

[Readings: Isaiah 43:16-21; Ps. 126; Phil. 3:8-14; John 8:1-11]

The theme for today's homily could be: "I Saw What You Did and I Know Who You Are!" Because all three readings today focus on our sinful past. Isaiah has been lamenting the infidelity of the people of Israel who continued to sin and turn away from the Lord and are now in exile. There seems to be no hope for those who stubbornly and deliberately refuse to turn back to the Lord and follow His commands. In spite of this, at this point in our First Reading passage, Isaiah gives a message of hope for that faithful remnant left behind in Jerusalem, in captivity in Babylon and for those who have not been faithful to God anywhere.

The key words of his message today are, "Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago, consider not." How many times do we play the same tapes over and over in our heads? You know which ones I mean. Not the ones of happier times and loving moments, but those tapes that remind us of our mistakes, our shortcomings, our sins and our weakness? Isaiah says, "He knows what you did, and He knows who you are," but then Isaiah says, "And He wants to forgive you and for you to forgive yourself."

It takes a lot of energy to harbor resentment, bitterness and regret, both against others and more importantly against ourselves. It keeps us from being healthy and whole. Isaiah says, let it go. As the Lord has forgiven you and forgotten your iniquities, so you must do for yourself and for one another.

Now, let's listen to the words of St. Paul. A fanatical Jew who took his religion VERY seriously! Serious enough that he would arbitrarily break into houses of Christian believers and have them removed, tortured and killed while he watched. Can you imagine the field day St. Paul would have if he played THOSE tapes over and over? He probably would have driven himself insane.

Instead, he says, "By the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace in me has not been in vain." God knows what we did, and God knows who we are. ***"But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace in me has not been in vain."*** I would ask that you remember these words this week. "By the grace

of God, I am what I am, and God's grace in me has not been in vain."

St. Paul admits that because of his conversion, his year-long retreat with St. Peter and the other Christians, his newfound fervor in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, all of his past life (before Christ) is loss and rubbish. The only thing that matters to him is where he is now -- in the power that comes with Jesus Christ and His Resurrection.

What else do you and I need, if we are in a right relationship with Jesus Christ? St. Paul also admits that he has not yet "attained perfect maturity." None of us can make that claim until we are six feet under, and even then, maybe not. Jesus Christ still has so much to work on in St. Paul, who says that he forgets what lies behind and strains forward to what lies ahead. This is a great philosophy of life for you and for me: forgive what lies behind and move forward.

Come to confession this Friday at 7 PM. There will be many priests on hand to offer you God's compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation. If it has been a while since you have been to confession, consider this as my personal invitation to you to come and be reconciled with the Lord, the Church, yourself.

Then we come to that curious scene from today's Gospel. There is an old joke used in the seminary about this scene, when Jesus says, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." There is silence for a moment. And then one solitary woman throws a stone with all her might and bops the adulterous woman square on the head. Jesus rolls his eyes and throws his arms up in the air and says, "Mother, will you PLEASE stay out of this?" Then Jesus bends down and begins scribbling in the dirt.

What is He writing? Could it be simply, "God saw what you did!" and then after challenging those who think they are sinless, He continues writing, "And He knows who you are and where you live!" Another theory suggests that Jesus wrote the personal, private sin of each person who gazed upon His writing. What would YOUR reaction be if that one secret sin that nobody knows about suddenly appears in the sand for all the world to see?

A third theory is a more positive one. It suggests that Jesus writes, "This woman is a child of God. You are a child of God. Why are you doing this to your sister?" And one by one, everyone realizes that they are NOT without sin and leave, BEGINNING WITH THE ELDERS! That was a tremendous statement made by the crowd. That those who are the most skilled in the law are the first to admit their sinfulness. That was an act of humility, humiliation and shame.

What are the compassionate words of Jesus to this woman? "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin anymore." Stop playing the negative tapes. Start playing the positive ones. Live in the present and prepare for the future. Saints are sinners with a past, sinners are saints with a future!
AMEN!

