

## **Divine Mercy and The Biography of St. Maria Faustina**

(August 25, 1905 – October 5, 1938)

Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska of the Blessed Sacrament was born as Helena Kowalska, in Glogowiec, north-west of Łódź in Poland on August 25, 1905. She was the third of 10 children to a poor and religious family.

Faustina first felt a calling to the religious life when she was just seven-years-old and attended the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. After finishing her schooling, Faustina wanted to immediately join a convent. However, her parents refused to let her. Instead, at 16-years-old, Faustina became a housekeeper to help her parents and support herself.

In 1924, Faustina experienced her first vision of Jesus. While at a dance with her sister, Natalia, Faustina saw a suffering Jesus and then went to a Cathedral. According to Faustina, Jesus instructed her to leave for Warsaw immediately and join a convent. Faustina packed her bags at once and departed the following morning. When she arrived in Warsaw, she entered Saint James Church in Warsaw, the first church she came across, and attended Mass.

While in Warsaw, Faustina approached many different convents, but was turned away every time. She was judged on her appearances and sometimes rejected for poverty. Finally, the mother superior for the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy decided to take in Faustina on the condition that she could pay for her own religious habit. Working as a housekeeper, Faustina began to save her money and make deposits to the Convent.

On April 30, 1926, at 20-years-old, she finally received her habit and took the religious name of Sister Maria Faustina of the Blessed Sacrament and in 1928, she took her first religious vows as a nun.

Over the next year, Faustina traveled convents as a cook. In May 1930 she arrived in Plock, Poland. Soon after, she began to show the first

signs of her illness and was sent away to rest. Several months later, Faustina returned to the convent.

On February 22, 1931, Faustina was visited by Jesus, who presented himself as the "King of Divine Mercy" wearing a white garment with red and pale rays coming from his heart. She was asked to become the apostle and secretary of God's mercy, a model of how to be merciful to others, and an instrument for reemphasizing God's plan of mercy for the world. In her diary, Faustina writes:

"In the evening, when I was in my cell, I became aware of the Lord Jesus clothed in a white garment. One hand was raised in blessing, the other was touching the garment at the breast. From the opening of the garment at the breast there came forth two large rays, one red and the other pale. In silence I gazed intently at the Lord; my soul was overwhelmed with fear, but also with great joy. After a while Jesus said to me, 'paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the inscription: Jesus, I trust in You.'"

Faustina also describes during that same message, Jesus explained he wanted the Divine Mercy image to be "solemnly blessed on the first Sunday after Easter; that Sunday is to be the Feast of Mercy." Faustina, not knowing how to paint, asked around her Plock convent for help but was denied. It wasn't until three years later, in 1934, that the first painting of the image was created by Eugene Kazimierowski.

In 1932, Faustina returned to Warsaw. On May 1, 1933 she took her final vows in Lagiewniki and became a perpetual sister of Our Lady of Mercy. After taking her vows, Faustina was transferred to Vilnius, where she met Father Michael Sopocko, the appointed confessor to the nuns. During her first confession with Sopocko, Faustina told him about her conversations with Jesus and his plan for her. Father Sopocko insisted she be evaluated by a psychiatrist. Faustina passed all the required tests and was determined sane, leading Sopocko to support her religious efforts.

Sopocko encouraged her to start keeping a diary and to record all of her conversations with Jesus. Faustina told Sopocko about the Divine

Mercy image and it was Sopocho who introduced her to Kazimierowski, the artist of the first Divine Mercy painting.

According to Faustina's diary, on Good Friday, April 19, 1935, Jesus told her he wanted the Divine Mercy image publically honored. On April 26, 1935, Father Sopocho delivered the very first sermon on the Divine Mercy. In September 1935, Faustina wrote about her vision of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, used to obtain mercy, trust in Christ's mercy and to show mercy to others.

During the following year, Faustina attempted to set up a new congregation for Divine Mercy, but was reminded that she was perpetually vowed to her current order and sent back to Warsaw. She reported Jesus said to her, "My Daughter, do whatever is within your power to spread devotion to My Divine Mercy, I will make up for what you lack."

In 1936, Faustina fell ill again. She moved to the sanatorium in Pradnik, Krakow and continued to spend most of her time in prayer. In July 1937, the first holy cards with the Divine Mercy image were created and Faustina provided instructions for the Novena of Divine Mercy, which she reported was a message from Jesus. Throughout the rest of 1937, the Divine Mercy image continued to be promoted and grow in popularity.

