

Second Sunday of Easter – Divine Mercy Sunday (A)

April 27, 2014. *Let those who fear the LORD say, 'His mercy endures forever' (Ps. 118).*

Today is Divine Mercy Sunday and we celebrate the mercy (*hesed; mercy*) of the Lord which endures for ever. Last Sunday, Easter Sunday, after the 12:30 Mass, the words of the Psalm which we have just sung were realized in our midst for I had the privilege of administering the Holy Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion to a frail, lady in her eighties who, because of her infirmities had been unable to attend the long Easter Vigil. Lydia is one of the millions of people whose lives were literally torn asunder by the barbarism of Communism. She grew up in Uzbekistan and in the maelstrom of the Communist revolution and its aftermath, and the horrors of the Second World War she was separated from her father whom she knew to be a Latin Rite Catholic from Lithuania. There are not many Catholics in Uzbekistan; but she was bound and determined one day to become a Catholic and the mercy of the Lord which endures forever brought her here to our parish community, where the deepest desire of her heart was fulfilled. With the aid of her walker and as Divine Providence would have it, the assistance of Ilya, a young man of Russian heritage who became a Catholic last year at the Easter Vigil, Lydia attended our RCIA classes and took instructions in the faith which last Sunday we all professed through the renewal of our baptismal vows: *Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth? I do.* The affirmation of this truth is more than a vague assertion that there is a Creator, a philosophical first cause, a divine architect who created all this. No, it is much more than this. We affirm belief in God who is our Father; a God who knows and loves each one of us and who sent His only Son into the world to die for our salvation. Our Saviour Jesus Christ has taught us to call this God, *Father*; and so we do *at the Saviour's command and formed by divine teaching*. He taught us that the mercy of the Lord that endures forever is the very essence of the Gospel. Indeed, *mercy is the central nucleus of the Gospel message; it is the very name of God, the Face with which he revealed himself in the Old Covenant and fully in Jesus Christ, the incarnation of creative and redemptive love* (Pope Benedict XVI). Though at times it may seem that this mercy has been vanquished and even outlawed by the forces of evil; this mercy, indeed endures forever. This mercy is at work in the world; with it and through our choices we actively cooperate with the accomplishment of God's plan. It is at work in the hearts of all who believe, forming us, the Church, into the visible community of God's mercy; the community of disciples that reveals and through the works of mercy makes known *the immeasurable riches of [the Father's] grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.* (Eph. 2: 4-7).

The Feast of the Divine Mercy was established by Pope St. John Paul II who today was canonised in Rome, together with Pope St. John XXIII. During the celebration of the Year 2000, Pope John Paul had himself canonised St. Faustina Kowalska, a humble, Polish nun, the chosen instrument through whom our Lord revealed the devotion to the Divine Mercy in this, our present age. She was the first Saint of the new millennium. Born in 1905, she died in 1938. She was a mystic, a soul chosen by our Lord to make known the great treasure of God's mercy. There is a thread connecting all of these events; connecting the life of Pope St. John Paul with the life of St. Faustina, with our lives and even the life of our parish. That thread is mercy of the Lord which endures forever. Though doubts and afflictions may assail us and often do, Divine Mercy has the last word. The understanding of this truth is what we should seek to *grasp and rightly understand* (Collect, Second Sunday of Easter; *The Roman Missal*). This is the grace that we implore on this beautiful Feast.

Near the beginning of his long pontificate, Pope John Paul wrote an encyclical on God the Father titled *Dives in misericordia* (*Rich in Mercy*). In a sense, this title could be placed over his entire life and pontificate, especially his year-long struggle with Parkinson's disease and his death in 2005. The pope, who had been so great a speaker, finally taught us best with his silence. In the Church that lives from the sacrifice of her Lord, he became a suffering and, finally a mute witness of Christ's love *to the end* (Cf. *Jn.* 13:1). Pope John Paul gave Divine Mercy the last word in his life. After entrusting everyone and everything into the hands of the Virgin Mary, just as our Lord did on the Cross, St John Paul wrote in his will and testament, *I ... ask for prayers, so that God's mercy may prove greater than my own weakness and unworthiness: 'For with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption'* (Ps. 103:7). Yes, Divine Mercy does indeed have the last word for it greater than our own personal weakness and even the collective weakness and wickedness of the world. Indeed, *His mercy endures forever*. So the Psalmist gives voice to the conviction of those who trust in this mercy. *I will sing for ever of your mercy, O LORD; through all ages my mouth will proclaim your truth. Of this I am sure, that your mercy lasts for ever, that your truth is firmly established as the heavens* (Ps. 89:1-2). So often through the ages this has been the song of those who have been martyred or exiled for their witness to the truth. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vY_zGwyH54s)

