Divine Mercy Answers Life's Crises and Problems

Divine Mercy Answers Life's Crises and Problems

Rev. George W. Kosicki, C.S.B.

© July 29, 2003, Rev. George Kosicki, CSB

Scripture quotes cited include the specific translation.

Quotes from the Diary of St. Faustina are used with permission of the Marians of the Immaculate Conception, Eden Hill, Stockbridge, MA..

Table of Contents

Divine Mercy Answers Life's Crises and Problems

Page

Words of Our Lord to Saint Faustina..... 6
Introduction..... 7

Overall Division:

Part I: What Should I Do When...?..... 10
Part II: How Can I...?..... 64
Part III: What Can I Do...?..... 82
(To Make use of God's gift of His mercy in my Daily Life?)
Conclusion: Live the Divine Mercy Message and Devotion..... 150
Epilogue 158

Divine Mercy Answers Life's Crises and Problems

Part I: **What Should I Do When...?**..... 10
...I'm Depressed?..... 11
...I'm in the Dark Night?..... 19
...My Mind is Wandering?..... 26
...I'm full of Fears?..... 29
...I'm Discouraged?..... 31
...I'm Confused about the Truth?..... 34
...In Difficult Times?..... 36
...Violence Surrounds Me?..... 40
...I'm Suffering?..... 44
...I'm Full of Doubts?..... 47
...I'm Powerless?..... 51
...All Things Fall Apart?..... 54
...I'm Addicted?..... 56
...I'm Scandalized by the Church?..... 58
...There is a War?..... 60

Part II: **How Can I...?** 64
...Make a Spiritual Communion? 65
...Be present to the Lord? 67
...Trust the Lord? 71
...Be Forgiven for What I have Done? 75
...Renew my Relationship to the Lord? 77
...Strengthen my Family? 79
...Live in Peace? 81

Part III: **What Can I Do?** 82
Be Holy! 83
Pray "Jesus, Mercy!" 85
Live a Litany of Mercy! 86
Celebrate God's Mercy! 89
Rejoice in the Lord Always! 91
Seek Him! 93
Repent! 95
Evangelize with the Image! 97
Rejoice in Your Misery! 99
Walk in Step with the Lord! 101
Be Merciful at Home! 103
Value Others! 105
Pray ... Then Watch God Act! 107
Give Thanks and Live the Eucharist! 109
Be United in Mercy! 111
Pray "Come Holy Spirit!" 113
Be a Saint! 115
Be an Apostle of Divine Mercy! 117
Forgive! 119
Intercede Eucharistically! 121
Give Personal Witness to Mercy! 123
Live Immersed in the Spirit! 125
Live in the Power of the Holy Spirit! 127
Evangelize by the Power of the Holy Spirit! 129
Hope in the Divine Mercy! 131

I will go to my Father!..... 133
Meet Justice with Mercy!..... 135
I can rejoice — God loves me!..... 137
Follow the “Little Way”!..... 139
Say “Yes” to God’s Love!..... 141
Follow the Merciful Way!..... 143
Live Fatima, Live Mercy!..... 145
Christ is born! Jubilate!..... 147
Plead Mercy on the Whole World!..... 149

Conclusion and Exhortation

Remember Eternal Life..... 151
Live the Divine Mercy Message and Devotion..... 153
“Be Apostles of Divine Mercy” John Paul II..... 158

Epilogue

Why Divine Mercy?..... 159

Words of Our Lord to Saint Faustina, the Great Apostle of Divine Mercy

Tell aching mankind to snuggle close to My merciful Heart,
and I will fill it with peace (Diary, 1074)**.**

Mankind will not have peace
until it turns with trust to My mercy (Diary, 300)**.**

Introduction

I have never met anyone without problems. I would surmise that the more than six billion people in the world all have some form of problem, and many have more than just one problem! They are in crisis.

In this deeply troubled world we all want, and are searching for, some solution or relief to our problems. The purpose of this book is to help you with your problems. **But** it is not a "self-help" book, rather it is a "grace-help," a "God-help" book. It is not a self-help book since trying to help by ourselves alone is the major cause of our problems. We need help from God's grace to break the spiral of acting independently of God. The answer to our rebellious independence from God is to surrender to His merciful love.

To surrender to God's merciful love with *trust* is the key to opening up the deep-seated problems within us. Surrender to God's love is central to this book. These many answers in response to our problems are drawn from Sacred Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II, The Diary of Saint Faustina, whom John Paul II called "The great Apostle of Divine Mercy in our time" (April 10, 1994), and my own experience of nearly fifty years as a priest, ministering to people in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Spiritual Direction and homilies at Holy Mass and numerous retreats for priests and lay faithful.

So this book is not just a "how to do it" book but rather it is "how to cooperate" with God's word and His present will.

When I use the word *Mercy* throughout this book I am using it to describe God's love, poured out in creating us, redeeming us, and sanctifying us. Mercy is God's love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Mercy, according to John Paul II, is the "Second name of love" (*Rich in Mercy*). Mercy is God's love of the unlovable, forgiveness of the unforgivable. Saint Faustina records in her Diary the words of our Lord to her:

> **The greater the sinner, the greater the right he has to my mercy** (Diary, 723).

> **[Let] the greatest sinners place their trust in My mercy. They have the right before others to trust in the abyss of My mercy. My daughter, write about My mercy towards tormented souls. Souls that make an appeal to**

> **My mercy delight Me. To such souls I grant even more graces than they ask. I cannot punish even the greatest sinner if he makes an appeal to My compassion, but on the contrary, I justify him in my unfathomable and inscrutable mercy. Write: before I come as a just Judge, I first open wide the door of My mercy. He who refuses to pass through the door of My mercy must pass through the door of My justice...** (Diary, 1146).

This is a book of Mercy answers for "Tormented Souls" — that is over six billion of us who have problems and crises!

Throughout the **Divine Mercy Answers** I will be using the description of man, male and female, as "spirit, soul and body" (1 Thess 5:23). The corresponding Greek words "pneuma, psyche, and soma" have a special meaning to me in light of my training in biochemistry. While I was a member of the teaching team at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor of the first year medical students (250 in the class) from 1958 to 1961, the students were told that some 70% of their patients would suffer from psycho-somatic diseases. That doesn't mean they are not sick, but rather it describes the *origin* of the sickness. As the psyche, the sickness is real. It can kill the patient!

But after some years of study and teaching I came to the realization that *all* sickness is pneumo–psycho–somatic! Yes, as we will see in following texts that spiritual disorder (pneumatic) is also a source of sickness as well as the psychological (the mental and emotional) and somatic (bodily, physical damages) disorders.

So in dealing with the problems of man — a body person — we will need to consider the three dimensions of this wonderful creation: man–both male and female–called by God to a new life, an everlasting life.

A Biblical Anthropology: *A Technical Note*

A further explanation of the nature of man is needed. The following description from *Spiritual Warfare* that I wrote some 25 years ago, now out of print, is an introduction to the way the Sacred Scriptures describe the unity of man:

> Sacred Scripture reveals the nature of the human as well as the nature of God. It would be good to recognize that God has something to say about the way He

made us. The most fundamental picture of mankind is that we are created by God as one whole being. We are a unity, however, that can be looked at from different points of view. We are a unity of body-soul-spirit, not divided into three parts, but rather one person related to all things around us. We are in relationship. As *body* or "flesh," we are related to all things that are created, sharing with them the commonness of creaturehood. As *soul*, we are unique and yet related to living things. As *spirit*, we are oriented to or related to God, Who is Spirit, communing with Him.

In Hebrew, there are three words for person: *bashar*, meaning body-person; *nephesh*, meaning soul-person; and *ruah*, meaning a spirit-person. The phrase "I am body, or I am soul, or I am spirit" is closer to Hebrew thought than "I have a body, I have a soul, or I have a spirit." The Hebrews used the terms: *bashar*, *nephesh*, *ruah*, to describe the whole man in three different relationships.

In keeping with the Hebraic love of earthly descriptions, man might also be described in the English terms heart, head and hand. Heart suggests the inner person that longs for God (spirit). Head refers to the unique, living, thinking person (soul), and hand denotes the helping and working person, the strength of man (body). In this sense, the Great Commandment of Deuteronomy 6:5 can be understood as loving God with the totality of our being. *You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength* (Page 97).

PART I

What Should I Do When...?

Part one deals with the crises and problems we face in our present day world.

Q: What Should I Do When I'm Depressed?

Depression is a major problem in our times especially in the first world countries. Some 14 million people in the United States of America (USA) are now affected by it and are taking anti-depressants. It is a very complex disease that has various types of causes: physical (somatic), psychological, and spiritual (pneumatic). So various ways of treating the problem must be considered because the multiple causes of depression are interrelated and overlapped.

I know from my own experience what it is to be in darkness, without zeal, without energy, without joy, without the light to see where I am or where I'm going. So, I share these insights from my own personal experience, as a biochemist and as a priest.

Depression is usually triggered by crises. A tragedy in our life will set off a sequence of strong reactions in our body chemistry (physical cause), strong emotions and confused thoughts (psychological causes) and darkness, sin and guilt (spiritual causes). There are a number of examples of crisis and tragedy that can lead to depression: death in the family, divorce, loss of possessions, loss of our job, loss of our reputation, chronic disease, accidents and calamities.

Let us look at the three major areas that respond to the crisis and cause of depression: the physical (soma), the psychological (psycho), and the spiritual (pneumo).

Physical Causes

Researchers have developed drugs, such as Prozac, to counteract the deficiency of the chemical serotonin in the brain. Serotonin is the hormone that is responsible for the sense of well–being and your response to stress. Serotonin is one of two important neurotransmitters in the brain, the other is the hormone dopamine which controls your actions.

Unfortunately the drugs developed by researchers can only increase the level of one or the other hormone but not both. More over these drugs have strong side effects such as memory loss. But other researchers have now come up with a totally different approach to the physical problem of increasing the levels of the key brain hormones which is not a drug, but a *food*. Purified fish oil! Yes, the old fashion remedy for so many things given to us by grandma. Good old Cod liver oil: **But** *now purified*. The purified fish oils (with the impurities of the polluted ocean removed) contain Omega–3 long chain fatty acids that increase the levels of

both serotonin and dopamine! The Omega–3 long chain fatty acids are like a miracle food that ACTS like a drug to counteract chronic–diseases such as obesity, diabetes 2, heart diseases, high blood pressure, depression and a wide range of inflammatory diseases such as Alzheimer, Parkinson, and arthritis. It sounds like a MIRACLE!

So there are positive ways to counteract the physical deficiencies that cause depression. In a thumbnail sketch they are a diet that controls excess insulin release by:

1. Avoiding the "3 S's" – *S*ugar, *S*tarch and *S*aturated fats.

2. *Balancing* our meals and snacks with good protein and good fat and restricting our carbohydrate intake to predominately vegetables and fruit.

3. Supplementing your diet with purified fish oil containing log chain Omega–3 fatty acids.

Dr. Barry Sears has pointed out in his conclusion of *Omega Zone* (the 9th book on this new approach to healthy living) that if you don't or can't do anything else to improve your health, then at least take the fish oil with Omega–3 long chain fatty acids.

Psychological Causes

Stress is a major cause of psychological depression. The research on the effect of stress is very well documented. Stress of a variety of kinds releases steroid hormones from the adrenal glands that prepare our bodies for defense. Sustained stress reeks physiological havoc with our body, mind and emotions.

The response is varied but very effective:

1• Sleep!
2• Rest and Recreation
3• Hobbies
4• Exercise — both aerobic and anabolic
5• Physical work

But one should avoid drugs if at all possible. They have many unknown side effects on

the body, mind and emotions.

Our **thoughts** are another major source of depression. Father Larry Fage, CSB, with a doctorate in clinical psychology taught me the powerful effect of our wandering thoughts: dark thoughts, anxieties, fears, judgements, "nursery and rehearsing" events, all hurts that disturb us. All these thoughts of the wandering mind have a physical, psychological, and spiritual damaging effect on us. They are like audio tapes that keep playing the same message over and over again. We must take courage and push the "eject button" — and replace the audio tape with tapes of the positive message of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Saint Paul writes clearly and positively about our wandering thoughts:

> Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
>
> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. *Then the God of peace will be with you* (Philippines 4:4-9 NAB).

Now there's a solution to depression — "*the God of peace will be with you!*"

Spiritual Causes

In one word the cause is **SIN!** Sin is a major cause of spiritual depression as well as other chronic diseases. To put it bluntly: REPENT and STOP SINNING!

When I speak of sin I am not only referring to breaking the ten commandments but also to the seven capital sins: pride, lust, avarice, anger, sloth, envy, and gluttony — which are an expression of breaking the ten commandments. I especially see the effect of the sins of lack

of forgiveness, hate, anger, rash judgments, gossip, jealousy and illicit or evil relationships.

Unfortunately *guilt* is considered bad in the modern world. But guilt has a necessary function and a good purpose — it awakens our conscience that we are in sin. It is like pain that tells you that you touched something hot and you must withdraw your hand from the hot stove or you will be severely burnt!

So if we are living in sin, in a sinful situation or in a sinful habit, we should feel guilty! It is our conscience reminding us to repent, to *change*, and to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). For example, if the television is the source of lustful thoughts then throw out the television! That would be a real change!

The Sacrament of Reconciliation has an amazing effect; it not only forgives sin but brings us the grace, the strength and determination to change and to sin no more. It brings us joy and relieves depression with the Lord's peace.

There is another type of guilt — call it a "bad guilt" such as scrupulosity, which can be a form of the "dark night" (see the question on the dark night).

Overall Response To Depression

We must make a serious examination of the three main causes of depression since depression is so common. It is common not only among the 14 million in the USA who are on anti-depressant drugs, but it touches most of us at times. The following three–fold approach to overcoming depression is essential to care for the marvelous and complex creations that we are.

The three–fold approach to the problem of depression described here is really effective! Stated in a simplified summary:

1.) Take Omega–3 long chain fatty acid from purified fish oil daily.
2.) Take "R & R" – rest and re-creating activity daily.
3.) Repent and go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly.

Another response to depression is the biblical way. You will find it very Jewish in practice:

• **Lament**. Cry out to God with your whole heart, pleading for mercy. You can even get angry at God — as long as your heart is right with God. Put very bluntly we need to re-discover lamentation. It is "bitching like hell to God" who can do something about the situation, rather than bitching like hell to one another which makes the situation worse! (See the book of Lamentations, and the Psalms in Distress e.g. – Psalm 6).

"Have pity on me, O Lord, for my body is in terror; my soul to is utterly terrified."

• **Trust in God and Praise and Thank God**, because He is God, He is in charge, and He loves you. God, in His providence, works out all things to the eternal good of them who love Him (Rom 8:28).

• **Play a musical instrument: dance and sing** – not because we feel like doing it, **BUT** because the dancing and singing will lead to the feeling of the experience of God's loving presence. e.g. Psalm 57: In the midst of being attached and betrayed, King David sings: "My heart is steadfast O God; my heart is steadfast, I will sing and chant praise. Awake, O my soul; awake lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn. I will give thanks to you among the peoples, O Lord. I will chant your praise among the nations."

This biblical kind of response to depression is not easy but it is very effective. Take your thoughts off of yourself and turn them over to God. This kind of approach is not a feeling but an act of the will.

• **Take your thoughts off yourself** – and be of service to others. Step out and do some work of mercy — for others. There is so much that can be done by deeds, by encouraging words and by prayer. "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36, Revised New American Bible).

Saint Faustina And Depression

Saint Faustina records a conversation of the merciful Lord with a soul that is deeply depressed: It is despairing. I found this conversation very effective, even over the phone with persons wanting to commit suicide:

> Jesus: **O soul steeped in darkness, do not despair. All is not yet lost. Come and confide in your God, who is love and mercy.**

— But the soul, deaf even to this appeal, wraps itself in darkness.

Jesus calls out again: **My child, listen to the voice of your merciful Father.**

— In the soul arises this reply: “For me there is no mercy,” and it falls into greater darkness, a despair which is a foretaste of hell and makes it unable to draw near to God.

Jesus calls to the soul a third time, but the soul remains deaf and blind, hardened and despairing. Then the mercy of God begins to exert itself, and, without any co-operation from the soul, God grants it final grace. If this too is spurned, God will leave the soul in this self-chosen disposition for eternity. This grace emerges from the merciful Heart of Jesus and gives the soul a special light by means of which the soul begins to understand God’s effort; but conversion depends on its own will. The soul knows that this, for her, is final grace and, should it show even a flicker of good will, the mercy of God will accomplish the rest.

Jesus: **My omnipotent mercy is active here. Happy the soul that takes advantage of this grace.**

Jesus: **What joy fills My Heart when you return to me. Because you are weak, I take you in My arms and carry you to the home of My Father.**

Soul (as if awaking, asks fearfully): Is it possible that there yet is mercy for me?

Jesus: **There is, My child. You have a special claim on My mercy. Let it act in your poor soul; let the rays of grace enter your soul; they bring with them light, warmth, and life.**

Soul: But fear fills me at the thought of my sins, and this terrible fear moves me to doubt Your goodness.

Jesus: **My child, all your sins have not wounded My Heart as painfully as**

your present lack of trust does — that after so many efforts of My love and mercy, you should still doubt My goodness.

Soul: O Lord, save me yourself, for I perish. Be my Savior. O Lord, I am unable to say anything more; my pitiful heart is torn asunder; but You, O Lord...

Jesus does not let the soul finish but, raising it from the ground, from the depths of its misery, he leads it into the recesses of His Heart where all its sins disappear instantly, consumed by the flames of love.

Jesus: **Here, soul, are all the treasures of My Heart. Take everything you need from it.**

Soul: O Lord, I am inundated with Your grace. I sense that a new life has entered into me and, above all, I feel Your love in my heart. That is enough for me. O Lord, I will glorify the omnipotence of Your mercy for all eternity. Encouraged by Your goodness, I will confide to You all the sorrows of my heart.

Jesus: **Tell me all, My child, hide nothing from Me, because My loving Heart, the Heart of your Best Friend, is listening to you.**

Soul: O Lord, now I see all my ingratitude and Your goodness. You were pursuing me with Your grace, while I was frustrating Your benevolence. I see that I deserve the depths of hell for spurning Your graces.

Jesus (interrupting): **Do not be absorbed in your misery — you are still too weak to speak of it — but, rather, gaze on My Heart filled with goodness, and be imbued with My sentiments. Strive for meekness and humility; be merciful to others, as I am to you; and, when you feel your strength failing, if you come to the fountain of mercy to fortify your soul, you will not grow weary on your journey.**

Soul: Now I understand Your mercy, which protects me, and like a brilliant star, leads me into the home of my Father, protecting me from the horrors of

hell that I have deserved, not once, but a thousand times. O Lord, eternity will hardly suffice for me to give due praise to Your unfathomable mercy and Your compassion for me (Diary 1486).

Q: What Should I Do When I'm In The Dark Night?

To respond to the question I need to give a short description of the dark night and then develop it more fully. The dark night is a spiritual experience of darkness and dryness that is described by Saint John of the Cross. The dark night is a purification by God of the obstacles to union with God. It is a purification of all deliberate sin and of the deep roots of sin. It is a painful experience that prepares one for a deeper union with the Lord.

The first point I want to make is the necessity to discern whether what you are actually in is a dark night according to the description of Saint John of the Cross *or* is it depression.

To repeat what I said in the previous chapter: depression has various causes and remedies. Depression is a real darkness. But it is all too often confused with the "dark night" described by Saint John of the Cross and used as an excuse for our behavior.

The Dark Night Of Saint John Of The Cross

A number of factors must be operating as signs of this real dark night. The following signs stand out as essentials of this dark night:

a) There is no *mortal sin* in your life — especially those rooted in a lack of forgiveness, sins of the tongue (see James 3), rash judgments, and illicit relationships. All deliberate sins are disappearing, even the smallest sins.

b) *Prayer* continues, even if dry. Be faithful and persistent to a daily hour of prayer.

c) The practice of *virtues* especially patience and kindness and is growing and leads to joy!

d) There is a strong *seeking* of and *desire* for God.

e) *Faith* is what sustains us and always works in conjunction with hope and love — in one word *TRUST* in God who is trust worthy and merciful (see Letter to the Hebrews).

f) *Deep humility* and a letting go of self-centeredness.

God Is At Work In The Dark Night

God is at work in purifying us in the real dark night. He is scrubbing the very depths of

our being to remove the "garbage" unknown to us. He is expanding our vessels to make space for grace. There is so much more grace that He wants to lavish on us but our vessels are constricted and must be expanded by God's work and our cooperation by prayer of desire and surrender. [Saint Augustine in his letter to Proba on the Our Father – Office of Readings]

The light of God's presence at work in us is so brilliant that the powerful light blinds us — so we are in darkness and cannot see what He is doing.

Spiritual Protection

During these times of deep excavation and purification Satan is trying his best to interfere with what God is doing – so we need spiritual protection and guidance. Our spiritual guide or direction can be a priest, a religious or a friend who knows and loves the Lord, and who will help you discern and pray with you.

We need guidance and protection during these dark nights — especially in the area of deliverance from interfering evil spirits in areas of our mind and memory that have been significantly influenced by our training, by the secularism of our culture and times. We need both prayer and healing in order to surrender more and more to what God is doing in the depths of our being, in the deep caverns of our heart.

What Can I Do To Cooperate With The Work of God In the Dark Night?

A number of good and profitable things can and should be done to cooperate with the grace of the dark night. It is important, however, to be under the direction of a spiritual director who can help you to recognize the movement of the Holy Spirit in your life. Each person is unique in his spiritual journey and so are the variations of the dark night, and so the appropriate responses need to be discerned.

Here is a list of responses to darkness that are taught by the saints:

a) *Wait and watch!* (e.g. the Parable of the Ten Virgins, Matthew 25:1-13, Saint Mark on watchfulness, Mk 13:32-37). God is at work in His timing. Be patient for Him to accomplish what He desires, but watch in prayer. The watching is an active waiting — actually praying, not just saying prayers.

b) *Be faithful* to the Lord and His commandments. By your faithful endurance you will

gain your lives (see Lk 21:19).

c) *Seek and long* for the Lord with your whole heart, mind and strength. Seek Him and you will find Him (Psalms, Saint Augustine).

d) *Focus your attention* on the indwelling presence — and not on the darkness (Saint Theresa of Avila).

e) *Remember the promise* of the Lord: "Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!" (Matt 28:20, NAB) — and rely on it. The Lord is always with you — even when it seems He is not there.

f) Make frequent *spiritual communions*. Frequently and regularly turn to the Lord who is present in your heart and venerate Him — as Saint Peter teaches us:

"Venerate the Lord, that is, Christ in your hearts" (1 Peter 3:15, NAB).

You can ask the Lord the favorite question of Saint John of the Cross when he was in darkness: "Lord where are you hiding now?" You may well hear the response: "I'm in the depth of your heart. Where have you been?"

Saint Maximilian Kolbe made the resolution at his ordination to make a spiritual communion at least every quarter of an hour.

g) *Rejoice and be glad* that God is at work in you to bring you to a greater union with Him. Give Him thanks for what He is doing!

h) Do not be attached to *consolations* — they come and go.

i) *Mortification*: Do small things that are against your self-will, especially the smallest things. They are a great way to overcome pride.

j) The dark night of faith is difficult. Be *faithful*; the reward is fantastic.

Other Forms Of Dark Night: Spiritual Depression

Other forms of spiritual depression call for spiritual direction in order to distinguish the origin of the darkness. Is it physical, psychological or spiritual?

• *Spiritual Depression* is experienced even by Saints in the dark night. For example, see
Saint Faustina (Diary, 1486) and the experiences described at the end of this question.

•*Scrupulosity* can be a form of dark night; it is a form of spiritual depression.

• *Sharing in the passion of Christ*, is a form of spiritual depression, it is painful and dark, yet filled with love. Saint Paul describes it as a crucifixion with Christ (Gal 2:19, NAB).

• *Spiritual warfare* is a form of spiritual depression. It is experienced in various ways such as judgments and accusations attacking us. It can be a cloud of oppression that darkens our whole being. Again the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a powerful antidote to spiritual attack.

Similarities And Differences Between The Dark Night And Depression

The depression caused by crisis and tragedy (such as those listed under the question of depression: death in the family, divorce, loss of possessions, loss of our job, loss of our reputation, chronic diseases, accidents and calamities) are analogous to the dark night. There are *similarities* in the *experience* of darkness of the mind, of pain, of not understanding why the crisis or what is its purpose.

However, if there is no faith, no hope, no love, and no prayer, then there is no peace or joy — it is not a dark night.

BUT with faith in the Lord, with prayer and with repentance, the effect of the crisis depression can be like the effect of the dark night. The Lord brings us to deeper faith and to a deeper conversion, and brings about changes in our relationships with the Church and the family, and above all, leads us to a deeper sense of union with the Lord.

From Sacred Scripture and from faith:

We know that God makes all things work together for the good of those who love Him who have been called according to his decree (Rom 8:28, NAB).

Saint Faustina On The Experience Of The Dark Night

Toward the end of the first year of my novitiate, darkness began to cast its shadow over my soul. I felt no consolation in prayer; I had to make a great effort to meditate; fear began to sweep over me. Going deeper into myself, I could find nothing but great misery. I could also clearly see the great holiness of God. I did not dare to raise my eyes to Him, but reduced myself to dust under His feet and begged for mercy. My soul was in this state for almost six months. Our beloved Mother Directress [Mary Joseph] encouraged me in these difficult moments. But this suffering became greater and greater.