[Readings: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; John 13:1-15]

The memorial of Christ we celebrate today, and every time we gather around the table of the Lord, does not leave us or our world unchanged. It continuously transforms us and makes us Christ-like so that when we leave this sacred space we do like him and, “tying a towel around our waist,” we make God’s love visible to others where they – and we -- need it the most.

Certainly we might want to hear God’s voice from above in times of need, but perhaps we long even more for God’s ongoing and active presence in our lives. We feel we need to see the invisible; to touch it and to have it touch us. We read the Old Testament accounts and might wonder why God is not present and visible in the world now as God was thousands of years ago?

Where are the marvelous signs that will lead, guide, and sustain me through life, which at times seem like a captivity, a desert journey, and a moonless midnight? Over 3,000 years ago that was precisely how the Israelites felt because that was their real situation. “Where is that marvelous sign?” they must have asked in their struggle. How can we see and touch and know that God loves us even in our darkest days?

God made His love known to them when they gathered by families in community and celebrated what at its core is a very human event: a meal. Gathered in God’s name, they shared their faith and food, both of them gifts of God. And they did so having marked their homes – and their lives – with blood, the sign of life itself. They were giving themselves to God, placing their lives in God’s hand, filled with the certain hope that God would make Himself known to them. So certain was their hope, that they were ready to go wherever God instructed them because they knew that God would be there with them.

And so it happened on that night. This night. Through a shared meal and a ready heart, their lives changed forever. The promises became reality and God’s love was visible to all. They were liberated from slavery in Egypt and on the road to freedom.

But there remained a different and more powerful captivity. As our Lenten journey helps us remember year after year, our humanity constantly wrestles with the oppression of sin, in our own lives and in the world. We know we are not truly free, as we were created to be, and we ask God to rescue us again. We want that sign that will tell us that we are truly free, truly alive, that “God is with us.”

But at the same we believe -- we know -- that God is with us in Jesus Christ, the very Word of God made flesh. Through Jesus’ life, the Reign of God erupts into the world and becomes real. In him God’s very essence and love become real. It is a love that, as Saint Paul recounts, the Church has celebrated from its very beginning in the Eucharist.

We know, though, that it was more than that. It was a powerfully unique supper. It was when Jesus made God’s love visible in the most profound way: through the breaking of His own body and the pouring of His own blood; a sacrifice we again will celebrate solemnly tomorrow on the second of these three most holy days, a sacrifice that truly destroyed our captivity to sin and death and has cleared for us the way to true freedom and life.

Unlike the other Gospels, John places the last meal with the disciples not on Passover but the evening before, when Jerusalem was preparing lambs for the feast. This circumstance could not have made more of an impact on the disciples: As their Master washed their feet, the sounds of the slaughter of Passover lambs was all over the city. Sacrifice and service, inextricably linked.

Like the blood of the Passover lamb that nourished the Israelites for the journey to freedom, so Christ’s blood gives us new life and victory over evil and death. It continuously transforms us and makes God’s love visible to others by gently touching their lives where they – and we -- need it the most.

We do this tonight with the symbolic washing of feet. We do it when we leave here with the choices to respond to others in need. “As I have done for you, so you must do for others.” Jesus washing the feet of the apostles teaches us about power and humility.

We can never say that we are too good for any act of service to another person. Nothing falls beneath our dignity. No act becomes too unimportant for

us to worry about. Nothing is a waste of our talents. Jesus lays claim on us. That claim is to offer the washing of forgiveness, helping people find the refreshment of release from guilt. We offer the washing of service, cleaning off the dirt of poverty, hunger, suffering, violence, hopelessness and despair.

The Last Supper was the most intimate moment in the life of Jesus. It is the most intimate moment in the life of His Church. This is the night when people who are personally close to Jesus know that He does not want to eat alone. Tonight, of all nights, He wants someone to talk to, someone to be with.

When He gathers His friends into a safe circle of concern, He washes their feet. As a kindness, because they are tired; as a courtesy, because He is their host; as a sign that in the long run, service to them is more to the point than teaching or leading or saving them.

Then He gives them His peace. As a kindness, because they are afraid of the future; as a courtesy, because they are ill at ease; as a sign that physical chaos, psychological insecurity or spiritual turmoil need not override the balm of His presence.

