

HOMILY
BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA
SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER (DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY)
NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE DIVINE MERCY
STOCKBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
APRIL 15, 2007

My brother Bishops and Priests, Deacons and Religious, and my Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

On this Divine Mercy Sunday, we gather here at the National Shrine of the Divine Mercy in the United States. As we do so, we cannot help but be touched by the memory of three significant people who have helped the Church to discover and appreciate this great Easter blessing of Divine Mercy: first of all, our beloved late Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, who died two years ago at the time of the first vespers of this feast. Secondly, we naturally think of Sister Faustina, the recipient of the visions and message of the Lord, who, in her own words called herself the “apostle” and “secretary” of His mercy for all the world. Finally, we remember the courageous witness of Father Joseph Jarzebowski, who dramatically escaped in 1944 from confinement and torture in Russia and Japan to arrive here at Eden Hill in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he established this Shrine. We thank the Congregation of the Marians of the Immaculate Conception for their hospitality this day, and for the important ministry they do for pilgrims throughout the world who come to find consolation, healing, hope, and new life at this holy place.

When our late Holy Father visited the tomb of St. Faustina near Krakow in the summer of 1997, he spoke about the importance of this devotion and how significant it had been for him personally: *“There is nothing that man needs more than divine mercy—that love which is benevolent, which is compassionate, which raises man above his weakness to the infinite heights of the holiness of God.”* He went on to speak in particular about the grace of St. Faustina and her own witness to divine mercy, *“Anyone can come to her, look at this image of the merciful Jesus, His heart radiating grace, and hear in the depths of His own soul, what Blessed Faustina heard: ‘Fear nothing. I am with you always.’ And if this person responds with a sincere heart, ‘Jesus I trust in you,’ he will find comfort in his anxieties and fears...”*

In our world today as we are overshadowed by much violence and suffering, including the persecution of Christians, the tragedy of abortion, and the breakdown of the family, more than ever, the healing rays of Divine Mercy offer us consolation and hope.

The image of Divine Mercy reminds us that God always takes the initiative to reach out to us in our times of doubt and anxiety. Just as Christ hastened to offer peace and consolation to all of His disciples, and especially “doubting Thomas” in today’s Gospel, he continues to reach out to us in our times of stress, loss, and fear. As St. Faustina described her vision, we see the Risen Lord walking toward us with rays of merciful love flowing out to all of us, His hands raised in blessing—even before we ask for it. This is indeed the same risen Christ who greeted the apostles through the locked doors of the Upper Room that first Easter evening and who returned a week later to help convince Thomas that the Resurrection was indeed credible and real.

In today’s Gospel, we hear the very familiar conversation of the Risen Lord and Thomas, his disciple and friend. The point of connection for Thomas was precisely the wounds of the Lord Jesus; by seeing and touching the wounds, he would know for sure that it was indeed the same Lord Jesus with whom he had lived for three years. In the Divine Mercy devotion, we especially find consolation and

encouragement by contemplating the wounds of Christ as Jesus Himself explained to Faustina, “*Know my daughter, that your silent, day-to-day martyrdom in complete submission to my will ushers many souls into heaven. And when it seems to you that your suffering exceeds your strength, contemplate my wounds.*”

On this day, even in the midst of our Easter joy, we know that the Lord Jesus and His Body, the Church, continue to bear the wounds of suffering. But yet, these wounds do not have the last word; they are indeed a means of passage or transition, an avenue of salvation, healing, and atonement. As we unite our own suffering to those of Christ, we join with Him in working for the salvation of all the world.

God's mercy is a gift to be received with gratitude and trust, and it is also a gift to be shared with others. And so it is that we hear in today's first reading the marvelous ways the apostles were instruments of the healing power of the Lord Jesus, bringing strength of body and spirit to all who were troubled.

Even as our celebration this day renews us and consoles us, we are also challenged to consider whether we are truly instruments of Divine Mercy in our daily lives—first and foremost within our own families, but also in the workplace. There remains the enduring question of how well we as a Church witness to the compassion of the Lord in and through our parish communities and our Archdiocesan programming. The most convincing and compelling testimony we Christians can offer to people of other faith backgrounds or no religious heritage at all, is precisely the testimony of Divine Mercy and the witness of our service for the defense of life from the first moment of conception until natural death.

St. Faustina once wrote in her journal, “*I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls and especially for poor sinners...*” By divine providence, the last two years of her life were a time of intense suffering, and even after her death, there was much misunderstanding about her writings until things were clarified in the 1970s. Yet through it all, her goodness and the truth of her message resonated all the more forcefully. So, too, with Father Joseph Jarzebowski; precisely as he endured much suffering, he was forged into a pure vessel of God's message of mercy. And we can say the same of our late Holy Father, servant of God, who carried tremendous suffering of body and spirit but always with love, breathing forth Divine Mercy even when he no longer could speak. Their witness and example truly resonate with the words of St. John in today's second reading from the Book of Revelation: “*I, John, your brother, who share with you the distress, the Kingdom, and the endurance we have in Jesus...*”

We have been greatly blessed to have lived in the same timeframe with such holy people as St. Faustina, Father Jarzebowski, and Pope John Paul II. Even more, we are blessed to have with us this beautiful and powerful image of Divine Mercy, a feast to celebrate and to live. Happily, we gather this day in the context of the Holy Eucharist, the source of God's saving mercy in every age. I, therefore, conclude this homily by reflection of St. Faustina on the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and how it is an ongoing extension of the Holy Eucharist and the forgiveness of sins: “*Eternal Father, I offer you the Body and Blood, soul and divinity, of your dearly beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world, for the sake of His sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.*”

May the Divine Mercy of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—shine upon us and through us. Amen. Alleluia.