The second year of the novitiate was approaching. Whenever I recalled that I was to make my vows, my soul shuddered. I did not understand what I was reading; I could not meditate; it seemed to me that my prayer was displeasing to God. It seemed to me that by approaching the Holy Sacraments I was offending God even more. But despite this, my confessor [Father Theodore] did not let me omit one single Holy Communion. God was working very strangely in my soul. I did not understand anything at all of what my confessor was telling me. The simple truths of the faith became incomprehensible to me. My soul was in anguish, unable to find comfort anywhere.

At a certain point, there came to me the very powerful impression that I am rejected by God. This terrible thought pierced my soul right through; in the midst of the suffering my soul began to experience the agony of death. I wanted to die but could not. The thought came to me: of what use is it to strive for virtues; why mortify oneself when all this is disagreeable to God? When I made this known to the Directress of Novices, I received this reply, “Know, dear Sister, that God has chosen you for great sanctity. This is a sign that God wants to have you very close to Himself in Heaven. Have great trust in the Lord Jesus.”

That dreadful thought of being rejected by God is the actual torture suffered by

the damned. I fled to Jesus' Wounds and repeated the words of trust, but these words became for me an even greater torture. I went before the Blessed Sacrament, and I began to speak to Jesus: "Jesus, You said that a mother would sooner forget her infant than God His creature, and that 'even if she would forget her infant, I, God, will never forget My creature.' O Jesus, do You hear how my soul is moaning? Deign to hear the painful whimpers of Your child. I trust in You, O God, because heaven and earth will pass, but Your word will last forever." Still I found not a moment of relief (Diary 23).

In order to purify a soul, Jesus uses whatever instruments He likes. My soul underwent a complete abandonment on the part of creatures; often my best intentions were misinterpreted by the sisters, a type of suffering which is most painful; but God allows it, and we must accept it because in this way we become more like Jesus. There was one thing which I could not understand for a long time: Jesus ordered me to tell everything to my Superiors, but my Superiors did not believe what I said and treated me with pity as though I were being deluded or were imagining things.

Because of this, believing myself to be deluded, I resolved to avoid God interiorly for fear of these illusions. But the grace of God pursued me at every step, and God spoke to me when I least expected it (Diary 38).

O my God, I understand well that You demand this spiritual childhood of me, because You are constantly asking it of me through Your representatives.

At the beginning of my religious life, suffering and adversities frightened and disheartened me. So I prayed continuously, asking Jesus to strengthen me and to grant me the power of His Holy Spirit that I might carry out His holy will in all things, because from the beginning I have been aware of my weakness. I know very well what I am of myself, because for this purpose Jesus has opened the eyes of my soul; I am an abyss of misery, and hence I understand that whatever good there is in my soul consists solely of His holy grace. The knowledge of my own misery allows me, at the same time, to know the immensity of Your mercy. In my own interior life, I am looking with one eye at the abyss of my misery and baseness, and with the other, at the abyss of Your mercy, O God (Diary 56).

> O Holy Trinity, Eternal God, I thank You for allowing me to know the greatness and the various degrees of glory to which souls attain. Oh, what a great difference of depth in the knowledge of God there is between one degree and another! Oh, if people could only know this! O my God, if I were thereby able to attain one more degree, I would gladly suffer all the torments of the martyrs put together. Truly, all those torments seem as nothing to me compared with the glory that is awaiting us for all eternity. O Lord, immerse my soul in the ocean of Your divinity and grant me the grace of knowing You; for the better I know You, the more I desire You, and the more my love for You grows. I feel in my soul an unfathomable abyss which only God can fill. I lose myself in Him as a drop does in the ocean. The Lord has inclined himself to my misery like a ray of the sun upon a barren and rocky desert. And yet, under the influence of His rays, my soul has become covered with verdure, flowers, and fruit, and has become a beautiful garden for His repose (Diary, 605).

For a complete set of readings on the darkness experienced by Saint Faustina see the month of May in *Revelations of Divine Mercy: Daily Reading from the Diary of Saint Faustina*, Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Q: What Should I Do When My Mind Is Wandering?

The wandering mind is a common problem. At times the mind goes around in circles, nursing and rehearsing some argument or difference we've encountered, and the thoughts and judgments and what we should have said or done keep playing over and over like a broken record. At times the thoughts are noisy and judgmental or even revengeful and bitter. At other times the thoughts jump from one topic to another, like a flitting butterfly going from one flower to another. And then there are the times of tragedy and crisis.

What should you do to find peace and joy? There are a number of effective responses, again touching the whole person: body, mind and spirit. Let us look at the pneumo-psycho-somatic approach.

A *somatic* (body or physical) approach is to do some physical work or do some exercises and take time for rest. Hobbies are great for changing our thought patterns and walking outside is another effect purifier of the mind.

A *psychological* approach is to guard your thoughts. Push the "eject" button on your tape recorder and put in a positive, up-building tape. This sounds like the advice Saint Paul gave the Philippians 4:4-9:

> Dismiss all anxiety from your minds present your needs to God in every form of prayer and in petitions full of gratitude. Then God's own peace, which is beyond all understanding, will stand guard over your hearts and mind, in Christ Jesus. Finally, my brothers, your thoughts should be holy directed to all that is true, all that deserves respect, all that is honest, pure, admirable, decent, virtuous or worthy of praise. Live according to what you have learned and accepted, what you have heard me say and seen me do. Then will the God of peace be with you (NAB).

Saint Paul puts it yet another way:

> ...take every thought captive in obedience to Christ (II Corinthians 10:5 RNAB).

So ask the thought: Where are you from? Show me your passport into my mind: If it is

not obedient to Christ then throw it out! This is great advice because the thoughts in our mind have an enormous effect on the peace and joy of our whole being.

A *pneumatic* (spiritual approach) is to turn to God's mercy and ask for *mercy* on the thoughts, on the persons, and on the events whirling around in our head. In one word *pray*. Prayer of this type is intercessory prayer. By praying for mercy we are joining Jesus at the throne of the Father "since he lives forever to make intercession" (Hebrews 7:25 NAR). And further by our baptism we have an accorded right to approach the throne of grace to *receive mercy* and favor and to find help in time of need (See Hebrews 4:16).

Saint Theresa of Avila recommends *focusing on the indwelling presence*. The wandering thoughts that clog up our minds are like children playing in the attic. Focus of the presence of the Lord in your heart and the work and the prayer you are called to.

Father Gaston Courtois recommends *smiling* at the Lord. He is Lord; He knows what He is doing; He cares for you and loves you. Smiling from the depth of our being is for more than just using 14 facial muscles: The Lord spoke to Father Courtois about smiling:

> There is in the smile, much more than you think, the expressive delicacy of true love based on the giving of self, and the more you give it, the more I give myself in return to you (page 22, *When the Lord Speaks to the Heart*, Gaston Courtois).

Smile at Jesus within you and with Jesus smile at Mary.

We can smile even in the times of crisis and tragedy because God is at work in the travail even though we do not understand it and feel only the pain and anguish. Saint Paul reminds us:

> We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28, NAB).

If the dark cloud of wandering thoughts persists, then ask your prayer partner to pray over you for deliverance from the dark spirits that cloud your mind. It is a powerful prayer that lifts the over-shadowing wandering thoughts.

It is important to respond properly to these wandering thoughts because they can lead to depression. Again the advice of Saint Paul to the Philippians is powerful and effective:

> Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understand will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:4-7 RNAB).

Q: What Should I Do When I'm Full of Fears?

There are various types and causes of fears. They are often interrelated; they are pneumo -psycho-somatic. Let us consider the major types and causes of fears.

Somatic (or physical or bodily) causes of fears.

Here are some examples of the somatic causes of fears: war, terrorism, family violence, physical abuse, sexual attack, robbers, dangerous situations, precarious heights, sickness, chronic diseases, drug and alcohol related threats.

The appropriate response is to get out of the situation, if possible. Ask your family and friends for protection and for help. Above all ask God for His mercy and trust in Him.

Saint Faustina records the powerful words of our Lord spoken to her:

> **Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to My mercy** (Diary, 300).

Psychological causes of fears.

Among the many psychological causes of fears are: verbal threats, hatred, jealousy; fears of the unknown; fears of the past, of the present, of the future; fears of failure, fears of others, their judgments and reactions.

Again the appropriate response is *trust in God's mercy*. (More is developed on trust in God's mercy in the response to the question: "How can I trust?")

Sacred Scripture tells us that "fear is useless, what is needed is trust" (Mk 5:36). "It is I. Do not be afraid!" (Matt 14:27).

Pneumatic *(spiritual) causes of Jesus*.

Among the spiritual causes of fears the one at the top of the list is *SIN* and the fear of punishment. Other related causes are temptations and scruples.

The correct response to sin is to *repent*! Stop sinning! And go to the Sacrament of

Reconciliation. (More is said about the Sacrament in response to man to make a good confession in the Sacrament of Reconciliation).

"Perfect love casts out all fear" (1 Jn 4:18) so we need to ask the Lord for His love to dispel spiritual fears. God is love and He is always with you. So ask and receive His love with thanksgiving

> Saint Faustina records her response to fears:
> When my soul is in anguish, I think only in this way: Jesus is good and full of mercy, and even if the ground were to give way under my feet I would not cease to trust in Him (Diary 1192).

A Note On The Use Of The Word "Fears"

I use the word "fears" to distinguish from "fear" that is also used in respect to God. The fear of God is a reverential aide. You might call it an awesome awareness of God.

I was given a mnemonic for the word fear (in the sense of the strong emotional reaction that I call "fears"):

False
Expectation
Appearing
Real

Q: What Should I Do When I'm Discouraged?

There are many things that can cause discouragement. In our times we are experiencing so many of them that there is no wonder that so many of us are discouraged. Let us consider some of the causes that bombard us from all sides.

• We are aware of our *own failures*, our weakness, our misery, our sin, our lack of vision and zeal — and our seeming inability to do anything about it. We are not the holy people we are called to be.

• We are aware of the *failures of the Church's people* from bishops , priests and religious to the lay faithful. We see parishes being closed down or combined, we see empty seminaries and convents, we hear of moral scandals. We read of the divisions and differences among Theologians and priests.

• We see the weakening *loss of faith* in our communities.

• We are aware of the failures and sins of *nations*, the injustices and neglect of the poor and disadvantaged, the terrorism, wars, communist regimes and persecution of Christians by Islamic nations.

• We are aware of the *moral decay* of the nations in their pursuit of power, pride, and pleasure. We see it in the practice of contraception, abortion, euthanasia and unjust laws that deprive people of the freedom of their faith.

• We are aware of the *mass media*'s bombarding us; newspapers, magazines, radio and television, with outright moral decadence and pornography. Now there is growing evidence that pornography is a chemically damaging addiction, not unlike alcoholism.

• We are aware that *the faith* of people has been eroded by a secular society. For them God doesn't exist in their lives. Without faith we cannot be saved and enter into eternal life! They say by their lives: "*Trust* now in your possessions and in your power and in what they can obtain for your pleasure."

But what is all of this in light of eternal life?

• We are aware of the *disintegration of families*. I don't know of any family that

doesn't have serious problems which certainly can cause discouragement: selfishness, birth control, abortion, differences of faith and morals, violence, alcoholism, chronic diseases, divorce, children going their own way along with the secular world. Lord have mercy on us all!

So what can you and I do in the environment we live in about the situations that cause us to be discouraged?

Our fundamental relationship with God needs to be re-established, strengthened and encouraged by our deeper conversion. In the words of our Lord to Saint Faustina we are told what to do: Turn to my mercy with trust:

> **The flames of mercy are burning me—clamoring to be spent; I want to keep pouring them out upon souls; souls just don't want to believe in My goodness** (Diary, 177).

Then in terms of our peace the Lord told Saint Faustina:

> **Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to My mercy** (Diary, 300).

> **Oh, how much I am hurt by a soul's distrust! Such a soul professes that I am Holy and Just, but does not believe that I am Mercy and does not trust in My Goodness. Even the devils glorify My Justice but do not believe in My Goodness** (Diary 300).

> **Tell aching mankind to snuggle close to My merciful heart and I will fill it with peace** (Diary 1074).

The Lord then stresses the need of TRUST which is a T.R.U.S.T. — **T**otal **R**eliance **U**pon **S**aving **T**ruth, Jesus Christ. He speaks of the transforming power of trust in Him:

Tell [all people], my daughter that I am Love and Mercy itself. When a soul approaches Me with trust, I will fill it with such an abundance of graces that it cannot contain them within itself, but radiates them to other souls (Diary 1074).

As we turn to Jesus with Trust we come to know and experience His loving presence — and knowing Jesus Christ is eternal life! (See John 17:3). And eternal life is what the whole world is about:

> Yes, God so loved the world that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in Him may not die but may have eternal life (John 3:16).

I often need to repeat to myself the Latin idiom: "*Quid hoc ad eternitatum?*" (What has this to do with eternal life?) I need to test all things according to the words of Saint Paul:

> Test everything; retain what is good (1 Thes 5:21).

We are here on earth in a the time of testing and proving our trust in the Lord! How poignant the question of Jesus:

> When the son of man comes, will he find any faith on the earth? (Luke 18:8).

Q: What Should I do When My Mind Is Confused About The Truth?

The truth is not what I think is true but truth is what is reality, and it is independent of my thinking. My thinking cannot change the truth; it is not relative. There is only one truth and not a multitude of personal opinions. My personal opinion does not make a thing true. Unfortunately many think that truth is relative. No wonder people's minds get confused!

The secular mass media present the news of events with its own opinion apart from the truth. Because it is secularized, mass media ignores the reality of objective truth. Truth is not an optional opinion or a majority consensus; the truth is a person, Jesus Christ, who said of Himself, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). And Jesus also said:

> If you live according to my teaching, you are truly my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free (Jn 8:31-32 NAB).

Our minds are confused when we do not base our thinking and life on the TRUTH. Pope John Paul II, in his major encyclical *The Splendor of Truth*, shows that our *faith*, our *morality*, our freedom, our conscience, and the *natural law* are all based on and rooted in the truth.

Saint Paul tells us how to renew our confused minds:

> Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect (Rom 12:2, RNAB).

Saint Paul also writes to the Ephesians:

> So, I declare and testify in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; darkened in understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance, because of their hardness of heart, they have become callous and have handed themselves over to licentiousness for the practice of every kind of impurity to excess (Ephesians 4:17-19, RNAB).

What an exact description of our modern age and confused minds! Saint Paul

continues to describe a Christian response:

> This is not how you learned from Christ, assuming you heard of him, and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, that you should put away the former way of life, corrupted through deceitful pleasures, and be renewed in *the spirit of your minds*, and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness in truth (emphasis added, Eph 4:20-24).

Saint Paul calls for a complete conversion: Repent, change, and believe and trust in Jesus Christ who is the way, and the truth and the life.

What is needed is a major transformation from the mind formed by the world to the mind formed by of Christ. Again Saint Paul writes as the conclusion to his call for wisdom:

> For "who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to counsel him? But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16 RNAB).

What we need to overcome confusion of the mind about the truth is a new understanding from teachers who are loyal to the teaching of the Church and the Holy Father and who *know* the power, the presence and person of our Lord Jesus Christ and who actually pray.

Start with the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament and study the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In this Catechism you will find the truth taught by the Church based on the Holy Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church handed down to us by the General Councils of the Church — a must to study and know.

Then, seek out a parish, or a priest, or a religious, or community, or a friend that can guide you and help you to discern the presence and movements of the Holy Spirit and who can lead you to Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life. "The truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

Q: What Should I Do When I'm In Difficult Times?

(The following was written for *Friends of Mercy*, March/April 2002, Marian Publications, Stockbridge, MA)

On the World Day of Peace, the first day of the year 2002, John Paul II made a powerful and personal plea for peace on the whole world.

From his own experience under Nazi and Soviet terrorism in Poland, he made the repeated plea: "No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness." He challenges all believers, all leaders of nations and religious leaders, as well as the terrorists, to prayer and forgiveness.

In his message: John Paul II further developed his challenge: no forgiveness without mercy, no mercy without trust and prayer.

"Prayer for peace is not an afterthought to the work of peace. It is of the very essence of building the peace of order, of justice, and of freedom" (*Message for the World Day of Peace, 14)*.

John Paul II concluded his plea for forgiveness on the World Day of Peace with a prayer that all pray intensely from their hearts for the victims of terrorism, the families stricken, and for the terrorists "that they may look into their hearts, see the evil of what they do, abandon violence, and seek forgiveness. In these troubled times, may the whole human family find true and lasting peace, born of the marriage of justice and mercy!" (Ibid,15)

Finding peace through mercy

Today, the world is troubled. There is no peace in our hearts, no peace among nations. Our daily condition brings fear and anxiety into our hearts.

The fundamental reason for this lack of peace in our hearts and in the world is our rebellious independence from God.

God's mercy is the answer!

Jesus mandated us to "Be merciful even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36, RSV).

And the Father's plan is "to have mercy on all" (Rom 11:32). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus described the mercy of the Father in a command: "My command to you is: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are sons of your heavenly Father, for His sun rises on the bad and the good. He rains on the just and the unjust — In a word you must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:44-48).

In His conversations with Saint Faustina, the Lord emphasized the connection between Himself, who is mercy itself, and finding peace. This peace which comes from trusting God's mercy is not just for individuals, but also for nations and the whole world. The path to peace is not in summit meetings, nor in stockpiling arms, nor in acquiring more material goods. The path to peace is found only in God's mercy. The Lord told Saint Faustina:

> Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to My mercy (Diary, 300).
>
> **Tell aching mankind to snuggle close to My merciful Heart, and I will fill it with peace** (Diary, 1074).

We all need to know how to pray for God's mercy on the whole world, especially in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent war against terrorism.

Using our suffering for good

Recently I was drawn to re-read the book on suffering which I had written some twenty years ago: *The Good News of Suffering: Mercy and Salvation for All*, (now out of print). I was amazed at what I had written and have forgotten!

The key phrase that stood out was "Salvation for All." The suffering of Jesus is the means He used to bring mercy and salvation to the whole world. Suffering is the present human condition that can bring mercy and salvation to the whole world in our time by our offering and prayer.

Pope John Paul II, both by his writing and by the example of his life, taught that we can help save souls in the whole world by our prayer and by offering our sufferings to Christ.

Saint Faustina's life and message was one of mercy and salvation to the whole world. She was mandated by the Lord to proclaim His mercy to the whole world and also to offer her

prayer and sufferings for the salvation of souls, especially sinners, in some very special ways.

Learning mercy from the best

There is so much we can learn from Sacred Scripture, from Pope John Paul II, and from Saint Faustina on how to make use of our prayers and sufferings for mercy and salvation for the whole world. We need to learn not to waste our present sufferings that are so precious.

Let us then turn to the challenge of Sacred Scripture, John Paul II and Saint Faustina. Jesus in the Sacred Scriptures, tells us to: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36, RSV).

But how can we be merciful like our heavenly Father unless we are merciful both with *His* mercy and in His *way* of being merciful on the whole world?

His mercy is His gift of self-giving love that creates us, redeems us, and sanctifies us. Mercy is His love poured out upon us sinners, forgiving the unforgivable and loving the unlovable. It is His love in action.

To be merciful with His mercy, we must ask for His mercy. The Father wants us to cooperate by prayerfully asking for His mercy. He is always ready to flood us with His mercy rather than just with our own mercy.

Another powerful way to receive His mercy is to be merciful as described in the beatitude:

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt 5:7, RSV).

By being merciful in deed and in word, as well as by prayer, we obtain the Father's mercy and so are enabled to be merciful even as our Father is merciful.

Pope John Paul II uses the beatitude "Blessed are the merciful" as a major theme of his encyclical on Divine Mercy (*Rich in Mercy*).

Five times he uses this text and gives five insights into how this beatitude is:

• the *great commandment* of love in the form of a blessing
• the *condition* of receiving and revealing mercy
• the *synthesis* of the whole Gospel
• the *call* to practice mercy
• *fulfilled* in the saints, "Come blessed of My Father, receive the Father's blessing of eternal life" (Mt 25:34).

All Scripture points to mercy

From these insights of John Paul II, we can appreciate better the Scriptures that describes God's mercy, especially the text of John 3:16. This text shows His love poured out in Christ Jesus on the whole world: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16, RSV).

God's total gift of love given in Jesus extends to the whole world — that all may have eternal life. God's sacrificial gift of Jesus made redemption and eternal life available to all. Now He waits for us to receive the gift of His mercy.

God's way of being merciful is to be merciful to the righteous and to the unrighteous. His desire and plan is to "have mercy on all" (Rom 11:32). What a magnificent plan: He wants to have mercy on the whole world. Saint Paul responds with a canticle of amazement:

> O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! (Rom 11:33, RSV).

Q: What Should I Do When Violence Surrounds Me?

Break the spiral of violence!

Follow the Holy Father's mission of mercy.

Our world is caught in a spiral of hatred and violence. It seems we are in a vortex, being pulled deeper and deeper into self-destruction. We must act decisively to bring peace and mercy. We can do it by calling on Our Merciful Lord.

Consider just a few examples from the long list of violence in the recent past.

•Oklahoma federal building
•Columbine High School
•September 11th terrorist attacks
•Violence and reprisals with more violence between Israel and Palestine
•Moral violence of the sex abuse scandal in the Church
•Annual worldwide violent death of many millions of children in the wombs of their mothers.
•War with Iraq
•War against terrorism

Pope John Paul II spoke directly about the spiral of violence immediately after celebrating Holy Mass on Divine Mercy Sunday (April 23, 1995):

> Dear brothers and sisters. We must personally experience [the tenderhearted mercy of the Father] if in turn we want to be capable of mercy. Let us learn to forgive! The spiral of hatred and violence which stains with blood the path of so many individuals and nations can only be broken by the miracle of forgiveness.

Repeatedly John Paul II has called for Divine Mercy in order to forgive. Mercy, he says, is the only solution for peace. Governments must halt the violence of terrorism, but more violence is not the permanent solution for peace.

What can I do?

What can you and I do about the spiral of violence? Is there someway to stop the violence and break the spiral? The spiral itself is so violent that it causes fears and paralysis. It seems beyond our control and power to break the spiral. Is there anything we can do?

Yes! We can turn to His mercy now, while there is still time for mercy. It is God's plan "to have mercy on all" (Rom 11:32); but to respect our freedom, He waits for us to ask for His mercy.

You who have experienced God's mercy and are at peace will radiate mercy to others. You can plead for mercy on the whole world. But there is more! You can encourage those who are without hope or trust in God to turn to the merciful God. You can be apostles of Divine Mercy to those who are trapped in fear.

The present situation worldwide is so serious, so vast, so beyond our human power that we need salvation by the sovereign act of God's mercy to break the evil and violence of the destructive spiral.

Pope John Paul II: Focus on mercy

Pope John Paul II proclaimed a "Manifesto of Mercy" on November 30, 1980, when he published his second encyclical *Rich in Mercy*.

With a prophetic sense, he made clear that mankind must turn to God's mercy as the only source of peace. He described mercy as the presence of love which is greater than death. He summoned the Church to plead for God's mercy on the whole world. Since then he has continued his strong call for mercy. It could be called a cornerstone of his pontificate. "Where, if not in Divine Mercy, can the world find refuge and the light of hope?" he said at the Beatification of Saint Faustina on April 18, 1993.

On Mercy Sunday, April 13, 1994, he said: "As people of this restless time of ours, wavering between the emptiness of self-exaltation and the humiliation of despair, we have a greater need than ever for a regenerating experience of mercy."

There is nothing that man needs more than Divine Mercy (Shrine of Divine

Mercy, Poland, June 7, 1997).

On numerous occasions he has quoted Our Lord's words to Faustina:

Humanity will not find peace until it turns with trust to My Mercy (Diary, 300).

A leader in prayer

Pope John Paul II has testified how he personally prays and how he has himself served as a minister of Divine Mercy. At the Shrine of Divine Mercy in Poland on June 7, 1997, he said:

> I pray unceasingly that God will have mercy on us and on the whole world (Chaplet of Divine Mercy).

Also, in the conclusion of his encyclical, *Rich in Mercy*, he wrote his prayer for mercy on the whole world:

> We lift up our voice and plead that the love which is in the Father ... may be shown to be present in our modern world and be shown to the more powerful than evil, more powerful than sin and death."

The Divine Mercy Chaplet itself can be summed up as a simple prayer: "Jesus, Mercy!"

The prayer, "Jesus, Mercy" can take on several levels of meaning when we pray it sincerely and from the heart. We are saying:

•Jesus, You are mercy itself (it is a prayer of praise)
•Jesus, have mercy on us (it is a cry of repentance)
•Jesus, give us grace and mercy (it is a petition for help).

Be an apostle of Divine Mercy

You who know God's mercy can and must do something to break the spiral of violence in the world. There is a three-step action plan that works:

1. Form a deep desire to break the spiral of violence;

2. Confess to God that man cannot do it because he is inadequate and incapable;

3. Ask God for His grace and mercy on the whole world. Plead in confidence with your whole heart and strength for His mercy which enables us to forgive — and so enables us to pray the Lord's prayer.

By living with trust in His Divine Mercy and pleading for His mercy on the whole world, you will be "holy ministers of Divine Mercy" (John Paul II, April 21, 2002).

Q: What Can I Do When I'm Suffering?

Don't waste your suffering! Your most difficult problem can actually be used for good.

What can you and I do to reach out to the whole world and save souls? We can pray and offer our sufferings for the whole world. Here I present, for your consideration, a collection of thoughts and reflections on how you can pray and offer sacrifices.