Then He gives them bread and wine. As a kindness, because they are hungry; as a courtesy, because it brought them together; as a sign of His Body and Blood, and a promise that whoever lived in His memory would never die. Tonight, Jesus invites us to His supper. He will serve us, extend His peace to us, and give us His Body and Blood. As a kindness, because we desperately need His peace; as a courtesy, because we are His awkward servants; as a sign, because we need to clean ourselves and each other. AMEN!

[Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 31; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42]

As Jesus had often gathered his disciples together to pray in the garden, so we are together right now as we enter into this passion. And, we all have a passion in our own lives. We all have a cross in our own lives. We don't have to go out and seek a cross, it's given to us. I want you to think about that right now. What is the cross that you've been asked to carry in your own life?

Now, our natural or our human nature has a tendency to want to fight or flee. That's our natural response when we encounter suffering – to either enter into a fight with it or to flee from it. That's our natural response, but Jesus shows us a supernatural response. Jesus shows us that when we encounter suffering, when we experience the cross, we don't need to fight. We don't need to flee. We simply need to stand.

And so, I was praying with this idea. As I went through the passion myself, I realized there is a lot of movement, a lot of motion. I was just going through some of that litany of movement and motion. It helped me to see that, during it all, the one that stands the entire time neither fighting nor fleeing is Jesus. He calls us to do the same with our own cross... not to fight it or to flee from it – but to stand.

So, we begin in the garden. Jesus is there with his disciples, and Judas had already begun to fight. So, Judas gathered the band of soldiers together, and they came with torches and weapons and lanterns. They were there coming for a fight. Jesus knew that everything was going to happen, but He simply stood there. When He was accused, he simply said, "I AM." Then there was a moment of flight when everybody collapsed and fell to the ground. And, Jesus said, "You've come for Me, so let My disciples go." The disciples began to follow Him for just a little bit until they got to the Praetorium. When they arrived at the Praetorium, none of the disciples entered in with Him.

Peter stayed outside. Peter would begin his flight. It was also Peter that would fight in the garden. When they first came to capture Jesus, Peter's natural instinct was to fight.

He took out his sword, and he cut one of the guard's ears off. Jesus corrected Peter. Jesus healed the ear, and He told Peter to simply just stand. When Jesus was taken to the Praetorium, He would stand there instead of fighting or fleeing. He simply stood. As the high priest continued to question Jesus, Jesus would not try to defend Himself. He didn't get into an argument. He simply stood and accepted. Peter would deny. The cock would crow, and Jesus would continue standing as he was taken into the Praetorium.

He was taken before Caiaphas the high priest. Jesus said, "My kingdom does not belong to this world." And, He said to Pilate, "Anyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Jesus stood as He was handed over to be scourged. He didn't fight it. He didn't run from it. He stood while, wrapped in a cloth of purple, they spit on Him and yelled, "Hail, king of the Jews." Jesus stood.

Pilate again questioned him and said, "Behold the man." Jesus stood, and they began to shout, "Crucify him. Crucify him." Jesus didn't panic. He didn't run. He didn't fight. He simply stood. So, Pilate said to him, "Why do you not speak to me?" And, Jesus said nothing. Jesus knew that Pilate had no power over Him. Jesus said, "You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above." Everything is continuing to spiral as the Crucifixion is coming closer and closer. Jesus doesn't defend himself. He doesn't flee. He simply stands.

Pilate says, "Behold your king," and the people cry out, "Crucify him. Crucify him." Jesus doesn't argue. He doesn't fight. He doesn't flee. He stands.

He's taken to Golgotha – the translation meaning "Place of the Skull," and he is crucified.

Interestingly, almost everyone has fled at this point. Standing by the cross now are only His mother and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. These are the only ones that didn't fight or flee. They were standing there with Him by the cross. We are given that beautiful line where Jesus says to His beloved, "Behold your mother," and to His mother, "Woman, behold your son." They don't fight, and they don't flee. They simply stand there.