Faustina's health significantly deteriorated by the end of 1937. Her visions intensified and she was said to be looking forward to the end of her life. On October 5, 1938, Faustina passed away. She was buried on October 7 and currently rests at the Basilica of Divine Mercy in Krakow, Poland.

Her entire life, in imitation of Christ's, was to be a sacrifice - a life lived for others. At the Divine Lord's request, she willingly offered her personal sufferings in union with Him to atone for the sins of others. In her daily life she was to become a doer of mercy, bringing joy and peace to others, and by writing about God's mercy, she was to encourage others to trust in Him and thus prepare the world for His coming again.

Her special devotion to Mary Immaculate and to the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation gave her the strength to bear all her sufferings as an offering to God on behalf of the Church and those in special need, especially great sinners and the dying. The message of mercy that Sister Faustina received is now being spread throughout the world; her diary, *Divine Mercy in my Soul*, has become the handbook for devotion to the Divine Mercy.

In 1965, Archbishop of Krakow, Karol Wojtyla, who would later become Pope John Paul II, opened up the first investigations into Faustina's life and virtues. He submitted a number of documents on her life to the Vatican and requested the official beatification process to start. One of his documents noted the case of Maureen Digan of Massachusetts. In March 1981, Digan reported she was healed from Lymphedema after praying at Faustina's tomb. She explained, while there, she heard a voice saying "ask for my help and I will help you," and her pain stopped. After returning to the United States, five different doctors all reported she was healed with no medical explanation. In 1992, the Vatican declared Digan's case miraculous.

St. Faustina Kowalska was beatified on April 18, 1993 and canonized on April 30, 2000, both by Pope St. John Paul II. Her feast day is celebrated on October 5 and she is the patron saint of Mercy.

## **The Divine Mercy Message and Devotion**

The message of The Divine Mercy is simple. It is that God loves us – all of us. And, He wants us to recognize that His mercy is greater than our sins, so that we will call upon Him with trust, receive His mercy, and let it flow through us to others. Thus, all will come to share His joy.

The Divine Mercy message is one we can call to mind simply by remembering ABC:

**A** - Ask for His Mercy. God wants us to approach Him in prayer constantly, repenting of our sins and asking Him to pour His mercy out upon us and upon the whole world.

**B** - Be merciful. God wants us to receive His mercy and let it flow through us to others. He wants us to extend love and forgiveness to others just as He does to us.

**C** - Completely trust in Jesus. God wants us to know that the graces of His mercy are dependent upon our trust. The more we trust in Jesus, the more we will receive.

This message and devotion to Jesus as The Divine Mercy is based on the writings of Saint Faustina Kowalska, an uneducated Polish nun who, in obedience to her spiritual director, wrote a diary of about 600 pages recording the revelations she received about God's mercy. Even before her death in 1938, the devotion to The Divine Mercy had begun to spread.

The message and devotional practices proposed in the *Diary of Saint Faustina* are completely in accordance with the teachings of Church and are firmly rooted in the Gospel message of our Merciful Savior. Properly understood and implemented, they will help us grow as genuine followers of Christ.

Spend time to learn more about the mercy of God, learn to trust in Jesus, and live your life as merciful to others, as Christ is merciful to you.

If you have the time, Hear a [30-minute crash course](#) by Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC.

## **How to Recite the Chaplet of Divine Mercy**

The Chaplet of Mercy is recited using ordinary rosary beads of five decades. The Chaplet is preceded by two opening prayers from the Diary of Saint Faustina and followed by a closing prayer.

### 1. Make the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

### 2. Opening Prayers

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

(Repeat three times)

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

### 3. Our Father

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, Amen.

### 4. Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

### 5. The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; on the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

### 6. The Eternal Father

Eternal Father, I offer you the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your Dearly Beloved Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.

### 7. On the 10 Small Beads of Each Decade

For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

8. Repeat for the remaining decades

Saying the "Eternal Father" (6) on the "Our Father" bead and then 10 "For the sake of His sorrowful Passion" (7) on the following "Hail Mary" beads.

9. Conclude with Holy God (Repeat three times)

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

10. Closing Prayer

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