The intercession of suffering needs to be expressed as clearly as possible. It is a difficult topic to consider because it is associated with the pain of actual suffering and the imagined pain of future suffering which complicate the issue. This type of intercession is known under various names such as victim intercession, redemptive suffering, vicarious suffering, and victim souls. This type of suffering is intercession for others, has a firm basis in Scripture and in the long tradition of the saints, but it is not something that is frequently discussed or frequently sought after!

The question of suffering has been of interest to me over the years, and I reflected on the meaning of suffering in a book titled *The Good News of Suffering Mercy and Salvation for All* (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1981, out of print).

The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, has written an encyclical, *The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering (Salvifici Doloris*, Feb. 11, 1984, an Apostolic Letter available from Origins or from the Daughters of Saint Paul). This very special letter from the Pope ties together the place of suffering and of intercession for the salvation of the world, as it explains the Sacred Scriptures that deal with suffering in light of our human experience of suffering. It is a masterpiece and calls for our study.

One of the scriptures that Pope John Paul II develops is taken from Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians:

> Even now I find my joy in the suffering I endure for you. In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of His body, the Church" (Col 1, 24).

He says:

> Gradually, as the individual takes up his cross, spiritually uniting himself to the cross of Christ, the salvific meaning of suffering is revealed before him. He does not discover this meaning at this own human level, but at the level of the suffering of Christ. At the same time, however, from this level of Christ, the salvific meaning of suffering descends to man's level and becomes, in a sense, the individual's personal response. It is then that man finds in his suffering interior peace and even spritual joy.
>
> Saint Paul speaks of such joy in the letter to the Colossians:
>
> I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake (Col 1:24).
>
> Pope John Paul II continues his commentary:
>
> A source of joy is found in overcoming the sense of the uselessness of suffering, a feeling that is sometimes very strongly rooted in human suffering. This feeling not only consumes the person interiorly, but seems to make him a burden to others. The person feels condemned to receive help and assistance from others, and at the same time seems useless to himself. The discovery of the salvific meaning of suffering in union with Christ transforms this depressing feeling. Faith in sharing in the suffering of Christ brings with it the interior certainty that the suffering person "completes what is lacking in Christ's afflictions": the certainty that in the spiritual dimension of the work of Redemption he is serving, like Christ, the salvation of his brothers and sisters. Therefore, he is carrying out an irreplaceable service. (John Paul II, Feb. 11, 1984, *Salvifici Doloris)*.

In a homily addressed to some 400 sick people gathered in the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome, John Paul II asks that they offer their sufferings for the conversion of the world and then refers to his Apostolic Letter published that same day (*L'Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, February 27, 1984).

Dear sick! Offer your sufferings to the Lord with love and with generosity for the conversion of the world! Man must understand the gravity of sin, of offending God, and be

converted to Him who, through love, created him and calls him to everlasting happiness. .... You too, like Jesus on the cross, can obtain graces of light, repentance, conversion, and salvation for these brothers and sisters.

> To offer sufferings for others is a special calling and gift. It is a gift that is to be received by spiritually mature souls who are under the direction of a spiritual director. We ought to support our brothers and sisters who have been called to this vocation with our love and prayer, because "suffering, in fact, is always a trial — at times a very hard one" (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*).

We ought not to assume too quickly that we are victims because we are suffering, rather we should more quickly examine ourselves and repent of our sins and aks God's forgiveness. At other times we should seek healing to remove the obstacles that prevent us from knowing and experiencing God's love for us.

When we have received sufficient healing to know God's love for us, then we can begin to discern God's call to unite more fully with Him in the ministry of the cross.

Over the years of interceding for the Church and especially for priests, many brothers and sisters have shared with me the vocation they have responded to as they offer their sufferings in union with Christ crucified for the salvation of others. I have been edified by their faith and generosity and am deeply grateful for the support they have been to me and many other priests.

Of course, all of us can offer our sufferings with Christ, no matter how small they are, no matter what type they are, physical, emotional, or spiritual. Suffering offered in union with Christ is very precious to the Lord. Don't waste it. Offer it up with Christ for the salvation of souls.

Q: What Should I Do When I'm Full Of Doubts?

Let us consider your doubts about this book, **Divine Mercy Answers**. Let us list the doubts and then consider what you should do.

- This religion stuff is all just emotion.
- This holiness stuff and prayer is not for me; I'm just too miserable.
- This mercy stuff is just another devotion.
- I don't believe; I don't trust. I'm a rational man.
- I'm too busy to be bothered with fairy tales.

What you need is a new and true understanding of who you are. You've been sold a bill of goods by the secularized world around you. You swallowed hook, line and sinker the message of the confused world defused by secular education and mass media. The truth is that you are a spiritual, rational body person. Yes, you are that, but that is only a piece of the whole. Yes, you are a rational body person, but you are more! You are one whole person: spirit, soul and body; a pneumo-psycho-somatic person. You are not just a brain on the top of your shoulders that thinks, judges, loves and acts through the body.

Consider the fallacy of the dominant role the brain is given in our secular society from a biochemical view point. Your brain is housed in the cranium, the bone box we call our head. Inside the head is the brain that acts as a fabulous computer, handling massive amounts of information, sorting, identifying and storing. It is fascinating to study the brain's mechanism and the chemical composition. It is made up of mainly fatty materials such as long chain fatty acids, polyunsaturated fats like the Omega-3 fatty acids. (EPA: Eicosopentanaic and; DHA: Docoso hexanoic acid), lecithen, sphengomylin, and cholesterol among others. In one word: *fat* is what makes up the stuff of the brain. You could call us human beings a bunch of "fat-heads." The irony of it is that we think that we can fit the whole of the created universe and the creator into our fat-heads!

Yes, we are a marvelous creation (Psalm 8) but we are not a spontaneous, random, development by "survival of the fittest"—the now passe out-dated explanation of evolution. We are *pneumo-psycho-somatic* persons: spirit-soul-body.

We are created by the all powerful God out of His love for us. He created us in His own *image* and *likeness* (Genesis 1:26-27). We are created in His *image* with a freedom and

an ability to receive and give love that is life-giving. God's great plan for us is to form man into His very family, growing into His very likeness, radiating His life and light. What a marvelous plan!

> What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him, this God has revealed to us through the spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9-10, RNAB).

And the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, communicates to our human spirit, to our hearts, which are capable of receiving the gift of God's Spirit, the gift of new life to make us His children, His sons and daughters:

> ...and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us (Romans 5:5).

Our rational mind can then reflect on and ponder this free gift of the Holy Spirit and give praise and glory to our creator. But, the Lord waits for our free "yes" to His gift. He so loves the freedom He created us with that He will not violate it. He waits for us to open our hearts and minds to receive His gift.

So the Lord asks for TRUST—to believe in Him, to hope and rely on His promises, and to love Him and love our fellow man that he also created out of love. [Read more on trust in the chapter on *How Can I Trust*].

The call to TRUST in God's mercy is not just another private revelation and devotion; it is rather the call to live the gospel of love of God and love of neighbor. It is living the root meaning of "devotion": i.e., to pay our vows to God, to respond to His love by accepting it with thanks and sharing it with others.

The greater the misery, the greater the doubts and confusion, and the greater the right we have to God's mercy [see the chapter on forgiveness and mercy].

And if you are too "busy" for these Divine Mercy answers, then the mnemonic applies:

Bound
Under
Satan's
Yoke.

We are pneumo-psycho-somatic persons, created by God in His own image and we are to grow into "His radiant likeness" which is holiness, which is being wholly in Christ—which is new and eternal life.

To be created in the image and *likeness* of God (See Genesis 1:26-27) means that we are to be like God who *is love* (1 John 4:8). This means that we are to love as God loves! God loves with a total gift of Himself which is life giving. God created man, male and female so that in their love for each other they may love as God loves and give life.

God's *plan* in creating us in His own image and likeness, is to form a family that can eternally receive His love and share in His glory. The marvelous text of Saint Paul's letter to the Ephesians describes this mystery of marriage prefiguring the marriage of the Lamb:

> Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So [also] husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself (Ephesians 5:25-28, RNAB).

Saint Paul writes:

> This [Marriage of the Lamb] is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church"(Ephesians 5:32).

And Saint Paul writes of "this great mystery" in a magnificent way:

> "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him," God has revealed to us through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

So, what should you do in the face of your doubts? Turn to God's mercy with trust, with *faith*, which is openness to the act of God. Ask for His mercy, turn to His mercy repenting of your self-centered life and receive His mercy. Receive His gift of life-giving love with thanksgiving and share that good news, that love with others—and you will find the TRUTH.

Turn to the mercy of God with trust and you will discover the meaning of life and find the peace and joy promised by Jesus who said: "I am the way, and the *truth*, and the life" (John 14:6).

Our Lord told Saint Faustina the great apostle of Divine Mercy:

> **Tell aching mankind to snuggle close to my Merciful Heart, and I will fill it with peace** (Diary, 1074).

Q: What Should I Do When I'm Powerless?

I learned of a real case of being powerless from Bishop Joe McKinney on our visit with him at his cottage in Irons, Michigan, September 22, 1999. Bishop Joe's younger brother, Father Tom McKinney had a tragic logging accident. An unnoticed leaning tree fell on him and broke his neck as he was cutting down a tree that supported the leaning tree. The accident left Father Tom paralyzed from his neck down — POWERLESS!

But, he is surviving and *joyful* in his limited but powerful priestly ministry. How can he be joyful? Prior to the accident Father Tom had made several Ignatian retreats during which he was blessed with four key words that sustained him in his tragedy: "*powerlessness, gift, trust, joy*." It sounds like Saint Paul!

Our Lord said to Saint Paul:

"My grace is enough for you, for in weakness power reaches perfection."

> And so I willingly boast of my weakness instead, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I am content with weakness, with mistreatment, with distress, with persecutions, and difficulties for the sake of Christ; for *when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong*" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10, NAB).

When ***I*** am powerless and weak, then ***Christ*** in me can be strong!

There are three areas of human power and powerlessness that we experience:

Somatic Power:

We can experience physical strength and a healthy body, free of chronic diseases. We can delude ourselves with the outward power of possessions and riches, or with the false power of weapons of defense and war. But with the loss of any of these human strengths we become powerless.

Psychological Power:

The power of knowledge, and training, discipline and control may seem like a power

of influence and capability, but that fades into powerlessness so easily by change of circumstances, by sickness, or by advancing age.

Pneumo (Spiritual) Power:

Spiritual power is the real power of God working in and through us by prayer and by our trusting in God's mercy. God's way of working is through the humble (I say that for the sake of Mary, our Spiritual Mother) and the miserable (I say that for our sake).

In our powerlessness we can more easily see with the eyes of faith that *all is gift*. God has given us everything out of His love so that we may have eternal life. This leads us to the second key word of Father Tom: all is *gift* and further leads us to the third word: *TRUST*. By trust we have faith in the all powerful God; we rely in hope on His promise of eternal life and love Him and our neighbor and so fulfill the plan of God—eternal joy. This *joy* the fourth key word of Father Tom is the joy of Christ:

> For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2, RNAB).

So what should you do when you are powerless? Turn to the Lord and proclaim what we pray at every Eucharist: The Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Follow the advice Saint Paul gives when we experience our powerlessness in the spiritual battle in this secularized world:

> Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens. Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground. So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all [the] flaming

> arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
>
> With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit. To that end, be watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the holy ones and also for me, that speech may be given me to open my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains, so that I may have the courage to speak as I must (Ephesians 6:10-20, RNAB).

My advice to the powerless is to take "Radiation Therapy" before the exposed Blessed Sacrament. Let the mighty power of God be your energy and strength. Take lots of time to be exposed to the Lord's radiance. Take time in silent presence. Do not be afraid; you will not get "SON-BURNT!"

Further Saint Paul advises us. I have found his exhortation powerful and real:

> Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all things give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus regarding you all (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Confraternity translation).

Q: What Should I Do When Everything Falls Apart?

What can I do when the bottom falls out of my life; when I'm completely fed up with everything; when it seems that all hope is gone; when I am misery itself?

When we find our self in this situation, it is then that God works the best! It is then that we can experience the power of His creating Spirit. When the Spirit of God hovered over the complete chaos in creation, He brought forth order, light and life (See Genesis 1:1-2).

God specializes in using the broken, the weak, the humble, the powerless, in a word, the miserable. Listen again to the word from Saint Paul:

> When I am powerless, it is then that I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:10).

God's great plan is to have *mercy on all*. He shakes us up in our disobedience and misery in order that we might cry out to Him for mercy! In this way he not only respects our freedom but also accomplishes His plan to have mercy on us all:

> For God delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all (Romans 11:32, RNAB).

Then Saint Paul goes on to proclaim the magnificent canticle of the wonders of God:

> Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and unsearchable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given him anything that he may be repaid?" For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be glory forever (Romans 11:35-36, RNAB).

Saint Paul then tells us what we are to do in light of God's plan to have mercy on all:

> I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship (Romans 12:1, RNAB).

So what should you do when everything falls apart?:

• *Invoke the Holy Spirit* to hover over your chaos. Come, Holy Spirit and fill my heart.
Come, Holy spirit and renew the face of the earth.

• *Thank, praise and worship the Lord*—because He is God, and I am not! His plan and wisdom are infinite and merciful.

• *Plunge into the ocean of Divine Mercy*. This is the teaching that our Lord gave Saint Faustina, the great apostle of Divine Mercy. She lived the way of mercy and she teaches us to immerse ourselves in the infinite ocean of God's mercy with complete trust (e.g. Diary , 668). Saint Faustina records the words of our Lord to the world in misery:

Tell aching mankind to snuggle close to My Merciful Heart, and I will fill it with peace (Diary 1074).

• *Surrender to God's power, and presence.* Trust in Jesus even more because the kingdom, the power and the glory are His forever and ever!

• And again I urge you: take time for "*Radiation Therapy*" before the Blessed Sacrament exposed. You don't need to be afraid of getting a "SON-burn". Just be present to the ONE who is present and loves you and is merciful. Take time in silent presence that the Lord may minister to your needs.

Q: What Should I Do When I'm Addicted?

There are various types of addictions. They all affect the whole person in body, mind and spirit. The various addictions begin with a seeking of euphoria or pleasure and eventually end in moral degradation and violent behavior. Consider the following:

• Addiction to *alcohol* is a complex phenomenon that involves the chemistry of the brain, genetic propensity stimulated by excessive intake of alcohol and stress. Some researchers have shown that the break down product of alcohol is not excreted but is "dumped" into the rain and sits on the site of the endorphins. The endorphins are the natural chemicals that timulate a sense of well-being and pleasure. The end product of alcohol metabolism blocks the site of the natural endorphin — so the alcoholic is addicted to stimulating the endorphin pleasure site with alcohol.

• *Addiction to drugs* (such as heroine, etc.) follows the same pattern as the end-product of the metabolism of alcohol's inhibiting the natural endorphins. So the drug addict seeks the euphoria of the drug in a compulsive way.

• *Addiction to pornography* is the latest addition to the list of addictions. The euphoric site in the brain is stimulated to give a sense of pleasure from looking at pornographic materials, for example on the internet. Researchers are reporting that addiction to pornography is the major cause of most of the violent action of molestation of the young and the break-up of the family.

So you ask: What should I **do** as an addict? There are Twelve-Step programs for each of the various additions. Seek them out for help; that is why they exist.

In terms of Divine Mercy as the antidote to addiction, consider the following points that echo the Twelve-Step programs:

• *Admit* your misery and your inability to overcome the complex pneumo-psycho-somatic addiction by yourself. Turn to God's mercy. Plunge into the ocean of God's mercy with complete trust.

• *Repent* of your sinful addiction and repent of your violent actions and moral degradation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

• *Ask* a prayer group or a priest to pray over you for healing of the addition.

• *Trust* in God who in His *infinite mercy* is always ready to forgive and to heal.

• *Seek* out a support group of merciful friends to encourage you and challenge you to keep your resolutions.

• *Stop all addictive behavior* by the grace of God i.e. no alcohol, no drugs, no porn.

• *Start with a new* life - new friends, new work if needed to reduce stress, new hobbies, new recreations, change your diet to a balanced intake of food.

• Start a *life of mercy* in action: by deeds, by word and by prayer. Seek out ways to be merciful to those in need of help.

• Repent *of your self-concern* and be concerned for others.

• *Continue* in regular, daily *prayer* of thanks and asking the Lord for mercy on all those with addictions.

• *Receive* regular and frequent *Holy Communion* to strengthen and nourish you with the Body and Blood of the Lord, the presence of Mercy Incarnate.

• *Entrust* your new life to Mary our Mother, the Mother of Divine Mercy.

Q: What Should I Do When I'm Scandalized By The Church?

You have good reason to be scandalized by the Church! The sex scandals of the Shepherds of the Church are the greatest crisis in the history of the Church in the United States. The Church is being purified.

In 1938 our Lord spoke to Saint Faustina about a purification of convents and Churches because of moral degradation. In the following strong words of our Lord you can read "rectories" as well as "convents and churches are to be destroyed":

> Towards the end of the Way of the Cross which I was making, the Lord Jesus began to complain about the souls of religious and priests, about the lack of love in chosen souls. **I will allow convents and churches to be destroyed.** I answered, "Jesus, but there are so many souls praising You in convents." The Lord answered, **That praise wounds My Heart, because love has been banished from convents. Souls without love and without devotion, souls full of egoism and self-love, souls full of pride and arrogance, souls full of deceit and hypocrisy, lukewarm souls who have just enough warmth to keep them alive: My Heart cannot bear this. All the graces that I pour out upon them flow off them as off the face of a rock. I cannot stand them, because they are neither good or bad. I called convents into being to sanctify the world through them. It is from them that a powerful flame of love and sacrifice should burst forth. And if they do not repent and become enkindled by their first love, I will deliver them over to the fate of this world...**
>
> **How can they sit on the promised throne of judgment to judge the world, when their guilt is greater than the guilt of the world? There is neither penance nor atonement. O heart, which received Me in the morning and at noon are all ablaze with hatred against Me, hatred of all sorts! O heart specially chosen by Me, were you chosen for this, to give Me more pain? The great sins of the world are superficial wounds on My Heart, but the sins of a chosen soul pierce My Heart through and through...**(Diary 1702).

One sentence that is especially true for our present situation stands out for me: "and if they do not repent and become enkindled by their first love, I will deliver them over to the fate

of this world...” which means, delivered over to the secularized and civil courts!

What can you and I do in this purification of the Church? *PRAY!* Pray for mercy, pray for healing, pray for protection for our shepherds, pray for their holiness.

Saint Faustina prayed for the holiness of priests and for their protection from the attacks and snares of Satan. It is a prayer I try to pray daily for priests and bishops:

Prayer For Priests

> O my Jesus, I beg You on behalf of the whole Church: Grant it love and the light of Your Spirit, and give power to the words of priests so that hardened hearts might be brought to repentance and return to You, O Lord.
>
> Lord, give us holy priests; You Yourself maintain them in holiness. O Divine and Great High Priest, may the power of Your mercy accompany them everywhere and protect them from the devil’s traps and snares which are continually being set for the souls of priests. May the power of Your mercy, O Lord, shatter and bring to naught all that might tarnish the sanctity of priests, for You can do all things. Amen. (Diary of Saint Maria Faustina, 1052)

For insights and analyses into the root causes and why the scandal happened I recommend reading two books:

> *From Scandal to Hope*: by Fr. Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R., Our Sunday Visitor.
>
> *The Courage To Be Catholic*: by George Weigel, Basic Books.

Both of the authors look to the seminary training, the leadership of the bishops, the secularized world-wide sexual revolution — and the challenge to holiness.

Q: What Should I Do When There Is A War?

War is a pnemo-psycho-somatic attack; an all out violence attack. It is a *spiritual* attack by diabolical spirits against God's plan for His family and His gift of peace. It is a *psychological* attack of violence that causes real fears and extreme stress. It is a *somatic* attack wounding and killing those in battle, and the innocent as well.

In war we must be aware: that our real enemy is Satan and his followers; that our weapons are those of God's mighty power and His armor (see Ephesians 6:10-20); that victory is in the victory of Jesus Christ. "Our battle is not just against human forces but against principalities and powers the rulers of this world of darkness, the evil spirits in regions above" (Eph. 6:12 NAB). That is why we put on the armor of God and call on Saint Michael the Archangel to defend us in battle.

What is the solution to the tragedy of war that causes fears, anxiety and concern for our own lives and the lives of those involved, especially our loved ones? War is a violent and destructive action against families, nations and cultures, destroying relationships and lives and property, creating hatred and anger for generations to come!

Where do you and I begin to take practical steps toward peace between nations and peace in our hearts? We begin by turning away from our self-concern and turning to God.

Turning from our self-concern, we make a very important beginning to deal with our fears. When we focus on ourselves we are blind to the presence and action of bad and also blind to the need of others. I experienced the practical power of repenting of our self-concern in our house of intercession for bishops, priests and deacons.

For eight years a team of us conducted a continuous retreat of daily intercession. Some 2000 clergy (900 different ones) came through our doors for a week or more of intercession. They usually came with a knapsack full of problems. We asked them to leave their knapsack at the door for the first three days and pray for others who have similar problems. We heard the testimony of hundreds who prayed for others, then returned to pick up their knapsack after three days and found it empty! God's ways are so radically different from ours. We called it the "Three-day resurrection principle."

Turning to the Lord God we make a real beginning to the solution of what we should

do in response to the war. God's ways are not our ways. He sees the matters of our hearts and is concerned for our eternal salvation.

The Lord God created us free in His own image and likeness (see Genesis 3:26) so that we would truly love Him. His plan was to create us free so that we could freely *receive* His love and freely give that love to Him and to our neighbor. What a risk God took in creating us free! He so respects our freedom, that He will not violate it! How freely we have violated our freedom by our misuse of it! This misuse of our freedom is what sin is about. By sin we say "no!" to God's plan and choose our own self-centered plan of life — which is really death!

God's plan is about *Eternal Life*!

Even when we do sin and disobey, His plan is to have mercy on all (see Romans 11:32). When in our sinful misery we cry out to God for mercy He can freely act and not violate our freedom because we cried out to Him to have mercy on us.

God works in His mysterious ways (see Romans 11:33-36). He makes all things work together for the good of those who love Him who have been called according to His decree (see Romans 8:28). God in His mysterious ways even makes use of war! — for the external good of our eternal life.

God wants us to turn to Him with Trust.

Saint Faustina, the great Apostle of Divine Mercy, records the words of our Lord about peace:

> **Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to my mercy** (Diary, 300).

And again, speaking to Saint Faustina, Jesus said:

Tell aching mankind to snuggle close to my merciful heart, and I will fill it with peace. Tell [all people] my daughter, that I am Love and Mercy itself (Diary, 1074).

Trust in Jesus is a radical abandonment to the truth of the word of the living God (according to Pope John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer* 14).

So our first solution to the situation of war is to trust in Jesus, and to trust in Jesus even more!

But there is more that we can do; we must pray.

Pray for Mercy

Pray in union with Jesus at the throne of the Father interceding for us (see Hebrews 4:16 and 7:25). Let us pray with Jesus for mercy on the whole world (see the Chapel of Divine Mercy, Diary, 474 to 476). Let us pray with Jesus: "Father, behold the broken body of your Son and have mercy on us and on the whole world."

Pray for our Country

Let us pray for our own country and for our enemies who persecute us (see the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5:44).

Saint Faustina teaches us a clear lesson on praying for our own country! Repeatedly the Lord asked her to pray for her native Poland (see Diary, 39, 286, 468, 686, 1038, 1188). Between the two world wars Poland has only two decades of freedom because of her lack of gratitude for God's gifts (Diary, 384, 686, 1038, 1188). It was during those two decades that Warsaw along with Paris became the abortion capitals of the world (see Diary, 1276, according to Bishop Kraszewski, auxiliary bishop of Warsaw in a personal testimony, May 1, 2000).

Pray for our country which continues with millions of abortions annually.

What more can you do in war?

Turn away from the television that continually bombards us with the destruction of war and turn to the Lord who is present in the temple of your heart. Turn to Jesus and "Lift Him up."

Three times in the gospel according to Saint John, Jesus says that He will be lifted up (crucified): That all would believe and be saved (see Jn 3:14), that we believe that He is the **I**

AM (Jn 8:28), that all will be drawn to Him (Jn 12:32).

Lift Jesus higher! —and not the war, not your anxiety, and not the television reports.

Jesus is our victory, our Savior and our eternal life.

PART II:
How Can I...?

How can I do the things that I really want to do? I am so weak and miserable—I need God's merciful help!

Part II gives Divine Mercy answers to our questions of "How can I" do the good things that I need to do?

Q: How can I make a Spiritual Communion?

A spiritual communion is a communion of hearts: my heart with the Heart of Jesus. It is a "common-union-in-Christ" who is present in my heart by the Sacrament of Baptism and Holy Communion. It is a heart to heart presence; a presence to one who is present. It is a response to the promise of Jesus: "I am always with you" (Mt 28:28). No words are necessary.

According to Saint Theresa of Avila spiritual communion is a *focus on the indwelling presence*. Saint John of the Cross expressed his spiritual communion by asking the Lord: "Where are you hiding now?" and he would hear the response: "In the deep corners of your heart."

Saint Maximilian Kolbe regularly practiced spiritual communion. He wrote: "At times spiritual communion brings the same grace as sacramental [communion]" (SK II, 968, p. 647). He resolved to make a spiritual communion *"at least once every quarter hour"* (SK II, 987 I p. 720). In 1912 during a retreat, he noted: "When you have no time to go to Jesus [in the Eucharist] and temptations assail you, and you do not know what to do, hold the Cross to your chest, kiss His holy wounds, and He will support you" (SK II, 962, p. 618). (From *The Life of the World*: Saint Maximilian and the Eucharist, by J. Domanski, O.F.M. Conv. Libertyville, IL) Saint Maximilian lived in the presence of God within his heart. He lived in a spiritual communion. I find Saint Maximilian a real challenge to me: a marvelous example of living in communion with God.