And finally, when it is finished, Jesus says His final words, which are not words of fighting or fleeing but simply humble acceptance. He says, "It is finished." He bows His head and breaths His last.

Jesus shows us all the way to embrace the Cross. When we experience any suffering in our life, our natural tendency is to fight it or to flee from it. He shows us how to simply and humbly stand with it and accept it.

So, I want us to think about our crosses. As we come to the end of these 40 days of praying, fasting, and almsgiving, maybe this Lent hasn't turned out the way that we wanted it to. Maybe we haven't done our praying, fasting, and almsgiving or become the saint that we wanted to.

Right now Jesus invites us simply to stand – no longer to fight, no longer to flee -- but to stand.

Maybe your cross for you is your marriage, and He's calling you right now not to fight anymore, not to flee from it, but to simply stand. Maybe your cross is conflict with your children or with your parents, with your brother or sister, and He's calling you right now not to fight it, not to flee from it but to stand.

Maybe your conflict is at work with your boss or your employees, and right now He's telling you not to fight it or to flee from it but to stand. Maybe God right now is asking you to give up something in your life or to let go of something – to stop fighting, to stop fleeing and to stand and accept.

Maybe there's some suffering in your life – some illness, be it spiritual or physical or emotional. Perhaps we have been fighting or running from something all of our lives – and right now, Jesus is just telling you to stand and accept it.

Judas fled, Peter fought, Jesus and the women simply stood.

This Good Friday, whatever is going on in your life, whatever your cross is, whatever your suffering is – know that we're not called to fight it, or to flee it – but simply to stand with it. And to realize that HE is standing right next to us, taking it from us, and laying upon it once more. AMEN!

[Readings: Gn. 1:1-2:2; Ex 14:15-15:1, Is 54:5-14; Rom 6:3-1; Lk: 24:1-12]

Maybe it was because I was seated in a particular place. Regardless, I cannot forget the sight. It was during the Easter Vigil several years ago. It was at night. All was dark. The lights in the church were turned off. The paschal candle had been brought into the church with all the majesty of the wondrous Holy Saturday liturgy, and, as is fitting, tapers burning with flames taken from the paschal candle had been used to light small candles held in the hands of all the people in the congregation.

At the moment I remember so vividly, and movingly, everyone had a lighted candle. I noticed the candles, of course, since they were the lights in an otherwise darkened church. Most of all, however, most of all, I remember the faces of the congregation. Each and every face was aglow. It was not an utterly brilliant shade of sharp, unadulterated light, piercing and unforgiving, revealing every blemish and every line on any face. Rather, it was soft, gentle, and warm, but gloriously bright in a special, marvelous way. The light fixtures above were shaped like orbs, reflecting the candle light as if they were all over the world!

For me, the sight was a lesson. The origin of light for each of the small candles was the fire atop the great paschal candle. I had solemnly blessed this fire at the beginning of the ceremony. It was God's fire.

The candle itself was large, strong, tall and imposing, festooned with the symbols of the Passion. On purpose, the great paschal candle represents Jesus, the Light of the World, the light shining in the darkness, breaking through the fog, destroying the power of night, bringing direction to any and all who stumble and fall, unable to see the path through life.

It is the symbol of the Lord, in whose wounds we are healed, by whose Crucifixion we are redeemed, whom we encounter, Risen, body and blood, in the Eucharist. The glow on each face was a lesson. The light of Christ brightens us all. It is more healing and complete than any cosmetic.

Absorbed by this holy light, our faces radiate with the sunshine of the Lord. We are evident and visible. We are clean and fresh. We are open and free.

We are alive because of Christ, and in Christ. He fills us with divine strength and grace.

Those faces that I saw that night, all receiving and then reflecting the brilliance and wonder of Christ, all victorious over the dark, told me that this is what Christians, each of us, are and should be. Christ is our light, as the Easter Vigil ceremony thrillingly and confidently had proclaimed to one and all.

Christ transforms us, if we allow it. In the Lord, the wayward find the right direction for their lives. The hard-hearted become inviting and kind. The desperate find hope. Everything is clarified for the confused. Nothing is hopeless. Hope is well-founded. Joy is to be expected. Life, not death, is the great fact of living.

