



## INTRODUCTION

### A. Purpose of the Guide

Since 1941, the Marians of the Immaculate Conception have been promoting the authentic Divine Mercy message and devotion from their apostolic center located at the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. In 1993, Pope John Paul II gave the Marian Congregation a special mandate: “Be Apostles of Divine Mercy under the maternal and loving guidance of Mary.” It is in this spirit that we provide this Guide to enhance the celebration of the Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday.

*Celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday in Your Parish: A Practical Guide for Parishes* is intended not only to provide a summary of the teaching and directives of the Church regarding Divine Mercy Sunday but also to offer practical suggestions for making the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday truly festive, meaningful, and spiritually enriching.

The Guide is intended to answer questions of pastors and laypeople: “What is Divine Mercy Sunday? How should it be celebrated? What options can be considered proper to make this Sunday a spiritually enriching experience?”

The Guide identifies very clearly the extraordinary spiritual benefits and blessings offered to the faithful who celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday. These graces, such as the Church’s offer of a Divine Mercy Sunday plenary indulgence and Christ’s promise of complete forgiveness of sin and punishment due to sin, are made available only on Divine Mercy Sunday.

First and foremost, it should be noted that the Divine Mercy Sunday graces flow from the Eucharist and its worthy reception and not from particular devotional practices. It is the living Lord, who is truly present in the Eucharist, who pours out special graces of regeneration on those who unite themselves to Him in Holy Communion on this particular Sunday.

The Guide offers special resources for priests who wish to learn more about Divine Mercy from Sacred Scripture, official Church documents, and from the *Diary of St Faustina*. Additional information is available on the Marians’ website: [www.thedivinemercy.org](http://www.thedivinemercy.org).

*Celebrating Divine Mercy in your Parish* offers a useful resource to pastoral ministers and those who coordinate Divine Mercy Sunday celebrations. Specifically, it addresses how to incorporate properly the Divine Mercy forms of devotion into Eucharistic devotions, such as Holy Hours, Expositions and Benedictions. While not required, or essential, these forms of devotion, such as veneration of the Divine Mercy image and praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet, are very valuable in leading the faithful to a greater appreciation and acceptance of the graces available on Divine Mercy Sunday.

We provide a questionnaire and look forward to receiving your feedback, which will help us enhance future editions of *Celebrating Divine Mercy in your Parish*. Also, visit our website ([www.thedivinemercy.org/guide](http://www.thedivinemercy.org/guide)) for the latest news and information or to sign up for free updates by email.



## B. The Second Sunday of Easter's other official name: Divine Mercy Sunday

"Divine Mercy Sunday" is another name or a title given by the Holy See to the Second Sunday of Easter.

The title "Second Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday" was first approved by the Holy See in 1995 for the use of the Church in Poland. Subsequently, upon request, the Church in Russia and the Church in the Philippines received a similar provision. Then, acceding to the wishes of the Christian faithful from all over world, on April 30, 2000, Pope John Paul II, declared that "this Second Sunday of Easter ... from now on throughout the Church will also be called 'Divine Mercy Sunday.'"

The Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in its decree issued on May 5, 2000 formalized this declaration and by its inclusion in the Roman Missal made it binding throughout the universal Church. (The full text of the decree is found in Appendix 1. A.)

The decree simply states: "The Supreme Pontiff John Paul II has graciously determined that in the Roman Missal, after the title 'Second Sunday of Easter,' there shall henceforth be added the appellation 'or Divine Mercy Sunday' and has prescribed that the texts assigned for that day in the same Missal and the Liturgy of the Hours of the Roman Rite are always to be used for the liturgical celebration of this Sunday."

What was Pope John Paul II's and the Congregation's reason for acceding to the wishes of the faithful and giving the Second Sunday of Easter an additional designation "Divine Mercy Sunday?" The Christian faithful, according to the decree, wished to praise the "merciful and gracious Lord (Ps. 111:4), who, out of great love with which He loved us (Eph. 2:4) and [out of] unspeakable goodness, gave us His Only-begotten Son as our Redeemer, so that through the Death and Resurrection of this Son He might open the way to eternal life for the human race, and that the adopted children who receive His mercy within His temple might lift up His praise to the ends of the earth." They also wished to "praise that Divine Mercy in divine worship, particularly in the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, in which God's loving kindness especially shines forth."

By giving this additional designation to the last day of the Octave of Easter, the Holy Father and the Congregation for the Divine Worship fulfilled the wishes of the Christian faithful, while at the same time safeguarding the true meaning and import of Easter.

The original designation, **Second Sunday of Easter**, continues to proclaim, with all its splendor, the Paschal Mystery of Christ's dying and rising, His victory over sin and death, and His gift of new and everlasting life. The added designation, **Divine Mercy Sunday**, points to the inscrutable mystery of God, the mystery of Divine Mercy. It unveils the truth that "the Paschal Mystery is the culmination of this revealing and effecting of [Divine] Mercy, and that the paschal Christ is the definitive incarnation of Mercy, its living sign ... [and] its inexhaustible source" (John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 8,7).

This added designation directs the hearts of humanity to God's boundless mercy and love "manifested in all its richness by Christ, our Risen Lord. It proclaims with joy and confidence that "merciful and gracious is the Lord (Ps. 111:4), who, out of great love with which He loved



us (Eph. 2:4) ... gave us His Only-begotten Son as our Redeemer, so that through the Death and Resurrection of this Son He might open the way to eternal life for the human race, and that the adopted children who receive His mercy within His temple might lift up His praise to the ends of the earth." (Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments)

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, in his celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday on April 23, 2006, attested, not only to the key significance of this Sunday's celebration, but also to the unity of the Second Sunday of Easter and Divine Mercy Sunday when he said: "On this the Second Sunday of Easter and Divine Mercy Sunday, may God's blessing of reconciliation and peace be with you all." Summarizing John Paul II's understanding of "the mystery of God's merciful love," which was at "the center of his Pontificate" and, in some way "summed up his Magisterium," Pope Benedict XVI underscored the importance of this message with unmistakable clarity: "the cult of Divine Mercy is not a secondary devotion but an integral dimension of a Christian's faith and prayer."\*

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\*The meaning of Pope Benedict XVI's summary is even clearer in the original German: "The cult ["Verehrung" – meaning worship, devotion] of Divine Mercy is not a secondary devotion ["zweitrangige Frömmigkeitspraxis" that is, "secondary, or second rate devotion or a pious practice] but an integral dimension of the faith and the prayer of a Christian."