There are numerous ways to practice being present to the presence of God in your heart. Among them are short ejaculations of love, the recognition of the Lord's presence, a longing desire to know and love Him. For example:

• Invoking the name "Jesus!"

•Frequent response of "Jesus I trust in you," "Jesus have mercy," or "Jesus I love you," or "Jesus I long for you," or "Jesus, Mary and Joseph I love you, save our souls" (Sr. Consolata Bertone).

• Greeting the Lord's presence within you with a silent love, desire or with praise and thanksgiving.

• Singing simple songs such as “I say yes, yes, yes...” or “Come Holy Spirit and fill my heart...” or “Rejoice in the Lord always...”

Try singing, you’ll love it!

Here is an important piece of advice about ejaculations: do not just recite them, or say them automatically, but address Jesus who is present in your heart. Say them to Jesus, as a friend who is present, not in some distant galaxy, but present in your heart. He is present and loves you. Speak to Him in love.

How did Saint Faustina practice Spiritual Communion?

Saint Faustina records the words of our Lord to her, words she heard after Holy Communion at midnight Mass (1935):

> **I am always in your heart; not only when you receive me in Holy Communion, but always** (Diary, 575).

She communed in silence:

> My spirit communicates with God without any word being spoken. I am aware that He is living in me and I in Him (Diary 560).

She would hide in the Heart of Jesus as a refuge and source of strength:

> When I see that the burden is beyond my strength, I do not consider or analyze it or probe into it, but I run like a child to the Heart of Jesus and say only one word to Him: “You can do all things and I keep silent...” (Diary, 1033, 1621, 1629).

Father Gaston Courtois in *When the Lord speaks to the Heart* describes a fascinating way to make a spiritual communion: *Smile*. Smile at Jesus in your Heart; smile at everyone and at everything. It is a marvelous way to be in communion with Jesus and those He loves.

Q: How Can I Be Present To The Lord?

For me, *presence* is the *key* to the spiritual life and to the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist. When we were baptized the love of God was poured into our hearts by the gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). We became living temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). Now, the Lord dwells in our heart; He is present in us!

The Holy Eucharist is the *presence* of the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Holy Communion He is present within us!

I came to appreciate the key centrality of *presence* when I made my first extended retreat with the Camaldolese Hermits in Bloomingdale, Ohio. I came exhausted and burned out from over extensive ministry and travel. I figuratively signed a blank check to the Lord: "Lord you fill it in: your will be done!" But then I did ask the Lord to help me to listen to Him: "Please teach me to listen to you." What I heard in my heart became the key to my retreat: *"Be present to me with your heart."* That's it! To listen is to be *present* to another with our hearts. To listen is not hearing words but really being present to the one who is present—it involves no words, but it involves love. Married couples are well aware of this real presence to each other.

During the year of solitude with the Camaldolese, in my three stays with them, the word expanded to be a word that has grown in my heart over these twenty years of prayer and reflection: "To please me, be present to me with your heart, in the Heart of Mary, trusting, rejoicing and giving thanks."

This word has grown to be the word I live by in my present time of hermitage with the Companions of Christ the Lamb in the wilderness of the upper peninsula of Michigan. The word here has been: "Be with me at the throne of the Father." Over and over again almost each day as I ask the Lord for a word to guide me that day I hear the word in my heart: "*Be present to me with your heart* in the Heart of Mary, trusting, rejoicing, giving thanks."

So what does presence to the Lord within my heart mean to me in practice? It means to be present to the ONE who is present; to be silent; to stop thinking and reflecting on my plans and teachings and be present with a loving attention to the Lord; to listen to Him who speaks a very strange language called *silence*. There are no images, no visions, usually no words, but a lovely attention to the indwelling presence of the Lord (the teaching of Saint Theresa of Avila

and of Saint John of the Cross).

I've used the word "presence" in a playful way to describe three varieties of presence. I try to be present to these three types of presences. I try to be present:

• *to* the *Presence* of the ONE who is present,

• *in* the *present*; that is *now* not past or future,

• *for* the *presents*—because all is God's gift to us, so let us give thanks.

Sacred Scripture teaches us about the presence of the Lord within us:

• "Remain in me, as I remain in you" (John 15:4 RNAB).

• "*The mystery*: Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27, RNAB).

• "...I live, no longer, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20 RNAB).

• "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you" (1 Cor 6:19 RNAB).

• "...Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts" (1 Peter 3:15 RNAB).

• "Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless of course, you fail the test" (2 Cor 13:5).

Just pick one of the *many* texts of Sacred Scripture that teaches us that *Christ Jesus lives in you* — dwell on it! I especially love the text of Saint Peter in the New American Bible:

Venerate the Lord, that is Christ, *in your hearts*. (1 Peter 3:15).

The *presence* of the Lord in our hearts *is* the reign of God; it is the *Kingdom*! Saint Matthew, who is strong on the teaching of the Kingdom of God, begins in Chapter 1 with the birth of "Emmanuel," God with us" (Mt 1:23) and ends his Gospel with the promise of Jesus:

“Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world” (Mt 28:28, NAB).

But, why do we not always know and perceive His presence? It is because we become opaque by our sin, especially by our self-concern and pride, and because the Lord so respects our freedom that He will not violate it; He waits for us to respond to Him with faith. He longs for us to seek Him, to trust Him, to love Him and to be present to Him.

In a marvelous way the Lord invites us to be present to Him with our hearts — in the Heart of Mary, His Immaculate Mother. The Heart of Mary is fully united with the Heart of Jesus and her great desire is to form our hearts the way she formed the Heart of Jesus — by the Holy Spirit.

And so I pray (many times a day):

> Mary as you formed the Heart of Jesus by the Spirit, form my heart to be the throne of Jesus in His glorious coming (an act of entrustment to Mary, G.W.K.).

Saint Faustina lived the Presence of the Lord

At the beginning of the diary Saint Faustina wrote a hymn to the present moment describing how she lived not in the past or in the future but in the now moment:

O My God

> When I look into the future, I am frightened,
> But why plunge into the future?
> Only the present moment is precious to me,
> As the future may never enter my soul at all.
>
> It is no longer in my power,
> To change, correct or add to the past;
> For neither sages nor prophets could do that.
> And so, what the past has embraced I must entrust to God.
>
> O present moment, you belong to me, whole and entire.

I desire to use you as best I can.
And although I am weak and small,
You grant me the grace of your omnipotence.

And so, trusting in Your mercy,
I walk through life like a little child,
Offering You each day this heart
Burning with love for Your greater glory. (Diary, 2).

Saint Faustina writes of the union of her heart with the Heart of Jesus from experience:

My heart is a permanent dwelling place for Jesus. No one but Jesus has access to it. (Diary, 193).

Throughout her diary she records her one great desire to be united with Jesus forever (see Diary 1700). She experienced the fire of the Lord's love in the depth of her heart (Diary, 903).

For a fuller collection of texts on the Heart of Jesus see *Special Urgency of Mary*, page 86 and the *Study Guide* under the entry "Heart" and "Merciful Heart of Jesus."

Q. How Can I Trust the Lord?

Trust involves our whole person: body, soul and spirit and also our whole relationship with God. So, let us look at the various facets of trust.

To Trust the Lord we need to *know* the Lord. Saint John tells us "Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ" (John 17:3 New American Bible). This knowing is the biblical meaning of "know"; it is the experience of God. For example: "Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain" (Genesis 4:1 R.S.V.). To trust the Lord we need to know that the Lord *is* God, that He loves us, and that He cares for us, that He is in charge and that He is always present to us (see Mt 28:28) — in a word He is *Mercy* itself (see Diary, 1739) and He is always merciful.

To Trust the Lord we not only need to know Him but also we need to *believe* in Him, to *hope* in Him and to *love* Him. To believe in Him is to put our faith in Him, to abandon our self to His merciful providence. To hope in Him is to rely on His promises of loving mercy and eternal life. Hope is not a wishful thinking or an optimistic attitude. To love Him is to desire Him and love Him with *His* love, with our whole person: body, soul and spirit.

To Trust the Lord is a word that includes faith, hope and love; it is like an umbrella that covers all three of the basic theological virtues of the gospel.

To Trust the Lord is like plunging into the infinite ocean of God's mercy with all our misery. We become totally immersed in His mercy. To use the Greek word, we are *baptized* into His mercy. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical on Mary, *Mother of the Redeemer* (14) describes what it means to believe or trust:

> to believe [trust] means "to abandon oneself" to the truth of the word of the living God, knowing and humbly recognizing "how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his way," (Rom 11:33).

I rejoiced when I read John Paul II's description of trust, because it confirmed a mnemonic I have used to define trust:

Total
Reliance
Upon

Saving
Truth

"Saving truth" is Jesus Christ! (See John 8:32). To trust is to totally plunge into His Mercy.

To Trust is the bridge to the merciful God. God in His creating, redeeming and sanctifying love gave us His only begotten Son for our salvation and eternal life (see John 3:16):

God

Trust Mercy

Man

Trust is our bridge to God and eternal life. Mercy is God's gift of love creating, redeeming and sanctifying us.

To Trust in the Lord has no limit. In my log cabin hermitage I have placed a half-dozen 3 X 5 inch index cards with the words printed with a bold black marker:

"TRUST IN JESUS EVEN MORE!"

I've made many dozens of copies of these cards to give to visitors to the hermitage over the years. My purpose is to remind them that we can never trust in Jesus enough. If you trust Him now, then there is still more to trusting Him. One priest friend had made these words the screen saver on his computer. You can make some cards for yourself as a daily reminder, even as book markers.

To Trust in the Lord is also to *entrust* the Merciful Heart of Jesus. I've recommended both expressions of trust: *"Jesus, I trust in you"* is an abandonment of our person and our personal concerns and needs; *"Jesus, I entrust to you..."* is a prayer of giving our concerns for others or for events outside of ourselves to the merciful care of Jesus.

To entrust to Jesus, is to offer to Him the prayer, works, sufferings and joys of others and of the whole world. Sounds just like the Chaplet of Divine Mercy: "...Have mercy on us and on the whole world" (Diary, 476).

To Trust and to entrust in the Lord is a marvelous way to hand over all the darkness around us to His merciful care. Then we can say with a confident heart: "Lord, now that I've given to you this person, this situation, this event ... I'm going to watch you work and I will see how you work all things for the good for those who love you (see Rom 8:28).

To Grow in the Trust of the Lord we can take some simple steps:

• *Desire* to trust in Jesus even more. Desire to desire to trust Jesus, if you can't trust Him fully.

• *Confess* your inability to trust by your own strength. "Lord, I want to but I'm so weak and distrustful. Therefore, help my unbelief."

• *Ask* for His grace and mercy to trust in Him. Ask, seek, knock, "how much more will the heavenly Father give good things to anyone who asks Him" (Mt 7:11).

But there are three more necessary steps to grow in trust:

• *Receive* the gift of trust — yield to it, surrender to it. Do not refuse it. But use it.

• *Thank God* for the gift of trust, acknowledge that it is a free gift and rejoice and praise the Lord!

• *Share* the gift with others both by your actions and your words, and it will grow.

It is fascinating to me that the six steps can be used to grow in any virtue or good disposition and *also* can be used to overcome *vices* and evil habits with virtues and holiness!

To practice trust, the very repetition of the prayer "Jesus, I trust in you!" is already trusting. Pray it often — But don't just say it. Say it to Jesus who is in your heart. He is present, not off in some distant galaxy. Say "Jesus, I trust in you" with love and attention because you are speaking to the loving, merciful God who is always in your heart unless you willfully reject Him.

But He is always merciful and always eager to forgive us.

Jesus told Saint Faustina that He wanted His image as the Divine Mercy painted with the signature “Jesus, I trust in you!” We are reminded to trust in Jesus as we gaze upon the image of the Divine Mercy in our rooms or office or on the dash board of our cars or in books.

Saint Faustina recorded her great trust in the Lord:

> Jesus, do not leave me alone in suffering. You know, Lord, how weak I am. I am an abyss of wretchedness, I am nothingness itself; so what will be so strange if You leave me alone and I fall? I am an infant, Lord, so I cannot get along by myself. However, beyond all abandonment I trust, and in spite of my own feeling I trust, and I am being completely transformed into trust — often in spite of what I feel. Do with me as You please, Lord, only give me the grace to be able to love You in every event and circumstance. Lord, do not lessen my cup of bitterness, only give me strength that I may be able to drink it all.
>
> O Lord, sometimes You lift me up to the brightness of visions, and then again You plunge me into the darkness of night and the abyss of my nothingness, and my soul feels as if it were alone in the wilderness. Yet, above all things, I trust in You, Jesus, for You are unchangeable. My moods change, but You are always the same, full of mercy (Diary, 1489).

Q: How Can I Be Forgiven for What I Have Done?

Our Lord calls out to 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:

> [Let] **the greatest sinners place their trust in my mercy. They have a right before others to trust in the abyss of My mercy...write about My mercy towards tormented souls** (Diary, 1146).

The merciful Lord exhorts us to go to confession and receive His mercy. Tell the confessor not only your sins but especially tell him where you need mercy the most. Our Lord told Saint Faustina:

> **When you go to confession, to this fountain of My Mercy, the Blood and Water which came forth from My Heart always flow upon your soul and ennobles it. Every time you go to confession, immerse yourself entirely in My mercy with great trust, so that I may pour the bounty of my grace upon your soul.**
>
> **When you approach the confessional, know this, that I myself am waiting there for you. I am only hidden by the priest, but I myself act in your soul. Here the misery of the soul meets the God of Mercy** (Diary, 1602).

What a promise of the merciful Lord: "Here the *misery* of the soul meets the *mercy* of God!"

Again, our Lord encourages Saint Faustina to tell sinners about His mercy:

> **Write, my daughter, that I am mercy itself for the contrite soul. A soul's great wretchedness does not enkindle me with wrath; but rather, my Heart is moved with great mercy** (Diary 1739).

Yes, Jesus is mercy itself toward the humble and toward the miserable. There is no sin, no misery, that Jesus will not forgive and heal if we turn to Him with trust and repentance. Take advantage of His "tribunal of mercy," His Sacrament of Reconciliation and receive His mercy:

Tell souls where they are to look for solace; that is, in the tribunal of mercy. There the

greatest miracles take place [and] are incessantly repeated (Diary, 1448).

What a promise of the Lord!

Our Lord made it clear to Saint Faustina that we don't have to make great pilgrimages or involve ourselves in other external ceremonies in order to receive these miracles of His mercy and forgiveness:

> **...it suffices to come with faith to the feet of My representative and to reveal to him one's misery, and the miracle of Divine Mercy will be fully demonstrated** (Diary, 1448).

When we go to Confession, it is our *misery* that we reveal!

Hear the prayer of the priests as he prays God's mercy and forgiveness for **all** your sins:

> God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church, may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Words of Absolution, Sacrament of Reconciliation).

With the gift of mercy you can go, do your penance, and live a new life of peace and joy!

Q: How Can I Renew and Deepen My Relationship With The Lord?

Our relationship with the Lord is unique and precious. God is "in love" with us and wants to possess us with his love — but he so respects our freedom that He will not violate it. So He waits and seeks the moment that each of us longs for Him and opens our hearts to Him. The Lord never refuses an invitation. He stands at the door of our heart and knocks, waiting for our invitation to come in and have supper together (see Rev 3:20-21).

So what can you do to renew your relationship with the Lord and to deepen it? There are a number of ways that are effective. Some will be more suitable to your temperament but you are welcome to try them all:

• *Repent* of your sins and sinful life. Repent of your self concern. Turn to Him and ask His mercy with complete trust.

• Go to the *Sacrament of Reconciliation* regularly and reveal your misery to God's representative and you will experience great miracles (see Diary of Saint Faustina, 1448). Tell the priest where you need mercy the most. Receive the graces of forgiveness of sin, of healing and teaching (Diary, 377).

• Make a daily *Holy Hour*. This is the life-time resolution of Bishop Fulton J. Sheen. It is a precious time of being present to the Lord and growing in our relationship with the Lord.

• *Desire* a deeper relationship with the Lord. Make your desire a top priority. Long for Him with your whole heart and strength. "Lord, I want and need you!"

• *Ask* for the gift of His presence. Ask for the experience of His presence, His power and His person. Ask for His love.

• *Invite* Him to come into your heart and set it on fire with His love.

• *Receive* what He gives you and give *thanks* for it and share it with others.

• *Renew the commitment* and *vows* of your life.

• Renew your *Baptismal* vows, like at the Easter Liturgy, but this time understand what you are doing and mean it: Lord I repent my sins, I renounce Satan and all his works and I believe in God the Father Almighty and Jesus Christ our Lord and the Holy Spirit. I believe in all the Church teaches me in the Creed.

• Renew your *Confirmation*. Ask a prayer group to pray over you for the full release of the Holy Spirit and His gifts that you may experience the Lord and serve Him better. Take a retreat that leads you to a deeper and renewed experience of the Living God who is in love with you and is present in you.

• Renew your *marriage* vows in a solemn way. You can do this at a marriage weekend

retreat.

• Renew your *Religious* vows, according to the customs of your community, but really mean them.

• Renew your *Consecration* to *Our Blessed Mother,* even daily — In the short form of Pope John Paul II "I am all yours Mary" (Totus Tuus), or any form you are led to.

• Renew your reception *of Holy Communion* with frequent and regular Spiritual Communions.

• *Entrust yourself to the Mercy of God*, by the prayer revealed to Saint Faustina (Diary, 49) and used by Pope John Paul II to renew His entrustment to the Divine Mercy: Jezu ufam tobie! Jesus I trust in you! (Shrine of Divine Mercy, Poland, June 7, 1997)

The Lord is seeking you more than you can possibly seek Him; so let Him find you. The Lord is deeply in love with you; let Him love you! Invite Him into your heart and love Him.

Q: How Can I Strengthen My Family?

The family is under severe attack by the secular culture and the attack of Satan against God's plan for His family. The attacks take the form of the sexual revolution, contraception, abortion, divorce and euthanasia, same sex unions, and pre-marital sex. For example, the rate of divorce in Catholic marriages is now the same as the national average: half of the marriages end in divorce!

My strong recommendation is that the family **prays together**. Parents and children can pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. They can pray the rosary of the Blessed Mother, a practice so strongly recommended by the Popes and now a new encouragement by Pope John Paul II:

> If the rosary keeps pace with the speed of our lives, it can become a privileged instrument for *building peace* with hearts of persons, in families and among people" (John Paul II, February 21, 2003)

I also strongly recommend contacting ministries that specialize in helping families; among them the Gift Foundation, The Apostolate for Family Consecration and your local Marriage Encounter.

The **GIFT Foundation**, P.O. Box 95, Carpentersville, IL 60110, Phone: 847-844-1167, FAX: 847-844-1195, Web Site: info@giftfoundation.org. On Credit Card Orders taken at (www.giftfoundation.org) make available at cost a 12 tape album and *Study Guide on a CRASH Course in the Theology of the Body* of Pope John Paul II, presented by Christopher West. This is a powerful and moving teaching on God's plan for marriage. I recommend this course because so many of the problems in marriage are rooted in the understanding and practice of the nuptial union.

Christopher West's books are also available as well as other tapes on marriage questions. Contact the Gift Foundation for further information.

The Apostolate for Family Consecration, Catholic Familyland, 3375 County Road 36, Bloomingdale, OH 43910-7903, Phone: 740-765-5500, 7-800-77-FAMILY, FAX: 740-765-5561, Web Site: www.familyland.org. e-mail: usa@familyland.org. and **Catholic Familyland** (TV) specializes in family ministry by TV, summer week long programs for the whole family, home study and video. My work with them has been conference and TV teachings on the Divine Mercy

message and devotions. Jerry and Gwen Coniker, parents of twelve children and forty seven grandchildren are the founders of the ministry. Call the Apostolate for help and information. Jerry gives his witness that the daily family rosary was the source of grace that keeps his twelve children in the Catholic Church.

Q: How Can I Live in Peace?

Peace is a gift of God. To receive it we need to *desire* it, *confessing* our own inability to live in peace and *ask* for it: Then we need to **receive** it with **thanks** and **share** it with others.

The Sacred Scriptures tell us that peace is a gift of Jesus given on the night before He suffered and died: Peace is my farewell to you, and peace is my gift to you (Jn 14:27).

Saint Paul tells us to:

> Rejoice in the Lord always...Dismiss all anxiety from your minds. Present your needs to God in every form of prayer and in petitions full of gratitude. *Then God's own peace*, which is beyond all understanding, will stand guard over your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:4-7 NAB).

Pope John Paul II in his second encyclical *Rich In Mercy*: *Divine Mercy* (1980) described the uneasiness [literally in the original Polish "lack of peace"] of hearts as a great problem (#11) and then in his conclusion urged that everything he said in the encyclical be translated into a prayer for mercy (#15). In 2002, in his apostolic letter on the *Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary* he urged that the rosary be prayed for *peace* in the hearts of persons, in families and among peoples. The rosary is an instrument for building this peace.

Peace is the presence of Jesus in our hearts. Ask for it and cooperate with the Lord for the felt awareness of His presence in order to respond to His loving presence with love, thanks, adoration and radiate that presence to others. Be present to the ONE who is present in your heart that He make radiate His presence to others. You are a presence of Jesus; you are His Body by Baptism. Let His presence radiate out to others.

> Saint Faustina records the words of our Lord about His radiant presence:
> **Tell [all people], My daughter, that I am Love and Mercy itself. When a soul approaches Me with trust, I fill it with such an abundance of graces that it cannot contain them within itself, but radiates them to other souls** (Diary, 1074).

PART III

What Can I Do?

What can I do to make use of God's gift of mercy in my daily life? I can actually do something! Try the following straight forward suggestions to answer your crises and problems. They are the message of Divine Mercy put into practice. (These were written for the *Marian Helpers Bulletin*, published four times a year from Fall 1992 to the Spring of 2001. Used with permission).

Be Holy

Be holy because I am holy (Lev 19:2).
Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48).
Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful (Lk 6:36).

These passages from the Old and New Testaments can be interpreted, not as three separate commands, but as three ways of expressing and clarifying a single command. God expects us to be holy like Him. This holiness consists in being perfect. And this perfection is expressed by being merciful.

Since only God is holy (see Rv 15:4), we cannot come to holiness apart from Him. The only way we can become holy is by being associated so intimately with God that we share in His holiness.

How do we do this? We do it by asking for His Holy Spirit. Saint Paul tells us that the love of God is poured into our hearts by the gift of the Holy Spirit (see Rom 5:5).

How do we express this holiness of God that comes to dwell within us?

We express it in the same way God expresses it, through love. God loves us first (see 1 Jn 4:10) and pours this love out upon us as mercy. He calls us to love Him in return and to let our love flow out to our neighbor as mercy, through our deeds, words, and prayers.

The Church's teaching about holiness can be clearly seen in the process of beatification of those presented as candidates for sainthood.

Take Saint Faustina, for example, Her life was examined thoroughly to determine the degree to which she practiced the virtues of faith, hope, and love, and all the other Christian virtues. The crucial question was: Did she practice these virtues in an heroic (meaning "perfect") way? Saint Faustina was first declared "venerable" (which means worthy of deep religious respect because of her holiness) and then "Blessed." She was awarded this honor, not because of her visions and locutions, but because she practiced all the Christian virtues perfectly and lived in humble obedience to the will of God. She joyfully served as cook, as gardener, and as door keeper, seeking always to be a channel of mercy to others.

It must be the same for us. The measure of our holiness is how we too carry out our daily duties in humble service and merciful love. Do we serve our families? Do we help the needy? Do we pray for the suffering?

Such things as pride, judgementalism, gossip, sadness, and discouragement — in a word sin — stand as obstacles in our path toward holiness. But thanks be to God that His mercy is greater than our sin and misery! Through the power of His merciful love and forgiveness, we can break through these sinful actions and attitudes.

What can we do to hasten this process so that we can continue to grow in holiness? We can try each day to fulfill the fundamentals of the message of Divine Mercy — the "ABC's" of mercy:

A. Ask for His Spirit of mercy, the Holy Spirit. "Ask, seek, knock. How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Lk 11:9-13).

B. Be Merciful, through humble service to others and through daily duties of life done in faith and with a pure intention.

C. Complete Trust in Jesus. Trust is the key that opens the floodgates of God's mercy. Trust is the key to Holiness.

Pray, “Jesus Mercy!”

How can you pray while in the midst of pain and tragedy? How do you react to death in the family, or to the shocking news that your unmarried daughter is pregnant, or to your teenage son when you find him abusing alcohol or using drugs? What can you do when your heart and mind are spinning in turmoil, confused by temptations, angers, jealousies, or lust, or wearied by anxieties, frustrations, stress, overwork, or lack of sleep?

How can you pray when you can’t pray prayers? Simply cry out from your broken heart, “Jesus, Mercy!”

“Jesus, Mercy!” sums up our whole response to tragedy. We turn to the One who is compassionate and who can help us in our need.

Jesus is Mercy itself and waits for our plea to respond with mercy. His mercy is the source of peace in the midst of travail, forgiveness in the midst of sin, healing in the midst of pain, unity in the midst of division.

The prayer “Jesus, Mercy!” is short and is easily repeated over and over again, yet it has several layers of meaning...