A question came to my mind. When others see ME, do they see the warm, firm light of Christ gleaming in MY face? When I see others, especially people less appealing to me, whose customs or circumstances are unfamiliar to me, do I see on THEIR faces the image of the Lord?

The mystery of the Incarnation, so utterly fundamental to the Christian faith, insists that even in the very worst beings -- the sinful and the despised -- Jesus is there. If nothing else, our very humanity links us with Christ. He is there in the divinity that created us, individually and with love.

Every Holy Week, I remember an elderly nun who told me, "Father, I live for the Easter Vigil." I know what she meant. What concrete lessons it teaches us so well. This Holy Saturday, I pray: "God, show us the light. Make us shine with your light."

Our Easter gift to you this year is a book entitled "Why I Love Being Catholic." It is edited by Matthew Kelly, of Dynamic Catholic fame. These days that isn't something you hear very often, especially in light of the scandalous behavior of some of our members, our clergy and our hierarchy.

"Why I Love Being Catholic" shows the vast majority of Catholics who still love their Church, and who still remember all the great treasures of liturgy, art, education and medicine given by Catholic institutions over the centuries.

The writers are people just like you: they've laughed, cried, suffered, and celebrated their way through all the ups and downs of life. Some have been Catholic all their lives; others have taken a longer route home. All, however, can speak to the amazing gift that the Catholic faith has been in their lives.

These days, it's challenging to be a Catholic. The collection of entries in "Why I Love Being Catholic" celebrates the best of the Catholic faith, highlights the everyday miracles taking place all around us, and reminds us that there are thousands of everyday heroes out there who dare to have big dreams for the Church. Even amidst the challenges of our times, holiness is possible, grace abounds, and there is every reason to live our lives with hope! Enjoy reading it!

Thumb through the book and let the Holy Spirit stop you on the right pages. Walk out of your private cave, stretch out your tired and weakened spiritual muscles and take a deep breath of fresh Holy Spirit air. There IS reason to hope and to celebrate a Happy Easter! That it's worth celebrating and calling it Resurrection Sunday. And then, healed, raised and cleaned off, we can become the Divine Word News Service, and share that Good News with those who need to hear it. "Tell us, what did you see?" "Let me tell you!" Alleluia! And AMEN!

[Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Ps. 118; Col 3:1-4 or 1 Cor. 5:6b-8; John 20:1-9]

Did Jesus know that He would rise from the dead in three days?

Both Matthew and Luke report that on three separate occasions Jesus told His apostles He would be put to death and rise on the third day (see Mt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Lk 9:22; 18:33; 24:6-7).

At first glance these words seem to make Jesus' acceptance of death rather simple: "Yes, I'll die a cruel death, but in three days I'll be alive again." But Jesus made this prediction for the encouragement of the apostles, as He did in the Transfiguration. Even if throughout His Passion, Our Lord had remembered He would rise, that memory would not have lessened the agony He endured in scourging and Crucifixion. His agony was unique. He suffered as no other human being ever has or ever can suffer.

As fully man and fully God, Jesus suffered the agony. Perfectly innocent, fully human, fully divine, Our Lord plumbed depths of suffering no human being can even approach.

Have you ever wondered what it was like for the first disciples to see Jesus in the light of the Resurrection?

Imagine being inside a dimly lit, windowless room and then suddenly walking outside into the brightest part of the day. The sunlight is all around you; everything is bright. By reflex, you close your eyes to protect them. You try squinting, maybe even using your hand as a visor to cast a little shadow on your now teary, hypersensitive eyes. You may see a blurry figure here and another there, but you can't focus or gaze at anything. You alternate between blindness and misperception.

From the Gospel testimonies, the first disciples' experience of seeing the Risen Christ was pretty much like this. In fact, it would be better to call it "unseeing." John and Luke especially are keen on establishing this. Consider these four episodes:

Mary Magdalene at the tomb on Easter morning: "[Mary] turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus" (Jn 20:14).

On the Sea of Tiberius: “When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus” (Jn 21:4).

