

Spend a year on a spiritual pilgrimage with St. Faustina. Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle's *52 Weeks with Saint Faustina* is an enriching gift.

— Fr. Michael E. Gaitley, MIC, author of *33 Days to Morning Glory*

52 WEEKS WITH SAINT FAUSTINA

A YEAR OF
GRACE AND MERCY



Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle

Acclaim for
52 Weeks with Saint Faustina

Born out of a desire for everyone to experience the depths of God's infinite love and mercy, and inspired by the incredible life of St. Faustina, Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle offers a weekly, life-changing spiritual pilgrimage that will leave you transformed by the tender and merciful Heart of Jesus. You will discover in these pages that Divine Mercy is a source of human flourishing and a salve of true healing. *52 Weeks with Saint Faustina* will help you to trust in the power of the Lord's loving mercy that fills our hearts and quenches our soul's thirst for God's grace, peace, and joy.

— **Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers**, author,
*Father Augustine Tolton: The Slave Who Became
the First African-American Priest*

Saint Faustina is arguably as important to this century as St. Therese was to the last. Both women were "little" in the eyes of the world, but now loom large in afterlife. Read this book to know what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

— **Mike Aquilina**, EWTN host and author,
A History of the Church in 100 Objects

I'm so impressed by this labor of love from Donna-Marie. Always deeply spiritual, she is also practical, and makes things applicable for the ordinary reader. Here she hones in on fascinating biographical anecdotes from St. Faustina's life and pulls valuable spiritual lessons from them for us to apply in our own lives. At a time when the world and the Church are leaving many feeling a bit helpless, the call to individual holiness is the perfect answer! No matter what your state in life, *52 Weeks with Saint Faustina* will be a great tool to help you draw closer to the God of mercy and allow Him to transform your life.

— **Vinny Flynn**, internationally known speaker,
musician, and best-selling author of
7 Secrets of the Eucharist

Saint Faustina is one of my favorite saints. Her intercession has been extremely powerful in my life and ministry. I believe Jesus wants you to have the friendship and intercession of St. Faustina, as well. After all, it's not a bad idea to be friends with the "secretary of God's mercy," as our Lord called her. *52 Weeks with Saint Faustina* will help you grow in boundless trust in Divine Mercy, and acquiring the friendship of St. Faustina will be a great blessing in your life!

— **Very Rev. Fr. Donald Calloway, MIC**
author, *Champions of the Rosary: The History and Heroes
of a Spiritual Weapon*

The message of Divine Mercy is one that every individual should know, understand, and live. In *52 Weeks with Saint Faustina*, Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle helps us to do just that. One of the best books on Divine Mercy I have encountered!

— **Gary Zimak**, Catholic speaker and author

52 WEEKS
WITH SAINT
FAUSTINA

A YEAR OF
GRACE AND MERCY

Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle

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Dedication

With love for my children: Justin, Chaldea,
Jessica, Joseph, and Mary-Catherine; and my
grandchildren: Shepherd and Leo.

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FOREWORD

Can I make a bet with you? I bet that if you take up this book and spend 52 weeks with St. Faustina, these weekly meditations will change your life.

Why am I so confident about that? Because Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle, a great Marian Helper, popular author, and EWTN show host, has created about as faithful and as thorough a presentation on the spirituality and the writings of St. Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938), the Secretary and Apostle of Divine Mercy, as I've ever read. It's a deep dive into the life and writings of one of the greatest mystics in the history of the Church, a religious sister who was given to us by God specifically for the times we are living in today.

After all, St. Faustina died just before World War II; not in the Middle Ages; not in the time of the apostles; nothing like that. She's a modern saint whose teachings are timeless, and who has helped bring about more miracles than most other saints. How? She shared the Divine Mercy message and devotion with the world.

I've been preaching and practicing the Divine Mercy message and devotion for more than a decade now, especially since I joined the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception. I've met people whose lives have been transformed by their encounter with St. Faustina in her work the *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul*, and with the Divine Mercy message and devotion. I've heard stories of miracles such as people being healed of incurable illnesses. I've been told about stubborn lapsed Catholics and resistant non-Christians finding their way to church, coming to the regular practice of the Sacraments, and changing their lives forever. I've seen how powerful it is to preach the Divine

Mercy, touching hearts that all the fire and brimstone in the world could not change.

So again, I challenge you to spend a year — 52 weeks — with St. Faustina. And I make this promise: If you spend time every week for the next 52 weeks doing the reading, meditating on what you learn, praying the weekly prayer, and performing the weekly works of mercy, your life will be touched by grace in ways you can't even imagine right now.

Saint Faustina changes lives. The Divine Mercy message and devotion that she was given by Jesus, a reminder and a prophetic restatement of the classic Gospel teaching on the mercy of God, changes lives.

And when you've completed spending your year with St. Faustina, I hope you do two things. First, I hope you plan to make another 52 weeks with St. Faustina again someday. Second, I hope that you share this book with someone who you think would find it a blessing. After all, Jesus said to St. Faustina, "Souls who spread the honor of My mercy I shield through their entire life as a tender mother her infant, and at the hour of death I will not be a Judge for them, but the Merciful Savior" (*Diary*, 1075).

Donna-Marie has certainly earned that promise from Jesus, the Divine Mercy, by writing this book. You can, too, by sharing what you read with your family, friends, and neighbors.

Come spend 52 weeks with St. Faustina. Let your life, your mind, and your heart be renewed. Come meet St. Faustina, and let her lead you to a deeper relationship with Jesus, the Divine Mercy; Mary, the Mother of Mercy; and the whole Communion of Saints.

May Jesus, the Divine Mercy, bless you, and may Mary, the Mother of Mercy, always keep you safely under her mantle.

Fr. Chris Alar, MIC

"Fr. Joseph, MIC"

Director, Association of Marian Helpers

October 5, 2018

Feast of St. Faustina



PREFACE

Truth be told, I didn't actually *plan* to write this book.

Here's what happened: In 2017, during the 100th anniversary of Our Lady's apparitions at Fatima, I attended a Catholic conference to give a talk. While there, I felt a strong inspiration during Adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament (and also while at Mass) that I should write a book about St. Faustina. I have always loved St. Faustina, and strive to follow the Divine Mercy message that Jesus entrusted to her in the 1930s. I wondered if I should write the book with Marian Press, which is completely associated with St. Faustina's message and writings. But I immediately dismissed the idea, telling myself that they already have their own priests who write such books. I shifted my thoughts back to the task at hand.

After I gave my talk, a gentleman came up to me, said that Marian Press would like me to write a book on St. Faustina, and asked me if I would consider it. Imagine my surprise! Or maybe we should call it "shock!"

In my humble opinion, the story behind the writing of this book gets even more incredible because, in God's Divine Providence, I had arranged to lead a pilgrimage to Fatima, Portugal, for the 100th anniversary of Our Lady of Fatima's apparitions. I decided to add a trip to Poland to that pilgrimage so that, in addition to drinking in the graces of Fatima during such an important anniversary year, we would also have the opportunity to walk in the footsteps of St. Faustina and St. John Paul II in Poland! Saint John Paul II is very much connected to Our Lady of Fatima's message to the world. After all, St. John Paul II was "the bishop dressed in white" whom the three young visionaries at Fatima saw in a vision. In addition, Pope John Paul II was responsible for consecrating the world

to the Immaculate Heart of Mary as Our Lady of Fatima had requested. The pontiff was also very much a part of the establishment and promulgation of the Divine Mercy message. Interestingly, he went to his eternal reward in 2005 on the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday!

As for St. Faustina, I didn't yet realize her significance at the time I was planning the trip. However, within a short time, I would recognize the amazing "coincidence."

Did I mention yet that I am Polish?

I had never been to Poland. I think the idea of visiting my homeland at some point was buried deep within my heart, but I had never even dreamed it was a real possibility. But, as Divine Providence would have it, I went! I will add that this pilgrimage was completely scheduled long before I ever received the inspiration to write a book on St. Faustina or was approached by a publisher to do so. When it all finally registered, I thought, "Wow! I am going to Poland and will have a chance to 'meet' St. Faustina!"



How amazing to visit many of the places significant to St. Faustina! I visited her family home, as well as the church where she was baptized and made her First Penance, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation. At one of the convents where St. Faustina lived and worked, I was excited to see the actual bell that Jesus rang when He appeared to St. Faustina as a beggar at the gate. During my visit, I met a nun named Sr. Fausta. Through an interpreter, I

explained that I would be writing this book about St. Faustina. Sister Fausta exuberantly exclaimed in one of the few English

words she knew: “Super!” I smiled and asked for her prayers for this project. She promised.

I also visited Czestochowa, where the famous Black Madonna is kept, and where St. Faustina poured her heart out to Our Lady for six hours. (A fellow sister was sent to fetch Sr. Faustina back to the convent for a quick meal and so that she wouldn’t miss her train.)

The Black Madonna was instrumental in my own life. My Polish grandmother was deeply devoted to Mother Mary, and specifically to the Black Madonna, or “Our Lady of Czestochowa,” as she is also called. A small image of the Black Madonna hung in my grandmother’s home. I have it here with me now as I write. It has inspired me deeply over the years. I believe that it was Our Lady of Czestochowa that brought me peace during a difficult time in my life, which I talk about in my spiritual memoir *The Kiss of Jesus: How Mother Teresa and the Saints Helped me To Discover the Beauty of the Cross*.¹



The late Fr. Andrew Apostoli, CFR, my dear friend, was scheduled to accompany me on this pilgrimage — he had always wanted to visit Poland — but, due to ill health, had to stay behind. Instead, Fr. Apostoli offered up his illness in reparation for sin during the 100th anniversary year of Our Lady of Fatima.

A couple of months after the Poland pilgrimage, dear Fr. Andrew was suddenly in his last days. We shared very special spiritual discussions at that time. Father let me know he was

reading the *Diary* in his final days and asking the intercession of St. Faustina. I found that amazing. We are all so connected on this pilgrimage through life! We are very blessed as Catholics to be part of the great Communion of Saints.

I am excited and honored to write this book. You can be certain that it was written amid much prayer. May it bring you ever closer to our Lord Jesus Christ and His holy Church as you learn more about Divine Mercy through the life and sanctity of St. Faustina.

Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

52 *Weeks with St. Faustina* is a unique spiritual pilgrimage with St. Faustina, God’s “Secretary of Divine Mercy,” based on her life, writings, and Divine Mercy. It will take you on a yearlong spiritual journey — week by week. You can do it as your schedule will allow, or you can commit to a full year of Faustina, prayerfully reading and putting into action a chapter a week.

Our body needs exercise, but our heart, mind, and soul need it, too! Use this book as a form of spiritual exercise. Keeping in mind that the Lord is the Creator of the intellect and imagination as you immerse yourself into each teaching, ask our Lord, “What is it I should learn?” Also, invite St. Faustina to pilgrimage along with you as you read about her life and amazing communion with Jesus, Mary, and the saints. The time and effort you put into your prayer exercises will result in a deeper and more intimate union with Jesus.

If you would like, begin each weekly exercise by:

1. Acknowledging the presence of God, who is everywhere.
2. Asking for God’s help in praying well and in being open to what He wants to teach you.
3. Inviting Jesus, Mary, and St. Faustina to accompany you.
4. Making an invocation from Scripture, such as, “Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths” (Ps 25:4).
5. As you read, picturing yourself in the scene with St. Faustina and Jesus or Mary. In your imagination, actively engage in the scene.

Pause from reading when something strikes you. Consider any emotions (“affections”) that may result. You may be provoked to sorrow, thanksgiving, or appreciation of God’s love, and so on, which can lead you into a deeper sense of peace and trust in God.

After your reading, pray and thank God. Be quiet for a while and listen for God. Rest in His presence. If inspired, make a resolution during the “Ponder” section at the end of each chapter, deciding upon some action to take as a result of your prayerful reading. You can also have a notebook handy for any insights you’d like to remember.

Essentially, you’d be using St. Ignatius of Loyola’s 16th-century practice of “composition of place,” putting yourself into scenes from the life of St. Faustina in your imagination. In a certain sense, composition of place builds upon St. Benedict’s sixth-century practice of *lectio divina*, which is Latin for “divine reading.” At first glance, it might seem complicated to pray in this way. But it’s not! Let’s take a quick look at what the Church says about this method of prayer.

The *Catechism* teaches, “[L]ectio divina, where the Word of God is so read and meditated that it becomes prayer, is thus rooted in the liturgical celebration” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1177, emphasis in original). The monks practiced this prayer daily in reading Scripture as well as when preparing for the Eucharist.

The Church also teaches, “Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in *lectio divina* or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him” (*CCC*, 2708).

Since the Communion of Saints forms the Mystical Body of Christ, we can also fruitfully meditate on their lives as a way to understand and approach the mysteries of the life of Christ. After all, they are only saints because of their communion with Him!

The nuts and bolts

You can start this book at any point in the year. It does not follow the liturgical seasons, which frees you in deciding when to start. Each week's chapter will discuss some aspect of St. Faustina's life: her "Ordinary Life," "Merciful Life," "Interior Life," and "Mystical Life." The book is broken up into these four parts. There are 52 chapters dealing with 52 topics pertaining to her life. You may feel free to read a particular topic on a whim, or read the chapters in order to encounter St. Faustina's life in chronological order (which I recommend as the best way to learn St. Faustina's story). If at all possible, choose a day of the week and try to enter into this St. Faustina pilgrimage each week on the same day (possibly on Sunday). Do whatever works for you!

Each chapter is comprised of five elements:

1. A pertinent verse, usually from St. Faustina's words, Scripture, or the words of Jesus to St. Faustina.
2. The next section tells the story of the chapter.
3. Next, you move into "Something to Ponder," which will give you suggestions on what to ponder that day and during that week.
4. Suggestions for works of mercy are in the "A Merciful Action" section.
5. Finally, the chapter ends with "A Prayer of Mercy for This Week," which you can pray each day throughout the week.

Just a quick word about "A Merciful Action." Jesus revealed to St. Faustina that there are three degrees of mercy:

You yourself command me to exercise the three degrees of mercy. The first: the act of mercy, of whatever kind. The second: the word of mercy — if I cannot carry out a work of mercy, I will assist by

my words. The third: prayer — if I cannot show mercy by deeds or words, I can always do so by prayer. My prayer reaches out even there where I cannot reach out physically (*Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska*, 163).

We can strive to keep Jesus' teaching to St. Faustina in mind as we consider our merciful actions for each week.

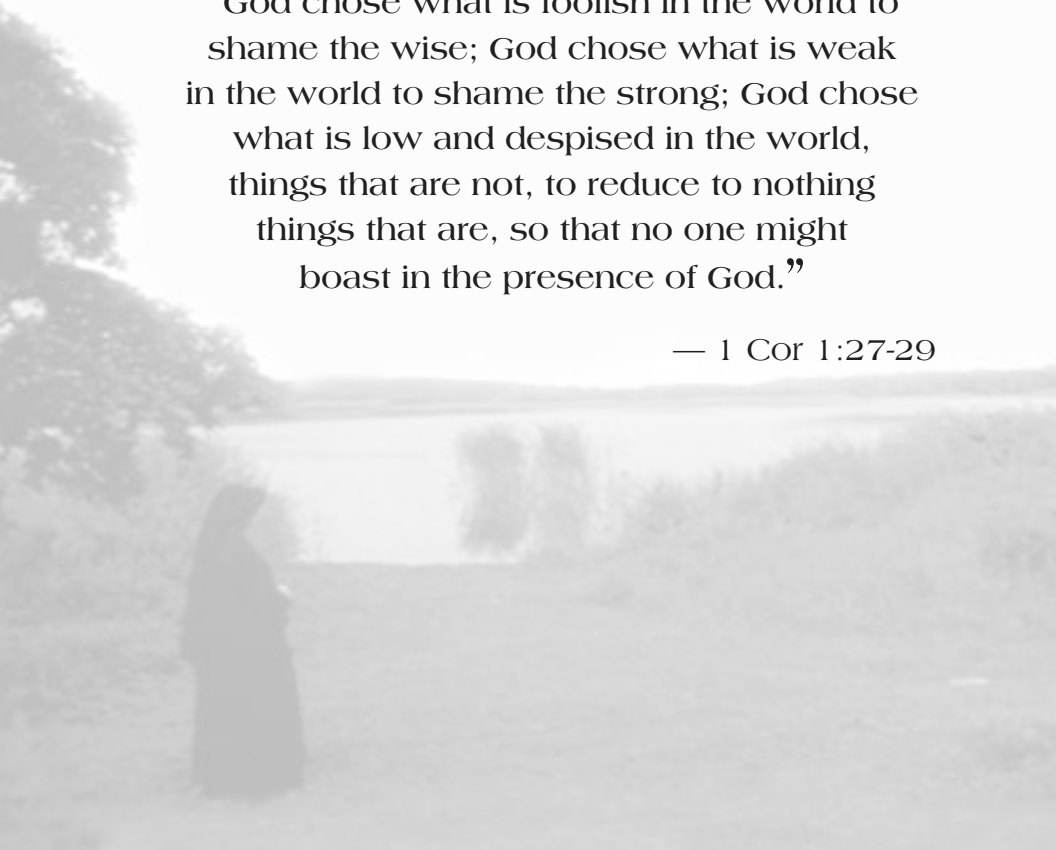
Finally, reading and actively partaking in this book is like taking a pilgrimage with St. Faustina, one you can make again and again. You might not have the opportunity to get to Poland to actually walk in her footsteps, but you can certainly walk with her through this armchair pilgrimage by immersing yourself in her teachings. Whatever way you decide to use this book, may it bless you.

Saint Faustina, please pray for us!



PART ONE

Ordinary Life



“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.”

— 1 Cor 1:27-29



WEEK 1

Spiritual Childhood



“Jesus gave me to know the depth of His meekness and humility and to understand that He clearly demanded the same of me.”

— *Diary*, 758



As we begin our pilgrimage with St. Faustina, we will delve into God’s call to us to possess spiritual childhood. We walk with St. Faustina right from her birth as Helen and through some of her early days. We touch upon prayer habits Helen learned from her family, as well as the holy stirrings in young Helen’s heart. Let us begin!

Saint Faustina was born Helen Kowalska to a peasant family at 8 in the morning on August 25, 1905. She was the third daughter of Stanislaus and Marianna Kowalski. Father Joseph Chodynski would pour the holy waters of Baptism over Helen’s little head at St. Casimir Church in Świnice Warckie just two days later. That same baptismal font is still standing today. Marianna and Stanislaus might have been eager to baptize their baby girl and ensure her entrance into Heaven in case she was stricken with cholera. People had been warned not to visit the area because of a cholera plague. Marianna had been more than a bit nervous about Helen’s birth because two previous deliveries (Josephine and Eve) had almost cost her her

life. With Helen, though, everything was different. Marianna was exceedingly thankful. Her labor was short, and neither the mother nor the baby experienced complications. Helen would live in a simple house built by her father, Stanislaus, made of limestone and red brick with a thatched roof. With the war going on and so many mouths to feed, the family was poverty-stricken. The girls took turns going to Sunday Mass because there was just one Sunday dress to be shared.

Helen lived only 33 years — just like Jesus! She would later be called the “Secretary of Divine Mercy.” Helen was beatified in 1993 and canonized as St. Faustina seven years later by St. John Paul II. In the year 2000, this same pope established the Feast of Divine Mercy, which is always celebrated on the Sunday after Easter Sunday. Later throughout this book, we will delve much deeper into the mysteries and messages of Divine Mercy entrusted to a simple, humble young lady from an obscure area where most were illiterate. For now, we focus on her childhood and family life.

On the day of Helen’s birth, times were restless in Poland. Martial law was declared in Warsaw, roughly 30 miles away from Świnice. Russian was the official language in the government and schools, with Russian teachers steadily replacing the Polish. There were strikes by students and teachers against the Russification of the educational system, as well as continued bloody clashes with the imperial army and police when factory workers protested against autocratic rule. They demanded that economic conditions be improved. Such was the atmosphere at that time in that area.

Family faith and familial routine

Every morning, sometimes before sunrise, Helen’s father fervently sang the Little Office of the Immaculate Conception, or, during Lent, the penitential Psalms. He never worried about the sleeping children or his tuckered-out wife — who could have benefited from another hour of sleep. He simply desired to praise God and honor the Blessed Mother. If

Marianna protested, Stanislaus told her that he needed to serve God first and above all, and “then think about you all” so that he could give a good example to the family.² Stanislaus’ tradition no doubt stood out in the minds and hearts of the whole family. Though Stanislaus’ ways of honoring Mary and saying his morning prayers might have annoyed some of the household part of the time (if not every morning!), Helen’s father set a robust example of dedication to prayer.

Stanislaus was also an avid reader, one of the two people in their region who could read and write. He even owned a collection of books. Marianna, on the other hand, while a hard worker and a fine baker of delicious breads, could neither read a recipe nor write barely a word. Marianna’s illiteracy would not, however, get in the way of teaching the faith to their children. She said, “The Faith was very important to [Stanislaus], which is what I liked about him. Though I could not read or write, I taught my daughters and sons the truths of the Gospel, taking care that they not only knew the precept of love of neighbor, but primarily, that they observed it.” She added, “Stanislaus was an example to them of daily prayer and obligatory participation in Sunday Mass.” It was certainly a joint effort.³

Helen was a favorite of her parents because of her docile disposition and her eagerness to help. A loving and intelligent child, she was very obedient and, even from a young age, was entrusted with duties in the household. When she was a bit older, she would help bring the cows out to pasture. As the cattle grazed, Helen would read books and pray. When inside her home, she prayed before a little homemade family altar and a metal crucifix that her father brought home from a pilgrimage to Czestochowa. As a youngster and again as a teenager, Helen had her first profound mystical experiences.

At 7 years old, in 1912, while praying before the Blessed Sacrament at a Vespers service at St. Casimir Church, Helen’s heart overflowed with God’s abiding love. She suddenly realized that she should live a more perfect and holy life. Later on, 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). The full meaning of the message would grow in her heart with time, and eventually she would discern that she was called to the religious life.

Some nights, Helen would be awakened by flashes of light. She would proceed to pray because she understood that her Guardian Angel had summoned her to it. In 1914, Helen received her First Holy Communion at 9 years old and made her first Confession in her parish’s confessional, which is still there today. On the day of her First Holy Communion, Helen felt very close to Jesus and kept to herself afterwards. She chose not to engage in conversation with anyone. When asked why she was walking by herself, she replied, “I am not walking alone; I am with the Lord Jesus.”⁴

Helen grew to be one of the best students in her class, but since the school was small, the older children usually left school to make room for the younger children. After almost three years of schooling, Helen begged her parents to allow her to take on employment. She desperately desired to help support her family because, though her father worked hard, he could not make ends meet. Finally, when she was 14, Helen’s parents gave their consent for her to do domestic work for a family they knew. Almost a year later, Helen returned home to plead again, but this time for permission to enter a convent. Since the family couldn’t provide the required dowry, Stanislaus firmly put his foot down on the subject. Helen obediently returned to domestic work.

A childlike trust and humility

Throughout her life, Helen remained obedient and humble. This future saint wanted to please God with all her choices. After Helen had become a nun, during a conversation with her Mother Directress, Mother Mary Joseph emphasized the necessity of cultivating spiritual childhood. “Sister,” she said to Sr. Faustina, “let simplicity and humility be the char-

acteristic traits of your soul. Go through life like a little child, always trusting, always full of simplicity and humility, content with everything, happy in every circumstance. There, where others fear, you will pass calmly along, thanks to this simplicity and humility. Remember this, Sister, for your whole life: as waters flow from the mountains down into the valleys, so, too, do God's graces flow into humble souls" (*Diary*, 55).

We are all called to spiritual childhood. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Mt 19:14). Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, who died at the age of 24, was known for her "little way of spiritual childhood." She said, "I know well that it is not my great desires that please God in my little soul, what He likes to see is the way I love my littleness and my poverty; it is my blind hope in His mercy, this is my only treasure. ... The weaker one is, without desires or virtues the more ready one is for the operations of this consuming and transforming love. ... God rejoices more in what He can do in a soul humbly resigned to its poverty than in the creation of millions of suns and the vast stretch of the heavens."⁵

Like St. Thérèse, Sr. Faustina aspired to remain little and humble. She prayed, "O my God, I understand well that You demand this spiritual childhood of me, because You are constantly asking it of me through Your representatives" (*Diary*, 55). Jesus Himself asked the nun to remain "little." He said, "Although My greatness is beyond understanding, I commune only with those who are little. I demand of you a childlike spirit. ... The greatest sinners would achieve great sanctity, if only they would trust in My mercy" (*Diary*, 332, 1784). It would seem that remaining "little" and humble has a lot to do with the "trust" for which Jesus asks.

Saint Thérèse also speaks about some of the essential components of the little way of spiritual childhood. "Merit is not to be found in doing much or in giving much, but rather in receiving and in loving much ... But when Jesus wants for Himself the sweetness of giving, it would not be gracious to refuse. Let Him take and give whatever He wants."⁶ Similarly,

St. Teresa of Calcutta used to say, “Take whatever He gives and give whatever He takes with a big smile.”⁷ The saints have much to teach us about spiritual childhood!



SOMETHING TO PONDER

“All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted,” we read in Matthew 23:12. Why do you think God uses the weak, the small, and the seemingly insignificant to deliver great and important messages? Reflect for a moment on the three young Fatima visionaries. They were all under the age of 11! They were simple, basically uneducated but faith-filled farm children who were chosen by God to deliver the message of Our Lady of Fatima to the world. We are told that God raises the lowly to confound the proud. Does God, in some sense, *need* our humility?

In this chapter, we’ve discussed St. Faustina’s birth and childhood, her early years, and the spiritual childhood to which we are all called. Saint Thérèse and St. Faustina are great examples of people who desired great holiness. They learned that it is essential to possess a childlike faith in order to grow closer to God and follow His holy will. This week, take some time to ponder your relationship with God. Do you give God enough time in prayer? Yes, life is busy, but making time for those we love is essential. God should be right at the top of our list!



A MERCIFUL ACTION

In an attempt to get you started on the right foot, this “Merciful Action” section will be much longer than those in each of the remaining chapters of this book. One of Sr. Faustina’s confessors once told her, “Comport yourself before God like the widow in the Gospel; although the coin she dropped into the box was of little value, it counted far more

before God than all the big offerings of others” (*Diary*, 55). Wise words indeed. He was referring to Jesus’ words to His disciples: “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on” (Mk 12:43-44). Take a moment sometime this week to read the story in Mark 12:41-44 or in Luke 21:1-4.

We tend to think that something seemingly little might not be worth very much, but the words of Jesus (above) and the witness of the saints say otherwise.

One time, late at night, a poor man showed up at the door of Mother Teresa’s convent. He had heard that she had just received the Nobel Peace Prize. He also wished to give her something and handed her a small offering. This hero for the poorest of the poor knew that it was all that the man had. She struggled interiorly for a brief moment, moved by his caring gesture, but at the same time, she did not know if she could accept it. In the end, she gratefully accepted his gift, sending him off with her blessing. She later explained that his generosity moved her more than receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. Imagine that!

One time after speaking at an event, I passed a gentleman standing by himself. He caught my eye, and I smiled at him. He came over later and told me that he had been corresponding with me for quite some time, but we hadn’t met in person until that moment. Imagine my surprise at that unexpected meeting! After the event, he wrote again to say, “You were on the way to the back of the room after finishing your speech when you passed by me and gave me a smile which melted my heart. You had no idea who I was, but you smiled at me and lifted my spirits in a wonderful way. It was worth driving all that way just to experience that moment.” He added, “You said on Fr. Andrew Apostoli’s show once that a simple smile can make all the difference in the world to someone. You certainly practice what you preach. I just wanted to let you know this. I truly believe the Holy Spirit led me to come see you that day.”

Simple acts of love can be great works of mercy, and can help transform someone's soul. Smile often, especially at complete strangers. Pray and ponder at least one meaningful work of mercy you can carry out this week.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, help me to be a more merciful and generous soul. I want to become “smaller” and more humble.

I want to strive to grow in holiness.

Mother Mary, pray for me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 2

The Burdens and Surrender of Daily Battles



“Patience in adversity gives
power to the soul.”

— *Diary*, 607



This week’s spiritual exercise is about the daily surrenders and the battles we fight. We will delve into how Helen’s heart yearned for God and the struggle she faced because of her parents’ refusal to allow her to enter religious life, as well as an amazing (yet sobering) visit from Jesus and Helen’s courageous response, which caused her to fear and ultimately to trust. Let’s get to it!

Each day, we fight a battle. It might be with the challenges we face in our vocation, state of life, or employment. It might be in the fact that every day, a spiritual battle is waged over our souls. The devil, who never sleeps, is constantly seeking to snatch souls to hell. Not a happy thought, but nonetheless, this is the reality of our life on earth. We need to be battle ready. We are to pray and stay in the state of grace, striving to be a radiant example of faith to others, caring for our eternal life, but also endeavoring to help others get to Heaven, too. Each challenge and daily burden is actually an opportunity to turn to God in prayer. Let’s turn our attention to Helen and how she handled contradictions and the opportunities for

grace that unfolded in her life, specifically in dealing with her parent's rejection of her desire for religious life.

Helen was sad that her parents would not give their blessing on her ardent desire to enter religious life. She obediently returned to domestic work. A dowry of clothing and money, necessary to enter religious life, was out of the question. The family simply couldn't afford it. Helen tried to explain that Jesus would provide. Her parents would not budge. Helen promptly left for the big city of Lodz to live with her cousins and search for work. Soon, Helen was employed by three female tertiaries, members of the Third Order of St. Francis. They were receptive to 17-year-old Helen's requests for time off for daily Mass, the Sacrament of Confession from the tertiaries' confessor, and visiting the sick and dying. Jesus kindled the desire in Helen's heart to comfort the dying, preparing her to be concerned for dying souls later on as a religious sister. Her new job seemed to be a win-win situation. She could earn wages, stay connected to the Church, and help souls through spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Her access to the women's confessor, Fr. Wyzykowski, was a great bonus!

Helen's heart yearned for God

When Helen was 18, she again begged her parents' permission to enter the convent. She received the same answer: "No!" Her heart sank over yet another flat refusal. She gave up trying. She began to ignore God, perhaps as a sort of survival tactic. Helen recorded in her *Diary*, "I turned myself over to the vain things of life, paying no attention to the call of grace, although my soul found no satisfaction in any of these things" (*Diary*, 8). As surprising as it might sound, Helen tried to suppress the graces entering her heart. Might the devil have been wreaking havoc in her heart and soul? Helen immersed herself in city life hustle and bustle, buying the latest fashions and frequenting dances with girlfriends.

Still, Jesus never stopped calling her. For a time, the future saint ignored Him. Helen recalled, "The incessant call of grace caused me much anguish; I tried, however, to stifle it

with amusements.” She continued, making a full disclosure, “Interiorly, I shunned God, turning with all my heart to creatures. However, God’s grace won out in my soul” (*Diary*, 8).

This reminds me of a lesson I learned from my former spiritual director, the Servant of God Fr. John Hardon, SJ, who encouraged the faithful to surround themselves with like-minded, faith-filled friends and acquaintances. This is not to say that Helen’s choice of friends was imprudent, but it does give us something to ponder. We might ask ourselves if our friends lead us to Heaven — or not.

Two of Helen’s sisters, Genowefa and Natalia, were living in Lodz, working as domestic servants as well. In time, Helen was also employed at another domestic job, caring for children and doing housekeeping for the Sadowska-Wieczorek family in Lodz, where Helen was much admired for her sincerity, charity, and contagious joy. At first, Helen’s fashionable clothes put off Mrs. Sadowska, who thought Helen was much too fashionable for the work. It wasn’t long into their first conversation, however, that the woman realized Helen’s great character. Mrs. Sadowska observed Helen’s strict fasting and dedication to prayer, and was delighted with Helen’s way with the Sadowska children. Helen was a reliable employee and a grand storyteller, no doubt garnering this talent from her father, who told many stories over the years to his children, tales he learned from his modest book collection, the Bible, and magazine articles.

Jesus appears and surprises Helen with a direct question

In July 1924, Helen accompanied her sisters Jeannie and Natalia, as well as a friend, Lucy Strzeleck, to a dance at Venice Park.⁸ It should have been an enjoyable experience; after all, everyone was having fun whirling and enjoying the music. Helen, on the other hand, was going through a battle of sorts. She felt zero comfort or pleasure being amongst her friends and the festivities. “While everybody was having a good time, my soul was experiencing deep torments,” she later explained (*Diary*, 9).

This particular evening would become a major turning point in Helen's life.

Jesus appeared to her at the dance. We can imagine Helen's shock. Jesus' appearance was unsettling, for He was covered in wounds as if He had just been scourged, "racked with pain, and stripped of His clothing" (*Diary*, 9).

"How long shall I put up with you and how long will you keep putting Me off?" Jesus succinctly asked (*Diary*, 9). He was calling her out of a distracted, somewhat worldly life and into His holy will for her.

Completely bowled over by the incredible, miraculous moment, it seemed to Helen as though just she and Jesus were standing together. Everything else was a foggy mirage, fading away in an instant — the people, the music. She walked off the dance floor to gather her thoughts and pretended that she had a headache in order to escape the dance. Her sister was perplexed at the sudden change. But Helen did not divulge what had really happened. Instead, she walked straight towards the Cathedral of St. Stanislaus Kostka, paying no attention to her surroundings. Upon arriving, totally oblivious to the few people present in the church, Helen immediately prostrated herself before the tabernacle to pour out her heart. Where should she go? What should she do? Helen heard, "Go at once to Warsaw; you will enter a convent there" (*Diary*, 10). Could Helen trust in those words?

Knowing she would leave in the morning, she went home to tie up loose ends. Jesus had instructed, "Go at once." She would try to get at least some sleep, though she was wide awake at that point because of her amazing encounter with Jesus.

Who wouldn't be?

The morning came quickly. Helen bid farewell to her sister and announced her plan to her uncle, who was clearly upset and quickly reminded his niece that her parents would be thoroughly crushed if she went without their blessing. Helen asked her uncle not to tell them about it just yet. She gave him all of her clothing to bring to her parents, with the exception of the clothes on her back. "Jesus will take care of all my needs," she simply stated.

A bit reluctantly, her uncle took her to the train station to board a train to Warsaw as Jesus had instructed. With one dress to her name and a heart filled to the brim with anticipation, this saint in the making was about to embark upon an exciting journey that would not only dramatically change her own life, but all of ours, too.

Knowing that she would finally enter a convent, Helen felt strong and confident in her decision to board the train to Warsaw — that is, until she sat down and her confidence vaporized. Doubts and fear suddenly set in like a runaway freight train zipping uncontrollably down the tracks. As thoughts of disappointing her parents pummeled her mind, she began to cry softly. She began to pray. She wanted to follow Jesus, but leaving her parents behind was so difficult.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

What did St. Faustina do when faced with a challenge, or when she was immersed in battle? She was discouraged over her parents' continual refusal to allow her to enter the convent. What did she do with her fears and doubts? Growing in holiness, she surrendered her heart fully to God, not relying upon feelings, but rather, upon faith. She teaches us to be vigilant and not lose heart, choosing instead to trust God.

Saint Faustina wrote:

My Jesus, despite Your graces, I see and feel all my misery. I begin my day with battle and end it with battle. As soon as I conquer one obstacle, ten more appear to take its place. But I am not worried, because I know that this is the time of struggle, not peace. When the burden of the battle becomes too much for me, I throw myself as a child into the arms of the heavenly Father and trust I will not perish. O my Jesus, how prone I am to evil, and this forces me to be constantly vigilant. But I do not lose heart. I trust God's grace, which abounds in the worst misery (*Diary*, 606).

She continued, “In the midst of the worst difficulties and adversities, I do not lose inner peace or exterior balance, and this discourages my adversaries. Patience in adversity gives power to the soul” (*Diary*, 607).

Take some time this week to reflect upon the daily challenges in your own life. Do you lose patience? Do you become angry? And do you remember to immediately bring these burdens to God? Could you devise a simple plan, a way to turn directly to God when things creep up on you or unexpectedly smack you in the face? Having a battle plan will be very beneficial.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Is there someone in your life who needs mercy? Someone who needs Christ’s love? Can you pray this week to surprise a total stranger with an act of mercy? No doubt God will provide the stranger! Try to carry out these two works of mercy, one for someone in your life and one for a total stranger, this week.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, please help me to see You more clearly in my daily life, even in the daily battles and contradictions. Please help me to surrender my will to Your holy will.

Help me to be merciful.

Mother Mary, help me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 3

Fear



“I do not fear anything in the world, but fear only lest I make Jesus sad.”

— *Diary*, 610



This week’s spiritual exercise focuses on fear. Thomas à Kempis wrote, “Why, then, do you fear to take up the cross when through it you can win a kingdom? ... [F]ollow Jesus, and you shall enter eternal life.”⁹ Let us take a look at fear in our lives and how young Helen faced and confronted her fears, and to whom she turned for help.

Even the apostles were afraid at times. But, after Pentecost, when they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they let go of their fears and trusted God more fully. We, too, can pray to the Holy Spirit for courage and guidance.

Helen was only about 19 years old when she boarded the train for Warsaw. It was the morning after Jesus suddenly showed up at the dance. Helen sought Jesus’ help in the Cathedral of St. Stanislaus Kostka. Prostrate on the floor before the Blessed Sacrament, Helen clearly heard Jesus tell her, “Go at once to Warsaw; you will enter a convent there” (*Diary*, 10). She made up her mind to follow Him.

When she stepped down the stairs to the platform, Helen felt a terrifying pang of fear pierce her heart. As she observed the passengers leaving the train to head in various directions,

this teen on the run realized she had nowhere to go and knew no one in Warsaw, a city of a million people. She became paralyzed with fear, but quickly reached out in earnest prayer to the mother who would understand her dilemma. “Mary, lead me, guide me” (*Diary*, 11) was her simple, fervent plea. Immediately, the answer rose from her innermost being. “I heard these words within me telling me to leave the town and go to a certain nearby village where I would find a safe lodging for the night. I did so and found, in fact, that everything was just as the Mother of God told me” (*Diary*, 11). Helen would stay overnight in a village near the capital.

From fear to trust

As Jesus had instructed, Helen returned to Warsaw the following morning and entered the first church she came upon. It was St. James Church at Grojecka Street in Ochota, a suburb of Warsaw. Helen began to pray. Where could she find a convent? Masses were being celebrated at St. James Church, one after the other. At one Mass, Helen heard the words, “Go to that priest ... and tell him everything; he will tell you what to do next” (*Diary*, 12). Before Helen received any private revelations about Divine Mercy and trust, she trusted Jesus in that big strange city. After Mass, Helen met Fr. James Dabrowski in the sacristy and explained the stirrings of her soul and her encounter with Jesus.

Though he was taken aback initially, he had some consoling words for Helen. Years later, Helen wrote, “[He] told me to have strong confidence that God would provide for my future” (*Diary*, 13). Father James told Helen, “For the time being ... I shall send you to a pious lady ... with whom you will stay until you enter the convent” (*Diary*, 13). Helen was welcomed with kindness by Aldona Lipszyc. Throughout Helen’s stay at the Lipszyc home, she knocked on many convent doors in search of a congregation. Helen was turned away from one convent after another. We can only imagine her disappointment, striving to follow Jesus and facing constant

rejection. As Helen explained in her *Diary*, “Sorrow gripped my heart.” She cried out to Jesus, “Help me; don’t leave me alone” (*Diary*, 13).

The door opened

The very next door that Helen knocked upon opened to her. It was the door of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. Its chief aim was to imitate Christ in His mercy, and its apostolic work was to help all, but especially to achieve the rehabilitation of wayward women and girls in need of moral conversion.

At first, Helen did not make a good impression. The sisters thought she was “no one special.” She still lacked a trousseau. However, Mother Michael, the superior of the house in Warsaw, asked to see her. She peered in on Helen, the door slightly ajar. At first glance, the Mother Superior felt she would turn Helen away. “No, she’s not for us!” But she had thought it would be more charitable to at least speak to the candidate first, and then send her away politely. The two met in the parlor, where Mother Michael asked a few questions. She then instructed Helen to go see the Lord of the house in the chapel and ask Him if He accepted her there.

“With great joy,” Helen later wrote in her *Diary*, “I went to the chapel and asked Jesus: ‘Lord of this house, do You accept me? This is how one of these sisters told me to put the question to You.’” Helen received her answer immediately. “I do accept; you are in My Heart” (*Diary*, 14). Immense joy entered Helen’s heart upon learning of Jesus’ acceptance. Helen reported to Mother Michael, who told Helen that she accepted her, too! Nevertheless, Helen would be required to live in the world for about a year longer in order to earn enough money for the dowry, an initial sum needed to cover her wardrobe and other basic costs. She stayed with Aldona Lipszyc and continued to work as a domestic servant.

Mother Michael would later say, “The candidate made a better impression at close quarters ... I became eager to accept her. The main difficulty was her poverty.”¹⁰



SOMETHING TO PONDER

We discussed Helen's decision to head to Warsaw to seek a convent, following Jesus' words and the call that had prodded her heart since she was only 7 years old. It took great courage for a girl of Helen's age and background to travel to a destination she knew nothing about. She trusted Jesus, who gave her courage. When Helen feared what lay ahead and didn't know where to turn, she looked to her Mother in Heaven. Helen courageously and with great determination continued knocking on convent doors until one opened.

This week, take time to ponder areas of your life where you are struggling or fearful. Can you offer those struggles and fears to our Lord? Is it possible to share them with a spiritual director or holy priest in Confession? Can you ask the Holy Spirit and Mary, the Mother of Mercy, for help and guidance?



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Is there someone you know who is struggling or fearful? Perhaps they are fearful due to serious illness or financial troubles. Could you lend a hand in some way? Can you be of comfort to them to help alleviate their fears? Take time to pray and ponder who you can help this week (a relative, neighbor, friend, co-worker).



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, You once told St. Faustina,
“Why are you afraid to do My will? Will I not help
you as I have done thus far?” (*Diary*, 489).

Please guide me to turn to You
and never act out of fear.

Mother Mary, please guide and protect me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 4

Suffering, “A Great Grace”



“Suffering is the greatest treasure on earth;
it purifies the soul. In suffering,
we learn who is our true friend.”

— *Diary*, 342



In this spiritual exercise, we discuss suffering at the beginning of Helen’s religious life, what happened when she was tempted to leave the congregation, and her experiences of interior and physical suffering. We also learn of her profound experience observing the suffering souls in Purgatory.

Suffering is a great mystery. Folks will sometimes flee or recoil from its pains and effects. In a world of pleasures, suffering is no fun. Why put up with it? Why should we embrace it? Catholics view suffering in a much different light. Christ Himself suffered immensely. He was persecuted, spat upon, and scorned by the very people He helped. He was scourged, crowned with painful thorns, and carried on His own shoulders the instrument of torture upon which He would eventually be crucified. But it was not in vain! Jesus’ Passion, Death, and subsequent Resurrection from the dead opened the gates of Heaven for us! Let’s look at what St. Faustina teaches us about suffering.

At one point, St. Faustina wrote, “True love is measured

by the thermometer of suffering” (*Diary*, 343). That one sentence gives us so much to ponder. Saint Faustina went on to thank Jesus for the sufferings in her life:

Jesus, I thank you for the little daily crosses, for opposition to my endeavors, for the hardships of communal life, for the misinterpretation of my intentions, for humiliations at the hands of others, for the harsh way in which we are treated, for false suspicions, for poor health and loss of strength, for self-denial, for dying to myself, for lack of recognition in everything, for the upsetting of all my plans.

Thank You, Jesus, for interior sufferings, for dryness of spirit, for terrors, fears and uncertainties, for the darkness and the deep interior night, for temptations and various ordeals, for torments too difficult to describe, especially for those which no one will understand, for the hour of death with its fierce struggle and all its bitterness (*Diary*, 343).

Saint Faustina then acknowledged that Jesus first drank the cup of suffering before she did, and to a much greater intensity. Our sufferings in life can never hold a candle to our Lord’s. However, we can take courage because Jesus knows all about suffering and its redemptive benefits.

Saint Faustina continued:

I thank You, Jesus, You who first drank the cup of bitterness before You gave it to me, in a much milder form. I put my lips to this cup of Your holy will. Let all be done according to Your good pleasure; let that which your wisdom ordained before the ages be done to me. I want to drink the cup to its last drop, and not seek to know the reason why. In bitterness is my joy, in hopelessness is my trust. In You, O Lord, all is good, all is a gift of Your paternal Heart (*Diary*, 343).

Saint Faustina thanked Jesus for everything, including both the pains and the joys of her life. She desired only His holy will. She continued, “I do not prefer consolations over bitterness or bitterness over consolations, but thank You, O Jesus, for everything!” (*Diary*, 343). The saint in the making came to learn that Jesus knew what was perfect for her soul. When we can acknowledge that fact, we stop fighting against God’s will. We discover that many opportunities for grace lie hidden in difficulties. In fact, St. Faustina teaches us, “Suffering is the greatest treasure on earth; it purifies the soul. In suffering, we learn who is our true friend” (*Diary*, 342). These and other seeds of wisdom would blossom in Helen’s heart as she grew in holiness and surrendered her will to God.

Helen enters the convent

In our last chapter, we left off with Helen being accepted by the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. But Helen faced one last hurdle before she could enter the convent: She would have to work for about a year out in the world in order to save up the money she needed for her dowry. The momentous day finally arrived on August 1, 1925, on the eve of the Feast of Our Lady of the Angels, when Helen Kowalska left the world she once knew and crossed over the threshold to religious life.

After she passed her first examination, which confirmed that she was free from obstacles for entering religious life, Helen began as an aspirant and became a postulant (someone undergoing a trial period in religious life). Several years later, Helen would describe her experience upon entering. “I felt immensely happy; it seemed to me that I had stepped into the life of Paradise,” she wrote. “A single prayer was bursting forth from my heart, one of thanksgiving” (*Diary*, 17). The deepest desire of her heart since she was a young child was becoming a reality.

Though Helen was happy to enter religious life, she quickly became discouraged after only a few weeks and was

tempted to leave. She felt that too little time was devoted to prayer, yearning for a stricter congregation with a more rigorous prayer life. She planned to meet with the Mother Superior the following day. Helen went to the chapel that evening seeking direction from Jesus. But she left the chapel the same way she entered — confused. When Helen reached her cell, she prostrated herself on the floor, begging God for help. Suddenly, bright light filled her little part of the dormitory. Jesus' sorrowful face appeared on her curtain. His sacred face appeared wounded. Large tears were rolling from His eyes and onto Helen's bed.

She was astounded and sad all at once. "Jesus, who has hurt You so?" she asked.

Jesus told her, "It is you who will cause Me this pain if you leave this convent. It is to this place that I called you and nowhere else; and I have prepared many graces for you" (*Diary*, 19). Helen immediately asked forgiveness for not trusting God. She also spoke to a priest the following day in Confession, who reiterated God's will for her. Now at complete peace, she would no longer doubt where it was that Jesus wanted her to be.

Purgatory: a place of suffering and transformation

Helen was very familiar with interior suffering, but now in the convent, she would also taste the cup of physical suffering. At times, she felt deeply tormented mentally and spiritually over the humiliations and pain that she experienced at the hands of some of the sisters and her superiors. The pain from these interior torments sometimes caused her to suffer physically. As Helen matured in the spiritual life, she realized the great power in redemptive suffering — in offering her suffering to God and asking Him to use it for His glory. She would later write, "Suffering is a great grace; through suffering the soul becomes like the Savior; in suffering love becomes crystalized; the greater the suffering, the purer the love" (*Diary*, 57). She

also learned she could suffer her Purgatory while on earth, and that she should work hard to help free souls from Purgatory.

A few weeks after Helen went through the interior trial of feeling tempted to leave the congregation, she became physically rundown due to a variety of things, including spiritual conflicts that weighed upon her. When Helen was at the point of exhaustion, her superior decided to send her to Skolimow, near Warsaw, to the congregation's rented summer country home. The home was used for the sisters living in Warsaw and the girls in their charge. There, Helen would get a much-needed rest, doing only the light work of cooking for the other sisters and looking after one convalescing nun.

In Skolimow, this young postulant experienced an incredibly profound mystical vision that involved her guardian angel. Helen had asked Jesus for whom she should pray. Jesus said He would reveal it on the following night. Helen was shown the souls in Purgatory. Her guardian angel appeared and instructed her to follow him. "In a moment I was in a misty place full of fire in which there was a great crowd of suffering souls" (*Diary*, 20). Later, she explained her visit to Purgatory. Though she observed the souls praying fervently, Helen was made to know that their prayers could not be of any use for themselves. They needed prayers from others to aid them. Helen asked the souls what was their greatest torment. It was their longing for God. The souls were assured that they would indeed be with God in Heaven in eternal happiness, but first, they needed to be purified.

Helen also observed that the Blessed Mother, called the "Star of the Sea" by the Holy Souls, visited them and brought them "refreshment." No doubt Mother Mary brought great hope and comfort to the souls. Her guardian angel escorted her out of Purgatory, and she heard an interior voice, "My Mercy does not want this but justice demands it" (*Diary*, 20). Helen was deeply impacted by this visit, and afterwards prayed earnestly for souls. Some souls would actually visit her, seeking prayers. We will discuss this more later on.

Helen returned to Warsaw and to her work in the kitchen, and finished out her postulancy.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

With great clarity, Jesus told us that if we want to be His disciples, we must deny ourselves, pick up our crosses, and follow Him (Mt 16:24). We shouldn't run from our cross. Thomas à Kempis wrote in *The Imitation of Christ*, "In the cross is salvation, in the cross is life, in the cross is protection from enemies, in the cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness, in the cross is strength of mind, in the cross is joy of spirit, in the cross is highest virtue, in the cross is perfect holiness. There is no salvation of soul nor hope of everlasting life but in the cross. Take up your cross, therefore, and follow Jesus, and you shall enter eternal life."¹¹

At one point, St. Faustina wrote, "All sufferings are nothing in comparison with what awaits us in heaven" (*Diary*, 596). Jesus told her, "It is not for the success of a work, but for the suffering that I give reward" (*Diary*, 90). Take some time throughout the week to meditate on the purpose of suffering and your crosses in life. Is it possible to consider that suffering is "a great grace"? Could you thank God for your daily crosses as St. Faustina did?



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Could you carry out a merciful action this week that involves more of a sacrifice on your part than usual? Perhaps it's in giving of your time. Is there someone in your life who needs help? Take this "merciful action" to prayer and ask our Lord, His holy Mother, and St. Faustina to guide you. Also, commit to praying for the Holy Souls in Purgatory.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, help me to be more generous in my desire to sacrifice and to suffer for Your glory.

Please grant me the graces to deny myself,
pick up my cross, and follow You.

I want to be Your disciple.

Please also relieve the Holy Souls in Purgatory
and bring them to Heaven soon.

Mother Mary, Star of the Sea,
and St. Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 5

The Habit and New Name



“Have great confidence; God is always our Father, even when He sends us trials.”

— Mother Directress to Sr. Faustina when undergoing a great trial (*Diary*, 24)



Saint Faustina’s life was a pilgrimage towards Heaven — and our life is, too. In this spiritual exercise, we delve into Helen’s progress in the religious life, as well as her experience of a dark night, disappointments, hard decisions, and great difficulties in prayer. Let’s now take a look at what Helen experienced and the choices she made in seeking God’s will for herself.

On January 23, 1926, towards the end of Helen’s postulancy, Helen left Warsaw for Krakow so as to prepare for the next stage of her religious life: her novitiate. Later in her *Diary*, St. Faustina would express the incredible feelings she experienced upon entering this phase: “An inconceivable joy reigned in my soul,” she wrote (*Diary*, 21). On April 30, 1926, the solemn ceremony of receiving the habit and veil for the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy in Krakow-Lagiewniki took place.

This ceremony was a pivotal moment in Helen’s life. She would move forward in the religious life and also be addressed by a new name. In addition to these important things, some-

thing extraordinary happened to Helen. It was so profound that Helen fainted. A certain Sr. Clemens Buczek was assigned to assist Helen at the altar by helping her to take off the white gown she had previously worn and don her new habit and veil. Sister Buczek rushed Helen a bit. “Hurry and put on the habit.”¹²

That’s when smelling salts were called for.

From that day forward, Sr. Clemens would endlessly tease Helen about the incident. It wasn’t until after Sr. Faustina’s death that Sr. Clemens learned what had actually taken place. Saint Faustina wrote in her *Diary*, “The day I took the [religious] habit, God let me understand how much I was to suffer. I clearly saw to what I was committing myself.” She continued, “I experienced a moment of that suffering. But then God filled my soul again with great consolations” (*Diary*, 22).

Helen received her new name: “Sister Maria Faustina,” which was chosen by Mother Leonarda Cielecka, the superior general of the congregation.

Dark night

Sister Faustina aimed to please. She wanted to do everything to please God — every little and big task. She exhibited a joyful demeanor and was quick to help with any need, offering her efforts and sacrifices for the souls in Purgatory. She often encouraged her fellow sisters to pray for the souls in Purgatory. There’s no doubt her visit to Purgatory was permanently etched on her heart.