In our age God revealed the immeasurable riches of His grace through the witness of St. Faustina, a messenger of the Merciful Heart of Jesus. To her our Lord entrusted the message of Divine Mercy and specifically the devotional prayer which we know as the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. According to what she wrote in her Diary, the chaplet's prayers for mercy are threefold: to obtain mercy, to trust in Christ's mercy and to show mercy to others. Many who pray the chaplet do so at three in the afternoon, the Hour of Mercy; as we do each Friday when we expose the Blessed Sacrament for adoration in the Sacred Heart Chapel. The chaplet is in essence, an extension of the Mass, the perfect prayer given to us by our Lord. The Mass is Calvary and in the Mass our Lord provides everyone who loves Him with an opportunity to be with Him on Calvary, where, for the world's salvation He offered the sacrifice of His Life. The prayers of the chaplet extend this offering: *Eternal Father, I offer you the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ; In atonement for our sins and those who the whole world. For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, Have mercy on us and on the whole world.* The chaplet was revealed to St. Faustina on September 13, 1935. The next ten years would be the bloodiest in the world's history, with millions of people deliberately brutalised, murdered, and exterminated in a world where through the influence of heathenism, barbarism and godless atheism society became deprived of its human face. Pope John Paul was himself a victim of this brutality, first under the oppression of Nazism and after the Second World War, the oppression of Communism. Lydia who was baptised last Sunday was also a victim of this brutality but through the tender mercy of our God she now belongs to God's Church as you and I do. *Let those who fear the LORD say, 'His mercy endures forever'* (Ps. 118).

The Church lives from the sacrifice of her Lord; the sacrifice of Calvary. This sacrifice is what sustains us and gives us hope. Many in our day are deprived of this sacrifice either because of persecution or because of heresy. In His infinite goodness our Lord has revealed to us a prayer that enables us wherever we are, to unite ourselves with His Sacrifice and offer to the eternal Father *the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ; In atonement for our sins and those who the whole world.* Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ *asks for childlike abandonment to the providence of our heavenly*

Father: "Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat' or 'What shall we drink?'...Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, # 305). This is the Kingdom that Lydia sought. It is the Kingdom that we also seek and to which we all belong; one Kingdom, one people from the many nations of the earth. And behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!' (Rev. 7: 9-10).

After receiving the Sacraments, in her broken English Lydia said, *I am calm. Tonight I can sleep. All my life I did not know whether I was fish or fowl. I know now who I am.* So I will ask you again today, *Do you believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth?* Yes, we do believe in Him and we rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy (1 Pt. 1:9) in the knowledge that in everything God works for good for those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). The constant witness of the saints confirms this truth. What a great gift our Lord gave to our parish this year; that through the mercy of His Divine Providence, we should have the privilege of collaborating with His saving will for Lydia.

On this Divine Mercy Sunday as we rejoice in the peace and glory of the resurrection and all the marvels that are wrought by the thread of God's mercy that binds us all together, we affirm our belief that *everything comes from love, all is ordained for the salvation of man, God does nothing without this goal in mind* (St. Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue on Providence*, Ch. IV, 138). So we are always full of confidence and unafraid.

With grateful hearts, let us now offer the Sacrifice of our Lord; the sacrifice that is our life. *Let the house of Israel say, 'His mercy endures for ever.' Let those who fear the LORD say, 'His mercy endures forever' (Ps. 118). Alleluia, Alleluia!*