



HOW TO OBSERVE THE YEAR OF DIVINE MERCY TO REAP THE SPIRITUAL BENEFITS (1)

By

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On 11th February, the Vigil of the Second Sunday of Easter or Sunday of Divine Mercy, 2015, His Holiness, Pope Francis, issued a Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy titled “The Face of Mercy” (*Misericordiae Vultus* in Latin). In this bull, the Pope declared that the Holy Year of Divine Mercy will open on 8th December 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and close on the Liturgical Solemnity of Christ the King on 20th November 2016. According to the Pontiff, “We will entrust the life of the Church, all humanity, and the entire cosmos to the Lordship of Christ, asking Him to pour out His mercy upon us like the morning dew, so that everyone may work together to build a brighter future”.

The Pope expressed his desire that the Holy Year will be steeped in mercy “so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God”. He prayed that the balm of mercy may reach everyone, “both believers and those far away, as a sign that the kingdom of God is already present in our midst”.

How can Catholics – the clergy, consecrated men and women, and the lay faithful observe the Year of Divine Mercy to reap the spiritual benefits?

To be able to observe the Jubilee Year of Divine Mercy faithfully in order to reap the spiritual benefits, it is important to understand the message and devotion of Divine Mercy as communicated to the world by Our Lord Jesus Christ through Sister Faustina of the Most Blessed Sacrament (Helen Kowalska). On February 22, 1931 Sister Faustina, a Polish nun, saw a vision of Jesus with rays of Mercy from the area of his heart. He told her to have an image painted to represent this vision and to sign it. “Jesus I trust in You”. In a diary that Sister Faustina kept, she recorded series of revelations from the Lord between 1931 – 38 concerning the availability of His limitless mercy to even the greatest sinners. Jesus revealed special ways for people to respond to his mercy in their lives, and he gave her several promises for those who would trust in his mercy and show mercy to others.

By the time of Sister Faustina’s death in 1938, devotion to the Divine Mercy had already begun to spread throughout Eastern Europe. The process for Sister Faustina’s beatification was begun in 1966 and she was declared venerable on March 7, 1992. She was beatified by Pope John Paul II in Rome on April 18, 1993 and canonized by him on Sunday 30th April, 2000.

Sister Faustina’s diary, written under obedience to the Lord and her spiritual director, is the main source of the message of Divine Mercy. The message points to the great need for mercy in our times. It reveals God’s mercy as the answer to our present human condition, to our misery.

Rev. George Kosicki in his illuminating book on Divine Mercy (Come To My Mercy) says that what God wants of us is to turn to Him with trust. To trust God is to rely on Him who is mercy itself, knowing that He is God, and that He loves us and cares for us.

Our Lord calls out for sinners to come to His infinite mercy. Repeatedly His words to Saint Faustina emphasize that He is more generous toward sinners than toward the just and that His mercy is always available to us, no matter what we have done or what state we

are in, even if our sins are as black as night and we are filled with fears and anxieties. Over and over again Our Lord stresses that He could never reject a repentant heart, never refuse an appeal to His mercy.

Ways and Means of Observing the Year of Divine Mercy

The following, among others, are the principal ways and means of observing the Year of Divine Mercy to reap the spiritual benefits:

1. Prepare yourself to start the Year of Mercy in a state of grace.
2. Make a novena in honour of the Immaculate Conception (starting from Sunday November 29th to Monday December 7th or at least a triduum (3 days prayers) accompanied, if possible, with fasting in honour of the Immaculate Conception for grace to faithfully observe the Jubilee Year of Divine Mercy to gain the spiritual benefits attached to the observance.
3. Practice the devotion to Divine Mercy with great intensity. Divine Mercy devotional practices are described below.
4. Live the message of Divine Mercy by genuine practice of the temporal and spiritual works of mercy.
5. Participate actively in the liturgical and devotional practices in observance of the Year of Divine Mercy which will be prescribed by the Pope and the Bishop of your Diocese.
6. Propagate the Divine Mercy devotion through various media including distribution of Divine Mercy booklets such as the one entitled "The Desires and Promises of the Merciful Jesus" written by the author of this article. The booklet which has the *Imprimatur* of Most Rev. Martin Uzoukwu, the Bishop of Minna and National Chaplain of Divine Mercy Devotion in Nigeria should be read and re-read many times by all Catholics during the Jubilee Year of Divine Mercy to have deeper understanding of what the merciful Jesus requires of us. The booklet includes the Guidelines for all Divine Mercy Centres and Divine Mercy Prayer Groups in Nigeria written by the Bishop himself. Copies can be obtained from the author (Phone: 08035020068).