Yet Sr. Faustina suffered from more than the usual trials of convent life. It wasn’t long after Jesus revealed to her the sufferings she would endure that she suffered various “splinters” from the Cross. One big splinter was in the way she was treated by some of her fellow sisters. Though she was very accommodating, there were some sisters who tormented her and others who didn’t believe Sr. Faustina when she said she was sick. This all contributed to her anguish.

Toward the end of the first year of her novitiate, a heavy darkness descended upon Sr. Faustina (*Diary*, 23). No matter how much Sr. Faustina prayed or the kind of prayers that she prayed, she found no joy in prayer. Remember, Faustina was the one who thought that she should leave the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy because there wasn't enough prayer. Now, she struggled with any prayer at all. Some of the great saints have also experienced this condition, called the "dark night" or "the dark night of the soul." Saint John of the Cross may have been the first to have coined the phrase.

Saint John of the Cross explained the spiritual life extensively in his writings. He wrote:

[I]t is most fitting and necessary, if the soul is to pass to these great things, that this dark night of contemplation should first of all annihilate and undo it in its meannesses, bringing it into darkness, aridity, affliction and emptiness; for the light which is to be given to it is a Divine light of the highest kind, which transcends all natural light, and which by nature can find no place in the understanding.¹³

The dark night of the senses and the spirit are distinct times of purification of the soul. In the dark night of the senses, God purges the soul of earthly affections, desires, and passions to prepare the person for a union with Him. The dark night of the spirit then purifies the person even more, finally raising the person, when the darkness clears, into the heights of self-forgetful adoration of the infinite light and love of God.

Sister Faustina's Mother Directress tried to help her through the difficulties, encouraging her to hang in there. But the trial was extremely intense, like nothing Sr. Faustina had ever experienced. On top of the aridity she felt in prayer, a great fear gripped her heart.

Poor Sr. Faustina! It was almost too much to bear. "I could find nothing but great misery," she said. Yet she was

reminded of God's great glory. "I could also clearly see the great holiness of God." But Sr. Faustina didn't dare lift her eyes to meet His. She reduced herself "to dust under His feet and begged for mercy" (*Diary*, 23). It would be a long six months of darkness, day in and day out. We should remember, though, that according to St. John of the Cross, when a soul is immersed in the dark night, God continues to communicate through infused contemplation, but God's light is actually blinding and the soul only perceives darkness.

Confused and miserable

Sister Faustina couldn't help but remember that the second year of her novitiate was coming up. If she couldn't get through this great trial, what would become of her? "Whenever I recalled that I was to make my vows, my soul shuddered." She could not meditate, nor could she understand any of the spiritual writings that she attempted to read. "It seemed to me," she wrote, "that my prayer was displeasing to God ... that by approaching the Holy Sacraments I was offending God even more" (*Diary*, 23). Yet Sister Faustina's confessor would not let her miss one single Holy Communion, knowing she was undergoing such a huge trial. Can we even imagine her pain?

The saint in the making said, "God was working very strangely." She couldn't even understand simple truths of the faith. "My soul was in anguish, unable to find comfort anywhere." Then, her trial increased to the point that she felt totally rejected by God. "This terrible thought pierced my soul right through; in the midst of the suffering my soul began to experience the agony of death," she wrote. "I wanted to die but could not." Everything seemed to be of no avail. What was the sense in striving for sanctity or mortifying oneself if it didn't please God? She made it known to her directress of novices, who said to her encouragingly, "Know, dear Sister, that God has chosen you for great sanctity. This is a sign that God wants to have you very close to Himself in Heaven. Have great trust in the Lord Jesus" (*Diary*, 23).

Of course, Sr. Faustina *wanted* to trust God. But her inner darkness got worse instead of better. Sister Faustina tried to endure in faith with all her might. She fled to Jesus' Sacred Wounds and repeated words of trust. She recalled, "These words became for me an even greater torture." She went to the Blessed Sacrament. "I began to speak to Jesus," she wrote in her *Diary*. "Jesus, You said that a mother would sooner forget her infant than God His creature, and that 'even if she would forget her infant, I, God, will never forget My creature.'" She pleaded with Him. "O Jesus, do You hear how my soul is moaning? Deign to hear the painful whimpers of Your child. I trust in You, O God, because heaven and earth will pass, but Your word will last forever."

There was silence. Nothing changed. "I found not a moment of relief" (*Diary*, 23).

One morning, Sr. Faustina felt overcome with despair as she prayed earnestly. "Complete darkness in my soul. I fought as best I could till noon." Later on, "deadly fears" seized her and zapped her of physical strength. Sister Faustina went to her cell and fell on her knees before the crucifix. She cried out for mercy. "But Jesus did not hear my cries. I felt my physical strength leave me completely." She fell to the ground, "despair flooding my whole soul." She suffered excruciating torments, "terrible tortures in no way different from the torments of hell" (*Diary*, 24). She suffered this way for almost an hour. She might have been given a glimpse of this hellish torture when she was about to take her veil earlier that year. It's no wonder that she fainted.

Sister Faustina felt oddly paralyzed in this strange pain and despair. She was unable to call for help. Thankfully, another novice entered Sr. Faustina's cell, found her in that awful state, and immediately told the directress. The directress arrived and called out to Sr. Faustina to get up "in the name of holy obedience." She then instructed, "Have great confidence," adding that "God is always our Father, even when He sends us trials." Her words helped. But again that evening, Sr. Faustina was immersed in yet another trial of terrible darkness.

She suffered intensely and would later say, “Only one who has lived through similar moments can understand how terrible is this torment of the soul” (*Diary*, 24).

Mother Mary brings relief

That night, Mother Mary came to visit Sr. Faustina. She was holding the Infant Jesus in her arms. “My soul was filled with joy, and I said, ‘Mary, my Mother, do You know how terribly I suffer?’ And the Mother of God answered me, ‘I know how much you suffer, but do not be afraid. I share with you your suffering, and I shall always do so.’” Mary smiled warmly at Sr. Faustina and then disappeared. Sister Faustina was transformed by the heavenly visit. “At once, strength and a great courage sprang anew in my soul; but that lasted only one day,” she recalled (*Diary*, 25).

“It seemed as though hell had conspired against me. A terrible hatred began to break out in my soul, a hatred for all that is holy and divine” (*Diary*, 25). A spiritual battle was being waged in her soul. Sister Faustina poured her heart out to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. She wanted Him to stop “hiding” from her. The suffering continued. On Good Friday at the end of her novitiate and during evening Adoration, Jesus let Sr. Faustina know how much He suffered for her. Sister Faustina said, “Jesus catches up my heart into the very flame of His love.” She forgot everything else, being so “invaded” by the “Divine Presence,” as she said. She continued, “Jesus gave me to understand how much He had suffered for me.” This encounter with Jesus left the young mystic with “[a]n intense yearning — a longing to love God” (*Diary*, 26).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Would Sister Faustina have chosen to endure the intense dark night she experienced if she was given the choice? I believe that she would have chosen it, no matter how painful and intense it would be, because she ultimately desired the holy will of God and all that was required to advance in holiness. As we discussed earlier, Sr. Faustina was given a glimpse of the sufferings she would need to endure when she received her habit. She might not have been privy to a sneak peek at everything, but she certainly chose to accept whatever God would give her. In addition, though Jesus was at times “hiding” from her, she continued to trust Him by choosing to make acts of trust through her prayers and actions.

Along our pilgrimage to eternal life, we also will face all sorts of decisions at crossroads, opportunities, trials, and challenges. Would we necessarily choose to undergo the twists and turns that unfold in life? Which way should we turn? How do we respond? Are we striving for holiness? Might God be involved in it all?

Take time this week to think about your spiritual journey. Where are you headed? Are you headed in the right direction? Do you need to take a detour, or a U-turn? Ask Mother Mary to help you as you ponder and pray. After all, she is famous for instructing, “Do whatever He tells you” (Jn 2:5).



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Take some time to reflect on who might feel lost or, in some sense, in darkness and need a helping heart and hand. Do your best to encourage that person or family in some way. For inspiration in deciding upon your merciful actions this week, refer to the “How to Use This Book” section to see the description of deeds of mercy that Jesus gave to Sr. Faustina.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus and Blessed Mother Mary,
help me to remain on the straight and narrow
path that leads to eternal life and to lead anyone
troubled with darkness into God's light.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 6

Work



“Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful and filled with good deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks.”

— *Diary*, 163



In this spiritual exercise, we discuss how work fit into St. Faustina’s life, and how it fits in our own lives. Even in her work, Sr. Faustina trusted our Lord. She didn’t hesitate to pour her heart out to Jesus when, for instance, she couldn’t manage the heavy pots of potatoes she drained in the kitchen. She was concerned because she desired to fulfill her responsibilities to please our Lord and get the job done well to satisfy others. Let’s now take a look at Sr. Faustina at work.

Sister Faustina was a hard worker. There should not have been a single doubt about that. But there were some sisters who occasionally questioned Sr. Faustina’s occasional inability to do heavy work when she was ill and feeling frail. They thought she was faking. Yet Sr. Faustina wholeheartedly desired to follow and abide by every rule of her religious order, knowing that it would be pleasing to Jesus. She never shirked from her duties, either — whether it was domestic work,

answering the door, working in the gardens, or helping in the kitchen. However, when Sr. Faustina's health was failing, she at times lacked the necessary strength for some of the work. Her superiors lessened her workload to accommodate her.

During Sr. Faustina's novitiate, she was assigned to work in the kitchen. There was one huge problem looming over her: The massive pots and pans were much too heavy, especially when they were filled with water and boiling vegetables. She had the most trouble draining the huge pots of potatoes. A convent filled with sisters required massive amounts of food to be cooked for meals. Potatoes were a mainstay because the Polish soil supported them. Many times, as Sr. Faustina tried to balance a huge pot of potatoes to drain off the boiling water into the kitchen sink, the cooked potatoes and scalding hot water ended up all over the linoleum floor — and, at times, on anyone standing nearby!

This predicament distressed poor Sr. Faustina, so much so that she spoke with her Mother Directress. She didn't want to continue wasting food and making a big mess, not to mention inconveniencing everyone. Other sisters were more suited for the job. Sister Faustina hoped she could properly convey that assessment to her superior. But what did the Mother Directress say? Simply that the novice would eventually acquire the necessary skill. That was it.

In her weakness, Jesus provides a miracle

We can opine that Sr. Faustina's heart must have sunk for a quick moment. She knew that she lacked the strength, and it was becoming near impossible for her to drain the potatoes and do other heavy work. On top of that, she was quite certain she wouldn't just "acquire" the skill to handle them. It didn't make sense. Her frailty was not considered — not one bit. Sister Faustina seemed to get weaker each day. She felt forced to avoid the heavy work. She got dirty looks from a few of the sisters and heard some murmuring going on around the convent. But God had a plan!

After speaking with her superior, Sr. Faustina shared her feelings with Jesus in her examination prayer. She shared with Him simply that she just couldn't do the required work because she lacked the strength. She immediately heard very clearly: "From today on you will do this easily; I shall strengthen you" (*Diary*, 65). What a consolation! Music to her ears, for sure! That evening, fully confident in Jesus' encouraging message to her, Sr. Faustina was exceedingly eager to rush over to the huge pot before anyone else. She quickly grabbed the potholders, lifted the pot straight off the stove, and drained every last drop of piping hot water down the drain without a single problem! When she lifted the pot cover to release the steam and peered inside, Sr. Faustina nearly fell over. This time, it wasn't because of the weight of the pot.

Instead of cooked potatoes, an abundance of the most beautiful red roses this sister had ever seen perfectly filled the pot! The mystic was completely taken by surprise. For one brief instant, Sr. Faustina could not comprehend the miracle's meaning. Suddenly, a distinct voice within her revealed the answer. "I change such hard work of yours into bouquets of most beautiful flowers, and their perfume rises up to My throne" (*Diary*, 65).

We can only imagine the renewed confidence Sr. Faustina felt about accomplishing her work with ease and her eagerness to continue to do her work after seeing the gift of the miraculous roses and hearing how pleased Jesus was with her efforts. What strength she experienced through His words! We can experience that strength, as well. We can learn from Jesus, realizing that He is pleased with our work when it is done lovingly and offered to Him.

After that amazing experience, Sr. Faustina strove to help the other sisters with arduous tasks, as well as to do her own. Later on, when she was extremely ill, she wrote a prayer (which you can see at the end of this chapter) about being merciful, doing good deeds, and assisting her neighbors, even when she herself was exhausted or weak.

Loving dedication and prayer transforms souls

Sister Faustina prayerfully immersed herself totally in every task. Later, when she was at the convent in Walendow (near Warsaw) in March 1936, Sr. Faustina was assigned to domestic duties, such as cleaning the refectory. Some of the sisters observed that Sr. Faustina did not change out of her habit into work clothes. When questioned about this, the mystic simply explained that she did not enter a religious order so as to take off her habit. Because of this, Sr. Faustina acquired a couple of nicknames, such as “woman of fashion” and the like. She was wholeheartedly dedicated to her vocation and all that her habit represented.

After staying in Walendow, Sr. Faustina was sent to the congregation’s residence in Derdy, only about a half mile away. It was set back away from civilization and, in Sr. Faustina’s words, was “like a house out of a fairy tale.”¹⁴ It was set up as a rest center for the sisters and girls from the Warsaw house on property donated to the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in 1881 by Countess Maria Tyzenhauz-Przedziecka. Eventually, a separate house was built there, called the House of Mercy, which housed several dozen school girls.

In Derdy, Sr. Faustina would again work in the kitchen, cooking meals for seven sisters and for the more than 30 girls living there. Each day, weather permitting, she would pray the Rosary and do some spiritual exercises in the outdoor “cathedral” of the forest, breathing deeply the fresh, crisp air. Sister Faustina was also required to take a two-hour rest each afternoon.

The cooking responsibilities were not too difficult for Sr. Faustina, who was suffering from tuberculosis. And while she was at work in the kitchen, Sr. Faustina’s holiness began to make an impression on a certain unruly girl assigned as her assistant.

She was a “neophyte of a very disagreeable disposition with whom no one, anywhere, wanted to work,” explained

Mother Serafina Kukulska, the superior of the convent in Walendow at that time. She added, “It was precisely that same girl, who worked with Faustina, who changed beyond recognition. Such was Sr. Faustina’s quiet but godly influence on that sinful soul.”¹⁵ So we learn that we too can have an influence on others in our work. This is why we must remember that we are the “aroma” of Christ wherever we are. God wants us to be a radiant example of His love.

Another time, while living at the convent in Lagiewniki, Sr. Faustina was assigned to gardening work. She spent much of her time in the greenhouse. No doubt as she toiled away in the soil, nurturing plants to good health, she prayed and meditated on Jesus’ requests of her, including starting a new congregation and everything about Divine Mercy. Sister Faustina was happy with whatever work she was assigned, pleased to do the will of God. Sister Faustina’s work produced much fruit — literally! Even when she was in declining health, Sr. Faustina’s plants churned out great abundance. The nuns harvested copious amounts of tomatoes (as many as 80 from each plant), cucumbers, and strawberries (with a small patch producing hundreds of pounds every day) from Sr. Faustina’s plants. It was actually miraculous.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Take time to ponder your attitude about your work.

- Do you think it produces positive “fruits”?
- Do you trust the Lord with your work?
- How about with all of the details of your life?
- Do you hesitate to approach Jesus with your concerns?
- Is anything holding you back?
- With regard to being a holy example to others in your work, do your attitudes and actions edify others?

- Does your commitment to your work give a good example to others?
- Do you show loving concern to those who are near you?

We should strive to recognize that we are given opportunities each day to make a positive difference in someone's life. Just as Sr. Faustina was such a good influence on the sinful girl in the kitchen, we, too, need to pray and act so as to be light to the nations and the salt of the earth.

Take time this week to ponder the meaning of work in your life. With God's help and your prayerful cooperation, many miraculous transformations can occur in your own life and the lives of those around you.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

What can you do this week at work that will help someone in a profound way?

Perhaps you work at home, or perhaps you don't work. In that case, still make a point of carrying out merciful actions this week to help others. Pray and ask Jesus and Mary to help you come up with an idea to put into action. Be sure to carry it out!

A few suggestions:

- Help someone with their work.
- Give a compliment to someone who is struggling.
- Offer to help a colleague in some way.
- Pray for someone who you know is looking for a job.

Ask St. Faustina to intercede for you and the person whom you are helping through words, deeds, or prayer.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful and filled with good deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks.

Help me, that my feet may be merciful, so that I may hurry to assist my neighbor, overcoming my own fatigue and weariness.

My true rest is in the service of my neighbor (see *Diary*, 163).

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Mother Mary, pray for me.

Merciful Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 7

Striving for Sanctity



“The more I come to know Him, the more ardently, the more fiercely I love Him, and the more perfect my acts become.”

— *Diary*, 231



In this week’s spiritual exercise, we delve into the universal call to holiness. We will follow Sr. Faustina’s progression in her spiritual life and her desire to become a saint. In addition, we are enlightened about an extraordinary encounter that Sr. Faustina had with another saint whom she loved dearly! Let’s take a look.

Sister Faustina had possessed a deep desire to become a saint ever since she was a little girl. Amazingly, one time she had the opportunity to ask another saint about it! One night during her novitiate in Lagiewniki, Sr. Faustina was going through some great difficulties that, she wrote, she “did not know how to overcome.” During this “dark night,” she decided to make novenas to various saints. Suddenly, it occurred to her to pray a novena to St. Thérèse of Lisieux, to whom she was greatly devoted. On the fifth day of the novena, Sr. Faustina had an intense, vivid dream in which she saw St. Thérèse “as if she were still living on earth” (*Diary*, 150). She reassured Sr. Faustina that her great trial would be resolved in three days.

During the conversation, Sr. Faustina did not hesitate to ask St. Thérèse if she, Faustina, would someday become a saint.

“Yes, you will be a saint,” Thérèse answered.

But Sr. Faustina wanted to know more. “But, little Thérèse, shall I be a saint as you are, raised to the altar?”

The Little Flower responded, “Yes, you will be a saint just as I am, but you must trust in the Lord Jesus” (*Diary*, 150).

How interesting that St. Thérèse spoke to the future St. Faustina about the need to trust Jesus! It’s not likely that you or I will have that same type of opportunity to ask a saint about our future. Also, it is certainly edifying to learn of this beautiful conversation between the two saints — one who had been already been raised to the honors of the altar and the other a saint in the making who had long had a desire to become a saint in order to aid the Church. In particular, Sr. Faustina would ultimately carry out the great mission to teach the world about Divine Mercy.

All of our journeys to holiness include trials and tribulations to help us grow and urge us to seek our Lord even more deeply. In the fall of 1936, a sister working in the infirmary with Sr. Faustina did not believe the murmurings about Sr. Faustina’s mystical experiences. This sister snarled in anger at Faustina, accusing her of being a hysteric who wanted to be coddled.

“Sister, you want to be a saint?” Sr. Chrysostom Korczak asked sarcastically. Before Sr. Faustina could say a word, Sr. Chrysostom fired away, “Pigs will fly before that’ll happen.” It might seem a little funny to think that the skeptical sister actually said this to the virtuous St. Faustina. But what did Sr. Faustina say in return? “Sister, I love you even more.”¹⁶

We can imagine that Sr. Faustina practiced heroic virtue in that moment. Perhaps she was even thankful that bad things were being said about her so that she could lovingly offer them in reparation to her sweet Lord Jesus. That act of love would help her own soul, the soul of the unpleasant sister, and be used in reparation for sinners in need of mercy. Every saint in the making undergoes many a trial. Their response to these

challenges is the stuff that eventually makes them a saint. God will grant the graces. We must not forget to ask for them.

Sister Faustina wrote in her fifth notebook, “I am striving for sanctity, because in this way I shall be useful to the Church. I make constant efforts in practicing virtue. I try faithfully to follow Jesus.” Further, she stated that she made constant efforts to practice the virtues in order to become holy. She added, “And I deposit this whole series of daily virtues — silent, hidden, almost imperceptible, but made with great love — in the treasury of God’s Church for the common benefit of souls.” Faustina continued, “I feel interiorly as if I were responsible for all souls. I know very well that I do not live for myself alone, but for the entire Church ...” (*Diary*, 1505). These are important and helpful words to ponder.

While most reading this book are probably members of the laity, who might not feel called to such an intense interior life as Sr. Faustina, a consecrated religious sister, it is important to recognize that every single one of us is called by God to strive for sanctity. Living virtuous lives will not only help our own souls, but also certainly edify others and help them desire to come closer to God. Sister Faustina expressed that she felt responsible for “all souls.” When the Blessed Mother appeared at Fatima, she told us that we need to be responsible for other souls and that our prayers can also help sinners in danger of going to hell. We are truly together on this journey through life. We must help one another.

Sister Faustina didn’t become a saint overnight. Just like any other saint, she needed to put forth the effort to become holy. Yes, she received great graces, but she also had to choose to act upon them and use her will to overcome the obstacles and challenges that beset her. One of St. Faustina’s spiritual directors, Fr. Joseph Andrasz, SJ, gave a testimony about Sr. Faustina. He attested that she “worked very hard on obtaining such virtues as purity of heart, humility, patience, conscientiousness, obedience, poverty, gentleness, diligence, active love of one’s neighbor, interior recollection, deep piety, and above all love toward God,” he explained.

And lest we think that she was so gifted and graced that everything was effortless, he made sure to say, “One should not think that she acquired these virtues — especially at their higher levels — without any difficulty. There is no doubt that she had her own petty sins that she fell into occasionally, whether in speech or in relationships with others, or in reacting with impatience, in minor vanities, or some small imperfections at work. ... She confessed them and sincerely asked God for forgiveness, but recovered from them with vigor. She mentions this in her *Diary*.”

We are all works in progress, all called to improve and grow in holiness every day. Father Andrasz’s testimony reminds us that even many of the saints struggle with their fallen humanity throughout their lives and are prone to imperfection. It’s truly within the nitty gritty details of life that we work on our imperfections with God’s grace. In life’s ordinary moments, we can become more virtuous and pleasing to God, as well as radiant Christian examples to others. A lot depends upon our responses to everything that unfolds in our life. Will we be open to God’s grace? Will we try to improve our attitudes and responses to the call to holiness? Father Andrasz added, “And although she gave into those imperfections from time to time (because holiness in this world, even heroic holiness, is not yet heavenly holiness), these shortcomings became less frequent and even smaller, while the lovely flowers of the virtues grew in her more and more beautifully.”¹⁷



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Do you also feel a sense of responsibility for souls? Maybe we don’t feel a responsibility for *all* souls, like St. Faustina felt. Yet we should feel a great need to help other souls by striving to live a life of holiness and remembering others in fervent prayers. Yes, Sr. Faustina has much to teach us. We might also ponder, “Do I trust the Lord Jesus, as St. Thérèse asked of St. Faustina?”

The quote beginning this week's teaching states, "The more I come to know Him, the more ardently, the more fiercely I love Him, and the more perfect my acts become."

- Do you love our Lord more and more?
- Do you offer everything with "great love"?
- Or do you complain and quibble along the way, or even hold back your love?
- Finally, do you accept God's will?

Learning to accept the will of God is an essential and foundational step in your spiritual journey.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

We must make efforts each day to help others get to Heaven. One way is to pray for sinners, as Our Lady of Fatima requested of the three shepherd children and the world. In her *Diary*, St. Faustina used the analogy of soldiers in battle when explaining how our prayers can help others. She said: "We will bear in mind that a soldier on the front line cannot hold out long without support from the rear forces that do not actually take part in the fighting but provide for all his needs; and that such is the role of prayer, and that therefore each one of us is to be distinguished by an apostolic spirit" (*Diary*, 539).

Be a holy example to your family, neighbors, and communities. Many times, it is not your words that can help change hearts, but your loving, merciful actions, empowered by God's amazing and merciful grace. Do you have an "apostolic spirit," as Sr. Faustina mentions? If not, pray for the graces to obtain this spirit. Pray also to be more generous with your time praying for others. Offer your merciful actions this week to Jesus with great love.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, please grant me the graces
to accept and trust Your holy will in my life and to
offer my virtuous actions with great love to You.

Help me to be a vessel of love
and mercy to everyone.

Mother Mary, please guide me closer
to your Son, Jesus.

Saint Faustina and St. Thérèse of Lisieux,
please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!
Amen.




WEEK 8

Our Lady



“Mary is my Instructress, who is
ever teaching me how to live for God.
My spirit brightens up in Your gentleness
and Your humility, O Mary.”

— *Diary*, 620



Sister Faustina enjoyed extraordinary encounters with the Blessed Virgin Mary, the likes of which most of us will never experience this side of Heaven. However, because Sr. Faustina shared them with her confessors and in her Diary, we can be edified and benefit from them. This week’s spiritual exercise unveils the importance of the Blessed Mother in our lives and offers a look at this mystic’s relationship with Our Lady. Let’s take a look!

In God’s great love for His children, He bestowed the exquisite gift of Mother Mary on us when Jesus was hanging on the Cross. “Here is your mother” (Jn 19:27), Jesus uttered. Because of the great gift of Mother Mary, we should strive to recognize that Mary is not some far away saint of ages past, but a real mother to us now. She has shown great love for God’s children from the beginning of her collaboration in the work of Christ as a co-redeemer. Before that, as a young Jewish girl, Mary prayed with her people for the coming of the Messiah.

Perhaps she was as surprised as anyone else that she would be chosen to be the Mother of God!

The Blessed Mother sings the praises of God, as we can see in her Magnificat. She always, and I mean *always*, leads us ever closer to her Son, Jesus. And she is very practical! Her famous instruction to the wine stewards (“Do whatever He tells you” [Jn 2:5]) uttered at the wedding feast at Cana to help a bride and groom is also meant for all of us. Yes, we need to do whatever He tells us. Mother Mary can help us to figure that out — how to stay close to Jesus and how to discern and follow His holy will for us. Yes, Mother Mary can help us now.

It would be difficult to count the many writings and movies about the Blessed Mother. There are also countless prayers invoking her aid. Mary is so beloved and has much to teach us. Many saints and popes were deeply devoted to the Blessed Mother. At one point, St. John Paul II questioned his devotion to the Mother of God. He wondered if his great love for her might take away from his love for Christ. But he learned from another saint that he had nothing to worry about. Saint Louis de Montfort played a pivotal role in this pope’s decision to stay with Mary. “I found the answer to my perplexities due to the fear that the devotion to Mary, if excessive, might end by compromising the supremacy of the worship owed to Christ,” the pontiff explained. “Under the wise guidance of St. Louis-Marie, I understood that, if one lives the mystery of Mary in Christ, such a risk does not exist,” he added. Saint John Paul II explained that Mary “accompanies us in our pilgrimage of faith, hope, and charity toward an ever more intense union with Christ, only Savior and Mediator of salvation.”

With regard to his coat of arms, St. John Paul II said, “As is known, in my episcopal coat of arms [...] the motto ‘Totus Tuus’ is inspired by the doctrine of St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort. These two words express total belonging to Jesus through Mary.”¹⁸

“But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2:19).

This pope proclaimed in his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater* (*Mother of the Redeemer*), “As the Council says, ‘Mary figured profoundly in the history of salvation Hence when she is being preached and venerated, she summons the faithful to her Son and his sacrifice, and to love for the Father.’”¹⁹ The Blessed Mother played a pivotal role in salvation history. God’s grace and Mary’s deep humility and faith prepared the young Jewish teen to respond wholeheartedly to the Archangel Gabriel’s greeting with a positive “*fiat*,” “Let it be done.” Mary desired only God’s holy will and humbly accepted that she was the chosen one — the holy daughter of Anne and Joachim, destined to conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Son of God. She could have said “no” out of fear or a myriad of other reasons. However, her momentous “yes” has changed the world for all eternity. At the same time, her example of great faith in the face of uncertainty gives each one of us the courage to utter our own “yes” to God, “yes” to whatever it is we are meant to do.

“Indeed, at the Annunciation,” St. John Paul II pointed out, “Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the ‘full submission of intellect and will,’ manifesting ‘the obedience of faith’ to him who spoke to her through his messenger. She responded, therefore, with all her human and feminine ‘I,’ and this response of faith included both perfect cooperation with ‘the grace of God that precedes and assists’ and perfect openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who ‘constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts.’”²⁰

Again, in his catechesis on the Virgin Mary, St. John Paul II points out that humility of heart is particularly attractive to the Lord. We will soon learn that it was a favorite virtue of the Blessed Mother, as well. “With her wise reading of history, Mary leads us to discover the criteria of God’s mysterious action. Overturning the judgments of the world, he comes to the aid of the poor and lowly, to the detriment of the rich and powerful, and in a surprising way he fills with good things the humble who entrust their lives to him (cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, n. 37).”²¹

Sister Faustina and Our Lady

Sister Faustina intensely loved the Blessed Mother. Early on in the religious life, as mentioned in the preface of this book, Sr. Faustina spent six hours steeped in prayer before the image of the Black Madonna at the shrine in Czestochowa, Poland. Another sister had to fetch her from the shrine for a meal and to catch a train. Sister Faustina would later reveal that during those long prayerful hours, the Blessed Mother spoke much to her heart about the spiritual life.

Sister Faustina kept company with the Blessed Mother in prayer, and at times, the Queen of Heaven left her throne to visit the sister. One evening, when St. Faustina was enduring a terrible spiritual dark night, Mother Mary came to visit Sr. Faustina. She brought great comfort through her words and presence. When Sr. Faustina asked the Virgin Mary if she knew of the terrible agony Faustina was enduring, the Blessed Mother not only said that she knew, but reassured Faustina that she was suffering right along with her. They were united in suffering for souls. It was music to Sr. Faustina's ears.

One time, as she was preparing for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, Sr. Faustina prayed even more intensely, thanking God for the great gift of Mary. She took part in the congregation's nine-day novena, but she also desired to do more. In Mary's honor, St. Faustina prayed 1,000 Hail Marys on each of the novena's nine days. On the actual feast day, Sr. Faustina saw the Blessed Mother at Mass. The Mother of God smiled at Sr. Faustina and told her that, at God's command, the Blessed Virgin Mary was to be in a special and exclusive way Sr. Faustina's mother. She added that she desired that Sr. Faustina would be, in a special way, her child. Mary then let Sr. Faustina know that she desired Sr. Faustina to especially practice three virtues: humility, purity, and love of God. She said, "As My daughter, you must especially radiate with these virtues" (*Diary*, 1412-1415). The Blessed Mother then pressed Sr. Faustina to her Heart and disappeared. Sister Faustina said her own heart became immensely attracted to

these virtues, and she practiced them faithfully. It would seem that the second and third virtues mentioned by Our Lady flow forth from the first virtue of humility, which is so necessary for spiritual growth. Like Jesus, Mary very much valued the virtue of humility.

One evening as Sr. Faustina was praying, the Mother of God told her, “Your lives must be like Mine: quiet and hidden, in unceasing union with God, pleading for humanity and preparing the world for the second coming of God” (*Diary*, 625). Now, the Blessed Mother was referring to the lives of religious sisters. As members of the laity, our lives might not be quiet or hidden (maybe far from it!). At the same time, we should also seek quiet in which to commune with God, as well as pray for our world “for the second coming of God.” We need to step up to the plate!



SOMETHING TO PONDER

When I was enduring a precarious pregnancy, Mother Teresa told me to put myself and my unborn baby into the hands of Mary — that the Blessed Mother would help me. Mother Teresa taught me a special prayer that I pray often: “Mary, Mother of Jesus, be Mother to me now.” Mother Teresa taught simply. She offered an unadorned way in which to ask Mary for help for an urgent need. I like that she added the word, “now.” For I have no doubt that we need Mary *now*.

Throughout this week, take time to ponder the Blessed Mother’s life. Try your best to put time aside to learn more about Mary by reading Scripture or other writings on the Blessed Mother from a pope or saint, and spend more time with Mary in prayer. Ask her to draw you closer to her Son. When you pray your daily Rosary, try your best to immerse yourself into each mystery, pausing and praying for the many graces available to you. Always ask for graces!

In the *Diary* passage that opens this chapter, we learn St. Faustina’s understanding of Mother Mary’s important

teaching role in her life. “Mary is my Instructress, who is ever teaching me how to live for God.” Strive this week and beyond to learn from Mary and live more for God. Saint Faustina also said, “Mary, Immaculate Virgin, take me under Your special protection and guard the purity of my soul, heart, and body. You are the model and star of my life” (*Diary*, 874). Can you sincerely pray that prayer to Mary now? If not, ask God to change your heart so that you can pray that prayer soon. Recalling St. Faustina’s nine days of a thousand Hail Marys, could you possibly pray even a few extra prayers to Mary each day?



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Try to carry out a merciful action as a complete surprise to someone this week. Send a Mass card, a greeting card, or a warm note of some kind. If you feel so inclined, do it anonymously. Add to that something you decide you should do after praying to Jesus, Mary, and St. Faustina.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, thank You for the gift
of Your mother, Mary.
Help me to get closer to her and learn from her.
Thank You for Your great love!
Saint Faustina, please pray for me.
Jesus, I trust in You!
Mary, Mother of Jesus, be Mother to me now.
Amen.




WEEK 9

First Vows and Her Parents' Blessing



“You are My joy;
you are My heart's delight.”

— Jesus to Sr. Faustina (*Diary*, 27)



This week's spiritual exercise delves into some of the ups and downs during Sr. Faustina's novitiate, as well as Sr. Faustina's first vows and the wonderful blessing from her parents. We will also see that at one point, Sr. Faustina was even tormented by a terrible hatred for all things holy. What a struggle this must have been because Sr. Faustina simply desired to grow in holiness and to please God. The intense darkness, confusion, and uncertainties were all a part of God's plan to purify her. It might be difficult to fully grasp the reasons that God operates in this way. Yet, if we study the lives of the saints, we will see that they all suffered as they carried their crosses, following Jesus. Let's move on to see what unfolds.

Sister Faustina would stay at the convent in Krakow-Lagiewniki for the entire two-year novitiate. Earlier, we discussed how Sr. Faustina fainted upon receiving her veil, overcome with the future she would need to endure. After that, it seemed as if all hell had broken loose. The new novice

was steeped in interior trials and even debilitating darkness, which included feelings of despair. At one point, as we discussed earlier, Sr. Faustina recalled, “A terrible hatred began to break out in my soul, a hatred for all that is holy and divine” (*Diary*, 25). She began to believe that this would be her lot in life, that the suffering would be continual, without relief. She made her way through her novitiate amid continual deep sufferings. Physical weakness added to her misery.

Deep suffering continued, but the young nun found much comfort in her Lord Jesus. As I mentioned earlier, during an evening Adoration on Good Friday, April 16, 1928, Jesus touched Sr. Faustina’s heart penetratingly and helped her to understand something profoundly sobering. Sister Faustina recalled in her *Diary*, “All of a sudden, the Divine Presence invaded me, and I forgot everything else. Jesus gave me to understand how much He had suffered for me.” It was brief, but it left her, as she described, with “an intense yearning — a longing to love God” (*Diary*, 26). Sister Faustina certainly gained much strength from this experience.

Profession of first vows

Shortly after, Sr. Faustina professed her first religious vows on April 30, 1928. These were temporary vows, and would be in effect for one year. Sister Faustina’s parents, who had initially been against her entering religious life, came to her profession ceremony. It was the first time they had seen one another in four years. What a consolation this must have been to Sr. Faustina, and what a great joy to her parents to finally see their daughter. Because every guest room was filled, Stanislaus and Mariana stayed the night in the garden shed. They were up all night, not because they were uncomfortable, but because they were praying the entire night for their dear Helen.

The ceremony began in the convent, where the novices knelt down and officially asked Mother General Leonard Cielecka for permission to make their profession of vows.

Holding lit candles, they processed to the chapel, where they asked the celebrant, the auxiliary bishop of the Krakow Archdiocese, Stanislaus Rospond, to accept their first profession of vows in the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. The bishop pronounced a special prayer and placed a black veil on each of the novice's heads. Their crucifixes and long rosaries, which hung on their habits, were blessed. Each sister pronounced her first religious vows.

It is said that afterwards, Sr. Faustina's father walked through the convent gardens with his Helen and asked if she was bored with the religious life. He didn't understand the beauty and holiness wrapped up in the monotony of obedience. His newly professed daughter didn't miss a beat. She said it wasn't possible to be bored living under the same roof as Jesus! "You see, Daddy, the One to Whom I made my vows is my Husband and your Son-in-law."²² Stanislaus and Marianna left for home, finally at peace with their daughter's decision to enter religious life.

First vows officially completed Faustina's novitiate. That day, she became a professed religious sister. Earlier, when Jesus showed her how He had suffered for her, Sr. Faustina was filled with "[a]n ardent desire to empty myself for God by an active love, but a love that would be imperceptible, even to the sisters closest to me" (*Diary*, 27). This young sister strove to draw closer to Jesus. As she moved through the joys and difficulties of each day, she was moving ever closer to a blessed union with her Beloved.

However, another six months of darkness would permeate Sr. Faustina's life. She didn't yet have a spiritual director to help her stay the course, and the dark night was excruciating. One superior claimed that all of her experiences were illusions. Though she received the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, her confessors were often ineffective as spiritual directors, and failed to relate to her that the dark uncertainties were part of God's plan to purge and sanctify her soul. Sister Faustina advanced very quickly in the spiritual life, and no one seemed to understand her. That was a big part of the problem. However,

after six months more of suffering, St. Faustina had one point of clarity during the stormy seas of murkiness. Sister Faustina's darkness melted away instantly when "Jesus pervaded all my soul," she explained. "I heard these words within me: 'You are My joy; you are My heart's delight'" (*Diary*, 27). From that very moment, she felt the Most Holy Trinity dwell in her heart. She wrote, "I felt that I was inundated with Divine light. Since then, my soul has been in intimate communion with God, like a child with its beloved Father" (*Diary*, 27). This would be the end of the first dark night for Sr. Faustina, who later wrote, "I would not have believed that one could suffer so, if I had not gone through it myself" (*Diary*, 104). Unbeknownst to her, she would be called to later endure another dark night.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

We have pondered some of the ups and downs during Sr. Faustina's novitiate. The young nun was even tormented by a terrible hatred for all things holy. What a struggle this must have been because Sr. Faustina wanted to grow in holiness and please God. The intense darkness, confusion, and uncertainties were all a part of God's plan to purify her. It might be difficult to fully grasp the reasons that God operates this way. Yet, if we study the lives of the saints, we will see that many, if not all, suffered as they carried their crosses, following Jesus.

Take time this week to reflect on Sr. Faustina's attitude and actions when enduring the pains of her suffering in the dark night. She chose to do her best to move forward in prayer. She also chose to trust God amidst the darkness. Jesus at times broke through with a consolation for Sr. Faustina, but for the most part, she suffered with great uncertainty. Think about your own reactions and responses to the contradictions in your life. How can you improve? If there is darkness, can you seek a spiritual director to help you navigate? Can you pray to persevere and continue to follow God?



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Is there someone you know in your own family, whether in your immediate family or a distant relative, who might be struggling in some way? How can you reach out in love to them this week? A phone call or visit? Letting someone know that you care can be healing indeed. Pray for direction. Make it happen.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, thank You for Your many blessings. Help me to be a blessing in the lives of everyone around me.

Help me to seek You throughout every joy and every bit of darkness I might experience.

Mother Mary, guide me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 10

Physical Illness, “A School of Patience”



“Physical weakness was for me
a school of patience.”

— *Diary*, 37



Sister Faustina discovered that sickness and suffering were a “school of patience” through which she learned to persevere in doing God’s will. That does not mean it was easy. Not at all. It required much effort to resign her will completely to God’s holy will. It requires much effort for each of us to do the same. This week’s spiritual exercise delves into Sr. Faustina’s lessons in the “school of patience.” Let’s take a look.

Growing up on a farm, every day Helen breathed the invigorating, crisp, clean country air into her lungs. She stretched her legs on the many acres of farmland, bringing the cows out to pasture and playfully romping around, as little girls do. During harvest seasons, she was nourished with unprocessed, wholesome vegetables picked right from the gardens that very day. You can’t get any fresher than that! She drank raw cow’s milk, rich with vitamins. Chicken eggs, plucked from nests and still warm from the hens, were scrambled up on the hot griddle by her mama. Being a fine baker, Marianna also made sure that her home-baked rolls and delicious breads

were a daily staple on their supper table. Though the family struggled financially, young Helen was well-nourished and healthy. So it might seem ironic that the bright-eyed young girl displaying a freckled, shining, and rosy face would later succumb to much illness after becoming a sister, and die at the young age of 33 years.

Sister Faustina wrote in her *Diary*, “Physical weakness was for me a school of patience. Only Jesus knows how many efforts of will I had to make to fulfill my duty” (*Diary*, 37). As Sr. Faustina progressed in the spiritual life, she learned how important it was to suffer patiently, as well as to offer her sufferings to God for His holy will to be accomplished. From her statement above, we learn that moving her will to fulfill her duties required much effort. Yet she trusted God. It’s the same with us. We need to choose to move our will so we can head in the right direction in our spiritual life, continually trusting God with our lives. Sister Faustina also wrote, “In order to purify a soul, Jesus uses whatever instruments He likes” (*Diary*, 38). Jesus might use sickness or interior suffering to purify a soul. He is the Divine Physician, and we need to trust that He knows just what we need and when we need it. We should ask ourselves, “If we had everything we wanted or thought we needed, would we ever get to Heaven?” It is possible that sickness might save the soul of someone who has turned away from God. God can lovingly show the soul who is the more powerful One and from Whom we need to seek help, especially before our dying breath.

In addition to so often being sick herself, Sr. Faustina felt called to pray for the sick. She once wrote, “I steeped myself in prayer, especially for the sick. I now see how much the sick have need of prayer” (*Diary*, 826). Another time, she wrote, “Today I must stay in bed all day. I had a violent fit of coughing, which left me so weak that I have no strength to walk. My spirit is eager to do God’s work, but physical strength has left me.” She certainly prayed to remedy her situation. To Jesus, she said, “I cannot penetrate Your actions at this moment, O Lord; therefore, I keep repeating with a loving act of the

will: Do with me as You please” (*Diary*, 1085). Sister Faustina knew that, since she was a professed religious sister, her life was completely in her Lord’s hands. There was no use fighting it. There would be no good purpose to do so. It would only complicate her condition. She desired only His holy will. She continued to repeat a loving act of surrender to Jesus, praying, “Do with me as You please.”

Jesus grants a miracle of health

One time, Sr. Faustina wrote a letter to her confessor, Fr. Michael Sopoćko (who, as we will later see, played an extremely important role in helping Sr. Faustina carry out her role as the “Apostle of Divine Mercy”). No sooner did she put her pen down than she was afflicted with illness. She felt miserable and wondered if the sudden attack of sickness meant she shouldn’t send the letter. She wrote in her *Diary*, “I did not send that letter, but waited for a clear sign of God’s will. However, my health got so bad that I had to go to bed. The coughing racked me so much that it seemed to me that, if this repeats a few more times, it will surely be the end of me” (*Diary*, 1088). A few days later, Sr. Faustina was even worse. It was the last day of a novena she had been praying to the Holy Spirit. She could barely breathe. She wheezed in pain; her lungs rattled. She managed to receive Holy Communion and prayed, “Jesus, may Your pure and healthy blood circulate in my ailing organism, and may Your pure and healthy body transform my weak body, and may a healthy and vigorous life throb within me, if it is truly Your holy will that I should set about the work in question; and this will be a clear sign of Your holy will for me” (*Diary*, 1089).

Sister Faustina felt a strange sensation moving through her whole body. “[I]n an instant, I felt completely well. My breath is clear, as if there never had been anything the matter with my lungs, and I feel no pain, and this is a sign for me that I should set about the work” she recalled (*Diary*, 1089). Sister Faustina said she found herself “united with the Lord Jesus in

a purely spiritual way,” adding, “Jesus gave me strong assurances; that is, He confirmed me in respect to His demands” (*Diary*, 1090). All throughout that day, Sr. Faustina stayed close to Jesus and talked with Him about details concerning a new congregation (more on that later on).

Sister Faustina learned much through this experience. She wrote, “Jesus infused my soul with power and courage to act. Now I understand that if the Lord demands something of a soul, He gives it the means to carry it out, and through grace He makes it capable of doing this.” She continued, “So, even if the soul be utterly miserable, at the Lord’s command it can undertake things beyond its expectation, because this is the sign by which it can be known that the Lord is with that soul: if God’s power and strength, which make the soul courageous and valiant, is manifest within it.” Sister Faustina expanded upon the wisdom learned. She admitted, “As for myself, I am always at first a bit frightened at the Lord’s greatness, but afterwards my soul is filled with profound peace which nothing can disturb, as well as an inner strength to do what the Lord is demanding at that particular moment” (*Diary*, 1090).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

God had great designs for St. Faustina’s soul. But He also has great plans for each one of us. Each person is given an important mission in life. We need to get our souls ready to meet Jesus face-to-face one day, as well as to help countless souls get to Heaven.

Take time throughout this week to ponder your life. Has sickness visited you? Can you pray to move your will wholeheartedly to accept God’s holy will for your life? Suffering is difficult. Yes, we can ask for good health so that we can continue on in our lives, but we must accept whatever God has for us. We can pray for patience and acceptance of our crosses of sickness.

My dear friend Fr. Andrew Apostoli, CFR, a renowned Fatima expert and EWTN television host, suffered from a few serious illnesses during the last year of his life. He shared with me that he would like to get better if it was God's holy will. However, Father heartily sought God's will and not his own. He patiently offered every bit of his suffering during the centenary year of Our Lady of Fatima for the conversion of sinners, as Our Lady of Fatima had asked. Father Andrew closed his eyes on this world on December 13, 2017, which came as a surprise to many. Countless miracles can happen in our souls and to others around us when we accept the will of God. Pray about it this week.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Carry out a special work of mercy to lift the burden from a sick person or to help the family of a sick or injured person. Perhaps it might be the gift of a holy Mass or a “spiritual bouquet,” a promise of certain prayers that you will pray for that person. You can indicate what the prayers consist of on a card and send the card to the person. Also, consider offering to make a meal or purchase a meal (if you are not handy in the kitchen!) and deliver the food to someone in need. Pray that Jesus' love will shine through your eyes and smile when you deliver the meal.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, please grant me the graces
to be patient and accepting of Your holy will,
no matter what it might be.

Enlarge my heart to be more patient and
merciful to others who are suffering.

Mother Mary, help me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 11

Sacrifice, Penance, and Her Mission Revealed



“My child, unite yourself closely to Me during the Sacrifice and offer My Blood and My Wounds to My Father in expiation for the sins of that city.”

— Jesus to Sr. Faustina (*Diary*, 39)



In this week’s spiritual exercise, we will discuss Sr. Faustina’s life in her juniorate phase as a consecrated religious, as well as some of the sacrifices she offered to God and the struggles she endured. We will see Faustina’s many moves to various convents and her obedience to whatever it was that our Lord asked of her. Something quite incredible happened to this simple, humble sister. In addition to the personal conversations she had with Jesus and Mary, Jesus appeared to her in her cell one cold February evening in Plock to invite her to become His messenger of Divine Mercy! This was the very beginning of Heaven’s great renewal of Divine Mercy teaching and devotion in the life of the Church. Let’s take a look at what transpired.

At this point, Sr. Faustina was immersed in the juniorate stage of religious life, which began with the profession of vows and lasted for a period of five years. She was fortunate

to have stayed in one place during her two-year novitiate, but now she would move around quite a bit. As we can imagine, moving around often to a variety of convents involved different sleeping quarters, changing work responsibilities, and rubbing elbows with new sisters — difficult even for someone in the best of health. Superior General Mother Michael later remarked that Sr. Faustina was needed in various places to replace certain sisters, and was the one sister who would relocate without any fuss. No matter how difficult the multiple changes of residence, Sr. Faustina didn't complain, especially because she viewed everything that unfolded as God's holy will for her life.

Among her many changes of residence, Sr. Faustina went from Warsaw to Vilnius, then to Zytnia Street in Warsaw, and on to Grochow, a section of Warsaw. A few weeks later, she'd be off to Kiekrz near Poznan to replace a sick sister there. She always tried to plunge right into the rhythm of the work expected in each new environment. For a few months, Sr. Faustina worked in the kitchen in Kiekrz and then returned to Grochow to be in charge of the garden. She worked with the girls there, as well. This saint in the making must have had a special way with the girls because later on, when the girls heard that Sr. Faustina would be leaving for Warsaw, they threatened to pack up and go with her!

During this period of time, Sr. Faustina was asked by Jesus and Mary to pray for her homeland, Poland. Jesus instructed Faustina to ask her Mother Superior for permission to make a Holy Hour of Adoration daily for nine days — a novena of Adoration. During this time, Sr. Faustina was to unite her prayers with Mother Mary for Poland. Jesus said, "Pray with all your heart in union with Mary, and try also during this time to make the Way of the Cross." Sister Faustina's Mother Superior would not give permission for a full hour each day, but rather for the time Faustina had available after her duties were completed.

On the seventh day of the novena, Sr. Faustina had a vision of the Blessed Mother clothed in a bright robe, standing between Heaven and earth. "She was praying with her hands

folded on Her bosom,” and she gazed towards Heaven with fiery rays coming from her heart. Some radiated in the direction of Heaven, and some, towards Poland.

On another occasion, Jesus told Sr. Faustina that He would punish the most beautiful city of Poland as He had Sodom and Gomorrah. Sister Faustina shuddered and prayed as she witnessed a vision of God’s great wrath. Shortly after, Jesus requested expiation from Sr. Faustina. “My child, unite yourself closely to Me during the Sacrifice and offer My Blood and My Wounds to My Father in expiation for the sins of that city. Repeat this without interruption throughout the Holy Mass. Do this for seven days” (*Diary*, 39). Sister Faustina did not need to ask permission from her Mother Superior. She could carry it out at each Holy Mass.

On the seventh day, Sr. Faustina saw Jesus in a bright cloud. She immediately begged Him to look with mercy upon her city and the whole country. She saw Jesus look graciously down. Sister Faustina wrote, “When I saw the kindness of Jesus, I began to beg His blessing.” Immediately, Jesus told her, “For your sake I bless the entire country” (*Diary*, 39). Jesus made a big Sign of the Cross over Poland. Sister Faustina was filled with immense joy upon seeing her Lord and Savior bless her country.

Sister Faustina receives a great vision and mission

Sister Faustina returned to Warsaw (much to the dismay of the girls at Grochow who had grown so fond of her). There, Sr. Faustina helped take care of about 200 girls for whom she cooked, as well as for the sisters living there. She again had to make great efforts to keep up with her duties because she again suffered from illness and physical challenges. She also endured painful pinpricks from the sisters who shunned her because of her deep interior life and the ones who thought she was faking her illnesses. Sister Faustina learned from Jesus Himself about the power in offering sacrifices and penances to Him.

Fresh on her mind was the joy that filled her heart when she witnessed the huge blessing that Jesus had bestowed upon her country after she had united her prayers to Jesus' Passion at Holy Mass, as Jesus had instructed. It was through her obedience, her faithful dedication to her work, her intense prayer life, and the sacrifices and challenges she offered up to Heaven that the good Lord was ever transforming Sr. Faustina's soul to ultimately become more and more like Him — to become united to Him.

In the spring of 1930, Sr. Faustina was sent to the city of Plock to work in the kitchen of the congregation's Guardian Angel Home. However, it wasn't long before she was sent to the sisters' rest home, just a short distance away in Biala. She stayed there a few months before returning to Plock to help in the bakery and store.

It was in Plock that Sr. Faustina would receive her great mission from Heaven through a spectacular vision of Jesus on February 22, 1931. In the evening, in her cell, Sr. Faustina saw Jesus clothed in white with "one hand raised in the gesture of blessing, the other [...] touching the garment at the breast." Sister Faustina recorded every detail in her *Diary*. "From beneath the garment, slightly drawn aside at the breast, there were emanating two large rays, one red, the other pale." She explained her experience. "In silence I kept my gaze fixed on the Lord; my soul was struck with awe, but also with great joy." Jesus then explained her mission. "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 [then] throughout the world." Jesus continued, "I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish. I also promise victory over [its] enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death. I Myself will defend it as My own glory" (*Diary*, 47, 48).

We will discuss Sr. Faustina's role regarding the Divine Mercy message and devotion, as well as the Image more particularly, in greater depth later in the book.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Take time throughout the week to ponder your life. Can you make sacrifices and offer penances quietly and lovingly for the benefit of other souls? Can you offer to God the difficulties of your daily life, keeping in mind that you actually work out your salvation through many ordinary duties? Pray for the grace to accept God's holy will in your life as Sr. Faustina did.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Our Lord calls us to serve others in deed, word, and prayer (*Diary*, 163). Pray and think about the people you come across each day that would benefit from a surprise act of mercy. Do you have a family member going through a hard time? What can you do to show mercy towards them? Is there a homeless person you see around town? Can you offer some soup and bread to them? Could you show God's mercy in a surprising, holy way to a person who finds fault with you or intimidates you in some way? Can you share your faith with someone this week? Ask St. Faustina to help you.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, thank You for choosing
St. Faustina to communicate Your great message
of Divine Mercy. Please use me to show
Your mercy to others in need.