It is a plea for mercy: “Jesus *have* mercy on us.”

It is an act of praise: “Jesus, You *are* mercy itself.”

It is a longing: “Jesus *come* in the fullness of Your merciful love!”

When we pray “Jesus, Mercy!” we are not praying alone; we are praying with Mary, the one who prays “Jesus, Mercy!” as no one else ever has: “Jesus, they have no wine; they have no mercy; send your new wine, the Spirit of Mercy.”

The prayer “Jesus, Mercy!” is not just a cry of the lips, but a cry from the depths of our heart. It can be prayed in every situation as an unceasing prayer of trust and thanksgiving throughout the day, a response to Saint Paul’s great exhortation:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in all things, give thanks, for this is the Will of God in Christ Jesus regarding you all (1Thess 5:16-18).

"Jesus, Mercy!" is a short form of the Divine Mercy Chaplet, by which we offer to the Father the Body and Blood of His Son in atonement for the sins of the world and for mercy on us and on the whole world.

"Jesus, Mercy!" is a "mini Chaplet," and the Chaplet, in turn, is a "mini Mass," which makes present the redeeming and merciful sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Our heartfelt prayer of "Jesus, Mercy!" extends and continues the redeeming, merciful love of the sacrifice of the Cross and applies it to each and every situation we encounter in our lives. The cry "Jesus, Mercy!" touches the tragedies and the joys of our daily lives with merciful, transforming love.

By unceasingly praying "Jesus, Mercy," even when we pray it silently, letting it flow from our hearts, we become channels of mercy and ambassadors of reconciliation (see 2 Cor 5:17-21), making mercy present.

In this way, we begin to fulfill the extraordinary command of Jesus: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful (Lk 6:36).

Jesus, Mercy!

Live a Litany of Mercy

Every day, a litany of various thoughts, feelings, memories, and emotions goes on and on inside each one of us. Memories, joys, pains, observations, fears, imaginings, and gut-reactions fill our day — along with constant judgements, temptations and anxieties.

These moment-to-moment experiences form the first part of a litany, called the *invocation*. But a litany also has a second part, called the *response*, a simple prayer: "Have mercy on us."

Each of the invocation events that fill our days calls for some kind of a response — either a curse or a blessing. If our response is a "curse" — a condemning judgement or anger with a violent outburst of emotion — then we bind ourselves and any other people involved.

Consider the effect of children cursing their parents or people cursing their pastors or employees their employers. The curse binds all the parties involved with hatred, jealousy, resentments, and the like.

Consider the even greater effect of those in authority cursing those under them. Spiritual freedom is destroyed. Is it any wonder that there are so many people bound up, spiritually and psychologically, locked in the darkness of the tomb of hatred and self-concern and so unable to function?

If, on the other hand, our response is a blessing, a plea for God's mercy, or an ejaculation of trust and thanksgiving, then the effect is a new peace and freedom for ourselves and for others.

To bless is to love, to forgive, to thank, to praise, to heal, to submit, to be patient, to be kind, to be merciful, to be compassionate, to intercede for others.

When we bless the people around us, God's mercy flows through us. We become channels of His mercy.

To each situation we can respond with an appropriate prayer: "Jesus, mercy," ... or "Jesus, I trust in You," ..."Jesus, thank You," ... "Jesus, I glorify You," ... "Jesus, I love You," or, simply, "Jesus, help!"

If we were to respond in this way to every invocation of our day, offering a blessing instead of a curse, we would end up praying all day long! And isn't that what we are supposed to be doing? Saint Paul exhorts us to "pray without ceasing!" (1 Thes 5:17).

In the gospel we have the example of Jesus responding to the three invocations that come as temptations from Satan (Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13). He responds by quoting the word of God in sacred scripture, and His response becomes a model for us. Jesus lived a litany of mercy, not only in rejecting temptations, but also in thanking and glorifying His Heavenly Father.

We, too, can live a litany of mercy throughout the day by blessing every person and situation with the love of God. And we can use a litany of mercy in our daily prayer time, specially if we are distracted and anxious about situations in our lives.

How do we do this? Let me suggest a method that has helped me. Simply begin by asking the Holy Spirit to pray in you, and then respond to each of the distractions and anxieties with one of the short prayers I mentioned above: "Jesus, mercy" or "Jesus, I trust in You," etc.

Imagine that each of the distractions, anxieties, fears, or hurts is a slide in a slide-show. Project one "slide" at a time on the wall and pray your response, and then move on to the next "slide." You will be surprised when suddenly you have run through all your slides and are at peace in the presence of the Lord in your heart.

Celebrate God's Mercy!

How do we celebrate God's mercy? We can do so by by following the example of Mary, the Mother of Mercy, and of Saint Faustina Kowalska, the Apostle of Mercy [Beatified April 18, 1993.]

Mary, by the example of her life, teaches us how to celebrate mercy. In complete trust, she consented to God's plan to make Mercy present by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because of her "yes" at the Annunciation, the Word was made flesh — Mercy became present among us.

Mary's response to the presence of Mercy Incarnate in her womb was to celebrate by bringing mercy to others. She went "in haste" to be with her kinswoman, Elizabeth.

As Mary greeted Elizabeth, the child in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy — sharing in Mary's celebration of God's mercy. (The child was later named "John," which means "mercy.") Then, filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth cried out in a loud voice: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Lk 1:43).

Mary responded to these words by praising God, celebrating His great mercy "from generation to generation" (Lk 1:47-55). In this song of praise, Mary shares with us the key to celebrating God's mercy — *trusting* in God's word and, in joyous appreciation, *giving thanks* to Him for His gift of mercy.

Saint Faustina, as a special daughter of Our Blessed Mother, celebrated God's mercy in that same spirit of trust, thanksgiving, and joy.

With great trust she immersed herself completely in God's mercy and steeped herself in thanksgiving — in times of darkness and suffering as well as in times of exultation.

Her daily life was a strong reflection of the instruction once given to her by her confessor, Father Andrasz, S.J.

> Act in such a way that all who come in contact with you will go away joyful. Sow happiness about you because you have received much from God (Diary, 55).

We, too, can celebrate God's mercy with trust and thanksgiving. By trust

> we make a free will decision, our "yes," to receive the tender mercy of God, and immerse ourselves in it. By our joyful thanksgiving we acknowledge the gift of God's mercy in every circumstance, even when we don't "feel" like thanking the Lord.
>
> This touches on a secret I've discovered in my own life. If I find myself in a dark mood, I just repeat "Jesus, I trust in You," and begin to thank Him for everything present at the moment within me and around me — including all my pains and tensions. Then a new joy grows within me.
>
> This habit of responding with trust and thanksgiving for every moment echoes what Father Pierre de Causade, S.J. described as the "essence of spirituality" in his classic *Abandonment to Divine Providence*.
>
> What God arranges for us to experience at each moment is the best and holiest thing that could happen to us (p. 27).

Trusting in this, and giving thanks from moment to moment, we are filled with such joy that, like Mary and Saint Faustina, we are able to pass it on to others:

> **When a soul approaches Me with trust, I fill it with such an abundance of graces that it cannot contain them within itself, but radiates them to other souls** (Diary, 1074).

That's the way to celebrate God's mercy!

Rejoice in the Lord Always!

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, Rejoice" (Phil 4:4).

That's how a small plaque in my office reads. That is what Saint Paul tells us to do. But how can I rejoice always when I don't feel like rejoicing? How can I rejoice when I'm hurt and depressed, when I'm angry and in a black mood, or worse still, when I'm in pain from sickness or a broken relationship? How can I rejoice when I feel so burdened with guilt and shame?

The first thing we need to do is recognize the important difference between "joy," which is a noun, and "rejoice," which is a verb. Joy is something we *want to have*. Rejoice is something we *decide to do*.

This distinction is very clear in the gospel. We are commanded to "rejoice always," but we are not commanded to "be always joyful." Now that's a relief for me — I don't have to be bubbling with joy all the time. The gospel tells us that our joy will be full at certain times, that joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and that it is the goal awaiting us. But, whether we feel joy or not, we are to "Rejoice always!"

To rejoice always means just that — to rejoice in every situation and circumstance. It means to step out, and acknowledge by our words and actions that God is God, that He is in charge, and that He loves us, cares for us, and guides us.

To rejoice in the Lord always is to express our trust and gratitude that *nothing* except our deliberate rejection of Him can separate us from God's love (See Rom 8:39), and that "all things work together for the good of those who love Him" (Rom 8:28). Neither our trials, sufferings, persecutions, humiliations, pains, hurts, darkness, or even death itself can separate us from Christ. The difficulties we endure are God's way of strengthening us in our trust of Him. He uses humility, times of anxiety and confusion to help us grow in patience, occasions of conflict and division to help us grow in mercy.

Our Blessed Mother gives us a wonderful example of trust and grateful rejoicing. When she visits her cousin Elizabeth, she is greeted with words of praise for her trust in the Lord: "Blest is she who trusted that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled."

But Mary doesn't take this praise for herself. She redirects it to God as she bursts out

with her famous song of rejoicing in the Lord:

> My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior... (Lk 1:45-47).

The example of Saint Faustina also stands out as a model for us to imitate. Those who knew her personally described her as always cheerful. In her diary, she writes of her desire to give thanks for everything, even the smallest things, and even her sufferings:

> I desire that my whole life be one act of thanksgiving to You, O God (Diary, 1285).

On one occasion, she was led to make a great and continuous act of thanksgiving, to steep herself in thanksgiving for seven days and nights (Diary, 1367, 1369). As a result, her whole being was thoroughly immersed in God — like being in a fierce fire of gratitude (Diary, 1369).

By her trust and her joyful thanksgiving, Saint Faustina is a presence of the merciful Lord in our times, teaching us how to live out the exhortation of Saint Paul:

> Rejoice in the Lord always! (Phil 4:4).

Following the example of our Blessed Mother and of Saint Faustina, we can take this as a daily challenge in every situation.

Seek Him!

There is a bumper sticker that reads, “Wise men still seek Him!” The Three Wise Men of old sought out Jesus, the King of the Jews, and those who are wise today also seek Him.

To seek Jesus should be the task of our whole life. The Lord wants us to reach out to Him with trust and faithful perseverance, seeking Him with our whole heart and mind and strength.

This continuous seeking of the Lord is characteristic of the *Saints*. We see Mary and Joseph seeking Jesus with sorrow and finding Him in the temple (Lk 2:41-52). We see Mary Magdalene seeking Jesus (Jn 20:15). When she found the tomb empty and then finding Him with joy. As the prophet tells us, “When you look for Me you will find Me. Yes, when you seek Me with all your heart you will find Me, says the Lord, and I will change your lot” (Jer 29:13-14).

Saint Faustina repeatedly writes in her diary that her only desire is to be in union with the Lord. He alone can satisfy. And so, she sought the Will of God with her whole heart, mind, and strength.

Saint John of the Cross, a master of the spiritual life, also wrote about seeking God. After years of trying to understand his teachings, I finally came up with a three-part summary of his writings on this subject:

1. God is hidden. Where? He is hidden in the depths of our hearts. It is our life-long task to *seek* for Him there.

2. The experience of God’s presence does not prove His presence; nor does the experience of His absence prove His absence. It is rather a question of TRUST. We must seek Him in faith.

3. God alone is God. All that we think about God is nothing (‘nada”) compared to what He is really like. We must continually seek Him in trust.

Our spiritual life consists in this continual seeking of God with our whole heart and mind and strength. The Book of Wisdom (1:1) begins with the exhortation to “Love justice ... think of the Lord in goodness, and *seek Him in integrity of heart*.” This is a summary of the spiritual life.

We should seek the Lord as a compass needle seeks the north pole. No matter which way we turn, the compass needle continues to seek out the north, following the magnetic field of the earth. But if a stronger magnetic force comes close to the compass, the needle will be drawn to it. A lesson in the spiritual life! Be drawn to the Lord. Turn away from the attracting allurements of material things and worldly pleasures.

We turn away from temptation, not by forcing the compass needle, but by withdrawing from the occasion and allowing ourselves to be drawn by the Lord.

A great prayer in situations when we feel we are losing our direction is “Draw me Lord, that I may be drawn.” This is an ancient prayer of the early Syriac Church. It stresses that it is the Lord who must draw us by His mercy. It is all gift.

As we seek the Lord throughout our lives, we can pray other similar short and powerful prayers: Lord, fill me with your mercy, so that I may be merciful. Lord, fill me with your love, so that I may love.

Our part in the spiritual life is to exercise our free will by seeking the Lord in trust, asking for His merciful love perseveringly so that we can be merciful to others even as the Father in Heaven is merciful (Lk 6:36).

Repent!

If God is so merciful, do I still need to repent? Yes! Repentance is at the heart of the preaching of Jesus and at the heart of the message of Divine Mercy. "Repent," Jesus tells us in the Gospel, "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mt 4:17). And to Saint Faustina He explained:

> **I cannot love a soul which is stained with sin; but when it repents, there is no limit to My generosity** (Diary, 1728).

What does it mean to repent? To repent is to turn; to turn away from our self-centeredness, to turn away from our sins, and to turn to God as our priority, our center, our all.

How often do we have to do this? We have to do it continually! Keeping ourselves in proper relationship to God requires constant, daily conversion. It is like keeping our car on the road. How often do we have to turn the steering wheel of the car as we drive to the shopping mall? What would happen if we took our hands off the wheel? So, too, we need to keep turning our hearts and minds to God, asking for His mercy.

Why do we need to ask for His mercy? We need to ask because we cannot turn from our sins by ourselves. We may decide not to sin again, and even make a firm resolution, bu we are unable to carry out our decision without the gift of *God's* forgiving and strengthening mercy.

What makes repentance possible is God's mercy itself. Only through His mercy, are we, as sinners, able to trust in His mercy and repent.

Asking is an expression of our free will and of our awareness that we need mercy. When we ask, we allow God to act freely, without violating our freedom.

God's mercy is greater than all of our sins, greater than all the sins of the world, and it is always available for anyone who asks with trust — especially those who need it most:

> **[Let] the greatest sinners place their trust in My mercy. They have the right before others to trust in the abyss of my mercy** (Diary, 1146).

There is no question here of a sinner being encouraged or allowed to remain in his sinful ways. Recall what Saint Paul said about remaining in sin:

> What, then, are we to say? Let us continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How can we who die to sin go on living in it? (Rom 6:1-3).

In John's Gospel, Jesus spoke to the woman caught in adultery in a similar way:

> "Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No, one, Lord." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. God, and from now on do not sin any more" (Jn 8:10-11).

"Do not sin any more" makes it clear that receiving God's forgiving mercy is not a license to continue in sin.

In Saint Faustina's Diary we find a triple focus: the infinite mercy of God, the trust that we as sinners are to place in our Merciful Lord, and the need for us to receive His mercy with thanksgiving and share it with others.

One major aspect of Saint Faustina's mission is to pray and sacrifice for sinners and encourage them to trust in the Lord, so that they may freely turn to the Lord with trust and not be afraid of going to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

So, what can I do in order to repent? I can ask for God's mercy. By asking for His mercy I freely acknowledge that I need His mercy to repent. By asking for His mercy with trust I receive it. I then can give thanks for His gracious gift and joyfully share it with others, receiving even more mercy.

Evangelize with the Image!

To use the Image of the Merciful Savior is a powerful way to evangelize.

When I meet people who are interested in what I'm doing or who ask about the Divine Mercy lapel pin I wear, the Image gives me an opportunity to spread the Good News of God's mercy.

I always carry a Divine Mercy prayer card in my shirt pocket (just over my heart.) It has the Image of the Merciful Savior on one side and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy on the other.

Taking the prayer card out of my pocket, I explain that the image represents Saint Faustina's vision of Jesus on February 22, 1931. Then I refer to each of the significant features of the image.

Jesus the High Priest

I point out first that Our Lord is dressed in a white robe, with His right hand raised in blessing. This, I explain, is Jesus, The Divine Mercy, the merciful and faithful Great High Priest of the New Covenant, offering us His priestly blessing of peace, bestowing the Holy Spirit and His mercy for the forgiveness of sins.

I then explain that the image is like a multi-exposure photograph, overlapping the events of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and the octave day of Easter (Mercy Sunday).

Thus, it summarizes the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Next, I call attention to the left hand of Jesus, which seems to be gesturing to His Heart, as if inviting us to come to His Heart for refuge. This, I explain, is his great desire, for the pierced Heart of Jesus, is the source of all mercy.

Pointing to the red and pale rays of light that emanate from the area of the Lord's Heart, I note that the rays represent the Blood and Water that gushed forth from the pierced Heart of Jesus, and that they symbolize the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist.

Pledge of Trust

Moving downward with the rays, I point to the words written below the feet of Jesus: "Jesus, I trust in You." I explain that the Polish word that Saint Faustina used in her diary for this phrase means "signature."

Jesus didn't tell Saint Faustina that He wanted the image "inscribed" with this phrase. He told her He wanted it "signed." It's like signing a contract. We are to pledge our trust in Jesus in all the circumstances of our lives, thus accepting His transforming mercy. By repeating this short prayer over and over again, we are reaffirming our willingness to keep our part of a covenant with Jesus, trusting all to Him, so that He can pour His mercy out upon us.

Be Merciful

The last, and perhaps most important thing I explain about the image is that it is not simply a reminder to trust in the mercy of God. It is also a reminder of the demands of His mercy.

"**I demand from you deeds of mercy**," Our Lord told Saint Faustina. "**You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere**" (Diary, 724).

Giving the prayer card to the interested person, I mention that by this image, Christ is inviting us to enter into His presence with complete trust, allowing the rays of His mercy to envelop us and then flow through us to others.

Rejoice in Your Misery!

We all experience misery in some form or other. I've questioned many thousands of people in all walks of life, and I've found no one without misery — not a single person. We all suffer from various types of misery: sin, sickness, fears, anxiety, depression, poverty, tension, conflict, violence, fatigue, inadequacy, confusion, injustice, division, addiction ... and the list could go on.

Our misery is worsened because of unfortunate situations in our family, in our workplace, in the Church, and in the world, and it is aggravated by our own responses of anger, hatred, judgment, resentment, pride, jealousy, avarice, lust, intemperance, and imprudence. In our misery we often feel frustrated and helpless. We are easily tempted to be sad and discouraged, and we end up wallowing in self-pity.

God's Response is Mercy

God's response to our misery is His gift of mercy. This is God's plan: "to have mercy on all" (Rom 11:32).

God the Father sent His Son Jesus to reveal His mercy (Pope John Paul II, *Rich in Mercy*) and bring us redemption, the forgiveness of all our sins (Col 1:14), and relief from our misery (Lk 4:18).

In His revelations to Saint Faustina in the 1930's, Our Lord repeatedly spoke of the immensity of His mercy, and of His merciful love for all, especially great sinners and those in misery.

> **Your misery does not hinder My mercy. My daughter, write that the greater the misery of a soul, the greater its right to My mercy; [urge] all souls to trust in the unfathomable abyss of My mercy, because I want to save them all. On the cross, the fountain of My mercy was opened wide by the lance of all souls — no one have I excluded!** (Diary, 1182).

Our Response is to Rejoice

Our response to God's mercy in our misery is to rejoice, to give thanks for His mercy, and to praise Him for what He is doing and will do with our misery.

Rejoicing is not a feeling, but a decision to acknowledge God's merciful love and to accept all suffering — even the pain of our own weakness and sinfulness — as a sharing in the cross of Christ.

Saint Paul wrote often about rejoicing in our misery: To the Colossians (1:24): "I find my joy in the suffering I endure for you." To the Corinthians (2 Cor 12:9): "I willingly boast of my weaknesses ... so that the power of Christ may rest on me." To the Philippians (1:29): "It is your special privilege to take Christ's part — not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for Him."

And Saint Peter wrote,

> Rejoice in the measure you share Christ's sufferings. When His glory is revealed, you will rejoice exultantly (1 Pt 4:12-13).

Saint Faustina too, though deeply aware of the abyss of her own misery, rejoiced because of the infinite abyss of God's mercy:

> The Lord gave me a deeper knowledge of His holiness and His majesty, and at the same time I saw my own misery. This knowledge made me happy, and my soul drowned itself completely in His mercy. I felt enormously happy (Diary, 1801).

We, too, are called to find joy even in our misery by trusting in God's mercy. The more we rejoice in God's mercy, the more we receive His mercy and are transformed by it. We then become able to share in the redeeming work of Christ, bringing mercy and reconciliation to others in misery (2 Cor 5:17-21).

Walk in Step with the Lord.

To walk in step with the Lord means to walk with the Lord at *His* pace, not running ahead of Him, wasting our energies, and not lagging behind Him, dragging our proverbial feet. A vivid illustration of this lesson comes to mind. In my high school years, I spent my summers helping out on a farm in New England. They still used a pair of oxen to drag logs out of the woods. I was fascinated to see how they trained oxen for this kind of work.

A young, inexperienced ox was yoked to an older trained ox. The yoke was made of a sturdy, curved piece of wood that fit over the necks of the two animals, with a bent U-shaped frame underneath their necks. It was attached to a long beam that stretched out behind them, with a chain at the end to hook around the logs.

When the command to pull was given, the exuberant, young ox would try to run ahead of the mature ox. But he would soon tire, because he was trying to pull the whole load by himself.

Out of breath and exhausted, he would then begin to lag behind the old timer. Each time he would drop a step behind, the heavy yoke would bounce against the back of his head with a thud as the older ox moved on ahead of him at a steady pace.

Alternating between the exhaustion of running ahead and the bumps on the back of his, he eventually learned to walk in step with the bigger ox and pull his share of the weight.

It was a lesson the young ox had to learn the hard way — to walk in step with his yoke-mate.

We, too, have this lesson to learn in our daily life: we are to walk in step with the Lord — not ahead of Him, not behind Him.

In one of the most beautiful texts of the Gospel, Jesus teaches us about shouldering His yoke and learning how to walk in step with Him:

> Come to me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Mt 11:28-30).

If we find ourselves burdened because the load is too great, it may be because we are ahead of the Lord's timing and plan. We are relying on our own strength to accomplish the Lord's work.

If, on the other hand, we are not in step with what the Lord is doing because of our own inertia, then we need to put our effort into prayer.

It all comes down to trust. Just as the young ox has to trust in the old one to set the pace, so we have to trust in God. We work with trust in God because it is His work we are doing, and we pray with trust in the Lord so that we can respond actively and effectively to His will.

When the great English Catholic writer, G.K. Chesterton, was asked how to walk with trust, he answered with a simple couplet:

"One foot up, one foot down, all the way to London town."

When we walk in step with the Lord, we walk one step at a time, trusting in Him to set the pace and guide our steps. So let us shoulder His yoke and hear Him speak to our hearts: "Take my hand and walk in the light, in simple faith, as a child"(Ignatian Retreat, 1974).

"Rejoice always
Pray without ceasing.
In all things give thanks,
for this is the will of God
for you all in Christ Jesus" (1 Thes 5:16-18, Confraternity Edition).

Be Merciful at Home

The saying, “charity begins at home” can also be expressed as “mercy begins at home.” How easy it is to be kind, patient, and generous with strangers but irritable, impatient, and selfish with our own family.

Saint Faustina records for us a powerful lesson that especially applies to families. The Lord teaches her three ways we can be merciful; by deed, by word, and by prayer (Diary, 742). “In these three degrees is contained the fullness of mercy,” Our Lord goes on to explain.

By Deed

One of the most important works of mercy that we can do is to fulfill in our family the daily duties of our state of life.

This means doing the ordinary and small things well: cleaning up, picking up after ourselves, repairing what is broken, and, especially, noticing and responding to each other’s needs.

It means doing things for others as we would for Christ because our brother or sister is the presence of Christ among us.

We can also do works of mercy as a family, visiting the sick, for example, or volunteering to help in soup kitchens or homeless shelters. A common project of service to others is a great way to bind the family together as it reaches out beyond its own personal concerns.

By Word

How easy it is to sin by our tongue! Saint James compares the power of the tongue to a small rudder that steers large ships. And with the same tongue we bless and curse one another (cf Jas 3:1-12).

We all know how a negative remark can hurt us and cause tension in the family. But a positive statement of encouragement and appreciation can build up and bring peace to the family.

We can express mercy by our words by living out the lesson of Saint Paul: “Speak the

truth in love" (Eph 4:15). But all three parts of the exhortation must be present, not just one or two. We must ***speak*** instead of remaining silent when truth is called for; but it must be the ***truth***, not flattery or lies, and it must be spoken in ***love***, not in anger.

By Prayer

Prayer is always available to us. In every situation, we can turn together to the Lord and ask for His mercy. There are many ways we can pray together, but at the very least, we should pray the Lord's Prayer, the "family prayer" of the whole Church.

A helpful way to deepen this prayer together is to have all those present express, in turn, two things: what they want to thank God for, and what they want to ask for. In this way, we praise Our heavenly Father for His goodness and acknowledge Him as the giver of all good gifts. Then, in praying the Lord's Prayer together, we pray for all the intentions of those around the table.

Make Mercy Present

By our merciful deeds, words and prayer, we make mercy present among us and fulfill the command of Jesus: "Be merciful even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). To make mercy present was the mission of Christ, it is the mission of His Church, and it is the mission of the domestic Church, the family.

Imagine what the world would be like if each family made mercy present and believable by deed, word, and prayer so that mercy would radiate out to the world!

Value Others!

Every man, woman and child is created by God in His own image. Each is a person, a unique presence of God, a child of God, and an unrepeatable individual. You are the only "you" that will ever exist.

Saint Paul writes to the Christians at Corinth that they are all special as members of the Body of Christ, and temples of the Holy Spirit, no longer their own, but bought at a great price (1 Cor 6:15-20).

