



The Chaplet and Novena
**to Divine
Mercy**



SHALOM

JESUS I TRUST IN YOU



The Chaplet and Novena to Divine Mercy

SHALOM

Text: **Taken from the Diary of saint Faustina Kowalska**

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ISBN 9 7 8 - 8 8 - 8 4 0 4 - 2 1 8 - 7

To order this book please quote code number 8459

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The first International Congress on Divine Mercy Rome 1-6 April 2008

The opening speech by Cardinal Schönborn, Archbishop of Vienna

“Eminencies, Excellencies, dear participants in this first Conference on Divine Mercy! *“Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo!”*. “I shall sing the mercies of the Lord forever!” (ref Psalm 89:2). In this third “dies natalis” of the Servant of God Pope John Paul II, we can truly praise the Mercy of the Lord. With the Holy Father, Pope Benedict, we look towards that window on the third floor of the Apostolic Palace, the Pope’s window, and we think back to the 2nd of April 2005. It was the Sunday before the “Domenica in Albis”, the eve of the Feast of Divine Mercy. The eyes of the whole world were truly on that window, knowing that the Pope was about to die.

The pope’s illness had already dragged on for some time. He was no longer capable of personally celebrating the functions of Holy Week.

Many will recall how on Easter Sunday he appeared at the window for the Urbi et Orbi blessing: he wanted to address an Easter blessing to all the

people who had gathered in St. Peter's Square and in front of their television sets at home.

He couldn't speak. All we saw was a mute gesture, a blessing and that unforgettable suffering face, of the much loved Pope. This was his last greeting, his last appearance at that window.

On the Friday, the 1st of April, I experienced the joy of celebrating the Eucharist with several Cardinals and Bishops, in the room of the last supper, in Jerusalem.

At the beginning of the Holy Mass the news came

photo: Sister Elvira Petrozzi, the founder of the community of Cenacolo, Card. Christoph Schönborn, Arch. Bishop of Vienna promoter of the first world congress of Divine Mercy, Card. Camillo Ruini and Card. Stanislaw Dziwisz.



in that the Holy Father was on his deathbed and that he could leave us at any moment. It was very moving to be able to pray for the Holy Father and celebrate the Eucharist right in that room of the Last Supper in Jerusalem. Towards the end of the Holy Mass, the news came in that the Holy Father was a little better. My first thought was: let the Lord take him on the Sunday of Divine Mercy! This would have been, in a sense, the right date for the death of Pope John Paul II.

The Servant of God John Paul II: the Pope of Mercy

Let us recall what happened next. I think that Cardinal Dziwisz is the most authoritative witness of those hours; as is Cardinal Ruini, who was also present. At eight o'clock in the evening on Saturday the 2nd of April, therefore, according to the liturgical custom, already the beginning of the Sunday (liturgically in fact, the Sunday begins with the vespers of the Saturday evening, which are in fact rightly referred to as "the first Vespers of the Sunday"), the Holy Father's secretary once again celebrated Mass at the Pope's deathbed.

It was already the Mass of Divine Mercy Sunday. For the last time the Holy Father received holy communion, in the form of some drops of the precious

Blood of Christ, and at 9.37 p.m. he returned to his merciful Father's house. His earthly life thus finished on the day of "Divine Mercy Sunday", the feast day that he himself had introduced during the jubilee year of 2000. And so, on Low Sunday of the year 2000, along with the new name of this Sunday of the Octave of Easter, he had also canonised Maria Faustina Kowalska, the first saint of the new millennium. It is difficult, actually, it is impossible, to fail to see a "sign from the Heavens" in this coincidence. Did God himself not put his signature on the life plan that Pope John Paul II repeatedly characterised, in an entirely explicit manner, as his mission?

In 1997 in Łagiewniki, in the place where Sister Faustina lived and is buried, he declared: "In a certain sense, the Message of Divine Mercy formed the image of my pontificate".

I would therefore invite you to consider together the pathway that Pope John Paul II took with this mystery, as he experienced it, lived it and pondered it and how he transmitted it to all of us. During his last visit to Poland – a last goodbye to his homeland, in 2002 – the Pope consecrated the new basilica of Łagiewniki, the Shrine of Divine Mercy. I would like to mention a few phrases from that sermon, which represents for me a sort of mandate for Christ, for his

Polish homeland, but also for the Church throughout the world. It was like an intimate request from the Pope and in the end a request from Jesus for our time.