Mother Mary, guide me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 12

Holy Mass, the Eucharist, and St. Faustina's Visions



“The courage and strength that are in me are not of me, but of Him who lives in me — it is the Eucharist.”

— *Diary*, 91



This week's spiritual exercise delves into holy Mass and the Eucharist, and the importance they have in our lives. Let's take a quick look at what the Catechism has to say and what the saints have shared. We will learn about Sr. Faustina's tender love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, how she strove to make her soul a sanctuary for Jesus, and how she relied on the strength of the Eucharist to overcome any contradiction. We will also see how the Eucharist ultimately sustained Sr. Faustina to enable her to learn and promote the message and devotion of Divine Mercy. Let's jump in!

Holy Mass and the Eucharist are at the center of the life of the Church. “The Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life’ [*Lumen Gentium* 11]” (CCC, 1324). Canon law instructs: “On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass. Moreover, they are to abstain from those works and affairs

which hinder the worship to be rendered to God, the joy proper to the Lord's day, or the suitable relaxation of mind and body" (Canon 1247).²³

The *Catechism* teaches, "At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us' [*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47]" (CCC, 1323). The Church teaches that we must partake of the Eucharist to abide in the life of Christ. "The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus. Indeed, the Lord said: 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him' [*Jn* 6:56]. Life in Christ has its foundation in the Eucharistic banquet: 'As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me' [*Jn* 6:57]" (CCC, 1391).

Many of the saints spoke about the necessity and importance of the Sacraments in our lives and the importance of Holy Mass. Saint Teresa of Calcutta used to explain that she and her sisters absolutely needed to participate in holy Mass each morning to receive the broken Body of Jesus in the Eucharist in order to receive the necessary strength and courage to go out and take care of the broken bodies of the poor. As Catholics, the Holy Eucharist is nourishment for our souls. Without it, our souls will die.

The Eucharist gives Sr. Faustina strength

Earlier, we mentioned that when Sr. Faustina worked as a domestic, she attended daily Mass whenever possible. She knew it was important to her soul. Later on, as a religious sister, Sr. Faustina told Jesus that she could do nothing without

Him. She acknowledged to Him that He alone knew the deep persecution she suffered. In the midst of these trials, she was faithful to everything Jesus asked of her. “You are my strength; sustain me that I may always carry out what You ask of me. Of myself I can do nothing, but when You sustain me, all difficulties are nothing to me” she told her Lord. She continued, “[F]rom the time when my soul first received the capacity to know You, my life has been a continual struggle which has become increasingly intense” (*Diary*, 91). Each daily struggle and splinter from the Cross was a reminder to her of the necessity of redemptive suffering. It was Jesus, after all, who had said that in order to become His disciples we must deny ourselves, pick up our crosses, and follow Him (see Mt 16:24). Sister Faustina knew just where to find strength. If it wasn’t for the Eucharist, she would have lacked the necessary hope, courage, and strength to go on.

She shared in her *Diary*, “Every morning during meditation, I prepare myself for the whole day’s struggle. Holy Communion assures me that I will win the victory; and so it is. I fear the day when I do not receive Holy Communion. This Bread of the Strong gives me all the strength I need to carry on my mission and the courage to do whatever the Lord asks of me. The courage and strength that are in me are not of me, but of Him who lives in me — it is the Eucharist” (*Diary*, 91). Another time, Sr. Faustina wrote a lengthy litany about the Sacred Host. In it, she said, “O Blessed Host, I trust in You when storms toss my heart about and my fearful spirit tends to despair” (*Diary*, 356).

This young sister desired to create a loving and welcoming abode in her heart for her Lord and Savior. One time, she wrote, “After Holy Communion, when I had welcomed Jesus into my heart, I said to Him, ‘My Love, reign in the most secret recesses of my heart, there where my most secret thoughts are conceived, where You alone have free access, in this deepest sanctuary where human thought cannot penetrate.’” Sister Faustina wanted only her Lord residing in her heart. She continued, “May You alone dwell there, and may everything I

do exteriorly take its origin in You. I ardently desire, and I am striving with all the strength of my soul, to make You, Lord, feel at home in this sanctuary” (*Diary*, 1721). Later on, we will discuss the importance of the Eucharist and the Mass in Sr. Faustina’s life. We will see that our Lord blessed this humble young nun with countless visions of Him at Holy Mass, many times in the form of the Child Jesus. Sometimes, the young mystic saw the Blessed Mother and Jesus, both in His Passion and when triumphant. But for now, let’s get back to what was happening with Sr. Faustina after she first began learning the Divine Mercy message.

Word gets out about the “visionary”

After Jesus had appeared to Sr. Faustina in her cell early in 1931 and showed her the Image of Divine Mercy, He shared the amazing promises mentioned earlier. Sister Faustina took it all into her heart and told her confessor at her first opportunity. He told her that Jesus was referring to her soul. “Certainly, paint God’s Image in your soul.” Sister Faustina left the confessional and heard Jesus say to her, “My image already is in your soul. I desire that there be a Feast of Mercy. 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). Jesus continued to explain to Sr. Faustina His Divine Mercy for souls, and how distrust on the part of souls hurts Him.

Sister Faustina went to her Mother Superior and told her what Jesus had asked. The superior requested that Jesus show a sign to make clear it was He who wanted the Feast and the Image. Sister Faustina prayed and requested a sign from Him. Jesus answered, “I will make this all clear to the Superior by means of the graces which I will grant through this image” (*Diary*, 51).

Without support from her superior and fearing she was delusional, utterly perplexed, Sr. Faustina decided to “run and hide” from the interior inspirations. In response, God told her

that she would be responsible on the Day of Judgement for the number of souls lost if she failed to act on these private revelations.

Meanwhile, word got out about Sr. Faustina having visions. She was ridiculed by many of the sisters, facing one humiliation after another. She chose to remain silent and not defend herself, even when questioned directly. Sister Faustina knew she needed a spiritual director to help her and begged the Lord to provide. At every Mass and each chance Sr. Faustina had to visit the chapel, she begged Jesus for help.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Sister Faustina's example of striving for holiness and keeping the Commandments, especially with regard to Holy Mass, is edifying. She also desired to make her heart a fitting and comfortable abode for the Lord to reside in. Do you make these kinds of efforts in your spiritual life? Sister Faustina dealt with continual humiliation and suffering in trying to carry out Jesus' requests. She remained silent and did not defend herself, even when deeply ridiculed. Take time throughout this week to ponder ways in which you can strive to make your heart a more loving place for our Lord. Also, think about how you might react in a holy way to an insult or to ridicule. Granted, not everyone is called to be silent. But as Catholics and Christians, we are all called to respond in charity.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

To please God and help souls, strive to go over and above what you think is your duty. Do your best to carry out an act of mercy, a word of mercy, or a prayer of mercy this week. Keep in mind that if you don't carve out time to ponder, pray, and then act upon your inspirations or responsibilities to reach out

with mercy, time will indeed slip away. Opportunities will be lost. Life is busy, but there should always be time for mercy! Ask dear St. Faustina to help you.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

*Strive to pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet each day
this week for those close to death.*

Dear Merciful Jesus, I love You.
Mother Mary, help me.
Saint Faustina, please pray for me.
Jesus, I trust in You!
Amen.




WEEK 13

Daily Cross



“I fervently beg the Lord to strengthen my faith, so that in my drab, everyday life I will not be guided by human dispositions, but by those of the spirit.”

— *Diary*, 210



This week’s spiritual exercise teaches us how to carry our daily cross and seize opportunities to grow in holiness. Let’s take a look at the splinters of the Cross in Sr. Faustina’s life and her response to grace, starting with Jesus’ instructions to the faithful. Jesus clearly instructed that if we desire to be His followers, we must deny ourselves, pick up our crosses, and follow Him (Mt 16:24). He never led us astray. He let us know that our lives as Christians wouldn’t be beds of roses. The Cross comes with a deep and abiding joy because Jesus loves us and promises us eternal life. Let’s take a look at the splinters from the Cross in Sr. Faustina’s life.

Every day we are given countless opportunities to grow in holiness and give our “yes” to God once again. The modern world seduces us with allurements, inappropriate pleasures, and sin. “You-know-who,” as I call the evil one, wants to knock us off track. He uses all kinds of distraction tactics to pull our focus elsewhere. We absolutely need to keep

our eyes on the prize — Heaven! We must pray for the grace we need in order to continue each day to put one foot in front of the other to walk in faith and do God’s holy will.

Sister Faustina wrote, “I fervently beg the Lord to strengthen my faith, so that in my drab, everyday life I will not be guided by human dispositions, but by those of the spirit. Oh, how everything drags man towards earth! But lively faith maintains the soul in the higher regions and assigns self-love in its proper place; that is to say, the lowest one” (*Diary*, 210). This sister knew all too well how human dispositions can tug at one’s heart, how criticisms and complaints can wear one down, and how worldly attractions can distract a soul from its holy purpose. A prayerful soul can offer the daily crosses of life to God so that He might transform them into something beautiful to be used for the good.

Splinters from the Cross and God’s grace

Even as a child, Sr. Faustina experienced splinters from the Cross due to the difficult and austere conditions that arose from her family’s poverty. These splinters included such challenges as not being able to go to Sunday Mass every week, since the sisters had to take turns wearing the only child’s dress the family owned. On Sundays when she was not able to attend Mass, little Helen would find a quiet area to read the Mass in a prayer book.

Later on, when Sr. Faustina was in spiritual formation in Warsaw, she was assigned to clean for a couple of the elderly nuns. One particular nun was never satisfied with Sr. Faustina’s meticulous work. Each time Sr. Faustina tidied up her room, the disgruntled nun pointed out problems or mistakes — a tiny stain here or a fleck of dust there. In her eyes, Sr. Faustina could do nothing right — she was too slow and careless. Sister Faustina never complained. She wrote in her *Diary* under “General resolutions,” “To see the image of God in every sister; all love of neighbor must flow from this motive” (*Diary*, 861). The constant nitpicking, criticisms, and

demands weighed upon her, but she strove to see the image of God in that sister. Sister Faustina knew that there was a divine purpose in it. The persnickety nun even took her grievances to the Mother Superior. What did Sr. Faustina do then? Well, she paused to ponder what Christ would do in such a case.

The saint in the making discovered that she could become a true martyr for the Lord through the daily crosses of her life. Sister Faustina strove more earnestly to offer all of the contradictions and suffering she faced up to the Lord for His glory and the good of souls. There were many instances of daily crosses. For instance, there was Mother Janina Bartkiewicz, who distrusted Sr. Faustina. The pain of being distrusted when she was as sincere as could be was a thorn in Sr. Faustina's side. Mother Bartkiewicz told Sr. Faustina that God doesn't have close contact with sinners like her; He is only close with the holy ones.

When one is striving for holiness in the convent, one would hope for support and even love from one's fellow sisters. However, in all places, adversity exists, and it is a true opportunity to grow in the love of God and holiness. Adversity and contradiction seem to be a common thread throughout the lives of the saints. As Sr. Faustina grew in holiness, she was happy to offer all of the inconveniences, challenges, and difficulties to our Lord in order to be united to His suffering in a spiritual way. She must have often recalled St. Paul's words: "I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col 1:24). Sister Faustina wrote, "Oh, how pleasing are the hymns flowing from a suffering soul! All heaven delights in such a soul, especially when it is tested by God" (*Diary*, 114). She also advises that a "soul that is determined to strive for sanctity and to derive fruit" should "benefit from confession." This should be accomplished, she advises, through "complete sincerity and openness ... humility ... and obedience" (*Diary*, 113).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

The reason for our very existence is to become holy and make it to Heaven one day to live in eternal happiness with our Lord! We are to love God and our neighbor. Each day we are to work out our salvation here on earth in such a way that we will also help to pave the road for others to get to Heaven, too. However, pain, suffering, and sacrifice — our daily crosses — are guaranteed. We might ask ourselves, “Am I above my Master who suffered in an excruciating way because of my sins?”

Like St. Faustina, we should also pray and beg the Lord for increased faith. Take time today and throughout this week to ponder the need for great faith. Strive to make a daily examination — sometime around the middle of the day and again in the evening before bed. Make a mental note about how things are going during the day. At night, mentally look over your entire day and ask God for forgiveness for your shortcomings and graces for an increased faith tomorrow.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Can you go out of your way this week to make life better for a person who has been a “thorn in your side”? Think about St. Faustina and how she continued to do her tasks, unruffled, even though she was criticized. This doesn’t mean that Sr. Faustina did not feel attacked or hurt inside. Pain still exists in these circumstances. But she strove to offer up all of the pain and contradiction to God. Can you offer up all of your difficulties and even pray for the person or people who have criticized you?



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, help me to be more generous and loving. Please take care of the people in my life (*name them*) who have hurt me.

Mother Mary, thank you for mothering me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 14

The Grace of the Present Moment



“O present moment, you belong to me,
whole and entire. I desire to use
you as best I can.”

— *Diary*, 2



God is in every moment. Each moment holds duty and grace. You might be familiar with the old adage: “Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift — that’s why it is called present.” Saint Padre Pio said, “Lord, I leave the past in Your mercy, the future in Your providential care, and the present moment in Your Love.” The present moment is the only moment of grace. This week’s spiritual exercise delves into the grace of the present moment. Let’s take a look at and learn from how Sr. Faustina lived in the present moment.

Many people lament about yesterday or worry about tomorrow. The spiritual life, however, can only be lived in the present — the here and now of our lives. Yes, we do set goals for the future, and we review the past. Perhaps we might feel sorrowful due to our sins or goals we haven’t achieved. It’s normal and natural to have those feelings, but we shouldn’t obsess over them. We can’t keep running back to re-live the past. Likewise, we can’t constantly be fearful about what lies ahead; we must give those fears to God. We move forward towards Heaven, but always by planting ourselves right with-

in our present moment of life — right where we can receive grace and grow in holiness. We need to try to experience each moment as a sacramental moment, full of grace. No matter whether it is a joyful or a painful experience, there is always grace in the present moment.

The French Jesuit Jean-Pierre de Caussade (1675-1751) preached about the importance of every moment of our lives. He wrote, “God speaks to every individual through what happens to them moment by moment ... The events of each moment are stamped with the will of God ... we find all that is necessary in the present moment.” He takes it further: “If we have abandoned ourselves to God, there is only one rule for us: the duty of the present moment.”²⁴ Author Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, also pointed out the importance of our present moments. The great Dominican theologian quotes Fr. de Caussade approvingly in his classic work, *Providence*:

The present moment is ever filled with infinite treasures; it contains more than you have capacity to hold. The will of God presents itself to us at each moment as an immense ocean that no human heart can fathom; but what the heart can receive from this ocean is equal to the measure of our faith, confidence, and love. If we could only look on each moment from this point of view, as the Saints did, we should see that to each moment there is attached not only a duty to be performed, but also a grace to be faithful in accomplishing that duty.²⁵

Sister Faustina lived in the present moment

Sister Faustina tried her best to always live in the present moment through obedience, both to her parents when she was a young girl, and to the rules of her order and her superiors when she became a sister. She was keenly attentive to God’s holy will and desired to please Jesus by doing everything He asked.

There were times, though, when Helen, feeling perplexed or incapable of the task laid out before her, tried to tune out God's call to her heart. For instance, when Helen was a teenager, she gave up trying to enter religious life after her parents refused permission. Then, as we know, Jesus appeared one evening to her at a dance and asked her straight out, "How long shall I put up with you and how long will you keep putting Me off?" (*Diary*, 9). As we discussed earlier, Helen left the dance, rushed off to church, and by the next morning was on a train to find a convent. Later, when she was a sister and wasn't receiving support from her superiors, Sr. Faustina once again tried to tune out the inspirations from Jesus. However, Jesus always granted the graces that Sr. Faustina needed to follow God's holy will, just as He does for each one of us. Our Lord told us, "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much" (Lk 16:10).

Sister Faustina fostered in her soul a spirit of humility and abandonment to God's desires. She learned to trust God more and more, and submitted her will to His holy will. That is how our Lord was able to use her so freely to accomplish the great mission He had for her in spreading the devotion to Divine Mercy. He needed her humble heart. He needed her to be faithful in small things — in all the details of her vocation. In the Parable of the Talents, to each of the faithful servants, Jesus said, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master" (Mt 25:21).

Sister Faustina expressed her gratitude, and she moved her will in faith to be united to God's will. She wrote in her *Diary*,

O My God

When I look into the future, I am frightened,

But why plunge into the future?

Only the present moment is precious to me,

As the future may never enter my soul at all.

It is no longer in my power,

To change, correct, or add to the past;

For neither sages nor prophets could do that.
And so, what the past has embraced,
I must entrust to God.

O present moment, you belong to me,
whole and entire.
I desire to use you as best I can.
And although I am weak and small,
You grant me the grace of Your omnipotence.

And so, trusting in Your mercy,
I walk through life like a little child,
Offering You each day this heart
Burning with love for your greater glory (*Diary*, 2).

Another time, she recalled, “O Jesus, I want to live in the present moment, to live as if this were the last day of my life. I want to use every moment scrupulously for the greater glory of God, to use every circumstance for the benefit of my soul. I want to look upon everything, from the point of view that nothing happens without the will of God” (*Diary*, 1183). Do we feel the same way?

Beyond the vision at Plock

After Sr. Faustina received the vision of Jesus showing her the Divine Mercy Image, she struggled. She went back and forth in her mind about carrying out the mission entrusted to her by Jesus. Was it an illusion? Neither her superiors nor the priests were supportive or reassuring. On top of that, many sisters were talking about her behind her back, thinking she was a hysteric or delusional. Sister Faustina did not yet have a permanent spiritual director. Confessors and superiors sent her back and forth between them, which caused more confusion. It was sometimes quite difficult for this young nun, but she was determined to live sanctity in each present moment of life in obedience to her vocation. Even though she could not see how the answers to her questions would unfold in the future, she needed to plant her heels in the present moment and trust God.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

God created us to share His divine life with us. He is present in every single moment of our lives. Many times, it is difficult to see God in each and every moment of our lives. But He wants us to pray hard, work hard, and trust Him. Can we do that? Take time throughout this week to examine your life and your trust in God. Can you release a problem from your grip? Can you offer it to God with loving prayer?



MERCIFUL ACTION

Is there someone in your family or neighborhood who might feel overwhelmed with stress or uncertainty? Can you pray about how you might help them? Try to be attentive to the needs of those around you as they unfold in each moment. Also, keep the souls in Purgatory in your prayers for they need them. Try your best to carry out your meaningful Works of Mercy this week.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

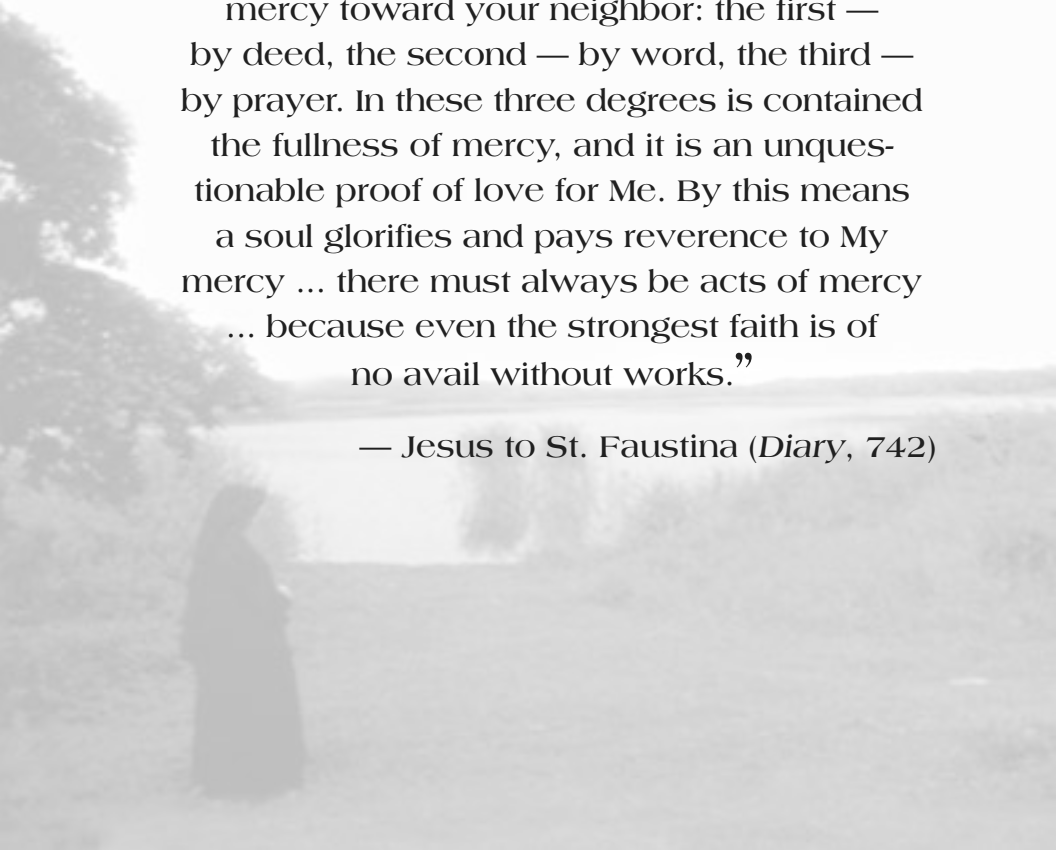
(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, please help me with my
difficulties and uncertainties.
Help me to stay focused on the present moment
of my life and to help others to do the same.
Thank You for Your great love for me!
Mother Mary, thank you!
Saint Faustina, please pray for me.
Jesus, I trust in You!
Amen.



PART TWO

Merciful Life



“I am giving you three ways of exercising mercy toward your neighbor: the first — by deed, the second — by word, the third — by prayer. In these three degrees is contained the fullness of mercy, and it is an unquestionable proof of love for Me. By this means a soul glorifies and pays reverence to My mercy ... there must always be acts of mercy ... because even the strongest faith is of no avail without works.”

— Jesus to St. Faustina (*Diary*, 742)



WEEK 15

Love of Neighbor



“I demand from you deeds of mercy, which are to arise out of love for Me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse or absolve yourself from it.”

— *Diary*, 742



This week’s spiritual exercise is all about God’s mercy and our responsibility to show mercy to our neighbor. At the very core of St. Faustina’s spirituality is God’s unfathomable mercy for every soul. Saint Faustina would come to understand in time that we must become aware of our own misery in order to seek God’s mercy. Let’s get to it!

The young mystic reflected in her *Diary*:

[F]rom the beginning I have been aware of my weakness. I know very well what I am of myself, because for this purpose Jesus opened the eyes of my soul; I am an abyss of misery, and hence I understand that whatever good there is in my soul consists solely of His holy grace. The knowledge of my own misery allows me, at the same time, to know the immensity of Your mercy. In my own interior life, I

am looking with one eye at the abyss of my misery and baseness, and with the other, at the abyss of Your mercy, O God (*Diary*, 56).

As Christians, we are called to trust in God's mercy for us. After that, we are to offer mercy to others. In order to better understand the need to offer mercy, let's look for a moment at God's great mercy and love. It is impossible to completely understand the great mystery of God. However, throughout history, we can see that God has revealed Himself and His salvific plan. He spoke to His people through the prophets. The Old and New Testaments reveal God's salvific plan for mankind. He always seeks the salvation of souls.

Desiring to know and understand God more deeply, Sr. Faustina often reflected on the Holy Trinity. On one occasion, she wrote, "I absolutely wanted to know and fathom who God is." During her prayerful reflection, she was suddenly caught up in what she thought seemed like the next world. "I saw an inaccessible light, and in this light what appeared like three sources of light which I could not understand. And out of that light came words in the form of lightning which encircled heaven and earth." She said she did not understand any of it and it caused her to be sad. But then she saw Jesus. "Suddenly, from this sea of inaccessible light came our dearly beloved Savior, unutterably beautiful with His shining Wounds. And from this light came a voice which said, 'Who God is in His Essence, no one will fathom, neither the mind of Angels nor of man.'" Jesus then told her, "Get to know God by contemplating His attributes" (*Diary*, 30).

Jesus offers mercy to heal our brokenness

We know that Jesus came to earth not to be served, but rather (extraordinarily) to serve us! Because He loves us, He became man and poured out His life upon the Cross to redeem us. When the lance pierced His sacred side, it caused Blood and Water to gush forth, which is a fount of mercy for us.

We must humble ourselves in order to receive God’s mercy. We must admit our littleness — that we can’t survive on our own, that we are sinners — and admit our great need for God’s mercy, acknowledging the fact that we are miserable creatures. I know “miserable” might sound too strong or harsh. Yet, truth be told, we are all broken in some way, and all in need of God’s mercy. Jesus told Sr. Faustina: “The greater the sinner, the greater the right he has to My mercy” (*Diary*, 723).

Pope St. Paul VI spoke about God’s mercy and our brokenness and misery. He began by stating that his spirituality resembles that of St. Augustine — that there is an inner struggle going on within himself, “as there is in each of us,” he said. The struggle is between the weaknesses within us, or *miseria*, and the “love of God that seeks us out, to cover the *miseria* that each one of us is.” He said the encounter between the two is *misericordia*, or “mercy.” He explained, “So, on the one hand, every one of us carries baggage, we all have *miseria* within us, we are all broken, but God sent his Son to cover over the brokenness, to redeem it and draw us back into the Father.” The pontiff went further to explain that mercy exists because sin exists, and it must be redeemed. He concluded, “When *miseria* and *misericordia* encounter each other, *misericordia* becomes prominent in our lives, we become conscious of God’s goodness to us.”²⁶

We offer mercy to our neighbor

I am reminded of something St. Teresa of Calcutta was famous for saying. She often preached that, for love to be authentic, it must be sacrificial, and that many times, love “hurts.” Showing Christ’s love to others can be utterly transforming to the recipient of the love, but also for the giver of the love. This chapter on “Love of Neighbor” began with a quote from Jesus Himself: “I demand from you deeds of mercy, which are to arise out of love for Me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse or absolve yourself from it” (*Diary*, 742).

Jesus sounds very serious. Of course He is. He instructs us that our deeds of mercy to our neighbor should arise out of love for Him. We should examine our hearts to see if anything there hinders the way we love Jesus. Furthermore, He asks that our deeds of mercy be carried out always and everywhere. In other words, we don't pick and choose to whom we should show mercy, and we don't decide when it should happen.

I was once roused from a sound sleep at 2 a.m. when the phone rang. A distraught elderly neighbor apologized for the time of the phone call, but said he desperately needed my help. It was wintertime, and his frail wife, who had just recently suffered a stroke, was sitting in the dark, cold car, refusing to budge. She suffered from advanced dementia, and her husband couldn't persuade her to go into the house to go to bed. She swore it was not her house. That's where I came in. I quickly dressed and walked across the icy driveway in the dark of the night to lovingly convince and assist Bev to go back into her warm home. With God's grace, I was able to get Bev inside her home and tuck her into her warm bed. As she settled in, she clung on to the Rosary beads I had given to her. Though agnostic, she very much appreciated the gesture and felt comforted by the holy beads. God's love can work wonders through our deeds of mercy — big or small, day or night.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Take time throughout the week to ponder ways in which you can show your love to God and trust in His mercy. Consider spending extra time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and ask Him to heal that brokenness of yours that Pope St. Paul VI spoke about. Pray to be more attentive so as to discover the needs of others and discern the best ways in which you can show God's mercy in deed, word, and prayer, as Jesus instructed.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Jesus asks for deeds of mercy “always and everywhere.” Pray on that divine instruction and carry it out. Respond to needs that unfold, and choose to move beyond your comfort zone to help others. Jesus also tells us, “You must not shrink from this or try to excuse or absolve yourself from it.” We must work hard to offer mercy to others. Mother Teresa often said that real love costs us something. With that in mind, pray, ponder, and act!



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, You require more of me
than I have given.

Please heal my brokenness, and open my eyes,
ears, and heart to those who need mercy from me.

Mother Mary, pray for me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 16

Humility



“Today, as God’s Majesty swept over me, my soul understood that the Lord, so very great though He is, delights in humble souls.”

— *Diary*, 1092



Indeed, the Lord delights in humble souls. Saint Faustina wrote in her Diary: “The more a soul humbles itself, the greater the kindness with which the Lord approaches it. Uniting himself closely with it, He raises it to His very throne. Happy is the soul whom the Lord himself defends. I have come to know that only love is of any value; love is greatness; nothing, no works, can compare with a single act of pure love of God” (Diary, 1092). This week’s spiritual exercise is all about humility. Let’s take a look at this virtue, which is absolutely necessary for salvation, and let’s see how it grew in Sr. Faustina’s heart.

Jesus taught in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3). It was C.S. Lewis who said, “As long as you are proud you cannot know God.”²⁷ We must strive to be humble souls. Even so, humility is said to be one of the most difficult virtues to acquire. Yet we must be humble in order to pray properly. For instance, contemplative prayer, which St. Teresa of Avila has said is simply a “close sharing between friends,” is a loving conversation

between ourselves and God, a conversation that requires of us humble hearts (see *CCC*, 2709). As the *Catechism* states, contemplative prayer is “the simplest expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gift, a grace; it can be accepted only in humility and poverty” (*CCC*, 2713). The *Catechism* also teaches that contemplative prayer “is a *gaze* of faith, fixed on Jesus” (*CCC*, 2715, emphasis in original). We must humble our hearts and seek God in all of our prayers. In humility, we must take time to adore God, praise Him, and love Him.

Saint James taught, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6). Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori reiterated that fact. He said, “Prayer must be humble: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble ... The prayer of the man that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds ... and he will not depart till the Most High behold. The prayer of a humble soul at once penetrates the heavens and presents itself before the throne of God, and will not depart thence till God regards it and listens to it. However sinful such a soul may be, God can never despise a heart that repents of its sins, and humbles itself: A contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”²⁸

Humility is a precious virtue in the spiritual life. The devil absolutely hates humility. He flees from it. He can’t get his way with a humble soul. Saint Vincent de Paul said, “The most powerful weapon to conquer the devil is humility. For, as he does not know at all how to employ it, neither does he know how to defend himself from it.”²⁹

The Lord delights in humble souls

One time St. Faustina told her Lord Jesus that she wished to be hidden from everyone but Him: “I want to be a tiny violet, hidden in the grass, unknown in a magnificent enclosed garden in which beautiful lilies and roses grow.” She explained that the “beautiful rose and the lovely lily can be seen from afar, but in order to see the little violet, one has to bend low; only its scent gives it away” (*Diary*, 591). Saint Faustina wanted her soul to be firmly rooted in God.

Her confessor Fr. Sopoćko told her, “Without humility, we cannot be pleasing to God” (*Diary*, 270). Sister Faustina came to realize the secret in learning true humility. She wrote, “He who wants to learn true humility should reflect upon the Passion of Jesus. When I meditate upon the Passion of Jesus, I get a clear understanding of many things I could not comprehend before.” Sister Faustina understood that she should strive to imitate and even resemble Jesus. She continued in her *Diary*, “I want to resemble You, O Jesus, — You crucified, tortured and humiliated. Jesus, imprint upon my heart and soul Your own humility. I love You Jesus ... “ (*Diary*, 267).

At one point, Fr. Sopoćko told Sr. Faustina to practice the third degree of humility. He said, “Not only must one refrain from explaining and defending oneself when reproached with something, but one should rejoice at the humiliation” (*Diary*, 270). Indeed, Sr. Faustina got a taste of this very practice early in religious life, when she remained completely humble one day during an exceedingly painful trial. It happened that when Sr. Faustina was still a postulant working in the kitchen, a certain Sr. Marcjanna Oswiecimska became annoyed with her and punished her by ordering her under obedience to sit on a table. Sister Faustina was forbidden to speak or to get off the table. Meanwhile, the older sister continued to clean up the kitchen. Sister Faustina would later write about the burning shame she felt, especially over not being able to defend herself. “And while I was sitting there, the sisters came along and were astounded to find me sitting on the table, and each one had her say. One said that I was a loafer and another, ‘What an eccentric!’” Sister Faustina suffered terribly. She wrote, “God alone knows how many acts of self-denial it took. I thought I’d die of shame.” Sister Faustina would indeed learn from her experiences. She continued, “God often allowed such things for the sake of my inner formation, but He compensated me for this humiliation by a great consolation.” She explained that during Benediction, she saw Him in “great beauty.” Her Lord and Savior looked at her kindly and said, “My daughter, do

not be afraid of sufferings; I am with you” (*Diary*, 151). Jesus’ words penetrated her heart with immense consolation.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

We can learn a lot about humility from the saints. Saint Augustine said, “Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues, hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance.”³⁰ We should ask ourselves, “Am I humble? Can I pray to be so?” Saint Faustina wrote:

O my Jesus, nothing is better for the soul than humiliations. In contempt is the secret of happiness, when the soul recognizes that, of itself, it is only wretchedness and nothingness, and that whatever it possesses of good is a gift of God. When the soul sees that everything is given it freely and that the only thing it has of itself is its own misery, this is what sustains it in a continual act of humble prostration before the majesty of God. And God, seeing the soul in such a disposition, pursues it with His graces. As the soul continues to immerse itself more deeply into the abyss of its nothingness and need, God uses His omnipotence to exalt it. If there is a truly happy soul upon earth, it can only be a truly humble soul. At first, one’s self-love suffers greatly on this account, but after a soul has struggled courageously, God grants it much light by which it sees how wretched and full of deception everything is. God alone is in its heart. A humble soul does not trust itself, but places all its confidence in God. God defends the humble soul and lets Himself into its secrets, and the soul abides in unsurpassable happiness which no one can comprehend (*Diary*, 593).

Saint Francis de Sales reminds us, “To be pleased at correction and reproofs shows that one loves the virtues which are contrary to those faults for which he is corrected and reproved. And, therefore, it is a great sign of advancement in perfection.”³¹ Saint Augustine pointed out, “It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels.”³² Those are powerful words to ponder in our hearts. As discussed above, St. Faustina also said that she learned true humility while meditating on the Passion of Jesus. Do your best to make time this week for meditating on Jesus’ Passion.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Take time to prayerfully consider a merciful deed that you can carry out towards someone who has humiliated you in some way. Or, if the merciful deed can’t, for whatever reason, be given to someone who is a source of humiliation, then offer a deed of mercy in secret to an unsuspecting person. Tell Jesus that you do it out of love for Him. Don’t wait — do it!



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, You love the humble-hearted.
Please make my heart humble and loving like Yours.

Mother Mary, teach me humility!

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 17

Joy



“Sow happiness about you ...
They should take leave of you with
their hearts filled with joy.”

— *Diary*, 55



Our spiritual exercise this week is all about joy. We will delve into how our desires for happiness must correspond to God's desires for us, and that we can be joyful as we endure trials at the same time. Many times, St. Faustina's joy was intertwined with tortures she felt in the spiritual life. This week, we learn authentic joy from St. Faustina and the other saints. Let's get right to it!

God wants us to be happy. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that is possessed by angels and human beings. Joy grows in our souls out of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Saint Teresa of Calcutta used to say, “A joyful heart is a normal result of a heart burning with love.”³³ She told her sisters that if they didn't have joy in their hearts, they could pack up and go home. It might sound harsh, but she knew that the poor did not deserve to be served by grumpy nuns! She also often said, “Joy is a net of love by which we catch souls.” This is a bit similar to the phrase that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. Speaking of which, no one wants to associate

with a sour-faced person! Once when lacking the time to deal with pettiness, false piety, and grumpiness, St. Teresa of Avila said, “From silly devotions and sour-faced saints, good Lord, deliver us!” The authentic joy that radiates from our loving souls can deeply affect those in our midst. As Christians, we are to exude joy. It actually will help to transform lives (our own, too!).

My former spiritual director Servant of God Fr. John A. Hardon, SJ, agreed with St. Teresa of Avila that our joy needs to be real. He also emphasized that our desires for happiness must correspond to God’s desires for us. In a lecture about joy, he said, “Who is the happiest being in existence? Who? God. And the most fundamental reason why God made us is that we might share in His happiness. Why go into the subject?” he asked. “Because Christianity is the religion of joy. There’s a sure way of turning people off or turning them away from the true faith if we who profess the faith are obviously unhappy. That is something, by the way, you can never mask. You can pretend to be happy. You can claim to be happy, but if you’re not happy, you’re going to reveal yourself. And finally, why go into the subject? Because even people who are more or less happy ought to be more happy.”

How do we become more happy and possess joy? Father Hardon explained, “Joy is satisfaction, or the satisfaction of having one’s desires fulfilled ... But ... only those desires satisfied which are truly good. What then is truly good which, once we get it and possess it, we are happy? [When] your desire corresponds with what God wants.”³⁴

One time when Sr. Faustina was given spiritual counsel by Fr. Andrasz, SJ, he told her:

Act in such a way that all those who come in contact with you will go away joyful. Sow happiness about you because you have received much from God; give, then, generously to others. They should take leave of you with their hearts filled with joy, even if they have no more than touched the hem of your

garment. Keep well in mind the words I am telling you right now (*Diary*, 55).

She strove to do just that.

Torture and joy intertwined

Earlier, we discussed the time at Plock when Jesus revealed the Divine Mercy Image, and Sr. Faustina felt much uncertainty because there was no one who could tell her that she was on the right road. Then one day, one of the sisters heaped her anger upon Sr. Faustina. “You queer, hysterical visionary, get out of this room; go on with you, Sister!” She continued to lash out at her. Sister Faustina held her upset-ness inside and rushed to her cell, where she fell down on her face before the Crucifix. She looked at Jesus, but she was speechless. “I could no longer say a single word,” she recalled (*Diary*, 128). Suddenly, Satan took advantage of her pain and planted doubts and discouragement in her mind. Sister Faustina thought, “How can one be sincere when one is so misunderstood? Jesus, Jesus, I cannot go on any longer.” She again fell to the floor under the weight of her anguish. “I broke out in a sweat, and fear began to overcome me.” She felt so alone. “Suddenly, I heard a voice within my soul. ‘Do not fear; I am with you.’ And an unusual light illuminated my mind, and I understood that I should not give in to such sorrows. I was filled with a certain strength and left my cell with new courage to suffer” (*Diary*, 129).

Even though Sr. Faustina felt a renewed strength after that trying incident, for some reason, she grew a bit negligent. In part, she was afraid of being deceived. She wrote, “I did not pay attention to these interior inspirations and tried to distract myself. But despite the noise and distraction, I could see what was going on in my soul.” God doesn’t leave us alone. He seeks us out. Sister Faustina wrote, “The word of God is clear, and nothing can stifle it. I began to avoid encounters with the Lord in my soul because I did not want to fall prey to illusions.” She

continued, “However, in a sense,” she said, “the Lord kept pursuing me with His gifts; and truly I experienced, alternately, torture and joy” (*Diary*, 130). Sufferings were mounting and would soon come to a peak. Sister Faustina would make up her mind what to do about the doubts she was experiencing.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

We know God wants us to be happy — truly happy. Yet, in the spiritual life, we will endure many trials. As St. Faustina shared in her *Diary*, she humbled herself in prayer before God when she was at her wits’ end with sufferings. God gave her peace and an abiding joy in her heart. We can be joyful and endure trials at the same time. The deep and abiding joy in our hearts is in knowing that in the end it will all work out. We know that there is eternal life, where we will indeed be happy forever with God in Heaven. When our hearts are heavy in anguish and trial, let’s be sure to always look up to God and ask for His help. Let’s ask for the gift of joy in our hearts, especially so that we can share that joy with others who might be struggling. Saint Teresa of Calcutta told me often, “Keep the joy of loving Jesus ever burning in your heart and share this joy with others by your thoughtful love and humble service.” That particular quote was taken from a personal letter that Mother Teresa wrote to me on October 5, 1988 (the 50th anniversary of St. Faustina’s death and now her feast day)!



A MERCIFUL ACTION

All those around you in your family and beyond deserve to see your joyful demeanor and actions, and to hear your joyful words. It can be difficult when we are tired or suffering in some way. We need to pray for the graces and put forth the efforts. Carry out beautiful deeds of mercy this week with a joyful, loving heart!



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, help me to radiate
Your love and joy to all I meet.
Mother Mary, show me how.
Saint Faustina, please pray for me.
Jesus, I trust in You!
Amen.




WEEK 18

The Saints



“The witnesses who have preceded us into the kingdom (cf. *Heb* 12:1), especially those whom the Church recognizes as saints, share in the living tradition of prayer by the example of their lives, the transmission of their writings, and their prayer today.”

— CCC, 2683



This week's spiritual exercise delves into the wisdom of the saints. We are certainly blessed to be part of the Communion of Saints, to learn from them and to seek their intercession. Saint Faustina realized that there was great wisdom to be learned from the saints and told Jesus that she wanted to be a saint who reflected His compassionate Heart. We'll also learn about one of St. Faustina's favorite saints and his powerful intercession. We couldn't possibly learn everything there is to know about the saints in our lifetime. There simply is not enough time! So let us begin!

Through our Baptism, we are blessed to be joined together with the great Communion of Saints, which consists of the saints in Heaven (the Church Triumphant), those of us here on earth (the Church Militant), and those being purified

in Purgatory (the Church Suffering). The *Catechism* teaches that the saints in Heaven “contemplate God, praise Him, and constantly care for those whom they have left on earth.” Additionally, “When they entered into the joy of their Master, they were ‘put in charge of many things’ [cf. *Mt* 25:21]. Their intercession is their most exalted service to God’s plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world” (CCC, 2683).

Many of the saints reassured their followers that they would be working even harder in Heaven, including St. Thérèse, who said, “I wish to spend Heaven doing good upon earth.” Saint Dominic Savio, a very pious student of St. Don Bosco (founder of the Salesians), died as a young teen. He appeared to his father shortly after his death and revealed that he was in Heaven, and he promised his prayers for his parents. Saint Don Bosco had preached during a Lenten sermon: “Everyone is called to be a saint, and do you know, it is easy to be a saint. Just do this: diligently do the ordinary things of the day in an extraordinary way.” Right after that, young Dominic put much effort into becoming a saint. When St. Bosco noticed Dominic looking too serious, he told him, “The way to be a saint, Dominic, is to be always cheerful, do your duties to the best of your ability, and give your classmates good example. Keep in mind that the Lord Jesus is always with you and wants your happiness.”³⁵

Saint Robert Bellarmine spoke about the wisdom of the saints in Heaven, saying, “All the blessed in heaven, though they may have been while on earth simple and ignorant, are now possessed of the deepest wisdom, and so endowed with the virtue of justice, that they might justly become kings of any kingdom.” In addition to their great wisdom is the gift of beholding God! “For all the blessed behold the essence of God Himself, and thereby, from this fountain of uncreated wisdom, they drink in such wisdom as neither Solomon nor any other mortal possessed, except our Lord Jesus Christ, who, even during the time of His mortal life, saw God, for in Him ‘were all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.’”³⁶

We can be assured that when we call upon the saints, they will know just how to help us.

One time, Sr. Faustina wrote, “O my Jesus, each of Your saints reflects one of Your virtues; I desire to reflect Your compassionate heart, full of mercy; I want to glorify it. Let Your mercy, O Jesus, be impressed upon my heart and soul like a seal, and this will be my badge in this and the future life” (*Diary*, 1242).

We can strive to imitate the saints in Heaven while recalling that they were all once like us — ordinary people with blemishes and faults, prone to temptation. The difference now is that they are in Heaven because they practiced the heroic virtues. They strove for holiness. When they made a mistake, they humbled themselves, confessed their sin, picked themselves up, and moved forward. They inspire us to do the same.

Saint Faustina and St. Joseph

Sister Faustina strove to learn from the saints, emulating their virtues. She was particularly fond of St. Thérèse. As we discussed earlier, St. Thérèse appeared to her in a dream in which they had a conversation about sanctity. In addition, Sr. Faustina was close to St. Joseph, who also appeared to her. She recalled in her *Diary*, “Saint Joseph urged me to have a constant devotion to him. He himself told me to recite three prayers [the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be] and the Memorare [to St. Joseph] and gave me to know how much he is supporting this work [of mercy]. He has promised me this special help and protection. I recite the requested prayers every day and feel his special protection” (*Diary*, 1203).

Venerable Mary of Ágreda, a mystic, wrote about St. Joseph and his special privileges. She wrote:

In virtue of these special privileges the intercession of Saint Joseph is most powerful: first, for attaining the virtue of purity and overcoming the sensual inclinations of the flesh; secondly, for procuring powerful help to escape sin and return

to the friendship of God; thirdly, for increasing the love and devotion to most holy Mary; fourthly, for securing the grace of a happy death and protection against the demons in that hour; fifthly, for inspiring the demons with terror at the mere mention of his name by his clients; sixthly, for gaining health of body and assistance in all kinds of difficulties; seventhly, for securing issue of children in families. These and many other favors God confers upon those who properly and with good disposition seek the intercession of the spouse of our Queen, Saint Joseph. I beseech all the faithful children of the Church to be very devout to him and they will experience these favors in reality, if they dispose themselves as they should in order to receive and merit them.

The Blessed Mother told Venerable Mary of Agreda:

The whole human race has much undervalued the privileges and prerogatives conceded to my blessed spouse and they know not what his intercession with God is able to do. I assure thee, my dearest, that he is one of the greatly favored personages in the divine presence and has immense power to stay the arms of divine vengeance ... That which my spouse asks of the Lord in heaven is granted upon the earth and on his intercession depend many and extraordinary favors for men, if they do not make themselves unworthy of receiving them.³⁷



SOMETHING TO PONDER

With regard to seeking the wisdom of the saints, take time to ponder St. John Paul II's words in *Veritatis Splendor*:

In particular, *the life of holiness* which is resplendent in so many members of the People of God, humble

and often unseen, constitutes the simplest and most attractive way to perceive at once the beauty of truth, the liberating force of God’s love, and the value of unconditional fidelity to all the demands of the Lord’s law, even in the most difficult situations. For this reason, the Church, as a wise teacher of morality, has always invited believers to seek and to find in the Saints, and above all in the Virgin Mother of God “full of grace” and “all-holy,” the model, the strength, and the joy needed to live a life in accordance with God’s commandments and the Beatitudes of the Gospel.³⁸



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Pray to discover opportunities this coming week to teach others about the saints, especially the children in your life. Could you possibly share a saint’s story at the dinner table or at work? Might you gift a book about the saints to someone soon? Could you choose a saint and pray a nine-day novena to that saint for someone who needs prayerful help? Ask intercession from the saints in carrying out your works of mercy.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, help me learn from Your saints.
 Mother Mary, help me to better know St. Joseph.
 Saint Faustina, please pray for me.
 Jesus, I trust in You!
 Amen.

*Consider praying to St. Joseph each day, as St. Faustina did,
the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, and the
Memorare to St. Joseph:*

Remember, O most chaste spouse of the Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who implored your help and sought your intercession was left unassisted. Full of confidence in your power I fly unto you and beg your protection. Despise not, O Guardian of the Redeemer, my humble supplication, but in your bounty, hear and answer me.
Amen.




WEEK 19

Love for the Poor, “Fruits of Mercy”



“Today I imprudently asked two poor children if they really had nothing to eat at home. The children, without answering me, walked away from the gate. I understood how difficult it was for them to speak about their poverty, so I went after them in a hurry and brought them back, giving them as much as I had permission for.”

— *Diary*, 1297



In this week’s spiritual exercise, we will discuss our responsibility to love and care for the poor. Specifically, we look at St. Faustina’s role as a gatekeeper, and about her humbly and obediently going about her assigned tasks skillfully and generously, as well as serving the poor with compassion, which pleased Jesus. We will also learn about Sr. Faustina’s amazing encounter with a poor beggar. Let’s dig in!

Sister Faustina continued to grow in the knowledge of God’s great mercy. She wrote in her *Diary*, “The mercy of the Lord is praised by the holy souls in heaven who have

themselves experienced that infinite mercy” (*Diary*, 753). Sister Faustina had the merciful heart of a true servant. She never wished to send any needy person away empty-handed. She served the poor with a great passion, much like St. Teresa of Calcutta. Both of these religious sisters sought to serve Jesus in the stranger. Mother Teresa would call the stranger “Jesus in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor.”

At times, Sr. Faustina was given the task of the gatekeeper. She, like other holy doorkeepers — such as St. Padre Pio, Blessed Solanus Casey, St. Juan Macias, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, and St. Andre Bessette — had endless opportunities to show Christ’s love to beggars and visitors alike. A humble and somewhat lowly task can turn into a holy encounter in each instance of opening the door or gate. But that all depends upon who is opening the door! If only the visitor could know the amazing blessings that await them when a saint is guarding the gate! The visitor might receive far more than a piece of bread, a dish of rice, or a bowl of soup. Being greeted at the door by a saint in the making indeed nourishes the heart and soul, and not merely the stomach!

Sister Faustina was sometimes chided by another sister for being too gentle with the beggars at the gate. Yet Sr. Faustina did her best to treat everyone with compassion. She even took measures not to embarrass the people if they came back for additional handouts. In fact, Sr. Faustina wrote, “When the same poor people come to the gate a second time, I treat them with greater gentleness, and I do not let them see that I know that they have been here before; [I do this] in order not to embarrass them. And then they speak to me freely about their troubles and needs.” Sister Faustina continued, “Although Sister N. tells me that is not the way to deal with beggars, and slams the door in their faces, when she is not there, I treat them as my Master would. Sometimes more is given when giving nothing, than when giving much in a rude manner” (*Diary*, 1282). Surely, it was very hard for Sr. Faustina not to be able to freely impart all of the gentleness she wished to give when this other sister was nearby. She must have also felt relief

when that sister was not standing over her as she ministered to the poor beggars.

Sister Faustina possessed many gifts. One was in reading souls whenever our Lord wanted her to have specific knowledge of someone so that she could better help them. This mystic was not only concerned with meeting the corporal needs of the beggars; she wanted so much to also help their souls. One time, Sr. Faustina wrote, “Often the Lord gives me interior knowledge concerning the persons I meet at the gate. One pitiable soul wanted to tell me a bit about herself. Taking advantage of the opportunity, I made her understand, in a delicate way, the miserable condition of her soul. She went away with a better disposition” (*Diary*, 1283).

So we discover that Sr. Faustina’s gatekeeping was not just a mere job, but rather an actual ministry of serving souls, similar to the good works of a spiritual director. By receiving from Jesus a special knowledge of some souls she met at the gate, she could serve them even more perfectly.

An extraordinary visit

One gloomy day, the bell at the gate rang. Sister Faustina looked out through sheets of rain to see a shivering young man persistently ringing the bell. The rain poured down with a vengeance, soaking the man to the skin. As soon as Sr. Faustina answered the gate, the fellow asked for something to eat. Sister Faustina ran to the kitchen and couldn’t find anything to offer. She was determined to help that young, unfortunate man. There had to be something in the kitchen. Finally, she found it — some wholesome soup; the perfect remedy to combat the icy rain while providing nourishment. She heated it up straightaway. Sister Faustina then added some pieces of bread on top to help fill his hungry belly and rushed the hot mug of soup to the poor beggar waiting in the rain. The stranger accepted the charitable meal from the sister’s hands and consumed it right there by the gate. He seemed to enjoy it despite the inclement weather. Sister Faustina took the empty mug

from the man's cold wet hands, and to her great surprise, discovered that the poor man was actually Jesus Christ Himself! He then immediately vanished from her sight. Sister Faustina later reflected upon the encounter. She heard an interior voice: "My daughter, the blessings of the poor who bless Me as they leave this gate have reached My ears. And your compassion, within the bounds of obedience, has pleased Me, and this is why I came down from My throne — to taste the fruits of your mercy" (*Diary*, 1312). Can we even imagine this?



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Take a moment to ponder the true story told above. Jesus actually came down from His throne in Heaven to experience the fruits of Sr. Faustina's mercy and tell her that He was pleased with her loving mercy towards the poor! Imagine if Jesus suddenly showed up in disguise at your door. Would He find you wholeheartedly giving with Christ's love? Think about how you might be sort of a "gatekeeper" in your own life. How welcoming can and ought you be? Also, ponder your vocation and role. Think about how you could possibly be a gatekeeper, ushering souls to Heaven because of your example and charity. Ponder St. Faustina's statement, "Sometimes more is given when giving nothing, than when giving much in a rude manner" (*Diary*, 1282). Could there be times in your busy days when you might act a bit hasty or even a tad rude towards someone? If so, how will you change that?



