

This column was originally printed in the March 2016 issue of *New Earth*, the magazine for the Diocese of Fargo.

Holy Week, Easter, and Divine Mercy

Bishop John T. Folda

In his declaration of the Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis mentions St. Faustina Kowalska, the Polish nun who received the Divine Mercy revelations in the 1930s. Pope Francis says: “Our prayer also extends to the saints and blessed ones who made divine mercy their mission in life. I think especially of the great apostle of mercy, St. Faustina Kowalska. May she, who was called to enter the depths of divine mercy, intercede for us and obtain for us the grace of living and walking always according to the mercy of God and with an unwavering trust in his love.”

We are now well into the season of Lent and standing on the threshold of Holy Week. What better time could there be to reflect on the Divine Mercy of God? As we enter into the mysteries of Holy Week and Easter, it seems opportune to see them all in the light of Divine Mercy. It was mercy that moved Jesus to enter the holy city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It was mercy that moved him to give us his own body and blood in the Eucharist at the Last Supper. It was mercy that led Jesus to institute the priesthood, so that his grace and mercy might be offered to the faithful throughout the centuries. It was mercy that impelled Jesus to take up the cross and accept his suffering and death, all out of love for us.

In the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, we will see that same Divine Mercy, glorious and eternal, given to all people of all times. Jesus now lives eternally, and his mercy is greater than any sin. You could even say that the Feast of Divine Mercy is a gift of Easter, which reveals and expresses to us the depth of God’s mercy. Mercy is a gratuitous gift that opens our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness. In the Risen Jesus, we see mercy that overcomes sin and death, a mercy that lives forever.

The heart of Christ is mercy itself, and in the Divine Mercy image of Christ described by St. Faustina, we see the streams of mercy flowing from his heart, symbolizing the blood and water that flowed from the wounded heart of Jesus. Christian spirituality also tells us that the blood and water represent the waters of baptism that wash away our sins and the blood of Christ that redeems us.

This year as we approach Divine Mercy Sunday, one week after Easter, I invite you to meditate on Jesus, who became like us to reveal to us the merciful face of the Father, a Father who loves each of us, and in whose mercy no sin is too great to be forgiven. He is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6). At the base of the Divine Mercy image, we see the words, “Jesus I trust in you.” This holy year should help us all to trust in God’s mercy, for he desires nothing more than to pour it upon us in abundance.

I also invite you to pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, a simple but powerful prayer of trust in God’s mercy toward his people. “For the sake of his sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.” This repeated refrain reminds us of the mercy of God manifested in the passion of Jesus. But in the prayers of the Chaplet, we also remember that Jesus is alive, he is immortal, and his mercy endures forever. Perhaps this Jubilee of Mercy will be an occasion to make the Chaplet of Divine Mercy a part of our daily prayer. It only requires a few minutes, but it can open our minds and hearts to the very life of God, which is mercy itself. And, as we learn to trust in God’s mercy, we also learn to bestow mercy on others: the poor, the weak, the distressed and even our enemies.

The Divine Mercy devotion is relatively new in the life of the Church. But it is important to remember that the message of Divine Mercy, revealed to St. Faustina and to our present generation, is not new. It is a powerful reminder of what God is and has been from the very beginning. God has always been love and mercy, and he manifests this love throughout the history of salvation. But that loving mercy is most fully revealed in the person of Jesus. In Jesus himself, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, we see the mercy of God made visible. In Jesus, who died on the cross for our sins and rose again to live forever, we see the mercy that atones for our sins “and those of the whole world.”

Pope Francis, echoing Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, tells us, “The name of God is mercy.” The mercy of God is never more evident than in the great mysteries of our redemption that we will celebrate in a few days. May we all place our trust in him, who is Divine Mercy itself.