I must confess that the words pronounced by Pope John Paul II at that time represent a commitment for me, I would almost go so far as to say, a mission. And so, on the 17th of August 2002, in Łagiewniki, he said: “The world is so in need of God’s mercy nowadays! In all continents, from the depths of human suffering, an invocation to mercy seems to rise up. Where hatred and the thirst for revenge cry out, where war brings with it the pain and death of the innocent, the grace of mercy is necessary, to appease minds and hearts, and to let peace flow forth. Where respect for life and the dignity of man are undermined, we need God’s merciful love, in the light of which the inexpressible value of each human being is manifested. We need mercy to ensure that all injustice in the world finds its end in the splendour of truth”. These solemn words then followed and they represent a sort of testament of this great Pope: “And so today, in this Shrine, I want to solemnly entrust the world to Divine Mercy.

I do this with the ardent desire that God’s merciful message of love, proclaimed here through Sister Faustina, might reach all the inhabitants of the earth and fill their hearts with hope. May this message

spread from this place throughout our whole beloved homeland and throughout the world. May the firm promise of the Lord Jesus be fulfilled: from here “the spark that will prepare the world for my last coming” will come out. We need to light up this spark thanks to the grace of God and send the world this fire of mercy.

In the mercy of God the world shall find peace and man shall find happiness!

I entrust this duty to you, dear Brothers and Sisters. Be witnesses to mercy!”. I think that the words of the great Pope, left as a testament in Poland, during his last trip there, and just one day prior to his departure, are like a directive for our time and for the whole Church. They are also, in a certain sense, the “godmothers of the baptism” of this conference. We want to understand his appeal as a mandate: “Be witnesses to mercy! Something very moving then occurs: at the end of the celebration of the Eucharist, the Holy Father speaks spontaneously about some of his own personal memories. In those words we notice how the theme of Divine Mercy is deeply anchored in his life, as though it were in a certain sense the fastener that holds it all together. Already at the beginning of his difficult pathway towards the priesthood, there is a meeting with the message of Divine mercy, and it was the seal of the hour of his death.

I shall now quote what he said then on the 17th of August 2002:

“At the end of this solemn liturgy I would like to observe the fact that many of my personal memories are associated with this place, Łagiewniki, a suburb of Krakow. I used to come here during the Nazi occupation when I was working in the nearby Solvay factory. I still remember the road that leads from Borek Falecki to Debniki. I used to take it everyday, going to work on various shifts, with wooden shoes on my feet. Who would ever have thought that that man with the clogs would have one day consecrated the basilica of Divine Mercy in Łagiewniki in Krakow?”.

In 1942 Karol Wojtyla had entered the ‘secret seminary’ founded by Cardinal Sapieha, the courageous Archbishop of Krakow. A seminary companion, Andreas Deskur, who is now Cardinal of the Curate and who is wheelchair bound and seriously ill, called his attention to the message of Divine Mercy of a certain sister Faustina Kowalska, born in 1905 and who died at the age of thirty-three, in 1938. At the time, he already knew of this simple nun, in front of whose monastery he used to pass every day on his way to work, at his forced labour in the chemical factory. Already at that time he knew of her and he had heard some talk of the messages that she received from

Jesus, which are written down so well in her diary. Karol Wojtyla, as Auxiliary Bishop of Krakow and later as the Archbishop and Cardinal, did a lot of work to ensure the beatification of Sister Faustina.

He had to overcome some resistance because the Holy Office, as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was then called in Rome, had important reservations on the writings of Sister Faustina. Later on it came to light that this was due to incorrect and equivocal translations. Lastly, as a Pope, John Paul II beatified Sister Faustina in 1993 and canonised her in the year 2000.

He repeatedly underlined how the theme of mercy was central to his life. In Sister Faustina's messages, which say nothing different from what the Gospel says, he saw a response to the indescribable proportions of evil in the twentieth century, to which he himself, in his own life, was a witness: the horrors of national-socialism, the incredible suffering of the Polish population during the nazi occupation, and communism later on. Turning his gaze towards those painful years, in 1997 he said: "The message of Divine Mercy has always been dear and near to me. It is as though history inscribed it in the tragic experience of the Second World War.

During those difficult years, it was a particular

form of support and an unending source of hope, not only for the inhabitants of Krakow, but also for the Polish nation as a whole. This was also my personal experience, which I brought with me to the Seat of Saint Peter and which, in a certain sense, forms the image of my pontificate”.

