

**Homily for Divine Mercy Prayer Service**

**Second Sunday of Easter**

**April 3, 2016**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: throughout the latter half of the last century, one of more-recognized voices in radio was the conservative personality by the name of Paul Harvey. Once a week, Harvey hosted a segment called *The Rest of the Story*. In these segments, he would tell a story of an event or a person, always leaving a critical piece of the story until the very end of the segment. After revealing this final nugget, he would conclude with his famous line: “And now you know...the *rest* of the story.”

For the past 15 years, the Universal Church has celebrated this Second Sunday of Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday. Pope St. John Paul II extended this devotion to Catholics throughout the world on the occasion of the canonization of St. Faustina Kowalska, who had received a series of private revelations from Jesus on the subject of His Divine Mercy, one of which was His desire for the establishment of a Feast of Mercy to be celebrated on the Second Sunday of Easter.

Speaking of this feast day, Our Lord told St. Faustina: “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.”<sup>1</sup>

These words of invitation by Our Lord to experience the profound depths of love and mercy are extremely appealing and have been embraced with enthusiasm by the faithful throughout the Church. Much attention is given to the remarkable benefits received by those who devoutly participate in the devotional practices connected with Divine Mercy Sunday, benefits which draw us into a deeper union with Our Risen Lord at the conclusion of this Octave of Easter.

While we do indeed rejoice in the powerful gift that is made available to us on this day, the Church has never ceased to insist on making sure we know, in the words of Paul Harvey, the *rest* of the story, that of *living* the graces received by practicing mercy. In his homily for the canonization of St. Faustina, the first saint canonized in the Great Jubilee Year beginning this Third Millennium of Christianity, Pope St. John Paul II said the following:

It is important then that we accept the whole message that comes to us from the word of God on this Second Sunday of Easter, which from now on throughout the Church will be called “Divine Mercy Sunday.” In the various readings, the liturgy seems to indicate the path of mercy which, while re-establishing the relationship of each person with God, also creates new relations of fraternal solidarity among human beings. Christ has taught us that “man not only receives and experiences the mercy of God, but is also called ‘to practice mercy’ towards others: ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy’ (Mt 5: 7)” (*Dives in misericordia*, n. 14). He also showed us the many paths of mercy, which not only forgives sins but reaches out to all human needs. Jesus bent over every kind of human poverty, material and spiritual.<sup>2</sup>

This *rest* of the story of Divine Mercy, that of practicing mercy, is explicitly mentioned by Our Lord in His revelations to St. Faustina, as He told her:

Yes, the first Sunday after Easter is the Feast of Mercy, but there must also be deeds of mercy, which are to arise out of love for Me. You are to show mercy to our neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to absolve yourself from it.<sup>3</sup>

Our present Holy Father, Pope Francis, continues to drive this message home, particularly during the Jubilee Year of Mercy. He ardently insists on the importance of not just seeking mercy, but also sharing it, encouraging the Church to reflect on and practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Speaking about these works of mercy, particularly as they are presented in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, the Pope reminds us that “[w]e cannot escape the Lord’s words to us, and they will serve as the criteria upon which we will be judged.”<sup>4</sup>

These two sides of the story of Divine Mercy are complementary to one another, for the graces that we receive free us from the attachments to our own selfish ways of living, so that we can better serve the needs of our brothers and sisters. Let us be mindful of this as we continue our celebration on this day dedicated to the message of Divine Mercy. May our hearts be open to receive the graces that Christ and His Church offer to us today, and may we then live those graces with greater intensity as we spread the light of this message to the world around us through works of mercy rooted in our love of God and our neighbor.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Faustina Kowalska, *Diary*, 699.

<sup>2</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, *Mass for the Canonization of Sister Mary Faustina Kowalska*, 30 April 2000.

<sup>3</sup> St. Faustina Kowalska, *Diary*, 742.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Misericordia Vultus*, §15.