

# Catholic

## UPDATE

KEEPING CATHOLICS  
UP TO DATE SINCE 1973

© 2026 LIGUORI  
PUBLICATIONS,  
A REDEMPTORIST MINISTRY.  
800-325-9521  
LIGUORI.ORG  
PHOTOCOPYING PROHIBITED.

C2604A

APRIL 2026

### Catholic Traditions: WHAT WE DO AND WHY WE DO IT



## Divine Mercy in Our Time

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS  
OF SAINT FAUSTINA

FR. JAMES WHITE, CSSR



### From Helena Kowalska to Saint Maria Faustina

Through her childhood and the early part of her religious life, the Lord was preparing St. Maria Faustina of the Blessed Sacrament to become his apostle of Divine Mercy. Helena Kowalska was born in Poland on August 25, 1905. She was the third of ten children in a poor but devout Catholic family. As she was born during a cholera outbreak, her parents, Stanislaus and Marianna Kowalski, were eager to have Helena baptized. Father Joseph Chodynski poured the holy waters of baptism over Helena's little head at St. Casimir Church in Świnice Warckie just two days later. That same baptismal font is still standing today.

Helena loved to go to Mass. The girls in the family took turns attending Sunday Mass because there was only one Sunday dress to be shared. As a small child, Helena reported seeing bright lights during her night prayers. About her childhood, she wrote in her *Diary*:

*The love of God was imparted to me for the first time and filled my little heart; and the Lord gave me understanding of divine things (Diary, §1404).*

At age sixteen, she begged to be allowed to leave school and help her struggling parents provide for her younger siblings. She went to work as a servant in a neighboring city, but she soon resigned after a fainting spell,

even though a doctor said she was healthy.

Helena told her parents that she wanted to enter religious life, but her father would not give her permission because he felt she was too young. She took another post as a servant and made friends with a circle of young women. At a dance, she experienced a vision of Christ's suffering that touched her conscience and revived her desire to be a nun.

In 1925, Helena entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, taking the name Faustina. She served as a cook, gardener, and doorkeeper in Krakow and several other community convents. The first years were difficult for Sr. Faustina. Prayer was dry, and she felt abandoned by God. She thought that God was not pleased with her. Yet, at the same time, her hunger and thirst for God was becoming more intense. She was being purified and growing in her fiery love for God and for the human race, especially for sinners.

After years of persevering in prayer despite the lack of consolation, during prayer one day, she experienced the flame of divine love embracing her, and she was filled with light and warmth. The inner darkness was gone.

### The Image

On February 22, 1931, Sr. Faustina was given a new and life-changing vision of Christ. She saw him wearing a white robe and raising his right hand in blessing, with his left hand resting on his heart. From his heart flowed two rays of light. Jesus told her,

*Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the prayer Jezuu, ufam Tobie (Jesus, I trust in you).*

Sister Faustina could not paint and struggled to

convince her incredulous sisters about the truth of her vision. Ultimately, she persuaded her spiritual director, Fr. Michael Sopocko, that the vision was real. He found an artist to create the painting, which was named *The Divine Mercy* and shown to the world for the first time on April 28, 1935.

Father Sopocko advised Sr. Faustina to record her visions in a diary. She obeyed and wrote that Jesus said the following to her:

*Apostle of my mercy, proclaim to the whole world my unfathomable mercy. Do not be discouraged by the difficulties you encounter in proclaiming my mercy. These difficulties that affect you so painfully are needed for your sanctification and as evidence that this work is mine. My daughter, be diligent in writing down every sentence I tell you concerning my mercy, because this is meant for a great number of souls who will profit from it (Diary §1142).*

She devoted the rest of her life to spreading the message of Divine Mercy



Tomb of St. Faustina, Chapel of the Miraculous Image of the Merciful Jesus, Shrine of Divine Mercy, Kraków, Poland.

PHOTO BY FR. JOSEPH E. WORMEK

and the growth of popular devotion to it. On October 5, 1938, she died of tuberculosis. She was thirty-three years old. Pope St. John Paul II canonized her on April 30, 2000. *Divine Mercy in My Soul: Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska* has been translated into many languages.

## Divine Mercy Sunday

Sr. Faustina wrote that she heard Jesus say to her,

*I want this image, which you will paint with a brush, to be solemnly blessed on the first Sunday after Easter; that Sunday is to be the feast of mercy (Diary §49).*

On the second Sunday of Easter of the Jubilee Year 2000, at the Mass for the canonization of St. Faustina Kowalska, Pope St. John Paul II proclaimed to the world that “from now on, throughout the Church, this Sunday will be called Divine Mercy Sunday.” Pope St. John Paul II had actively promoted the message of St. Faustina. In his 1980 encyclical on God’s mercy, *Dives in Misericordia*,



Stained glass window with inscription: “Jesus, I trust in you.”

Shrine of the Birth and Baptism of St. Faustina, Świnice Warckie, Poland.

PHOTO BY FR. JOSEPH E. WORMEK

(Rich in Mercy), he developed a scriptural and doctrinal basis for our faith in the mercy of God and the particular necessity for mercy in modern troubled times. He wrote,

*The present-day mentality, more perhaps than that of people in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy, and in fact tends to exclude from life and to remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy (DM, §2).*

## The Chaplet

During a time of prayer, Sr. Faustina saw a powerful storm approaching that would have destroyed the city. She was inspired to pray a prayer she had never prayed before. As she prayed, the storm lost its destructive power and disappeared. This prayer has become known as The Chaplet of Divine Mercy. In several places in her *Diary*, she writes that Jesus pressed upon her the importance of praying this prayer for the dying.