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Mother Teresa often preached that the poverty of the West far outweighed the poverty of the poor she served in Calcutta. She said the Western world is starved for love! She also said we shouldn't only give from our surplus, but to love "until it hurts." The petite saint said, "The same way Jesus

allows himself to be broken and given to us as food, we, too must divide and share with those in our homes because love starts at home. From there, charity extends to our neighbors who are right next door, then to those who live on the same street, and from there to those in the city where we live.”³⁹ Mother Teresa’s instructions are both simple and challenging. Is there someone in your life who needs a lift? Someone who has been struggling or depressed? Can you come up with a plan to show mercy and kindness towards them? You can certainly pray for them. Possibly you can reach out and let them know that you are keeping them in your prayers. It may take a bit of effort to push beyond your comfort zone, but that is where God works. Sometimes, just knowing that someone cares enough to pray for you can totally transform your attitude and outlook. Prayers work miracles! Merciful actions please our Lord and help our neighbor. Try your best to give until it hurts. Stretch yourself in merciful love.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, You were pleased with St. Faustina’s compassion and mercy for the poor. Please open my eyes to the poor around me, and grant me courage to reach out to help others.

Mother Mary, help me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 20

Grace



“Neither graces, nor revelations, nor raptures, nor gifts granted to a soul make it perfect, but rather the intimate union of the soul with God.”

— *Diary*, 1107



Grace is a little word with a huge definition! We need grace to enter Heaven one day. It is essential that we pray for grace. This week’s spiritual exercise is all about God’s grace. We’ll learn how it helps us and how we can respond to it. Saint Faustina also lets us in on a secret — a pearl of wisdom she learned from experience about the necessity of praying for “actual grace.” Let’s begin!

The *Catechism* teaches, “Grace is a *participation in the life of God*” (CCC, 1997, emphasis in original). “Grace is what we need beyond what we have by nature to reach our heavenly destiny,” wrote Servant of God Fr. John A. Hardon, SJ.⁴⁰ In St. John’s Gospel, we read, “We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will” (Jn 9:31). Therefore, we should be seeking and doing God’s will in order for God to listen to our prayers. Yet God is merciful and can certainly hear the sincere prayer of a sinner. We should also know that in addition to prayer being necessary

for obtaining graces from God, we must cooperate with grace in order to enjoy an eternal reward in Heaven. The *Catechism* teaches: “Jesus teaches us that one enters the kingdom of heaven not by speaking words, but by doing ‘the will of my Father in heaven’ [Mt 7:21]” (CCC, 2826).

What is grace? “The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it” (CCC, 1999). Grace is a powerful gift, which is “first and foremost the gift of the Holy Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us” (CCC, 2003). The Holy Spirit gives us special graces that help us to aid others, as well as the Church. Specifically, the *Catechism* teaches, “Grace also includes the gifts that the Holy Spirit grants us to associate us with his work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church” (CCC, 2003). There are graces that are specific to the different Sacraments; these are called sacramental graces. There are also graces called charisms. Sometimes their character is extraordinary — “such as the gift of miracles or of tongues” — but all “charisms are oriented toward sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good of the Church ... at the service of charity which builds up the Church [Cf. 1 Cor 12]” (CCC, 2003).

We learn in St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans that our gifts differ from other people’s gifts depending on the graces we have received. Particularly, “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophesy, in proportion to faith; ministry in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness” (Rom 12:6-8). The Church teaches that we can receive special “*graces of state* that accompany the exercise of the responsibilities of the Christian life and of the ministries within the Church” (CCC, 2004, emphasis in original).

So, we must pray for graces (*Ask* for them), be open to receiving them (*Accept* them), and *Act* upon them. I’ll call them “The Three As.” Father John Hardon taught that we

should pray for the graces that we need in the mind and in the will. He wrote, “In the mind, we are asking for the light we need to recognize the will of God: for supernatural discernment to know what God wants and how He wants us to do it. In the will, we are asking for strength not only to begin but the perseverance necessary to continue doing what God wants of us.”⁴¹

Grace in Sr. Faustina’s life

Sister Faustina prayed to be attentive to grace in her spiritual life. She also strove to act on the graces given to her. She wanted, first and foremost, to please God by doing her part to help sanctify her own soul, as well as the souls of others. This indeed required grace. Much was expected of Sr. Faustina, since God entrusted her with the great mission of spreading the message of Divine Mercy. Sister Faustina had no doubt that God was calling her to great holiness. Every soul is called to holiness, but it would seem that God has chosen some particular souls for great holiness. We recall Sr. Faustina had even asked St. Thérèse one time in a dream whether or not she would be raised to the honors of the altar as a saint.

During a meditation one day, God gave Sr. Faustina an inner light and understanding of sanctity. She wrote what she learned: “Neither graces, nor revelations, nor raptures, nor gifts granted to a soul make it perfect, but rather the intimate union of the soul with God. These gifts are merely ornaments of the soul, but constitute neither its essence nor its perfection.” She understood that effort is required. “My sanctity and perfection consist in the close union of my will with the will of God. God never violates our free will. It is up to us whether we want to receive God’s grace or not. It is up to us whether we will cooperate with it or waste it” (*Diary*, 1107). We can also learn from Sr. Faustina’s inner illumination and do our best to pray to be united with God. We should pray to surrender our will to that of the Lord.

One time, Sr. Faustina suffered terribly because someone had spread rumors about her. Sister Faustina felt upset that

the person had abused the goodness of others. Even though pained by it, she resolved to keep quiet and not defend herself. As time went on, she still felt upset. She said, “I became aware, however, that I was not strong enough to bear this calmly.” As the situation worsened, Sr. Faustina went to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and poured out her heart. “Lord Jesus, I ask You to give me the strength of Your actual grace, because I feel that I will not manage to survive this struggle. Shield me with Your breast.” Immediately, Jesus spoke to her. “Do not fear; I am with you.” Extraordinary peace entered Sr. Faustina’s heart when she left the altar. “Power filled my soul, and the storm that was raging broke against my soul as against a rock; and the foam of the storm fell on those who had raised it. Oh, how good is the Lord, who will reward each one according to his deed!” She advised, “Let every soul beg for the help of actual grace, as sometimes ordinary grace is not enough” (*Diary*, 1150). The *Catechism* refers to actual graces as “God’s interventions, whether at the beginning or in the course of the work of sanctification” (*CCC*, 2000). Father Hardon defined actual grace as “the transient illuminations of mind and inspirations of will that enable us to obtain, retain, or grow in sanctifying grace.”⁴²

Earlier, we discussed God’s love for the humble-hearted. We must be humble enough to pray for and to receive God’s graces. One time, Jesus said to Sr. Faustina that He had wanted to exalt her congregation many times but was unable to do so because of its pride. He said, “Know, My daughter, that I do not grant My graces to proud souls, and I even take away from them the graces I have granted” (*Diary*, 1170).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

We discussed the need for grace in our lives and the need for humble, loving prayer, uniting our wills to God’s will. Take time throughout the week to ponder grace in your own life. Do you ask for it? Do you waste it? Do you desire more grace?

Remember “The Three As” that I mentioned: *Ask*, *Accept*, and *Act* upon God’s graces. Take some time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, if possible, and ask Him for many graces (as well as actual grace) and strength to follow His holy will.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Surprise someone this week with an unexpected beautiful deed of mercy. In addition, pray for that person each day this week. All the while, be attentive to the needs of the people that God will put into your life this week. Offer your deeds of mercy with love. Make it happen!



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, please grant to me the graces I need to follow Your holy will.

Mother Mary, please help me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 21

Patience and Perseverance Approaching Perpetual Vows



“At this very moment the superiors are deciding which sisters are going to take perpetual vows.”

— Jesus to Sr. Faustina (*Diary*, 165)



Patience is difficult to master. Perseverance requires much effort. But as trying as it is, all that effort is for the good! This week's spiritual exercise delves into patience and perseverance. We also look at how those virtues came into play as Sr. Faustina's spiritual life unfolded when she approached her perpetual vows. Let's take a look!

Many a time, as she united her own sufferings to God, Sr. Faustina recalled St. Paul's words in his Letter to the Colossians: “I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col 1:24). Sister Faustina had been struggling with doubt and discouragement after Jesus revealed the Divine Mercy Image in her vision in Plock. Her third probation, a five-month period of time before she would make her perpetual vows, was coming up, and Sr. Faustina resolved to put an end to her doubts before professing her perpetual vows. But, as she

tried to dispel all doubts, things got worse. A sister blurted out, “Sister, you will not be going for the third probation. I myself will see to it that you will not be permitted to make your vows” (*Diary*, 165). Sister Faustina held her pain inside. She didn’t react, but felt deeply wounded. Some of the perpetually professed sisters had judged Sr. Faustina to be hysterical, possessing an unhealthy imagination. Prayer and perseverance would be lifesavers for this young sister.

Jesus comforted Sr. Faustina’s heart a few days later in the chapel. He said, “At this very moment the superiors are deciding which sisters are going to take perpetual vows. Not all of them will be granted this grace, but this is their own fault. He who does not take advantage of small graces will not receive great ones. But to you, my child, this grace is being given” (*Diary*, 165). Sister Faustina was joyfully surprised to learn this from her dear Savior. The sting from the sister’s cutting words a few days earlier completely dissipated. Sister Faustina noted that her heart “beat with joy at the thought of such an immense grace, that of perpetual vows.” She immersed herself in a prayer of thanksgiving and heard these words in her soul: “My child you are My delight, you are the comfort of My heart, I grant you as many graces as you can hold. As often as you want to make Me happy, speak to the world about My great and unfathomable mercy” (*Diary*, 164).

Third probation

Sister Faustina happily left for Warsaw in November of 1932 to begin her third probation. There she would be engaged in spiritual formation and with light work in the vestuary, where clothes and linens are kept. After following the proper protocol in meeting with her fellow sisters, Sr. Faustina went straight to the modest chapel to meet with Jesus. She felt God’s presence fill her soul and heard these words: “My daughter, I desire that your heart be formed after the model of My merciful Heart. You must be completely imbued with My mercy” (*Diary*, 167).

Jesus' words soothed her heart and soul, but this saint in the making would endure suffering once again. Some older nuns were distrustful and critical of her. Sister Faustina again suffered in silence and offered up her sufferings, uniting herself to Jesus Crucified. At other times, she was thankful to "recognize the great virtues of some sisters," she wrote, "who always asked for the poorest things from the vestuary." She "admired their spirit of humility and mortification" (*Diary*, 179).

When Mother Directress Margaret realized that Sr. Faustina had not attended a retreat that year, she quickly made arrangements for her to leave immediately for Walendow to take part in an eight-day retreat already in session. Sister Faustina would partake in three of the days. However, though the mother was arranging for her to go, Sr. Faustina overheard that a certain sister was opposing it. It seemed certain that she would not be going. Sister Faustina slipped into the chapel after dinner to make a five-minute adoration. She suddenly saw Jesus! He filled her in. "My daughter, I am preparing many graces for you, which you will receive during this retreat which you will begin tomorrow." Sister Faustina told Jesus she thought she wouldn't be going. Jesus said, "Get ready for it, because you will begin the retreat tomorrow. And as for your departure, I will arrange that with the superiors" (*Diary*, 167). Jesus then disappeared. Sister Faustina was puzzled, but quickly rejected doubts and prayed instead. When she left the chapel to start her duties, Mother General Michael called to her. "Sister, you will go to Walendow today with Mother Valeria so that you can start the retreat tomorrow" (*Diary*, 167).

Two hours later she was there! She marveled at how "Only Jesus can arrange things in such a way" (*Diary*, 167). The convent in Walendow was in a tranquil, secluded farm setting on more than 700 acres, with fish ponds and pretty views of God's creation. Horses, pigs, sheep, cows, chickens, ducks, guinea fowl, and a few barns and a mill dotted the property, along with a house for the sisters. At the time of Sr. Faustina's arrival, a church was being built. The sisters who lived or visited worked hard to keep all running smoothly.

Sister Faustina caught a glimpse of the sister who had opposed her going to the retreat.

Surprised eyes opened wide, the sister then shot her a look of dissatisfaction. Nonetheless, Sr. Faustina greeted her affectionately and paid no heed to the negativity. Off she went to visit Jesus in the chapel, where He gave her instructions for the retreat:

You shall strive to maintain a profound peace in respect to your communings with Me. I will remove all doubts in this regard. I know that you are at peace now as I speak to you, but the moment I stop talking you will start looking for doubts. But I want you to know that I will affirm your soul to such a degree that even if you wanted to be troubled, it will not be within your power. And as a proof that it is I who am speaking to you, you will go to confession on the second day of the retreat to the priest who is preaching the retreat; you will go to him as soon as he has finished his conference and will present to him all your doubts concerning Me. I will answer you through his lips, and then your fears will end. During this retreat, observe such strict silence that it will be as though nothing exists around you. You shall speak only to Me and to your confessor; you will ask your superiors only for penances (*Diary*, 169).

Sister Faustina was overjoyed that Jesus would show her “such kindness and lower himself so much for my sake” (*Diary*, 169). Equipped with words from Jesus, Sr. Faustina desired to make a good and holy retreat. However, keeping complete silence is difficult for anyone. Sister Faustina’s first temptation to break silence would arise very quickly.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Things don't always go as planned — even, and maybe we should say especially, in the spiritual life. Some say, “Make plans and God laughs,” which is a lighthearted way to underscore that fact. God desires that we will be happy with Him forever in Heaven. However, many times our path to Heaven is a crooked one. I speak about that in my memoir *The Kiss of Jesus* (Chapter 9). God draws good out of our sufferings and challenges, and He allows certain contradictions, doubts, and pains to help us to become holy and grow closer to Him. Take time this week to meditate upon your life. Where is it going? Are you seeking God's will to the fullest? Do you turn to prayer immediately when things go awry? Can you strive to offer every single thing to God?



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Carry out a deed of mercy for someone you don't necessarily care for — someone who has not been kind to you. Yes, this will be difficult, but God will supply the grace. Ask for it! Pray for that person each day during the upcoming week. Don't forget to smile!



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, teach me to be more patient
with everyone I meet. Please let Your love
shine through me to them.

Mother Mary, please guide me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 22

Heroic Virtue



“[The] saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult circumstances in the Church’s history.”⁴³

— St. John Paul II



This week’s spiritual exercise involves heroic virtue in our lives. We will delve into heroic virtue and what we can learn from Sr. Faustina’s realization that she needed to strive for heroic virtue and not just ordinary virtue. She also learned that as weak as she was, God would support her. Let’s begin with a bit of background on what exactly heroic virtue is in the spiritual life. Ready? Set? Go!

Servant of God Archbishop Fulton Sheen said the difference between Judas and Peter is that Peter became a saint “because he overcame his weakness with the help of God’s grace.”⁴⁴ In other words, Peter responded to grace and so became capable of heroic virtue. Every one of the saints canonized by the Church has been raised to the honors of the altar because of a life of heroic virtue. The Catholic Dictionary defines heroic virtue as: “The performance of extraordinary virtuous actions with readiness and over a period of time. The moral virtues are exercised with ease, while faith, hope, and charity are practiced to an eminent degree. The presence of

such virtues is required by the Church as the first step toward canonization. The person who has practiced heroic virtue is declared to be Venerable, and is called a ‘Servant of God.’”⁴⁵

Father John A. Hardon, SJ, regularly taught the importance of practicing heroic virtue. He said it was a matter of survival. “For Catholic parents to live good Catholic lives in our day requires heroic virtue. Only heroic parents will survive the massive, demonic secularization of materially super-developed countries like America.”⁴⁶

What does “heroic virtue” have to do with us? Well, plenty. We are all called to lives of holiness. We are all called — every single one of us — to become saints. The Church teaches: “By *canonizing* some of the faithful, i.e., by solemnly proclaiming that they practiced heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God’s grace, the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of holiness within her and sustains the hope of believers by proposing the saints to them as models and intercessors ... ‘Holiness’ is the hidden source and infallible measure of her [the Church’s] apostolic activity and missionary zeal’ [Saint John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. CL 17, 3]” (CCC, 828, emphasis in original).

Saint Faustina recorded in her *Diary* that she “felt the gaze of God” in her soul. She was immediately filled with love and understood that God was drawing close to her heart because of her virtues and heroic efforts. She wrote, “It is from this that I have come to understand that it is not enough for me to strive only for ordinary virtues, but that I must try to exercise the heroic virtues” (*Diary*, 758).

Depending on God, not ourselves

Sister Faustina learned that it was essential to lean on God for everything and not to depend upon her own strength. She knew she was weak — sometimes extremely weak. During some of the times when doubts and discouragement battled within her heart and soul, she became aware that God strengthened her will, which she said protected her against “the attempts of the enemy,” which were then “shattered as if against a rock.”

She explained, “I see how many actual graces God grants me; these support me ceaselessly. I am very weak, and I attribute everything solely to the grace of God” (*Diary*, 1086). In a sense, her weakness and God’s strength humbled her even more.

One time, Sr. Faustina was working hard on a particular virtue. She wrote, “I lapsed into the vice opposed to that virtue ten times more frequently than on other days.” Later that evening, she reflected on why that might have happened. As she pondered, she heard Jesus tell her, “You were counting too much on yourself and too little on Me” (*Diary*, 1087). She then understood her problem. We can certainly benefit from this too!

Finally, a priest who believes her!

In the last chapter, we discussed that as Sr. Faustina was approaching her final vows, she was sent to the convent in Walendow for a three-day silent retreat. Just before this, Jesus told Sr. Faustina to tell the priest at the retreat about all of her doubts. “I will answer you through his lips,” Jesus said. “And then your fears will end” (*Diary*, 169). He also told her to keep strict silence. It is difficult for anyone to keep complete silence, especially when sisters whom Sr. Faustina hadn’t seen in some time were there. One of them enticed her to speak aloud when she showed up unannounced at Sr. Faustina’s cell. The saint in the making kept quiet. Not getting a peep out of Sr. Faustina, the other sister whirled around in a huff and left, but not before she shot a few choice words at Sr. Faustina.

Despite that awkward moment and also feeling a bit odd after seeing the sister who had opposed her attending the retreat, Sr. Faustina would finally experience a sense of relief in the course of the retreat. Jesuit Fr. Edmund Elter, a professor of ethics, homiletics, and rhetoric at the Gregorian University in Rome, would lead the retreat. An experienced spiritual director, he would be the first priest to discern Sr. Faustina’s mystical states and acknowledge that her experiences were not illusions. Knowing what Jesus expected of her, Sr. Faustina

decided she must confide in the priest during the retreat and reveal her secret inner spiritual life to him. However, before she could tell him, the evil one showed up to torture Sr. Faustina with doubts and confusion. A battle raged in her brain as Satan plagued her with doubt. “Jesus!” she cried out in her soul. The priest walked in at that moment. He gave a short conference and then Sr. Faustina made a beeline for the confessional.⁴⁷

In words that were music to her ears, Fr. Elter confirmed her in her spiritual mission and reassured her that the revelations came from God. “Sister, be completely at peace. Jesus is your Master, and your communing with Him is neither daydreaming nor hysteria nor illusion. Know that you are on the right path,” he said (*Diary*, 174). He told her to be faithful to the graces Jesus was bestowing upon her, and that she was not free to shun them. He advised her to be unswervingly dedicated to the holy mission entrusted to her and urged her to pray for a good spiritual director. He told her that she did not have to tell her superiors about the interior graces unless Jesus were to tell her to do so. Even then, she was to first consult with her confessor. It was the very first time that a priest had confirmed the authenticity of Sr. Faustina’s mission. As she left the confessional, she was filled with peace and immense joy. The immediate peace of soul was just as Jesus had said it would be, and Sr. Faustina felt surprised that she had doubted in the first place. She quickly withdrew to a quiet area of the garden to pour her heart out to God in secret. “God’s presence penetrated me and, in an instant, all my nothingness was drowned in God; and at the same moment I felt, or rather discerned, the Three Divine Persons dwelling in me” (*Diary*, 175).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Imagine if every one of the faithful stepped up to the plate and strove to grow in the virtues! To be able to practice heroic virtues, according to Benedict XIV, we must be “already purified from all attachment to things worldly, and solidly

anchored in the love of God.”⁴⁸ I’d say we have our work cut out for us — each one of us in our own state of life. God is sure to provide plenty of opportunities for us to strive for holiness and to allow Him to purify us so that we are able to exercise the heroic virtues. You must have noticed already, but I believe as you continue on in your pilgrimage with St. Faustina, you will surely observe again and again this young sister’s practice of the heroic virtues. Take time this week to reflect on your spiritual life. Are you striving for heroic virtue? Do you lean on God for strength and not on your own abilities? Why or why not?



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Ponder ways you can grow in virtue yourself and how you can impress upon others the need to grow in virtue. Could you be a gentle teacher in steering others away from gossip at home or in the workplace? Could you possibly help others to be more attentive to the needs of the poor around you? Countless opportunities surround us. Pray about immediately carrying out your merciful actions. Ask our Mother of Mercy and St. Faustina to help you.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, help me to lean on You and not upon my own strength. Open my eyes to see that You provide opportunities in my daily life to turn to You and to practice heroic virtue.

Mother Mary, pray for me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 23

“You Did It to Me”



“An ardent love of God sees all around itself
constant opportunities to share itself
through deed, word, and prayer.”

— *Diary*, 1313



My friend Mother Teresa used to hold up her hand and count off on her five fingers, quoting Jesus’ words “You did it to me.” She lived her life this way, wholeheartedly believing that each person she served was Jesus Himself! After all, Jesus had said, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). This week’s spiritual exercise delves deeply into the works of mercy and serving Jesus in others. Let’s see how St. Faustina took this to heart and put it into action. Let’s get right to it!

We know that Jesus was telling His disciples about His Second Coming in Matthew 25:40. The Bible tells us that all of the angels will be with Jesus when He comes. All of the nations will be gathered and Jesus will separate the good from the evil — the sheep from the goats. The good will be told that they will inherit the kingdom that has been prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The evil will be sent away to eternal punishment. What determines where one is sent — to Heaven or hell? Jesus tells us that our fate will be determined by how we have loved. Simply stated, those who

took care of and loved the poor will be rewarded with eternal happiness in Heaven. Those who chose to turn their backs on the needs of the poor will suffer eternal damnation. Sobering, yes. But we should be thankful that Jesus told us.

Jesus clearly stated, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Mt 25:34-36). The accursed who heard Jesus asked when it was that they had seen Jesus with these needs. Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me” (Mt. 25:45). Jesus’ words could not be clearer. We are here on earth to help one another physically and spiritually. We are to offer mercy to others and help them to get to Heaven.

Saint Faustina offers mercy

We recall that when Sr. Faustina arrived in Warsaw to begin her third probation, she heard Jesus tell her in the chapel, “My daughter, I desire your heart be formed after the model of My merciful Heart. You must be completely imbued with My mercy” (*Diary*, 167). These powerful words filled her heart and soul. She prayed to be formed after the model of Jesus’ merciful heart. Sister Faustina was obedient to the duties of her state of life, her religious vocation, and her superiors. She was continually merciful in her actions and words, and even in her prayers. No matter what duty she was assigned or task she was required to carry out, her heart was merciful towards others. When some of the elderly sisters snapped at Sr. Faustina or found fault with her housekeeping, Sr. Faustina continued to aim to please and didn’t let on that the criticisms wore her down. When some of the sisters made fun of Sr. Faustina after hearing rumors that she was a mystic, Sr. Faustina remained humble and loving. She always returned a kind word or remained silent.

We have already seen that in her role as the gatekeeper, Sr. Faustina served many a sandwich or mug of soup to the hungry beggars who showed up at the convent's gate. We know that one time, Jesus Himself visited Sr. Faustina in the disguise of a beggar. He told her, "[Y]our compassion, within the bounds of obedience, has pleased Me, and this is why I came down from My throne — to taste the fruits of your mercy" (*Diary*, 1312). Sister Faustina already had a heart for the poor and needy, but her love for them grew tremendously after that experience. She wrote in her *Diary*, "From that moment on, there was stirred up in my heart an even purer love toward the poor and the needy. Oh, how happy I am that my superiors have given me such a task!" She thoroughly enjoyed answering the door and greeting the beggars. Sister Faustina's example of offering mercy teaches us that we need to choose to do good and that we should be capable of doing so at any given moment. Sister Faustina wrote, "I understand that mercy is manifold; one can do good always and everywhere at all times. An ardent love of God sees all around itself constant opportunities to share itself through deed, word, and prayer. Now I understand the words which you spoke to me, O Lord, some time ago" (*Diary*, 1313).

Works of mercy

The Church teaches that our good example and good works have tremendous transforming power. "The very testimony of their Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have the power to draw men to belief and to God."⁴⁹ Let's take a look at good works, or works of mercy. The *Catechism* tells us:

The *works of mercy* are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. [Cf. *Isa* 58:6-7; *Heb* 13:3] Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy

consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. [Cf. *Mt* 25:31-46] Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God [Cf. *Tob* 4:5-11; *Sir* 17:22; *Mt* 6:2-4] (*CCC*, 2447).

The spiritual works of mercy pertain to the soul, while the corporal works of mercy pertain to the body. Let's take a look at them:

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY

- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Shelter the homeless
- Visit the prisoners
- Comfort the sick
- Bury the dead

SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY

- Teach the ignorant
- Pray for the living and dead
- Correct sinners
- Counsel those in doubt
- Console the sorrowful
- Bear wrongs patiently
- Forgive wrongs willingly

Jesus gives us the three ways to exercise mercy

Jesus told St. Faustina the three ways to exercise mercy that will help others, but will also glorify and pay reverence to Jesus' mercy. He said, "I am giving you three ways of exercising

mercy toward your neighbor: the first — by deed, the second — by word, the third — by prayer. In these three degrees is contained the fullness of mercy, and it is an unquestionable proof of love for Me. By this means a soul glorifies and pays reverence to My mercy” (*Diary*, 742).

Sister Faustina wrote about these three degrees of mercy in her *Diary*, saying, “The first: the act of mercy, of whatever kind. The second: the word of mercy — if I cannot carry out a work of mercy, I will assist by my words. The third: prayer — if I cannot show mercy by deeds, I can always do so by prayer. My prayer reaches out even there where I cannot reach out physically” (*Diary*, 163).

I’d like to close this chapter with a beautiful example of rendering service to our neighbor and how it affects Jesus. One time when Sr. Faustina was not feeling well, she couldn’t go to the chapel for the Passion Service (Palm Sunday), and so had to stay behind in her room, where she prayed. A bell rang in the next room. Sister Faustina immediately got up, though she was weak, to help the severely sick sister in need. She recalled, “When I returned to my room, I suddenly saw the Lord Jesus, who said, ‘My daughter, you gave Me greater pleasure by rendering Me that service than if you had prayed for a long time.’” The young mystic questioned Jesus. “But it was not You, Jesus, but to that patient that I rendered this service.” Jesus answered His faithful servant, “Yes, My daughter, but whatever you do for your neighbor, you do for Me” (*Diary*, 1029). As we know, this was not the first time that Sr. Faustina was blessed to find out from Jesus Himself that He was pleased with her loving works of mercy.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Take time this week to ponder Jesus’ instruction to serve Him in others: “You did it to me.” Also, look over the list of the works of mercy. Think about the merciful actions that you will commit to carrying out. Meanwhile, call to mind that St. Faustina declared that giving mercy is possible at all times.

Opportunities abound for showing mercy. We choose whether or not we will be merciful. We might ask ourselves some honest questions. Do we choose to turn our back on a need due to selfishness or laziness? Do we choose to answer a criticism with a kind word and a prayer? Or do we choose to react negatively? Do we bear wrongs patiently? These and other questions we can ponder as we do a mental examination of our behavior and motives. Let's choose the high road! We must make good progress in our spiritual lives. If we are not moving forward, we are most certainly slipping backwards.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

After pondering the lists of the works of mercy, if possible, carry out at least one that you've never done before. Refer to the lists all throughout your St. Faustina pilgrimage this year. Try not to shy away from the ones you've never done before. Try to pray as St. Faustina prayed: "Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful and filled with good deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks" (*Diary*, 163).



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus,
 I want to be among the righteous and be rewarded with eternal happiness in Heaven.
 Please help me to choose to do good all of the time.
 Please grant me the graces I need in order to do so.
 Mother Mary, help me.
 Saint Faustina, please pray for me.
 Jesus, I trust in You!
 Amen.



WEEK 24

“Make Your Life as Clear as Crystal”



“Make your life as clear as crystal before
the Lord ... Let God suffice you.”

— Words of one of St. Faustina's confessors (*Diary*, 55)



This week's spiritual exercise discusses how God prepared special graces for Sr. Faustina, some difficulties she faced along her way, and the need for all Christians to unite our sufferings with those of Jesus Crucified. In addition, we learn how the grave responsibility of the Divine Mercy message and devotion weighed on Sr. Faustina's shoulders, and discover Jesus' invitation to her to suffer more for Him and for souls by becoming a victim soul. When the mystic gave her consent, she felt totally loved by God and in union with Him, something she couldn't quite express. Let's dive in!

One time, a confessor told Sr. Faustina: “Sister, God is preparing many special graces for you, but try to make your life as clear as crystal before the Lord, paying no attention to what anyone else thinks about you. Let God suffice you; He alone” (*Diary*, 55). We can surmise that hearing these words of reassurance was music to Sr. Faustina's ears. This confessor's description of a “clear as crystal” life brings to mind an image of purity and simplicity — no hidden agendas. Further, he

cautioned this young sister not to get caught up in useless chatter or worry about anyone's opinion. She should strictly and wholeheartedly seek God alone in every single thing. We might take a moment to ask ourselves if we do this. Is your life as clear as crystal? Are shadows, dirt, and smudges obscuring the brilliant light that should shine through your soul?

Rejoicing in sufferings

Father Elter had earlier confirmed Sr. Faustina in her spiritual mission and reassured her that the revelations she was experiencing were indeed from God. At that time, the humble mystic was at peace and entering into the five months of preparation for her perpetual vows. Sister Faustina's daily routine was a mix of prayer and work, but she was often burdened by the criticisms from a few of the older nuns who shot a number of stern gazes her way and voiced occasional cross words at her. Mother Janina Bartkiewicz, in particular, said some choice words to Sr. Faustina. Mother Janina flat out told her that Jesus didn't have close contact with sinners like her ("a miserable bundle of imperfections!"), but only with holy people (*Diary*, 133). Sister Faustina was hurt, but immediately offered her pain to Jesus. She knew that criticisms and humiliations were meant to burnish and mold her into a merciful soul like her Lord Jesus. In order for her to achieve growth in holiness, it was absolutely necessary for her not to allow the pain to fester in her heart, but to immediately and wholeheartedly place it into the hands of Jesus, praying to unite her sufferings with His. Throughout her experiences both painful and joyful, she kept moving forward towards her loving Savior.

One evening, Jesus appeared to Sr. Faustina when she was praying at the convent of the Sisters of the Holy Family in Warsaw. Sister Faustina felt the presence of God fill her soul. "I prayed as I do at certain times, without saying a word." She suddenly saw Jesus, who delivered a very sobering warning. "Know that if you neglect the matter of the painting of the image and the whole work of mercy, you will have to answer for a multitude of souls on the day of judgment." Fear perme-

ated the young sister's heart and soul. She recalled, "Try as I would, I could not calm myself. ... These words cut deep into my heart" (*Diary*, 154). Jesus' warning played over and over again in her mind. She felt such pressure knowing she would be responsible for countless others and not merely for herself on Judgment Day. The great mission entrusted to her from Jesus had continuously been on her mind, but Sr. Faustina believed her hands were somewhat tied since she had no real help to carry out such a task. She had been praying for a spiritual director. When Sr. Faustina was back at her convent, she wasted no time heading to the little chapel and prostrating herself on the floor before the Blessed Sacrament. "I will do everything in my power, but I beg You to be always with me and give me strength to do Your holy will; You can do everything, while I can do nothing of myself" (*Diary*, 154).

"A victim offering"

This third probation period turned out to be quite eventful. Sister Faustina was initially frightened by an invitation from Jesus. "[T]he Lord gave me to understand," she explained, "that I should offer myself to Him so that He could do with me as He pleased." She continued, "I was to remain standing before Him as a victim offering." The thing that scared her most was the knowledge of her "misery." The young mystic responded to Jesus. "I am misery itself; how can I be a hostage [for others]?" Jesus reassured her. "You do not understand this today. Tomorrow, during your adoration, I will make it known to you." Jesus' words sank deeply into Sr. Faustina's soul even as she trembled. She loved her Lord with an untold passion and would do anything for Him; however, she shuddered over the intensity and reality of the situation (*Diary*, 135).

The next day during Adoration, Sr. Faustina encountered the great and incomprehensible majesty of God. Suddenly, God's presence pervaded her being, and she experienced a vision before the eyes of her soul. She recalled that it was like the vision Jesus had had in the Garden of Olives. Sister Faustina

saw the physical sufferings she would be called upon to bear, as well as the full scope of spiritual sufferings awaiting her, which included “false suspicions, loss of good name,” and more. She wrote, “My name is to be: ‘sacrifice.’” A cold sweat broke out over Sr. Faustina’s forehead. Jesus gave her the choice whether or not to accept the call to be a victim soul for Him. She could still be saved, and God’s graces would not be lessened if she refused (*Diary*, 135).

Union with God

The intensity increased in that moment and, as Sr. Faustina recalled, “I realized I was entering into communion with the incomprehensible Majesty. I felt that God was waiting for my word, for my consent.” Her spirit immersed itself in God, and she gave her *fiat*. “Do with me as You please. I subject myself to Your will. As of today, Your holy will shall be my nourishment, and I will be faithful to Your commands with the help of Your grace. Do with me as You please. I beg You, O Lord, be with me at every moment of my life” (*Diary*, 136). As soon as Sr. Faustina had consented, God’s presence pervaded her soul to such a degree that she was totally inundated with an untold happiness. Try as she might, she couldn’t describe it accurately. “I felt that His Majesty was enveloping me. I was extraordinarily fused with God.” Throughout this intense experience, Sr. Faustina saw that God was well pleased with her. She was incomprehensibly elated and drowned her spirit in Him. She was united with God! She recalled, “Aware of this union with God, I felt I was especially loved and, in turn, I loved with all my soul.” She continued. “A great mystery took place during that adoration, a mystery between the Lord and myself. It seemed to me that I would die of love [at the sight of] His glance.” Sister Faustina rested in that love and spoke much with Jesus “without uttering a single word.” Jesus said to His bride, “You are the delight of My heart; from today on, every one of your acts, even the smallest, will be a delight to My eyes, whatever you do” (*Diary*, 137).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Calling to mind the directives spoken by a confessor early in this chapter (“Make your life as clear as crystal before the Lord, paying no attention to what anyone else thinks about you. Let God suffice you; He alone”), and knowing that each of us has a specific mission in life, how might this apply to your own life? Can you strive to pay no attention to what anyone thinks of you? Can you open your heart fully to God’s plans for your life? Pray for the graces you need to do so.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Exercise the three degrees of mercy (deed, word, and prayer) as much as possible throughout this week. Look and pray for opportunities. Don’t give up praying to find opportunities. Jesus, Mary, St. Joseph, and St. Faustina will help you. Ask them.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and that I don’t deserve Your love. Please help me to be more worthy and to also help others around me to strive for holiness.

Mother Mary, I need you.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 25

To Possess a Generous Heart and Apostolic Spirit



“Pure love is capable of great deeds, and it is not broken by difficulty or adversity ... It knows that only one thing is needed to please God: to do even the smallest things out of great love — love, and always love.”

— *Diary*, 140



This week’s spiritual exercise involves possessing a generous heart and apostolic spirit, both of which we will explore as we continue on with Sr. Faustina, discovering what unfolded during and after that amazing encounter with Jesus in the chapel. Sister Faustina shares about preparing for her “perpetual betrothal” and the intense longing of her heart for Jesus. Then Jesus reveals essential meditations for Sr. Faustina and a powerful prayer of conversion. Let’s get to it!

During that amazing Adoration, Sr. Faustina became mystically united to God. It was an experience almost impossible to describe. She wrote, “A great mystery has been accomplished between God and me. Courage and strength have remained in my soul.” Sister Faustina was immensely transformed. She said her body remained the same, but her

soul was different: “God was now living in it with the totality of His delight.” She knew it was not a mere feeling, but rather “a conscious reality that nothing can obscure” (*Diary*, 137). After giving her consent to be a “victim offering” for Jesus, she felt an immense sense of calm take hold of her heart. She was ready for whatever would be required of her as Jesus’ little victim soul. Just as soon as she left the chapel, the first splinter from the Cross jabbed her in the heart. It was an intense humiliation that Sr. Faustina would suffer because of a certain person awaiting her in the corridor. “I accepted it with submission to a higher will and snuggled closely to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, letting Him know that I was ready for that for which I had offered myself” (*Diary*, 138).

“Suffering seemed to spring out of the ground”

Sister Faustina certainly possessed a generous heart and wished to please her Lord. She was ready to suffer even more for Him. She remarked, “Suffering seemed to spring out of the ground.” She surely didn’t need to look for it, for it found her! Sister Faustina said that even Mother Margaret was surprised by the amount of sudden suffering that she would endure. But Sr. Faustina delighted in it, knowing that it was being used for good. She said, “I rejoiced at this in the depths of my soul and had been ready for it for a long time.” This victim soul was learning much about the mystery of redemptive suffering. She wrote, “I see now that a soul cannot do much of itself, but with God it can do all things. Behold what God’s grace can do.” She continued, “Few are the souls that are always watchful for divine graces, and even fewer of such souls who follow those inspirations faithfully” (*Diary*, 138).

Longing for God, and God’s attributes

Sister Faustina felt an intense longing for God as she entered the Advent season that year. She said, “My spirit rushed toward God with all its might.” God would enlighten the

humble sister about His greatest attributes: holiness, justice, and love and mercy. Sister Faustina wrote, “His holiness is so great that all the Powers and Virtues tremble before Him. The pure spirits veil their faces and lose themselves in unending adoration, and with one single word they express the highest form of adoration; that is — Holy” She continued to record what she had learned. “The holiness of God is poured out upon the Church of God and upon every living soul in it, but not in the same degree,” she wrote. “There are souls who are completely penetrated by God, and there are those who are barely alive” (*Diary*, 180). The Lord then enlightened Sr. Faustina about His justice. “His justice is so great and penetrating that it reaches deep into the heart of things, and all things stand before Him in naked truth, and nothing can withstand Him.” The third attribute consists of love and mercy. Sister Faustina wrote, “And I understood that the greatest attribute is love and mercy. It unites the creature with the Creator. This immense love and abyss of mercy,” she continued, “are made known in the Incarnation of the Word and in the Redemption [of humanity], and it is here that I saw this as the greatest of all God’s attributes” (*Diary*, 180).

Blessed graces

A very blessed grace was bestowed upon the young mystic the day before Christmas: a special closeness to the Blessed Mother. Sister Faustina stepped into the chapel and prayed to the Blessed Mother to grant graces to her loved ones. Sister Faustina’s spirit was totally steeped in God. She recalled, “I relived her interior sentiments” (*Diary*, 183). What an amazing grace it would be to share in Mother Mary’s own Nativity sentiments!

Later during midnight Mass, Sr. Faustina saw the Child Jesus in the Host and recalled, “[M]y spirit was immersed in Him. Although He was a tiny Child, His majesty penetrated my soul” (*Diary*, 182). Sister Faustina meditated upon the mystery and the “great abasement on the part of God,” the

“inconceivable emptying of Himself” (*Diary*, 182). This all remained very vividly alive in the mystic’s soul all throughout the holy season. The Child Jesus would visit with Sr. Faustina on other occasions, as well. One time when Sr. Faustina was trying to meditate on Jesus’ Passion, she was suddenly filled with joy when the Child Jesus showed up! She remarked to Him that He was so little, but she knew He was her Creator and Lord. He answered the saint in the making, “I am [your Creator and Lord], and I keep company with you as a child to teach you humility and simplicity” (*Diary*, 184).

Jesus’ loving Heart burns for souls

Sister Faustina was always busy preparing her heart and soul for her perpetual vows, or as she put it, her “perpetual betrothal.” No matter what happened each day, Sr. Faustina was prepared to offer it all for the love of God and His holy will. She wrote, “I gathered all my sufferings and difficulties into a bouquet for Jesus for the day of our perpetual betrothal. Nothing was difficult for me, when I remembered it was for my Betrothed as proof of my love for Him” (*Diary*, 184). Sister Faustina worked hard at achieving great silence for Jesus. She suffered much, but wrote, “But what can be too great for Jesus, for Him whom I love with all the strength of my heart?” (*Diary*, 185).

Soon, Jesus would intimately reveal essential meditations for Sr. Faustina, as well as a powerful prayer of conversion. Sister Faustina recalls that great day in her *Diary*. She wrote, “Today Jesus said to me, ‘I desire that you know more profoundly the love that burns in My Heart for souls and you will understand this when you meditate upon My Passion. Call upon My mercy on behalf of sinners; I desire their salvation. When you say this prayer, with a contrite heart and with faith on behalf of some sinner, I will give him the grace of conversion. This is the prayer:

O Blood and Water, which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fount of Mercy for us, I trust in You” (*Diary*, 186-87).

This is a powerful prayer that we should pray often with deep faith and contrite hearts. Jesus promised the grace of conversion for sinners through this prayer. Sister Faustina wholeheartedly desired the salvation of souls, and so she made sure to pray that new prayer often for sinners. One time, she wrote about the necessity of an apostolic spirit: “Our life is truly apostolic; I cannot imagine a religious living in one of our houses; that is, in our Community, and not having an apostolic spirit. Zeal for the salvation of souls should burn in our hearts” (*Diary*, 350).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Take some time today and ponder your life and your attitude. Do you have a generous heart and an apostolic spirit? Can you ask God to help you in those areas? This week, think about Sr. Faustina’s ways of handling the humiliations and sufferings in her daily life. How did she continue to put one foot in front of the other to walk in faith? Sure, Jesus was granting her many tremendous graces, but she had a humungous weight on her shoulders in her call to propagate the Divine Mercy message to the world. However, God grants graces to each of us in different ways, according to our missions. Be sure to ask God for many graces and strive to be open to God’s will in your life.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Pray Jesus’ special prayer for sinners as often as you can this week. Also, reach out to someone with whom you don’t exactly see eye-to-eye and shower them with God’s love in some concrete way. Do your best. Pray about it.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, I love You. I want to care
more for sinners and help them with my prayers.
O Blood and Water, which gushed forth from the
Heart of Jesus as a fount of Mercy for us,

I trust in You.

Mother Mary and St. Faustina,
please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 26

Praying for the Dying and Deceased



“Especially now, while I am in the hospital, I experience an inner communion with the dying who ask me for prayer when their agony begins. God has given me a wondrous contact with the dying!”

— *Diary*, 835



This week’s spiritual exercise deals with the souls of the dying and deceased, and how they affect our lives. We’ll also discuss one of the special gifts that Jesus bestowed upon St. Faustina as she sought to aid souls on the path to Heaven — that is, to be in contact with and to pray for the dying and the deceased. Jesus gave His Secretary of Mercy a very sensitive spirit so that she understood when her prayer was needed urgently. Let’s take a look!

As we touched upon earlier, near the beginning of her religious life, Sr. Faustina asked the Lord for whom should she pray. Jesus let her know that He would reveal those people to her the following night. The next night, something quite extraordinary happened. Sister Faustina recalled it in her *Diary*.

I saw my Guardian Angel, who ordered me to follow him. In a moment I was in a misty place full of fire in which there was a great crowd of suffering souls. They were praying fervently, but to no avail, for themselves; only we can come to their aid. The flames which were burning them did not touch me at all. My Guardian Angel did not leave me for an instant. I asked these souls what their greatest suffering was. They answered me in one voice that their greatest torment was longing for God. I saw Our Lady visiting the souls in purgatory. The souls call her "The Star of the Sea." She brings them refreshment. I wanted to talk with them some more, but my Guardian Angel beckoned me to leave. We went out of that prison of suffering. [I heard an interior voice] which said, "My mercy does not want this, but justice demands it." Since that time, I am in closer communion with the suffering souls (*Diary*, 20).

We can be sure that this experience left an indelible impression on Sr. Faustina's heart. From that night forward, she was in very close communion with the souls in Purgatory, as she noted. We also know how important the souls in Purgatory are to Jesus. He gave Sr. Faustina the Novena to Divine Mercy (which she began praying on Good Friday, though it can be prayed at any time of year), and the eighth day is for the souls in Purgatory:

Today bring to Me the souls who are in the prison of Purgatory, and immerse them in the abyss of My mercy. Let the torrents of My Blood cool down their scorching flames. All these souls are greatly loved by Me. They are making retribution to My justice. It is in your power to bring them relief. Draw all the indulgences from the treasury of My Church and offer them on their behalf. Oh, if you only knew the

torments they suffer, you would continually offer for them the alms of the spirit and pay off their debt to My justice (*Diary*, 1226).

Souls came to meet her

Numerous souls visited Sr. Faustina, seeking her prayers for their relief so that they could be released from Purgatory. I'll mention just a few instances. At the end of her postulancy after she was sent to Krakow, Sr. Faustina was aware that a Sr. Henry was dying. After her death, Sr. Henry appeared in spirit to Sr. Faustina. Sister Henry requested that Sr. Faustina arrange a Mass and three ejaculatory prayers for her soul through the directress of novices and Fr. Rospond. Initially, Sr. Faustina agreed, but the following day, she changed her mind, not being 100 percent sure if the visit had really happened or if it might have been a dream. However, Sr. Henry came back again to make her request, and Sr. Faustina no longer doubted. Yet, in the morning, something prevented her. Sister Faustina recalled, "I decided not to tell the Directress about it unless I saw her [Sister Henry] during the day. At once I ran into her in the corridor." Sister Faustina continued, "She reproached me for not having gone immediately, and a great uneasiness filled my soul." Sister Faustina went to Mother Directress to tell her everything. Mother said she would take care of the matter, and an instant peace filled Sr. Faustina's soul. "[A]nd on the third day," she continued, "this sister came to me and said, 'May God repay you'" (*Diary*, 21).

Another time, a sister who had died a couple of months previously came to Sr. Faustina in a "terrible condition, all in flames with her face painfully distorted." She disappeared shortly. Sister Faustina shuddered in fear because she couldn't tell whether this sister was in Purgatory or hell. But the young mystic did not lose a moment, and quickly began praying a great deal for the sister, who returned the following night. This time, she was "in an even more horrible state, in the midst of flames which were even more intense, and despair

was written all over her face.” Sister Faustina was astonished to see her in this condition after so many fervent prayers. Faustina asked, “Haven’t my prayers helped you?” The sister said they had not and that nothing would help. Sister Faustina asked if the community’s prayers had helped. She responded that they had not helped her personally, but they had helped other souls. Sister Faustina put her foot down. “If my prayers are not helping you, Sister, please stop coming to me.” The sister disappeared immediately. Nonetheless, Sr. Faustina continued to pray for her.

“After some time she came back again to me during the night, but already her appearance had changed.” The flames were gone, and her face shone radiantly. “Her eyes were beaming with joy.” The radiant sister told Sr. Faustina that she, Sr. Faustina, had “a true love” for her “neighbor and that many other souls had profited from [her] prayers.” She begged Sr. Faustina to continue “praying for the souls in purgatory and added that she herself would not remain there much longer.” Sister Faustina punctuated that entry in her *Diary*, exclaiming, “How astounding are the decrees of God!” (*Diary*, 58).

Her soul sensed the needs of souls

Sister Faustina recalled in her *Diary*, “It has happened to me for some time now that I immediately sense in my soul when someone is praying for me; and I likewise sense it in my soul when some soul asks me for prayer, even though they do not speak to me about it” (*Diary*, 155). Sister Faustina experienced a certain disquiet in her soul at these times and received peace when she prayed for the needy souls.

One night a soul came to Sr. Faustina and did not want to leave her. She recalled:

When the soul of a certain young lady came to me one night, she made me aware of her presence, and made known to me that she needed my prayer. I prayed for a while, but her spirit did not leave me.

Then I thought to myself, “If you are a good spirit, leave me in peace, and the indulgences I will gain tomorrow will be for you.” At that moment, the spirit left my room, and I recognized that she was in Purgatory (*Diary*, 1723).

So she prayed often for the Holy Souls in Purgatory. Sometimes she would go out to the gate of the cemetery when she had permission, and she would talk to and pray for the souls of those buried there. Once before All Souls’ Day, standing by the gate to the cemetery, she told them, “If you need something, my dear little souls, I will be glad to help you to the extent that the rule permits me.” The souls told her, “Do the will of God; we are happy in the measure that we have fulfilled God’s will” (*Diary*, 518). Later in the evening, she was visited by souls in need of prayer. She also saw a “great multitude of souls walking with us into the chapel and praying with us” (*Diary*, 519). Can we imagine this?

Sister Faustina had occasion to experience the longing for God that a soul in Purgatory experiences. She was allowed to feel it keenly during her prayers for someone in Purgatory. Sister Faustina wrote, “From early morning on the following day, I offered everything for her intention. During Holy Mass, I had a brief experience of her torment. I experienced such intense hunger for God that I seemed to be dying of the desire to become united with Him.” It was of short duration, but she then “understood what the longing of the souls in Purgatory was like” (*Diary*, 1186).

Wholeheartedly knowing the importance of praying for the deceased and the dying, Sr. Faustina cried out to Jesus in prayer:

O Jesus, I understand that Your mercy is beyond all imagining, and therefore I ask You to make my heart so big that there will be room in it for the needs of all the souls living on the face of the earth. O Jesus, my love extends beyond the world, to the souls

suffering in Purgatory, and I want to exercise mercy toward them by means of indulgenced prayers. God's mercy is unfathomable and inexhaustible, just as God Himself is unfathomable. Even if I were to use the strongest words there are to express this mercy of God, all this would be nothing in comparison with what it is in reality. O Jesus, make my heart sensitive to all the sufferings of my neighbor, whether of body or of soul. O my Jesus, I know that You act toward us as we act toward our neighbor.

My Jesus, make my heart like unto Your merciful Heart. Jesus, help me to go through life doing good to everyone (*Diary*, 692).

Sister Faustina told Jesus on the day of her perpetual vows that she knew He would not refuse her the longings of her soul. Therefore, she made three specific requests. The third one was this: "Jesus, I plead with You for the souls that are most in need of prayer. I plead for the dying; be merciful to them. I also beg You, Jesus, to free all souls from Purgatory" (*Diary*, 240). The dying and the Holy Souls were forever on her mind.

Prayers of relief before they die

In addition to praying for the souls in Purgatory who are in need of prayers because they can no longer pray for themselves, Sr. Faustina deeply desired to assist those in their last agony getting ready for their eternal reward. She especially pleaded for mercy for sinners. Sister Faustina's sensitive spirit often detected when a soul was in need of prayer. It might not be someone in her convent; sometimes it was even a person at a distance. She wrote, "It sometimes happens that I know about a death occurring several hundred kilometers away. This has happened several times with regard to my family and relatives and also sisters in religion, and even souls whom I have not known during their lifetime" (*Diary*, 835). Sister

Faustina began praying earnestly as soon as she sensed a need. She stopped praying only when peace came to her soul. Many times, through conversations the following day, the time when the person was in their last agony and when they died was confirmed. It always matched the timing of her prayers.

With regard to her role for these souls, one time Sr. Faustina poetically cried out to God, “O God of fathomless mercy, who allow me to give relief and help to the dying by my unworthy prayer, be blessed as many thousand times as there are stars in the sky and drops of water in all the oceans! Let Your mercy resound throughout the orb of the earth, and let it rise to the foot of Your throne, giving praise to the greatest of Your attributes; that is, Your incomprehensible mercy ... ” (*Diary*, 835).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Let us also say: “O Jesus, make my heart sensitive to all the sufferings of my neighbor, whether of body or of soul. O my Jesus, I know that You act toward us as we act toward our neighbor. My Jesus, make my heart like unto Your merciful Heart. Jesus, help me to go through life doing good to everyone” (*Diary*, 692). Let us also recall that Jesus asked Sr. Faustina to pray much for the souls in Purgatory. He loves them dearly and requests that we “draw all the indulgences from the treasury of [His] Church and offer them on their behalf” (*Diary*, 1226). Take time this week to ponder the dying and the souls in Purgatory. Make a commitment to praying for these souls in need. We are all a part of the Communion of Saints. We are meant to help one another. They will certainly help us as well.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Look for someone most in need and carry out your works of mercy. Also, make a plan for a spiritual bouquet of prayers for the dying and souls in Purgatory and stick to it. Consider also having at least one holy Mass offered for the Holy Souls. Can you pray like St. Faustina? She prayed, “My Jesus, make my heart like unto Your merciful Heart. Jesus, help me to go through life doing good to everyone.”



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Jesus, I love You. My Merciful Jesus, please make my heart like unto Your merciful Heart and help me to go through life doing good to everyone.

Help me to be more mindful about praying
for the dying and deceased.

Mother Mary, Star of the Sea, guide me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



PART THREE

Interior Life



“O soul, you will find no beauty
outside of God.”

— *Diary*, 833





WEEK 27

“I Thirst”



“I thirst. I thirst for the salvation of souls. Help Me, My daughter, to save souls. Join your sufferings to My Passion and offer them to the heavenly Father for sinners.”

