

DIVINE MERCY 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is risen! Indeed, He is risen!

Today we celebrate the Octave of Easter ... Divine Mercy Sunday.

As you know, back in the 1930's a Polish nun named Faustina Kowalska had a series of visions of Jesus in which she was asked to promote devotion to him under the title of "the Divine Mercy."

This devotion centered around an image of Jesus as he appeared to her, the praying of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, as well as a feast to be established by the Pope.

On April 30, 2000, St. John Paul II fulfilled our Lord's wish, by declaring the Octave Sunday of Easter to henceforth be known as the Feast of Divine Mercy.

Today our Lord renews his call to each of us to trust in God's mercy. No one is excluded from the power of Divine Mercy!

In our Gospel, Jesus shows mercy to the apostles by not scolding them about their lack of courage as all but John deserted him when he was arrested in the garden.

Jesus greets them with those marvelous words: "Peace be with you!"

The mercy and love of Jesus is the source of true and lasting peace within our souls.

Our response to this gift of peace is to respond in the words that Jesus told Sr. Faustina to write at the bottom of the image of the Divine Mercy: "Jesus I trust in you!"

Jesus handed on to the apostles and their successors the ministry of mercy: "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them."

We associate this ministry most often with the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

However, there are other ways in which the Church celebrates and extends Divine Mercy.

Pope Francis has established special indulgences for this time of suffering in our world due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

An indulgence is the pardon of all our sins as well as the remission of the punishment due them.

In this instance, it is granted by the Church to everyone who offers any form of prayer for:

- those who have died and those who mourn their passing,
- all those who are sick and those who care for them
- those who put themselves in harm's way as they serve the common good
- and everyone who is suffering spiritually, emotionally, or financially because of the need for self-isolation.

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Of course, one has to have a conscious desire to be separated from all sin, and one must pray for the intention of the Pope (usually an Our Father and a Hail Mary).

However, the requirement to go to Confession and then to receive Holy Communion is deferred until such time as things return to normal.

In the second half of today's Gospel we have the exchange between Jesus and the apostle Thomas.

Jesus invites the doubting disciple to put his finger in his hand and to place his hand into Jesus' side.

This is another gracious act of mercy on the part of our Lord.

As with the other apostles, Jesus did not scold Thomas, but rather drew him into a moment of intimate encounter.

And then, Thomas makes that profound profession of faith: "My Lord and my God."

Pope Francis has said, "Mercy is the name of God."

Once we have experienced God's mercy our faith is renewed.

Finally, I believe that there is a beautiful parallel between touching the wounds of Christ and our experience of so much sickness, death, and uncertainty around us today.

Jesus received those wounds through the Cross; they did not disappear because of his Resurrection; they remained.

They remained as a reminder that it is only through the acceptance of the Cross in our lives out of love for others that we can ever hope to share in the fullness of life revealed in Christ's Resurrection.

Jesus is telling us: "Do not be afraid of the wounds ... of suffering."

We must literally go through those wounds in order to be truly healed.

This is the pattern for all of life, not just sickness.

My brothers and sisters, as we find ourselves in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, we need to trust in God's mercy and to share God's mercy more than ever.

And, we are being called to see in the wounds of our world and in our own personal lives the wounds of Jesus through which we can find grace, strength, and healing.

This year I invite you this year to watch the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and the Divine Mercy Chaplet followed by Benediction on EWTN.

Pope Francis has extended the special provision regarding Confession and Communion to receiving the Indulgence associated with these devotions as well.

May God in the greatness of the Divine Mercy bless you and keep you safe!