

Sister Mary Faustina Kowalska was a nun with the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Krakow, Poland. Jesus came to her in a series of apparitions starting in 1933. One of Jesus' requests during the revelations to Sister Faustina was that the entire Church reserve the Sunday after Easter to honor and commemorate God's infinite mercy. In 2000, Pope John Paul II fulfilled that request during the canonization ceremony for Saint Faustina. Ever since that day, the Church celebrates the Feast of Divine Mercy on this the Second Sunday of Easter.

Now, the week after Easter may seem like an odd time to celebrate Divine Mercy. We're already riding a spiritual high. Just last week, we celebrated the glorious fact that the sinless Lamb of God took upon Himself the sins of humanity and conquered death by His cross and resurrection. But Easter doesn't mean that we sinful human beings no longer need God's mercy, but rather that through the crucified and risen Lord, His mercy is abundantly available to us.

Mercy can be understood in two ways. The first way is not getting the bad that we deserve. Our sins deserve punishment, but God doesn't punish us according to our sins. That is Divine Mercy. The second way is getting the good that we don't deserve. Mercy is not something to which we have a right. We receive grace; which is unmerited favor; a free gift. That is also Divine Mercy.

The world needs Divine Mercy now more than ever. Just look at the news headlines. There's an overwhelming abundance of sin in the world today. The silver lining though is that because of that abundance of sin there's an overwhelming abundance of mercy available to us. All we have to do is accept it. God freely pours out His unconditional love on us. It's always available to us. Sometimes, we forget this and have to be reminded.

In today's Gospel, Jesus assures us that we can find forgiveness and mercy. He breathes on His apostles and gives them the ability to forgive sins in the great sacrament of mercy – the

Sacrament of Reconciliation. He tells them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them.”

Unfortunately, there are people out there that don’t believe in the mercy of God. They don’t believe in the forgiveness of sin. They don’t believe in their own dignity. They don’t believe that God really loves them because they don’t believe that they can be loved. Yet, we can be confident in knowing we’re worthy because Jesus has made us worthy. He has forgiven us, and He will always be willing to forgive us – that’s why confessionals are a permanent fixture of Church architecture and not an optional add-on.

There’s only one unforgivable sin and that is to think that our sin is too great for the mercy of God. As we saw during Holy Week, this was the sin of Judas: not that he betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver but that he denied the Divine Mercy. He thought that his sin was too great to be forgiven. He could have been forgiven just as Peter was forgiven for denying Jesus three times, just as the apostles who abandoned Jesus on the cross were forgiven, just as Jesus’ torturers were forgiven on Calvary, just as Thomas was forgiven for doubting the Resurrection. God’s forgiveness is as limitless as His goodness.

All this talk about mercy reminds me of the story of a priest being pulled over for speeding. As the police officer was about to write the ticket, the priest looked at him and said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” The police officer was undeterred. He finished writing the ticket and handed it to the priest saying, “Go, and sin no more.”

It’s a funny story but it does contain a kernel of truth. We all truly desire mercy when we find ourselves in a precarious situation. But imagine if we were driving by and saw the police officer standing at the window of the car. Would we be wishing for mercy for the speeder? Or would we be wishing for justice?

One of the prayers in the Divine Mercy Chaplet that's repeated over and over is, "For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world." We're quite content and happy with the "have mercy on us" part. It's the "have mercy on the whole world" part that gives us pause. All too often, we're not so eager to show mercy or pray for mercy for others. We find excuses for holding a grudge. We hold others to a higher standard than we hold ourselves. We've all been hurt by family, friends, coworkers, and strangers. We're tempted to strike back at times, but Gandhi once said, "An eye-for-eye and tooth-for-tooth would lead to a world of the blind and toothless."

It's tempting to feel that certain people don't deserve mercy but mercy is a two-way street. Jesus teaches us to forgive and show mercy. As we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us." If we wish to receive mercy, we must also show mercy.

In addition to forgiving His chosen Apostles, who had abandoned Him just two nights earlier, Jesus reaffirms His confidence in them by reaffirming their mission. He gives them their marching orders, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

We have those same marching orders. We've been commissioned to love with the heart of Jesus – with a heart that is humble and full of love, a heart that is merciful and open to the needs of others. We're called to be apostles of mercy. We saw a powerful example of this in our first reading. Saint Peter was so filled with God's grace that when his shadow touched someone that person was healed. Our shadows may not heal people, but we can bring joy to others and change their lives. We can touch them with the mercy of God by feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, bearing wrongs patiently, and comforting the afflicted. Just to name a few.

As Christians, mercy is our work, our daily task. Mercy starts in the heart and is practiced in deeds - in acts of kindness and especially in acts of forgiveness. God is patient with us, so we should be patient with others. God loves to forgive us, so we should be generous in offering forgiveness to others. Mercy means serving others with love – with our hearts always open to their needs, their hurts, and their longings. And we need to really believe what Jesus told us – that what we do for others, we do for Him.

Brothers and sisters, on this Divine Mercy Sunday, we're called to open our hearts to the limitless ocean of God's mercy and have the courage to extend that mercy to others, even to those who seem to us to be the most unworthy. It's extremely difficult, for sure. But it's also undeniably God-like. And we, who are made in the image and likeness of God, are called to show His merciful face to everyone. And the more unworthy of mercy they seem to us, the more God-like we'll be in extending mercy to them.

In His conversations with Saint Faustina, Jesus promised to unleash on the world a flood of mercy. He's been doing so, and He wants to continue doing so. The flood hasn't yet reached every heart. That's where we come in. He'll give us plenty of opportunities to carry out His mission. The image of Divine Mercy that we associate with Saint Faustina always includes the little prayer, "Jesus, I trust in you!" This should be our prayer too – many times every day, "Jesus, I trust in you!"