Devotional Practices

Having known the desires and promises of our Merciful Saviour, how do we practice devotion to His divine mercy? Here are the devotional practices revealed through Sister Faustina and given to us as "vessels of mercy" through which God's love can be poured out upon us and upon the world: Through St. Faustina, the merciful Saviour has given the aching world new channels for the outpouring of His grace. These new channels include the Image of The Divine Mercy, the Feast of Mercy (Divine Mercy Sunday), the Novena to The Divine Mercy, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, and prayer at 3 O'clock in the afternoon, the Hour of Great Mercy.

(1) The Image of The Divine Mercy

In 1931, Our Lord appeared to St Faustina in a vision. She saw Jesus clothed in a white garment with His right hand raised in blessing. His left hand was touching His garment in

the area of the Heart, from where two large rays came forth, one red and the other pale. She gazed intently at the Lord in silence, her soul filled with awe, but also with great joy. Jesus said to her:

Paint an image according to the pattern you see with the signature (inscription): Jesus, I trust in You. I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish. I also promise victory over [its] enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death. I Myself will defend it as My own glory (Diary, 47, 48). I am offering people a vessel with which they are to keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy. That vessel is this image with the signature: "Jesus, I trust in You" (327). I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and [then] throughout the world (47).

Our Lord promised many graces to those who honour the image of Divine Mercy:

By means of this image I shall grant many graces to souls. It is to be a reminder of the demands of My mercy, because even the strongest faith is of no avail without works (742).

(2) The Feast of Mercy

Among all of the elements of devotion to The Divine Mercy requested by our Lord through Sr. Faustina, the Feast of Mercy holds first place. The Lord's will with regard to its establishment was already made known in His first revelation to the saint. In all, there were 14 revelations concerning the desired feast.

The most comprehensive revelation can be found in Diary entry 699:

My daughter, tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy. I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and a shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy.

The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day are opened all the divine floodgates through which graces flow. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet.

My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or of angel, will be able to fathom it throughout all eternity. Everything that exists has come from the very depths of My most tender mercy. Every soul in its relation to Me will contemplate My love and mercy throughout eternity.

The Feast of Mercy emerged from My very depths of tenderness. It is My desire that it be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. Mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of My mercy.

Our Lord's explicit desire is that this feast be celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. This Sunday is designated in "The Liturgy of the Hours and the Celebration of the Eucharist" as the "Octave Day of Easter". It was officially called the Second Sunday of Easter after the liturgical reform of Vatican II. Now, by the Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the name of this liturgical day has been changed to: "Second Sunday of Easter, or Divine Mercy Sunday".

Our Lord's promise to grant complete forgiveness of sins and punishment on the Feast of Mercy is recorded three times in the *Diary of St. Faustina*, each time in a slightly different way:

I want to grant a complete pardon to the souls that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion on the feast of My mercy (1109).

Whoever approaches the Fountain of Life on this day will be granted complete forgiveness of sins and punishment (300).

The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion will obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment (699).

How do we prepare ourselves properly for the celebration of the Feast of Mercy?

Going to Confession is not the only way we should prepare ourselves for Divine Mercy Sunday. As Cardinal Francis Macharski, Archbishop of Cracow, Poland, explains in a 1985 pastoral letter, we are not simply called to ask for God's mercy with trust. We are also called to be merciful: "Our own merciful attitude is likewise a preparation. Without deeds of mercy, our devotion would not be real. For Christ does not only reveal the mercy of God, but at the same time He places before people the demand that they conduct themselves in life with love and mercy. The Holy Father states that this requirement constitutes the very heart of the Gospel ethos (*Rich in Mercy*, 3) — it is the commandment of love and the promise: 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy' (Mt 5:7). Let it be a mercy that is forgiving and true, and universal, with good words, deeds, and prayer for others!" Our Lord's words to St. Faustina about this requirement to be merciful are very strong and leave no room for misinterpretation:

Yes, the first Sunday after Easter is the feast of Mercy, but there must also be acts of mercy. ... I demand from you deeds of mercy, which are to arise out of love for Me. You are to show mercy to your neighbours always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse or absolve yourself from it (742).

