation of the Holy Spirit.

Father Paul MacDonald, a pastor in the diocese of St Catharines in Ontario, Canada spoke with Vatican News about the importance of seeking forgiveness and trusting in the Lord on this Feast dedicated to the Divine Mercy.

The fact that Divine Mercy Sunday is celebrated on the Octave of Easter is no coincidence, Fr MacDonald said. He noted that although the texts of the liturgy did not change with the addition of the new title, they nonetheless speak to the theme of Divine Mercy. The opening prayer, for instance, addresses the Lord as “God of everlasting mercy,” and there are numerous references to the blood and water that came forth from the side of Christ on the Cross.

Father McDonald also spoke of the roots of the Latin word for mercy, “misericordia” which include the idea of the heart of God, the love of God, “the infinite love of the Lord encountering our misery.” God, he said, “reacts to our misery by compassion, and grace, and healing, and enlightening, and strength, and all the superabundant graces that He gives.

The devotion to the Divine Mercy, Fr McDonald said, can be found in divine public revelation, that is, in the Tradition of the Church (especially the liturgy), and throughout the Sacred Scriptures. But, he explained, the Church also recognizes, per the Catechism, that “throughout the ages, there have been so-called ‘private’ revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church... Guided by the Magisterium of the Church, the *sensus fidelium* knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church” (CCC, 67). In the revelations of St Faustina, Fr McDonald said, the Church has discerned an authentic call in our day that the Divine Mercy might be honoured and called upon more and more; and that we might ourselves renew our commitment to showing mercy to our brothers and sisters.

Citing Pope Francis, Fr McDonald emphasized, “It is not that our Lord ever gets tired of forgiving us, it is that we get tired of asking for forgiveness.” It is true, he said, that God is just and holy, and one who rejects mercy will face “sorrowful,” and even eternal consequences. “But we must never distrust our Lord and His mercy,” Fr McDonald said. “We must have unlimited confidence in His mercy.”

He said that confidence is not a presumption that would allow us to continue sinning. Rather, it is a confidence that we can always “throw ourselves” on God’s mercy, no matter what we have done, “and He is always ready to receive us, during this life, this time of mercy.”

Returning once again to the Catechism, citing what he called “one of the more chilling passages,” Fr McDonald recalled that with death, the time of mercy is over (cf. CCC, 1013). “So therefore, ‘Now is the acceptable time... today is the day of salvation,’ as Saint Paul says. Be reconciled to God – and don’t you ever doubt that He is ready to take you back!”

As noted above, the Church offers a number of indulgences to the faithful on Divine Mercy Sunday. The decree granting those indulgences explains that Pope St John Paul established that the feast should be enriched with a plenary indulgence, “so that the faithful might receive in great abundance the gift of the consolation of the Holy Spirit.” In this way, it continues, “they can foster a growing love for God and for their neighbour, and after they have obtained God’s pardon, they in turn might be persuaded to show a prompt pardon to their brothers and sisters.”

The same decree, from the Apostolic Penitentiary, fully explains the indulgences granted to the faithful on this day:

“And so the Supreme Pontiff, motivated by an ardent desire to foster in Christians this devotion to Divine Mercy as much as possible in the hope of offering great spiritual fruit to the faithful, in the Audience granted on 13 June 2002, to those Responsible for the Apostolic Penitentiary, granted the following Indulgences:

** a plenary indulgence, granted under the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer for the intentions of Supreme Pontiff) to the faithful who, on the Second*

Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday, in any church or chapel, in a spirit that is completely detached from the affection for a sin, even a venial sin, take part in the prayers and devotions held in honour of Divine Mercy, or who, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament exposed or reserved in the tabernacle, recite the Our Father and the Creed, adding a devout prayer to the merciful Lord Jesus (e.g. Merciful Jesus, I trust in you!);

** A partial indulgence, granted to the faithful who, at least with a contrite heart, pray to the merciful Lord Jesus a legitimately approved invocation.*

For those who cannot go to church or the seriously ill

“In addition, sailors working on the vast expanse of the sea; the countless brothers and sisters, whom the disasters of war, political events, local violence and other such causes have been driven out of their homeland; the sick and those who nurse them, and all who for a just cause cannot leave their homes or who carry out an activity for the community which cannot be postponed, may obtain a plenary indulgence on Divine Mercy Sunday, if totally detesting any sin, as has been said before, and with the intention of fulfilling as soon as possible the three usual conditions, will recite the Our Father and the Creed before a devout image of Our Merciful Lord Jesus and, in addition, pray a devout invocation to the Merciful Lord Jesus (e.g. Merciful Jesus, I trust in you).