— Jesus to St. Faustina (*Diary*, 1032)



Our Savior Jesus, amazingly, thirsts for our love. It might seem hard to believe — after all, He is God! How and why does He thirst for our love? We will take a thorough look at this holy “thirst” of Jesus from the Cross for the salvation of souls and what it entails in this week’s spiritual exercise. Let’s get to it!

The human heart is restless until it finds God. In the Psalms, we read, “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps 42:1-2). Saint Augustine penned the now familiar words, “[F]or you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you”⁵⁰ (CCC, 30). Man might do tons of searching in all the wrong places and never have peace until he is right with God. But that’s not just a one-sided longing, or a one-sided quest. It’s true that our Lord yearns for us, too, though He is the Creator of the universe. He thirsts for our love.

When Jesus hung dying on the Cross, He uttered the words, “I thirst” (Jn 19:28; NABRE). It was not merely for water that He thirsted. He also thirsted for our love and the salvation of souls. This thirst was expressed immediately after He had gifted to His disciple John (as well as to all of mankind) the eminent gift of His own Mother, when He said, “Here is your mother” (Jn 19:27). Most of us cannot comprehend the full meaning of such a gift. However, we can at least try to remember to call upon Mother Mary often in all of our needs. She will pray for us, protect us, and mother us! Mary is our wonderful mediator. She will show us how to satiate her Son’s thirst for love and for souls.

Mother Mary knows all about the need to save souls — the souls for whom Jesus thirsts. Mary is fully aware of the problems and blessings of our sinful world, and has always been closely united to her Son’s work of salvation, right from the start. She continues to work from Heaven. We can recall that when Mary appeared to three simple peasant children in Fatima, Portugal, in 1917, she offered several “tools” to save souls. One such tool is praying the daily Rosary. Another is committing to the Five First Saturdays devotion. Further, praying a powerful prayer that she taught the children (Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta) is most effective: “O Jesus, this is for love of You, for the conversion of poor sinners, and in reparation for the offenses committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.” The Blessed Mother taught the children this prayer during her July 13, 1917, apparition. It can be prayed at any time, especially when offering up a specific suffering or situation to our Lord, asking Him to use it for the purposes mentioned in the prayer. The simplest thing can be transformed into a formidable means to save souls! In this way, we are helping to satiate Jesus’ thirst!

Mother Teresa, St. Faustina, and Jesus’ thirst

In discussing Jesus’ thirst for the salvation of souls, I can’t help but think of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who was

deeply impacted by Jesus' thirst for the salvation of souls and, in fact, founded a religious order that would work to accomplish their salvation. Mother Teresa was a Catholic nun who received what she referred to as a "call within a call" when, on September 10, 1946, she was on a train en route to her yearly retreat in Darjeeling. Mother Teresa experienced a mystical vision of Jesus on the Cross, uttering the words, "I thirst." Jesus called to this simple nun's heart and asked her to take care of His poorest — "the least." Mother Teresa totally embraced Jesus' invitation. After an exercise of due diligence and following normal protocol, the Church's hierarchy reviewed Mother Teresa's proposal for the religious order she would found and gave her permission to step out in faith, following the call of the Lord. On August 17, 1948, Mother Teresa crossed over the threshold from the peaceful order of the Loreto convent into the unpredictable, sometimes dangerous, slums of the poor. On October 7, 1950, Mother Teresa and 11 companions (some were her former students!) were established officially as a religious congregation of diocesan right.

Mother Teresa stated, "The General End of the Missionaries of Charity is to satiate the thirst of Jesus Christ on the Cross for Love and Souls." She included these words in the order's Statutes. In each of the Missionaries of Charity (MC) convent chapels all around the world, the words "I THIRST" are prominently displayed on the wall, close to the altar and tabernacle. Mother Teresa explained, "We have these words in every chapel of the MCs to remind us what an MC is here for: to quench the thirst of Jesus for souls, for love, for kindness, for compassion, for delicate love."⁵¹ I have been personally blessed to meditate upon these simple, yet profound, words in many of the MC chapels in various places around the world.

On March 25, 1993, Mother Teresa explained the meaning of the words "I thirst" in a letter to her community. She wrote, "'I thirst' is something much deeper than just Jesus saying 'I love you.' Until you know deep inside that Jesus thirsts for you — you can't begin to know who He wants to be for you. Or who He wants you to be for Him. The heart

and soul of [Missionaries of Charity] is only this — the thirst of Jesus’ Heart, hidden in the poor. ... ‘I thirst’ and ‘You did it to me’ — remember always to connect the two.”⁵²

Just after Mother Teresa passed on to her eternal reward, St. John Paul II described the saint of the gutters’ holy mission:

Her mission began every day, before dawn, in the presence of the Eucharist. In the silence of contemplation, Mother Teresa of Calcutta heard the echo of Jesus’ cry on the Cross: “I thirst.” This cry, received in the depths of her heart, spurred her to seek out Jesus in the poor, the abandoned, and the dying on the streets of Calcutta and to all the ends of the earth.⁵³

Later, at her beatification on October 19, 2003, the pope expressed similar sentiments:

The cry of Jesus on the Cross, “I thirst” (Jn 19:28), expressing the depth of God’s longing for man, penetrated Mother Teresa’s soul and found fertile soil in her heart. Satiating Jesus’ thirst for love and for souls in union with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, had become the sole aim of Mother Teresa’s existence and the inner force that drew her out of herself and made her “run in haste” across the globe to labor for the salvation and the sanctification of the poorest of the poor.⁵⁴

About 10 years before Mother Teresa experienced hearing Jesus’ words “I thirst,” another great saint in the making would be blessed to hear the same two powerful words spoken to her heart. It was during a vision when Sr. Faustina saw Jesus suffering on the Cross. Sister Faustina recalled, “During Holy Mass, I saw the Lord Jesus nailed upon the Cross amidst great torments. A soft moan issued from His Heart. After some time, He said, ‘I thirst. I thirst for the salvation of souls. Help

Me, My daughter, to save souls. Join your sufferings to My Passion and offer them to the heavenly Father for sinners” (*Diary*, 1032). What an awesome privilege to be asked by Jesus Himself to help Him save souls! Sister Faustina no doubt took these words to her heart and meditated upon them deeply. She searched for every opportunity to help Jesus save souls by joining her every suffering to His. The humble saint said she didn’t know how to suffer properly. Specifically, she wrote, “I understood that I did not know how to suffer. In order to gain merit for my suffering, I will unite myself more closely, in suffering, to the Passion of the Lord Jesus” (*Diary*, 1762). This she did often. At another time, Jesus told His bride, “I desire that you know more profoundly the love that burns in My Heart for souls, and you will understand this when you meditate upon My Passion” (*Diary*, 186).

In a meditation on Jesus’ words, “I thirst,” Pope Francis said:

“Love is not loved”: This reality, according to some accounts, is what greatly upset St. Francis of Assisi. For love of the suffering Lord, he was not ashamed to cry out and grieve loudly.⁵⁵ This same reality must be in our hearts as we contemplate Christ Crucified, he who thirsts for love. Mother Teresa of Calcutta desired that in the chapel of every community of her sisters, the words “I thirst” would be written next to the crucifix. Her response was to quench Jesus’ thirst for love on the Cross through service to the poorest of the poor. The Lord’s thirst is indeed quenched by our compassionate love; he is consoled when, in his name, we bend down to another’s suffering. On the day of judgment, they will be called “blessed” who gave drink to those who were thirsty, who offered true gestures of love to those in need: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).⁵⁶



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Both Mother Teresa and St. Faustina acted upon the great invitation of Jesus to help save souls. Also, the shepherd children at Fatima responded to Our Lady's requests to save souls with their prayers and sacrifices. Calling to mind Jesus' invitation to Sr. Faustina to "join [her] suffering to [His] Passion and offer them to the heavenly Father for sinners," can we strive to do the same? Jesus' cry from the Cross expressing His thirst for the salvation of souls should echo deeply in our hearts. Take time today and this week to ponder these things. Make your life all about being lovingly attentive to the needs of those around you and to saving souls — "connecting the two," as Mother Teresa suggested. Also, ponder Jesus' great thirst for your love. Can you strive to satiate His thirst? Jesus has asked in a particular way two of His daughters (Sts. Faustina and Mother Teresa) to help Him to save souls. He beckons to us, as well.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Who near you is most in need of God's love? Knowing that each human heart desires deeply to rest in God's love, how can you satiate their thirst for God's love? What work of mercy can you put into practice throughout this week? Pray about it. Here are a few suggestions:

- Go out of your way to offer assistance to a stranger.
- Take time to truly listen to someone who needs to share (even if you've already heard it!).
- Strike up conversations with people around you, allowing them to vent.
- Always mention "prayer" and "God." Get those

powerful words in your conversations! It can help change someone's life!



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Lord, my Crucified Jesus,
I love You.

I am Your unworthy servant.

Thank You for thirsting for my love.

I want to satiate Your thirst for love and I want
to offer my life for the salvation of souls.

Mother Mary, please help me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 28

Silence and Simplicity



“Silent lips are pure gold and bear witness to holiness within.”

— *Diary*, 552



This week’s spiritual exercise focuses on the need for silence and simplicity in our lives. We might think they are impossible to find and achieve, but silence and simplicity are necessary for spiritual survival, as St. Faustina shows us so well. In addition, we might struggle with temptations to voice our personal opinion at all costs and not listen very well to the opinions of others. Let’s take a look!

We need silence to pray. The *Catechism* speaks of the silence necessary for contemplative prayer: “Contemplative prayer is *silence*, the ‘symbol of the world to come’⁵⁷ or ‘silent love.’⁵⁸ Words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love. In this silence, unbearable to the ‘outer’ man, the Father speaks to us His incarnate Word, who suffered, died, and rose; in this silence the Spirit of adoption enables us to share in the prayer of Jesus” (*CCC*, 2717, emphasis in original).

Sister Faustina wrote, “[I]n order to hear the voice of God, one has to have silence in one’s soul and to keep silence; not a gloomy silence but an interior silence; that is to say, recol-

lection in God” (*Diary*, 118). Unless you are living the life of a hermit, you might not have ample opportunities to rest your heart and soul in a bit of silence so as to refresh your batteries and to listen to the Holy Spirit speaking to you. Our fast-paced lives seem to be getting more hurried by the day. Many people lament that they lack the time to properly carve out quiet intervals to spend with the Lord. That is tragic, actually. We cannot exist in a spiritually healthy way if we are not communicating with our Creator. Eventually, that lack of communication with God will wreak havoc on our whole person, not merely our spiritual lives. We must not wait. We need to correct the lack of quiet in our lives now by putting a concrete plan into practice to make it happen. Immerse yourself into as many quiet moments and oases of serenity as possible in which you can better communicate with your Savior. Form those invaluable prayer habits! When it seems impossible to retreat to silence, due to your hectic schedule and your environment, do your best to silence your mind and give your full attention to Jesus — even for a moment. He’ll be there waiting.

“Silent lips are pure gold”

There is another kind of important silence. It is a silence of discretion, of governing one’s tongue. This is necessary for religious and laity alike. Saint Faustina wrote about a number of topics in her *Diary* that she believed were key spiritual attributes and important rules for her religious congregation. She said that in addition to the vows, there was one specific rule that stood out in her mind as most important. “Truly, if this rule were to be observed strictly, I would not worry about the others.” Since she was dealing with a congregation of women, she pointed out a prevalent problem for women, as well as the opposite traits of the Holy Spirit. “Women are very fond of talking, but the Holy Spirit does not speak to a soul that is distracted and garrulous,” she stated. “He speaks by His quiet inspirations to a soul that is recollected, to a soul that knows how to keep silence” (*Diary*, 552).

Sister Faustina added. “If silence were strictly observed, there would not be any grumbling, bitterness, slandering, or gossip, and charity would not be tarnished. In a word, many wrongs would not be done. Silent lips are pure gold and bear witness to holiness within” (*Diary*, 552). Sister Faustina was wise beyond her years. It shouldn’t come as a surprise though, because she was being trained by Jesus Himself! We should take some time to ponder our own lives and the possibility that we may have formed bad habits along the lines St. Faustina describes. But more on that later. I might add that men are equally guilty of gossip and talking too much. Man or woman, we need to curb our tendency to chatter away unnecessarily. The temptation to speak up and answer back when it would be better to remain silent will always poke at us.

Sister Faustina believed, “Silence is a sword in the spiritual struggle. A talkative soul will never attain sanctity. The sword of silence will cut off everything that would like to cling to the soul.” She reminded us, “We are sensitive to words and quickly want to answer back, without taking any regard as to whether it is God’s will that we should speak.” Yet “a silent soul is strong; no adversities will harm it if it perseveres in silence.” Also, “the silent soul is capable of attaining the closest union with God. It lives almost always under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God works in a silent soul without hindrance” (*Diary*, 477). Powerful words to ponder.

When to speak and when to be quiet

Though Sr. Faustina believed that silence was essential for a soul to be able to grow in holiness, and that keeping silent and not giving into the temptation to talk too much (or even worse, to gossip) was indispensable, she also knew without a doubt that there are times when it is most appropriate to express oneself. Sister Faustina made sure to bring up another important rule for the congregation after writing about silence. She wrote, “Keeping silent when one ought to speak is an imperfection and sometimes even a sin.” Naturally, conversation is sometimes needed in the performance of certain duties. She

also pointed out that permission to speak was granted to the sisters twice a day during recreation. “Recreation is an opportunity for getting to know one another. Let each sister speak her mind in all simplicity for the edification of the others and not in a spirit of superiority nor, God forbid, in a quarrelsome manner, for that would not be keeping with perfection and the spirit of our vocation, which should be especially characterized by love.” Sister Faustina completed her explanation on silence for the sisters, saying that if a sister breaks silence when she is supposed to be quiet, she would be punished with public penances by the superior, “or else she will answer for this before the Lord” (*Diary*, 553).

An elderly priest friend of mine used to suffer from a swollen tongue on occasion because of certain allergies. It flared up suddenly out of the blue. Antihistamines got it under control again. Whenever I tried to console him because of the mysterious malady, he quickly explained that it was “good penance” for him “for sins of the tongue” in his younger days. Sister Faustina once wrote, “I tremble to think that I have to give an account of my tongue. There is life, but there is also death in the tongue.” She explained a particular grave sin of the tongue. “Sometimes we kill with the tongue: we commit real murders. And we are still to regard that as a small thing? I truly do not understand such consciences.” Sister Faustina had a gentle heart and recalled a situation in which an acquaintance was seriously harmed by gossip. “I have known a person who, when she learned from someone that a certain thing was being said about her, fell seriously ill. She lost a good deal of blood and shed many tears, and the outcome was very sad. It was not the sword that did all this, but the tongue,” she explained. “O my silent Jesus, have mercy on us!” (*Diary*, 119). Will we learn from her teaching? Can we control our tongues? Yes, I believe we can and must.

Silence and prayer

Silence should be an important part of our prayer lives. Sister Faustina was not the only saint who knew the value of

silence. So many of the saints learned the intrinsic value of silence. Mother Teresa was one who spoke a lot about silence and prayer — both to her sisters and to the world. For instance, she said, “We need to find God and God cannot be found in noise and restlessness. We cannot place ourselves directly in God’s presence without imposing upon ourselves interior and exterior silence. That is why we must accustom ourselves to stillness of the soul, of the eyes, of the tongue. There is no life of prayer without silence.”⁵⁹ Before throwing in the towel, fearing you cannot possibly achieve this treasured silence in your heart and soul, read a bit further.

Mother Teresa exclaimed, “In the silence of the heart God speaks. If you face God in prayer and silence, God will speak to you. Then you will know that you are nothing. It is only when you realize your nothingness, your emptiness, that God can fill you with Himself. Souls of prayer are souls of great silence.” Those are powerful words to ponder in our hearts. Mother Teresa recommended finding times of silence to be alone with God. She said, “We too are called to withdraw at certain intervals into deeper silence and aloneness with God, together as a community as well as personally; to be alone with Him — not with our books, thoughts, and memories but completely stripped of everything — to dwell lovingly in His presence, silent, empty, expectant, and motionless.” She continued, “We need silence to be alone with God, to speak to him, to listen to him, to ponder his words deep in our hearts. We need to be alone with God in silence to be renewed and to be transformed. Silence gives us a new outlook on life. In it we are filled with the grace of God himself, which makes us do all things with joy.” This petite saint of the gutters warned of the danger of our prayer lives suffering when we are too chatty. She said, “If we are careful of silence it will be easy to pray. There is so much talk, so much repetition, so much carrying on of tales in words and in writing. Our prayer life suffers so much because our hearts are not silent.”⁶⁰



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Let's not allow our prayer lives to suffer because of a noisy and distracted heart and soul. Even in a noisy environment, we can seek to quiet our hearts and make plenty of room for God to speak to us. If we don't, our souls are in danger of dying. Take time this week to ponder the silence in your life, or lack thereof. Plan concrete ways to discover and carve out times of silence in which to immerse yourself in prayer. Try your best to carve out time to be quiet with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament — even for a short while.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

In addition to carrying out works of mercy this week, strive to bless others with your silence. In other words, be silent and let them speak. Bite your tongue! Also, seek to be more quiet and meditative. By all means, speak up when there is a need, but hold back from trying too hard to get your point across. Also, pray about opportunities to gently teach others the need to avoid gossip.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, far too many times I have added to the noise around me by talking too much and wanting my words to be heard. Forgive me, please.

Help me to be quiet and allow others to express themselves when it's appropriate to do so.

Mother Mary and St. Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 29

Obedience



“And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning — you must walk in it.”

— 2 Jn 6



Obedience is the key that unlocks all of the doors in the spiritual life, a fact we thoroughly discuss in this week’s spiritual exercise. The Church teaches about this essential virtue. Saint Faustina learned it, benefited from it, and teaches us all about it. It can be a challenging virtue to practice, but the rewards are great in Heaven! Let’s dig in!

Let’s step back in time to recognize that even Jesus Christ was obedient. As a Jew, Jesus was obedient to God’s Law. In Luke 2:51-52, we learn that Jesus was “obedient” to St. Joseph and to His beautiful mother, and that He “increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.” Jesus was also obedient to His Father in Heaven. Through obedience to His parents on Earth, He was demonstrating His obedience to the fourth commandment: “Honor your father and mother.” Though He was God incarnate, He sets us a powerful example in that every single day, Jesus obeyed His parents. Later on, on Holy Thursday, Jesus would obey His Father in Heaven in an

extraordinary way. He uttered the words, “[N]ot my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42). Jesus was obedient unto death (see Phil 2:8), which He accepted willingly for our redemption. He took our sins upon Himself, or as the Bible tells us, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross” (1 Pet 2:24).

We know that Jesus’ obedience to His Father all the way to and through His death on the Cross was a supreme, heroic act of obedience to make up for our disobedience. Saint Francis de Sales, a Doctor of the Church and prominent figure in the 17th-century rebirth of the Catholic mystical life, said, “He mounted the cross through obedience and died on it through obedience.”⁶¹ Jesus atoned for our sins “and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father”⁶² (CCC, 615).

Baptized Catholics and obedience

The *Catechism* beautifully expresses how Jesus’ love for mankind is revealed through His death on the Cross: “It is love ‘to the end’ [Jn 13:1] that confers on Christ’s sacrifice its value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction. He knew and loved us all when he offered his life [Cf. Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2, 25]” (CCC, 616). The Church professes that no one other than Jesus was ever able to take on the sins of all mankind, and He did that through the unique sacrifice on the Cross. Jesus united Himself to every person and therefore opened the “‘possibility of being partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery’ [Gaudium et Spes, no. 22 § 5; cf. § 2]” (CCC, 618) to us all. Jesus’ obedience all the way through His death on the Cross calls us to take up our own crosses to follow Him. We must be obedient to our state of life and all it entails.

Also, the *Catechism* tells us that “Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be his first beneficiaries [Cf. Mk 10:39; Jn 21:18-19; Col 1:24]. This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering” (CCC, 618).

The *Catechism* explains why baptized Catholics are called to obedience, and to Whom. Specifically, it states, “Having become a member of the Church, the person baptized belongs no longer to himself, but to him who died and rose for us [Cf. *1 Cor* 6:19; *2 Cor* 5:15].” But there are more reasons to be obedient, as well as others to whom we need to show obedience. Listen to this: “From now on, he is called to be subject to others, to serve them in the communion of the Church, and to ‘obey and submit’ to the Church’s leaders, [*Heb* 13:17] holding them in respect and affection [Cf. *Eph* 5:21; *1 Cor* 16:15-16; *1 Thess* 5:12-13; *Jn* 13:12-15].” Our responsibility to obedience stems from our Baptism — from when we officially entered the Church. We also have wonderful “rights” as baptized Catholics. “Just as Baptism is the source of responsibilities and duties, the baptized person also enjoys rights within the Church: to receive the sacraments, to be nourished with the Word of God, and to be sustained by the other spiritual helps of the Church [Cf. *LG* 37; CIC, cann. 208-223; CCEO, can. 675:2]” (CCC, 1269). The Sacraments are powerful — and I mean powerful — helps to our spiritual life! We cannot exist spiritually without them. Our souls would wither away.

Saint Faustina learns the importance of obedience

One time, Jesus told Sr. Faustina to go to the Mother Superior. Faustina was to ask her Mother Superior to let her wear a hair shirt for seven days and that once each night she, Faustina, should get up and go to the chapel. Sister Faustina acknowledged Jesus’ request, but found it difficult to bring herself to ask the Mother Superior for permission. Jesus appeared to her again that evening, asking her why she had not done as He had asked. The next day, Sr. Faustina told Mother Raphael about Jesus’ wishes. Her Mother Superior immediately responded, “I will not permit you to wear any hair shirt. Absolutely not! If the Lord Jesus were to give you the strength

of a colossus, I would then permit those mortifications” (*Diary*, 28). Was the Mother Superior being disobedient to Jesus? We shall see. Sister Faustina apologized for taking up her time and left. She immediately saw Jesus standing near the kitchen door. Sister Faustina questioned Jesus about commanding her to perform the mortifications and told Him that Mother would not permit them. Jesus said, “I was here during your conversation with the Superior and know everything. I don’t demand mortification from you, but obedience. By obedience you give great glory to Me and gain merit for yourself” (*Diary*, 28). Sister Faustina learned from Jesus Himself what is most important. He’s not looking for mortifications more than He’s seeking our surrender and choice to unite our wills to His. He wants our obedience.

Once when Sr. Faustina was praying for a certain soul, she decided to make a novena to the Merciful Lord and add a mortification. She wore a penitential chain on each leg throughout holy Mass. After three days enduring this penance, when it was time for Confession, Sr. Faustina shared with her spiritual director that she had undertaken this mortification. She was surprised to hear him tell her that she should not do this because it was done without permission. She had assumed that it would be all right. Afterwards, she lamented, “O my Jesus, so it was willfulness again!” (*Diary*, 364). Sister Faustina asked for pardon for having assumed permission and asked for another mortification. Her spiritual director replaced it with an interior mortification, which was to meditate during Mass on why the Lord submitted to being baptized. The young mystic hardly considered the interior mortification a mortification at all since she loved to think about her dear Lord. However, as she wrote later, though it didn’t seem like a sacrifice, this counted as a mortification of the will because she was doing what she was told to do, “and it is in this that interior mortification consists” (*Diary*, 365).

She recited her penance after leaving the confessional and heard these words: “I have granted the grace you asked for on behalf of that soul, but not because of the mortification

you chose for yourself, but because of your act of complete obedience to My representative did I grant grace to that soul for whom you interceded and begged mercy. Know that when you mortify your own self-will, then Mine reigns within you” (*Diary*, 365).

On another occasion, Jesus told Sr. Faustina how important it is to be obedient. He said, “Be obedient to your director in everything; his word is My will. Be certain in the depths of your soul that it is I who am speaking through his lips, and I desire that you reveal the state of your soul to him with the same simplicity and candor as you have with Me. I say it again, My daughter: know that his word is My will for you” (*Diary*, 979). Jesus was referring to Fr. Andrasz, who was a very effective spiritual director. Sister Faustina took Jesus’ words to her heart. Even though Jesus spelled out her obligations to obey her earthly superiors clearly, Sr. Faustina still felt as if she was being tortured by her vow of obedience, given the apparent conflict between her private revelations and the instructions of her superiors. She wrote, “I have been on the cross between heaven and earth. That is to say, I am bound by the vow of obedience and must obey the superior as God Himself. And on the other hand, God makes His will known to me directly, and so my inner torture is so great that no one will either understand or imagine these spiritual sufferings.” She continued, “It seems to me that it would be easier to give up my life than to go again and again through one hour of such pain.” She went on a bit more to explain that she couldn’t even bring herself to dwell on this dilemma but stated that she was very thankful that she had a spiritual director — “otherwise, I would not have advanced one single step,” she wrote (*Diary*, 981).

At another time, Sr. Faustina was overcome with many struggles and suffering in what she would call a “fiery trial.” It seemed to her that neither her prayers nor her good works were pleasing God. Sister Faustina was not aware that it was written all over her face until Mother Raphael felt a need to take her aside. Straightaway, she said, “Sister, ask God for grace and consolation, because I can see for myself and the sisters keep

telling me that the very sight of you evokes pity.” On top of that, the Mother Superior kind of threw her hands up, saying, “I really do not know what to do with you, Sister. I command you to stop tormenting yourself for no reason.” Mother Raphael’s words did not help, “nor did they clarify anything for me,” Sr. Faustina wrote in her *Diary*. This young mystic hoped to get help in the confessional. However, Sr. Faustina said she was feeling so miserable that she “couldn’t even define [her] trouble, and that vexed [her] even more.” A deathly sadness enveloped her. She sank deeply, felt lost in darkness, and wrote simply, “I lost hope.” She felt utterly tormented as “the night was growing darker and darker” (*Diary*, 68).

The priest who attempted to help her said he saw great graces in the obedient nun and was edified to see that, even as she was going through such a perplexing time, Sr. Faustina was working on virtues. He said he was not worried about her; she was not offending God; and she should stop torturing herself. Still, Sr. Faustina did not feel consoled and concluded, “God wanted me to give Him glory through suffering.” The words that eventually consoled Sr. Faustina’s soul somewhat came when the priest told her that in her present condition she was more pleasing to God than if she was filled with the greatest consolations. Sister Faustina recalled, “[I]n the midst of unspeakable torments, I imitated the blind man who entrusts himself to his guide, holding his hand firmly, not giving up obedience for a single moment, and this was my only safety in this fiery trial” (*Diary*, 68). Obedience is the golden key!



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Jesus told Sr. Faustina, “By obedience you give great glory to Me and gain merit for yourself.” Sister Faustina expressed her imitation of the blind man entrusting himself to his guide. We are so blessed to have this great counsel from our Lord through St. Faustina. Take time this week to consider the need for obedience in your own life. You might not be bound by

a vow of obedience, but each of us in our own lives is bound to be obedient to God. Further, as baptized Catholics, we are bound to be obedient to the Church. In addition, we are all bound to obedience to the duties of our state of life. Our Lord expects us to carry out our duties in the best possible way and to the best of our ability.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Jesus told Sr. Faustina that lukewarm souls wound His Heart painfully. He keenly felt the pain when He suffered in the Garden of Olives. Pray to somehow make a difference in the lives of the lukewarm this week. Certainly, pray for them. But also carry out concrete works of mercy, if possible. Be a radiant example of faith and obedience to God. May your holy example of obedience to Christ and His Church help to stir embers in the hearts of the lukewarm!



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, please help me to be mindful about where and when I need to be obedient to others, as well as to set a good example for those who might be under my command.

Mother Mary, show me how.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 30

The Power of Prayer



“My daughter, those words of your heart are pleasing to Me, and by saying the chaplet you are bringing humankind closer to Me.”

— Jesus to St. Faustina (*Diary*, 929)



What kind of prayer mitigates God’s anger? This week’s spiritual exercise will reveal that. We’ll also discuss St. Faustina’s prayer life, especially her desire to pray for the dying and her dedication to this great work of mercy. Following Jesus’ example, Sr. Faustina learned to pray longer. She knew well the necessity of perseverance in prayer and expressed it through a compelling true story. We’ll take a look at Church teaching on prayer as well. Let’s dig in!

The Church teaches us about the importance of prayer and how it should animate our lives. Specifically, the *Catechism* states, “Prayer is the life of the new heart. It ought to animate us at every moment. But we tend to forget him who is our life and our all. This is why the Fathers of the spiritual life in the Deuteronomic and prophetic traditions insist that prayer is a remembrance of God often awakened by the memory of the heart.” Saint Gregory of Nazianzus stated, “We must remember God more often than we draw breath”⁶³ (*CCC*, 2697). Further, the *Catechism* points out, “But we cannot pray ‘at all

times' if we do not pray at specific times, consciously willing it. These are the special times of Christian prayer, both in intensity and duration" (*CCC*, 2697).

We can learn the rhythm of prayer and carve out times for prayer that are most appropriate to our lives. The *Catechism* teaches, "The Tradition of the Church proposes to the faithful certain rhythms of praying intended to nourish continual prayer." For instance, the Church teaches various kinds of daily prayer "[s]uch as morning and evening prayer, grace before and after meals, the Liturgy of the Hours. Sundays, centered on the Eucharist, are kept holy primarily by prayer." In addition, we learn, "The cycle of the liturgical year and its great feasts are also basic rhythms of the Christian's life of prayer" (*CCC*, 2698). Prayer should always rise from a contrite and humble heart. It should become as natural as breathing. However, we cannot become complacent and only pray when we feel like it. We must carve out times for prayer and make them happen. Certainly, there are times when our prayers get interrupted by important needs. I always say that these times are when our Lord is calling us from our contemplative or scheduled prayer to a more active prayer in the form of taking care of the need that unfolded before us. But let us be sure to get back to conversing with our Creator as soon as we are able, and also remember to offer up all of those "interruptions" for His glory!

There are many ways to pray. Each person has his or her own way of offering sincere and loving prayer, or they might even form a new approach to prayer as he or she grows in the spiritual life. For instance, St. Faustina often prayed without words when her humble and contrite heart earnestly cried out to God. The *Catechism* states, "The Lord leads all persons by paths and in ways pleasing to him, and each believer responds according to his heart's resolve and the personal expressions of his prayer." There are three major expressions of prayer, according to Christian Tradition. They are "vocal, meditative, and contemplative. They have one basic trait in common: composure of heart. This vigilance in keeping the Word and

dwelling in the presence of God makes these three expressions intense times in the life of prayer” (*CCC*, 2699).

Faustina’s familial examples of prayer

We recall that from early childhood, Sr. Faustina was faithful to prayer. Her father’s example of starting his day with prayer before the sun came up, belting out his “Hours” (that is, fervently singing the Little Office of the Immaculate Conception or the Psalms) made quite an indelible impression on the entire family. The children might have pulled their pillows over their ears, but they learned quickly from their father’s expression of faith and their mother’s prayerful and loving guidance, as well.

As was discussed earlier, Sr. Faustina continued to grow in her faith as she navigated her life and ultimately ended up in the convent where, by God’s grace, she became a great intercessor and prayer warrior for sinners, the sick, the dying, and the souls in Purgatory. Prayer doesn’t necessarily come easily, though, and for many holy souls, there are various periods of great aridity and even darkness during prayer as these souls are being purged and burnished in Jesus’ furnace of love. As we know, Sr. Faustina struggled through many periods of difficulty in praying as well as a couple of dark nights, feeling deeply afflicted and abandoned. Her example of perseverance in prayer and striving for holiness throughout trying times are very edifying.

The young mystic had a huge heart for her neighbor. She desired to bring consolation and relief to others while not expecting the same help for herself, so much so that she acquired the nickname “Dump.” She would discuss this with Jesus. “My heart is always open to the sufferings of others; and I will not close my heart to the sufferings of others, even though because of this I have been scornfully nicknamed ‘dump’; that is, [because] everyone dumps his pain into my heart.” Yet, when Sr. Faustina was taunted, she would poignantly say, “[E]veryone has a place in my heart and I, in return, have a

place in the Heart of Jesus. Taunts regarding the law of love will not narrow my heart.” Instead, she continued, “My soul is always sensitive on this point, and Jesus alone is the motive for my love of neighbor” (*Diary*, 871).

Sister Faustina's faithfulness to prayer

On January 7, 1937, during a Holy Hour, Sr. Faustina learned a foundational truth about the absolute necessity of prayer and the fact that whether or not we pray as we should determines various outcomes, including God's great plans. Sister Faustina wrote that the Lord allowed her to taste His Passion. “I shared in the bitterness of the suffering that filled His soul to overflowing. Jesus gave me to understand how a soul should be faithful to prayer despite torments, dryness, and temptations; because oftentimes the realization of God's great plans depends mainly on such prayer.” Further, “[i]f we do not persevere in such prayer, we frustrate what the Lord wanted to do through us or within us.” Powerful and insightful words from our humble nun. Yet she gives full credit to Jesus and instructs us, “Let every soul remember these words: ‘And being in anguish, He prayed longer.’” She said: “I always prolong such prayer as much as is in my power and in conformity with my duty” (*Diary*, 872). Can we strive to do the same — to pray longer?

One evening, Sr. Faustina prayed intensely for a young dying man. She began to pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet (which you can find in the back of this book). She recalled, “I said it all, but the agony continued.” Just as she was about to begin the Litany of the Saints, Sr. Faustina heard the words, “Say the chaplet.” She immediately understood that the dying soul needed God's mercy, and she begged for it, finally taking the crucifix that she had received on the day of her perpetual vows off her neck and placing it on the chest of the dying man. She cried out, “Jesus, look on this soul with the same love with which You looked on my holocaust on the day of my perpetual vows, and by the power of the promise which You made to me

in respect to the dying and those who would invoke Your mercy on them, [grant this man the grace of a happy death].” His suffering ended, and he died peacefully. Sister Faustina wrote, “Oh, how much we should pray for the dying! Let us take advantage of mercy while there is still time for mercy” (*Diary*, 1035). She added, “I realize more and more how much every soul needs God’s mercy throughout life and particularly at the hour of death. This chaplet mitigates God’s anger, as He himself told me” (*Diary*, 1036).

Sister Faustina shared an intimate, holy relationship with her Lord Jesus, always sharing with Him deeply from her heart. One day after Holy Communion, she told Him that she desired so much to tell Him something. Jesus asked her what it was. “Jesus,” she said, “I beg You, by the inconceivable power of Your mercy, that all souls who will die today escape the fire of hell, even if they have been the greatest sinners.” What a very tall request! In addition, Sr. Faustina did not hesitate to remind Jesus what day it was! “Today is Friday, the memorial of Your bitter agony on the Cross; because Your mercy is inconceivable, the Angels will not be surprised at this.” She was amazingly sincere and sweet, but sure got her points across!

Jesus replied, “My beloved daughter, you have come to know well the depths of My mercy. I will do what you ask, but unite yourself continually with My agonizing Heart and make reparation to My justice. Know that you have asked Me for a great thing, but I see that this was dictated by your pure love for Me; that is why I am complying with your requests” (*Diary*, 873). Truly amazing!



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Earlier in this chapter, I quoted St. Gregory of Nazianzus, who said, “We must remember God more often than we draw breath.” Take a moment to ponder that. Sister Faustina wrote, “Let every soul remember these words: ‘And being in anguish, He prayed longer.’” According to Sr. Faustina and

Jesus, we must persevere in prayer, even when we don't feel like it (especially then!). We certainly don't want to frustrate God's plans for us by giving up on prayer. No matter how we feel, we can lift our heart to God and plead for His great mercy and love. Take time this week to ponder your prayer life. Do you rush through your prayers? Do you make sure you have scheduled enough time for daily prayer? Can you make a conscious effort to cut down on some technology to spend more time in silence conversing with God? Don't forget about the dying and souls in Purgatory. They absolutely need our prayers.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Pray about works of mercy you can carry out this week. Ask Jesus to help you to be more attentive to the needs of those around you. Can you move beyond your comfort zone this week to speak about the faith and the need for prayer to someone who might be agnostic or an atheist, or who has left the Church? God will open up opportunities to do so if you pray and trust Him.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, teach me Your ways. Help me to persevere in prayer, no matter how I feel.

Mother Mary, help me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 31

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament



“Know this, My daughter, that you are already tasting now what other souls will obtain only in eternity.”

— *Diary*, 969



Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament should be commonplace in the life of every baptized Catholic. In this week’s spiritual exercise, we will discuss the Church’s teaching on the Eucharist, as well as dear St. Faustina’s great love for the Blessed Sacrament, which gave rise to her wisdom and insights into the source and summit of the Christian life. Let’s jump in!

The Church instructs us about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, saying:

In the liturgy of the Mass we express our faith in the real presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine by, among other ways, genuflecting or bowing deeply as a sign of adoration of the Lord. “The Catholic Church has always offered and still offers to the sacrament of the Eucharist the cult of adoration, not only during Mass, but also outside of it, reserving the consecrated hosts with the utmost

care, exposing them to the solemn veneration of the faithful, and carrying them in procession [Paul VI, *MF 56*] (*CCC*, 1378).

Also, the Church teaches about Adoration of Jesus:

The tabernacle was first intended for the reservation of the Eucharist in a worthy place so that it could be brought to the sick and those absent outside of Mass. As faith in the real presence of Christ in his Eucharist deepened, the Church became conscious of the meaning of silent adoration of the Lord present under the Eucharistic species. It is for this reason that the tabernacle should be located in an especially worthy place in the church and should be constructed in such a way that it emphasizes and manifests the truth of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament (*CCC*, 1379).

We should deeply desire many opportunities to spend time with our Lord. He is waiting there in the tabernacle for our visits. A whole hour is not necessary for our time with Jesus to be meaningful. I tell folks to visit the chapel or church even for a short time, perhaps squeezed between errands, or on the way to or from work. Hopefully, you'll also schedule longer times of Adoration, too. Kneeling before Him and pouring out our hearts melts away our concerns and fears. Nourished by His love, we leave with grace, renewed hope, and peace.

Saint Faustina, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and the Chaplet

Sister Faustina was so in love with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament that she visited the chapel at every chance, while obeying the rules of her vocation. It's not a coincidence that her full religious name was Sister Maria Faustina of the Most Blessed Sacrament. Once she said, "All my strength is in You, O Living Bread. It would be difficult for me to live through

the day if I did not receive Holy Communion. It is my shield; without You, Jesus, I know not how to live” (*Diary*, 814). She described Jesus’ great gift, saying, “You wanted to stay with us, and so You left us Yourself in the Sacrament of the Altar, and You opened wide Your mercy to us” (*Diary*, 1747). God’s mercy and the Blessed Sacrament are intimately intertwined. The Chaplet of Divine Mercy is very Eucharistic because it offers the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father, in atonement for the sins of the world.

One time, the young mystic prayed, “O Jesus concealed in the Host, my sweet master and faithful Friend, how happy my soul is to have such a Friend who always keeps me company.” She elaborated, “I do not feel lonely even though I am in isolation. Jesus-Host, we know each other — that is enough for me” (*Diary*, 877).

The sisters had a special custom: At the beginning of each New Year, each sister would draw out by lot a choice of patron for the year. Sister Faustina was overwhelmingly ecstatic year after year because, by God’s grace, she drew “the Most Blessed Eucharist.” She recalled, “Jesus likes to intervene in the smallest details of our life, and He often fulfills secret wishes of mine that I sometimes hide from Him, although I know that from Him nothing can be hidden” (*Diary*, 360).

Sister Faustina’s love for Jesus was so great that praying to Him and being with Him at times even accelerated her heart rate! One time, the young mystic prayed and approached the altar. “God’s presence pervaded my soul. I was plunged into an ocean of His divinity, and Jesus said to me, ‘My daughter, all that exists is yours.’” Sister Faustina responded, “My heart wants nothing but You alone, O Treasure of my heart.” Sister Faustina went on, “For all the gifts You give me, thank you, O Lord, but I desire only Your Heart.” With love, she continued, “Though the heavens are immense, they are nothing to me without You. You know very well, O Jesus, that I am constantly swooning because of my longing for You.” Jesus answered her, “Know this, My daughter, that you are already tasting now what other souls will obtain only in eternity” (*Diary*, 969).

Just then, Sr. Faustina's soul was completely flooded with the knowledge of God. So much so that she could hardly describe it. She wrote, "Oh, would that I could express even a little of what my soul experiences when resting near the Heart of the incomprehensible Majesty! I cannot put it into words!" She stated, "Only a soul who has experienced such a great grace at least once in his life, will recognize it." Sister Faustina returned to her room. The transition from being so intimately present with Jesus back to reality, so to speak, was intense. She recalled, "[I]t seemed to me that I was coming from real life to death." The doctor came to see her and checked her pulse. "You have never had a pulse like this! I would like to know what has speeded it up so much." Sister Faustina was at a loss for words. "What could I tell him, when I myself did not know that my pulse was so rapid. I only know that I am dying of yearning for God, but this I did not tell him, for how can medicine help in this instance?" (*Diary*, 970). It can't. Only the Divine Physician can take care of these matters! Do we also yearn for God so intensely?

At times, due to illness, Sr. Faustina was ordered to stay in her room. It was truly a bittersweet dilemma because she desired to participate at Mass and receive Holy Communion, but she also wanted to be obedient. Jesus knew her heart and desired her obedience. Other times, the Lord of Heaven would reduce the young mystic's fever or restore her health so that she could go to the chapel to receive Him in Holy Communion. She lived for and craved the Bread of Heaven. One time, Jesus told her, "In the Host is your power; It will defend you." Then Jesus allowed her to see a vision of a bright Sacred Host in her cell. The vision disappeared and a "strange power" entered her soul. "[A]nd a strange light as to what our love for God consists in; namely, in doing His will" (*Diary*, 616).

Another time, Sr. Faustina was deeply moved at a Holy Hour when Jesus allowed her to mysteriously and miraculously enter the Cenacle (the upper room where the Last Supper took place) to witness what happened there. "I was most deeply moved when, before the Consecration, Jesus raised His eyes

to heaven and entered into a mysterious conversation with His Father. It is only in eternity that we shall really understand that moment.” She wrote, “His eyes were like two flames; His face was radiant, white as snow; His whole personage full of majesty, His soul full of longing.” She observed, “At the moment of Consecration, love rested satiated — the sacrifice fully consummated ... Never in my whole life had I understood this mystery so profoundly as during that hour of adoration. Oh, how ardently I desire that the whole world would come to know this unfathomable mystery!” (*Diary*, 684).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Saint Faustina wished everyone would believe in eternity. Let’s join her in praying for those who don’t believe. Not believing in a life after this one means believing there are no consequences for sin and that hell does not exist! This notion is fabricated by the devil, who is constantly on the prowl, seeking to snatch souls to hell. Saint Faustina also ardently desired that the whole world would come to know the unfathomable mystery of Jesus present in the Eucharist and His message of Divine Mercy. Take time this week to ponder the Eucharist in your life. Can you strive to carve out more time to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament? If sickness or infirmity prevents it, you can pray right where you are. Be sure to pray for the souls who don’t yet believe in God or those who are lukewarm and cause much pain to Jesus. Their souls are in serious jeopardy. May God have mercy on us all.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Ask Jesus to increase the love in your heart so that you can continually reach out in mercy to others in need. Remember that moving out of your comfort zone to help others is

often difficult but can cause great transformations to come about — yours as well as theirs. Pray for many opportunities!



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, open my heart to receive
Your love at all times, but especially in Holy
Communion and while visiting with
You in the Blessed Sacrament.
Help me to pass Your love on to
others without reserve.
Mother Mary, help me.
Saint Faustina, please pray for me.
Jesus, I trust in You!
Amen.



WEEK 32

Submission to God's Will



“A soul that loves Me very much must,
ought to live by My will.”

— Jesus to St. Faustina, *Diary*, 1023



Submission can be a tough pill to swallow. That is because we often prefer to do our own thing. So let's explore submission thoroughly in this week's spiritual exercise. We will delve into how Sr. Faustina came to realize how perfect it is to be united to God's holy will — how in her weakness, she became strong. God certainly knows what is best for our lives. Let's take a look. Ready? Set? Go!

Sister Faustina was familiar with the words of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2). Even before she started religious life, Sr. Faustina wanted to know God's holy will. The young sister recalled, “At the beginning of my religious life, suffering and adversities frightened and disheartened me. So I prayed continuously, asking Jesus to strengthen me and to grant me the power of His Holy Spirit that I might carry out His holy will in all things, because from the beginning I have been aware of my weakness” (*Diary*, 56). She persevered in prayer, asking for strength and light from the Holy Spirit.

Sister Faustina was often sick and weak. She continually offered her pain and sickness for the purposes of God's holy will. Her superiors didn't allow her to perform any extreme penances. Also, Jesus had been guiding the young saint in the making to realize that His will was perfect. One time, a sister brought fresh oranges to her. Sister Faustina knew she shouldn't take on extra penances, but for a brief moment, she questioned whether or not she should eat the luscious fruit. "I thought to myself, 'Should I eat the oranges instead of doing penance and mortifying myself during Holy Lent? After all, I am feeling a bit better.'" She heard Jesus tell her, "My daughter, you please Me more by eating the oranges out of obedience and love of Me than by fasting and mortifying yourself of your own will. A soul that loves me very much must, ought to live by My will. I know your heart, and I know that it will not be satisfied by anything but My love alone" (*Diary*, 1023). Jesus taught His bride the importance of following His holy will and not her own.

At times, the mystic felt quite useless and even like a burden. Jesus encouraged her, explaining the importance of her continual prayers and the offering of her sufferings so as to aid others to accept His holy will. This is illustrated in her *Diary*: "One day I complained to Jesus that I was being a burden to the sisters. Jesus answered me, 'You are not living for yourself but for souls, and other souls will profit from your sufferings. Your prolonged suffering will give them the light and strength to accept My will'" (*Diary*, 67). These are important words to apply to our own lives. We also must learn how to offer our sufferings in union with the sufferings of Jesus for the salvation of souls. Saint Faustina's example teaches us how! Keep reading!

There are countless instances in the *Diary* in which Sr. Faustina follows her heart in abiding by God's holy will, fully surrendering her will to His. Because of space constraints, I will mention only a few. I encourage you to read the *Diary* on your own. It is a treasure trove of spiritual wealth!

A soul discovers profound freedom in God's will

Even when Sr. Faustina's mother was seriously ill and in danger of dying, with an aching heart Sr. Faustina desired only God's holy will. It would no doubt be incredibly hard to ignore her aching heart in order to carry on with her ordinary duties, yet Sr. Faustina was aware that at times carrying our cross in life might require deep sacrifices. She was willing to do all it took to follow God's will. She noted in her *Diary* that her mother had asked her to come home. The letter caused "a host of emotions" to come alive in the young nun's heart. She loved her mother deeply. She wrote, "But I left this to God and resigned myself completely to His will. Paying no heed to the ache in my heart, I followed God's will" (*Diary*, 395). Sister Faustina's Mother Superior granted permission for her to visit her parents at their home since her mother was dying. There, at the home of her youth, she thanked God for the blessing of being together. They spent a few days together and visitors flocked to their humble home, delighted to see their Helen.

Another time, Sr. Faustina reflected on the profound freedom the soul finds when it finally joins its will to God's will. "Now I understand well that what unites our soul most closely to God is self-denial; that is, joining our will to the will of God. This is what makes the soul truly free, contributes to profound recollection of the spirit, and makes all life's burdens light, and death sweet" (*Diary*, 462).

Sister Faustina recalled the special love she shared with Jesus by being united to His holy will. "Jesus bent toward me, looked at me kindly and spoke to me about the will of the Heavenly Father." She went on to explain what kind of soul enjoys this special love, and that there aren't many souls like that. "He told me that the most perfect and holy soul is the one that does the will of My Father, but there are not many such, and that He looks with special love upon the soul who lives His will." We can imagine how her heart felt when Jesus told her that she was doing the will of God perfectly, and then

said, “[A]nd for this reason I am uniting Myself with you and communing with you in a special and intimate way.” Sister Faustina went on to describe the easy communication she shared with Jesus. “God embraces with His incomprehensible love the soul who lives by His will. I understood how much God loves us, how simple He is, though incomprehensible, and how easy it is to commune with Him, despite His great majesty. With no one do I feel as free and as much at ease as with Him. Even a mother and her truly loving child do not understand each other so well as God and I do” (*Diary*, 603). We should not become discouraged by knowing that there are not many souls like Sr. Faustina’s soul. Rather, we should strive to become like her, pleasing to Jesus, who accomplishes so much through holy souls united to His will.

We can be sure that, like the Psalmist, Sr. Faustina also cried out from her heart, “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart” (Ps 40:8). She fervently wanted only to please Him in her every word and deed. One time, when she was struggling through a period of spiritual darkness, she expressed the state of her soul in her *Diary* while also crying out to Jesus, accepting His holy will for her life. She wrote:

O my Jesus, despite the deep night that is all around me and the dark clouds which hide the horizon, I know that the sun never goes out. O Lord, though I cannot comprehend You and do not understand Your ways, I nonetheless trust in Your mercy. If it is Your will, Lord, that I live always in such darkness, may You be blessed. I ask You only one thing, Jesus: do not allow me to offend You in any way. O my Jesus, You alone know the longings and the sufferings of my heart. I am glad I can suffer for You, however little. When I feel that the suffering is more than I can bear, I take refuge in the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and I speak to Him with profound silence (*Diary*, 73).

Sister Faustina's heartfelt words teach us so much. First of all, there's the model she provides of her total surrender to God's holy will for her — even if it means groping in the darkness for the rest of her life. Secondly, she asks Jesus to make sure that she is not allowed to ever offend Him. She does not want to do this even by mistake. Further, she underscores the importance of retreating to the foot of the Cross by coming before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to pour her heart out silently and receive His healing and sustaining graces.

As this young mystic grew deeper in holiness, our Lord accomplished much through her submission to His holy will. One time, Sr. Faustina said, "There is one word I heed and continually ponder; it alone is everything to me; I live by it and die by it, and it is the holy will of God." She knew without doubt that it was the secret to great holiness. Though at times she trembled under the weight of what was required of her, she knew surrendering to God's will was absolutely essential. She continued, "It is my daily food. My whole soul listens intently to God's wishes. I do always what God asks of me, although my nature often quakes and I feel that the magnitude of these things is beyond my strength. I know well what I am of myself, but I also know what the grace of God is, which supports me" (*Diary*, 652). We can pray to be like Sr. Faustina, knowing well our weaknesses, but learning from her to strive hard and cling to God's promises and grace. We can never go wrong by accepting what God desires for us. His will is perfect.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

We are encouraged with these words from Scripture: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). We might want to ask ourselves a few questions. Am I careful not to get caught up in the lures of the culture? Is doing God's will my "daily food"? If not, why not? Let us reflect on Jesus' words to St. Faustina, "A soul that loves Me very much

must, ought to live by My will.” Remember that St. Faustina said she discovered “self-denial” to be absolutely essential in this regard, for it unites our soul most closely to God. She said that it “is what makes the soul truly free, contributes to profound recollection of the spirit, and makes all life’s burdens light, and death sweet.” Take time this week to ponder what it means to unite your will to God’s will. Pray for the grace to be open to God’s will in your life, remembering that Jesus had informed Faustina that uniting her sufferings and challenges to Him helped other souls in accepting His will. Specifically, He said, “Your prolonged suffering will give them the light and strength to accept My will.” Pray to imitate the obedience and love of St. Faustina.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

The need for mercy is all around us. We can either sit back and observe, gaining nothing and not helping anyone (and possibly losing our soul), or we can reach out to help where there is a need — always adding heaping doses of prayer to whatever we set out to do. Could it be someone whom you pass by each day who is hurting inside and would benefit from your listening ear? Find ample opportunities this week to show God’s mercy to those in need in concrete loving ways. It is absolutely essential.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, I love You and want
to be united to Your holy will.

Mother Mary, please help me and grant
me your graces.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 33

The Stigmata, Intercession, and Sacrifice



“Jesus, You know how weak and little I am, and so from today on, I am entering Your novitiate in a very special way. I continue to be a novice, but Your novice, Jesus, and You will be my Master to the last day.”

— *Diary*, 228



This week’s spiritual exercise delves into some special gifts, including Sr. Faustina’s experience of Jesus’ Passion, receiving the stigmata, and her charism for intercessory prayer. We meet Sr. Faustina’s sister Wanda, learn of Sr. Faustina’s additional doubt, darkness, and challenge, and more! Let’s see what unfolds.

Earlier, we discussed Sr. Faustina’s preparations for perpetual vows. Jesus asked her to meditate upon His Passion and gave her a powerful prayer that, when said with a contrite, faithful heart, would bring about the grace of conversion. Sister Faustina continued to pray ardently for sinners and added that formidable prayer to her spiritual arsenal.

