

AN ACT OF MERCY - DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

(APRIL 3, 2005)

“Who can overcome the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

He it is who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with water alone but with water and blood, and it is the Spirit that bears witness, for the Spirit is Truth. So there are three witnesses, the Spirit, water and blood; and the three of them coincide. If we accept the testimony of human witnesses God’s testimony is greater, for this is God’s testimony which He gave about His Son”.

1 John 5: 5-9

When reading this beautiful passage of Scripture one can immediately call to mind the Image of Divine Mercy, which is publicly venerated on Divine Mercy Sunday as one of the conditions for proper celebration of this day of grace. In the image we see the Risen Saviour with red and pale rays streaming from His Sacred Heart. This was exactly as St Faustina saw Jesus on February 22, 1931 when He revealed Himself to her as the Merciful Saviour. The rays signify the blood and water that streamed from His heart at the moment the soldier’s spear pierced His side and, as they flowed down over him, instantly converted his heart of stone into a heart of living flesh, beating for the Lord. Not only the soldier was converted however, but all those who through the grace of God and the prayers of others (prayer, penance, offerings) immerse themselves in the great ocean of mercy that was filled by the suffering, death, and the shedding of blood and water by Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary.

For Catholics in particular this is most fully revealed to us in the Sacraments, especially the sacraments of cleansing (water/pale ray) - baptism and reconciliation, and the sacrament of life - Eucharist (blood/red ray).

For it is these sacraments, more than any others, that most fully enter us into and sustain us on the way of Christian holiness. It is an intimate sharing in the life of Christ and it is this sharing, this mercy, that Jesus most poignantly wishes to emphasise in his vision of Divine Mercy to His servant St Faustina. He said, *“These rays shield souls from the wrath of My Father. Happy is the one who will dwell in their shelter, for the just hand of God shall not lay hold of him”*.

So we have St Faustina, apostle of mercy, reawakening our understanding of Revelation concerning these ‘sacraments of mercy’ which are freely given to us from the Father, by the Saviour and through the Spirit as vehicles of grace by which we share in His life and are prepared for eternity. Concerning prophecy St Thomas Aquinas tells us, *“That is why at every period men were instructed by God about what they were to do, according as was expedient for the salvation of the elect”* and in Proverbs we read, *“Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint”* (29:18).

Is it any wonder then that Jesus wanted this great mystery more fully recognised and fittingly celebrated? Enter the Image of Divine Mercy, of which Jesus says, *“Not in the beauty of the colour, nor of the brush lies the greatness of this image, but in My grace”*.

This leads us to Our Saviour’s great desire to have the first Sunday after Easter (Second Sunday of Easter) honoured as a great celebration of His mercy offered from the cross to humanity. Rather than being a cause for hesitation in the face of incomprehension as to our need for mercy, Divine Mercy Sunday should be a great cause for joy and celebration when presented with the Lord Jesus’ incomprehensible and unfathomable mercy for His creatures. *“For this is God’s testimony which he gave us about His Son”* - water, blood and Spirit. He gives all in abundance to those who *trust* in Him, through His grace which is consumed through the sacraments of water and blood (baptism, reconciliation and eucharist) and now celebrated and culminated with the

feast of Divine Mercy.

Yet we stumble and draw back from receiving the balm of mercy for we often fail to trust entirely in Jesus. The Divine Mercy image reminds us of this and carries the banner, which offers the key to unlock this ocean of mercy and immerse our whole being - *Jesus I Trust in You*. Simple words but oh how difficult to relinquish our whole body, mind and soul to the mercy of God – though this is what is required. To begin we need only set ajar the door to our hearts and the Merciful Jesus will accomplish His task.

In recent months many of us could be excused from feeling some confusion, some doubt, regarding the mercy and goodness of the Lord. I am of course referring to the tsunami that struck the Indian Ocean. How then does such an event reconcile with a Merciful Saviour?

To understand such events we need to look to the past, in fact we actually need to look to the very beginning – Genesis. It would be true to say that many regard the book of Genesis as mythology, just a story which can never convey to us the reality of our beginnings. Yet if we accept this rationale, and further, if we embrace the reductionism of evolutionary theories, then we immobilise our discernment and fail to fully understand the effects of sin on our world and how this has influenced the past (since the fall) and continues to influence the future.

Without diverging into creationist theories, many of which now have sound scientific backing which are startling and challenging sections of the scientific community, it is enough to understand that since sin entered the world the ‘good, indeed very good’ world that God made has been deformed and is now in a state of journeying to a new heaven and a new earth.