Now we must obviously ask ourselves a question: “Did Pope John Paul II want to promote a special form of devotion with this?” You all know the image of the Merciful Jesus of Łagiewniki in Krakow with the rays coming out of him, you know the chaplet of Divine Mercy, the hour of Mercy. Certainly, he appreciated these forms of devotion, but he rarely dealt with them as a subject. In the words and messages that Sister Faustina received from Jesus and that she transmitted in an entirely simple language, he found the answer to the great questions and challenges of our time. Pope John Paul II reflected, in the light of these messages, throughout his whole life, on the inexhaustible mystery of Divine Mercy. This mystery moulded his work as a priest, as a bishop and as a pope, and through his person, it touched an infinite number of men throughout the world. He was truly a unique “witness of Mercy”.

Before dealing with the contents of the theme of Mercy, I would like to first make a brief observation

regarding “private revelations”. What value do they have? In what way are they “binding”? Let’s listen to what the “Catechism of the Catholic Church” has to say in this regard:

“Throughout the centuries there have been revelations called ‘private’, some of which have been recognised by the authority of the Church. They are not however part of the deposition of the faith. Their role is not to ‘improve’ or ‘complete’ the definitive Revelation of Christ, but to help us to experience it more fully in a certain historical era. Guided by the Teaching of the Church, the sense of the faithful is capable of discerning and welcoming that which in these revelations constitutes an authentic appeal from Christ or his saints of the Church” (no. 67). The “private revelations” received by Sister Faustina certainly help us to experience the Revelation of Christ in a fuller manner “in a determined historical era”. Without a doubt we also encounter in them, “an authentic appeal from Christ... to the Church”. On this very day, the third anniversary of the death of the great Pope of Mercy, from all the parts of the earth we are called to this conference, we want to make an effort together, to listen to and welcome Christ’s appeal to the Church of today. Let it be Christ himself who will help us to come to a deeper understanding of his will,

recommended so often to the heart of saint Faustina:
that all men might come to know his Mercy,
experience it and live it in person.

photo: Sister Elzbieta Siepak C. S. B. V. M. M.



The Mercy of God: the core of christian faith

Together with all of you, I would like to consider so many things, in this short time, when we ask ourselves what the most important points of the doctrine of God's Mercy are. I must however limit myself greatly: I will first of all speak about the Mercy of God in the Old Testament, I will turn my gaze then towards Jesus, God's Mercy personified. Lastly, I will offer some indications on how to live the mystery of Mercy ourselves in a more profound manner.

The Mercy of God: the heart of the Old Testament

There is still unfortunately a distorted image that the God of the Old Testament is an angry God and that the God of the New Testament is a loving God. In actual fact, the matter is entirely different. The Old Testament is a school of the Mercy of God. God reveals himself to Moses as “a merciful and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in grace and faithfulness” (ref Ex 34:6; ref CCC 210). His anger is not like ours. His anger is only the reverse side of his passionate love. His anger is the expression of his care. It is not he who needs his people, it is his people who need him. The distancing of his people from him brings unhappiness and misery.

“For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the source of living waters; they have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water” (ref Jer 2:13). God’s love for his people is of an unimaginable faithfulness. But it is also truthful. His Mercy is manifested in the first place by the fact that it reveals the truth. Is there a religion in which all the errors of the community are stripped naked and punished, with such an implacable, merciless criticism? The mistakes are called out carelessly, every failure is called by name. From the king to the simplest people, they are all reproached for their mistakes, in an apparently merciless manner. God’s mercy is manifest in this. It can never exist without truth.

It can only heal if it formulates the diagnosis in a wholly honest and clear manner.

The Old Testament shows God’s grandiose Mercy for the sins of his people. But the sins are neither minimised or made to seem banal. Christ will bring this to fulfilment: his Mercy is never without truth. Hypocrites cannot find mercy because they behave as though they did not need any commiseration.

Mercy may only take root where sins are called by name. But, vice-versa, it is possible to look at one’s own mercy, see one’s own sins and recognise them, only in the meeting with God’s Mercy. To reveal one’s

own fault before a pitiless judge would be, in a certain sense, a form of suicide. Only before God's love, which hates sin, but loves the sinner, is it possible to recognise and confess one's own sin. Like a child who gets up to mischief, the sinner may run to God and throw himself into his merciful arms. Only trust in God, in Jesus ("Jezu, ufam tobie", "Jesus, I trust in You") will allow true repentance for one's sins for love of God. The Bible and Christianity are often willingly reprimanded for talking about sin continuously.