Pope John Paul II repeatedly writes of the value and dignity of each human person, created in the image and likeness of God. One of the most powerful examples of this is found in his encyclical on Divine Mercy, as he reflects on the parable of the prodigal son.

The prodigal son lost his sonship, not by squandering his inheritance, but by rejecting his father. When, in his misery, he finally turns back to his father, he begins to experience the value of his sonship. At the same time, the father, in finding his son who was lost, has his fatherhood restored.

The father's mercy toward his son is not an act of condescension, but an act that recognizes the dignity of the person of his son. Each now recognizes the value of the other.

From this common experience of a good, Pope John Paul II points out, comes the need to rejoice. The father in the parable explains to the elder son: "We had to celebrate and rejoice! This brother of yours was dead, and has come back to life. He was lost, and is found" (Lk 15:32).

John Paul II's teaching on the value of man and his dignity is based on the fact that we are created in the image of God.

Since we are created in God's image, we are to behave like God. And we behave like God when we value others, respecting their lives, reputation, and dignity.

The life of a person is a God-given value from the moment of conception to the moment of death, so we give thanks for God's gift. We respect a person's reputation by speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15) and saying only what builds up another (Eph 4:29). We value one another's dignity as children of God by mutually forgiving (Eph 4:32).

How do we respond to the obvious defects in others? Every individual — even with defects, malformation, sickness, suffering, or sin — is a child of God, created in His image; so we are to love every person even as we are loved by God. God is present in each one in a unique way, in the suffering and in the weak.

And what about the tensions and hurts between us and others? We are mandated by Christ to love all others, to pray for them, to forgive them — in a word, to be merciful even as our heavenly Father is merciful to us. But then the real question arises: how can we do all this in practice?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives us a very practical way:

> It is not in our power to ignore or forget an offense: but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession (2843).

What a marvelous insight into the often expressed problem in valuing others: "I've forgiven, but I can't forget." Thanks be to God that you cannot forget, because then each time the memory of the hurt arises, you can ask the Holy Spirit for mercy on others and intercede for their needs.

Thus, the memory of our hurts can make us compassionate rather than bitter and lead us to become intercessors for others, recognizing and valuing their dignity as children of God.

Pray...Then Watch God Act!

Did you ever wonder how God operates? To use a term from detective stories, God has a "modus operandi" a way of operating that reveals a clear and consistent pattern of behavior.

According to scripture scholar, Father George Montague, SM, the first verses of the first book of the bible give us an important clue to God's particular "modus operandi."

God created the world by sending His Spirit to hover over the chaos, and then He spoke the word: *Let there be light*. And so there was. Later He spoke the word: *Let there be life*, as He breathed His Spirit into the clay to form man (Gen 1).

Fr. Montague concludes that "the creation story is a prototype for man's experience of order and chaos in his life and in the world... Man, like the universe, lives and knows peace when God's Spirit breathes over his chaos and God's word orders his life."

We find this same pattern of God's acting by His Spirit and word in the incarnation. At the annunciation, Mary is "deeply troubled" by the words of the angel (Lk 1:29). But hearing the explanation of the angel that "the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you," (Lk 1:35) Mary then spoke the word: "*Let it be done to me according to Your word"* (Lk 1:38), and so the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

Further on, we find this pattern of God's action at the baptism of Jesus, when Jesus took on our sin. The spirit hovered over Him in the form of a dove, and the Father spoke the word: *"You are my beloved Son, my favor rests on you"* (Lk 3:22).

We also see this pattern on Calvary. In the midst of widespread confusion, darkness, suffering, and chaos, Jesus speaks the word: *"Father into your hands I commend my Spirit"* (Lk 26:46) and then delivers over His Spirit (Jn 19:30) — and our salvation is won!

Still later, as the apostles and disciples, united in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, await the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14), we see this pattern, a united word of prayer and the invocation: *Come, Holy Spirit*. *Let it be done to me according to your word.* On this day of Pentecost "all were filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4) and the Church was born. Confused and fearful men and women became transformed and boldly proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ.

In every Holy Mass we experience this same pattern of God's "modus operandi." The Holy Spirit is invoked over mere bread and wine mixed with water so that they may become the Body and Blood of the Lord. The words and institution are spoken: *"This is my Body... This is my Blood..."* and it happens! The Body and Blood, Soul, and Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and now risen, are present to us as the source of new life.

In our own lives, too, we can see this pattern of God's acting, transforming, and divinizing, as we invoke the Holy Spirit and speak His word over our confusion and chaos. In the midst of the chaos around us and confusion within us we can pray:

> Come, Holy Spirit, hover over the chaos. Fill our hearts with the fire of Your Divine love. Transform darkness into light. Bring order out of confusion. Breathe new life into our decay. Renew the face of the earth. Come, Holy Spirit, come!

With this prayer, we say with Mary, "Let it be done to me according to Your word." Then we watch and wait to see God at work.

Give Thanks and Live the Eucharist!

What does it really mean to give thanks? Is it just a polite expression we were taught as children at mealtimes and on gift-giving occasions?

Actually, giving thanks involves much more than just learning formal courtesies. It means acknowledging God as the source of all gifts.

Jesus himself demonstrated the value of giving and receiving thanks. He gave thanks, for example, when he instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist (Lk 22:19). In fact, "Eucharist" is the Greek word for thanksgiving.

Jesus also expected to be thanked. When only one of the ten lepers who had been healed by Jesus returned to give thanks and praise, Jesus asked him:

> "Were not all ten made whole? Where are the other nine? Was there no one to return and give thanks to God except this foreigner?" (Lk 17:17-18).

So, too, Saint Paul exhorts us to make thanksgiving an integral part of our lives: "Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness" (Col 3:12-17)), he proclaims. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in all things give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus, regarding you all" (1 Thes 5:16-18 Confraternity Edition).

This wonderful movement of giving and receiving thanks is expressed beautifully in the celebration of the Holy Mass. The priest begins the solemn Eucharistic Prayer at every Mass with the exhortation to the congregation, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God;" and the people respond, "It is right to give Him thanks and praise."

After receiving this response of thanks, the priest continues. "Father, it is our duty and salvation, always and everywhere, to give you thanks through Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ."

Again, at the words of institution of the Eucharist, the celebrant gives thanks as he takes the bread and then the cup and prays the words of consecration.

After the consecration, he offers the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ as an act of thanksgiving to the Father for the infinite gifts and graces of the passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, His Son.

This flow between gift and giver in the Mass means that, through each celebration of the Holy Eucharist, we can grow in thanksgiving so that we actually become a living Eucharist.

Saint Faustina of the Most Blessed Sacrament was keenly aware of the importance of thanksgiving in daily life, especially through the Eucharist. Thanksgiving was her way of glorifying God's mercy and fulfilling her mission in life. She gave thanks to God for everything! She thanked Him for graces granted to her, for her vocation, for the wonder of creation, for inspirations, for the sacraments.

And she also thanked Him for her daily crosses: for interior sufferings, for illness and discomforts. And, always and everywhere she thanked Him for the mystery of God's mercy (see Diary, 343).

She desired that her whole life be one act of thanksgiving, one act of Eucharist. She wanted to be a living Eucharistic Host.

Her burning desire was to live in a spirit of faith, readily accepting everything God sent her with gratitude (Diary, 1367-1269, 1549, 1794).

We, too, can dedicate ourselves to thankfulness by giving thanks to God, always and everywhere, for everything. We can trust that whatever God brings into our lives is His gift to us. Let us give thanks and live the Eucharist.

Be United in Mercy!

The division of the Christian Church is a scandal and an obstacle to evangelization. How can people believe our message if we are not united as the one family of God? We need to unite in mercy, change how we relate to each other, and strive to mend our broken relationships.

Jesus, on the night before He died, prayed that we be one as a family (Jn 17:21). But He did even more that night. He commanded us to love one another even as He loved us (Jn 13:34), to the point of laying down our lives for one another (Jn 15:13).

Jesus commanded us to be merciful, even as our Father is merciful (Lk 6:36) and to forgive one another (Mt 18:22). He gave us the way to be united — by prayer, by love, by forgiveness, by conversion of heart — in one word — by *mercy*.

Pope John Paul II explains that mercy is love that is greater than sin and greater than death (*Rich in Mercy*). So mercy is love that is greater than disunity, greater than the brokenness of the Body of Christ.

In his encyclical on Christian unity (*Ut Unum Sint*) the Holy Father writes that our service of unity must be "rooted in the action of Divine Mercy" (94).

Saint Faustina, whom Pope John Paul II called "the great apostle of Divine Mercy in our time," recorded in her Diary three ways of being merciful:

> You yourself command me to exercise the three degrees of mercy. The first: the act of mercy, of whatever kind. The second: the word of mercy — if I cannot carry out a work of mercy, I will assist by my words. The third, prayer — if I cannot show mercy by deeds or words, I can always do so by prayer. My prayer reaches out even there where I cannot reach out physically.
>
> O my Jesus, transform me into Yourself, for You can do all things (Diary, 163).

Saint Faustina left us a living example of how to be merciful even as our heavenly Father is merciful — in deed, word, and prayer. She immersed herself and others in the infinite ocean of God's mercy. In the Novena to The Divine Mercy, she immersed those who have separated themselves from the Church and prayed, "Draw them by Your light into the unity of the

Church" (Diary, 1219).

Saint Faustina also prayed to be useful to the Church and to live for the Church by striving for sanctity (Diary, 1505). She was aware that she must be immersed in God's mercy. "Everything begins with Your mercy and ends with Your mercy" (Diary, 1507).

We, too, following the command of the Lord and the example of Pope John Paul and Saint Faustina, must become signs and apostles of Divine Mercy. We must all be united in mercy.

What can we do? We can *love* one another, even to laying down our lives. We can *forgive* and be forgiven for our sins against unity. By God's mercy, we can overcome our prejudices and be healed of our hurts, angers, and memories by God's mercy.

We can *pray* for mercy, in order that we be one. We can *strive* for daily conversion of heart and for sanctity, imploring the Holy Spirit to change our hearts. We can *share* the *gifts* and treasures of God's mercy with one another.

If we can be united in mercy, we will truly become the family of God, so that all will know that the Father sent Jesus and that we, too, are loved and sent forth by the Father (Jn 17:24).

Pray “Come, Holy Spirit!”

On the feast of Pentecost, the Church prays “Come, Holy Spirit” and teaches us to pray: “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful; and enkindle in them the fire of Your love. Send forth Your Spirit, and we shall be recreated, and You will renew the face of the earth.”

Saint Paul tells us that the gift of the Holy Spirit is poured into hearts (Rom 5:5). How wonderful this is, because we need the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts and set them on fire with His love. Once our hearts are enkindled, then the fire of divine love can illuminate our dark minds and transform us so that we become one spirit in Christ.

Why do we need to pray to the Holy Spirit? Couldn’t He just fill our hearts at our birth and be done with it?

The Holy Spirit is most gentle and respects our freedom. He will not enter our hearts against our will, nor will He enter if our hearts are already filled with others or with other desires. The Holy Spirit enters only an emptied, humble heart, and then He fills it completely.

So, we need to empty ourselves of all other desires and attachments, and then invite the Holy Spirit to come into our hearts and fill them with His love. And we can’t just do this once.

Why? Because we leak! We are simply earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7), and cracked ones at that, and so we gradually lose the fullness of the Spirit.

Every day, we should each call upon the Holy Spirit to come afresh into our hearts and do what God wants to do in us. God wants to expand our vessels so we can receive more! God wants to transform us! Our transformation is His desire, His plan, and His goal for us. He wants us to be transformed by the Holy Spirit into His sons and daughters and become members of His family.

One way the Holy Spirit does this work of transformation is by the sacraments. The sacraments are the sworn oaths of Jesus working through the Holy Spirit accomplishing our transformation into His Body. By Baptism, we are cleansed of our sins and made children of God. By Confirmation, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit to do the work of the Father, doing the very mission of Jesus. By Holy Eucharist, our incorporation into Christ is brought to fullness, as we enter into a common-union-in-Christ.

As we pray to the Holy Spirit, we can renew our part of the covenant entered into by the sacraments, and be more fully transformed by the Holy Spirit. Each time we make the sign of the cross, especially with Holy Water, we renew our "obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5, 16:26) to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in whose name we were baptized.

Each time we invoke the Holy Spirit and pray: "Come, Holy Spirit," we are renewing our commitment of the sacrament of Confirmation. We are strengthened to do the work of God, witnessing to Jesus, and making the Father's *mercy* present. In a sense, we are immersed in the Holy Spirit more fully; or, to use the Greek word, we are "baptized" into the Holy Spirit more completely.

And each time we participate in Holy Mass and receive Holy Communion, we are transformed more and more into Christ, fulfilling the prayer of the priest after the consecration:

> Grant that we, who are nourished by His Body and Blood, may be filled with His Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ.

So let us all pray to the Holy Spirit to transform us, so that we may be truly holy and more fully divinized as members of God's family.

Be a Saint!

A saint? Me? But, I'm miserable, weak and a sinner. How can I be a saint?

By yourself, you can't become a saint! But Christ in you, through His Holy Spirit, can make you a saint!

Jesus Christ wants to continue His incarnation and redemption in you! He wants you to be a saint so that He can reveal His mercy to all the people you encounter. Christ wants to continue His presence in each generation and in every place through those who submit to His Holy Spirit.

Sanctity has not so much to do with our earthen vessel as it does with the presence of the Holy Spirit within our earthen vessel, making us the body of Christ, so that Christ can be present, through us, in every situation.

Look at the saintly people who have left us an example of holy lives. Consider Saint Faustina and her great desire to be a saint. She prayed for sanctity and thanked God for His continuing presence in her, redeeming souls through her:

> When I awaken I adore the Holy Trinity for a short while and thank God for having deigned to give me another day, that the mystery of the incarnation of His Son may once more be repeated in me, and that once again His sorrowful Passion may unfold before my eyes. I then try to make it easier for Jesus to pass through me to other souls (Diary, 486).

By living and working in the members of His Mystical Body, Christ, through the Holy Spirit, extends and prolongs His life and activity among men and women through time and space. His aim is to live, in His members, various concrete forms of existence, activity, and love which He could not realize as one individual at one time in one location. In this way He completes His saving work, develops it, consolidates and amplifies it.

Saints, by their cooperation with the Spirit of Christ, and by giving free reign to Him, live His life intensely and so are preeminent members of His Mystical Body. With their unique and distinct personalities, they offer Christ the possibility of living in them those human possibilities He could not live in Israel as one person.

Because of their pre-eminent union with Christ, saints are models of holiness and so also are mediators in and through Christ. This means that we can imitate them as models of life and turn to them as mediators in our needs. Our veneration of the saints enriches, enhances, and reinforces God's Glory.

Saint Faustina Kowalska, whom Pope John Paul II calls "The great apostle of Divine Mercy in our time," is a unique presence of Christ's mercy, a living message of mercy! She is a model of union with God, of trust in God, of mercy to others, of humility, and of obedience to the will of God.

Like Saint Faustina we, too, can desire to be saints. We can pray that the Holy Spirit, the spirit of mercy, will transform us into living images of mercy and trust.

We can, with confidence, pray to Saint Faustina [canonized a Saint April 30, 2000] that we, too may become saints, here on earth and in heaven:

> Saint Faustina, you told us that your mission would continue after your death and that you would not forget us (See Diary, 281, 1582).
> Our Lord also granted you a great privilege, telling you to "distribute graces as you will, to whom you will, and when you will" (See Diary, 31).
> Relying on this, I ask your intercession for the graces I need, especially the grace to be a saint.
> Help me, above all, to trust in Jesus as you did and thus to glorify His mercy every moment of my life.

Be an Apostle of Divine Mercy!

For over 50 years, Pope John Paul II has been an apostle of Divine Mercy, trusting the Lord. While in the seminary in Krakow in the early 1940's, he learned of the message of The Divine Mercy from his classmate, now Andrew Cardinal Deskur.

In his second encyclical, *Rich in Mercy,* John Paul II pointed out that we have a right and duty not only to practice mercy and to proclaim mercy, but especially to plead for mercy in this present time of urgency in the world.

It is Jesus who is the first and foremost Apostle of Divine Mercy. He is Mercy Incarnate, mercy in person, and, as John Paul II explains, He reveals God as the Father who is "rich in mercy."

"The program of Christ," writes the Holy Father, is also the "program of the Church, with the Cross of Christ at its very center" (*Rich in Mercy* #8).

Christ crucified stands at the door and knocks at the heart of each of us to draw mercy toward God and one another: "As you did it to one of the least of these... you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). Jesus came to make the mercy of the Father present and believable (*Mission of the Redeemer).* We are to do the same!

Our Blessed Mother, the Mother of Mercy, is our best teacher and model of mercy. She is the unique Apostle of Divine Mercy, giving birth to Mercy itself, receiving mercy while standing at the cross of Jesus, and now continuing to reveal that mercy through her maternal heart (*Rich in Mercy*).

Saint Faustina, one of Our Lady's special daughters, is also a wonderful model and teacher for us. Called "the great apostle of Divine Mercy" by Pope John Paul II, she passes on to us the teachings of Jesus, who taught her to be merciful in deed, word, and prayer, and to trust in Him.

For the past 50 years the Marians of the Immaculate Conception, in Stockbridge, MA, have been proclaiming this message to the world, using their magazine as their primary apostolic tool.

Through the magazine and numerous books, leaflets, and films, the message of the

merciful Savior has been spread around the world, and the prayer "Jesus, I Trust in You!" has become a universal prayer of apostles of Divine Mercy.

Addressing the General Chapter of the Marians in 1993, the Holy Father confirmed the Marians in this work and challenged them to continue to "Be apostles of Divine Mercy under the maternal and loving guidance of Mary."

At the end of his homily on Divine Mercy Sunday in 1995, Pope John Paul II presented this same challenge to us, exhorting us all to "be apostles of Divine Mercy and trust in the Lord."

This mission is at the very heart of the Gospel: "Be merciful even as your Father is merciful." Like Jesus, we, too, are to make mercy present and believable by deed, word, and prayer.

With John Paul II, we can ask Mary, Mother of Mercy, for the trust and mercy we need to be Apostles of Divine Mercy in our time:

> O Mary, Mother of mercy! You know the heart of your divine Son better than anyone. Instill in us the filial trust in Jesus practiced by the saints, the trust that animated Blessed Faustina Kowalska, the great apostle of Divine Mercy in our time (John Paul II, prior to her canonization.)
>
> Look lovingly upon our misery: O Mother, draw us away from the contrary temptations of self-sufficiency and despair, and obtain for us an abundance of saving mercy (Pope John Paul II, Mercy Sunday, April 10, 1994).

Forgive!

To forgive is the heart of the Gospel, but that doesn't mean it's easy.

Jesus on the cross prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing" (Lk 23-34). And He taught us to pray to our Father, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Mt 6:12).

The teaching is clear, but there's a problem! I can so easily say, "I forgive," but I can't forget. The problem is with the "but."

Rather than be anxious that I cannot forget, I can take another approach. I can treat the memory of the heart as a call for mercy. It is like a knock on the door of my heart asking for mercy and renewed forgiveness for that past hurt.

In this way, each time we remember the hurt, we express renewed forgiveness by an act of my will. In taking this approach, we need to remember that forgiveness is not a feeling or a forgetting of the injury, but a decision to forgive and ask for mercy.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states this in a powerful and beautiful way in its teaching on forgiveness from the heart:

It is there, in fact, "in the depths of the heart," that everything is bound and loosed. It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession (#2843).

To forgive is an act of mercy. Unless we are merciful and forgive from our hearts, we will be treated by our Father as the merciless official (see Mt 18:35).

Pope John Paul II teaches us:

> *Forgiveness demonstrates the presence in the world of the* ***love which is more than sin*** **— [that is mercy].** *Forgiveness is also the fundamental condition for reconciliation not only in the relationship of God with man, but also in relationships between people. ... The Church rightly considers it her duty and the*

> *purpose of her mission* ***to guard the authenticity of forgiveness,*** *... by guarding its* ***source,*** *which is the mystery of the mercy of God Himself as revealed in Jesus Christ* (Rich in Mercy, 14).

As an expression of her mission, Saint Faustina, the great apostle of Divine Mercy, pleaded for all souls and especially for sinners that they might receive mercy and so forgiveness of their sins. On the first day of the Novena to The Divine Mercy, she prays:

> Most Merciful Jesus, whose very nature it is to have compassion on us and to forgive us, do not look upon our sins but upon our trust which we place in Your infinite goodness. Receive us all into the abode of Your Most compassionate Heart, and never let us escape from it. ...
>
> Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon all mankind and especially upon poor sinners, all enfolded in the Most Compassionate Heart of Jesus. For the sake of His sorrowful Passion show us Your mercy, that we may praise the omnipotence of Your mercy for ever and ever. Amen. (Diary, 1211).

By forgiving, I become like my Father in heaven who has forgiven me in Christ Jesus. And, in forgiving from the heart, a twofold healing takes place: I unbind my brother or sister from the curse of sin' and I, too, am set free.

What can I do? Forgive and forgive 7 X 70 times a day, and be an apostle of Divine Mercy.

Intercede Eucharistically!

What can I do in response to the degenerating situations going on around me, in families, in nations, and in the Church? I can join in what Jesus is doing right now: interceding for mercy on us and on the whole world.

After His death and resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven and is now at the throne of the Father continually interceding for us (cf. Heb 7:25). This is His "full time job." As our High Priest, He interceded by offering His one sacrifice of Calvary — His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. It is the offering the Father will not refuse — that of His only begotten Son.

What happened on Calvary almost 2000 years ago is present in the eternal *now* of God, offered by the Eternal Spirit (Heb 9:14). At every Mass we enter into the one, heavenly liturgy at the throne of the Father. We can intercede in union with Jesus' offering of the eternal heavenly Mass. The main way is offering Holy Mass. The Second Vatican Council teaches us very clearly:

> They [the faithful] should be instructed by God's word and be refreshed at the table of the Lord's body: they should give thanks to God; by *offering the Immaculate Victim*, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, *they should learn to offer themselves too* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy #48, emphasis added).

Interceding is a full-time ministry, not just for ordained priests, but for all the faithful who are a priestly people by virtue of their baptism. Again, the Second Vatican Council teaches that the faithful are to be active in the celebration of Holy Mass:

> The Eucharistic Action is the very heartbeat of the congregation of the faithful over which the priest presides. So priests must instruct them *to offer God the Father the divine Victim* in the sacrifice of the Mass, and to join to it the offering of their own lives (Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests #5, emphasis added).

A powerful example of how to offer ourselves in union with Christ and extend the offering of Holy Mass, and so intercede for the whole world is recorded for us in the Diary of Saint Faustina. It is the text used for the Office of Readings for her feast on October 5th:

> O my God, I am conscious of my mission in the Holy Church. It is my constant endeavor to plead for mercy for the world. I unite myself closely with Jesus and stand before Him as an atoning sacrifice on behalf of the world. God will refuse me nothing when I entreat Him with the voice of His Son (Diary, 482).

In this text, Saint Faustina virtually described herself as a living Chaplet of Divine Mercy. She offered all her sufferings in union with Jesus for mercy on the whole world.

Praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, offering the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Eternal Father, we can intercede Eucharistically in a powerful way. The Chaplet was designed by Our Lord, taught to Saint Faustina, and given to us with His promise that our prayers would be heard. The witness of countless people who pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy testify to its power. It has been rightly called a “mini-Mass.”

So there is something definite and powerful I can do in response to the present human condition. I can intercede Eucharistically, crying out for mercy on us and on the whole world.

Give Personal Witness to Mercy!

Pope John Paul II visited the tomb of Saint Faustina Kowalska at the Shrine of The Divine Mercy in Lagiewniki, Poland (June 7, 1997). I'd like to explore what you and I can do in response to the Holy Father's *personal witness of deed, word, and prayer* at Lagiewniki.

First, he came "as a pilgrim to take part in the unending hymn in honor of Divine Mercy." He didn't just come to preside over an inspiring prayer service and give an eloquent address to the assembled faithful. No, he came as a pilgrim and spent time in personal prayer before the tomb of Saint Faustina — not once, but twice.

During his address, he entrusted his Petrine ministry once more to Divine Mercy with the words, "Jesus, I trust in You!" quoted from his encyclical on mercy, and made the prayer of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy his own by calling for God's "mercy on us and on the whole world."

He also gave thanks for the grace of the institutions of the Feast of Divine Mercy in Poland and for the beatification of Saint Faustina. In a very personal way, he spoke of how The Divine Mercy "had always been near and dear" to him during his own tragic experience of World War II and then throughout his pontificate.

As I reflected on his address, I was reminded of how he was given *personal witness* to Divine Mercy at other significant moments in his life.

Several stand out in particular. At Fatima in May of 1982, he gave personal thanks to Divine Mercy that his life was spared in the assassination attempt a year earlier. Yet again, on his 75th birthday and then on the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood, he spoke of how God's mercy had guided and sustained him.

The world can never forget his dramatic witness of mercy when he visited his would-be assassin, Mehmet Ali Agca, in his prison cell on December 23, 1983, and forgave him from the heart. As the Vicar of Christ, he was following the example of the Merciful Savior who forgave His executioners from the cross (Lk 23:34).

Truly, we can say that he has taken part in an "unending hymn in honor of Divine Mercy" throughout his pontificate!

As an apostle of Divine Mercy, the Holy Father also challenged the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, the Congregation to which Saint Faustina belonged, when he told them at Lagiewniki: "The people of today need your *proclamation of mercy*, they need your *words of mercy*, and they need your *prayer to obtain mercy*."

