



The Holy See

DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 22 April 2001

1. *"Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore" (Rv 1: 17-18).*

We heard these comforting words in the Second Reading taken from the Book of Revelation. They invite us to turn our gaze to Christ, to experience his reassuring presence. To each person, whatever his condition, even if it were the most complicated and dramatic, the Risen One repeats: "Fear not!"; I died on the Cross but now "I am alive for evermore"; "I am the first and the last, and the living one".

"The first", that is, the source of every being and the first-fruits of the new creation; "the last", the definitive end of history; "the living one", the inexhaustible source of life that triumphed over death for ever. In the Messiah, crucified and risen, we recognize the features of the Lamb sacrificed on Golgotha, who implores forgiveness for his torturers and opens the gates of heaven to repentant sinners; we glimpse the face of the immortal King who now has "the keys of Death and Hades" (Rv 1: 18).

2. *"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endures for ever!" (Ps 117: 1).*

Let us make our own the Psalmist's exclamation which we sang in the Responsorial Psalm: *the Lord's mercy endures for ever!* In order to understand thoroughly the truth of these words, let us be led by the liturgy to the heart of the event of salvation, which unites Christ's Death and Resurrection with our lives and with the world's history. This miracle of mercy has radically changed humanity's destiny. It is a miracle in which is unfolded the fullness of the love of the Father who, for our redemption, does not even draw back before the sacrifice of his Only-begotten

Son.

In the humiliated and suffering Christ, believers and non-believers can admire a surprising solidarity, which binds him to our human condition beyond all imaginable measure. The Cross, even after the Resurrection of the Son of God, "speaks and never ceases to speak of God the Father, who is absolutely faithful to his eternal love for man.... Believing in this love means believing in mercy (*Dives in misericordia*, n. 7).

Let us thank the Lord for his love, which is stronger than death and sin. It is revealed and put into practice as mercy in our daily lives, and prompts every person in turn to have "mercy" towards the Crucified One. Is not loving God and loving one's neighbour and even one's "enemies", after Jesus' example, the programme of life of every baptized person and of the whole Church?

3. With these sentiments we are celebrating the Second Sunday of Easter, which since last year, the year of the Great Jubilee, is also called "*Divine Mercy Sunday*". It is a great joy for me to be able to join all of you, dear pilgrims and faithful who have come from various nations to commemorate, after one year, the canonization of Sr Faustina Kowalska, witness and messenger of the Lord's merciful love. The elevation to the honours of the altar of this humble religious, a daughter of my land, is not only a gift for Poland but for all humanity. Indeed the message she brought is the appropriate and incisive answer that God wanted to offer to the questions and expectations of human beings in our time, marked by terrible tragedies. Jesus said to Sr Faustina one day: "Humanity will never find peace until it turns with trust to Divine Mercy" (*Diary*, p. 132). Divine Mercy! This is the Easter gift that the Church receives from the risen Christ and offers to humanity at the dawn of the third millennium.

4. The Gospel, which has just been proclaimed, helps us to grasp the full sense and value of this gift. The Evangelist John makes us share in the emotion felt by the Apostles in their meeting with Christ after his Resurrection. Our attention focuses on the gesture of the Master, who transmits to the fearful, astounded disciples the mission of being ministers of divine Mercy. He shows them his hands and his side, which bear the marks of the Passion, and tells them: "*As the Father has sent me, even so I send you*" (Jn 20: 21). Immediately afterwards "*he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained' "*" (Jn 20: 22-23). Jesus entrusted to them the gift of "forgiving sins", a gift that flows from the wounds in his hands, his feet, and especially from his pierced side. From there a wave of mercy is poured out over all humanity.

Let us relive this moment with great spiritual intensity. Today the Lord also shows us his glorious wounds and his heart, an inexhaustible source of light and truth, of love and forgiveness.

5. The Heart of Christ! His "Sacred Heart" has given men everything: redemption, salvation, sanctification. St Faustina Kowalska saw coming from this Heart that was overflowing with

generous love, two rays of light which illuminated the world. "The two rays", according to what Jesus himself told her, "represent the blood and the water" (*Diary*, p. 132). The blood recalls the sacrifice of Golgotha and the mystery of the Eucharist; the water, according to the rich symbolism of the Evangelist John, makes us think of Baptism and the Gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 3: 5; 4: 14).

Through the mystery of this wounded heart, the restorative tide of God's merciful love continues to spread over the men and women of our time. Here alone can those who long for true and lasting happiness find its secret.

6. "Jesus, I trust in you". This prayer, dear to so many of the devout, clearly expresses the attitude with which we too would like to abandon ourselves trustfully in your hands, O Lord, our only Saviour.

You are burning with the desire to be loved and those in tune with the sentiments of your heart learn how to build the new civilization of love. A simple act of abandonment is enough to overcome the barriers of darkness and sorrow, of doubt and desperation. The rays of your divine mercy restore hope, in a special way, to those who feel overwhelmed by the burden of sin.

Mary, Mother of Mercy, help us always to have this trust in your Son, our Redeemer. Help us too, St Faustina, whom we remember today with special affection. Fixing our weak gaze on the divine Saviour's face, we would like to repeat with you: "Jesus, I trust in you". Now and for ever. Amen.