

St. Faustina: The Apostle of Mercy For the New Millennium

His Holiness Pope John Paul II was deeply devoted to the Divine Mercy. He said that it was the key to his pontificate. It is a devotion closely linked to Poland and the devotion he had to Sr. Maria Faustina who began spreading devotion to Divine Mercy.¹ Karol Wojtyła grew up with the spirituality of Sr. Faustina carrying over into his seminary formation. As Pope John Paul II, he officially established the Divine Mercy for the entire Church in the canonization of St. Faustina on April 30, 2000, the first Saint of the Jubilee, recognized by the Pope as the great Apostle of Divine Mercy in our time. Pope John Paul II proclaimed that from then on in the liturgical calendar, the Second Sunday of Easter would be called Divine Mercy Sunday, the same day of St. Faustina's canonization.² Following her canonization, the devotion of Divine Mercy began to spread especially among the laity, now taking the form of an apostolic and social movement with millions of members world-wide.³

St. Faustina started her life as Helena Kowalska. She was born in 1905 to a poor peasant and very religious family in Glogowiec, Poland. She lived for thirty-three years until her death in 1938 in Krakow, Poland. She had a minimal third grade education. Helen was an ordinary woman described as quiet, humble, obedient, kind, contemplative, and cheerful. In July of 1924, she went to Warsaw to apply to enter a cloistered convent, the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. The superior assessed her as “no one” special.” On her second application, she was admitted into this religious community.⁴ In the convent, she entered into an extraordinary mystical relationship with Jesus and the Blessed Mother centering her interior life on the spiritual mystery of Divine Mercy. As Sr. Faustina died to the world and uplifted herself heart and soul to God in intense prayer “the years of her religious life abounded with supernatural graces, such as revelations, visions, hidden stigmata, participation in Christ's passion, as well as the rare gift of mystical betrothal and marriage.”⁵ Sr. Faustina also had exceptional sensitivity to human misery. She performed spiritual acts of mercy for neighbors through prayer. In her *Diary*, she wrote: **“I feel tremendous pain when I see the sufferings of others. All these sufferings reverberate in my heart. I carry their anguish that it even physically destroys me”** (1039).⁶

Her experiences and conversations in union with God, Jesus, and the Blessed Mother are

expressed in her *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina: Divine Mercy in My Soul* written in the form of a journal during the last four years of her life as requested by God.⁷ In the following *Diary* excerpts, God, manifested in Jesus, the Savior, expresses his mission of mercy as a Father of love and mercy for the world appointing Sr. Faustina as His messenger of mercy: **“Today I am sending with My mercy to the whole world. I do not want to punish aching mankind but I desire to heal it, hugging it to my merciful heart (...) before the Day of Justice I am sending the day of Mercy (Diary, 1588.⁸ You are the secretary of my mercy. I have chosen you for that office in this and the next life” (Diary 1605).⁹ “Your task is to write down everything that I have made known to you about My mercy, for the benefit of those who by reading these things will be comforted in their souls and will have the courage to approach Me” (Diary, 1693).¹⁰ Sr. Faustina’s role in God’s mission was to deliver new prayers and forms of devotion to the Divine Mercy. To assist in this devotion, the image of the Merciful Jesus was revealed to Sr. Faustina in a vision on February 22, 1931. Her *Diary* states:**

“after a while, Jesus said to me, paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: “Jesus, I trust in You.” I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and throughout the world. I promise that the soul that venerates this image will not perish. I also promise victory over its enemies already on Earth, especially at the hour of death “ (47-48).¹¹ In the *Diary* she writes: “By means of this image, I shall be granting many graces, so let every soul have access to it” (570).¹² In response to this divine request, I respectfully make the recommendation to Campus Ministry that our campus chapel secure a painting of this sacred image following Jesus’ directive as revealed to Sr. Faustina. This image of the Divine Mercy is intimately connected to Christ’s Paschal mystery where God’s revealed his love for humanity. The Lord asked for a special prayer to be said in the presence of this image at three o’clock, but especially on Friday, the hour and day of His death on the Cross. This Chaplet is to be recited with rosary beads. Each day at the hour of Divine Mercy the faithful across the world pray the Chaplet as recorded in St. Faustina’s *Diary*. My second respectful suggestion to Campus Ministry is that the Chaplet be scheduled as a prayer to be said regularly in our campus chapel. St. Faustina resources: divinemercymatters.org ¹³

¹ See George Kosicki, C.S.B., *John Paul II: The Great Mercy Pope* (Marian Press: Stockbridge, MA, 2011) for discussion of how Karol Wojtyla was fascinated by the message of mercy that arose in Poland between two World Wars.

² Cardinal Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (Paulist Press: New York/Mahwah, NJ., 2013), 8.

³ Sister M. Nazareta, O.L.M. and Sister M. Caterina Esselen, O.L.M., *The Spirituality of Saint Faustina: The Road to Union with God* (The Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy: Warsaw, Poland, 2000), 100-101.

⁴ See Sister Maria Faustina Kowalska, O.L.M., *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul*, 2nd ed. (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 1987), for a chronology of events in the life of Saint Maria Faustina – Helen Kowalska, pp. xxix-xliv. The *Diary* itself consists of six notebooks that record the last four years of her life from 1934-1938. It includes a section titled “My preparation for Holy Communion” written by Sr. Faustina. The last sections of the *Diary* include “Endnotes,” “Abbreviations Used in the Endnotes,” and a “Thematic Index.” The *Diary* concludes with a pictorial description of St. Faustina’s life and the historical development of the Divine Mercy devotion.

⁵ Nazareta and Esselen, 9.

⁶ Kowalska, 394.

⁷ More than 800,000 copies of St. Faustina’s *Diary* have been sold and it has been translated into more than twenty languages. The *Diary* was translated from Polish into English by Adam and Danuta Pasicki, a couple in Poland. It made its way to the United States to the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception in Stockbridge, MA for further editing in terms of clarity of expression, readability, and correct English and grammar usage. The Polish *Diary* is the official text. However, The Marian Fathers have made every effort to retain the various shades of meaning implied in the theological and spiritual terms used by St. Faustina in the English edition. The original Polish *Diary* was published in 1981. The English edition was first published by the Marian Fathers in 1987. The Marian Fathers published the third edition with revisions (32nd printing) in 2016.

⁸ Kowalska, 563-564.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 570.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 599.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 241-242.

¹³ The National Shrine of Divine Mercy is operated under the auspices of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the St. Stanislaus Kostka Province located on Eden Hill, Stockbridge, MA. They are the promoters of St. Faustina. Resources including books, articles, audios, videos, images, the Chaplet, and devotionals can be obtained online at www.divinemercymatters.org and numerous other websites. The Marian Fathers are presently undertaking a campaign to declare St. Faustina a Doctor of the Church.

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