Divine Mercy Sunday: April 7, 2024.

This is the second week of Easter, and we continue to reap the fruits of the blessings of the risen Christ. Jesus was alive on this earth for over 40 days period after His resurrection. The Bible records more than twelve different appearances of the resurrected Jesus to different people at various times and locations before He ascended into heaven. In each of these appearances, there is joy and faith. The gospel passage this Sunday records one of the appearances of Jesus to his disciples.

Jesus Appears to His Disciples (John 20: 19-29)

"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again, Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Jesus Appears to Thomas Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So, the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ***Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*** Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." **(John 20: 19-29)**

The disciples believed after seeing the risen Jesus, Thomas who was absent then, refused to believe. However, Jesus was not hard on Thomas. Some people need to doubt before they believe. If doubt leads to questions, and questions lead to answers, and if the answers are accepted, then doubt has done good work. It is only when doubt becomes stubbornness and stubbornness becomes a prideful lifestyle that doubt harms faith. When you doubt, don't stop there. Let your doubt deepen your faith as you continue to search for the answer.

Some people think they would believe in Jesus if they could see a definite sign or a miracle. But Jesus says we are blessed if we believe without seeing. The Bible is filled with His Words, and the Holy Communion is the highest gift of Christ's power and presence. Prayer: Lord, I believe, help my little faith. Amen.

The Message of Divine Mercy, and St. Faustina Kowalska (1905 – 1938)

Faustina Kowalska, the Apostle of Mercy, was an ordinary nun who did the duties of a cook, doorkeeper, and gardener. Born in Glogowiec, Poland, in 1905, she had only three years of formal education. She was the third of 10 children to a poor and religious family. Faustina experienced her first vision of Jesus while she was at a dance with her sister, Natalia. Faustina saw a suffering Jesus who instructed her to leave for Warsaw immediately and join a convent. As a teenager, she worked as a domestic servant for a few years. Then in 1925, she joined the religious congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. Sister Faustina lived only 13 years as a nun. She died of tuberculosis in 1938, at the age of 33.

However, pretty soon, she began to be known all over the world as she had been chosen by the Lord Jesus to spread the message of Divine Mercy. According to her diary, Jesus appeared to her several times between 1930 to 1938. During these apparitions, ***Jesus asked her to remind the world about the merciful love of God toward everyone.*** Jesus also gave her a chaplet to be said every day. At night on Sunday,

February 22, 1931, Jesus appeared wearing a white garment with red and pale rays emanating from his heart. During that time, Jesus said to 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 then throughout the world. I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish." Sister Faustina also heard the Lord telling her to dedicate a feast day to the Divine Mercy. It was in the context of this request of the Lord that the Church, through a decree dated May 23, 2000, instituted the Feast of Divine Mercy to be celebrated on the Second Sunday of Easter. Pope John Paul II beatified Sr. Faustina on April 18, 1993. On the following day, he said during a general audience, "God has spoken to us through the spiritual wealth of Blessed Sister Faustina Kowalska."

According to the Diary of Sr. Faustina, Jesus said the following regarding the Feast of Divine Mercy: "Whoever approaches the Fountain of Life on this day will be granted complete forgiveness of sins and punishment." As we celebrate the Feast of Divine Mercy this weekend, let us approach the Lord and ask him for the forgiveness of all our sins. May the Lord bless all of us.

She had special devotions to Mary Immaculate, to the Eucharist, and to the sacrament of confession. The message of mercy that Sister Faustina received is now being spread throughout the world; her diary, Divine Mercy in my Soul, has become the handbook for devotion to the Divine Mercy. St. Faustina Kowalska was beatified in 1993, and canonized in 2000, both by Pope St. John Paul II. She is the patron saint of Mercy.

Divine Mercy Sunday was fixed on the Church calendar on April 30, 2000. This devotion was close to the heart of St. John Paul II and has rapidly spread throughout the world. The Holy Father, Pope Francis, has urged us to keep in mind that we are now living in a time of mercy.

Here are some inspiring quotes from St Faustina's diary on the mercy of God.

1. "'Proclaim that mercy is the greatest attribute of God. All the works of My hands are crowned with mercy.'" (No. 301)

2. "'My daughter, have fear of nothing; I am always with you. All your adversaries will harm you only to the degree that I permit them to do so. You are my dwelling place and my constant repose. For your sake I will withhold the hand which punishes; for your sake, I bless the earth.'" (No. 431)

3. "Jesus: 'My child, life on earth is a struggle indeed; a great struggle for my kingdom. But fear not, because you are not alone. I am always supporting you, so lean on Me as you struggle, fearing nothing. Take the vessel of trust and draw from the fountain of life – for yourself, but also for other souls, especially such as are distrustful of My goodness.'" (No. 1488)

4. "He who knows how to forgive prepares for himself many graces from God. As often as I look upon the cross, so often will I forgive with all my heart." (390, page 175).

5. "'I am love and Mercy Itself. There is no misery that could be a match for My mercy, neither will misery exhaust it, because as it is being granted – it increases. The soul that trusts in My mercy is most fortunate because I Myself take care of it.'" (1273, page 459)

Life on this earth is about learning to know and love God so we can be with Him in heaven. This is not an easy task. Jesus is here to support us. We need to trust in him each and every day, no matter how difficult the situation. It is not easy to trust God in difficult situations. However, God is with us always, in the small struggles just as much as the big struggles. The Mercy of God brings healing, courage, and hope.

Sometimes life feels like one is stuck in a trench. Jesus' love meets you there! On Divine Mercy Sunday, we see how Jesus' wounds carry our burdens and sins, pouring out mercy and forgiveness. Invite Jesus into your trenches, contemplate His wounds, embrace your weaknesses, share your struggles, and practice mercy and compassion. This is one sure path to healing and strength. Amen.

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