Later on, during a Holy Hour on Shrove Tuesday (the day before Ash Wednesday), Jesus allowed Sr. Faustina to see how horribly He had been scourged, and even to experience

the intensity of His suffering. “Oh, such an inconceivable agony!” she recalled. “How terribly Jesus suffered during the scourging!” Sister Faustina described the scourging in gory detail, as well as warning sinners about that for which they will have to answer. “O poor sinners, on the day of judgment, how will you face the Jesus whom you are now torturing so cruelly? His blood flowed to the ground,” she wrote. “In some places His flesh started to fall off. I saw a few bare bones on His back.” She continued, “The meek Jesus moaned softly and sighed” (*Diary*, 188). Sister Faustina was closely united in prayer with her suffering Jesus. She continued to offer her prayers, sufferings, and penances for sinners in the world, but also for “transgressions committed in [her] house” (*Diary*, 190).

A heroic intercessor

Sister Faustina was a heroic intercessor for the girls who were in her charge. As mentioned earlier, part of her congregation’s apostolate was the rehabilitation of wayward women and girls in need of moral conversion. With permission from Jesus and her superiors, she took upon herself certain torments experienced by the girls. Once, she took upon herself the terrible temptation of suicide. Sister Faustina keenly felt it in the depth of her heart. She recalled, “For seven days I suffered; and after seven days Jesus granted her the grace which was being asked, and then my suffering also ceased.” She said the suffering was intense (*Diary*, 192).

Once, Sr. Faustina’s younger sister Wanda visited the convent. It wouldn’t take long for “big sis” to realize that Wanda was depressed. When she revealed her plans for her future, Sr. Faustina was “horror-stricken.” She could not believe her ears. “How was such a thing possible?” she wondered. “A beautiful little soul before the Lord, and yet, great darkness had come over her.” Wanda was unable to help herself. Sister Faustina was certain that God had entrusted her sister to her, allowing Sr. Faustina to aid Wanda with prayer and penance. She happily complied; however, it cost her much. “[H]ow many sacrifices

this soul cost me is known only to God.” She elaborated, “For no other soul did I bring so many sacrifices and sufferings and prayers before the throne of God as I did for her soul. I felt that I had forced God to grant her grace.” Sister Faustina said it was “truly a miracle.” She witnessed intercessory prayer in action. “Now I can see how much power intercessory prayer has before God” (*Diary*, 202). We need to keep this fact in the forefront of our minds.

Taking part in the Passion of Jesus

During this particular Lenten season, Sr. Faustina often experienced the Passion of Jesus in her own body. “I experience deeply in my heart all that Jesus suffered, although no exterior sign betrays these sufferings of mine,” she recorded in her *Diary* (203). She only disclosed the matter of the invisible stigmata to her confessor. Sister Faustina continued to meditate deeply on Jesus’ Passion. At the Mass of the Resurrection, she saw Jesus in the midst of a great light coming towards her. He lifted His hand to give a blessing, saying, “Peace be to you, My children.” Sister Faustina observed the wounds in His hands, feet, and side. They were “indelible and shining.” Her soul “drowned itself in Him” when Jesus looked at her with kindness and love. “You have taken a great part in My Passion; therefore I now give you a great share in My joy and glory,” Jesus said. The Mass seemed to speed by as a “wondrous recollection” filled Sr. Faustina’s soul (*Diary*, 205). This holy recollection would last throughout the Easter Season.

Doubt and darkness visit again

The young mystic continued praying for many souls, and offered all of her sacrifices and sufferings to God. Though she sought no consolation from creatures, instead going straight to God for help, at times it would seem that God was not listening. However, Sr. Faustina persevered. “I will not grow weary, because it is on You that I am leaning — O You, my Strength!” (*Diary*, 209).

Still, though Jesus never left her side, Sr. Faustina often felt alone. The burden of her mission weighed on her, and she still did not have an established priest serving as her spiritual director who could guide her. Jesus was very quiet. Darkness crept back to envelop her soul. Sister Faustina feared she was falling prey to illusions. She went to Confession seeking help or relief, but she could not find peace there. “The confessor left me with even more doubts than I had before.” He told her, “I cannot discern what power is at work in you, Sister, perhaps it is God and perhaps it is the evil spirit.” The young nun exited the confessional pondering those alarming words and sinking into a deeper darkness. Fear poured in. “Jesus, what am I to do?” she asked. “When Jesus approached me with kindness,” she recalled, “I was frightened.” She couldn’t help but wonder: Was He “*really* Jesus?” She added, “What torture! I cannot describe it” (*Diary*, 211). This was a great trial for Sr. Faustina. When she went back to Confession, the priest dropped an unexpected bomb. “I do not understand you, Sister. It would be better if you did not come to me for confession,” which sent her into a tailspin. “O my God! ... I have to do such violence to myself before I say anything about my spiritual life, and here I am getting this answer: ‘Sister, I do not understand you!’” (*Diary*, 212). Immediately upon leaving the confessional, Sr. Faustina was flooded with torments and oppression. It was yet another blow and lesson in humility. She needed to persevere in prayer and take one step of faith at a time. She fled to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and begged, “Jesus, save me; You see how weak I am!” (*Diary*, 213). We might pause and ponder what we would have done in her situation.

Jesus encourages Sr. Faustina before her retreat

Jesus spoke to Sr. Faustina: “I will give you help during the retreat before the vows” (*Diary*, 213). Sister Faustina felt very encouraged, but still experienced times of doubt. She

continually begged God to enlighten the priest who would hear her Confession at the retreat before her perpetual vows. She was often misunderstood. She wanted a simple “yes” or “no.” After that, she would be “all set at peace once and for all” (*Diary*, 213), or so she thought. Still, she worried whether or not someone would be willing to listen to what was bubbling over in her heart and soul. Finally, Sr. Faustina decided to stop worrying and instead put her trust firmly in the Lord. Jesus’ words (“I will give you help during the retreat”) rang in her ears. She would trust Him.

Sister Faustina went straight to the chapel to thank Jesus for the countless graces He had bestowed upon her over the past five months of her probation. “My heart was deeply touched at the thought of so many graces and so much care on the part of the superiors,” she reflected (*Diary*, 214). The following day, she would accompany two fellow probationers to St. Joseph’s in Lagiewniki for their retreat.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Sister Faustina sets us an example of patience and perseverance in prayer, even when doubt and darkness come to visit. She expresses the love in her heart for Jesus in His Passion. She offers the pain she experiences for the redemption of souls. When she feared she was falling prey to illusions, she prayed and trusted God. Take time this week to ponder your trust in God. Do you trust Him no matter what? What can you do to surrender your heart fully to His holy will for you?



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Pray and ponder ways to carry out meaningful works of mercy this week. Be attentive to opportunities as they unfold. Simple smiles and kind words can help someone. Strive to

spread God's love through your smiles and kind words, even if you are tired or suffering in some way. God will grant the graces for the asking! No doubt, wherever you are, there is a great need for love and mercy. Do your very best to gift it to others. Keep in mind Sr. Faustina's powerful intercessory prayer for her sister Wanda and the girls, and pray about opportunities to engage in intercessory prayer for others.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus,
You suffered tremendously for my soul.
During the scourging,
You were torn apart for my sins.
I am sorry. I love You.
Help me to be a better Catholic,
generous with my intercessory prayers
and love for You and for others.
Mother Mary, help me.
Saint Faustina, please pray for me.
Jesus, I trust in You!
Amen.



WEEK 34

Purification and Trials



“Mary, Immaculate Virgin, take me under Your special protection and guard the purity of my soul, heart and body. You are the model and star of my life.”

— *Diary*, 874



Trials and purification go hand in hand. We might resist at times, but trials and purification are absolutely essential in our spiritual lives. Facing these challenges should start within our hearts and our souls as early as possible. Saint Faustina shows us how to do it! Let's delve into all of that in this week's spiritual exercise — and also learn of another wondrous mystical experience for Sr. Faustina! Let's get started!

We know that the real purpose of our lives here on earth is to work out our salvation so that, at the appointed time, we can make it to Heaven to live in eternal happiness with the Most Holy Trinity (God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit), as well as with the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, and all of the angels and the saints. That is our ultimate goal. It's no secret that the world is abuzz with activity. Our lives are often cluttered with things we need to do and stuff that gets in the way of our prayer lives. Sometimes we can get sidetracked or distracted, but we must keep our eyes on the prize! We read

in Scripture, “[P]ress on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14). We need to fight the good fight and press on throughout all of the nitty gritty details of our lives to stay on that straight and narrow path that leads to Heaven. We want to be able to say with St. Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Tim 4:7-8).

As my former spiritual director Fr. John A. Hardon, SJ, would often say. “There’s work to be done!” This is certainly a succinct instruction about our purpose and direction in our spiritual lives. We must do the work to earn the prize — our crown in Heaven. Purification is oftentimes arduous. However, as St. Faustina had written in her *Diary*, “In order to purify a soul, Jesus uses whatever instruments He likes” (*Diary*, 38).

Purification and trial for Sr. Faustina

Sister Faustina underwent a continual purification as she strove for holiness, pursuing perfection in the spiritual life. Sometimes that purification came through enduring murmuring from other sisters questioning her authenticity, or from the illnesses and weakness she often experienced. Other times, purification occurred during the trials of obedience that she navigated. Though she was very obedient, she felt conflicted at times because of how important matters involving Jesus’ requests to her were handled. For instance, when she shared some of these things openly with her confessor, she was told that these things could be from God, but they could also be from the devil, or possibly illusions. Sister Faustina wrote, “Because of my frequent changes [of assignment], I did not have a permanent confessor and besides,” she added, “I had great difficulty in speaking of these things. I prayed ardently that the Lord would give me that great grace — that is, a spiritual director” (*Diary*, 34). She would be given that special grace after she made her perpetual vows. His name was Fr.

Michael Sopoćko. God had allowed Sr. Faustina to, in a sense, meet him in advance of their first meeting. She had seen him in an interior vision long before they met in person.

One time, miraculously, Sr. Faustina was summoned to the judgment seat of God! Jesus presented Himself to her as He appeared in the Passion. “After a moment, His wounds disappeared except for five, those in His hands, His feet, and His side.” Suddenly, Sr. Faustina “saw the complete condition” of her soul as God sees it. “I could clearly see all that is displeasing to God” (*Diary*, 36).

She learned something profound in that moment. “I did not know that even the smallest transgressions will have to be accounted for. What a moment! Who can describe it? To stand before the Thrice-Holy God!” Jesus asked her a question: “Who are you?” Sister Faustina answered, “I am Your servant, Lord.” Jesus told her, “You are guilty of one day of fire in purgatory.” The mystic deeply desired to throw herself into the flames of Purgatory. Jesus stopped her by giving her the choice of suffering for one day in Purgatory or for a short while on earth. Sister Faustina chose both. She desired to suffer in Purgatory, but also to endure “the greatest pains on earth, even if it were until the end of the world.” However, Jesus told her “one [of the two]” was enough. He said she would go back to earth where she wouldn’t suffer too much longer, but would accomplish His holy will. He promised her a faithful servant to help her.

Jesus told her to rest her head on His “bosom, on My heart, and draw from it strength and power for these sufferings.” He warned her, “[Y]ou will find neither relief nor help nor comfort anywhere else” (*Diary*, 36). He finished by telling her she would have very much to suffer, but not to be afraid, He would be with her. Immediately after that, Sr. Faustina was stricken ill. She said that the physical illness became a “school of patience” for her and that “Jesus uses whatever instruments He likes” (*Diary*, 37, 38) to purify a soul. Sister Faustina was being purified through the melting pot of God’s love so that she would be able to stand before Him on Judgment Day as

pure as pure can be. All throughout, Sr. Faustina sought God's holy will and responded in love to the many contradictions (that is, challenges or trials) that unfolded in her life, which included many forms of suffering.

Sister Faustina explained, "My soul underwent a complete abandonment on the part of creatures; often my best intentions were misinterpreted by the sisters, a type of suffering which is most painful; but God allows it, and we must accept it because in this way we become more like Jesus." She continued, "There was one thing which I could not understand for a long time: Jesus ordered me to tell everything to my Superiors, but my Superiors did not believe what I said and treated me with pity as though I were being deluded or were imagining things" (*Diary*, 38). This caused Sr. Faustina to avoid God interiorly for fear of being deluded. Thank God He always provides! As Sr. Faustina explained, "[T]he grace of God pursued me at every step, and God spoke to me when I least expected it" (*Diary*, 38).

Eight-day retreat before perpetual vows

Getting back to Sr. Faustina's retreat before her perpetual vows, on April 18, 1933, the three sisters left for Krakow. It would be a welcome place for such an important retreat since the sisters had been there before as novices. It was where Sr. Faustina first embarked upon her religious life. The sisters were over the moon seeing the cheerful Mother Mary Joseph and the others. Upon arriving, Sr. Faustina visited the chapel. Joy filled her heart. "In a flash," she recorded in her *Diary*, "I recalled the whole ocean of graces that had been given me as a novice here" (*Diary*, 216).

The Mother Directress explained the retreat program and gave a short talk. Sister Faustina was profoundly grateful for her. She felt bittersweet emotion, realizing that the retreat marked the last time she would be in the novitiate. There was a certain security felt in the novitiate, as though the novices had a kind of spiritual "safety net." Now, though, Mother Directress would no longer "be at my heels to teach me here,

warn me there, or to admonish, encourage, or reproach me.” She paused and took it all in. She thought, “Now I must battle together with Jesus, work with Jesus, suffer with Jesus; in a word, live and die with Jesus.” It thoroughly penetrated her brain. “I am so afraid of being on my own,” she thought. “Jesus, do something about this. I will always have a superior, that’s true; but now a person is left more on her own” (*Diary*, 217). She had a lot to think about, but would trust God.

Later on, she prayed, “I am beginning the retreat today. Jesus, my Master, guide me.” She desired only His holy will, praying, “Govern me according to Your will, purify my love that it may be worthy of You, do with me as Your most merciful Heart desires.” She wanted to drown out the world and just be with Jesus. “Jesus, there will be just the two of us during these days until the moment of our union. Keep me, Jesus, in a recollected spirit!” (*Diary*, 218), she earnestly begged. He answered her that evening.

“My daughter, let nothing frighten or disconcert you. Remain deeply at peace. Everything is in My hands. I will give you to understand everything through Father Andrasz. Be like a child towards him” (*Diary*, 219). We can imagine that Jesus’ words deeply consoled Sr. Faustina’s heart, since now she could know that a priest would understand her. Jesus had told her to be at peace — deeply at peace!



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Trials certainly help us to become more loving and humble, depending upon how we respond to them. We must be purified in this life on earth before we can go to Heaven for all eternity. Even holy St. Faustina, who was privileged to receive many great graces, was told by Jesus that, unless she suffered her Purgatory on earth, she would have to undergo “one day of fire in purgatory” for purification before going to Heaven. Sister Faustina teaches us that “even the smallest transgressions will have to be accounted for.” What might be the state of our

own souls? Take time this week to pause and ponder, as well as to beg for grace and mercy. We know not the day or the hour when we will be called to the judgment seat of God.

Now is the time to pray for a more profound conversion of heart. It is time to do the work required to change our hearts and souls. Will we grumble and complain when our Lord allows us to be burnished in the fire of His love? Will we respond in love to His holy will in our lives? Certainly, we will want to earn that “crown of righteousness.” However, first we must fight the good fight! We can also pray to serve at least part of our Purgatory while on earth.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

What are some concrete ways in which you can impart God’s love to those in need this week? Can you devise a plan to do so by taking time to jot ideas down on a short list? Also be open for the needs that spontaneously unfold before you. In light of our discussion this week, could you work hard at bearing wrongs patiently? It’s not easy. But never doubt that it will change your soul and perhaps help to change the person or persons who have wronged you. Pray about it.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, I want to pay more attention to the state of my spiritual life.

I want to step back from the busy-ness of the world and immerse my heart in Your Heart.

Mother Mary, help me to slow down and pray more.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 35

Spiritual Battle



“My daughter, I want to teach you about spiritual warfare. Never trust in yourself, but abandon yourself totally to My will. ... I will not delude you with prospects of peace and consolations; on the contrary, prepare for great battles.”

— *Diary*, 1760



This week’s spiritual exercise broaches a very important topic, yet possibly an uncomfortable one — hell and the spiritual battle! But we learn much about this invisible battle for souls, how Satan hated St. Faustina, some important truths that Sr. Faustina learned from the evil one (in spite of himself!), and invaluable spiritual counsel from Jesus Himself! Let’s dig in!

Hell is real. Satan is real. The devil’s biggest and most effective trick is to convince the world that he and hell do not exist. If there is no hell, then there is no ultimate consequence for sin. The folks who fall for the lies of the devil will wind up in hell for all eternity if they do not change their ways and turn to God before it is too late. That might seem blunt, but it’s a fact.

Our Lady of Fatima did not hesitate to show the reality of hell with all its gore, shrieking demons, and burning souls

to three unsuspecting shepherd children: Lucia dos Santos and her younger cousins Francisco and Jacinta Marto, the visionaries at Fatima, all of whom were under the age of 11. (Francisco and Jacinta have since been raised to the honors of the altar, to sainthood.) Hell was utterly terrifying to see; however, after they received the vision, the three faithful children spent the remainders of their lives working tirelessly to save souls from the eternal fate of hell. It was necessary for Mary to remind us of the existence of hell through certain chosen souls in order to wake us up from our spiritual slumber. She told the children that God is grieved by the sins of the world, and that many souls go to hell because there is no one to pray for them. She instructed the children to make many sacrifices and pray for sinners.

Now let's take a step back and look at the big picture. Where did Satan come from and why do we need to deal with him? The Church teaches:

Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy [Cf. *Gen* 3:1-5; *Wis* 2:24]. Scripture and the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called "Satan" or the "devil" [Cf. *Jn* 8:44; *Rev* 12:9]. The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: "The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing [Lateran Council IV (1215): DS 800]" (CCC, 391).

God gave the angels free will, just as He has given it to human beings. Because Satan and the other fallen angels chose to be evil, we must be on guard in the spiritual life.

An invisible battle rages on around us. If we are serious about getting to Heaven, we must be active participants in the battle and pray continually, putting on the armor of Christ to fight for our souls and the souls of others. We do this through

assiduous prayer, keeping the Commandments, and striving for holiness. Saint Paul exhorted in his Letter to the Ephesians:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness (Eph 6:10-14).

Defense in the spiritual battle

Many of the saints had to deal with the devil. Saint Padre Pio, for instance, actually wrestled with demons. Saint John Vianney had many encounters with the evil one. He called him “*grappin*” (wrestler). Saint Gemma Galgani, St. Anthony of the Desert, St. Athanasius, and many others have dealt with the devil’s evil tactics. Saint Faustina dealt with the devil, too. One time, she recalled, “Today I have fought a battle with the spirits of darkness over one soul. How terribly Satan hates God’s mercy! I see how he opposes this whole work” (*Diary*, 812). She was referring to the work of Divine Mercy.

While this talk about encounters with the devil or demons might sound too scary and cause us to beg God to ordain that we will never have to endure such things, we should know that God will only allow what is best for our souls and will not give us anything that we are not able to bear. He always provides the necessary graces. We should never become paranoid about the spiritual battle. But we should frequent the Sacraments and pray continuously. Let us remember that St. Padre Pio

called his Rosary beads his “weapon!” The Rosary is powerful. Mother Mary crushes the head of the serpent. We are not helpless in the face of the devil.

Not every bad thing happens because the devil is after us. Yet we should be smart and know that the evil one uses everything to his advantage to wreak havoc in our souls. If we never have troubles in the spiritual life, we should contemplate St. John Vianney’s warning: “The greatest of all evils is not to be tempted, because then there are grounds for believing that the Devil looks upon us as his property.”⁶⁴

Most times, the devil will aim his attack at vulnerable areas, typically through deception and lies provoking us to doubt. I once heard a great homily in which the preacher said that Satan is usually depicted with horns, but that we should be more concerned that he carries a huge “magnifying glass” to exaggerate our imperfections, frighten us, and make us doubt God’s love. Sister Faustina recalled a time when she had thoroughly prepared for Confession and intended to tell of a multitude of sins. Yet, when in the confessional, she could only tell two of them. She wrote, “God allowed me to accuse myself of only two imperfections, despite my efforts to make a confession according to what I had prepared.” When leaving the confessional, Jesus explained, “My daughter, all those sins you intended to confess are not sins in My eyes; that is why I took away your ability to tell them.” Sister Faustina then realized something very important. “I understood that Satan, wanting to disturb my peace, has been giving me exaggerated thoughts. O Savior, how great is Your goodness!” (*Diary*, 1802).

The devil tries to provoke us to anger, pride, lust, despair, and more. He tempts us to lust after what we shouldn’t possess, even something that might be good. Humility drives the devil nuts. Lucifer pridefully said, “I will not serve” (as we read in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*), and was cast into hell. In Revelation 12:7-9, we read:

And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his an-

gels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world — he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

The devil cannot stand humility; therefore, we must strive to be humble. The ancient desert fathers told a story of a humble monk praying in his cell. The devil, disguised as an angel, appeared to the monk saying that he was sent by God. However, he was really there to tempt the monk to pride. The humble monk told the being that he must be in the wrong place — that he, the monk, was not worthy of an angel's greeting. The devil vanished. The virtue of humility is powerful! Saint Peter extols us, "Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering" (1 Pet 5:8-9).

Sister Faustina and spiritual warfare

Sister Faustina was certainly immersed in spiritual battle as she strove for holiness. We can be sure that Satan was not happy with her holy work. In fact, he hated her. The young mystic recalled in her *Diary*, "Satan has admitted to me that I am the object of his hatred." He told her, "A thousand souls do me less harm than you do when you speak of the great mercy of the Almighty One. The greatest sinners regain confidence and return to God, and I lose everything." He added, "But what is more, you persecute me personally with that unfathomable mercy of the Almighty One." The young mystic took note. She wrote, "He does not want to acknowledge that God is good" (*Diary*, 1167).

On one occasion, Sr. Faustina recalled, "I saw Satan hurrying about and looking for someone among the sisters, but he could find no one. I felt an interior inspiration to command

him in the Name of God to confess to me what he was looking for among the sisters.” Satan unwillingly confessed, “I am looking for idle souls.” Sister Faustina commanded him again in the Name of God to tell her “to which souls in religious life he has the easiest access.” Satan confessed, “To lazy and idle souls.” Sister Faustina surmised that no such souls were there at that time. She wrote, “Let the toiling and tired souls rejoice” (*Diary*, 1127). It’s essential that we all take seriously this inside scoop, cleverly uncovered by the young mystic. It brings to mind a couple of phrases, such as, “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop,” a piece of wisdom that appears in Chaucer’s book the *Tale of Melibee* (c. 1386). Also, the Apostle Paul notes in 2 Thessalonians 3:11 the danger of “living in idleness” and being “mere busybodies,” as well as issuing a call to “not be weary in doing what is right.” My friend’s phrase I mentioned earlier also comes to mind: “There’s work to be done!” Let’s stay busy for the Lord, busy with either love of God or love of neighbor, with prayer and devotion or with showing our love with works of mercy.

One day, Jesus told Sr. Faustina, “But child, you are not yet in your homeland; so go, fortified by My grace, and fight for My kingdom in human souls; fight as a king’s child would, and remember the days of your exile will pass quickly, and with them the possibility of earning merit for heaven. I expect from you, My child, a great number of souls who will glorify my mercy for all eternity” (*Diary*, 1489).

Personal retreat from Jesus

Another time, Jesus explained the spiritual battle and offered concise instructions on how to “fight the good fight” to better prepare Sr. Faustina to protect her soul. It was in Krakow-Pradnik, at the beginning of June 1938, that Sr. Faustina was given a three day retreat by Jesus Himself! After receiving her superior’s permission to make this retreat before Pentecost, Sr. Faustina became united in prayer with Jesus and listened attentively to His divine instructions. Jesus gave specific

meditations to His little bride. One meditation was that she read chapter 15 of the Gospel of St. John slowly.

During the first day of the retreat, Jesus gave the young mystic a conference on spiritual warfare. He said:

My daughter, I want to teach you about spiritual warfare. Never trust in yourself, but abandon yourself totally to My will. In desolation, darkness, and various doubts, have recourse to Me and to your spiritual director. He will always answer you in My name. Do not bargain with any temptation; lock yourself immediately in My Heart and, at the first opportunity, reveal the temptation to the confessor. Put your self-love in the last place, so that it does not taint your deeds. Bear with yourself with great patience. Do not neglect interior mortifications. Always justify to yourself the opinions of your superiors and of your confessor. Shun murmurers like a plague. Let all act as they like; you are to act as I want you to.

Observe the rule as faithfully as you can. If someone causes you trouble, think what good you can do for the person who caused you to suffer. Do not pour out your feelings. Be silent when you are rebuked. Do not ask everyone's opinion, but only the opinion of your confessor; be as frank and simple as a child with him. Do not become discouraged by ingratitude. Do not examine with curiosity the roads down which I lead you. When boredom and discouragement beat against your heart, run away from yourself and hide in My heart. Do not fear struggle; courage itself often intimidates temptations, and they dare not attack us.

Always fight with the deep conviction that I am with you. Do not be guided by feeling, because it is not always under your control; but all merit lies

in the will. Always depend upon your superiors, even in the smallest things. I will not delude you with prospects of peace and consolations; on the contrary, prepare for great battles. Know that you are now on a great stage where all heaven and earth are watching you. Fight like a knight, so that I can reward you. Do not be unduly fearful, because you are not alone (*Diary*, 1760).

What can we learn from Jesus' counsel on spiritual warfare? A lot!



SOMETHING TO PONDER

It's important not to get overly intrigued with the powers of darkness. It is, however, important to be certain of the existence of demons and aware of their tactics. It's not likely that you or I will visibly wrestle with the devil or demons. Yet we must be attentive in the spiritual life and recognize that a true spiritual battle rages on for souls. Since it's mostly invisible, we might not notice. Remember that the devil looks for "idle" souls. The evil one never sleeps and is always on the prowl to snatch souls to hell. Do your part to heed Our Lady of Fatima's message; answer her call to pray and make sacrifices for the souls of sinners. She told the young visionaries that many souls go to hell because there are none to pray for them. We must be more generous with our prayers, and offer reparation for sinners. We also need to protect our own souls by keeping company with faith-filled Catholics and continually nourish our faith with Church teaching and (most of all) the Sacraments.

Take time to read chapter 15 of the Gospel of St. John. Read it slowly and prayerfully, as Jesus instructed Sr. Faustina. Sometime this upcoming week, read again over Jesus' conference (above) on spiritual warfare. Read each line, pausing to think about how you might apply the instructions to your own spiritual life. Or take just one or two points to focus on

for now. Perhaps this one: “If someone causes you trouble, think what good you can do for the person who caused you to suffer.” This is difficult, but it is a very important means to holiness. Opportunities unfold continually. Remember Jesus tells us we are not alone and to “not be unduly fearful.” Follow Jesus’ instructions. You can never go wrong with His counsel! Work hard in the spiritual life. Don’t be “idle.” Remember what Sr. Faustina wrote in her *Diary*: “Let the toiling and tired souls rejoice.”



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Remember, Jesus said, “Do not be guided by feeling, because it is not always under your control; but all merit lies in the will.” Move your will to do good — always! This upcoming week, seek out every opportunity to do good “for the person who caused you to suffer,” as Jesus instructed. Also, find opportunities to gently teach about the existence of hell and the consequence for sin. Spend some extra time in prayer for the souls of sinners and the souls in Purgatory. Offer penance and sacrifices for them. These are beautiful works of mercy.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, teach me Your ways.
 Help me to be more generous with my time,
 prayer, and love for others.
 Mother Mary, please protect me and my family
 from the lures of the devil.
 Saint Faustina, please pray for me.
 Jesus, I trust in You!
 Amen.




WEEK 36

Spirit of Poverty



“Today, penetrate into the spirit of My poverty and arrange everything in such a way that the most destitute will have no reason to envy you.”

— Jesus to St. Faustina (*Diary*, 532)



Saint John the Baptist proclaimed, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn 3:30). The spirit of poverty is essential to our spiritual growth. Every other virtue springs forth from humility. In this week’s spiritual exercise, we will learn about the spirit of poverty, how we might acquire it, and why it is absolutely necessary for spiritual survival. Let’s get to it!

Jesus told us, “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Mt 6:24). Let’s take a quick look at the sentiments of a couple of saints with regard to poverty and riches. Saint Teresa of Calcutta once said that the only thing she feared was the love of money because Jesus was sold for 30 pieces of silver. Money itself is not an evil, but the love of it is, as we learn from Scripture: “[T]he love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains” (1 Tim 6:10).

Mother Teresa and the saints prayed frequently for the grace to keep a spirit of poverty in all matters. The saints knew they shouldn't be attached to worldly things. Consider St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscans, who bore the stigmata. He stripped himself of riches in order to wholeheartedly embrace a life of poverty, which he pursued most of his life. He called this way of living, "Lady Poverty." Saint Francis renounced all rights to his inheritance to go on to find perfect joy in poverty and service, caring for lepers and the poor. He would exclaim, "Poverty is the way to salvation, the nurse of humility, and the root of perfection. Its fruits are hidden, but they multiply themselves in infinite ways."

Mother Teresa has said, "The more you have, the more you are occupied, the less you give. But the less you have the more free you are. Poverty for us is a freedom. It is not mortification, a penance. It is joyful freedom. There is no television here, no this, no that. But we are perfectly happy."⁶⁵ That spirit of poverty then protected them from becoming distracted by the allurements of the world. Now, again, owning things does not mean we are far from God. However, becoming overly attached to material things or wealth is not of God.

Scripture teaches, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world — the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches — comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 Jn 2:15-16). And we know well that the evil one tirelessly entices the faithful to fall in love with the world and all its allurements so he can distract us from God and the narrow and difficult path to Heaven. We live in this world, but we are not of this world. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3).

We discussed humility and pride in the last chapter about spiritual warfare. Pride is the complete opposite of the virtue of humility. Satan's pride cast him into hell. Jesus told Sr. Faustina, "The torrents of grace inundate humble souls. The proud remain always in poverty and misery, because my grace turns away from them to humble souls" (*Diary*, 1602). Kind

of paradoxical, isn't it, that we become rich *right within* our spiritual poverty? This is important food for thought! "The proud always "remain in poverty and misery." Humility is most pleasing to God. Sincere humility allows us to acknowledge our complete dependence on God. Truly, without Him, we are nothing.

A humble soul will keep their sights on Heaven and its rewards, and work hard to detach him or herself from worldly things. So, yes, we can be in the world but not a part of it. Also, our holy example can be a healing balm and bright light to those who are struggling to find God in a darkened world.

We cannot please God without humility

The Blessed Mother told Sr. Faustina, "I desire, My dearly beloved daughter, that you practice the three virtues that are dearest to me — and most pleasing to God. The first is humility, humility, and once again humility; the second virtue, purity; the third virtue, love of God. As My daughter, you must especially radiate with these virtues" (*Diary*, 1415). Mary mentioned humility three times. Humility is that important!

We touched upon this earlier, but it bears repeating. We cannot please God without true humility. That's what Sr. Faustina's confessor Fr. Sopoćko rightly said: "Without humility, we cannot be pleasing to God." He told her to "practice the third degree of humility; that is, not only must one refrain from explaining and defending oneself when reproached with something, but one should rejoice at the humiliation" (*Diary*, 270). It is very difficult to not defend ourselves and to even rejoice in those humiliations. But there are times when remaining silent in the face of accusations helps us to grow in the virtue of humility. God's grace strengthens us and gives us courage to remain silent when appropriate, as well as to speak up when necessary; as, for instance, when our doing so can help to prevent others from suffering at the hands of someone who might have injured us. We must move our wills to respond appropriately to what unfolds in our lives.

On a lighter note, I'll share a story about a young priest I know and a lesson he learned in humility. When he was in New York City, he parked his car, put money in the meter, and went on his way to his scheduled events. Later on, he discovered that his car was missing! He searched the neighboring streets and finally reported his vehicle to the police as stolen. After some time, several police officers were on the case, even searching tow-away parking lots. At day's end, the car was finally found — right where he had left it! Red faced, he burned with humiliation after having told so many all day that his car was missing, when it was his recollection of his car's whereabouts that was incorrect. He punctuated his story by telling our intimate gathering that the humiliation happened after he had been earnestly praying the Litany of Humility. We all smiled. When we pray to become more humble or to learn humility, we should expect that we might be humiliated or humbled. It's good for our soul!

Humble Jesus and Sr. Faustina

In Scripture, we read, “And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Pet 5:5-6). After receiving Holy Communion one day, Sr. Faustina saw Jesus, who told her, “Today, penetrate into the spirit of My poverty and arrange everything in such a way that the most destitute will have no reason to envy you. I find pleasure, not in large buildings and magnificent structures, but in a pure and humble heart” (*Diary*, 532). Sister Faustina pondered deeply upon Jesus' instructions.

She recalled, “I began to reflect on the spirit of poverty.” She clearly saw Jesus in His poverty. “[A]lthough He is the Lord of all things,” He “possessed nothing.” From the very beginning, this was true. “From a borrowed manger He went through life doing good to all, but himself having no place

to lay His head.” Continuing, she wrote, “And on the Cross, I see the summit of His poverty, for He does not even have a garment on Himself.” Sister Faustina prayed, “O Jesus, through a solemn vow of poverty I desire to become like You; poverty will be my mother.” She explained, “As exteriorly we should possess nothing and have nothing to dispose of as our own; so interiorly we should desire nothing.” She went on. “And in the Most Blessed Sacrament, how great is Your poverty! Has there ever been a soul as abandoned as You were on the Cross, Jesus?” (*Diary*, 533). Every step of the way, as she strove to humbly serve her Lord; more and more the young mystic realized the meaning of humility.

Sister Faustina also wrote, “I must never judge anyone, but look at others with leniency and at myself with severity. I must refer everything to God” (*Diary*, 253). She did not want to place herself above others, especially knowing that the Lord Himself lived poverty. As she told Him in the words above, she desired to become like Him.

Perpetual vows around the corner

On May 1, 1933, Sr. Faustina would profess her perpetual vows. But first, she made an eight-day retreat, as was mentioned earlier. Jesus told her to be at peace. He instructed her to “be like a child” toward Fr. Andrasz (*Diary*, 219).

Sister Faustina recounted everything to Fr. Andrasz. She had hoped that he would dispense her from the responsibility of having the Divine Mercy Image painted, since she was not believed by her superiors. She also doubted whether she should be listening to the inspirations she was receiving from the Lord. But she did not receive a dispensation. She recalled, “Father Andrasz gave me this answer: ‘I will dispense you from nothing, Sister; it is not right for you to turn away from these interior inspirations, but you must absolutely — and I say, absolutely — speak about them to your confessor; otherwise you will go astray despite the great graces you are receiving from God’” (*Diary*, 52).

Sister Faustina was taken aback. She was upset, as she reported in her *Diary*. Father continued, “For the present you are coming to me for confession, but understand, Sister, that you must have a permanent confessor; that is to say, a spiritual director” (*Diary*, 53). Sister Faustina had been praying for a permanent confessor. Jesus told her that she would have one. In fact, Jesus gave her two visions of Fr. Sopoćko. “This is the visible help for you on earth. He will help you carry out My will on earth” (*Diary*, 53). Sister Faustina would have to wait for him to come on the scene in God’s perfect timing. For now, she took in all of Fr. Andrasz’s instructions and prepared to profess her permanent vows.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Remember that, without humility, “we cannot be pleasing to God.” We learned above that Scripture instructs, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world — the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches — comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 Jn 2:15-16). Jesus told Sr. Faustina, “Penetrate into the spirit of My poverty and arrange everything in such a way that the most destitute will have no reason to envy you.” Can you try that? Take time this week to ponder Sr. Faustina’s reflection on Jesus’ spirit of poverty, which you can see above. Ponder your own life and think about particular areas where you can make changes to better live a spirit of detachment from possessions and wealth. Also, read James 4:6-10 and prayerfully ponder the message.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Who needs your help? How can you help them? Will it be the warmth radiated in your loving smile at the stranger you might encounter? Will it be the warm meal you gift to someone in need? How about the care and concern you can show through phone calls and emails this week? Could you carve out time to visit an elderly neighbor or relative? There are many possibilities. A very meaningful act of mercy is to make an act of humility by choosing a lesser place than someone around you. Strive to prayerfully put others ahead of you. Pray about a way to carry out meaningful, loving works of mercy — and do it soon.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, though You are the Lord of all, You are poor in spirit. You came to serve and not to be served. Please make my heart like Yours.

Mother Mary, guide me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 37

Saint Faustina's Dark Night and Perpetual Vows



“O my Jesus, despite the deep night that is all around me and the dark clouds which hide the horizon, I know that the sun never goes out.”

— *Diary*, 73



It's not depression and it's not evil. Even so, a dark night in the spiritual life can feel utterly devastating. Many of the saints have experienced similar experiences. Saint Faustina was one of them! We will thoroughly delve into this mystical reality in this week's spiritual exercise. Let's get to it!

Those who suffer from depression usually aren't able to function properly without counseling or medication. Those going through a dark night in the spiritual life are able to function because, by the grace of God, they can be strong in spirit despite what is happening to them. The devil doesn't cause a dark night, as some may surmise. Rather, God permits it as He refines the soul of His loved one. Dark nights can be the means for a transformative union with God.

The “dark night,” a spiritual condition that might have first been explained in those terms by St. John of the Cross,

can happen to any one of us. It will be different for each soul as God works to bring us closer to Him. We recall St. Teresa of Calcutta's very lengthy spiritual darkness that became known 10 years after her death, when a book revealed her personal correspondence with her spiritual directors. In her letters, she shared feelings of abandonment by God and a spiritual darkness that spanned about 50 years. The initial consolations she had received from Jesus and Mary stopped soon after Mother Teresa began her mission in the slums of Calcutta. Yet, through it all, Mother Teresa continued to walk in faith to serve God's poor.

The experience of a dark night might involve exterior conflicts and afflictions, in which it seems to the soul that God does not care about their sufferings, or love them enough to help them. A dark night could also be experienced through interior temptations to pride, lust, anger, vanity, doubt, and more. The soul might experience feelings of confusion, inner desolation, or total abandonment by God. Prayers might seem useless, and the heart and soul feel dryer than the hottest, most arid desert. Souls undergoing the dark night should try their best to discuss their experiences with a spiritual director and also stick together with like-minded faithful and serious Catholics so as to be nourished in their faith and encouraged. As difficult as a dark night might be, God always provides the necessary graces. We should be thankful for the opportunity for our soul to be burnished during our lifetime, which might take away some time in Purgatory.

According to the great spiritual theologian, Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, there are three stages of the spiritual life. Two "dark nights" play an essential role in moving a person from one stage to the next. The first stage is the purgative way. Habits and vices are broken and virtues are learned in this phase. Towards the end of the purgative way, the soul feels abandoned by God in a time of temptation, trial, and affliction. This is the dark night of the senses. A soul going through this period can be purified of inordinate attachments to the world and to certain consolations in prayer. A soul striv-

ing for holiness can, with God's grace, learn to give up their attachments to things such as pleasures, successes, comforts, and more by going through this stage. In this phase, the soul might feel deep sorrow and no longer find comfort in things that formerly gave pleasure. Indeed, this lack of consolation and comfort may mean their prayers and even the Sacraments don't bring the same feelings to which the soul is accustomed. The soul is being prepared for the illuminative way and a contemplative life of prayer.

The second period is the illuminative way, during which the soul grows deeper in virtue, love, and prayer. Towards the end of the second phase (the illuminative way), the soul experiences the dark night of the soul. The soul might feel utterly crushed, all while being purged of deep attachments to sin and self, often without the soul being consciously aware of it. A soul is plunged into a devastating deep darkness in this illuminative way. An acute awareness of the soul's nothingness without God comes to light. The soul comes closer to the Cross of Jesus and is prepared for carrying their cross in union with Christ. The third phase is the unitive way, in which a soul's heart and will becomes united perfectly with God.⁶⁶

Saint Faustina and the dark night

A faithful soul might experience a dark night only once in their lifetime, but some individuals experience it more than once. A soul may need to experience more deeply what it had only begun in its first passage through the darkness. Saint Faustina seems to have been such a soul; she experienced two passages through the dark nights. Throughout this book, I have discussed several times that Sr. Faustina experienced darkness and doubt. One time, Sr. Faustina recounted, "My mind became dimmed in a strange way; no truth seemed clear to me. When people spoke to me about God, my heart was like a rock. I could not draw from it a single sentiment of love for Him." She said that when she tried to remain close to Jesus, she experienced "great torments" and thought she was "provoking God to an even greater anger" towards her. She said

meditating was “absolutely impossible.” She felt her soul to be in a great void “and there was nothing with which I could fill it,” even though she suffered from a “great hunger and yearning for God.” No matter how slowly she read her meditations, she said, “I understood nothing of what I had read.” Every time she entered the chapel for a spiritual exercise, the torments and temptations increased. She even felt an aversion to the Sacraments, and had to fight against it. She wrote, “It was only out of obedience to my confessor that I frequented them, and this blind obedience was for me the only path I could follow and my very last hope for survival” (*Diary*, 77). The priest tried to reassure her that God loved her very much and surely had confidence in her if He was sending her these trials. But it brought zero comfort to her. The young saint in the making was clearly immersed in a dark night.

As we discussed earlier, Sr. Faustina recalled in her *Diary* how she trusted God through the darkness. She continued to put one foot in front of the other and walk in faith, even when it was so difficult to find her way through the darkness. When things go wrong in our own lives or we experience doubt and darkness, can we, like Sr. Faustina, heroically tell our Lord that we will trust in His mercy? And recalling that Sr. Faustina told Jesus, “If it is Your will, Lord, that I live always in such darkness, may You be blessed” (*Diary*, 73), could we express that as well — that we will be willing to always live in darkness if that is God’s holy will for us? Indeed, these are heroic words! Also, like Sr. Faustina, can we turn to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for strength and all that we need?

Finally, the long-awaited day arrived

The night before she would profess her vows, Sr. Faustina poured her heart out to her Beloved during a Holy Hour. She offered herself fully to Jesus and recalled, “I saw the abyss of my misery; whatever there is good in me is Yours, O Lord. But because I am so small and wretched, I have a right to count on Your boundless mercy” (*Diary*, 237). Sister Faustina gave great thanks that evening for what she considered an “immense

and inconceivable favor of His”: to profess perpetual vows. She then heard Jesus say, “My daughter, your heart is My heaven.” After that, sleep was “out of the question.” Sister Faustina was too excited. Immense joy filled her heart and she wondered what it would be like in Heaven “if already here in exile God so fills my soul” (*Diary*, 238).

The momentous occasion arrived after a sleepless night. It was May 1, 1933. During Mass, while in prayer, Sr. Faustina “placed” her “heart on the paten where Your heart has been placed, O Jesus, and today I offer myself together with You to God, Your Father and mine, as a sacrifice of love and praise. Father of Mercy, look upon the sacrifice of my heart, but through the wound in the Heart of Jesus” (*Diary*, 239). Sister Faustina was united to Jesus on this solemn day of perpetual vows. She told Him, “Jesus, from now on Your Heart is mine, and mine is Yours alone. The very thought of Your Name, Jesus, is the delight of my heart. I truly would not be able to live without You, even for a moment, Jesus.” This young bride was immensely wrapped in Jesus’ love. “Today my soul has lost itself in You, my only treasure. My love knows no obstacles in giving proof of itself to its Beloved.” Jesus told His bride, “My spouse, our hearts are joined forever. Remember to Whom you have vowed.” Sister Faustina could not write all of the details in her *Diary* because, as she stated, “[E]verything cannot be put into words” (*Diary*, 239).

Before the altar, Sr. Faustina laid prostrate under the pall (a cloth normally spread over a coffin) along with the other sisters making their perpetual vows and prayed most deeply. The lead celebrant, Bishop Stanislaus Rospond, blessed the sisters with holy water and prayed, “Rise, you who are dead to the world, and Jesus Christ will give you light.”⁶⁷ Sister Faustina begged Jesus to grant her the grace of never “consciously or deliberately offending Him by even the smallest sin of imperfection.” She silently cried from her heart, “Jesus, I trust in You! I love You with all my heart!” (*Diary*, 239). She heartily prayed and made three requests, knowing that her Beloved would not refuse her on this most special day.

She requested help for the Church, particularly in Russia and Spain. She requested help for her congregation and all the girls in their charge. Thirdly, she asked for help for the souls that are most in need of prayer, as well as the dying. She begged that all souls in Purgatory would be released. She asked for help for her superiors and everyone recommended to her prayers (*Diary*, 240).

For herself, she asked, “Lord, transform me completely into Yourself, maintain in me a holy zeal for Your glory, give me the grace and spiritual strength to do Your holy will in all things. Thank You, O my dearest Bridegroom, for the dignity You have conferred on me, and in particular for the royal coat-of-arms which will adorn me from this day on and which even the Angels do not possess; namely, the cross, the sword, and the crown of thorns. But above all, O my Jesus, I thank You for Your Heart — it is all I need.” She then prayed to the Blessed Mother. “Mother of God, Most Holy Mary, my Mother, You are my Mother in a special way now because Your beloved Son is my Bridegroom, and thus we are both Your children. For Your Son’s sake, You have to love me. O Mary, my dearest Mother, guide my spiritual life in such a way that it will please Your Son” (*Diary*, 240).

And then she prayed: “Holy and Omnipotent God, at this moment of immense grace by which You are uniting me with Yourself forever, I, mere nothingness, with the utmost gratitude, cast myself at Your feet like a tiny, unknown flower and, each day, the fragrance of that flower of love will ascend to Your throne. In times of struggle and suffering, of darkness and storm, of yearning and sorrow, in times of difficult trials, in times when nobody will understand me, when I will even be condemned and scorned by everyone, I will remember the day of my perpetual vows, the day of God’s incomprehensible grace” (*Diary*, 240).

When she professed her permanent vows, many indescribable graces were let loose in her heart. She would later recall, “I am in Him, and He in me. As the Bishop [Rospond] was putting the ring on my finger, God pervaded my whole

being, and since I cannot express that moment, I will be silent about it.” Upon making her perpetual vows, Sr. Faustina was united to the Lord. She wrote succinctly, “I sense that I love God and that He loves me” (*Diary*, 254).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Sister Faustina’s heartfelt prayers and attitude during her dark nights illustrate the necessity of the virtue of hope in our lives, especially in trying times. Hoping in God alone, she told Jesus that she would accept the darkness even if it lasted for the rest of her life. She wholeheartedly trusted Jesus, the Divine Physician, to do whatever was best for her soul (and ultimately the souls of countless others). Take time this week to ponder your own life. How much do you trust God? Do you trust Him with your whole life? What can you do when darkness envelops you? Will you immediately turn to prayer and trust God through any doubt or trouble? Remember that Sr. Faustina said she clung to the Sacraments out of obedience. Though she felt no consolation in them at times, they indeed helped her soul. Sister Faustina wrote, “When I feel that the suffering is more than I can bear, I take refuge in the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and I speak to Him with profound silence.” Can you strive to do the same? Be sure to frequent the Sacraments!



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Schedule time soon to be with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and dedicate your time with Him to pray for souls who are in darkness. Their darkness could be from an unholy life. You can beg God’s mercy for them. Pray for those in spiritual darkness because of a dark night. Pray for strength, hope, and courage for them. Try your best to pray every day for the confused, misguided, abandoned, and unfortunate. Carry out your

works of mercy with this in mind. Move beyond what might feel comfortable to reach that person who is suffering with darkness. God's love through you can give them great hope!



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, please give me strength and courage through all of the dark corners of my life.

Help me to help others who are in darkness or experiencing doubt.

Mother Mary, pray for me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 38

Doubt



“A whole wave of doubts beats
against my soul.”

— *Diary*, 1086



How often we doubt God’s love for us! Doubt is the opposite of faith. According to 2 Corinthians 5:7, “[W]e walk by faith, not by sight.” How strong is our faith? Can it overcome doubts? This week’s spiritual exercise discusses doubt and how it plays out in our lives. We will also look at how Sr. Faustina moved through doubt. It wasn’t easy for her since she often seemed to be plagued by it. Let’s jump in!

In the Letter to the Hebrews, we learn, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (11:1). At times, our faith is weak. When St. Thomas didn’t believe, Jesus told him to touch His sacred wounds. “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe” (Jn 20:27). At times, we need reassurance.

Doubt can be debilitating — it can make us sink! We recall that St. Peter was rebuked by Jesus when he doubted that he could walk on water. In my book *By Dawn’s Early Light: Prayers and Meditations for Catholic Military Wives*, I spoke about walking on water:

Recall that St. Peter, walking on the water, began to sink when he took his eyes off his Lord Jesus who was calling to him. It was dark, and Peter remembered the fierce winds and the unruly waves that had battered the terrified disciples' old fishing boat just moments earlier. At first, Jesus appeared like a ghost out on the water, but He quickly identified Himself. "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." "Come," Jesus simply instructed. Peter got out of the boat. He was okay for a few seconds, when he trusted Jesus, but as soon as he doubted his ability to stay afloat, down he went! Maybe through the darkness it was hard to trust. Perhaps the strength of the storm rattled his brain and caused him to fear. But the good news is that as soon as the sinking Peter, who, by the way, was an experienced fisherman, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately rescued him, grabbing Peter's arm and lifting him safely out of the frightening waves. Jesus gently rebuked Peter: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" They both got into the boat, and the stormy winds settled down. Everything became still, and the witnesses in the boat immediately worshipped Jesus, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God" (Matt. 14:22-33).

How often do we doubt when we take our eyes off God? How many times are we in situations when our Lord can say to us, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" I am absolutely sure that it is an everyday occurrence in most people's lives. We doubt God's ability in seemingly insignificant circumstances, as well as in huge, overpowering ones.⁶⁸

Let's look at another scene in the Gospel — the one when Christ was sleeping in a boat. Here, we are reminded

of faith and the lack thereof. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) once preached, “God sleeps while his affairs are about to sink — is that not the experience of our own lives? Do the Church and the faith not appear like a little sinking ship that uselessly struggles against wind and waves while God is absent?” He continued, “The Apostles in utter despair shake the Lord and cry out to waken him, but he appears surprised and scolds them for their lack of faith. Is it any different for us? When the storm has passed, we will recognize how foolish our faint-hearted faith was ... Lord help us, for without you we would perish.”⁶⁹

Sister Faustina and doubt

Doubt can occur due to our lack of faith. But doubt might also visit us in the form of a trial, or even as a trick from the devil trying to discourage us. In Sr. Faustina’s case, doubt visited often. It was a part of a dark night she experienced in the spiritual life. Some of it we discussed earlier — the huge responsibility weighing heavily on her shoulders and no one to help sort through the heavenly messages — but now we turn to another key element. Sister Faustina was often troubled by doubt. It confused her. In response, she turned to prayer at every opportunity, even when she thought her prayers would be useless. Sometimes her earnest prayers were uttered in complete silence as she lifted her heart in full surrender to God.

As we know, the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy took care of wayward girls, many from rough backgrounds. Sister Faustina was always concerned for their souls. One time when St. Faustina struggled with doubt and lack of peace, she asked Jesus if the voice she heard was from Him or some kind of delusion.

She recalled, “I began to speak to Jesus interiorly without forming any words. Suddenly an inner force took hold of me and I said, ‘If You who commune with me and talk to me are truly my God, I beg You, O Lord, to make this ward go this very day to confession; this sign will give me reassurance.’ At

that very moment, the girl asked to go to confession” (*Diary*, 74). This totally amazed the Mother Superior in charge of the class of girls. A priest was called, and the girl made her contrite confession. Sister Faustina recalled, “At the same time, I heard a voice within me say, ‘Do you believe Me now?’” Again a strange power pervaded her soul, and she was strengthened and reassured. The young nun wondered why she had allowed herself to doubt “even for a moment” (*Diary*, 74).

Another time, Sr. Faustina recalled, “Although the temptations are strong, a whole wave of doubts beat against my soul, and discouragement stands by, ready to enter into the act. The Lord, however, strengthens my will, against which all the attempts of the enemy are shattered as if against a rock.” She added, “I see how many actual graces God grants me; these support me ceaselessly. I am very weak, and I attribute everything solely to the grace of God” (*Diary*, 1086).

Moving forward amid tears and grace

Shortly after making perpetual vows on May 1, 1933, Sr. Faustina was sent to Vilnius on May 27 for her next assignment. There, she would work in the gardens. She had previously received reassuring words from Fr. Andrasz: “Have confidence and walk ahead with courage” (*Diary*, 257). Before departing, Sr. Faustina told Jesus about her unease in going to unfamiliar Vilnius with its foreign dialect and in leaving behind Fr. Andrasz, who understood her. Jesus said, “Do not fear; I will not leave you to yourself” (*Diary*, 258). Sister Faustina thanked Jesus for all of the graces she had already received and suddenly remembered the vision of the priest that was to be her confessor. “[T]he words I had heard came back vividly: ‘He will help you to fulfill My will here on earth’” (*Diary*, 258). When it was time to leave, Sr. Faustina glanced back at the house and gardens. Tears welled up in her eyes when she turned her glance towards the novitiate. “[T]ears suddenly ran down my cheeks. I remembered all the blessings and graces bestowed on me by the Lord” (*Diary*, 259). Just then, Jesus

told His bride, “Do not weep; I am with you always” (*Diary*, 259). Jesus accompanied Sr. Faustina all along her journey.

