

Divine Mercy Sunday

On the second Sunday of Easter, 2000, during the canonization Mass of Sr. Faustina Kowalska, Pope John Paul II proclaimed the second Sunday of Easter “Divine Mercy Sunday” for Catholics throughout the world. In doing so, he called on Catholics to pray for the experience of God’s mercy, which is particularly featured in the scripture readings of the Mass for the day. St. Kowalska was a Polish nun who lived in the early part of the 20th Century and had a number of personal spiritual experiences. As others learned of her experiences and writings, pious practices and popular devotions developed around them, first in Poland, then worldwide. Being Polish himself, Pope John Paul II was well familiar with these private revelations and devotions throughout his life, and they were personally meaningful to him. It was out of this background that he promoted the Divine Mercy devotion for worldwide observance. While Pope John Paul II formally and officially proclaimed Divine Mercy Sunday, and encouraged the Divine Mercy Devotion, he did not spell out exact details of how it was to be observed. The development of how it is has come to be practiced throughout the Church is a good example of how such popular devotions are the fruit of the Holy Spirit working among all the faithful of the Church, rather than just through its officials and hierarchy. I find what Fr. Alfred McBride writes about this devotion helpful: “The revelations experienced by St. Faustina were of a private nature, which are not essential to anyone’s acceptance of the Catholic faith. These types of visions and revelations are described in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: *“Throughout the ages, there have been many ‘private’ revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church, though they do not belong to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ’s definitive Revelation, but to help us live more fully by it... The religious sense of the Christian people has always found expression in various forms of piety surrounding the Church’s sacramental life, such as veneration of relics, visits to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, processions, the stations of the cross, religious dances, the rosary, medals, and so on. These expressions of piety extend the liturgical life of the Church, but do not replace it.”* We see that devotion to divine mercy in no way replaces any of our rich liturgical traditions. The Divine Mercy devotion fosters the virtue of trust in God’s mercy that finds its fulfillment in the liturgy of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. Popular piety animates the faith that make participation in the sacraments more vital and fruitful.”

(<http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/JohnPaulII/DivineMercy.asp>)