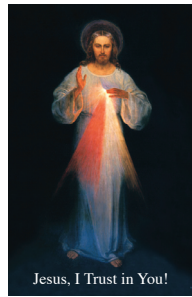


Marians of the Immaculate Conception and EWTN presents

The Divine Mercy Cenacle



LESSON ELEVEN

The Mercy Pope

The late Holy Father, John Paul II, was an extraordinary man for countless people from every nation, culture and religious affiliation. We have seen this appreciation and affection coming, not only from the Catholics worldwide, but also from the secular media, which for weeks after his death paid great tribute to this special human being who worked tirelessly for the spiritual and material betterment of millions, defending their freedom and God-given dignity. Yet at the heart of his mission was the proclamation of the Gospel message of God's unbounded mercy and love manifested in the Lord Jesus.

John Paul II gave witness to this fact in 1997 when at the tomb of [Sister] Maria Faustina Kowalska he said: "The message of Divine Mercy has always been very close and precious to me. It is as though history has written it in the tragic experience of World War II. In those difficult years, this message was a particular support and an inexhaustible source of hope, not only for those living in Krakow, but for the entire nation. This was also my personal experience, which I carried with me to the See of Peter and which, in a certain sense, forms the image of this pontificate. I thank Divine Providence because I was able to contribute personally to carrying out Christ's will, by instituting the Feast of Divine Mercy [in Poland]. Here, close to the remains of [Sister] Faustina, I thank God for the gift of her beatification. I pray unceasingly that God may have 'mercy on us and on the whole world.'"

1. Pope John Paul II and Marians' special mission

John Paul II was very special to the Marians. What forged this special relationship was a deep understanding of the importance of proclaiming the message of God's mercy to all humanity, knowing that "mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to God's mercy" (Diary 300). Thus the late Holy Father encouraged the Marians of the Immaculate Conception, gathered at their General Chapter, to always "be apostles of Divine Mercy under the maternal and loving guidance of Mary".

Our Lady, who has proclaimed God's mercy from generation to generation, has likewise guided John Paul II to make this message better known in the Church and in the world through the words of his second encyclical "Rich in Mercy" promulgated in 1980. John Paul II, not proclaimed, but, in a unique way, lived the message of mercy, when he forgave his attempted assassin, and when he patiently embraced his sufferings in union with Christ.

2. What were some other accomplishments that earned John Paul the title: "The Pope of Divine Mercy?"

1) John Paul II proclaimed the importance of the Divine Mercy message for the world throughout his pontificate. For example, only a year after he published the encyclical "Rich in Mercy," and several months after the attempt on his life, the Holy Father visited the Shrine of Merciful Love in Collevaleza, Italy, and said that spreading the Message of Mercy

was his "special task" assigned to him by God's Providence.

2) When Maureen Digan, suffering from an incurable disease was healed through the intercession of Sr. Faustina, and Sr. Faustina's heroic virtues were recognized by the Holy See, it was John Paul II who beatified her on the Second Sunday of Easter in 1993. On that day speaking to the hundreds of thousands gathered in Rome he said:

"O Faustina, how extraordinary your life is! Precisely you, the poor and simple daughter of Mazovia... were chosen by Christ to remind people of this great mystery of Divine Mercy! You bore this mystery within yourself, leaving this world after a short life, filled with suffering. However, at the same time, this mystery has become a prophetic reminder to the world... Her mission continues and is yielding astonishing fruit. It is truly marvelous how her devotion to the merciful Jesus is spreading in our contemporary world and gaining so many human hearts! This is undoubtedly a sign of the times - a sign of our 20th century. The balance of this century which is now ending, in addition to the advances which have often surpassed those of preceding eras, presents a deep restlessness and fear of the future. Where, if not in The Divine Mercy, can the world find refuge and the light of hope? Believers understand that perfectly."