Sister Faustina received permission from her Mother Superior to stop off in Czestochowa on the way. Sister Faustina had yearned for a respite with the Blessed Mother at the Marian shrine at Jasna Gora in Poland, and had always wanted to visit the Black Madonna image. (This visit was discussed in an earlier chapter about the Blessed Mother.) While there for six hours communing with Mary, the perpetually professed nun entrusted her vows to the great Mother of God. She recalled, “I felt that I was her child and that She was my Mother. She did not refuse any of my requests” (*Diary*, 260).

Some time after arriving in Vilnius, Sr. Faustina finally met the priest that Jesus had destined to be her spiritual director. Little by little, Sr. Faustina revealed her soul to Fr. Michael Sopoćko. She struggled against grace at first, overcoming internal resistance in order to open up fully, even though grace penetrated her soul during each Confession. Doubt loomed, and Sr. Faustina decided not go to Confession. She was then filled with anxiety, and God reproached her severely. She recalled, “When I did lay bare my soul completely to this priest, Jesus poured an ocean of graces into it.” She added, “Now I understand what it means to be faithful to a particular grace. That one grace draws down a whole series of others” (*Diary*, 263). This fact is important for us to remember.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

How many times have we doubted God’s promises? How often do we strive to grow in our faith? The virtue of faith in our hearts, a virtue that is given at Baptism, is meant to grow and not become stagnant. We must pray for an increase in the virtues each day. Remember that Sr. Faustina clung to prayer and the Sacraments even though she was plagued with doubts. She also offered an Act of Trust to Jesus when she felt doubtful or helpless. Take lessons from this humble saint. Carve out

some time today and throughout this week to ponder faith and doubt in your life. Examine your habits. Do you crumple when hit by doubt? Are you tempted to give up? Resist that temptation and move forward with prayer. Perhaps you can make necessary changes in your prayer life. Trust God wholeheartedly and “walk by faith, not by sight.”



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Is there someone in your life who is struggling with doubt? Or someone who has left the Church? Pray and ponder a concrete way in which you can make a holy difference in their life this week. Even small loving things can make a difference in someone’s life, though we might not see the fruits of it now. Be a gentle teacher of the faith — plant seeds! Pray hard and make it count! Pray, love, act!



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, help me never to doubt You.

When I am doubtful, please strengthen me
in my faith.

Please open my eyes and my heart to see those
in need of encouragement and reassurance.

Allow me, please, to be a radiant example of faith.

Mother Mary and St. Faustina,
please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 39

Forgiveness



“We resemble God most when
we forgive our neighbors.”

— *Diary*, 1148



So often we struggle in the spiritual life because we are not willing to forgive or to accept someone's forgiveness. We may fail to show mercy to others and can turn our backs on Jesus, the King of Mercy, Who urges us to be merciful. In addition, it is essential to accept God's forgiveness. Forgiveness — a tough word to swallow. Nonetheless, we will feast on it during this week's spiritual exercise! There's no time to waste. Ready? Set? Go!

How hard it is to say, “I’m sorry.” It can also be difficult to accept someone’s apology when we are still stinging with pain from their insult or some hurt inflicted upon us.

We even have trouble accepting God’s forgiveness. We might want to wallow in our misery for a while and even throw a pity party for ourselves.

Perhaps we would rather totally close ourselves off to the notion of forgiving or accepting forgiveness. Why is that? Because we would have to choose the high road and swallow our pride in order to forgive or to accept someone’s forgiveness. More accurately, we need to die to self. We need to humble ourselves, and that is difficult. To the extent that we

are unwilling to forgive, we are kept in bondage to the pain and deep wounds we have experienced. It might seem ironic that the person who shows no remorse for his wrongdoing appears to be at peace while the injured person is still held in bondage because he chooses not to forgive. With God's grace, it is indeed possible to forgive and to be forgiven. Peace will then enter our hearts.

That may sound unlikely, but experience proves it to be true. For instance, a woman shared with me that she felt deep regret after her father passed away. I encouraged her to pray the Our Father prayer slowly and to ponder the words, especially, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." The woman needed to forgive her father even after his death. She had been holding on to anger and bitterness, and the open wound in her heart had continued to fester throughout the years. After finally forgiving her deceased father, she felt God's abiding peace again.

Forgiveness is a mercy — a great act of mercy. Saint Faustina understood the need for mercy and forgiveness. We can recall Jesus' own words about loving and serving. As was mentioned earlier, Jesus instructs us to serve Him in others. He said, "[J]ust as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of the family, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). This holds true for forgiveness. Jesus taught Sr. Faustina, "My daughter, in this meditation, consider the love of neighbor. Is your love for your neighbor guided by My love? Do you pray for your enemies? Do you wish well to those who have, in one way or another, caused you sorrow or offended you? Know that whatever good you do to any soul, I accept it as if you had done it to Me" (*Diary*, 1768). Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Forgiveness, a continual process

In my own life, I've learned that forgiveness is paramount in our spiritual lives. I've also had to forgive those who harmed me, including the crazed fiancé who held me captive and threatened to kill me and my family. After a very long and painful ordeal, it was only by God's amazing grace that I safely

escaped. I tell that story in my memoir, *The Kiss of Jesus*. I also share some important lessons from St. Faustina on forgiveness:

When meditating on the Cross of Christ, Saint Faustina realized the need to forgive others. In her diary, *Divine Mercy in My Soul*, she wrote, “He who knows how to forgive prepares for himself many graces from God. As often as I look upon the cross, so often will I forgive with all my heart” (390).

As tough as it is to forgive someone who hurts you, it is essential so that healing can occur and we can move forward in God’s redeeming grace. God grants the graces to forgive. We need to ask Him for them — again and again. Sometimes it feels easier to resist forgiving others because it can be so difficult and painful. Forgiving someone is not accepting or condoning the harm that was done. It is forgiving the offender and becoming vulnerable before God to allow healing to occur in one’s own heart. If we let go of our anger or resentment toward the person who has harmed us, we can allow the floodgates of healing to pour in. This has been a continual process in my life.⁷⁰

We are a people who rely too much on our feelings, rather than placing our trust in God. So many times Jesus taught Sr. Faustina about the need for mercy and forgiveness, even if we had to overcome our feelings to do it. One time, Jesus taught His little bride a powerful lesson in forgiveness when He appeared to her at holy Mass. The young mystic recounted, “During Holy Mass, I saw Jesus stretched out on the Cross, and He said to me, ‘My pupil, have great love for those who cause you suffering. Do good to those who hate you.’” She answered, “O my Master, You see very well that I feel no love for them, and that troubles me.” Jesus said, “It is not always within your power to control your feelings. You will recognize that you have love if, after having experienced annoyance and contradiction, you do not lose your peace, but pray for those

who have made you suffer and wish them well” (*Diary*, 1628). Powerful words for us all.

Doubting God's forgiveness

Sister Faustina shared a compelling story in her *Diary* in which she helped lift a huge burden from a fellow nun's heart. It was just before she left for a new assignment after her perpetual vows. An elderly sister revealed the condition of her soul to Sr. Faustina. She had suffered interiorly for years, felt her Confessions had been bad, and therefore doubted God's forgiveness. Sister Faustina asked her if she had ever shared her burden with her confessors. The sister responded that she had, several times. The sister recalled, “[T]he confessors are always telling me to be at peace, but I still suffer very much, and nothing brings me relief, and it constantly seems to me that God has not forgiven me.” Sister Faustina told her, “You should obey your confessor, Sister, and be fully at peace, because this is certainly a temptation.” Sister Faustina could not get away from this nun's tearful pleadings, as well as the firm grasp she had of the young mystic's hand! (*Diary*, 628).

Sister Faustina recalled in her *Diary*, “But she entreated me with tears in her eyes to ask Jesus if He had forgiven her and whether her confessions had been good or not.” Sister Faustina was firm. “Ask Him yourself, Sister, if you don't believe your confessors!” The sister wouldn't let go of Sr. Faustina's hand. She wanted an answer. “[S]he kept asking me to pray for her and to let her know what Jesus would tell me about her. Crying bitterly, she would not let me go and said to me, ‘I know that the Lord Jesus speaks to you, Sister.’” Sister Faustina couldn't get away. She promised prayers for the poor soul. “In the evening, during Benediction, I heard these words in my soul: ‘Tell her that her disbelief wounds My heart much more than the sins she committed.’ When I told her this, she began to cry like a child, and great joy entered her soul.” She continued, “I understood that God wanted to console this soul through me. Even though it cost me a great deal, I fulfilled God's wish” (*Diary*, 628).

We absolutely need to take time to reflect upon the fact that Jesus is offended and even sad over our mistrust in His great mercy and forgiveness. No sin is unforgivable except for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The *Catechism* teaches:

“Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven” [*Mt* 12:31; cf. *Mk* 3:29; *Lk* 12:10]. There are no limits to the mercy of God, but anyone who deliberately refuses to accept his mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. [Cf. John Paul II, *DeV* 46]. Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss (*CCC*, 1864).

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is to refuse to repent of sin, which separates one from God. In choosing to remain in sin, one is essentially refusing God’s mercy and blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

Jesus told Sr. Faustina, “The greater the sinner, the greater the right he has to My mercy” (*Diary*, 723). He also said, “If someone causes you trouble, think what good you can do for the person who caused you to suffer” (*Diary*, 1760). We not only need to forgive, but according to Jesus, we should do good to that person. God will grant us the graces we need.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

We read in Scripture, “Then Peter came and said to him, ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times’” (*Mt* 18:21-22). Think about the many lessons Jesus taught Sr. Faustina. Take time this week to reflect deeply upon your own life. Is there someone you need to forgive? Is there someone who has tried to apologize to you? What was your response? What can it be with God’s grace?

Let us keep in mind Jesus' instructions to His dear Sr. Faustina. We can ask ourselves His questions. Is our love for our neighbor guided by God's love? Do we pray for our enemies? Do we wish well to those who have, in one way or another, caused us sorrow or offended us? Jesus reminded us "that whatever good you do to any soul," He will "accept it as if you had done it to Me" (*Diary*, 1768).



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Be sure to be merciful and loving to all you meet this week. Ask God to put those in your path who need much love and mercy. Pray for those who have hurt you and plan whole-hearted works of mercy to offer selflessly to those who have not been good to you. Yes, you can do these acts of mercy! But only with God's grace. Pray that you will carry them out with a pure heart. Could you write that person a letter or email? How about a phone call? If that is not possible, you can still wholeheartedly forgive that person in your prayers to God. Consider going to the Sacrament of Confession very soon and confess any times you have failed to forgive, or refused to accept an apology or forgiveness — even from God!



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, please teach me how to forgive, and how to accept Your forgiveness.

I love You, and though I am weak,

I want to be like You.

Mother Mary, guide me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



PART FOUR

Mystical Life



“[Saint Faustina] was chosen by Christ to be a particularly enlightened interpreter of the truth of Divine Mercy. For Sister Faustina, this truth led to an extraordinarily rich mystical life. She was a simple, uneducated person, and yet those who read the Diary of her revelations are astounded by the depth of her mystical experience.”⁷¹

— St. John Paul II





WEEK 40

The Angels, God's Messengers



“As the Sisters were making their vows,
I heard Angels singing in various tones,
'Holy, Holy, Holy,' with chanting so delightful
that no human tongue could ever match it.”

— *Diary*, 1111



Angels are all around us! In fact, an amazing invisible world of angels has existed since the dawn of creation, but is often overlooked simply because we cannot see the angels! Yet, at each and every Catholic Mass, we are invited to join the angels in singing of the glory of God! Let's get to know them better and learn about St. Faustina's encounters with angels through this week's spiritual exercise! Let's get started!

Angels are God's special messengers, mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. The angels shouted for joy when God created the earth (Job 38:4, 7). God created the angels before He created the physical universe, including mankind. We are immensely blessed to be gifted with a guardian angel to assist us on our journey through life. We learn in Hebrews 1:14, “Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?” Saint Thomas Aquinas stated, “The angels work together for the benefit of us all”⁷² (CCC, 350). The *Catechism* teaches,

“The Church venerates the angels who help her on her earthly pilgrimage and protect every human being” (*CCC*, 352). We know that some of the saints had direct experiences with angels. Saint Faustina was one such saint.

Angels and Sr. Faustina

God protected Sr. Faustina with His holy angels. Sister Faustina wrote, “I thanked God for His goodness, that He gives us angels for companions. Oh, how little people reflect on the fact that they always have beside them such a guest, and at the same time a witness to everything! Remember, sinners, that you likewise have a witness to all your deeds” (*Diary*, 630). This was after being accompanied by a great angel that rode with her on the train on her journey to Vilnius. Sister Faustina recalled, “Then I saw one of the seven spirits near me, radiant as at other times, under a form of light. I constantly saw him beside me when I was riding on the train. I saw an angel standing on every church we passed, but surrounded by a light which was paler than that of the spirit who was accompanying me on the journey, and each of these spirits who were guarding the churches bowed his head to the spirit who was near me” (*Diary*, 630). Can we even imagine?

Sister Faustina had a very close relationship with her guardian angel and greatly admired St. Michael. As she explained, “I have great reverence for Saint Michael the Archangel; he had no example to follow in doing the will of God, and yet he fulfilled God’s will faithfully” (*Diary*, 667). During Adoration one time, Sr. Faustina repeated the prayer “Holy God” several times. “[A] vivid presence of God suddenly swept over me, and I was caught up in spirit before the majesty of God. I saw how the Angels and the Saints of the Lord give glory to God.” She couldn’t describe it. “The glory of God is so great that I dare not try to describe it, because I would not be able to do so” (*Diary*, 1604). Sister Faustina said she truly understood why St. Paul did not want to describe Heaven (see 1 Cor 2:9 and 2 Cor 12:1-7). In her simplicity, this young nun was absolutely brilliant!

Sister Faustina wrote about her guardian angel several times in her *Diary*. Her guardian angel instructed her to pray for the dying, for instance, and came to her rescue, as well. Earlier, we discussed how her guardian angel had once revealed Purgatory to her. Sister Faustina recalled, “When I went to the garden one afternoon, my Guardian Angel said to me, ‘Pray for the dying.’” She and the gardeners prayed immediately. “After the rosary, we said various prayers for the dying” (*Diary*, 314). Another time, Sr. Faustina’s guardian angel alerted her to the needs of a dying soul. Sister Faustina recounted, “My Guardian Angel told me to pray for a certain soul, and in the morning I learned that it was a man whose agony had begun that very moment. The Lord Jesus makes it known to me in a special way when someone is in need of prayer. I especially know when my prayer is needed by a dying soul. This happens more often now than it did in the past” (*Diary*, 820). Often, her guardian angel alerted her, and she prayed fervently for the souls of the dying. “I feel vividly and clearly that spirit who is asking me for prayer. I was not aware that souls are so closely united, and often it is my Guardian Angel who tells me” (*Diary*, 828).

In a future chapter, we will discuss “Hell and Evil,” but for now I will share that Sr. Faustina’s guardian angel came to the rescue when Sr. Faustina needed protection from the devil. She recalled, “I fell asleep as soon as I lay down, but at about eleven o’clock Satan shook my bed. I awoke instantly, and I started to pray peacefully to my Guardian Angel” (*Diary*, 412). Another time, Sr. Faustina’s radiant guardian angel appeared to her and “a flame of fire sparkled from his forehead” (*Diary*, 419). A great multitude of demons, filled with hatred, were blocking the mystic’s way. Sister Faustina beseeched her guardian angel for help. He said, “Do not fear, spouse of my Lord, without His permission these spirits will do you no harm.” Sister Faustina recounted, “Immediately, the evil spirits vanished, and the faithful Guardian Angel accompanied me, in a visible manner, right to the very house” (*Diary*, 419). Wow.

At Adoration another time, Sr. Faustina was overcome with love for Jesus. She wrote, “[M]y spirit seemed to be dying for Him” (*Diary*, 471). She began to cry and suddenly saw “a spirit of great beauty,” who spoke to her, saying, “Don’t cry — says the Lord.” She asked who he was. “I am one of the seven spirits who stand before the throne of God day and night and give Him ceaseless praise.” Sister Faustina’s yearning for God increased. “This spirit is very beautiful,” she recalled, “and his beauty comes from close union with God.” She added, “This spirit does not leave me for a single moment, but accompanies me everywhere” (*Diary*, 471).

An angel, God’s wrath, and reparation

One night in her cell, Sr. Faustina saw a dazzling angel with a glorious face, an executor of divine wrath, who appeared on a cloud. “From the cloud, bolts of thunder and flashes of lightning were springing into his hands; and from his hand they were going forth, and only then were they striking the earth.” She began to implore the angel to halt when she saw he would strike the earth. She hoped penance could prevent the punishment. “But my plea was a mere nothing in the face of the divine anger.” She then saw the Most Holy Trinity. “The greatness of Its majesty pierced me deeply, and I did not dare to repeat my entreaties. At that very moment, I felt in my soul the power of Jesus’ grace, which dwells in my soul. When I became conscious of this grace, I was instantly snatched up before the Throne of God.” She said, “Oh, how great is our Lord and God and how incomprehensible His holiness!” She wouldn’t attempt to describe the greatness of God. She pleaded with God for the world. “As I was praying in this manner, I saw the Angel’s helplessness: he could not carry out the just punishment which was rightly due for sins.” She recalled, “Never before had I prayed with such inner power as I did then. The words with which I entreated God are these: Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ for our sins

and those of the whole world; for the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us” (*Diary*, 474-475). As we know, this prayer makes up part of the Divine Mercy Chaplet.

Sister Faustina was served by angels

Sister Faustina heard angels singing! She wrote in her *Diary*, “Today is the renewal; that is, the profession of vows in the course of a solemn celebration. As the Sisters were making their vows, I heard Angels singing in various tones, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy,’ with chanting so delightful that no human tongue could ever match it” (*Diary*, 1111). Sister Faustina was also served by angels! At one point, when she was confined to bed due to illness, Sr. David said Sr. Faustina couldn’t go to the chapel to receive Holy Communion. Sister Faustina was sad, but felt calm and resigned herself to God’s will. The next day, a seraph surrounded by radiant light came to her, said, “Behold the Lord of Angels,” and gave Holy Communion to Sr. Faustina! She then “drowned in the love of God and in amazement.” She recalled, “The Seraph was surrounded by a great light, the divinity and love of God being reflected in him.” She described him, saying, “He wore a golden robe and, over it, a transparent surplice and a transparent stole. The chalice was crystal, covered with a transparent veil.” She said, “As soon as he gave me the Lord, he disappeared” (*Diary*, 1676). The seraph visited the young mystic for 13 days and gave her Holy Communion each time.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

We have recourse to our own guardian angels. We should never tire of calling upon them for their protection and intercession. Take time this week to ponder the fact that your guardian angel has been with you since the very beginning of your life and that you can strive to be more attentive and thankful for his care. Strive to strike up conversations with

your angel, saying things like, “Please help me today to follow God’s will more precisely,” and, “Please guard and protect me from veering off the path.” Pray traditional prayers to your guardian angel and St. Michael often.

PRAYER TO YOUR GUARDIAN ANGEL

Angel of God,
 my guardian dear,
 to whom God’s love
 commits me here,
 ever this (day/night),
 be at my side,
 to light, to guard,
 to rule, and guide.
 Amen.

PRAYER TO ST. MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

Saint Michael the Archangel,
 defend us in battle.
 Be our defense against the wickedness
 and snares of the Devil.
 May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,
 and do thou,
 O Prince of the heavenly host,
 by the power of God,
 thrust into hell Satan,
 and all the evil spirits,
 who prowl about the world
 seeking the ruin of souls.
 Amen.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Make a point of enlightening the children in your life about the reality of angels. Youth today need to know that angels are real! Hopefully, they can grow to be fascinated with the angels rather than fictitious fairytale and superhero characters. Teach them to pray to the angels for help and protection. Also, pray to your guardian angel and ask him to enlighten you about ways to carry out your works of mercy — and then be sure to make them happen! For ideas of what works of mercy to perform, take a look at the traditional list of Works of Mercy given in Week 23.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, thank You for the
amazing gift of my guardian angel.
Dear Mother Mary and St. Faustina,
please pray for me.
Jesus, I trust in You!
Amen.




WEEK 41

Passion of Christ and Beauty of the Cross



“When I see Jesus tormented, my heart is torn to pieces, and I think: what will become of sinners if they do not take advantage of the Passion of Jesus: In His Passion, I see a whole sea of mercy.”

— *Diary*, 948



It might be difficult to meditate upon the bloody wounds and the other sorrows and sufferings of Christ. After all, the human heart tends to recoil from suffering. In addition, pondering what Jesus suffered for love of us can make us very sad. Sister Faustina deeply loved her Lord Jesus and often meditated upon His Passion. In fact, Jesus asked her to do so. How might this practice be a benefit to our souls? Let's delve into this incredible topic and learn the secrets of Jesus' Passion in this week's spiritual exercise!

The young mystic recorded in her *Diary*, “Jesus told me that I please Him best by meditating on His sorrowful Passion, and by such meditation much light falls upon my soul” (*Diary*, 267). Jesus told His little bride, “There are few souls who contemplate My Passion with true feeling; I give

great graces to souls who meditate devoutly on My Passion” (*Diary*, 737).

Jesus told Sr. Faustina, “There is more merit to one hour of meditation on My sorrowful Passion than there is to a whole year of flagellation that draws blood; the contemplation of My painful wounds is of great profit to you, and it brings Me great joy” (*Diary*, 369). Jesus wants us to also meditate on His Passion. He said, “Remember My Passion, and if you do not believe My words, at least believe My wounds” (*Diary*, 379). In her *Diary*, Sr. Faustina recalled seeing Jesus during His Passion and how it caused her to hate sin and to experience fear for sinners who might not take advantage of God’s great mercy. She wrote,

Today, during the Passion Service, I saw Jesus being tortured and crowned with thorns and holding a reed in His hand. Jesus was silent as the soldiers were bustling about, vying with each other in torturing Him. Jesus said nothing, but just looked at me, and in that gaze I felt His pain, so terrible that we have not the faintest idea of how much He suffered for us before He was crucified. My soul was filled with pain and longing; in my soul, I felt great hatred for sin, and even the smallest infidelity on my part seemed to me like a huge mountain for which I must expiate by mortification and penance. When I see Jesus tormented, my heart is torn to pieces, and I think: what will become of sinners if they do not take advantage of the Passion of Jesus: In His Passion, I see a whole sea of mercy (*Diary*, 948).

Sister Faustina experienced Jesus’ agony and brought Him great solace

Earlier, we discussed that during a Holy Hour, Sr. Faustina shared her experience of seeing Jesus suffering at the scourging and how upsetting it was to her to see such

agony and parts of Jesus' flesh coming off! She also warned "poor sinners" that, on the day of judgment, they would face "the Jesus" that they have tortured "so cruelly" (*Diary*, 188). Another time at adoration, Jesus told Sr. Faustina that He suffered for sins of impurity when He was scourged at the pillar. She recalled her experience with Him. "I saw the Lord Jesus tied to a pillar, stripped of His clothes, and the scourging began immediately. I saw four men who took turns at striking the Lord with scourges." She could barely stand watching it happen before her eyes. "My heart almost stopped at the sight of these tortures. The Lord said to me, 'I suffer even greater pain than that which you see.' And Jesus gave me to know for what sins He subjected Himself to the scourging: these are sins of impurity. Oh, how dreadful was Jesus' moral suffering during the scourging!"

Jesus then told Sr. Faustina to "[l]ook and see the human race in its present condition." Sister Faustina watched in horror, for she saw that the executioners left Jesus, and other people began to scourge Jesus mercilessly. She recalled in her *Diary*, "These were lay people of all ages and walks of life. All vented their malice on the innocent Jesus." Sister Faustina expressed that seeing it play before her eyes caused her heart to fall "as if into a mortal agony." Jesus was silent when the executioners scourged Him. However, she said, "Jesus closed His eyes, and a soft but most painful moan escaped from His heart" when the other people that she mentioned scourged Him. She added, "And Jesus gave me to know in detail the gravity of the malice of these ungrateful souls." Jesus told her, "You see, this is a torture greater than My death." Sister Faustina fell silent. She began to experience Jesus' agony and death. She wrote, "I felt that no one would comfort me or snatch me from that state but the One who had put me into it." Just then, Jesus said to her, "I see the sincere pain of your heart which brought great solace to My Heart. See and take comfort" (*Diary*, 445). Jesus then explained to Sr. Faustina, "Those who are like Me in the pain and contempt they suffer will be like Me also in glory." And those who resemble Jesus

less “in pain and contempt will also bear less resemblance to Me in glory” (*Diary*, 446).

One time, the Lord came to Sr. Faustina hanging on the Cross. The young mystic observed His sacred blood flowing from all His wounds. Jesus said to her, “All this is for the salvation of souls. Consider well, My daughter, what you are doing for their salvation.” Sister Faustina lamented that she felt she was doing “next to nothing.” Jesus reassured her, “Know, my daughter, that your silent, day-to-day martyrdom in complete submission to My will ushers many souls into heaven. And when it seems to you that your suffering exceeds your strength contemplate My wounds, and you will rise above human scorn and judgment. Meditation on My Passion will help you rise above all things” (*Diary*, 1184). Sister Faustina then understood many things she hadn’t understood before.

In our own lives

When sufferings unfold in our own lives, we might want to run from the Cross. Yet our Lord calls us to deny ourselves, pick up our crosses, and follow Him. He will help us through our afflictions: As our Divine Physician, He knows exactly what we need and when we need it. We can also recall that St. Paul wrote, “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” (2 Cor 4:17-18). Many times, our affliction feels anything but “slight” or “momentary,” but we must trust God and recognize that there is a great purpose to our suffering. Indeed, it can become redemptive when it is united to Jesus’ Passion and Crucifixion.

In 1 Peter 4:12-13, we are told, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout with joy when his

glory is revealed.” It is a privilege to share in Jesus’ sufferings. As Christians, we shouldn’t be surprised to suffer. Rather, we should have joy in our hearts and pray for the graces we need in order to be transformed and grow closer to Jesus.

“Infinite value” in redemptive suffering

Suffering will always be a heavy burden, but when lovingly accepted and offered to God, it can become lighter as it works miracles in our souls and the souls of others. Jesus asked Sr. Faustina to help Him to save souls. He said, “Help Me, My daughter, to save souls. Join your sufferings to My Passion and offer them to the heavenly Father for sinners” (*Diary*, 1032). Another time, He said, “My daughter, meditate frequently on the sufferings which I have undergone for your sake, and then nothing of what you suffer for Me will seem great to you. You please me most when you meditate on My Sorrowful Passion. Join your little sufferings to My Sorrowful Passion, so that they may have infinite value before My Majesty” (*Diary*, 1512). That’s what Jesus desires from us, as well. By doing what He requests, we will not waste our sufferings, but rather, by God’s grace, we will provide “infinite value” before God!

In my spiritual memoir, I speak about the value of redemptive suffering and Jesus’ “kiss.” The reason I titled my book *The Kiss of Jesus* was that my dear friend Mother Teresa told me that I had come so close to Jesus on the Cross in my suffering that He could kiss me. Imagine that! I am still unpacking the full meaning of her words as my life unfolds. I’d like to share an excerpt from two of the letters Mother Teresa wrote to me, which I also shared in my memoir. The humble, petite hero of the poorest of the poor wrote, “Jesus loves you and though He is the Lord of all — He cannot interfere with the gift of free will He has given man. Jesus shares His love with you and shares His suffering and pain. He is a God of love and does not want His children to suffer, but when you accept your pain, suffering, death, and resurrection your pain becomes redemptive for yourself and for others ...

Be assured of my prayers. Christ calls us to be one with Him in love through unconditional surrender to His plan for us. Let us allow Jesus to use us without consulting us by taking what He gives and giving what He takes” Another time, Mother Teresa wrote to me, “If we pray, it will be easy for us to accept suffering. In all our lives suffering has to come. Suffering is the sharing in the Passion of Christ. Suffering is the kiss of Jesus, a sign that you have come so close to Jesus on the Cross that He can kiss you. Do offer some of your sufferings for us and our people”

Saint Faustina's redemptive illnesses and silent sufferings

It wasn't long after the young sister entered religious life that she was afflicted with many physical ailments. She suffered from exhaustion, consumption, and asthma (which might have been the beginning of her tuberculosis). Consumption is an older term for tuberculosis, a condition that “consumes” the body, a potentially fatal wasting disease. Typical symptoms include night sweats, chills, a paroxysmal cough, and a wasting away of the body as the disease spreads to various organs. We can observe in later photos of Sr. Faustina that she is pale and her eyes and cheekbones are sunken, showing the progression of her grave illness.

As the years went on, Sr. Faustina began to experience more and more suffering by way of sickness. She was in and out of hospitals and transferred here and there due to deteriorating health. The last five months of her life were spent in the same hospital until she came home to the convent in Krakow where she would finally close her eyes on this world. We will discuss that more later on.

But, for now, let us consider that even throughout painful sicknesses, Sr. Faustina never lost her burning zeal for her mission of spreading the Divine Mercy message and devotion. Even as her health deteriorated, she continued to focus on starting a new order, which she believed Jesus was calling her

to do. As bad as she felt, the ailing nun smiled and remained cheerful.

One time Jesus told His bride, “You often call Me your Master. This is pleasing to My Heart; but do not forget, My disciple, that you are a disciple of a crucified Master. Let that one word be enough for you. You know what is contained in the cross” (*Diary*, 1513). Sister Faustina endeavored to do just that.

Throughout her illnesses, Sr. Faustina suffered much from the physical ravages of the disease upon her body, but also from the seeming lack of concern from her fellow sisters. She wrote about some of these experiences in her *Diary*. One time, she said, “At such times, God Himself comes to our rescue, for otherwise the soul would not be able to bear these crosses of which I haven’t even begun to write” (*Diary*, 1511). She certainly did not dwell on these times of difficulty, but did give us a few good clues as to the type of suffering she endured.

Sister Faustina mentions her long illnesses and the fact that, after some time, other people tended to become accustomed to them, and less willing to help. She wrote about how a soul can be like Job when losing friends who don’t seem to care and who bring suffering rather than comfort, which as she wrote, “is an occasion of a good deal of suffering.” She continued, “And so the soul, like Job, is alone; but fortunately, it is not alone, because Jesus-Host is with it.” Sister Faustina said that after a whole night of bitter suffering, she could barely control herself when Fr. Theodor, the chaplain, brought her Holy Communion. She recalled, “I had to control myself by sheer effort of will to keep from crying out at the top of my voice, ‘Welcome, my true and only Friend!’” She punctuated her recollection with some poignant words: “Holy Communion gives me strength to suffer and fight” (*Diary*, 1509).

In another instance, when explaining “silent sufferings,” Sr. Faustina wrote, “When God gives neither death nor health, and [when] this lasts for many years, people become accustomed to this and consider the person as not being ill. Then there begins a whole series of silent sufferings. Only God

knows how many sacrifices the soul makes” (*Diary*, 1509). This was her personal experience. It would have been hard enough to experience debilitating illnesses, but on top of that, Sr. Faustina was often not believed and not lovingly cared for by some of those around her.

Mother Mary tells us to fix our gaze on her Son’s Passion

Let’s take a quick look at some blessed advice from the Queen of Heaven. The Blessed Mother has always been fully united to her Son’s mission in the redemption of souls. It would be difficult to fully understand the pain she had endured while at the foot of the Cross, knowing that her Son had been abandoned by those that He served and that He had been mercilessly tortured, and then watching Him suffer an extremely cruel death. Yet we should know that Mother Mary was also keenly aware of the unspeakable power and victory in Jesus’ Passion and Death on the Cross — that His suffering was not in vain, because His holy Death brought great hope to our world. As the *Catechism* states, “Jesus atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father”⁷³ (*CCC*, 615).

On August 5, 1935, the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, Sr. Faustina was going through an interior struggle and turned to the Blessed Virgin Mary in prayer. Suddenly, during Mass, Mary appeared to Sr. Faustina, “unspeakably beautiful.” The Blessed Mother left the altar to come to the young mystic’s kneeler. Sister Faustina recalled that Mary “held me close to herself.” The Blessed Mother let Sr. Faustina know that she was pleasing to her because she “faithfully carries out the will of God” and “had found favor in His eyes.” Mary then gave instruction to her daughter. “Be courageous. Do not fear apparent obstacles, but fix your gaze upon the Passion of My Son, and in this way you will be victorious” (*Diary*, 449).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Take Jesus' words to heart: "There is more merit to one hour of meditation on My sorrowful Passion than there is to a whole year of flagellation that draws blood; the contemplation of My painful wounds is of great profit to you, and it brings Me great joy" (*Diary*, 369). Once we've welcomed these words into our hearts, we can work at carving out more time daily to think about the Passion of Jesus. Even little aspirations lifted from your heart will please Him and can help atone for sin. Jesus wants us to meditate on His Passion, as He reminded His bride, Sr. Faustina: "Remember My Passion, and if you do not believe My words, at least believe My wounds" (*Diary*, 379). Mother Mary encouraged Sr. Faustina to fix her gaze upon Her Son's Passion. Take time this week to ponder Jesus' sacred wounds. Consider meditating on each wound in turn (each hand, each foot, and His side) during each of the five decades of the Divine Mercy Chaplet. Remember that Jesus told St. Faustina to let that one word ("crucified") be enough. He said, "You know what is contained in the cross." Endeavor to learn what Jesus means.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

With regard to His Passion, Jesus told Sr. Faustina, "All this is for the salvation of souls. Consider well, My daughter, what you are doing for their salvation." What are we doing? Are we going out of our way to reach out to others who need His mercy? Pray and carry out meaningful works of mercy this week. Pray to unite yourself with Jesus' Passion, and pray that those you serve will be granted graces according to God's holy will.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, I am embarrassed and very sorry for all of my sins, and I ask forgiveness for having hurt You by sinning.

In return for my ingratitude,

You have suffered and died for me.

Please help me to turn away from even the slightest sin and grow closer to You.

Please help me to fix my gaze upon Your Passion.

Mother Mary and St. Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 42

Divine Mercy and the *Diary*



“Mercy is the flower of love.
God is love, and mercy is His deed.”

— *Diary*, 651



All throughout your pilgrimage thus far in reading this book, we have discussed many compelling sentiments that St. Faustina recorded in her Diary. We might wonder why she wrote the Diary in the first place. In this week’s spiritual exercise, we explore the process of writing the famous Diary of St. Faustina! We will also learn about the drastic measures the young mystic carried out because she was told to do so. Are you ready? Let’s begin!

As we know, Jesus entrusted the great mission of Divine Mercy to a simple Polish nun, Sr. Maria Faustina Kowalska. The young mystic grew deeply in holiness through perseverance and continual communing with Jesus, and ultimately achieved union with her Divine Lord. She worked tirelessly to carry out every detail of her mission and had to be very patient with the endless delays she faced throughout her efforts. Particular sources of difficulty were, for example, getting the Divine Mercy Image painted, the Divine Mercy message propagated, and the Feast established (*Diary*, 47-51). We will talk about the Divine Mercy Image in a later reflection. For now, we will focus on the fact that a big part of Sr. Faustina’s mission was writing the *Diary*. Jesus depended

on His little daughter, His “Secretary of Mercy” and told Sr. Faustina that the “graces of My mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is — trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive” (*Diary*, 1578). This faithful nun learned to deeply trust Jesus and His holy will for her. She surrendered her life wholeheartedly to Him and even delighted in every single bit she needed to suffer to bring about God’s will.

One time, Sr. Faustina exclaimed. “O Incomprehensible God, how great is Your mercy! It surpasses the combined understanding of all men and angels. All the angels and all humans have emerged from the very depths of Your tender mercy. Mercy is the flower of love. God is love, and mercy is His deed. In love it is conceived; in mercy it is revealed. Everything I look at speaks to me of God’s mercy. Even God’s very justice speaks to me about His fathomless mercy, because justice flows from love” (*Diary*, 651).

How do we know so many details of St. Faustina’s mission and experiences with Jesus? Some of the information is from the witnesses of people to whom she was connected. Most of it is from her writings. We have been discussing and quoting from Sr. Faustina’s *Diary* all throughout this book. But you might wonder how the *Diary* came about.

Writing the *Diary* under obedience

Sister Faustina wrote her *Diary* because she was instructed to do so under obedience. Since the saint in the making desired to follow God’s holy will in all things (which, above all, was accomplished by obedience to her superiors), she faithfully recorded all of her experiences. At the time she was writing, she had no way of knowing that her *Diary* would be read and studied by millions of people for many years to come. The drafting of her *Diary* began after she made her perpetual vows, when she finally met her spiritual director, Father Sopoćko, who then instructed the young mystic to record all of her experiences. “Write a diary,” he told her. As Sr. Faustina became more comfortable with revealing her heart and soul to

Fr. Sopoćko, her time in the confessional grew longer, much to the chagrin of the irritated sisters who were waiting their turn. Sister Faustina sensed the irritation and decided to go last. But the timing of her lengthy Confession didn't matter to her new director Fr. Sopoćko, because it was just too long for him to hear, no matter when it would occur. He put his foot down and ordered Sr. Faustina to write everything in a notebook. The superiors of her Congregation gave consent. Father would read the accounts when he could. No doubt he wanted ample time to analyze and discern the contents of the writings. Unbeknownst to Father, the *Diary* would later become an amazing bestseller, considered a gem of mystical literature. Some might say it is one of the most widely read religious works in the world! An article in *L'Osservatore Romano* pointed out that “[St.] Faustina’s work sheds light on the mystery of the Divine Mercy. It delights not only simple, uneducated people, but also scholars, who look upon it as an additional source of theological research.”⁷⁴ Saint John Paul II would say, “To those who survived the Second World War, Saint Faustina’s Diary appears as a particular Gospel of Divine Mercy, written from a twentieth-century perspective.”⁷⁵

Jesus’ Secretary of Divine Mercy

Jesus would call this simple, humble nun His “Secretary of Divine Mercy.” Even though Sr. Faustina accepted the task of writing down the encounters of her soul with the Divine Mercy, it was not at all easy for her to write about herself, nor to write about the unique personal communion she had with Jesus and Mary, or her other contacts with the supernatural world: angels, saints, souls in Purgatory, and attacks by the devil. But the call to write came as an order from her spiritual director and ultimately from God. We must remember that Sr. Faustina had received very little education. Further, she was continually watched by the sisters, so she had to be careful with her notebooks in order to avoid any extra attention. Her writing was done completely in secret. In addition, another

great difficulty for her was that the spiritual matters of which she wrote were often almost impossible to describe.

Early in her *Diary*, she explained her task:

I am to write down the encounters of my soul with You, O God, at the moments of Your special visitations. I am to write about You, O Incomprehensible in mercy towards my poor soul. Your holy will is the life of my soul. I have received this order through him who is for me Your representative here on earth, who interprets Your holy Will to me. Jesus, You see how difficult it is for me to write, how unable I am to put down clearly what I experience in my soul. O God, can a pen write down that for which many a time there are no words? But You give me the order to write, O God; that is enough for me (*Diary*, 6).

The young nun's first writings were put down on loose sheets of paper, but afterwards she wrote in bound notebooks — a total of six notebooks were filled out on both sides of the pages in beautiful penmanship. Father Sopoćko read her writings at the convent. He asked Sr. Faustina to underline Jesus' words in pencil.

Reading Sr. Faustina's precious words to Jesus about the writing of the *Diary* will surely make you smile. It did for me. She wrote, "My Jesus, You see that I do not know how to write well and, on top of that, I don't even have a good pen. And often it scratches so badly that I must put sentences together, letter by letter. And that is not all. I also have the difficulty of keeping secret from the sisters the things I write down, and so often have to shut my notebook every few minutes and listen patiently to someone's story, and then the time set aside for writing is gone. And when I shut the notebook suddenly, the ink smears." She goes on to explain, "I write with the permission of my superiors and at the command of my confessor. It is a strange thing: sometimes the writing goes quite well, but at other times, I can hardly read it myself" (*Diary*, 839). In

spite of coming from someone with very little education under her belt (she had finished less than three grades of school), and who had claimed that she didn't know "how to write well," I believe that her description of her writing process is absolutely fabulous!

Saint John Paul II conveyed St. Faustina's precious relationship with God and her role in communicating Divine Mercy in the *Diary* when he wrote:

[Saint Faustina] was chosen by Christ to be a particularly enlightened interpreter of the truth of Divine Mercy. For Sister Faustina, this truth led to an extraordinarily rich mystical life. She was a simple, uneducated person, and yet those who read the *Diary* of her revelations are astounded by the depth of her mystical experience.⁷⁶

The *Diary* was burned!

There is no chronological order to the *Diary*. That is because Sr. Faustina burned all the initial notebooks of her *Diary* when Fr. Sopoćko went away to the Holy Land for a few weeks in 1934. Satan appeared to Sr. Faustina in the form of an angel, telling her to burn the *Diary*. Upon his return, Fr. Sopoćko directed Sr. Faustina to rewrite the *Diary* anew as a penance, which she did, painstakingly keeping everything extremely accurate. She began that task in July 1934. Father explains why there is no chronological order to the *Diary*. "I directed her to rewrite the destroyed contents as a penance. At the same time, she was having new experiences, which she also noted down, interweaving them with what she recalled from the burned notebook. This is why there is no chronological order in her notebooks."⁷⁷

The *Diary* continued to flow from Sr. Faustina's pen in Vilnius and Krakow from 1934 to 1938 as she recalled her mystical experiences and spoke about God's merciful love for His children. Father Sopoćko was not the only one who had

ordered her to write — Jesus also told her to write, many times reminding her not to forget to write certain things. Week after week, Fr. Sopoćko read St. Faustina's writings and became very united to the message. After all, God had personally chosen him to spiritually direct the Secretary of His Divine Mercy. Yet the well-trained theologian trod prudently because some of what Sr. Faustina had written seemed to him a bit unorthodox. In time, he saw it was all authentic. He would tell Sr. Faustina:

If the things you are telling me really come from God, prepare your soul for great suffering. You will encounter disapproval and persecution. They will look upon you as a hysteric and an eccentric, but the Lord will lavish His graces upon you. True works of God always meet opposition and are marked by suffering. If God wants to accomplish something, sooner or later He will do so in spite of the difficulties. Your part, in the meantime, is to arm yourself with great patience (*Diary*, 270).

Later, we will discuss his continued role in spreading the Divine Mercy message.

The last of the *Diary* was written in June 1938, three months before Sr. Faustina's death. She poured herself out until the end, desiring to help others. "Although I am feeling weak and my nature is clamoring for rest," nevertheless she said, "I feel the inspiration of grace telling me to take hold of myself and write, write for the comfort of souls, whom I love so much and with whom I will share all eternity. And I desire eternal life for them so ardently that that is why I use all my free moments, no matter how short, for writing in the way that Jesus wishes of me" (*Diary*, 1471). There are a few blank pages in the *Diary*. Experts believe that Sr. Faustina left them blank in order to come back to them later. Amazingly, the original manuscript is in very good shape; however, one page is missing. No one knows who tore the page from the notebook, but it is noted as missing in the finished publication.

Mistakes in the *Diary*

The young mystic did consider that her writings might be read after her death and perhaps give encouragement and consolation to the reader. For that reason, Sr. Faustina attached a note to her writings:

Jesus. Nobody can read the notebooks and notes — Father Andrasz or Rev. Sopoćko must check them first because the notes contain the secrets of my conscience. It is God's will so that all of that is given to souls for their consolation. Apart from the superiors, the sisters should not be allowed to read the notes until they have been published. Krakow, retreat, 3 April 1938, Sister Faustina.⁷⁸

Saint Faustina's writings remained in the congregation's custody after her death. Access to the writings would have been only by permission of the general superior, though practically no one knew about the *Diary*. But something tragic would happen to the mystic's writings. The notebooks were transcribed and typed by order of the Mother General, Michael Moraczewska. Unfortunately, it was not done with accuracy, resulting in mistakes too numerous to count. Words were left out; the message was misinterpreted and "corrected" into error. Saint Faustina often included Jesus' words within her own sentences, which caused some confusion in the later typescripts that did not have her pencil marks to differentiate Jesus' words from her own. Because of these tragic mistakes, the *Diary* was initially viewed as heretical. The erroneous typescript was translated into Italian. In 1959, the Holy See banned the spreading of the Divine Mercy message and devotion in the forms conveyed by Sr. Faustina.

Sister Faustina foresaw that there would be a time that the work of Divine Mercy would encounter a most serious problem, when it would be "as though utterly undone." One time when she was speaking with Fr. Sopoćko, she suddenly

had an interior vision about his great suffering — “such agony that God touches very few souls with such fire. The suffering arises from this work.” She was enlightened about what would happen with the Divine Mercy message, but she also knew it would eventually be saved. She wrote, “And then God will act with great power, which will give evidence of its authenticity. It will be a new splendor for the Church, although it has been dormant in it from long ago” (*Diary*, 378).

Fortunately, the manuscript was transcribed a second time for the Informative Process, part of the investigation needed for Sr. Faustina’s beatification. This was done from the original. It was carefully collated by Fr. Isidore Borkiewicz, OFM Conv, and Sr. Beata Piekut, OLM. The translation and typescript were certified by the Metropolitan Curia in Krakow on October 19, 1967. The photocopies of the original manuscript were also sent to Rome. Vice-Promoter of the Faith Fr. George Mrówczyński and Sr. Beata Piekut, OLM, prepared this copy of the *Diary*, along with footnotes and indices, all of which was sent to Fr. Anthony Mruk, SJ, the general postulator (or the person in charge of pursuing the canonization of a particular person) working on the beatification process in Rome. The work was later published in Polish in Rome for the first time in 1981, and then in Poland. This accurate edition has been the source text for any further translations.

Cherished by Catholics around the globe, the *Diary*, now translated into more than 20 languages, has become one of the most widely-read religious books in the world. The writings are derived from the instruction of Jesus Christ Himself; St. Faustina’s spiritual director, Fr. Sopoćko; and the young mystic’s own spirit of obedience and love, desiring to fulfill the mission of Divine Mercy by getting the essential message out to the world through painstakingly recording all of her experiences as best she could. The *Diary* is recognized in the Roman Breviary as “among the outstanding works of mystical literature.”⁷⁹



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Saint Faustina obeyed her superiors and her Lord. Jesus told her that she should write the *Diary* so that others would know of His Divine Mercy. We know that it was not an easy task for Sr. Faustina, but she suffered through it to accomplish God's holy will. We should be thankful to St. Faustina for being obedient in writing her *Diary*, for it blesses us to know the journey of such a beautiful soul. We, and hopefully future generations, can indeed benefit by reading, studying, and meditating upon St. Faustina's words, which were humbly written under the guidance of Jesus, our Lord. While you or I might not be given a *huge* holy task from God, we, too, need to be obedient to the duties of our state in life and all that those entail. We must be faithful in our prayers and works of mercy. We must trust God! Remember, Jesus told His Secretary of Mercy, "The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive" (*Diary*, 1578). Take time this week to ponder your life. What are specific areas in which you can be more prayerful, more obedient, less self-serving, and more patient? Where are you having trouble trusting God? Pray and ask God for the graces you need to change and grow deeper in holiness.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Jesus asks for loving works of mercy. Try hard to carry out beautiful works of mercy, especially at times that you are tired or struggling. Those will be perfect times to roll up your sleeves and help someone. You can be assured that if you are attentive and prayerful, Jesus will provide the opportunities to act upon grace and to move your will to help others. In addition, bearing in mind that God called St. Faustina to a specific mission in writing the *Diary*, could you pray to discern if there is a specific "mission" of mercy God might be calling you to, as well?



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, please grant the graces
to me of which I am in most need.

Help me to be more generous with my
time and with my prayers.

Blessed Mother Mary, guide and protect me please.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 43

The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus



“The Heart of Christ! His ‘Sacred Heart’ has given men everything: redemption, salvation, sanctification. St. Faustina Kowalska saw coming from this Heart that was overflowing with generous love, two rays of light which illuminated the world.”⁸⁰

— St. John Paul II,
Homily on Divine Mercy Sunday, 2001



Our Lord loves all of His children without exception. Sadly, though, at times, instead of loving Him back and appreciating His great love, we choose to live sinful lives and therefore wound Jesus’ Heart. This week’s spiritual exercise will discuss the Church’s teaching on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as well as St. Faustina’s devotion to Jesus’ Heart. Saint Faustina mentioned Jesus’ Heart in her Diary more than 200 times! In our reflection, we’ll also explore how the young mystic snuggled in close to His Heart and wholeheartedly trusted in God’s will for her. Let’s begin!

The *Catechism* teaches, “Jesus knew and loved us each and all during his life, his agony, and his Passion, and gave himself up for each one of us: ‘The Son of God ... loved me and gave himself for me’ [Gal 2:20]. He has loved us all with

a human heart. For this reason, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pierced by our sins and for our salvation, ‘is quite rightly considered the chief sign and symbol of that ... love with which the divine Redeemer continually loves the eternal Father and all human beings’ without exception”⁸¹ (*CCC*, 478).

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was given a tremendous boost in the late 1600s. Jesus appeared on several occasions in France to a Visitation nun named Margaret Mary Alacoque. He explained the devotion to His Sacred Heart during the apparitions, asked that people practice the devotion, and requested that He be honored in the symbol of His Heart of flesh. He also requested acts of reparation and frequent Communion, especially on the First Friday of the month, and for the faithful to make a regular Holy Hour. The Church approved the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus not only because of the personal holiness of St. Margaret Mary, but on the devotion’s own merits. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* explains, “The worship, although paid to the Heart of Jesus, extends further than the Heart of flesh, being directed to the love of which this Heart is the living and expressive symbol.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* goes on to say that “one of the essential phases of the devotion is that it considers the love of Jesus for us as a despised, ignored love. He Himself revealed this when He complained so bitterly to St. Margaret Mary.”⁸²

We should never doubt God’s love, for it is immeasurable. Through the Incarnation, Passion, and Death of His only Son, Jesus, God poured out His love for us and continues to do so through the Holy Spirit in the Church. Our Lord continues to seek mankind’s ultimate good — our freedom from slavery to sin. He loves us more than we can imagine, no matter how we may have treated Him, even if it was with indifference, ingratitude, sin, and contempt. When we turn our backs on God, He searches us out and offers His mercy and love. He does not want us to suffer eternal damnation. God gifts us with free will, allowing us to ultimately choose where we will end up. Jesus told Sr. Faustina, “I do not want to punish aching mankind, but I desire to heal it, pressing it to My Merciful Heart. I use

punishment when they themselves force Me to do so; My hand is reluctant to take hold of the sword of Justice. Before the Day of Justice I am sending the Day of Mercy” (*Diary*, 1588). Our dear Lord is compassionate. He is love and mercy itself. He told St. Faustina, “I cannot punish even the greatest sinner if he makes an appeal to My compassion, but on the contrary, I justify him in My unfathomable and inscrutable mercy” (*Diary*, 1146). Jesus desires that we seek His mercy through His Merciful Heart. Jesus asked His little bride, “Tell sinners that no one shall escape My hand; if they run away from My Merciful Heart, they will fall into My Just Hands” (*Diary*, 1728).

Novena to Divine Mercy

As we know, on February 22, 1931, in Plock, when Jesus revealed the Image of Divine Mercy to His bride Sr. Faustina, He touched His garment at the breast and large rays emanated from His Heart. Jesus’ Sacred Heart is very much a part of the devotion of Divine Mercy. Sister Faustina was very devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Her devotion to Jesus’ Sacred Heart no doubt increased when Jesus dictated the “Novena to the Divine Mercy” to His humble bride. It is recorded in the *Diary*, entries 1209-1229. Jesus specifically asked St. Faustina or whoever would pray the prayers to “bring to My Heart” a different group of souls on each day of the Novena, and “immerse them in the ocean of My mercy” (*Diary*, 1210). Jesus also gave Sr. Faustina a beautiful prayer focusing on the Heart of Jesus that has become very popular among the Catholic faithful. We can pray it at 3 p.m. (the “Hour of Great Mercy”) each day or at any time: “O Blood and Water, which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fount of mercy for us, I trust in You” (*Diary*, 84). Remember, Jesus told Sr. Faustina that this prayer is powerful and can work conversions.

