

[Readings: Acts 5:12-16; Ps. 118; Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13. 17-19; John 20:19-31]

Every year, on the first Sunday after Easter, we celebrate God's mercy, which is greater than any sin we may ever commit. This feast day, known as Divine Mercy Sunday, was established 17 years ago by Pope St. John Paul II and is observed by Catholics all over the world. The inspiration for Divine Mercy Sunday can be found in the diaries of St. Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun who experienced apparitions of Jesus and recorded his messages. "My daughter," Jesus told her, "say that I am love and mercy personified."

During the canonization of St. Faustina on April 30, 2000, Pope John Paul II proclaimed that the first Sunday after Easter "will be called 'Divine Mercy Sunday.'" He also named St. Faustina the "apostle of Divine Mercy" and urged everyone to make her "beautiful exclamation your own, 'Jesus, I trust in you!'" Five years later, on the vigil of Divine Mercy Sunday in 2005, Pope John Paul II died. He was beatified on Divine Mercy Sunday in 2011 by Pope Benedict XVI. On Divine Mercy Sunday in 2014, Pope Francis canonized Pope John Paul II, along with Pope John XXIII.

On this Divine Mercy Sunday, I share two stories of how people have experienced Divine Mercy. They come from Lorene Hanley Duquin's book *"God Listens: Stories of Answered Prayer"* (OSV, \$12.95). I hope that you will recognize in these stories your own call to trust Jesus, to accept his mercy, and to become an instrument of his mercy by extending love and forgiveness to others.

Father Donald Calloway, MIC, was a seminarian at home on vacation when he was called to the bedside of a neighbor who was dying. "The woman was in agony," he said. "I remembered Jesus saying in the diary of St. Faustina that if you pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy at the bedside of someone who is dying, that person will be given the grace of final perseverance."

The family members were not familiar with the chaplet, so Father Calloway, of Steubenville, Ohio, pulled a rosary out of his pocket and began to pray. "During that prayer we all saw the countenance of this woman change, from being in tortured agony to what looked like she was seeing something beautiful.

Then right there in front of us, when chaplet was done, she took her last breath. Her face was at peace. Everyone in that room knew that something deep and supernatural had happened.

The same thing happened when I was in the last parish, and our permanent deacon, Deacon Richard Damaske, a classmate of Deacon Marion Jurewicz, was dying at the Martha T. Berry Convalescent Home. Three women from the parish prayed the Divine Mercy Novena over him, and he received that same peace.

At age 15, Maureen Digan was diagnosed with lymphedema, an incurable disease that caused painful swelling in her legs. Over the next 10 years, she endured more than 50 operations, including the amputation of one of her legs.

"My already weak faith became even weaker," she said. "I thought I was being punished for something I had done or something I would later do in life. People told me to pray and to trust God. How could I pray and trust when God kept knocking me down? I built a wall around myself."

Her boyfriend, Bob, broke through the wall when he asked her to marry him. But Maureen's first pregnancy ended in a miscarriage. Two years later, she gave birth to Bobby, who had a progressive neuromuscular disease. Then the lymphedema worsened, and the doctors feared that Maureen would need a second amputation. During this time, Bob saw a movie about Sister Faustina and Divine Mercy. "He tried to share it with me, but I wouldn't listen," Maureen said. "Bob felt as if God was calling him to take our family to Poland. I tried to resist, but it was no use."

On March 23, 1981, Bob, Maureen and their son, Bobby, arrived in Poland. Five days later they prayed the Chaplet of Divine Mercy at the tomb of Sister Faustina. "I sensed Sister Faustina say to me in my heart, 'Ask for my help and I will help you,'" Maureen recalled. "I said, 'OK, Faustina, I came this far from home, now do something!'" Suddenly, the pain and swelling in Maureen's leg disappeared. By the following day, it was clear that she had been healed. "When I returned home, I was examined by five independent doctors who had no medical explanation for the sudden healing of this incurable disease."

The evidence of Maureen's miracle cure was examined by the

Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican. “Having passed this test, my case was examined by a board of medical doctors and then of theologians.

Finally, my case was presented to a team of cardinals and bishops headed by then-Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI). My cure was accepted by all as a miracle through Sister Faustina’s intercession.”

The first gift of Easter is peace. It’s a startling turn of events, given the action that preceded this hour in the Upper Room. There’s been betrayal of trust and a vigilant e mob, the cold rejection of religion and condemnation by the state.

There’s been denial of deep friendship and desertion by the cowardly. There’s been confusion and despair, former disciples turning tail and heading homeward in hopeless defeat. And then, the facts get even darker and murkier. Reports of a vandalized tomb spread. Those who loved Jesus are afraid to go outside, afraid that the violence of these past days will engulf them.

And when it seems the darkness can’t get deeper and the violence is all too close, Jesus stands in their midst once more, gentle as the dawn. And he speaks of peace. He brings peace in his extended, wounded, glorious hands. He offers peace to those he called his friends. It doesn’t matter they’ve shown themselves to be fair-weather friends, unfaithful disciples, doubters, and deserters. To a brutal world that condemned him to a violent death, Jesus comes to speak of peace.

His second offering is just as incredible. After a completely undeserved peace, Jesus extends the equally unmerited forgiveness of sin. Into a history as marred by selfishness as ours, Jesus brings healing and the hope that we are forgiven *for all of it*. Would you do that? Would I? We don’t have to ask. We already know the answer. What do we offer people who offend us, harm us, cause us untold grief and pain? How do we respond to a world of disappointments and fears and threats to our security? Do we walk through this generation of a thousand profound troubles as people dedicated to peace and forgiveness? When life hurts, when we’ve been hurt, are the first words that spring to our lips: “Peace be with you”? “I forgive you”?

The mystery of Divine Mercy Sunday is that Jesus is that kind of Lord. Jesus moves through the greatest violence history can muster and comes out the

other side as dedicated to peace and forgiveness as before. Lord of wrath and judgment. No excuses, no reprisal. Peace and forgiveness.

We hear no excuses about how he's been crippled by his past experiences and become an understandably seething God's answer to the world's hostility is in gently extended wounded and glorified hands.

The prophet says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" How beautiful are feet that walk back toward those who sought to destroy them. How lovely the hands outstretched to those who denied and disappointed. How beautiful the heart that knows cruelty, returns full of mercy. Jezu, Ufam Tobie! AMEN!

(This homily was given also at the closing of the Divine Mercy Devotion at St. Faustina Parish, Warren.)