Thus, to fittingly observe the Feast of Mercy, we should:

1. **Celebrate the Feast** on the Sunday after Easter;
2. Sincerely **repent** of all our sins;
3. Place our **complete trust** in Jesus;
4. **Go to Confession**, preferably before that Sunday;
5. Receive **Holy Communion** on the day of the Feast;
6. **Venerate the Image** of The Divine Mercy;
7. **Be merciful** to others, through our actions, words, and prayers on their behalf.

(3) Novena to the Divine Mercy

On Good Friday, 1937, Jesus requested that St Faustina make a special novena before the Feast of Mercy, from Good Friday through the following Saturday. He, Himself, dictated the intentions for each day. By means of a specific prayer she was to bring to His Heart a different group of souls each day and thus immerse them in the ocean of His mercy, begging the Father — on the strength of Jesus' Passion — for graces (for them. Prayers of the Novena to the Divine Mercy can be found in any Divine Mercy prayer book.

(4) The Chaplet of Divine Mercy

Our Lord also taught Sr. Faustina to say the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, adding that the Chaplet was not for herself alone but for the whole world. The Chaplet is said as follows, using the normal Rosary Chaplet: Begin with the **Our Father**, then **Hail Mary** and **I Believe in God**. On the large bead before each decade (of the Rosary), say this prayer:

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.

On the small beads of each decade say: **For the sake of His' sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.**

After the five decades, conclude with: **Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world.**

(Three times)

Concluding Prayer (Optional)

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself. Amen.

O Great Merciful God, Infinite Goodness, today all humanity calls out from the abyss of its misery to Your mercy—to Your compassion, O God; and it is with its mighty voice of misery that it cries out.

Gracious God, do not reject the prayer of this earth's exiles! O Lord, Goodness beyond our understanding. Who are acquainted with our misery through and through, and know that by our own power we cannot ascend to You, we implore You: anticipate us with Your grace and keep on increasing Your mercy in us, that we may faithfully do Your holy will all through our life and at death's hour.

Let the omnipotence of Your mercy shield us from the darts of our salvation's enemies, that we may with confidence, as Your children, await Your final coming—that day known to You alone.

And we expect to obtain everything promised us by you in spite of all our wretchedness, For your mercy is our Hope: Through His merciful Heart, as through an open gate, we pass through to heaven.

Our Lord told Sr. Faustina: **“Encourage souls to say the Chaplet which I have given you” (1541). Whoever will recite it will receive great mercy at the hour of death (687). Through Chaplet, you will obtain everything if what you ask for is compatible with my will (1731).**

(5) The Hour of Great Mercy

In His revelations to St Faustina, Our Lord asked for special prayer and meditation on His Passion each afternoon at the three o'clock hour, the hour that recalls His death on the cross.

At three o'clock, implore My mercy, especially for sinners; and, if only for a brief moment, immerse yourself in My Passion, particularly in My abandonment at the moment of agony. This is the hour of great mercy. ...In this hour I will refuse nothing to the soul that makes a request of Me in virtue of My Passion (Diary, 1320).

As often as you hear the clock strike the third hour, immerse yourself completely in My mercy, adoring and glorifying it; invoke its omnipotence for the whole world, and particularly for poor sinners; for at that moment mercy was opened wide for every soul. In this hour you can obtain everything for yourself and for others for the asking; it was the hour of grace for the whole world — mercy triumphed over justice. ...

My daughter, try your best to make the Stations of the Cross in this hour, provided that your duties permit it; and if you are not able to make the Stations of the Cross, then at least step into the chapel for a moment and adore, in the Most Blessed Sacrament, My Heart, which is full of mercy; and should you be unable to step into chapel, immerse yourself in prayer there where you happen to be, if only for a very brief instant (1572).

From these detailed instructions, it's clear that Our Lord wants us to turn our attention to His Passion at the three o'clock hour to whatever degree our duties allow, and He wants us to ask for His mercy.

Little Prayers recommended for use at the Hour of Great Mercy are the following:

You expired Jesus, but the source of life gushed forth for souls, and the ocean of mercy opened up for the whole world. O Fountain of Life, unfathomable Divine Mercy, envelop the whole world and empty Yourself out upon us (1319).

O Blood and Water which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fount of mercy for us, I trust in You (84).

(To be continued)