3) In response to the request of the Polish Bishops, the Holy Father approved in 1994 the official celebration of the Second Sunday of Easter as "Divine Mercy Sunday" for Poland. Subsequently Bishops of the Philippines and Russia made such requests and they were also granted this privilege.

4) In 1995 Our Holy Father chose to celebrate publicly the Divine Mercy Sunday on the Second Sunday of Easter in the Holy Spirit Church in Sassia near the Vatican manifesting thus his personal support and approval for this liturgical celebration.

5) When Fr. Pytel, a priest of the Archdiocese of Baltimore was miraculously healed through Blessed Faustina, it was John Paul II who canonized her on April 30, 2000 as the first Saint of the New Millennium. In his homily, the Holy Father made this proclamation regarding St. Faustina and the Divine Mercy message:

"Today my joy is truly great in presenting the life and witness of Sr. Faustina Kowalska to the whole Church as a gift of God for our time. By Divine Providence, the life of this humble daughter of Poland was completely linked with the history of the 20th century, the century we have just left behind. In fact, it was between the First and Second World Wars that Christ entrusted His message of mercy to her. Those who remember, who were witnesses and participants in the events of those years and the horrible sufferings they caused for millions of people, know well how necessary was the message of mercy.

Jesus told Sr. Faustina: 'Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to My mercy.'" (Diary, 300) John Paul continued - "It is not a new message but can be considered a gift of special enlightenment that helps us to relive the Gospel of Easter more intensely, to offer it as a ray of light to the men and women of our time. What will the years ahead bring us? - We are not given to know. - But the light of Divine Mercy, which the Lord in a way wished to return to the world through Sr. Faustina's charism, will illumine the way for the men and women of the third millennium. - Sr. Faustina's canonization has a particular eloquence: by this act I intend today to pass this message on to the new millennium."

It was also during this Eucharistic celebration that the Holy Father proclaimed Second Sunday of Easter as the Divine Mercy Sunday for the Universal Church.

6) On August 18, 2002, at the Divine Mercy Shrine in Krakow-Lagiewniki, Poland John Paul II entrusted the whole world to the Divine Mercy.

3. Pope John Paul II declared the Second Sunday of Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday. What are some of the promises regarding this Feast Day?

Jesus said to St. Faustina: "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 are open all the divine floodgates through which graces flow. Let

no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. (699)

Divine Mercy Sunday is a day of great grace to all who approach the fount of mercy and receive Holy Communion. In God's Providence, Pope John Paul II died on the vigil of Divine Mercy Sunday. At 8:00 P.M., Italian time, Archbishop Stanislaus Dziwisz celebrated the Divine Mercy Sunday Vigil Mass for the Holy Father at his bedside with the participation of three other prelates. Pope John Paul II received Holy Communion and then peacefully died at 9:37 P.M. that evening. By receiving Holy Communion on that day, John Paul II obtained the grace of complete forgiveness of sins and punishment, in accordance with the promise made by Jesus to all peoples and nations.

In summary, Pope John Paul II's legacy will be one of a holy, merciful father guiding his family — the whole Church of God — in truth and enabling all to cross the threshold of hope to God's infinite and unfathomable mercy.

4. Pope Benedict XVI gives witness to the message of Divine Mercy

In his first homily, Pope Benedict XVI said, "Beloved, this profound gratitude for a gift of the Divine Mercy prevails in my heart despite everything. And I consider it in fact as a special grace obtained for me by my venerable Predecessor, John Paul II. I seem to feel his strong hand gripping mine; I seem to see his smiling eyes and to hear his words, addressed at this moment particularly to me: "Be not afraid!""

* References without a source listed with the number are taken from the *Dairy of Saint Maria Faustina*.



Marians of the Immaculate Conception

To learn more about The Divine Mercy message and devotion, the Marians of the Immaculate Conception, and Eucharistic Apostles of The Divine Mercy visit us online at www.thedivinemercy.org or call 1-800-462-7426.