

Christus resurrexit!

In February of 1931, Our Lord appeared to Sister Maria Faustyna Kowalska. He appeared wearing a white garment with red and pale white rays of light emanating from His heart. According to the Polish nun, Jesus told her to “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 Faustyna had no artistic talent and it was three years before she was able to have an artist paint the image of Divine Mercy. She was never completely happy with the artist's work and when she complained to Jesus in a subsequent vision, He told her, "Not in the beauty of the color, nor of the brush, is the greatness of this image, but in My grace."

Over the years Sister Faustyna's vision has been painted by many artists, the version we have in our chapel is particularly beautiful, but like all sacred art, the power is not in the image but rather in the Truth that lies behind the image.

In that very first revelation, in 1931, Sister Faustyna recorded in her diary that Jesus told her that He wanted the Divine Mercy image to be “solemnly blessed on the first Sunday after Easter Sunday; that Sunday is to be the Feast of Mercy.” This desire was finally realized on April 30, in the year of Our Lord 2000, when Pope Saint John Paul II recognized Sister Faustyna Kowalska as a saint, and declared the second Sunday

after Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday to honor and commemorate God's infinite mercy.

But why this particular Sunday? Is there something about today that is especially relevant to God's mercy? I think there is.

Think of the mercy Jesus shows to the apostles, the men who had abandoned Him only two nights before. As Our Lord was nailed to a cross all the apostles hid in fear for their lives, except for John, John stayed by His side.

In the great Anglo Saxon epic Beowulf, there is a similar scene. In his later years the great hero is called to defeat a dragon who is terrorizing the kingdom. Beowulf takes his bravest warriors to face the dragon but at the most critical moment, they abandon him, all but the youngest, a man named Wiglaf. Wiglaf stays at Beowulf's side and bears witness to a king who defends his people and defeats the dragon even though it costs him his life.

There is something noble and admirable in the one who stays by the side of his lord after all others have abandoned him. We would all like to see ourselves as Wiglaf, or John, but the truth is that many of us are more like the apostles who fled in fear for their own lives.

And how does Jesus respond? He passes through the locked doors of their hearts, past their grief and their regrets, to show that He has not abandoned them. "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Jesus renews His confidence in them and renews their mission.

This is God's mercy. This is His reaction to the men who had crucified Him. Not anger, not revenge, but peace, and trust. Jesus sends them out into the world, to tell the whole sinful world, the world that had crucified its God - that they can be redeemed, that God has not condemned them.

When we turn our backs on God, we break that life giving bond that sustains our souls. To restore that bond we go to confession, have that sin absolved and that bond restored. It was God's mercy that gave us this as well. "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

And then there is Thomas. Thomas perhaps felt this mercy most dramatically. We heard in the first reading how united the community was, holding all things in common, including their belief in the risen Lord.

But Thomas had separated himself from the community. In his mind the great promise of the Messiah was a lie, and the salvation of God's people was a failure. He wants proof in order to believe otherwise. "Unless I see the mark of the nails... I will not believe."

A week later, a week after the Resurrection, Divine Mercy Sunday, Jesus appears to the apostles again. This time Thomas is there. After His greeting of peace, the very next words of the Lord are directed at the doubting disciple, *touch my wounds, be no longer unbelieving, but*

*believe*. And it is Thomas who falls to his knees and proclaims the Truth, “my Lord, and my God.”

Jesus is not offended by Thomas' doubt. He is more concerned with restoring the apostle's faith. He does this by lowering Himself to Thomas' level, letting him touch and feel the real physical presence of the Christ.

We would all like to think of ourselves as another Moses, or Peter, or Paul. But the truth is that many of us are more like Thomas, full of doubt and uncertainty.

We all resist God's action, at some point in our lives, in one way or another. We get mad at him, don't trust him, rebel against him, or even stop believing in Him.

And it is precisely in those moments and those corners of our lives where Jesus wants to show his boundless mercy, to lower Himself to our level, and win back our faith.

What does God's mercy do for us now, here, today? It does what it has always done, it gives us peace of heart.

Anxiety and frustration and stress seem to be at higher levels in the world than ever before, and those plagues can all be traced back to doubt. But the world has always been that way, the world has always been full of doubt.

We doubt our own worthiness but God has made us worthy. We doubt the power and goodness of God, we doubt His desire to forgive us our

faults, to fix our mistakes, to bring victory out of failure and good out of evil and life out of death.

But God has forgiven us and is always ready to forgive us, the confessionals in our churches bear witness to that fact. The revelation of God's mercy wipes away all doubts. God's power is as limitless as His goodness; He has conquered all the force of evil without ever resorting to evil Himself.

And when we have reclaimed that peace of heart, we need to share it with the rest of the world.

In his conversations with St Faustyna, Jesus promised to unleash on the world a flood of mercy. He accomplishes that through each one of us.

We all have relationships that are not exactly marked by mercy. We all know of relationships that are marred by indifference and envy and resentment. It is literally our God-given mission to reconcile the world with our God, through our prayers, our words, and our actions.

It is up to us to reach out our hands to those who doubt, just like Jesus reached out his hands to Thomas, showing them by our courage and humility the face of Christ, our merciful Lord.

Jesus told Sister Faustyna that He would make up for anything she lacked to fulfill her mission. He does the same for us.

If we put ourselves at the service of Christ, He will give each one of us plenty of opportunities to carry out our mission, and He will make up for anything we lack.

All we need to do is to keep always on our lips that prayer that He himself taught to St Faustyna: “Jesus, I trust in you.”

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