It is true: our liturgy speaks much about sin. But does this not also depend on the fact that we trust in God's Mercy? Given that we believe and have faith in the fact that God is infinitely merciful, we do not need to hide our sins, or deny our mistakes, or continuously declare our innocence.

Only in this way can we understand why great saints believed themselves to be such great sinners.

In the light of God's Mercy, they could see to what extent they were still sinners, and how deep their mercy was. In conclusion, I shall quote a surprising text by Sister Faustina, which clarifies the issue. The Old Testament is truly the great love story between God and his people, the school of mercy. But only in Jesus Christ is the whole measure of God's Mercy revealed. He is God's Mercy personified.



Jesus “the Incarnation” of God’s mercy

Jesus himself supplies us with the best proof that the God of the Old Testament is a merciful God. As a “brief formula” for the pathway of holiness we are simply told the following: “Be merciful, as your Father is merciful with you” (ref Luke 6:36). Experiencing mercy therefore means being perfect “as perfect as your celestial Father is” (ref Matthew 5:48). But how is our celestial Father merciful? Do we know? How can we learn? How can God’s Mercy enter our blood, so to speak, so that we might come to know God’s Mercy spontaneously, from within our heart, to take it in and love it? How can we, poor sinners, reflect God’s perfection in mercy? God revealed this pathway towards his perfection to us. He prepared his people for this throughout the entire Old Testament. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son” (ref Gal 4:4). Now we can see God’s Mercy, in a human form. In communion with Jesus, we can learn about his Father’s Mercy. Living in communion with Jesus we can become his followers, his disciples.

He can show us the Mercy of his Heart. Even more, he can imprint it in us, mould us according to his

photo: Some presbyters, taking part in the World Apostolic Congress on Divine Mercy, attend the Conference of H. E. Cardinal Schönborn in the Patriarchal Basilica of St. John Lateran (Rome).

Heart. This is the new pathway that the Father has opened up for us. Otherwise, how could we come to know God's Mercy, if we couldn't see it in Jesus' human face? The Mercy of Jesus is therefore our pathway to become similar to God. And so we must pray to him to show us his Mercy. In conclusion, I will pray to saint Faustina to give us her word that it might be of help to us here. Often in the Gospel we see Jesus taken by mercy. I shall outline three examples below: the widow of Nain (ref Luke 7:11-15). Her only son has died. They take him out of the city. Jesus meets the funeral cortege. When Jesus saw the widow "he was taken by compassion", literally: "he was moved to his entrails". On another occasion it is the sight and the sorrowful plea of a leper that moves Jesus so profoundly (ref Mark 1:41 et seq.).

Once again, there are two blind men who, with their misery, arouse a profound sense of compassion within Jesus (ref Matthew 20:34). What is mercy? Is it a spontaneous, natural reaction to the misery of our neighbour?

Or with his Mercy did Jesus bring a new sort of behaviour from heaven to earth? Nowadays, some people try to make euthanasia pass for mercy. Is it not cruel to leave an ill person squirm in pain until his death? Is it not merciful to end his suffering? This leads

us to think that the promoters of euthanasia must beautify the killing of an ill person so to speak, to defend them. As Christians we must try to call things by their name, we must put them into the light of truth. A doctor friend told me how he behaves when faced with requests for euthanasia. When people come to him to say: “Doctor, our granny is suffering greatly, could you not shorten her suffering, you know, with a little injection...”. He replies saying: “Kill her yourselves, your granny!” With one word it is all clear: euthanasia is homicide, even if it is hidden under the cloak of mercy. Mercy is one of man’s fundamental modes of behaviour. It is not incidental that we put the lack of mercy and the lack of humanity on the same footing. When faced with pain, those who suffer it, those who can bear it, behave as true men.

Those who make fun of pain, behave in an inhuman manner. In this sense, the Mercy of Jesus has simply human features. At the school of Jesus, we learn the simple virtues of man.

We must therefore be merciful, in order to be truly human. There is something protesting within me; I cannot be merciful towards everyone!

And then, is mercy not like “looking down from above”? Do we not need justice rather than mercy? In my youth – I belong to the so-called generation of