On the road to Emmaus: “Jesus himself drew near and walked with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing him” (Lk 24:15-16).

In the Upper Room: “[H]e stood in their midst ... But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost” (Lk 24:36-37).

Every time the Risen Christ appears to his disciples, they cannot see Him, even when they see something. But in each instance, a change occurs, and they suddenly see.

We might be tempted to think that something about Jesus suddenly changes so He becomes recognizable, but in fact the Gospels attest something else. It is the disciples who move -- or rather, they are moved.

Yes, Jesus acts in each instance to bring about the change, but what unlocks vision and moves the disciples from a place of unseeing to a place of seeing and recognition is a change within themselves: Mary hears Jesus call her name. The seafaring disciples receive their calling again in the same way they had before. On the way to Emmaus, Jesus teaches the disciples the Scriptures before feeding them with the bread He blesses and breaks. In the Upper Room, Jesus gives peace and shows His wounds and forgives and commissions them. With each of these actions, it is as if the disciples' eyes grow accustomed to the light of day, and they see.

As they become capable of seeing, the disciples no longer are limited by what they wanted to see or what their dim expectations had prepared them to see -- now, they see Jesus as He is, in all his glory. They change; Jesus is the one who changes them. St. Thomas captures what each of them has come to see in their various encounters: that Jesus is “my Lord and my God” (Jn 20:28). Not only do they SEE Him, but they also become His witnesses. They tell others who He is.

Easter is the time to become witnesses. For disciples today, being changed into a witness is no less demanding or dramatic than it was for those

first disciples. It requires a change in vision, moving past dim expectations, becoming accustomed to Christ's light.

This is painful at first -- in fact, it has to be. We grow comfortable with wanting too little, and we confine ourselves to our own preferred ways of seeing things, which is like being holed up in a windowless room where we don't realize how dark it is until we walk out into the light of day. To become witnesses means being shocked into seeing the dazzling beauty of Christ and proclaiming to others both what we have seen and how we see in this new light.

At Easter, how do you tell others that you have glimpsed what matters most and that this has affected the way you see everything? That's what it means to become a witness to Christ, who is himself the light by which disciples see. The way to learn how to do this is not to try to do everything all at once.

Instead, we learn this craft of witnessing to the grace of Christ in our lives the way we learn everything else: by practicing small, basic skills to which we grow more accustomed. For disciples to become witnesses, this means practicing the skills of storytelling, and to make our storytelling about encounters with grace. Start with your Easter meal and go from there.

The Catholic writer and speaker Matthew Kelly has recently published a book about why he and others love being a Catholic, which we present to you as an Easter gift. He asked his contributing writers three questions, which he compiled in this book, and which I share with you as you reflect on what being a Catholic means to you. Here they are:

Why do YOU love being Catholic?

What is your favorite memory as a Catholic?

As a Catholic, what are your hopes for the future?

God loves new beginnings. He wants to give you a fresh start. Let Jesus resurrect you this Easter season. May you be filled with His Joy.

AMEN AND ALLELUIA!

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

Are you anxious? Do you worry? Then today's Divine Mercy message is for you! The Diary of St. Faustina, the visionary who gave us the Divine Mercy devotion wrote in her diary: "You should not worry too much about adversities. The world is not as powerful as it seems to be."

In recent years, the Divine Mercy message has become increasingly popular. Thanks to the efforts of St. John Paul II, many individuals are aware of the fact that Jesus appeared to St. Maria Faustina Kowalska (a Polish nun who died in 1938) and revealed the depth of His mercy. She was instructed to share the message that God loves us and that His mercy is greater than our sins. And, while this is great news and can fill us with tremendous hope, there is an aspect of the Divine Mercy message that is virtually unknown. The revelation given by Jesus to St. Faustina is not only directed toward hardened sinners, but also to those who live in fear. If you are looking for a way to break free from worry, the message of Divine Mercy is your answer!

