

The Sacrament of Penance: A Gift of Divine Mercy

Dear friends in Christ, today, we gather on this beautiful second Sunday of Easter, which the Church celebrates as Divine Mercy Sunday. This is a day when we are reminded of the immeasurable mercy of God, who loves us unconditionally and invites us to trust in His infinite compassion and forgiveness.

Divine Mercy Sunday has its roots in the revelations of St. Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun and mystic who lived in the early 20th century. St. Faustina was chosen by Jesus to be a messenger of His Divine Mercy. Through a series of visions and messages, Jesus revealed to her the depth of His love and mercy for all humanity, especially for sinners. He asked her to share this message with the world and to inspire devotion to His Divine Mercy.

Jesus specifically requested that the Sunday after Easter be designated as a Feast of Mercy. As recorded in St. Faustina's diary, Jesus said: *"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."* (Diary, 699)

This request was fulfilled by Pope St. John Paul II, who was deeply devoted to the message of Divine Mercy. On April 30, 2000, during the canonization of St. Faustina, Pope John Paul II declared the Second Sunday of Easter to be known as Divine Mercy Sunday for the universal Church. It is a powerful reminder of God's mercy, flowing abundantly from the heart of Jesus, particularly as depicted in the image of the Divine Mercy with the rays of red and pale light emanating from His heart.

In today's Gospel (John 20:19-31), we hear how Jesus appeared to His disciples on the evening of the first Easter Sunday. His first words to them were, "Peace be with you." This greeting was not just a casual salutation but a profound expression of reconciliation and mercy. Even though the disciples had abandoned Him during His Passion, Jesus, in His infinite love, came to bring them peace, not condemnation.

It is here, in this intimate encounter, that Jesus institutes the Sacrament of Penance. He breathes on the apostles and says: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:22-23).

This moment is significant because it establishes the apostles—and by extension, their successors, the bishops and priests—as ministers of God's mercy. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they are entrusted with the authority to forgive sins in the name of Jesus. This is the foundation of the Church's ministry of reconciliation, a gift that has been passed down to us through the Sacrament of Penance.

The Sacrament of Penance is one of the most profound ways we encounter God's mercy. It is here that we experience the healing and forgiveness of Christ. No matter how far we may have strayed, no sin is too great for God's mercy. St. Faustina Kowalska, whose visions of Jesus inspired this feast, reminds us of Jesus' words: *"The greater the sinner, the greater the right he has to My mercy."* (Diary, 723)

This sacrament is not just about wiping away wrongs; it is about restoring our relationship with God, healing our souls, and giving us the strength to begin anew. When we approach the sacrament with a sincere heart, confess our sins, and seek forgiveness, we are met with the loving embrace of God.

As recipients of God's mercy, we are called to be messengers of mercy to others. Jesus told St. Faustina: *"Be merciful to others, just as I am merciful to you."* (Diary, 742) This means forgiving those who have wronged us, showing compassion to those in need, and being instruments of reconciliation in a divided world. When we live out this call, we reflect the love of Christ and bring His mercy into the lives of those around us. Amen!

Fr. Bula