

THE WOUNDS OF MERCY THAT BANISH ALL DIFFICULTIES/DOUBTS

During this year's Holy Saturday vigil, something dramatic happened in France that took everyone by surprise. France as we all know is a very secularised society and on the 8th of March 2024, France became the first country in the world to promulgate abortion as a Constitutional Right. However, on Holy Saturday Night, France broke the world's record as the country with the highest number of Baptisms in one night. Yes, on that night, 12,000 people were baptised and became Catholics in France. What is even more interesting is the fact that of that number, 7,000 were adults while 5,000 were teenagers. After the ceremony, one of the teenagers who was baptised was interviewed on France National TV as to why she decided to become a Catholic; her answer is not only refreshing but equally an eye-opener. According to her, while the world sees Millennials and Gen-Zs as people who are careless, carefree, and without much stake in life; however, the ANSWERS TO LIFE'S QUESTIONS are keeping them awake at night and they are increasing asking themselves – WHAT EXACTLY ARE WE LIVING FOR? Furthermore, she stated that so many things that people took for granted in the world as unshakable foundations have been upturned in the last few years; there was the pandemic that threw people off-balance, the present increased violence in the world, the return of war, ecological crises, terrorism, and a complete spiritual malaise. To make matters worse, the many things that people held onto as sources of happiness and tranquillity no longer make sense and no longer guarantee happiness which is why many young people are increasing searching for meanings for themselves. Her own search brought her to the conclusion that Catholicism is the only way to go, which was why she abandoned secularism in favour of Catholicism. Her journey of faith from doubts/difficulties to that of acceptance and belief is the same journey of Thomas the Twin as we encountered in today's Gospel pericope from John Chapter 20. Their journeys of faith are equally our journeys of faith be it in a small or large scale; in fact, it is a necessary journey to undertake for anyone to become a serious and staunch Catholic. It was my own journey of faith between 2011 to 2015, a journey of faith that shaped me and made me the Catholic I am today. However, the one thing that elicited, encouraged, and held together these journeys of faith is the feast we celebrate on this Octave of Easter – **THE DIVINE MERCY**.

In 1931, St Faustina Kowalska had a vision in her cell wherein she saw the Lord Jesus Christ clothed in white garment. One hand was raised in a gesture of blessing while the other was touching the garment at the breast. From the breast gushed forth two large rays: one red and the other pale. Jesus commanded her to paint the image she had seen with the words: **Jesus I Trust in You**, and to be venerated on the first Sunday after Easter. Jesus promised to defend all souls that will venerate the image and they will never perish. Since St Faustina could not draw, her confessor Fr Michael commissioned Eugene Kazimirowski to draw the painting under the strict guidance of St Faustina. Although St Faustina did not like the outcome of the painting as it did not depict Jesus Christ in all His beauty, it was a formidable religious art. When the image was venerated

publicly for the first time in April 1935, a large crowd paid homage to it for three days. However, since the painting was in Vilnius, Lithuania and under the Soviet control, it was impossible to move it elsewhere. After surviving the onslaught of World War II with his family, the Polish painter Adolf Hyla decided as a votive offering to God to sketch another painting of the image following the instructions St Faustina had left in her diary and a copy of the painting by Eugene Kazimirowski. This painting was finished in 1943 and now hangs at the left side altar in the Chapel of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy and underneath it is where the mortal remains of St Faustina Kowalska lie. It was in the year 2000 and at the canonisation of St Faustina that Pope St John Paul II decreed that the Second Sunday after Easter would be known as Divine Mercy Sunday. There is no other image that succinctly captures the Paschal Mystery than the Divine Mercy painting. Jesus suffered and died for all our sins; however, He rose again to justify us, shatter our doubts/difficulties, and give certainty to our hope. It is that journey of and in mercy that has held together all our journeys of faith.

My friends, at the heart of the Divine Mercy Message is this appeal of Christ to St Faustina: **“I am love and mercy itself. ... Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. ... My mercy is greater than your sins, and those of the entire world. Let the greatest sinners place their trust in My mercy. They have the right before others to trust in the abyss of My mercy. ... Souls that make an appeal to My mercy delight Me. To such souls I grant even more graces than they ask.”** This Feast of Divine Mercy carries a promise made by Jesus Christ Himself. In her diary 699, St Faustina wrote these words by Christ: **“The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion on this day shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment.”** The Divine Mercy Devotion is another powerful treasure we have in the Catholic Church and one of the most powerful answers to our secularised world’s quest for meaning which was given to us free of charge. Yes, although we do not have all the answers to solve all the world’s problems, we know someone who does. All we need is to cling to Him and His Mercy which endures forever as today’s Psalmist says.

- When there is darkness and confusion in the world; **Jesus, I Trust in You.**
- When there are so many difficulties on our ways; **Jesus, I Trust in You.**
- When there is no light at the end of our tunnels: **Jesus, I Trust in You.**
- When we are troubled by the many wars in our world; **Jesus, I Trust in You.**
- When our sins weigh us down and we are nearing despair; **Jesus, I Trust in You.**
- When all is well in our lives and we do not lack anything; **Jesus, I Trust in You.**
- When we are immersed in God’s Mercy and Compassion; **Jesus, I Trust in You.**

Only Jesus has answers to all the uncertainties of our lives; His answers are contained in His Divine Mercy. I am a devotee of Divine Mercy and have gained a lot from it; I recommend it to everyone for the Name of God is Mercy and He does not fail.

Fr Johnpromise Umeozuru

Homily for Divine Mercy Sunday, Year B (07/04/2024)