There's no doubt that life can be challenging. At one point or another, everyone will deal with trials and tribulations. When these difficulties arise, it is perfectly acceptable to experience the emotion of fear. According to Church teaching, this feeling is not wrong or sinful. What can be problematic, however, is letting your fear lead to worry. Choosing to worry instead of turning to prayer exhibits a lack of trust in God's providence. It also presents an obstacle to holiness. In one of His conversations with St. Faustina, Jesus had this to say:

My child, know that the greatest obstacles to holiness are discouragement and an exaggerated anxiety. (Diary of St. Faustina, 1488)

Both discouragement and exaggerated anxiety arise when we fail to trust in the Lord's goodness and His desire to assist us. Addressing the idea of distrust, Jesus spoke the following words to St. Faustina:

How painfully distrust of My goodness wounds Me! Sins of distrust wound Me most painfully. (Diary, 1076)

My child, all of your sins have not wounded My Heart as painfully as your present lack of trust does. (Diary, 1486)

Although these messages are startling, there is no need for us to panic. The Lord had much more to say to St. Faustina about this topic and we would be wise to listen.

We often succumb to worry or discouragement because we live our lives as if everything depends on us. It doesn't! We should never forget that the all-loving and all-powerful Lord of the Universe wants to assist us with our daily struggles:

Why are you afraid? Do you think that I will not have enough omnipotence to support you? (Diary, 527)

Do not fear; I will not leave you alone. Do whatever you can in this matter; I will accomplish everything that is lacking in you. You know what is within your power to do; do that (Diary, 881).

You should not worry too much about adversities. The world is not as powerful as it seems to be. (Diary, 1643)

So far we've learned that our lack of trust hurts Jesus and that we never have to face our problems alone. No doubt these are important messages, but it's probably not enough. When problems arise and fear sets in, we need something more than reminders of why we shouldn't worry. We need a plan of action. Fortunately, Jesus provides us with exactly that.

Ask For Help!

While most of us know that Jesus instructs us to avoid worry (Matthew 6:25-34), we often fall short of our goal. One of the biggest challenges is that it can be extremely difficult to avoid doing something negative, unless we replace it with something positive.

Therefore, the "do not worry" message sometimes gets ignored because it's deemed to be impossible. When we do make an effort to grit our teeth and not worry, we often fail miserably. In another piece of advice to St. Faustina, Jesus reveals why this happens:

The cause of your falls is that you rely too much upon yourself and too little on me. (Diary, 1488)

There you have it. Instead of trying to give up worrying on your own, Jesus wants us to ask for His help. Unfortunately, we often hesitate to ask for fear of bothering Him.

What a mistake! Jesus specifically told St. Faustina that it pleases Him when we give Him our problems:

You will give me pleasure if you hand over to me all your troubles and griefs.
(Diary, 1485)

I am very pleased that you confide your fears to Me, my daughter: Speak to Me about everything in a completely simple and human way; by this you will give Me great joy. (Diary, 797)

For anyone who is prone to anxiety, the Divine Mercy message is literally an answered prayer. Jesus cares deeply about us and doesn't want us to suffer needlessly. He desires that we share all of our troubles with Him and ask for His assistance. By doing so, we give Him a chance to work in our lives.

I also encourage you to get into the habit of praying the words found at the bottom of the Divine Mercy image: "Jesus, I trust in You." These words don't represent a feeling. Rather, they represent a conscious decision to trust Jesus with all of your needs. It doesn't matter if your stomach feels queasy and your knees are shaking, the words will still be effective. Try it for yourself and see what happens.

At each Mass where I preside, when I receive Communion, as I place the chalice back on the altar, I say these words in Polish: *Jestem przy Tobie, pamiętam, czuwam. Jezu, ufam Tobie!* The first is taken from a Marion hymn and means, "I am with you, I remember, I stand watchful." The other is "Jesus, I trust in You." I don't know why I say them in Polish, the language of my ancestors. When Pope John Paul II was pope, I was told that God is Polish, or at least, He listens to Polish prayers first!

God knows your needs: He desires to bring you closer to Himself, and He will do so as long as you keep striving and stumbling towards Him. God is only as far away as we place Him and never as far away as we think. For it is in Him that we live and move and have our being. AMEN! ALLELUIA!