These words can equally apply to you and me. Do we realize that the people around us need our proclamation of mercy, our works of mercy, and our prayer to obtain mercy? If we truly want to be apostles of Divine Mercy, we can do no less.

After the prayer service, the Holy Father himself performed a work of mercy when he spent time with the young women in need whom the Sisters care for.

At the close of his address, he also cordially blessed "all those devoted to The Divine Mercy." He exhorted everyone to pray for the whole Church and for him, emphasizing how much all of us need Divine Mercy as the Third Millennium approaches.

I can respond, then, by making my own the words the Holy Father spoke to the Sisters and by taking to heart not only his exhortation but his *personal witness* to Divine Mercy.

As an apostle of Divine Mercy, I, too, can give personal witness in deed, word, and prayer.

Live Immersed in the Spirit!

How can I respond to the Holy Father's call to focus on the Holy Spirit and "His sanctifying presence" throughout the new Church Year (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente, #44)?* I can decide to immerse myself every day in the Holy Spirit's sanctifying presence. I can ask my heavenly Father, through Jesus, to bless me with an abundance of the fruits and gifts of the Spirit, especially those I need most at a particular moment. It might be patience, self-control, or peace.

The Holy Spirit wants to make us holy. He wants to bless us with His gifts. And He wants to see our lives bear fruit for the kingdom of God. But He waits for our invitation, because He has so much respect for our freedom.

In making a daily decision to immerse ourselves in the Spirit, we can tap into the graces available through the Sacraments and make use of devotional prayers and practices that we find especially helpful.

Our new life in the Spirit began at Baptism. It was confirmed by the anointing of the Spirit in Confirmation. It now reaches a fullness in our ongoing way as we receive Jesus in the Eucharist.

In the Spirit, through His sacraments, Christ acts to give us new birth, strengthening and nourishing us. They are His solemn oath and promise of grace in the Spirit, so we can live a new life. But, to receive the graces that are available, we need to place our trust in Him.

We can call upon the graces of our Baptism and Confirmation daily by renewing our "yes" to the Lord. In saying this "yes" to God, we can consciously recall our Baptism by making the Sign of the Cross.

If we are unable to attend daily Mass, we can also repeatedly make "spiritual communions" by uniting ourselves to Jesus in His perfect and acceptable Sacrifice to the Father.

Then, too, incorporating certain prayers or devotions into our daily life can be helpful. Using the ancient invocation of the Church, we can cry out every morning, "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of Your Love. Lord, send forth Your Spirit and renew the face of the earth."

Throughout the day, we can ask our heavenly Father to bless us — His children — with the Holy Spirit, the giver of life in Christ Jesus. We can ask in particular for the spiritual blessings we so need. It might be love, peace or joy.

Morever, we can ask our Blessed Mother Mary to help us surrender to the Holy Spirit ever more fully and live immersed in Him. This ability to surrender to the Holy Spirit is Mary's special charism, and she wants to share it with us, her spiritual children.

So we can pray:

> Mary, help me to surrender ever more fully to the Spirit, even as you did. As you formed the Heart of Jesus by the Spirit, form my heart by the Spirit to be the throne of Jesus in His glorious coming.

Aware of her own weakness and need to surrender to the Holy Spirit, Saint Faustina writes:

> At the beginning of my religious life, suffering and adversities frightened and disheartened me. So I prayed, continuously, asking Jesus to strengthen me and to grant me the power of the Holy Spirit that I might carry out His holy will in all things, because from the beginning, I have been aware of my weakness (Diary, 56).

Live in the Power of the Holy Spirit!

We may feel inadequate to live and proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We may even complain about our inadequacy.

I love the response of a priest friend of mine to those who bemoaned their inadequacy. “Don’t worry, “ he would say, “you *are* inadequate!”

When we know our inadequacy and admit it, then we can turn to the power of the Holy Spirit in humility, in trust, and in need. He empowers us in three special ways: to continue the work of Jesus; to continue His life; and to continue His love.

At the Last Supper, Jesus promised: “I solemnly assure you, the man who has faith in Me will do the works I do, and greater far than these” (Jn 14:12). The Holy Spirit Jesus breathed upon His apostles (Jn 20:22) empowered them with the mission of Jesus (Jn 20:21) and the power to forgive sin (Jn 20:23). The first work of the Spirit is to forgive sins and, so too, the first work of mercy is to forgive. Our very redemption is the forgiveness of sin (see Col 1:14).

And the Holy Spirit does more! He is our advocate, the Paraclete that witnesses to Jesus. He defends, counsels, reminds, teaches, and guides us. He enriches us with the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord that bring us to spiritual maturity (Is 11:2).

He empowers us with gifts of faith, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, and words of knowledge. He also makes us helpers and administrators.

All of these gifts are given to build up the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:1-31). They reveal Jesus and continue His work.

As we invoke the Holy Spirit and surrender to His presence and power, the gift of life given to us in Baptism and Confirmation is stirred into flame (2 Tim 1:6-7). Jesus continues to live in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In a certain sense, Jesus was frustrated by the fact that He lived in only one country and one historical period — it wasn’t enough for Him to reveal the Eternal Father’s love for us. So by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is able to live in each one of us who surrenders to the presence and power

and person of the Holy Spirit. By our "yes" to the Holy Spirit, we become saints, each unique and unrepeatable — millions of saints to glorify the mercy of the Father!

By the gift of the Holy Spirit, we become members of the family of God! We are divinized by the Holy Spirit into a new creation in Christ Jesus. "It is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

Jesus loves us to the utmost (cf. Jn 13:1) with a love that poured itself out on the cross for us. "There is no greater love than this to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13). It is this love that is poured into our hearts by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In His thirst for souls (Jn 4:7, 19:28), Jesus asks us for our help and enables us by the power of the Holy Spirit to love with His love — "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34).

Jesus expressed His love and thirst for souls to Saint Faustina and asked her help to save them:

> **I thirst. I thirst for the salvation of souls. Help Me, My daughter, to save souls. Join your sufferings to My Passion and offer them to the heavenly Father for sinners** (Diary, 1032).

So what can I do? Invoke the Holy Spirit, surrender to Him, let Him possess me. With Mary, I can pray "Let it be done to me according Your word" (Lk 1:38).

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, I can let Jesus work in me, live in me, and love in me.

Evangelize by the Power of the Holy Spirit!

You and I are called as evangelists to proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord!

And only by the power of the Holy Spirit can we proclaim that Jesus, crucified and risen, is Lord (1 Cor 2:2-5). Whenever Jesus is proclaimed as Lord and is lifted up, He desires to draw everyone to Himself. He cuts to the heart of those who are willing to listen, as on the day of Pentecost when Peter explained to the crowd that this Jesus whom the Jewish leaders had crucified, God had now made both Christ and Lord. They were cut to the heart (see Acts 2:36-37).

Peter explained to them that what they had just seen and experienced was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In response to their question, "What are we to do, brothers?" The apostle answered boldly, "You must repent, be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins, and then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

This call to conversion must be the first and main thrust of evangelization. For when we proclaim that Jesus, crucified and risen, is Lord, the power of the Spirit is released and it cuts to the heart. "Something happens" inside our hearts when we are open to the Spirit, and this something can then be explained by the teachings of the gospel, as on the day of Pentecost.

Unfortunately, we can tend to get caught up in explaining the gospel before our listeners have had any experience of the power of God. We simply assume that "something" will happen later and try to explain to the minds of our listeners what they have not yet experienced in their hearts.

That is why it is crucial that we proclaim Jesus as Lord by our very lives — our deeds, our words, and our prayer. We begin by prayer, asking the Father to send the Holy Spirit into the hearts of our listeners because He is "the principal agent of evangelization." Pope Paul VI tells us in his Apostolic Letter *On Evangelization in the Modern World*. Then the Holy Spirit can remind us of the fundamental message that the Father loves each of us in Christ Jesus and desires to bring salvation to all of us who accept His Son as Lord of our lives (see Jn 3:16).

But, in order to evangelize by the power of the Holy Spirit, we must both live the message and explicitly proclaim it — namely, that Jesus is Lord!

To live the message means that we really believe that Jesus is the Lord God, who became man, was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, was crucified, died, and was buried, and on the third day rose again. We truly believe that He has sent His Spirit into our hearts through faith and Baptism.

On a deeply personal level, it means that Jesus lives at the center of our hearts: we love Him and trust in Him to the glory of the Father. It means that we have received Him as the Savior of our lives — the one who forgives us our sins and gives us eternal life, all as a gift of His mercy.

To explicitly proclaim that Jesus is Lord means that we, like Peter, state clearly and proclaim boldly who Jesus is for us and for all those who have accepted Him. We cannot simply assume that people have accepted the Lordship of Jesus in all of its dimensions in their lives.

In all of these ways, the real goal of evangelization is that the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts and makes Jesus present as Lord of our lives. This reality is what makes us "Christians" (Acts 11:26). The Spirit makes us other "Christs," so we can do the work of Jesus by proclaiming the kingdom of God through our deeds, words, and prayer.

So, I can evangelize by the power of the Holy Spirit. With the whole Church, I can proclaim, "Praised be the Lord Jesus!" And then I can respond in my heart and on my lips, "Now and forever!"

Hope in The Divine Mercy!

What exactly is hope? We commonly say, “I hope things work out,” or “I hope I win the lottery.”

But Christian hope is not wishful thinking, optimism, or luck. Christian hope is an insurance and an assurance that what Jesus has promised will come to pass, because He is God and desires to be merciful toward us. More than ever our troubled world needs this kind of “real” hope in Jesus as The Divine Mercy.

“The balance of this century, which is now ending ... presents a deep restlessness and fear of the future. *Where, if not in The Divine Mercy, can the world find refuge and the light of hope?”* Said Pope John Paul II in his homily at the beatification of Saint Faustina.

Repeatedly, Saint Faustina herself describes Jesus, who is The Divine Mercy, as our only hope — the hope of our salvation and the hope of sinners.

> We expect to obtain everything *promised us by Jesus* in spite of all our wretchedness. *For Jesus is our hope*, through His merciful Heart, as through an open gate, we pass through to heaven (Diary, 1570).

Jesus is our hope because of *what He has promised us* — especially His promise of eternal life to those who trust in Him. Trusting in His promises provides us with the key to understanding hope and then living in hope.

But how exactly do we live in hope? *By our trust in Jesus!* We must trust Him for every aspect of our lives.

But to really understand the theological virtue of hope and our call to trust in Jesus, we must also consider how the other two theological virtues of faith and love call us to trust in Jesus.

We might think of trust like an umbrella that covers faith, hope, and love, so they can all work together for our sanctification and salvation. Trust, then, is a living faith in Jesus, an enduring hope in Jesus, and a burning love for Jesus.

There is also a time dimension to faith, hope, and love that shows us how to trust in Jesus at all times. Faith looks to the past, looking at what Jesus did for us. Hope looks to the future, to what Jesus has promised and prepared for us. Love encompasses the past, present, and future — it is the eternal now of God's love for us in Christ Jesus.

Written in the language of faith, hope, and love, we spell "**TRUST**" as **T**otal **R**eliance **U**pon
Saving **T**ruth, Jesus Christ.

By trust in Jesus, we receive the love of God that is poured into our hearts and which is the source of our hope. As Saint Paul tells us:

> And this hope will not leave us disappointed, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5).

In the Letter of the Hebrews, we are even promised by oath, as heirs to the promises of Jesus, to take courage so that:

> ... we who have taken refuge in Him might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope which is placed before us. Like a sure and firm anchor, that hope extends beyond the veil through which Jesus, our forerunner, has entered on our behalf (Heb 6:18-20).

Hope, then, is "a sure and firm anchor." It gives us the "strong encouragement" we need to endure in following Jesus. It sustains us when we face disappointments and trials in this life until we are fully embraced by God's love in the next. What a precious gift hope is! It is exactly what we need, especially in our time which "presents a deep restlessness and fear of the future," as the Holy Father tells us.

So, what can I do? I can pray that through the gift of the Holy Spirit, I am able to hope at all times in Jesus as The Divine Mercy!

I Will Go to My Father!

What can I do in this world so torn apart by strife and division, with so many running after pleasure and power?

What can I do in my own life that is filled with anxieties from personal and family problems, arising from divisions and differences with others? What can I do when my world seems to be falling apart around me?

I can do what the prodigal son did when he realized the condition of his own soul and that of the world around him. "I shall get up and go to my father" (Lk 15-18), he said. And we, too, can get up and go to our Father.

Who is this Father who can deliver us from our predicament? He is "God, who is rich in mercy, the One Jesus Christ has revealed to us as Father," Pope John Paul II tells us in his opening lines of his encyclical ***Rich in Mercy***.

"The reason for [the Church's] existence is, in fact, to reveal God, that Father who allows us to 'see' Him in Christ" (*Rich in Mercy,* 15), says the pope as he concludes his encyclical.

This is good news for us! We need not despair, for Jesus is the Way to the Father of Mercies. He Himself tells us, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me" (Jn 14:6).

With Jesus, you and I can go to the Garden of Gethsemane and cry from the heart: *Abba, dearest Father! Your will be done. Have mercy on me and on the whole world.*

Every day, with the Lord Jesus, we can pray to His Father and our Father: "Your will be done. Your kingdom come. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

As Jesus forgave His persecutors from the cross, we can forgive those who have harmed us. We can let go of any grudges, any bitterness or resentment.

Listen to the powerful words of the pope on Mercy Sunday 1995 about our need to *experience* the Father's tender-hearted mercy, so we can learn to forgive.

> Dear brothers and sisters, we must personally experience this mercy if, in turn, we want to be capable of mercy. *Let us learn to forgive!* The spiral of hatred and violence which stains with blood the path of so many individuals and nations can only be broken by the *miracle of forgiveness*.

So, as the Father's tender mercy in Christ touches our lives, we can learn to be merciful as the Father is merciful (see Lk 6:30).

You and I can also resolve to go to our Father by making a good confession next Lent in preparation for Easter and Mercy Sunday. Then, as we ourselves receive mercy, we can make the Novena to The Divine Mercy, consciously imploring mercy on souls in need that they, too, may get up and go to our Father's house through Jesus, The Divine Mercy. As Jesus told Saint Faustina:

> **On each day** [of the Novena] **you will bring to My Heart a different group of souls, and you will immerse them in this ocean of My mercy, and I will bring all these souls into the house of My Father. You will do this in this life and in the next. I will deny nothing to any soul whom you will bring to the fount of My mercy. On each day you will beg My Father, on the strength of My bitter Passion, for graces for these souls** (Diary, 1209).

So, what can I do in the midst of the misery in my life and in the world around me? In the words of the prodigal son: "I shall get up and go to my Father!"

Meet Justice With Mercy

In His Word, God tells me, "Mercy and truth shall meet justice and peace shall kiss" (Ps 85:10).

Now that's beautiful, but can I really meet mercy with truth, and justice with peace? I don't know about you, but when someone has injured me, my natural human response is "I want justice done."

The injury might involve a major offense like getting "mugged" on the street, or just a perceived slight because a friend didn't invite me to a party. Yet I know that, time and again, I experience emotional pain and a lack of peace when I demand *justice alone* for the injury.

Even with a small slight, when I entertain it, judgment and a critical spirit enter into my heart. And all I get is grief.

The problem is our human exercise of justice tends to "suffer from distortions" that lead to "spite, hatred, and even cruelty" (*Rich in Mercy, 12)*. Among us humans, "the summit of justice" tends to be "the summit of injury" (ibid 12). No, it doesn't bring me the peace and satisfaction that I seek.

What am I missing then?

I've forgotten that I'm under judgment myself. I need to remember that *I am a sinner in need of God's mercy.* Once I have received God's mercy for my own sins and failings, I can turn to those who have injured me, let go of my judgments, and forgive them from the heart.

Then, a wonderful thing happens. My demand for justice meets the mercy of God. I am free to experience real peace and the truth of God's love. That's the incredible freedom God the Father offers each of us as His children. It is the miracle of forgiveness made possible by God's transforming love and mercy in our own hearts.

As Pope John Paul II told us when he celebrated Mercy Sunday in 1995: "We must personally experience this [tender-hearted mercy of the Father] if, in turn, we want to be capable of mercy. *Let us learn to forgive!"*

In fact, the Holy Father explains in his encyclical *Rich in Mercy* that our challenge is to go beyond our judgment and hurt and tap "the deeper power, which is love," by being merciful and forgiving toward those who have wronged us (12-14).

We even have his own powerful example as the "Mercy Pope" when he personally visited his would-be assassin, Mehmet Ali Agca, in his prison cell and forgave him from the heart. We need to pray for the grace to do likewise by "fasting" from our judgments and "feasting" on God's mercy.

We can think of this reality every time we fold our hands in prayer. God's mercy and our demand for justice can meet together like our hands joined in prayer.

The "joining" of hands is the key. When I raise only my left hand, it represents justice with all my judgments and questioning of others. Alone, it takes the form of a curse which binds others and me.

But, when I raise my right hand representing God's mercy and join it to the hand of justice, I call down God's blessing and freedom on others and myself. I am released from the curse and restored to my dignity as a child of God.

The prayer of mercy and justice, said in the embrace of transforming love, is a prayer for "that love to be present in our modern world and to be more powerful than evil, more powerful than sin and death" (*Rich in Mercy*, 15).

So, what can I do? In every situation, whenever I notice myself judging someone in my heart because of a hurt, I can join the right hand of God's mercy to the left hand of justice. In that gesture of prayer, I can forgive my brother or sister from the heart. And I can thank God for His blessing of mercy and peace to me.

I Can Rejoice — God Loves Me!

How can I experience the Triune God's love for me as a member of His family? How can this love bring joy into my life?

Pope Paul VI gave all of us a clue during the Holy Year of 1975 when he shared the "secret" of the life of the Most Holy Trinity. It is the *love* of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. He expressed it in a joyful way:

> The Father is seen as the one who gives Himself to the Son without reserve and without ceasing in a *burst of joyful generosity*. And the Son is seen as He who gives Himself in the same way to the Father *in a burst of joyful gratitude* in the Holy Spirit (*On Christian Joy)*.

What a magnificent and joy-filled picture he paints of the mutual love of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit! And what is even more magnificent for me is that I am called to enter into the circle of joyful love for all eternity as a member of God's own family.

Jesus, The Divine Mercy, is my way to enter into the circle of joyful love as I join all the angels and saints — even those in the "sauna" of purgatory who are being cleansed for the family marriage banquet of the Lamb!

But what does the Lord ask as we enter into the reality of the Communion of Saints?

We are asked by the Lord to *receive* His gift of love. For it is *all* gift, as He waits for us to open our hearts, so He can pour into them His love by the gift of the Holy spirit (see Rom 5:5).

As we say "yes," we discover this stupendous gift of God's love for us is truly the cause of our joy. Again, Pope Paul VI shares a "secret" about the joy of Jesus:

> If Jesus radiates such peace, such assurance, such happiness, such availability, it is by reason of the inexpressible love by which *He knows that He is loved by His Father (On Christian Joy).*

So, rejoice because you, too, are loved by your heavenly Father! — as well as by His Son Jesus and Their Holy Spirit!

The Apostle Paul prays that you may "*experience this love* which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God Himself" (Eph 3:14).

This is the love that we are called to celebrate. We rejoice and give thanks for the merciful love that the Triune God has lavished on us.

In proclaiming the Holy Year for the Great Jubilee Pope John Paul II described it as the "year of mercy." He emphasized:

> As the successor of Peter, I ask that in this year *of mercy* the Church, strong in the holiness that she received from her Lord, should kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters. ... May the *joy* of forgiveness be stronger than any resentment (*The Mystery of the Incarnation, #13*).

The way John Paul II described the Great Jubilee is like a continuous Mercy Sunday all year long!

Hear the words of our Lord about Mercy Sunday addressed to us through Saint Faustina:

> **On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of mercy upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy** (*Diary, 699*).

I can rejoice that the Triune God loves me more than I can ever imagine. I can receive that love with thanks, experience it in the depths of my heart, and share it with my family — my brothers and sister in Christ.

Follow the “Little Way”!

How can I be humble with all of my faults and sins — especially my pride?

I can decide to humbly and obediently follow God’s plan for my life like Jesus, Mary and Joseph did.

Jesus perfectly followed the plan of the Father and became the Way. The Word of God humbled Himself and became flesh and dwelt among us (see Jn 1:14). The Divine Word of the Family of God emptied Himself and became Jesus of the family of man in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit.

So, too, Mary said “yes” to this plan of God at the Annunciation. And Joseph expressed his silent “yes” by his action — he took Mary the infant as his own after God’s angel commanded him to do so in a dream.

The spirit of humility and obedience is what was celebrated in the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, marking the 2000th anniversary of the mystery of the Incarnation, this mystery of God becoming man for our sake.

Jesus led the way even further — even to death on a cross. Mary also followed the way and stood in silence offering her Son to the Father in compassion. At the cross, the humble Virgin Mother was commissioned by Jesus to be the mother of all the disciples whom He loved, mother of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church.

At the cross was another Joseph, Joseph of Arimathea, who became the guardian of the Body of Jesus. All four Gospels give the account of Joseph boldly going to Pilate and asking for the Body of Jesus, which he wrapped in fine linens and buried in his own tomb. Truly, he carried out the work of Saint Joseph the Guardian of the Church in caring for the Body of Christ.

The saintly members of the Body of Christ have continued to follow the way of humility and obedience to God’s plan. In various images, the Blessed Mother offers us the little Jesus. This is powerfully portrayed in the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

In our time, Saint Theresa of Lisieux was declared a Doctor of the Church because of her living and teaching us the “little way.” She teaches us that we can be united with God by

offering Him each moment of our daily lives.

Saint Faustina, who had great devotion to the Mother of God and to Saint Theresa (see Diary, 150), also lived the little way.

Saint Faustina was instructed by Jesus, by the Blessed Mother, by her superior, and by her spiritual director to be humble. “Humility, humility, and ever humility, as we can do nothing of ourselves,” counseled her spiritual director (Diary, 55).

The Lord further instructed her to be childlike when He appeared to her as a child. When she saw the infant Jesus, she exclaimed, “Jesus, You are so little, and yet I know that You are my Creator and Lord.” And Jesus answered,

> **I am, and I keep company with you as a child to teach you humility and simplicity** (Diary, 184).

We, too, are instructed in the Gospel to follow the little way, “Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it” (Mk 10:19). We, too, are to receive Mary as our mother as disciples whom Jesus loves (see Jn 19:26-27).

Like Saint Joseph the Just Man, we, too, are to receive the gift of the Child named “Emmanuel” (God is with us) and Mary named “Full of Grace” and take them as our own.

So, what can I do? I can accept with joy and thanksgiving the gift of the little way. I can seek to follow the little Jesus in humility and obedience every day, offering up any little trial or difficulty out of love for Him. And I can do it all in the company of Mary, Joseph and all the saints.

Say “Yes” to God’s Love!

I’ve noticed how impatient I can get with God. I desire to have His love at work within me, transforming me. But I don’t know how to go about it and I quickly get frustrated.

The problem is: when I let my impatience get in the way, I forget that God is God and His ways are not my ways. He is beyond our questions of how, when, and where. God is beyond our limitations of space and time, matter and gravity.

You and I need to consider how God’s love really does work in us, so we can better understand His ways and grow in patience.

First, and most simply, we need to realize, “*God is Love!”* (1 Jn 4:8). So, we need to let Him be God and love us. In fact, God is always loving us. It’s His nature. And He takes the initiative: “Love consists in this; not that we have loved God, but that He has loved us” (1 Jn 4:10).

Second, this God who is Love is always *present*. The love of God is present in us by the gift of the Holy Spirit who has been poured into our hearts at Baptism. So we can be present in silent, loving adoration to the One who is always present to us.

Third, God’s love is always at *work*. Whether we feel it or not, His love is at work in the deep, dark caverns of our hearts, cleaning up and reaming out all the obstacles to His presence. He is making space for the gift of Himself. We need to ask Him, then, to continue His work of love in us as He makes more space for Himself.

Fourth — and perhaps most importantly for us — God *wants for us to open our hearts ever wider to Him*. What the Lord asks of us is a bit of good will and permission for Him to work in our hearts. He says to you and me, “Here I stand, knocking at the door. If anyone hears Me calling and opens the door, I will enter his house and have supper with him, and he with Me” (Rev 3:20).

Saint Faustina — whose canonization was on Mercy Sunday, 2000 — allowed the Lord’s love to work in her heart as she grew in greater trust and a deeper desire for Him. So, too, we can invite Jesus ever more fully into our hearts, asking Him to remove any obstacles

to His love.

"O my Jesus, how easy it is to become holy; all that is needed is a bit of good will," writes Saint Faustina. "If Jesus sees this little bit of good will in the soul, He hurries to give Himself to the soul, and nothing can stop Him, neither shortcomings or falls — absolutely nothing" (Diary, 291).

If we muster only a "flicker of good will, the mercy of God will accomplish the rest" (see Diary, 1486). We can make a simple offering of ourselves or a gesture expressing our good will. Then, the Lord will take us deeper and further into His love.

Even Saint Faustina had to probe her soul more deeply when the Lord told her that there was something she still had not offered Him. Finally, she cried out, "Jesus, tell me what it is, and I will give it to You at once with a generous heart."

Jesus replied with kindness,

Daughter, give Me your misery, because it is your exclusive property.

