Open the floodgates of mercy

Divine Mercy Sunday 2017

Last year I accompanied the pilgrims to the World Youth Day in Krakov, Poland. One place of pilgrimage was the Divine Mercy shrine. I was looking forward to visiting the shrine for the second time. A Mass was being celebrated in the chapel when we arrived and there was a long line of people waiting to pray before the image of Divine Mercy. I hopped on the end of the line content to wait. Finally, I reached the kneeler before the image and knelt down. I was there in front of the image of Divine Mercy and I prayed to the Lord for His Divine Mercy to be bestowed on Tasmania. How much we need mercy to flow forth across this island. How much we need the mercy of the Lord to convert hearts back to him.

As I waited in the line I thought of the young Karol Wojtyła who, as a young man, was forced by the Nazis to work in a nearby chemical factory. On his way home from work each day he would visit this chapel and pray before the image of Divine Mercy. I wondered what he prayer emerged from his heart, given his own circumstances and those of his beloved country. I reflected how this image must have shaped his spiritual life at this critical time in his life.

The words at the bottom of the image must have deeply affected him: “Jesus I trust in you”. In the midst of the terrible darkness that had descended on Poland under Nazi occupation, the Polish people were considered nothing better than a labouring class. The intellectuals had all been eliminated. The Jewish people were rounded up and sent to the gas chambers. It was a dark and desperate time.

The young secret seminarian must have wondered what hope there was for himself and his people. He must have carried the burden of the suffering he witnessed all around him. He would have felt the deprivation of food and clothing, of any prospect for the future. These were extremely dark times.

Yet his heart must have been touched by the invocation to have trust in Jesus despite all signs to the contrary. I imagine him praying prayers of trust and abandonment in response to the image before him.

He would have known also about the revelations to the young Sr Faustina, just ten years before. These were promises from God that he would open up floodgates of mercy. He must have wondered how this would be possible in the situation in which he found himself. I sense the saint would have embraced these promises even though he did not know how they would be realised.

On the occasion of the dedication of the Shrine of Divine Mercy in 2002 Pope John Paul II said,

This proclamation, this confession of trust in the all-powerful love of God, is especially needed in our own time, when mankind is experiencing bewilderment in the face of many manifestations of evil. The invocation of God's mercy needs to rise up from the depth of hearts filled with suffering, apprehension, and uncertainty, and at the same time yearning for an infallible source of hope. That is why we have come here today, to this Shrine of Lagiewniki, in order to glimpse once more in Christ the face of the Father: "the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation" (2 Cor 1:3). With the eyes of our soul, we long to look into the eyes of the merciful Jesus, in order to find deep within his gaze the reflection of his inner life, as well as the light of grace which we have already received so often, and which God holds out to us anew each day and on the last day.

Listening to these words I cannot but imagine the young Karol Wojtyła praying before the image in the midst of the darkness that enshrouded his own life and that of the Polish people for so many decades, firstly under Nazism and then under Communism. Yet in the midst of this darkness arouse a spirit of hope and confidence. God’s mercy would triumph over the evil so evident around him. And the great saint of our time, John Paul II, would say to the world of today, sixty years later, mercy will still triumph over evil.

In the midst of the deepest of human suffering the God of Mercy can be found and experienced. Believing in this mercy, trusting in this mercy, sustained him and his people. So for us today a similar trust in Divine Mercy can sustain our personal lives and the hopes for our nation, Australia, and our island state of Tasmania.

The promises can now be read in the Diary of St Faustina which, as Archbishop of Krakov, the future pope approved for distribution among the faithful. We hear these words today and find in them a great consolation for us, and a great hope as we face our future. Words like these:

My daughter, tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy. 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. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day all the divine floodgates through which graces flow are opened. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or of angel, will be able to fathom it throughout all eternity. Everything that exists has come forth from the very depths of My most tender mercy. Every soul in its relation to Me will contemplate My love and mercy throughout eternity. The Feast of Mercy emerged from My very depths of tenderness. It is My desire that it be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. Mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of My Mercy.

These are extraordinary promises that are to find fulfilment on this Sunday each year, Divine Mercy Sunday.

The image of Divine Mercy, its caption, “Jesus I trust in you”, and the Diary of St Faustina contain a message which remains vital for our personal lives and for our nation of Australia, and to our State of Tasmania.

We, in our turn, must become agents of the message of Divine Mercy to a world that is losing its way. We face the future with a confidence born of these revelations. We know deep within that Mercy will triumph over evil.

Archbishop Julian Porteous

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