

DIVINE MERCY PUBLICATIONS NEW ZEALAND



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Report on visit of Bishop Martin Uzoukwu of Minna Diocese Nigeria to Christchurch Diocese - April 10-17 2010

From the moment of Bishop Uzoukwu's arrival, and for all who met him or heard him preach, one could only marvel at his courage, commitment, and zealously in proclaiming the Gospel and witnessing to the mission and importance of Divine Mercy in the Church and in the world. His insights were arresting, particularly in his re-telling of well known Scripture passages such as the Prodigal Son, the Woman at the well, Ezekial 47: 1-12, John 19:34 & Revelation 22:1-2. These last three passages in particular show one of the strongest links between the Gospel and the Diary of St Faustina in Diary references No.84 & 187

Bishop Uzoukwu was able to flesh-out these quotations at the Masses at which he preached and celebrated, beginning with the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Christchurch, at both the 9.00am and 10.30am celebrations of Holy Mass. In the afternoon the annual celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday, which was first held at Christ the King Parish, Burnside in 1995, some 15 years ago, was attended by over 350 people from throughout the diocese and farther afield. Bishop Uzoukwu's sermon was well received with many commenting afterwards on 'his great faith and humility'. A recurring comment from everywhere he offered Mass and gave the homily, from Nazareth House, to over 70 elderly residents and the sisters, to Sacred Heart, Timaru, where over 60 attended evening Mass and a talk, to Holy Name, Ashburton, where around 50 came for Midday Mass, to St Patrick's Greymouth, where 60 of the faithful gathered for Mass, to Carmel in Halswell where Mother Superior and the sisters enjoyed a wonderful time of prayer, laughter, and guidance with the Bishop.

He was able to impart to the faithful, the religious, and priests that Divine Mercy is not just another devotion, but that at its core is the mission and message of the Church, Divine Mercy Incarnate – Jesus Christ. Divine Mercy, he told us, has been present in the Church since the beginning, in reality, present for all eternity as it is the greatest attribute of God (St Faustina & Pope JPII).

In fact the Church, Bishop Martin reflected, through its many apostolates which practice the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, has, and always will be a vessel of mercy (St Vincent de Paul, Caritas, Catholic Women's League, Sisters of Mercy etc) and it is only in recognising this truth and linking it with the graces of Divine Mercy Sunday, the Chaplet of Mercy, 3pm Hour of Mercy, and Image of Divine Mercy that, "the world can find refuge and the light of hope". (Pope JPII)

The Works of Mercy were a large part of the focus for many of the talks and sermons that Bishop Martin gave and especially those he gave to the priests of the diocese in Christchurch,

Timaru and Greymouth, when presenting the topic of the catechesis entitled ‘The Sacrament of Divine Mercy – Reconciliation’. This title, composed by Bishop Barry Jones, formed an important part of his mission here to promote the ‘forgotten sacrament’, confession, and its need to be practiced regularly by all the faithful.

I believe this was an especially powerful part of his discourse to the priests in helping them to encourage parishioners to come back to confession with renewed vigour and a much greater understanding of the Lord’s Divine Mercy for all sinners.

This focus on personal holiness was espoused many times by Bishop Uzoukwu as the only way to achieve authentic Christian growth and to know the Will of the Father. As an adjunct to this point the Bishop continually reminded his listeners of the need to pray daily, to reflect on Scripture and the Diary of St Faustina, in an effort to discover both our vocation in life and to effect it in accordance with the Will of God. He suggested that we each give the Lord an hour every day.

These themes resonated throughout the Bishop’s time here and again in a poignant way, and with the great power Bishop Uzoukwu is capable of delivering in his addresses, to the young people, some 70-80 of them, who gathered at Christ the King for the Friday evening talk. He managed to teach and castigate them with candour, spiced with ample humour, conveying the importance and immediateness of Divine Mercy in both our personal lives and our public witness. On this point he further reminded us of the Encyclical of John Paul II, *Dives in Miserecordia* (Rich in Mercy), and the relevance of this document in the light of both Scripture and Divine Mercy. Bishop Uzoukwu was also interviewed by Ken Joblin, for the Sounds Catholic programme, and Kath Casey for NZ Catholic newspaper.

The final part of his time in the diocese was given over to a full day of prayer, reflection, adoration, and teaching on the themes of evangelisation and the works of mercy. Attendees were encouraged to sing and praise the Lord, to reflect on Scripture and the Diary of St Faustina as the vehicle to being merciful to others and evangelising them. Fr John Adams presented a lecture on *Caritas in Veritate*, the recent Encyclical by Pope Benedict, and masterfully linked this work to the message and mission of Divine Mercy. A brief talk was also given (Pat Barrett) on the letter writing campaign to inmates in African jails being coordinated by Divine Mercy Publications in Christchurch.

Bishop Uzoukwu exhorted all to be faithful witnesses to the Gospel and the teachings of the Church, to proclaim mercy and to live mercy.

His own personal witness to Divine Mercy was ‘compelling and inspirational’, adjectives used oftentimes by various listeners during his time with us. This witness we will keep alive in our hearts as the way forward for the Church in these turbulent times. Bishop Martin, we will miss you, but your legacy of hope and mercy, I believe, for New Zealand, has just begun.

(From Christchurch Bishop Martin continued his witness to Divine Mercy in Wellington Archdiocese, New Zealand, and then to Sydney and Melbourne dioceses, Australia where he met with Bishop Porteous, priests, seminarians, parishioners and youth.)

Footnote

We have been asked by Bishop Martin to help financially support the training of priests in the Diocese of Minna, Nigeria, estimated at NZ\$1900.00 per year.

If you are interested in this appeal please contact Divine Mercy, Christchurch.

A DVD of the Divine Mercy Mass is available from the above address also.

Please send \$12 with your order.

I especially would like to thank Bishop Barry Jones for his unflinching commitment and unstinting help in bringing this great event to completion. Pat Barrett . Director/Trustee

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE PROMOTION OF DIVINE
MERCY AS THE MISSION OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH IN
CHRISTCHURCH DIOCESE**

- 1. To foster more widespread promotion of Divine Mercy Sunday throughout Christchurch Diocese each year to raise the level of observance of this Solemnity at parish level. (Bishop's letters to priests each year. On going catechesis to priests)**
- 2. To create and promote the mission of Divine Mercy in the Pastoral Plan of the Diocese. (Work toward a greater understanding of Divine Mercy as the mission and message of the Universal Church, especially through the Corporal and Spiritual works of Mercy and a greater understanding of the Encyclical of Pope John Paul II, Dives in Misericordia)**
- 3. To work toward a greater understanding of Divine Mercy as the mission of the Church in the Diocesan Youth Groups and ministry.**
- 4. Send a Remit to the NZ Bishops Conference requesting that each diocese begin to more widely accept and observe the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday each year. (Ask for Bishop Barry Jones to countersign this letter. Promotional materials and information to be made available)**
- 5. Request the permanent installation of the large (2mtr) image of Divine Mercy in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament (Christchurch Diocese). This framed image, which was used for the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday at the Cathedral this year, would be donated.**
- 6. Raise an appeal to help fund the training of priests in the Diocese of Minna, Nigeria (Bishop M Uzoukwu).(Annual amount to be raised NZ\$1900.00)**
- 7. Send a delegation from Christchurch Diocese, and perhaps other dioceses, to WACOM (World Apostolic Congress on Mercy) in Krakow, Poland, Oct 1-5 2011.**