> "At that moment, a ray of light illumined my soul," writes Saint Faustina, "and I saw the whole abyss of my misery. In that same moment, I nestled close to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus with so much trust that even if I had the sins of all the damned weighing on my conscience, I would not have doubted God's mercy" (Diary, 1318).

So, what can I do?

The Lord is waiting for me to give Him everything — my impatience, my frustration, all of my misery. I can say with all of my being, "Come into my heart, Lord Jesus! Do your work of love. Root out all of my misery."

"Make my heart like Yours. Make it ever true."

Follow the Merciful Way!

What can I do now that Saint Maria Faustina has joined the major leagues with all of the officially recognized saints? I can follow the way Jesus revealed to her — *the merciful way*.

All of the saints in heaven followed *Jesus* who is the *Way*. Yet major saints followed the way of Jesus in a unique and precious way that can be instructional for all of us. We might think of them as God's "Dream Team."

Saint John of the Cross, Doctor of the Church and great mystic, followed and taught *the dark way*: dark, because we walk in the darkness of faith. When the faithful follow Saint John's teaching, the Lord Jesus is able to prepare His pilgrim bride for total surrender to Himself in love.

Saint Therese of Lisieux, spiritual daughter of Saint John of the Cross and a Doctor of the Church, followed and taught the *little* way: the way of love. We are called to be love in the heart of the Church; to go to the Father as a little child.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits and great teacher of the spiritual life, lived and taught the *discerning way*. Through his spiritual exercises based on the Gospels, he taught us how to discern God's will, and then to follow it wholeheartedly.

In the following *the merciful way,* as revealed by Jesus and recorded in her diary, Saint Faustina built on these great saints who had gone before her. She went through her own "dark night of the soul," which is described by Saint John. She was also devoted to Saint Therese and her little way (see Diary, 150). Further, Saint Faustina was trained in the spiritual life by Father Joseph Andrasz, SJ — her Jesuit confessor in Cracow, Poland, who helped the young religious discern her call. Now the great Apostle of Divine Mercy has taken her own place as a member of the "Dream Team"!

But what is so special about the merciful way of Saint Faustina? When we follow this way, we discover the immense spiritual benefit of recognizing the great misery of our human condition and growing in greater trust in God's mercy every day. As Divine Mercy transforms the misery in our own lives, we are eager to share this good news with others in need.

At the end of the *Diary*, we capture a glimpse of how following the merciful way transformed the spiritual life of Saint Faustina:

> One day during Holy Mass, the Lord gave me a deeper knowledge of His holiness and His majesty, and at the same time I saw my own misery. This knowledge made me happy, and my soul drowned itself completely in His mercy (Diary, 1801).

Now her mission in heaven with the "Dream Team" is to share the great news of Divine Mercy with souls that are in misery.

> I feel certain that my mission will not come to an end upon my death, but will begin. O doubting souls, I will draw aside for you the veils of heaven to convince you of God's goodness, so that you will no longer continue to wound with your distrust the sweetest Heart of Jesus. God is Love and Mercy (Diary, 281).

So, what can I do?

I can follow the merciful way. In my misery, I can plunge into the infinite ocean of God's mercy with complete trust in Jesus. When doubts assail me, I can pray unceasingly, "Jesus I trust in You!" I can decide to "nestle close" to the merciful Heart of Jesus (Diary, 1726).

Then like Saint Faustina, I can "tell aching mankind to snuggle close" to His merciful Heart to find peace (See Diary, 1074). I, too, can be an apostle of Divine Mercy, inspired by the newest member of the "Dream Team."

Live Fatima, Live Mercy!

Do you realize that Pope John Paul II has just given us a two-fold challenge to live the message of mercy in our time?

On April 30 of the Jubilee Year 2000, he canonized Saint Maria Faustina and declared that he was passing on to the Third Millennium the mercy message which she lived and proclaimed. And then, when he beatified Francisco and Jacinta Marto on May 13, 2000, two of the shepherd children who witnessed the appearances of the Blessed Mother in 1917, he further endorsed the Fatima message as one of mercy, especially for sinners.

As I have previously shared on following the merciful way, Saint Faustina is our model for trusting in Jesus, for praying "have mercy on us and on the whole world," and for fulfilling the Lord's demand that we perform works of mercy.

Further, living the merciful way leads to peace: "Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to My mercy" (Diary, 300, quoted by John Paul II in the canonization homily).

Our Lord also made it clear to Saint Faustina that the message of mercy is urgent and the world needs it to prepare for His coming"... Tell souls about this great mercy of Mine, because the awful day, the day of My justice is near" (Dairy, 965).

Saint Faustina's life was one of pure love and trust in the Lord Jesus. She glorified God's merciful love by offering her sufferings and her very life totally to the Lord for the salvation of souls, especially sinners.

So, too, through the heroic lives of Blessed Francisco and Blessed Jacinta and the timely message that Our Lady gave them, we are challenged to live the message of mercy. This time, our Holy Father tells us that the emphasis is on the call to conversion, repentance, and salvation for sinners. Our Lady gives us warnings of war and apostasy. She calls us to pray for peace and the conversion of sinners (John Paul II, Fatima, May 13, 1982 and 2000). The call is ultimately to sacrifice all for God's purposes and to trust in the Lord (John Paul II, Fatima, May 13, 2000).

Blessed Francisco and Blessed Jacinta point the way for us. In an apparition, the angel told them "The Hearts of Jesus and Mary have for you purposes of mercy." So, the children

responded by living the Fatima message of mercy. They trusted in the Lord; and they offered their prayers, their penances, their sufferings, and their very lives for souls — especially sinners.

By leading lives of sacrifice and faithfully communicating Our Lady's messages, the little shepherds conveyed this message of mercy which prepares the world for peace and for the coming of the Lord.

So what can I do?

Repent: I can repent whenever I sin by turning to the Lord who is present in my heart — even as often as I need to turn the steering wheel of my car to drive.

Trust: I can trust in Jesus — even more! As the Holy Father told the sick at Fatima on May 13: "Have trust. Abandon yourselves to [God's] provident hands, as did the little shepherds Francisco and Jacinta."

Pray: I can pray the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy for the salvation of sinners and for the souls in purgatory, "Pleading for mercy on us and on the whole world." I can pray as Mary taught the little shepherds: "O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of Your mercy."

Offer. Throughout my day, I can consciously offer my sufferings in union with Jesus for the salvation of souls as a penance, especially for poor sinners.

I can live the Fatima message of mercy!

Christ is Born! Jubilate!

What can I do now that Jesus Christ is born? (Written for the Christmas Season.)

I can rejoice with all my heart — I can *jubilate!* Mercy is Incarnate. The Word is made flesh and now dwells among us!

Further, this mystery of God's mercy — Jesus — is present every day in the Holy Eucharist and in our hearts. We can commune with Him today and every day.

That's why the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, called our celebration of the Great Jubilee Year of the Incarnation to be "intensely Eucharistic." The same Jesus who was born 2,000 years ago to redeem us is truly present to us in the Holy Eucharist.

Our Emmanuel, who has come among us, is victorious over sin, death, and Satan. So, I can jubilate in the Christmas season. As the psalmist says:

> Sing joyfully to the Lord, all you lands; serve the Lord with gladness; come before Him with joyful song (Ps 100:1-2).

While all this is true, how can I jubilate with all of my misery — with my sufferings and troubles?

The key is seeing that in this very misery, the Lord wants to teach us about His mercy, showing us how we can jubilate. Remember how Jesus saw His apostles, with His power, casting out Satan and "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" to see it (Lk 10:21)?

There is also redemptive value and even great joy in our suffering when we join it to the perfect and acceptable Sacrifice of Jesus on the cross — a reality that we are invited to participate in at every Eucharist. That is why Saint Maria Faustina could write about the ineffable joy of suffering for God:

> Oh, if only the suffering soul knew how it is loved by God, it would die of joy and excess of happiness! Some day, we will know the value of suffering, but then we will no longer be able to suffer. The present moment is ours (Diary, 963).

In our suffering, we need to learn to *tribulate*. How do we do that? We jubilate!

Saint John the disciple whom Jesus loved, encourages the Christians of his day who are going through "tribulation" to suffer with "patient endurance" (Rev 1:9, RSV). He then shows us that when we tribulate, we can jubilate by keeping our eye on the victory of Jesus, which is assured:

> Now, the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ... Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! (Rev 12:10-12, RSV).

Our Savior is born, and He is truly victorious! He reigns right now in our midst through the Holy Eucharist.

It's fascinating that Saint Faustina recorded an entry about our victorious, Eucharistic Lord on Mercy Sunday, April 28, 1935. The occasion was the conclusion of the Jubilee Year of Redemption:

> Toward the end of the service, when the priest took the Blessed Sacrament to bless the people, I saw the Lord Jesus as He is represented in the image. The Lord gave His blessing, and the rays extended over the whole world (Diary, 420).

So, what can I do? I can jubilate as I tribulate, celebrating the victory of Jesus who became man, so I might jubilate with Him forever in heaven. And I can enter into the reality every day through the Holy Eucharist!

As I jubilate may the victorious rays of Divine Mercy, the Blood and Water which gushed forth from the pierced Heart of Jesus, bless me and the whole world..

Plead Mercy on the Whole World!

What can I do as I prepare for the celebration of Mercy Sunday?

First, I can recognize that this feast is intended for everyone — especially sinners. As it is celebrated around the world, Mercy Sunday presents us with a unique opportunity to receive graces from the Merciful Savior and to plead for mercy on the whole world.

Recall what the Merciful Savior said to Saint Maria Faustina:

> **My daughter, tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy. I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and 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** (Diary, 699).

Once I understand the unique opportunity this day presents, I can reflect on the world's urgent need for Divine Mercy. There is so much breaking of God's Ten Commandments today. We see an increasingly secularized society that ignores God and produces violence, hatred, wars, poverty, starvation, drug abuse, epidemics like AIDS, and legalized abortion.

With this global view, I begin to see that only God's mercy working in each of us will bring lasting peace to our world. As Jesus told Saint Faustina, "Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to My mercy" (Diary, 300).

So Jesus invites each of us to trust more in Him and to "be merciful even as [our heavenly] Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). We discover that the Father's plan isn't just for you and me to receive mercy — He desires to "have mercy upon all" (Rom 11:32).

To share in God's desire for mercy on all is a key to living Divine Mercy — particularly in preparation for Mercy Sunday. This becomes clear when we consider the elements of the message and devotion. *The Feast of Divine Mercy* is to be "a refuge and shelter for all souls, especially poor sinners" (Diary, 699). *The Image of The Divine Mercy* with its rays of mercy is a "reminder of the demands of [Christ's] mercy" — namely, to exercise it by our deeds, words, and prayer (Diary, 742). And the Image is to "be venerated ... throughout the world" (Diary, 47).

The *Three O'clock Prayer* is the "hour of great mercy for the whole world" (Diary, 1320). In the *Chaplet of Divine Mercy*, we pray that God will 'have mercy on us and on the whole world" (Diary, 476). And the *Novena to The Divine Mercy* is for "the conversion of the whole world and for the recognition of The Divine Mercy" (Diary, 1059).

But there is something even more important that you and I can do as we prepare for our worldwide celebration of Mercy Sunday. Every day we can participate in offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in union with Christ Jesus for the whole world.

After all, participating in Mass will be the heart of our celebration on Mercy Sunday itself. And the very words of the consecration of the Precious Blood of Christ express the scope of the Mass: "This is the Blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all, so that sins may be forgiven."

Saint Faustina appreciated the infinite value of the Mass in pleading God's mercy for all of us. "With what great devotion should we listen to and take part in this death of Jesus," she wrote: "One day we will know what God is doing for us in each Mass" (Diary, 914).

What a great challenge, then, is set before me!

I can plead God's mercy on the whole world through participating in Holy Mass and trying to live the message of mercy every day. Then, on Mercy Sunday itself, I can pray for "a whole ocean of graces" to be poured out on me and on the whole world!

CONCLUSION AND EXHORTATION

Remember Eternal Life!

Remember, remember, remember and do not forget! We are on a pilgrimage journey to our eternal home. Here on this earth we experience crises and problems, persecution and lack of peace and death. But our *hope* is not a wishful thinking, rather it is a total reliance upon the saving truth and promise of Jesus Christ; it is TRUST in Jesus.

Pope John Paul II wrote in his encyclical on Divine Mercy about the role of Divine Mercy and love in this present life and in the future life:

> The fact that Christ "was raised from the death" (1 Cor 15:4) constitutes the final sign that perfects the entire revelation of merciful love in a world that is subject to evil. At the same time it constitutes the sign that foretells "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1, NAB) when God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there will be no more death or mourning, no crying, nor pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4).

John Paul II then continues to share the relationship and role of mercy: now and with eternal life:

> In the eschatological [final] fulfillment mercy will be revealed as love, while in the temporal phase [now on earth], in human history, which is at the same time the history of sin and death, love must be revealed above all as mercy and must also be actualized as mercy (*Rich in Mercy*, 8).

Sacred Scripture tells us how we can and should respond to the present times. In Sacred Scripture the message of present time of crises and problems is described as a time of testing darkness, suffering and persecution, but always in the light of the coming of eternal life. Consider the following tests that remind us of the present journey to eternal life (paraphrased):

- Mark 10:28 — to you who have given all and are following the Lord, you will receive a hundred fold here on earth and persecution *and* eternal life.
-

• Luke 6:22 — Blessed are you when you are persecuted. Rejoice and leap for joy for your reward is great in heaven.
• Romans 8:17 — you are co-heirs with Christ if only you suffer with Him.
• Philippians 1:29-30 — You are privileged not only to believe in Christ but to suffer for Him.
• Hebrews 12:1-2 — Lay aside every weight and sin. Run the race with perseverance. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that lay ahead endured the shame of the cross.
• James 1:2 — Count it all joy!! — when you meet various trials, they are a test of our faith!
•1 Peter 4:12-13 — The present fiery ordeal is a test. Therefore rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings.

What does this mean to you and me in this time of testing, persecution, crises and problems? It means to *trust* in God's mercy and to trust in Jesus even more! It means that we are to give *thanks* for the hundred fold gift of God and *rejoice* in this time of testing and persecutions and *HOPE*, relying on the promises of Jesus of eternal life.

So what **should** we do and **can** we do in the midst of our crisis and problems of our lives? **Remember** the marriage feast of the Lamb of God. We as the Church are the Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ we are called to an eternal union with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit! Invite the Holy Spirit to prepare your heart now — as you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus!

Here on earth now we can and should live the message of Divine Mercy as Pope John Paul II taught us that while on earth "love must be revealed above all as mercy and must be actualized as mercy" (*Rich in Mercy, 8)*. This is what it means to "be merciful even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). The ones who are blessed by the Father are the ones who exercised mercy while here on earth (see Mt 25:31-46).

LIVE THE DIVINE MERCY MESSAGE AND DEVOTION

Live the ABC's of the Divine Mercy Message

In preparation for the Divine Mercy Sunday, April 26, 1987 homily at the Marians, Eden Hill, Stockbridge, MA, I was trying to come up with a pithy summary of the Divine Mercy Message and devotion. While driving for the celebration of an earlier Mass at Saint Peter's, Great Barrington, MA, the ABC's developed as a working formula:

Ask for His mercy.
Be merciful.
Completely trust in Jesus.

I used the ABC's as the structure of the homily at the 3 o'clock celebration outdoors with the largest gathering of people up to that time: some 500 people. Since then I've used the ABC's to introduce the Divine Mercy Message and Devotion many times.

Let us consider the ABC's as they have developed over the years.

A. **Ask for His Mercy**

Asking is the key for receiving: "How much will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask Him" (Mt 7:11 RNAB). In the gospel of Saint John Jesus tells us: "Whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it" (Jn 14:13-14 RNAB).

And we need to ask for *His* mercy, which is His love poured out upon us — unworthy though we may be. It is all gift and the Lord desires to flood us with His merciful love.

There is a sequence of steps we need to take to receive the gift of mercy that the Lord has for us; it is a three-step sequence:

- **Desire**: we need to really want His mercy. And if we don't have the desire then we can ask for the **desire to desire** His mercy in order to be merciful: "Lord I want and need your mercy to be merciful."

• **Confess** our inadequacy and inability to be merciful by ourselves: "Lord, I can't do

it!" — but You want to and You can do it.

• So **Ask**: "Have mercy on me a weak sinner! Please help me with your mercy."

A second three-step sequence must follow to make our asking effective:

• **Receive** the gift of mercy with trust even if you don't "feel" like you've received it. Then

• **Thank** the Lord for His gift. Thank you Lord for pouring your loving mercy into my heart. And finally we

• **Share** His mercy with our neighbor. What Mother Teresa of Calcutta used as a theme of her work we can use: "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt28:40 RNAB).

These six steps lead into the "B" of the ABC's.

B. **Be Merciful**

How merciful are we to be? The gospel of Saint Luke tells us the words of Jesus: "Be merciful just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 36 RNAB). But that goal is impossible unless we ask for **His** mercy and receive it with thanksgiving and share it with others: "Without cost you have received; without; cost you are to give" (Mt 10:8, RNAB).

There is no limit to being merciful because God's mercy is infinite and without limit. God's plan is to have **mercy on all!** (See Rom 11:32). Saint Paul then urges us: "By the mercies of God, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship (Rom 12:1 RNAB).

Saint Faustina records the words of our Lord about being merciful:

> **I demand from you deeds of mercy, which are to arise out of love for Me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse or absolve yourself from it.**

I am giving you three ways of exercising mercy toward your neighbor: the first — by

deed, the second — by work, the third — by prayer. In these three degrees is contained the fullness of mercy, and it is an unquestionable proof of love for Me. By this means a soul glorifies and pays reverence to My mercy. Yes, the first Sunday after Easter is the Feast of Mercy, but there must also be acts of mercy, and I demand the worship of My mercy through the solemn celebration of the Feast and through the veneration of the image which is painted. 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(153) faith is of no avail without works. O my Jesus, You yourself must help me in everything, because You see how very little I am, and so I depend solely on Your goodness, O God (Diary, 742).

And to receive the mercy of the Lord and be merciful as He is we need to *TRUST!*

C. **Completely trust in Jesus**

In this "C" of the ABC's of Divine Mercy I would have preferred to used Latin based word: "*Confide* in Jesus," but the English word "confide" which is a strong word in Latin meaning TRUST, has lost its strength in English taking on the meaning to tell secrets to others. *But*, after studying Saint Theresa of Lisieux I found that we should not only trust in Jesus but also confide in Him, tell our confidences, our secrets to Him. So *Confide* in Jesus is okay after all!

To *Trust* in Jesus is a verb meaning to "put our faith in Him as well as to hope in Him, and to love Him. In English we don't have a verb to "faith" God, but we do have the verbs to "believe" in God and to trust in Him. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical **Mother of the Redeemer** (14) describes the meaning of the word to believe or to trust: "to believe [to trust] means 'to abandon oneself' to the truth of the word of the living God."

Which confirmed my use of the mnemonic:

Total
Reliance
Upon
Saving
Truth — Jesus Christ!

Saint Faustina records the words our Lord said to her about the effect of trust in Him:

> **I am Love and Mercy itself. When a soul approaches me with trust, I fill it with such an abundance of graces that it cannot contain them within itself,**

but radiates them to other souls (Diary, 1074).

The Lord is concerned that we would TRUST Him because mercy is a person who loves us and is present to us and wants to sanctify us — if we would trust Him:

> **How very much I desire the salvation of souls! My dearest secretary, write that I want to pour out My divine life into human souls and to sanctify them, if only they were willing to accept My grace. The greatest sinners would achieve great sanctity, if only they would trust in My mercy. The very inner depths of My being are filled to overflowing with mercy, and it is being poured out upon all I have created. My delight is to act in a human soul and to fill it with My mercy (133) and to justify it. My kingdom on earth is My life in the human soul. Write, My secretary, that I Myself am the spiritual guide of souls — and I guide them indirectly through the priest, and lead each one to sanctity by a road known to Me alone** (Diary, 1784).

And the short prayer that says so much:

> Jesus, I trust in You! (Diary, 47).

It is one of the summaries of the Divine Mercy message and devotion.

Live the Devotions of the Divine Mercy

Living the devotions of the Divine Mercy is a way of living the message of Divine Mercy.

Devotions are not just a pious of things to do. They are not just private or personal expressions of our love for God, and prayer according to our own liking and choice. The very word *devotion* in its root meaning tells us of the significance and importance of devotions. The Latin root of the word *devotion* means to pay our vows to God; to make our commitment to God.

By our Divine Mercy devotions we commit ourselves to be merciful, even as our Father is merciful (see Lk 6:26, RSV). Let us look at the basic Divine Mercy devotions revealed to Saint Faustina for our use:

• *The Image of the Divine Mercy* is a call to *trust* in Jesus (Diary, 47) and a *reminder* of the demands of His mercy (see Diary, 742).

• *The Feast of the Divine Mercy* is a celebration of the Octave Days of Easter; the day when the flood gates of God's mercy are open (see Diary, 699). "This Feast emerged from the very depth of my mercy" (Diary, 420).

• *The Chaplet of the Divine Mercy* is the prayer Jesus taught Saint Faustina to plead for mercy on the whole world (see Diary, 687, 1541, 1731).

• *The Novena of the Divine Mercy* is nine days of prayer of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy for the intentions given by the Lord in preparation for the Feast (see Diary, 796, 1731).

• *The Great Hour of Mercy* — is the prayer at 3:00 o'clock for mercy, especially for sinners, at the hour of the Lord's death, the hour that mercy was poured out on the world (see Diary, 1319, 1320, 1572).

Be Apostles of Divine Mercy

John Paul II (June 7, 1997, Krakow) challenged the Sisters of Our Lady of Divine Mercy, Saint Faustina's religious community, and also us. His challenge to "Be Apostles of Divine Mercy" can be summarized in three key words: *Practice* mercy, *proclaim* mercy, and *plead* for mercy.

On other occasions the pope has called us to be apostles of Divine Mercy:

• Where, if not in Divine Mercy, can the world find refuge and the light of hope (Beatification of Saint Faustina, April 18, 1993).

• Saint Faustina's canonization has a particular eloquence: by the act, I intend today to pass this message on to the third millennium (April 30, 2000).

• Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to My Mercy" (John Paul quoted the Diary of Saint Faustina 300, April 30, 2000).

• John Paul II took a great bold step on August 17, 2002 at the Shrine of Divine Mercy, in Krakow:

> Today...in this shrine, I wish solemnly to entrust the world to the Divine Mercy. I do so with the burning desire that the message of God's Merciful love, proclaimed here through Saint Faustina, may be made known to all people of the earth and fill their hearts with hope. May this message radiate from this place to our beloved homeland and throughout the world. May the binding promise of the Lord Jesus Christ be fulfilled: from here there must go forth "The spark which will prepare the world for his final coming (see Diary, 1732).

Truly the Divine Mercy answers life's crises and problems!

Epilogue

Why Divine Mercy? Because mercy is God's way. Mercy is God's love for us, his covenant love, his forgiving love for us sinners. Mercy is the topic of Pope John Paul II's second encyclical "*Rich in Mercy*." Since it's publication I've had the opportunity to read and reread the encyclical many times and to reflect on it and teach on it on various occasions. As a result I am now in a better position to consider the question, "Why mercy?" The answer to that question is what the encyclical is about. Mercy is the answer to the basic questions and problems of our times. I want to reflect on mercy as *the* answer as described for us in John Paul's encyclical.

Mercy is *the* prophetic word of our times. We hear so many voices calling us one way or another. Here the Holy Father is calling us not only to practice, profess, and proclaim mercy but also to implore mercy. His voice is clear and certain: implore mercy.

Mercy is *the* answer to the "uneasiness" of our times. The Latin text uses several different words to translate the rich Polish word "niepokuj" (literally, non-peace or non-shalom) which is used some half-dozen times in section (#11) describing the current unrest in our day. The "uneasiness" of our times is described as a state of solicitude, anxiety, anguish, unrest, turbulence, danger, and trepidation. To all of these John Paul says that the answer is mercy. Justice alone is not enough. Only mercy can bring about the unity we need for peace.

Mercy is *the* power of love that is greater than evil, greater than sin and death, greater that Satan. Mercy is God's power at work. It is only his mercy that will bring about the full victory. His triumph will come about by his sovereign action of mercy. Our part is to implore his mercy on us and on the whole world.

Mercy is *the* content and power of Christ's mission and so also of the Church. Mercy is the sum of the gospel: "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy" (see Mt 5, 7, RSV).

The fullest revelation of mercy is in Jesus. Jesus shows us in person the mercy of the Father. Jesus is mercy in the flesh, "mercy incarnate", as the Pope describes him. This revelation of God's mercy is centered in the Heart of Jesus, pierced for us on the cross. Christ crucified and risen never ceases to speak to us of mercy.

The Heart of Mary, the Mother of Mercy, continues to reveal this mercy. She who knew and obtained God's mercy like no other, shares in revealing God's mercy by the sacrifice of her heart. What Jesus came to reveal, her heart continues to reveal. Hers is the merciful love of a mother that continues to proclaim: "His mercy is ... from generation to generation" (Lk 1, 50, RSV) — even to this our generation.

Pope John Paul II's final chapter is a powerful appeal to implore mercy [Love's second name] on the world. He concludes by praying:

> May the Love which is in the Father once again be revealed at this stage of history, and that, through the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit, may that Love be shown to be present in our modern world and to be more powerful than evil: more powerful than sin and death. We pray for this through the intercession of Mary who does not cease to proclaim mercy ... from generation to generation, and also through the intercession of those for whom there have been completely fulfilled the words of the Sermon of the Mount: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

So why Divine Mercy? Because mercy is *the* answer.