**Step 1:** Using the traditional rosary beads, the Chaplet prayers begin with the Sign of the Cross, one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and the Apostles’ Creed.

**Step 2:** On the Our Father beads, say the following:

*Eternal Father, I offer you the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of your dearly beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.*

**Step 3:** On the ten Hail Mary beads, say the following:

*For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.*

(Repeat Steps 2 and 3 for all five decades.)

**Step 4:** Conclude with:

*Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world. (Pray this three times.)*

## The Hour

Another key aspect of the Divine Mercy devotion is the hour of prayer when Jesus wants us to remember his death on the cross. Sister Faustina

heard Jesus’ voice say to her:

*“At three o’clock, implore my mercy, especially for sinners; and, if only for a brief moment, immerse yourself in my passion, particularly in my abandonment at the moment of agony. This is the hour of great mercy for the whole world” (Diary, §1320).*

## The Novena

The fifth key aspect of the Divine Mercy Devotion is the novena, begun on Good Friday and prayed every day until Divine Mercy Sunday. From the *Diary*:

*The Lord told me to say this chaplet for nine days before the feast of mercy. It is to begin on Good Friday. By this novena, I will grant every possible grace to souls” (Diary §796).*

For each of the nine days, our Lord gave Saint Faustina a different intention:

- all humankind, especially sinners
- the souls of priests and religious
- all devout and faithful souls
- those who do not believe in God and those who do not yet know Jesus
- the souls who have separated themselves from the Church
- the meek and humble souls and the souls of little children
- the souls who especially venerate and glorify his mercy
- the souls detained in purgatory
- souls who have become lukewarm

It is common to add one’s own intentions.

*I desire that during these nine days you bring souls to the fountain of my mercy, that they may draw therefrom strength and refreshment and whatever grace they have need of in the hardships of life, and especially at the hour of death (Diary, §1209).*

## Mercy Is the Answer

All three popes since Pope St. John Paul II have emphasized mercy as the answer to the troubles in this world. Pope Benedict XVI, celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday, proclaimed, “It is mercy that puts an end to evil. In it is

expressed God's special nature—his holiness, the power of truth and love" (Homily, April 15, 2007).

Pope Francis also called on the world to embrace mercy as a way of meeting all those placed on our path and a way of life in general: "Having received mercy, let us now become merciful. For if love is only about us, faith becomes arid, barren and sentimental. Without others, faith becomes disembodied. Without works of mercy, it dies (cf. James 2:17). Dear brothers and sisters, let us be renewed by the peace, forgiveness and wounds of the merciful Jesus. Let us ask for the grace to become *witnesses of mercy*. Only in this way will our faith be alive and our lives unified. Only in this way will we proclaim the gospel of God, which is the gospel of mercy" (Homily, April 11, 2021).

Pope Leo XIV, at the Mass that marked the end of the Jubilee Year of Hope, said, "God challenges the existing order, for he has plans that inspire his prophets even today. God is determined to rescue us from both old and new forms of slavery. He involves young and old, poor and rich, men and women, saints and sinners in his works of mercy, and in the wonders of his justice. Although the Lord does so quietly, he already makes his kingdom sprout forth everywhere in the world" (Homily, January 6, 2026).

And in his message for the fifty-ninth World-Day of Peace, Pope Leo spoke with urgency, begging believers to be witnesses to mercy: "The peace of the risen Jesus is unarmed, because his was an unarmed struggle in the midst of concrete historical, political, and social circumstances. Christians must together bear prophetic witness to this novelty, mindful of the tragedies in which they have too often been complicit. The great parable of the Last Judgment invites all Christians to act with mercy in this awareness (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). In doing so, they will find brothers and sisters at their side who, in different ways, have

listened to the pain of others and freed themselves inwardly from the deception of violence" (Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 2026).

Now, as much as in times past, the world needs the witness of disciples who embrace and practice mercy in their daily lives. Saint Faustina wrote, "Tell aching mankind to snuggle close to my merciful Heart, and I will fill it with peace" (*Diary*, §1074). Humankind is aching. With St. Maria Faustina of the Blessed Sacrament, we can each become a sign of God's merciful love.



Confessional where for many years every week St. Faustina went to confession Shrine of the Birth and Baptism of St. Faustina in Świnice Warckie, Poland.

PHOTO BY FR. JOSEPH E. WORMEK

## Sacrament of Penance

On Divine Mercy Sunday the Church proclaims God's boundless mercy and love, inviting us to examine our lives, seek his forgiveness in the sacrament of penance, and become instruments of that same mercy by forgiving others.

### From the Gospel on Divine Mercy Sunday

*Jesus said to [his disciples], "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:21-23).*

All of us sin, and all of us stand in need of forgiveness. Ours is a God who heals, a physician who binds up our wounded hearts, a loving parent who forgives and embraces the child who has wandered off. How could we not want this for ourselves?

**Fr. James White, CSsR**, is the local superior of the St. Clement Redemptorist community in St. Louis. He has served in retreat ministry at the Spiritual Life Center in Wichita and the Redemptorist Retreat Center in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, and in parish ministry at Our Lady of Perpetual Help parish in Kansas City, Missouri.

This issue of *Catholic Update* includes adapted material from "Why Catholics Celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday" by Rev. Alfred McBride, OPraem (C0803A) and "Reconciliation: Coming Home to God" by Fr. Kenneth Brown (C1602A).