This is what Christ accomplished on the Cross for us through His mercy, but we are not there yet – we are pilgrims on the journey.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church refers to the now transformed state of creation, transformed from “*indeed it was very good*” (Gen. 1:31). It states, “Harmony with creation is broken: visible creation has become alien and hostile to man. Because of man, creation is now subject to its bondage to decay.....Death makes its entrance into human history”. CCC 400.

Events like the tsunami may shock us but they should not surprise us, as God did not create a world full of storms, disasters, wars, death and sin. He could not. How could the source of all goodness, love and mercy, our perfect God, create imperfection? This imperfection we now deal with on a daily basis, to lesser or greater degree, is the effect of sin – Adam’s sin.

So suffering, be it that of the tsunami or that of illness, is still the result of sin and if we fail to comprehend the veracity of Genesis, which all the Fathers of the Church accepted and as science is beginning discover, then we will forever lament, ‘Where is God now? or ‘How could a loving, merciful God do this?’ The truth is *He* didn’t, *We* did. But God is with His people, we are not forgotten He has given us many gifts among which is the gift of Divine Mercy Sunday!

“God is rich in mercy; because of his great love for us He brought us to life with Christ when we were dead in sin”. (Eph 2:4-5)

Let us prepare then for battle, the spiritual battle for our souls, by arming ourselves with the incomparable ‘sacraments of mercy’ and celebrating the Lord’s inestimable mercy on Divine Mercy Sunday (April 3) this year and every year.

“Gather all sinners from the entire world and immerse them in the abyss of My mercy. I want to give Myself to souls; I yearn for souls, My daughter. On the day of My feast, the Feast of Mercy, you will go through the whole world and bring fainting souls to the spring of My mercy. I shall heal and strengthen them”.
Jesus’ words to St Faustina (206)

The conditions for properly observing Divine Mercy Sunday and receiving the graces promised are:

- Celebrate the Feast and receive the Blessed Eucharist on Divine Mercy Sunday
- Sincerely repent all our sins
- Go to Reconciliation, preferably before the day.
- Completely trust in Jesus
- Acts of mercy toward your neighbour, daily, and of course on Divine Mercy Sunday, through prayer, word or deed.
- Veneration of the Divine Mercy Image
- Jesus also asked St Faustina for the recitation of the Novena of Chaplets, beginning on Good Friday, as part of the preparation for Divine Mercy Sunday.

For a free copy of the Chaplet, Plenary Indulgence attached to Divine Mercy Sunday and additional information on Divine Mercy and our work to air the Divine Mercy Image on TV and in other media please contact:

Divine Mercy Publications, PO Box 20266, Christchurch 5. Ph/Fax 03 352 2177

Parishes where Divine Mercy Sunday (April 3) is known to be celebrated.

(This is not a comprehensive list, check with your parish priest.)

Auckland: Logan Campbell Centre Showgrounds, Green Lane Road. 3-4pm Chaplet and confessions. Mass 4.30pm

Hamilton: St Matthews, Silverdale Rd, Hillcrest. 9.30am Mass, Chaplet to follow.

Hastings: St Peter Chanel, 817 Gordon Rd, 10am Mass

Wellington: St Joseph's, Upper Hutt, 2pm, Confessions and Mass.

Tawa: Our Lady of Fatima, Main Rd & Lyndhurst. Ph 04 232 5611

Paraparaumu: St Patrick's, Hinemoa St. 2pm Confessions, veneration, Chaplet.

Christchurch: Christ the King, Burnside, 1.30 Confessions, 3pm Chaplet and Mass

Dunedin: St Peter Chanel, Green Island, 10.30am Mass, Chaplet/veneration of image to follow.

DIVINE MERCY IMAGE ON TV - *NOW IS THE TIME FOR MERCY*

Since 1997 the Divine Mercy Image has been appearing in cinemas, on television, in the TV Guide and other media in an effort to raise the hearts and minds of all to the need to ask for, and show mercy. A freephone number (0508 4 Mercy) is listed for callers to contact one of three call centres and receive help, spiritual counselling or advice on how to become (or return to being) a Catholic. All callers receive a free information pack and prayerbook on the Divine Mercy message and its relevance for our times together with a response form for the Catholic Enquiry Centre in Wellington. There have been thousands of callers over this period and hundreds who have requested information packs. Many have been Catholics, touched by the image of Jesus, who wish to 'return home', others wish to turn their lives to God.

If you wish to know more or to contribute financially to this important outreach contact:

Divine Mercy Trust PO Box 20266, Christchurch 5. All donations over \$5.00 are tax deductible.

Pat Barrett.