

Divine Mercy Sunday
Parish Diary
April 4, 2012
Fr. Peter Daly

Fr. Peter Daly discusses Divine Mercy Sunday.

The Sunday after Easter was proclaimed “Divine Mercy Sunday” by Pope John Paul II in 2000 at the same time he canonized the Faustina Kowalska, the first saint of the new millennium. A year later he established Divine Mercy Sunday as a solemnity, a major feast, of the Catholic Church. John Paul II died on the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday in 2005. He was declared “Blessed” by Pope Benedict XVI on Divine Mercy Sunday of 2011.

Probably no feast day is more closely identified with a particular Pope than Divine Mercy Sunday is identified with Pope John Paul II. Certainly no feast day is more closely identified with a particular saint than Divine Mercy Sunday is identified with Saint Faustina Kowalska, who died in 1938 at the age of 33.

Faustina was the source of the devotion to Divine Mercy. Her spiritual director, Father Michael Sopocho, promoted the devotion. Father Sopocho introduced Faustina to the artist, Eugene Kazimierowski, who painted the image of Divine Mercy that we associate with the devotion today.

For nearly twenty years, from 1959 to 1978, her devotion was banned by the Vatican. Her biography was on the index of prohibited books from 1959 until the index was abolished in 1966, John Paul II who began the cause for Faustina’s canonization in 1967, while he was Archbishop of Krakow.

There can be no doubt the world that Faustina lived in was in need of mercy. Just a year after she died in 1938, Poland was invaded by the Nazis. Just a few miles from the convent where she lived, a death camp was established at Auschwitz. Only 10 years after she died, the Iron Curtain of communism descended across her homeland and much of the world.

Sister Faustina knew nothing of any of these atrocities. She probably did not see her devotion as a remedy for social sin. Her focus seems to have been on personal sin. But we need God’s mercy for both kinds of our sins, social and personal.

Our parish has a small but growing devotion to the Jesus of Divine Mercy. Like many parishes, we display the image of Divine Mercy during our adoration, five times a week. On Divine Mercy Sunday we display the image at all the masses. We have devotions, including the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, which is like a rosary.

I think that mercy is at the heart of the Christian message. At first I didn’t see the reason for a special Sunday. I think every Sunday is divine mercy Sunday.

I also didn’t see the need of a plenary indulgence associated with the feast. After all, if any one fulfills the requirements for the plenary indulgence at any time, their sins are all forgiven.

The Vatican decree for Divine Mercy Sunday says that you are supposed to go to confession, receive the Eucharist, and say prayers for the intentions of the Pope, and “in a spirit that is completely detached from the affection for sin, even a venial sin,” take part in devotions held in honor of Divine Mercy Sunday.

It seems to me if you are “completely detached from the affection for sin, even a venial sin,” you don’t really need a plenary indulgence. But the idea is a good one. We need mercy.

And just like in Faustina's time, we certainly need a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation in our world. We human beings are often merciless to each other. A rediscovery of divine mercy might be just what we need to make us more merciful to one another.