In his homily on Divine Mercy Sunday in 2001, St. John Paul II spoke about this aspect of St. Faustina’s spirituality:

The Heart of Christ! His “Sacred Heart” has given men everything: redemption, salvation, sanctifica-

tion. St. Faustina Kowalska saw coming from this heart that was overflowing with generous love, two rays of light which illuminated the world. “The two rays” according to what Jesus Himself told her, “represent the blood and the water” (*Diary*, 299). The blood recalls the sacrifice of Golgotha and the mystery of the Eucharist; the water, according to the rich symbolism of the Evangelist John, makes us think of Baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 3:5; 4:14). Through the mystery of this wounded Heart, the restorative tide of God’s merciful love continues to spread over the men and women of our time. Here alone can those who long for true happiness find its secret.⁸³

Sister Faustina and the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Sister Faustina knew just where to retreat in times of need — right near her Lord’s Sacred Heart. Earlier, we discussed when Sr. Faustina experienced a “great suffering and humiliation” and “snuggled closely to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,” as she wrote, letting Jesus know that she was ready for that for which she had offered herself (*Diary*, 138). Elsewhere in the *Diary*, Sr. Faustina recorded her experience on the Feast of the Sacred Heart. She wrote, “Today is the Feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. During Holy Mass, I was given the knowledge of the Heart of Jesus and of the nature of the fire of love with which He burns for us and of how He is an Ocean of Mercy. Then I heard [Jesus’] voice: ‘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).

Another time, Sr. Faustina recalled Jesus' requests and how she once again nestled close to His Most Sacred Heart. She wrote:

October 10, [1937]. O my Jesus, in thanksgiving for Your many graces, I offer You my body and soul, intellect and will, and all the sentiments of my heart. Through the vows, I have given myself entirely to You; I have then nothing more that I can offer you. Jesus said to me, "My daughter, you have not offered Me that which is really yours." I probed deeply into myself and found that I love God with all the faculties of my soul and, unable to see what it was that I had not yet given to the Lord, I asked, "Jesus, tell me what it is, and I will give it to you at once with a generous heart." Jesus said to me with kindness, "Daughter, give Me your misery, because it is your exclusive property." At that moment, a ray of light illumined my soul, and I saw the whole abyss of my misery. In that same moment I nestled close to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus with so much trust that even if I had the sins of all the damned weighing on my conscience, I would not have doubted God's mercy but, with a heart crushed to dust, I would have thrown myself into the abyss of Your mercy. I believe, O Jesus, that you would not reject me, but would absolve me through the hand of Your representative (*Diary*, 1318).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Recall how St. Faustina nestled close to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus with so much trust. She did not doubt His mercy. She wrote, "I would not have doubted God's mercy but, with a heart crushed to dust, I would have thrown myself into the abyss of Your mercy." In your prayers, can you take

time today and during the upcoming week to seek Jesus in His Sacred Heart, either in prayer where you are or in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and to trust Him fully with your life? We should never tire of moving in closer to Jesus' Sacred Heart.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Pray earnestly this week, uniting your heart with Jesus' Sacred Heart as you carry out your works of mercy. Pray the prayer to the Sacred Heart (below) and ask Jesus for the graces to offer loving works of mercy to all around you.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, I love You. Please allow me to come closer to Your Most Sacred Heart where I may rest awhile.

Mother Mary, show me the way and please protect me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.

PRAYER TO THE SACRED HEART

(From the Raccolta)

O MOST Sacred Heart of Jesus, pour down thy blessings abundantly upon thy Church, upon the Supreme Pontiff, and upon all the clergy; give perseverance to the just, convert sinners, enlighten unbelievers, bless our parents, friends, and benefactors, help the dying, free the souls in Purgatory, and extend over all hearts the sweet empire of thy love. Amen.⁸⁴




WEEK 44

Immaculate Heart of Mary, Cause of Our Joy



“O Mary, my Mother and my Lady, I offer You
my soul, my body, my life and my death,
and all that will follow it.”

— *Diary*, 79



Saint Faustina loved the Blessed Mother very much and trusted that she would take care of her. Faustina came to know Mary as a young child. Her father’s great devotion to Mary was foundational to St. Faustina’s spiritual life. In this week’s spiritual exercise, let’s look at Mary in this mystic’s life and in our lives. Let’s jump in!

The Blessed Mother told St. Faustina, “My daughter, at God’s command I am to be, in a special and exclusive way your Mother; but I desire that you, too, in a special way, be My child” (*Diary*, 1414). Can we imagine this? What an amazing blessing! Yet we should be assured that Mother Mary wants to be our mother, too. She desires that we be her children!

One time, Sr. Faustina prayed, “Mary, Immaculate Virgin, take me under Your special protection and guard the purity of my soul, heart and body. You are the model and star of my life” (*Diary*, 874). Sister Faustina had loved Mary ever since she was a little girl. She had dreams about her and was

immersed in the many Catholic Marian traditions through the example of her family. Later on, when Sr. Faustina went to Warsaw to begin her religious life, who does she cry out to? Our Lady. “Mary, lead me, guide me,” she prayed (*Diary*, 11). Indeed, Mary guided Sr. Faustina all throughout her life. We discussed Our Lady in depth in Week 8, but I’d like to give some background here specifically on the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary began to blossom in the Middle Ages. It became more prominent in the time of St. John Eudes, born in 1601 in Normandy, France. A tireless preacher, he promoted devotion to Mary’s Immaculate Heart alongside Jesus’ Sacred Heart. Later on, in 1830, the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to St. Catherine Labouré occurred in Paris, in which the devotion of the Miraculous Medal was established by the Blessed Mother. The front of the medal shows Mary crushing the head of the serpent and rays of grace streaming from her fingers. The reverse of the Miraculous Medal confirms Mary’s union with her crucified Son. There is an image of the Cross of Christ surmounted by the letter “M,” and underneath it are the symbols of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, side by side.

Shortly after, a confraternity to the Immaculate Heart of Mary was established at Our Lady of Victories church in Paris in 1836 after a saintly parish priest, Monsignor Charles Desgenettes, was inspired to consecrate his abandoned parish to the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary. After consecrating his church, himself, and the people, he promised that he would establish a confraternity in her honor. He then announced at his next Mass that he would hold a meeting to form the confraternity. To his surprise, that evening the church was filled to capacity. The parish was saved, a complete transformation took place, and the confraternity of Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners was firmly established. In 1838, Pope Gregory XVI raised it to the status of an archconfraternity, and the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary became more widely known.

The Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (or Most Pure Heart of Mary) was approved as a local feast by the Vatican in 1855, but at the time, was not added to the liturgical calendar for the Universal Church.

Later, the devotion spread further when Our Lady of Fatima revealed her Immaculate Heart to the three shepherd children. When she appeared to them, they saw that Mary's Immaculate Heart was encircled with thorns, representing the many sins committed against her. Our Lady asked for communions of reparation for blasphemies and outrages against her Immaculate Heart to be made on the First Saturday of the month, as well as the consecration of Russia to Her Immaculate Heart so that future calamities would be prevented in the Church and throughout the world. This consecration was accomplished by St. John Paul II.

Both of the younger Fatima visionaries, Francisco and Jacinta Marto, were canonized by the Catholic Church in 2017, during the 100th anniversary of the apparitions. In 1982, 65 years after the first apparition of Our Lady of Fatima, St. John Paul II gave a homily at the shrine in Fatima, Portugal, and stated that he presented himself before the Mother of the Son of God “reading again with trepidation the motherly call to penance, to conversion, the ardent appeal of the heart of Mary that resounded at Fatima.” He explained that he was reading again the message of Fatima with “trepidation in his heart” because he was greatly concerned over “how many people and societies — how many Christians — have gone *the opposite direction* to the one indicated in the message of Fatima.” He continued, “Sin has thus made itself firmly at home in the world, and denial of God has become widespread in the ideologies, ideas, and plans of human beings.”⁸⁵

Saint John Paul II lamented the fact that though the Queen of Heaven had come down from her throne in Heaven to give a warning and to request prayer to end one war, prevent another war, and stave off other future catastrophes, people looked the other way. They were given a recipe for peace, and decided to turn from it to seek the pleasures of the

world. Yes, the world is steeped in sin. There is a great need for purification. Mother Mary calls us to penance and conversion, and she draws us to her Immaculate Heart.

The Two Hearts are connected

In that same homily, the pontiff also explained the connection between the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus in a profound way. He said:

The Immaculate Heart of Mary, opened with the words “Woman, behold, your son!” is spiritually united with the heart of her Son opened by the soldier’s spear. Mary’s Heart was opened by the same love for man and for the world with which Christ loved man and the world, offering himself for them on the Cross, until the soldier’s spear struck that blow. ... Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother means returning beneath the Cross of the Son. It means consecrating this world to the pierced Heart of the Saviour, bringing it back “to the very source of its Redemption.”⁸⁶

On another occasion, when speaking of the Heart of Mary, St. John Paul II said, “Immaculate Heart! Help us to conquer the menace of evil, which so easily takes root in the hearts of the people of today, and whose immeasurable effects already weigh down upon our modern world and seem to block the paths towards the future!”⁸⁷

Then-Cardinal Ratzinger beautifully described Mary’s Immaculate Heart and her promise. He said:

“[M]y Immaculate Heart will triumph.” What does this mean? The Heart open to God, purified by contemplation of God, is stronger than guns and weapons of every kind. The *fiat* of Mary, the word of her heart, has changed the history of the world, because it brought the Saviour into the world —

because, thanks to her *Yes*, God could become man in our world and remains so for all time. The evil one has power in this world, as we see and experience continually; he has power because our freedom continually lets itself be led away from God. But since God himself took a human heart and has thus steered human freedom towards what is good, the freedom to choose evil no longer has the last word. From that time forth, the word that prevails is this: “In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). The message of Fatima invites us to trust in this promise.⁸⁸

We should certainly take time to ponder these words and take them to heart.

The Heart of Mary calls us to Jesus. Her Heart is Immaculate, which means it is pure and sinless. Mary’s Immaculate Heart is Mary’s presence with us on earth. We recall that when Jesus was being crucified for our sins, hanging from the Cross, He gifted us with His holy Mother. “Here is your Mother,” He said (Jn 19:27). Jesus desires that we get to know His Mother and learn from Her. Mary is our intermediary in our consecration to Jesus’ Sacred Heart.

Mary and Divine Mercy

In discussing St. Faustina’s *Diary* and God’s mercy, Robert Stackpole, STD, director of the John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy, an apostolate of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception, wrote, “The prayer of faith, Jesus said in the gospels, can move mountains. Maybe, as part of God’s great plan, it is the prayers of faith on Divine Mercy Sunday, above all other times and seasons, that will open the floodgates of God’s love and finally bring about the great triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Merciful Heart of her Son.”⁸⁹ Surely, something for us to ponder.

I love how Fr. Donald Calloway, MIC, described the role of Mary in St. Faustina's life. In an interview, he said:

Saint Faustina, having grown up in Poland, knew of the Our Lady of Czestochowa image. She would know that that image was carried into battles by armies, and she even refers to Mary as her shield. She knows she's in a spiritual battle, and she knows, just from living the life of the Church, that Mary is the one who has the victory over the darkness. She's the one who crushes the head of Satan. She's the promised one in Genesis. If you want to be on Jesus' side, completely and totally, and if you want to completely trust Him, you have to kind of nestle up close to Mary. She's going to be the teacher. Our Lady actually teaches St. Faustina about the interior life. You see that in how Faustina has to really keep her mouth shut a lot of the times and practice abnegation and self-sacrifice when people are saying stuff about her or doubt her. I think she finds her strength in being able to do that with Our Lady there able to comfort her as a mother does. At one point, her spiritual advisor, Fr. Andrasz, tells her, "Place yourself in the hands of the Most Holy Mother" (*Diary*, 1243.). Jesus actually tells Faustina at one point, just before she was to go on a retreat, to ask His Mother for the graces she will need. The point is, we all need a mother, even if we're seeing Jesus in visions. It's human to want to have that maternal dimension. By nature, we need a mother.⁹⁰

Sister Faustina recalled in her *Diary* that Jesus asked her to make a novena consisting of a daily Holy Hour for nine days, uniting herself to the Blessed Mother. He told her to "[p]ray with all your heart in union with Mary, and try also during this time to make the Way of the Cross" (*Diary*, 32). Sister Faustina explained, "I was to make this novena for the

intention of my Motherland.” She recalled a wonderful sight: “On the seventh day of the novena I saw, between heaven and earth, the Mother of God, clothed in a bright robe. She was praying with her hands folded on Her bosom.” Mary’s eyes were “fixed on heaven.” The young mystic observed, “From Her heart issued forth fiery rays, some of which were turned toward Heaven while the others were covering our country” (*Diary*, 33). Let us have recourse to Mother Mary at all times.

One of the many beautiful prayers that St. Faustina wrote about the Blessed Virgin Mary is this:

O Mary, Immaculate Virgin,
 Pure crystal for my heart,
 You are my strength, O secure anchor,
 You are a shield and protection for a weak heart.

O Mary, you are pure and unparalleled,
 Virgin and Mother at one and the same time;
 You’re beautiful as the sun, by nothing defiled.
 Nothing is worthy of comparison to the image of
 Your soul.

Your beauty enthralled the Thrice-Holy One’s eye,
 That He came down from heaven, forsaking
 th’eternal See’s throne,
 And assumed from Your Heart Body and Blood,
 Hiding for nine months in the Virgin’s Heart.

O Mother, Virgin, this will no one comprehend,
 That the infinite God is becoming a man;
 It’s only love’s and His inscrutable mercy’s purpose.
 Through You, Mother — it’s given us to live with
 Him for ever.

O Mary, Virgin Mother, and Heaven’s Gate,
 Through You salvation came to us;
 Every grace to us streams forth through Your hands,
 And faithful imitation of You only will sanctify me.

O Mother, Virgin — most beautiful Lily.
 Your Heart was for Jesus the first tabernacle on earth,
 And that, because Your humility was the deepest,
 Wherefore You were raised above Angel choirs and
 Saints.

O Mary, my sweet Mother,
 To You I turn over my soul, my body, and my poor
 heart.
 Be the safeguard of my life,
 Especially at death's hour, in the final fight (*Diary*, 161).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Saint Faustina prayed for Mary to take her under her special protection to guard the purity of her soul, heart, and body. She also offered herself to the Queen of Heaven, saying, “Mary, my Mother and my Lady, I offer You my soul, my body, my life and my death, and all that will follow it.” We know that Mary always leads us to her Son, Jesus. Can you entrust your entire life to the Blessed Mother? If you haven’t already, can you ask her to be your mother? Take some time this week to ponder the life of the Blessed Mother. For “extra credit,” read some of *Redemptoris Mater* by St. John Paul II, writings by St. Louis de Montfort, or some other approved writings on Mary.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Call upon Mother Mary and ask for her guidance in carrying out your works of mercy this week. She will help you. Strive to carry out your works of mercy while praying to Mother Mary. Ask her to accompany you as you move forward with God’s love and mercy through your works of mercy this week.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, bring me closer
to Your mother, Mary.

Thank You for the gift of Your mother.

Mother Mary, please pray for me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 45

Grace of Union with God



“God, who is Light itself, lives in a pure and humble heart, and all sufferings and adversities serve but to reveal the soul’s holiness.”

— *Diary*, 573



On the outside, no one would suspect that the young nun was a mystic who had been given a great prophetic mission by God. They would not know that she was often in mystical communion with Jesus and Mary even as she carried out her duties, acting as if nothing extraordinary was going on. In this week’s spiritual exercise, let’s delve into the complex mystery of grace in the life of St. Faustina, who, to all outward appearances, was a simple and poorly educated nun of the “second choir.” Her seemingly very ordinary life concealed an astonishing depth of union with God. Let’s dive in!

While experiencing many extraordinary graces and reaching the heights of union with God, the humble young nun kept her nose to the grindstone. She humbly lived obedience and turned industriously to the tasks at hand, never letting on to the wider world that she was in a state of mystical union with God. All throughout her *Diary*, Sr. Faustina expresses her love of God. We can read in the introduction

to her *Diary* (pg. xvi), “Her entire life was concentrated on constant striving for an even fuller union with God and on self-sacrificing cooperation with Jesus in the work of saving souls.” Sister Faustina told Jesus, “My Jesus, You know that from my earliest years I have wanted to become a great saint; that is to say, I have wanted to love You with a love so great that there would be no soul who has hitherto loved You so” (*Diary*, 1372).

Reading the *Diary*, one will perceive the depths of Sr. Faustina’s spiritual life and the high degree of her soul’s union with God, as well as the many times that God keeps company with His bride. Her *Diary* is filled with records of the many graces she received, as well as her great efforts, continual sufferings, and struggles all along the path to Christian perfection.

One time, she wrote, “I know well, O Lord, that You have no need of our works; You demand love. Love, love and once again love of God — there is nothing greater in heaven or on earth. The greatest greatness is to love God; true greatness is in loving God; real wisdom is to love God. All that is great and beautiful is in God; there is no beauty or greatness outside of Him. O you sages of the world and you great minds, recognize that true greatness is in loving God! Oh, how astonished I am that some people deceive themselves, saying: There is no eternity!” (*Diary*, 990). Sister Faustina’s simple words are beautiful and heartfelt, especially her sentiment, “The greatest greatness is to love God.” She was always concerned for the souls of the lost. She prayed fervently for them and felt sorry for the ones who didn’t believe in eternity.

Sister Faustina explained a certain peace that may be experienced in the spiritual life if a soul is united to God. She wrote, “[I]f a soul loves God sincerely and is intimately united with Him, then, even though such a soul may be living in the midst of difficult external circumstances, nothing can disturb its interior life; and in the midst of corruption, it can remain pure and unsullied; because the great love of God gives it strength for battle, and God also protects in a special way,

even in a miraculous way, a soul that loves Him sincerely” (*Diary*, 1094).

Many times, Sr. Faustina wrote that she simply could not explain the mysteries of God and what happened in her heart and soul when experiencing them. At other times, Sr. Faustina attempted to explain union with our Lord, writing things such as: “God approaches a soul in a special way known only to himself and to the soul. ... Love presides in this union, and everything is achieved by love alone. Jesus gives Himself to the soul in a gentle and sweet manner, and in His depths there is peace. He grants the soul many graces and makes it capable of sharing His eternal thoughts. And frequently, He reveals to it His divine plans” (*Diary*, 622).

A chosen soul

Jesus told Sr. Faustina about His chosen souls and how they transform the world. “Chosen souls are, in My hand, lights which I cast into the darkness of the world and with which I illumine it. As stars illumine the night, so chosen souls illumine the earth. And the more perfect a soul is, the stronger and the more far-reaching is the light shed by it. It can be hidden and unknown, even to those closest to it, and yet its holiness is reflected in souls even to the most distant extremities of the world” (*Diary*, 1601).

Jesus said His chosen souls are few, but they actually sustain the world! He said, “Your great trust in Me forces Me to continuously grant you graces” (*Diary*, 718). He also said:

[T]here are souls living in the world who love Me dearly. I dwell in their hearts with delight. But they are few. In convents too, there are souls that fill My Heart with joy. They bear My features Their number is very small. They are a defense for the world before the justice of the Heavenly Father and a means of obtaining mercy for the world. The love and sacrifice of these souls sustain the world in existence (*Diary*, 367).

Sister Faustina wrote, “Nothing disturbs my union with the Lord, neither conversation with others nor any duties; even if I am to go about settling very important matters, this does not disturb me. My spirit is with God, and my interior being is filled with God, so I do not look for Him outside myself. He, the Lord, penetrates my soul just as a ray from the sun penetrates clear glass.” She then went on to compare her union with her mother *in utero* and her union with God. “[B]ut here [with God], it is fullness of reality and the consciousness of union. My visions are purely interior, but the more I understand them, the less I am able to express them in words” (*Diary*, 883).

Sister Faustina was so united to God that she felt His presence physically. She thought no one could possibly understand it. She once wrote, “Love was becoming purer and stronger, and the Lord brought my will into the closest union with His own holy Will. No one will understand what I experience in that splendid palace of my soul where I abide constantly with my Beloved. No exterior thing hinders my union with God” (*Diary*, 582). Though she was a chosen soul, she still needed to practice self-denial in order to move her will to follow God’s holy will. Graces and blessings didn’t just fall into her lap. She had to cooperate with God’s grace and listen to her Lord very attentively. As Mother Teresa has said, real love costs us something. Real love often “hurts.” Because of the love she had for Jesus and for souls, Sr. Faustina willingly suffered physically from illness and spiritually from doubt and the other struggles of the dark night. Yet she knew that the struggles were necessary to bring about the conversion of sinners, and she was willing to make the sacrifices that that entailed. Jesus told Sr. Faustina, “[E]very conversion of a sinful soul demands sacrifice” (*Diary*, 961). Sister Faustina chose to wholeheartedly trust God, and therefore, He granted her additional graces. As mentioned above, He explained the importance of *trust* in enabling a soul to acquire His graces. Grace builds upon grace.

Though Sr. Faustina received many graces and gifts meant to glorify God (such as a hidden stigmata, visions, revelations,

bilocation, levitation, the gift of contemplation, reading human souls, a gift of prophesy, deep knowledge of God's mercy and of the Blessed Trinity, and mystical espousal), she knew what was most important. "Neither graces, nor revelations, nor raptures, nor gifts granted to a soul make it perfect, but rather the intimate union of the soul with God. ... My sanctity and perfection is based upon the close union of my will with the will of God" (*Diary*, 1107). Sister Faustina's great gifts and graces were only known to her confessors, but occasionally, someone would witness one of them. For instance, one day Sr. Kajetana Bartkowiak came to visit the secret mystic. When Sr. Faustina didn't answer the door, Sr. Kajetana let herself in. To her astonishment, Sr. Faustina was levitating over her bed, gazing into the distance. She came to and greeted her fellow sister, acting as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. When Mother Irena Krzyżanowska got wind of this from Sr. Kajetana, she forbade her to speak of it.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Each and every one of us has a distinct mission from God. We might not yet fully realize what it is. Yet we should be quite certain that we are all called to holiness. We are called to be a beacon of light in this darkened world. Without question, we need to possess the virtue of humility in order for God to work through us so that we can help illuminate the darkness. Also, for true happiness and peace in this life and the next, we need to be obedient to God's holy will for us. As mentioned above, Jesus told His bride Faustina that there were no other souls with whom He was united as closely, precisely because of her deep humility and the ardent love she had for Him. Take time this week to ponder Jesus' great love for you, as well as what steps you can take to love Him more ardently and trust Him more completely with a humble heart. Remember what He said about the effect these souls have on the world, even if in a hidden way!



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Carry out your works of mercy this week with the most humble heart. Pray to love Jesus within each person who receives your works of mercy. Ask Jesus and Mary for the graces. Remember, Jesus tells us, “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of the family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, I love You with all of my heart. Thank You for Your great love for me.

Help me to love You more and to show
Your love to all I meet.

Mother Mary, please keep me close to
your Immaculate Heart.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 46

Hell and Evil



“I fight a continuous battle with
the enemy of my soul.”

— *Diary*, 1287



We touched upon spiritual battle earlier in this book when we discussed Sr. Faustina’s dealings with doubt, struggle, and what she called a “continuous battle” fought in her soul. This week’s spiritual exercise will delve into the existence of hell, some tricks and traps of Satan, and how hell and evil impacted St. Faustina’s life. Are you ready? Let’s go!

Hell and evil are not necessarily comfortable subjects. Perhaps most of us would be delighted if these topics never had to come up. Countless folks simply do not believe in the existence of hell. Yet it’s essential to acknowledge that hell indeed exists, and that the devil is not some fictitious cartoon character with horns, but rather a very real evil being. Not only that, but he also desires to drag as many souls as possible to the eternal fires and tortures of hell.

Sister Faustina spoke about the “continuous battle” fought in her soul. Early on in her spiritual life, Sr. Faustina was plagued with doubts and confusion. Clearly, the evil one was trying to trip her up. However, God allowed these struggles, not for her destruction, but in order to cause the young nun’s growth in holiness. Sister Faustina trained herself to turn to

prayer immediately when she was tempted or struggling. Jesus told her many times to reside near His Sacred Heart. One time, she wrote, “Despite the peace in my soul, I fight a continuous battle with the enemy of my soul. More and more, I am discovering his traps, and the battle flares up anew. During interludes of calm, I exercise myself and keep watch, lest the enemy find me unprepared. And when I see his great fury, I stay inside the stronghold; that is, the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus” (*Diary*, 1287). The young mystic was certain that prayer and staying close to Jesus’ Heart would be her saving graces.

One evening, Satan tried to convince Sr. Faustina to give up on Divine Mercy. Just before he spoke to her, a “strange dislike for everything having to do with God” suddenly came over her, and Satan said, “Think no more about this work. God is not as merciful as you say He is. Do not pray for sinners, because they will be damned all the same, and by this work of mercy you expose your own self to damnation. Talk no more about this mercy of God with your confessor and especially not with Father Sopoćko and Father Andrasz.” She noted that, following these words, “the voice took the appearance of my Guardian Angel.” She said in reply, “I know who you are: the father of lies [cf. Jn 8:44].” Sister Faustina made the Sign of the Cross, and the being vanished “with a great racket and fury” (*Diary*, 1405). The devil knew well the great importance of the work of Divine Mercy and would attack Sr. Faustina often, attempting to cause her to doubt the mercy of God. He even knew the names of Sr. Faustina’s spiritual directors.

Satan also knew well the power of intercessory prayer and wanted to stop it. When Sr. Faustina was praying for sinners and offering all of her sufferings for them, she recalled that “the Evil Spirit could not stand that.” Sister Faustina said he took on the form of an apparition and said, “Do not pray for sinners, but for yourself, for you will be damned.” The young mystic paid no attention to Satan. She redoubled her efforts to pray for sinners! Satan “howled with fury,” she recalled. He was full of anger, saying, “Oh, if I had power over you!” and disappeared. Sister Faustina was enlightened about the benefits

of her intercessory prayer and how it stops Satan in his tracks. She wrote, “I saw that my suffering and prayer shackled Satan and snatched many souls from his clutches” (*Diary*, 1465).

Satan hated St. Faustina

Sister Faustina recalled the graces she experienced during Mass one day as she was praying. She thought she might die of joy. Her knowledge of her union with God and His attributes became very acute. Her awareness of what she described as her own “wretchedness” was crystal clear. She marveled over God’s love for her. “I am amazed at the Lord’s great condescension to such a miserable soul as mine.” All throughout the day, Sr. Faustina was very aware of “His every glance into the depth” of her heart. She continued to be in a state of recollection, and, about midday, visited the chapel. She recalled, “Again the power of grace struck my heart.” Obviously, Satan was not happy because, she recalled, suddenly he “took a large flowerpot and angrily hurled it to the ground with all his might.” Sister Faustina “saw all his rage and his jealousy” (*Diary*, 411). She tried to quickly clean up the mess and repot the flower before anyone entered the chapel. However, Mother Borgia, along with the sacristan and several other sisters, suddenly walked in. They assumed Sr. Faustina had touched something on the altar and had caused the flowerpot to fall. A look of displeasure spread over the sacristan’s face. The young novice tried to explain.

Later, Sr. Faustina felt exhausted and asked the Mother Superior to allow her to go to bed early and miss her Holy Hour. Sister Faustina recalled, “I fell asleep as soon as I lay down, but at about eleven o’clock Satan shook my bed.” Awakened, she prayed to her guardian angel peacefully. She suddenly saw many souls in Purgatory, but among them she also saw demons. “One of these tried to vex me; taking on the form of a cat, he kept throwing himself onto my bed and on my feet, and he was quite heavy, as if [weighing] a ton.” She continued to pray the Rosary, and toward dawn, fell asleep after everything vanished. In the morning, Jesus spoke to His bride

as she entered the chapel. “You are united to Me; fear nothing. But know, my child, that Satan hates you; he hates every soul, but he burns with a particular hatred for you, because you have snatched so many souls from his dominion” (*Diary*, 412).

Hell is real

Make no mistake — hell is real! The reality of hell is part of public Revelation. We might avoid thinking about its existence or even deny its reality. Yet God in His great mercy and love has revealed the reality of hell by giving certain souls unique visions of hell or unique insights into hell for their own sakes, as well as for the benefit of the entire world. One time, St. Faustina was led by an angel to the depths of hell. She described it in detail in her *Diary*. “It is a place of great torture; how awesomely large and extensive it is!” She observed many kinds of torture:

[T]he first torture that constitutes hell is the loss of God; the second is perpetual remorse of conscience; the third is that one’s condition will never change; the fourth is the fire that will penetrate the soul without destroying it — a terrible suffering, since it is purely spiritual fire, lit by God’s anger; the fifth torture is continual darkness and a terrible suffocating smell, and despite the darkness, the devils and the souls of the damned see each other and all the evil, both of others and their own; the sixth torture is the constant company of Satan; the seventh torture is horrible despair, hatred of God, vile words, curses and blasphemies. These are the tortures suffered by all the damned together (*Diary*, 741).

However, there is more. Saint Faustina enumerated specific tortures. “There are special tortures destined for particular souls. These are the torments of the senses. Each soul undergoes terrible and indescribable sufferings, related to the manner in which it has sinned.” There are even specific places in

hell for certain damned souls. Sister Faustina explains, “There are caverns and pits of torture where one form of agony differs from another.” She admitted that she would “have died at the very sight of these tortures if the omnipotence of God had not supported” her. Saint Faustina wants us to know of the reality of hell and the torture that awaits the damned. She wrote, “Let the sinner know that he will be tortured throughout all eternity, in those senses which he made use of to sin. I am writing this at the command of God, so that no soul may find an excuse by saying there is no hell, or that nobody has ever been there, and so no one can say what it is like” (*Diary*, 741).

Saint Faustina explained that she had been commanded by God to testify to hell’s existence and to give a warning. She wrote, “I, Sister Faustina, by the order of God have visited the abysses of hell so that I might tell souls about it and testify to its existence. I cannot speak about it now; but I have received a command from God to leave it in writing. The devils were full of hatred for me, but they had to obey me at the command of God.” And hell is worse than Sr. Faustina has described. She explained, “What I have written is but a pale shadow of the things I saw.” She adds a very dire warning. “But I noticed one thing; that most of the souls there are those who disbelieved that there is a hell.” She was so shaken by the experience that she could “hardly recover” when she “came to.” The suffering of the damned souls upset her immensely. “How terribly souls suffer there!” she wrote. Because of this terrifying experience, St. Faustina prayed even more fervently for souls of sinners to be converted. “I incessantly plead God’s mercy upon them. O my Jesus, I would rather be in agony until the end of the world, amidst the greatest sufferings, than to offend You by the least sin,” she exclaimed (*Diary*, 741).

The warning St. Faustina gives, that “most of the souls there are those who disbelieved that there is a hell,” should deeply impact our hearts. We should do all that we can to impress this fact upon our loved ones and those whom God puts into our lives for us to serve in love. The three young visionaries at Fatima were also shown a horrifying vision of

hell. Sister Lucia wrote in her *Memoirs* that if she hadn't already known from the Blessed Mother that she would be going to Heaven, she would have died of fright at the sight of hell. The vision only lasted a brief moment, but it made a lasting impression on the three young shepherds, who then devoted the remainder of their lives to praying and making sacrifices for the conversion of sinners. Sister Lucia wrote, "Some people, even the most devout, refuse to speak to children about hell, in case it would frighten them. Yet God did not hesitate to show hell to three children, one of whom was only six years old, knowing well that they would be horrified to the point of ... withering away with fear."⁹¹

We must examine our own lives and ask ourselves if we could also care about the souls of sinners like the Portuguese shepherd children and St. Faustina.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Every Christian faces the reality of spiritual battle. How do we handle it? We are instructed to put on the armor of Christ.

Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will

be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints (Eph 6:11-18).

We must be steadfast in prayer and always attentive, for as the St. Michael Prayer tells us, Satan prowls “about the world seeking the ruin of souls.”

I discussed this earlier; however, as a reminder, let us recall that when St. Faustina asked Satan to tell her to which souls in religious life he has the easiest access, he unwillingly confessed, “To lazy and idle souls.” Let us stay busy for the Lord! Now, we don’t want to allow the devil to make us think we have to be super busy by joining endless committees and engaging in countless activities so that we have no time to pray. We need to find a proper balance. Fidelity to prayer and the Sacraments is a perfect way of avoiding idleness and staying close to God. Like St. Faustina, let’s also stay close to Jesus’ Sacred Heart.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Pray and ponder ways in which to carry out works of mercy this week that will specifically help the souls of sinners. Be attentive for opportunities to help the doubtful, especially unbelievers. Also, be prepared to speak to those who present themselves as Christians, but don’t believe in hell. And, finally, make time this week for the Sacrament of Confession.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, You love us so much that
You arranged for Your chosen ones to experience
seeing the torments of hell so that they could
attest to its existence to benefit us.
Please grant me the graces to turn away from even
the least sin and to confess any
sins as soon as possible.
Mother Mary, please keep me pure.
Saint Faustina, please pray for me.
Jesus, I trust in You!
Amen.

PRAYER TO ST. MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

Saint Michael the Archangel,
defend us in battle.
Be our defense against the wickedness
and snares of the Devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,
and do thou,
O Prince of the heavenly hosts,
by the power of God,
thrust into hell Satan,
and all the evil spirits,
who prowl about the world
seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.



WEEK 47

Holy Trinity



“I knew, more distinctly, than ever before, the Three Divine Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But their being, their equality, and their majesty are one.”

— *Diary*, 472



I remember what my parish priest said to me one day years ago when he saw that I had scheduled a few Masses for loved ones and requested that they be offered “in honor of the Holy Trinity.” He quipped, “You can’t get any higher than that!” That said, let’s explore the Holy Trinity and Sr. Faustina’s experiences in this week’s spiritual exercise!

The Holy Trinity is a great mystery. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Is 55:8-9). So how are we to understand God’s ways and thoughts, let alone the fact that He is triune? Our human minds have trouble fathoming this great mystery, but we accept it on faith.

Christians are baptized in the name of the Trinity. Specifically, we are baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The *Catechism* says, “Christians

are baptized in the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: not in their *names*,⁹² for there is only one God, the almighty Father, his only Son, and the Holy Spirit: the Most Holy Trinity” (CCC, 233; emphasis in original). Right from the beginning in Genesis, we see that God used the pronouns “us” and “our.” He said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” (Gen 1:26).

Christians are called to share in the life of the Trinity. The Holy Trinity is the central doctrine of the Catholic faith. Saint Faustina mentions the Holy Trinity often throughout her *Diary*. Yet the Holy Trinity is difficult to comprehend. The Church teaches:

The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the “hierarchy of the truths of faith” [GCD 43]. The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men “and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin” [GCD 47] (CCC 234).

Dr. Robert Stackpole, STD, who has written about Divine Mercy and the Trinity, once stated:

[T]he doctrine of the Trinity was not something invented by theologians in some academic “ivory tower” in order to make God too complicated for average Christians to understand. On the contrary, the earliest Christians *experienced* God in prayer and worship, in baptism, and in apostolic blessings in a Trinitarian way, and Jesus their Savior had taught them about the Trinity as well. So they could not

help but speak of God as Tripersonal if they were going to be true to what they were taught, and to what they were experiencing, however paradoxical it all must have seemed to them at first.⁹³

Furthermore, the *Catechism* tells us:

The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity. But even now we are called to be a dwelling for the Most Holy Trinity: "If a man loves me," says the Lord, "he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him" [*Jn* 14:23] (*CCC*, 260).

There is so much to learn about the Holy Trinity; I encourage you to read the *Catechism*, Part One: "Profession of Faith." It is important to note that the Church teaches, "*The Trinity is One*. We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the 'consubstantial Trinity'"⁹⁴ (*CCC*, 253, emphasis in original). We see that the Holy Spirit is clearly coequal and one with the Father and the Son: "The mission of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father in the name of the Son (*Jn* 14:26) and by the Son 'from the Father' (*Jn* 15:26), reveals that, with them, the Spirit is one and the same God. 'With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified' (Nicene Creed)" (*CCC*, 263).

The Holy Trinity and St. Faustina

As we know, St. Faustina prayed continually that she might follow God's holy will. Because of God's grace, she communed often with Jesus and Mary. We are blessed indeed to have her writings so that, following her example, we can learn and advance in the spiritual life, knowing that her writings were entirely scrutinized by the Church before they received approval. One time, Sr. Faustina wrote, "I understand the spiritual espousal of a soul with God, which has no exterior

manifestation. It is a purely interior act between the soul and God. This grace has drawn me into the very burning center of God's love. I have come to understand His Trinitarian Quality and the absolute Oneness of His Being" (*Diary*, 1020).

On one occasion, Sr. Faustina "was reflecting on the Holy Trinity, on the essence of God." She said her spirit seemed to be caught up in the next world. She saw words in the form of lightning come out of an inaccessible light. But this young mystic could not understand any of it and became sad. As was mentioned earlier, Sr. Faustina saw "our dearly beloved Savior, unutterably beautiful with His shining Wounds. And from this light there came a voice which said, 'Who God is in His Essence, no one will fathom, neither the mind of angels nor of man.' Jesus said to me, 'Get to know God by contemplating His attributes.'" Right after that, Jesus "traced the sign of the cross with His hand and vanished" (*Diary*, 30). By contemplating God's attributes, we, too, can begin to understand the Trinity.

Another time, St. Faustina experienced the Holy Trinity after receiving Holy Communion. She heard, "You are Our dwelling place." Upon hearing those words, Sr. Faustina recalled, "I felt in my soul the presence of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I felt that I was the temple of God. I felt I was a child of the Father. I cannot explain all this, but the spirit understands it well." She marveled, "O infinite Goodness, how low You stoop to Your miserable creature" (*Diary*, 451).

Sister Faustina attempted to explain the Trinity. She wrote:

On one occasion God's presence pervaded my whole being, and my mind was mysteriously enlightened in respect to His Essence. He allowed me to understand His interior life. In spirit I saw the Three Divine Persons, but Their Essence was One. He is One, and One only, but in Three Persons; none of Them is either greater or smaller; there is no differ-

ence in either beauty or sanctity, for They are One. They are absolutely One. His Love transported me into this knowledge and united me with Himself. When I was united to One, I was equally united to the Second and to the Third in such a way that when we are united with One, by that very fact, we are equally united to the Two Persons in the same way as with the One. Their will is One, One God, though in Three Persons. When One of the Three Persons communicates with a soul, by the power of that one will, it finds itself united with the Three Persons and is inundated in the happiness flowing from the Most Holy Trinity, the same happiness that nourishes the saints. This same happiness that streams from the Most Holy Trinity makes all creation happy; from it springs that life which vivifies and bestows all life which takes its beginning from Him. In these moments, my soul experienced such great delights that I find this difficult to express (*Diary*, 911).

We can take some time to re-read her words and ponder them in our own hearts.

Over her lifetime, Sr. Faustina came to understand more about the mystery of the Holy Trinity, but was not always able to put it into words. One time, she wrote, “I knew, more distinctly, than ever before, the Three Divine Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” She explained as best as she could, but some things, especially the Holy Trinity, are too difficult to express. Also, sometimes she experienced extraordinary visions with her physical sight; other times, the experience was purely in her heart and soul. She continued, “But their being, their equality and their majesty are one. My soul is in communion with these Three; but I do not know how to express this in words; yet my soul understands it well. Whoever is united to One of the Three Persons is thereby united to the whole Blessed Trinity, for this Oneness is indi-

visible. This vision, or rather, this knowledge filled my soul with unimaginable happiness, because God is so great. What I am describing I did not see with my eyes, as on previous occasions, but in a purely interior manner, in a purely spiritual way, independent of the senses. This continued until the end of Holy Mass.” She added, “This now happens often to me, and not only in the chapel, but also at work and at times when I least expect it” (*Diary*, 472).

One time, St. Faustina wrote:

During Holy Mass, I found myself suddenly united with the Most Holy Trinity. I recognized His majesty and greatness. I was united to the Three Persons. And once I was united to One of these Most Venerable Persons, I was, at the same time, united to the other Two Persons. The joy and happiness that my soul felt is beyond description. It grieves me that I am unable to put down in words that which has no words (*Diary*, 1129).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

We know that the Holy Trinity is difficult to understand and explain. Saint Faustina understood the great mystery of the Holy Trinity mostly interiorly, but had some trouble explaining what she had learned. However, what she has written in her *Diary* can be a great help to us. Saint Faustina once said, “Oh, if souls would only be willing to listen, at least a little, to the voice of conscience and the voice — that is, the inspirations — of the Holy Spirit! I say ‘at least a little’ because once we open ourselves to the influence of the Holy Spirit, He Himself will fulfill what is lacking in us” (*Diary*, 359). Take some time this week to try to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, to ponder St. Faustina’s words, and to pray to the Holy Trinity.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Pray and ponder ways you can carry out works of mercy this week in honor of the Holy Trinity. Take a moment to pray and jot down a few ideas for concrete works of mercy you can carry out. Refer to the lists in Week 23 for help.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
 I adore You, and I pray to love and adore
 You more and more.
 Mother Mary, protect me, please.
 Saint Faustina, please pray for me.
 Jesus, I trust in You!
 Amen.

PRAYER OF ST. ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY

O my God, Trinity whom I adore, help me forget myself entirely so to establish myself in you, unmovable and peaceful as if my soul were already in eternity. May nothing be able to trouble my peace or make me leave you, O my unchanging God, but may each minute bring me more deeply into your mystery! Grant my soul peace. Make it your heaven, your beloved dwelling and the place of your rest. May I never abandon you there, but may I be there, whole and entire, completely vigilant in my faith, entirely adoring, and wholly given over to your creative action (*CCC*, 260).




WEEK 48

“Let God Push Your Boat Out Into the Deep Waters”



“Put out into the deep water and let down
your nets for a catch.”

— Lk 5:4



It's not uncommon to get a bit too comfortable staying the same, day in and day out. Yet we always need to be moving forward in the spiritual life. Otherwise, we will become worse than stagnant. We will slide backwards. In addition to striving to grow spiritually, sometimes God beckons us to venture out into the deep. What are we going to find in deeper waters? Let's take a look in this week's spiritual exercise! Ready? Set? Let's dive in!

Jesus told Simon Peter, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch” (Lk 5:4). Simon Peter and the other disciples who were seasoned fisherman were accustomed to fishing in the shallow waters of the Sea of Galilee at night. In this particular instance, the fishermen had toiled all night and had nothing to show for it. Now, during the light of day, after preaching in the boat, Jesus asks Simon Peter to set out into the deeper waters for a catch. Though skeptical, Simon Peter obeyed Jesus and was astounded at the miraculous, bountiful catch that actually tore at the once-empty nets. Suddenly, embarrassed at his unworthiness, he dropped to his

knees before Jesus, who reassured His disciple, saying, “Do not be afraid” (Lk 5:10), and that soon Simon Peter would become a fisher of men! The fishermen left their nets behind to embrace a new lifestyle, following Jesus and becoming His disciples, completely detached from the world.

One time, early on in her religious life, Sr. Faustina’s spiritual director Fr. Andrasz told her, “Let God push your boat out into the deep waters, toward the unfathomable depths of the interior life” (*Diary*, 55). Saint Faustina did not comment in her *Diary* about this particular piece of spiritual counsel. However, it is very obvious that she took this wise instruction straight to heart. Allowing God to push her boat out into deep waters meant having total trust in Him, and submitting to His holy will. She kept moving forward on her rich spiritual journey. At times, it was like floating on tranquil waters and being pushed by God into deeper waters. But most times, it was arduous work rowing against stormy waves and intense winds in her spiritual life.

The young, determined novice once wrote, “Sorrow will not establish itself in a heart which loves the will of God. My heart, longing for God, feels the whole misery of exile.” Yet what did she do when her heart felt that way? She said, “I keep going forward bravely — though my feet become wounded — to my homeland and, on the way, I nourish myself on the will of God.” That is her secret, for sure — to continually nourish herself on the will of God. To do so, one must surrender to God’s holy will, as well as to wholeheartedly embrace it. She had to work diligently and choose to move forward in faith, even when doing so was strenuous. Sister Faustina continued, “It is my food. Help me, happy inhabitants of the heavenly homeland, so that your sister may not falter on the way.” She knew she needed the strength available through the intercession of the saints and angels — as do we. She wrote, “Although the desert is fearful, I walk with lifted head and eyes fixed on the sun; that is to say, on the merciful Heart of Jesus” (*Diary*, 886).

Saint Faustina lived for Holy Church

Jesus told His bride, “Be watchful that you lose no opportunity that My providence offers you for sanctification” (*Diary*, 1361). She endeavored never to waste one drop of suffering or sacrifice. She united it all to Jesus so that His holy will could be accomplished through His little instrument. Sister Faustina completely trusted Jesus to show her the way. She wrote, “Whatever God sends me, I accept with complete submission to His holy will. ... It is through all this that my soul becomes like unto Jesus. ... This is the surest way. If some other way were better, Jesus would have shown it to me. Sufferings in no way take away my peace” (*Diary*, 1394). Another time, she wrote, “He is bringing me to understand deeply how everything depends on His will, and how He allows certain difficulties precisely for our merit, so that our fidelity might be clearly manifest. And through this, I have been given strength for suffering and self-denial” (*Diary*, 1409). During Holy Mass on a First Friday, Sr. Faustina was united to God. She wrote, “Jesus gave me to know that even the smallest thing does not happen on earth without His will. After this my soul entered into an unusual repose; I found myself completely at peace ...” (*Diary*, 1262).

Sister Faustina had grown in God’s love and mercy, and desired to fully carry out every bit of the mission entrusted to her. She prayed:

O my God, I am conscious of my mission in the Holy Church. It is my constant endeavor to plead for mercy for the world. I unite myself closely with Jesus and stand before Him as an atoning sacrifice on behalf of the world. God will refuse me nothing when I entreat Him with the voice of His Son. My sacrifice is nothing in itself, but when I join it to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, it becomes all-powerful and has the power to appease divine wrath. God loves us in His Son; the painful Passion of the Son

of God constantly turns aside the wrath of God
(*Diary*, 482).

The young mystic was very aware of her duty to “live ... for the entire Church,” pray to save souls, and make continual efforts to grow in holiness with the practice of virtues, as well as to suffer much and silently, all for the good of souls:

I am striving for sanctity, because in this way I shall be useful to the Church. I make constant efforts in practicing virtue. I try faithfully to follow Jesus. And I deposit this whole series of daily virtues — silent, hidden, almost imperceptible, but made with great love — in the treasury of God’s Church for the common benefit of souls. I feel interiorly as if I were responsible for all souls. I know very well that I do not live for myself alone, but for the entire Church
(*Diary*, 1505).

She continually allowed God to push her boat into deep waters, even when her health was deteriorating.



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Jesus said to His bride Faustina, “Be watchful that you lose no opportunity that My providence offers you for sanctification” What could these words mean to your soul? Can you be open to daily opportunities to grow in holiness through inconveniences and splinters from the Cross? Also, St. Faustina’s spiritual director encouraged her to “[l]et God push your boat out into the deep waters.” Take time this week to ponder how God might be asking you to allow Him to push your boat out onto deeper waters. Try to make a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament if you are able. Or do what St. Faustina often did. Take a “spiritual flight” to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament when you are not able to visit

Him at church. Sister Faustina wrote, “When I steeped myself in prayer, I was transported in spirit to the chapel” (*Diary*, 1420). Wherever you are, lift your heart to Him often!



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Let God move your boat out into the deep waters in your moving beyond your comfort zone to offer your works of mercy this week. Countless souls could benefit from your works of mercy. Pray to be attentive to the opportunities. Pray to grow in virtue and to be a generous giver. Also, be sure to pray for the souls of sinners, the dying, and the souls in Purgatory.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, thank You for
 Your great love for me.
 Use me to spread Your love to others.
 Mother Mary, guide me please.
 Saint Faustina, please pray for me.
 Jesus, I trust in You!
 Amen.



WEEK 49

The Image of Divine Mercy



“Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: Jesus, I trust in You.”

— *Diary*, 47



Jesus desired that the whole world would learn about His Divine Mercy. This week’s spiritual exercise transports us into the fascinating and intricate journey of the Divine Mercy Image. The marvelous journey involved much attention, prayer, and suffering, as well as a few twists and turns to finally get the Image out to the world. Let’s take a look!

We cannot begin to fathom God’s great mercy. God’s mercy is not a new teaching, but Jesus taught it in a renewed way to His bride, His “Secretary of Mercy,” St. Faustina. In His goodness, God has gifted us with new visible signs of His mercy, using His humble instrument, St. Faustina, to carry out the mission of Divine Mercy, passing on to us the majestic image of Divine Mercy to stir our hearts and remind us to call on His mercy. Father Seraphim Michalenko, MIC, vice-postulator in North America for St. Faustina’s cause for canonization, said, “The image Jesus asked for, therefore, is to be a powerful means by which souls might learn of this — the deepest of all mysteries hidden in His person; and thus they

will be encouraged to take advantage of that Mercy which no one will ever be able to fathom, and which the Lord Himself declared through Sr. Faustina to be God's greatest attribute."⁹⁵

The Image of Divine Mercy is central to the message of Divine Mercy. The journey of the Image had a few twists and turns. Let's back up to the evening of February 22, 1931, in Plock, when St. Faustina, a young nun in the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, would see an extraordinary vision. Jesus came to her in her cell, clothed in a white garment. She wrote: "One hand [was] raised in the gesture of blessing, the other was touching the garment at the breast." She recalled each detail. "From beneath the garment, slightly drawn aside at the breast, there were emanating two large rays, one red, the other pale." Completely awestruck and filled with great joy, Sr. Faustina silently kept her eyes fixed on Jesus. After some time, Jesus spoke to her. "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 [then] throughout the world. I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish. I also promise victory over [its] enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death. I Myself will defend it as My own glory" (*Diary*, 47-48).

We can only imagine what the young nun felt in those moments. She did write that her soul was "struck with awe" and "great joy." However, the tremendous weight of responsibility would soon follow, as well as the discouragement she felt because she was not believed when she shared what happened with a select few. Still, this was her mission, and she was determined to carry it out.

Sister Faustina immediately discussed the vision with her confessor, who said, "That refers to your soul. Certainly, paint God's image in your soul." She left the confessional and heard the words, "My image already is in your soul. I desire that there be a Feast of Mercy. 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." Jesus gave additional instructions to Sr. Faustina, telling her that

He desired that “priests proclaim this great mercy of Mine towards souls of sinners.” He continued, “Let the sinner not be afraid to approach Me. The flames of mercy are burning Me — clamoring to be spent; I want to pour them out upon these souls” (*Diary*, 49-50).

This young mystic would need to share these instructions with her superiors. She approached Mother Rose and told her all about the vision. The Mother Superior then requested a sign in order to be able to recognize Jesus’ will more clearly. So Sr. Faustina asked Jesus for a sign as a proof “that You are truly my God and Lord and that this request comes from You.” She immediately heard an interior voice, “I will make this all clear to the Superior by means of the graces which I will grant through the Image” (*Diary*, 51). It would seem that Jesus’ response meant the Image needed to be painted before the proof would come. What a quandary! No one believed her. She eventually tried to turn away from her interior inspirations, but as she wrote in her *Diary*, God told her “that on the day of judgment He would demand of me a great number of souls” (*Diary*, 52); in other words, she had to be faithful to her call or else be guilty of the loss of many souls who might have otherwise been saved.

Divine Mercy on her shoulders

As mentioned earlier, with this great responsibility weighing upon her shoulders and having to deal with various difficulties relating to the task of getting the Image painted, Sr. Faustina decided that she should ask Fr. Andrasz to dispense her from the responsibilities that came from all her interior inspirations and the duty of painting the Image. We know she did not receive the response she hoped for. He said, “I will dispense you from nothing, Sister; it is not right for you to turn away from these interior inspirations, but you must absolutely — and I say, absolutely — speak about them to your confessor; otherwise you will go astray despite the great graces you are receiving from God” (*Diary*, 52). He also told her that she

needed a permanent spiritual director. Sister Faustina was upset that she was not freed from the responsibilities coming from her private revelations. She was also upset by the fact that she did not have a regular confessor. On top of that, she had much trouble discussing the graces she had received. The journey was difficult, and Sr. Faustina doubted she could accomplish what was asked of her.

Sister Faustina asked Jesus to give the graces to someone else because she felt she was wasting them, since she couldn't put them to use. She said, "Jesus, have mercy on me; do not entrust such great things to me, as You see that I am a bit of dust and completely inept" (*Diary*, 53). Through it all, Sr. Faustina trusted that Jesus would provide. After all, He had promised her visible help on earth. That came when she went to Vilnius, where she would finally meet Fr. Sopoćko, who would spiritually direct her. At first, this priest was a bit skeptical. As we know, Fr. Sopoćko instructed Sr. Faustina to keep a diary of her experiences. In time, he realized that they were authentic.

The greatness of the Image is in God's grace

Father Sopoćko was very instrumental in getting the Divine Mercy Image painted. But at first, he wasn't sure if he believed everything Sr. Faustina told him. He admitted, "Finally, because I was curious what the image would be like rather than I believed that Sister Faustina's visions were true, I decided to start having the picture painted."⁹⁶ He found the artist, Eugene Kazimirowski, to paint the Divine Mercy Image. At first, Sr. Faustina was very sad about the results. Let's see how Jesus' faithful servant Fr. Sopoćko explained it. In 1958, Bl. Michael Sopoćko wrote a letter describing the painting and the efforts it took to get the image painted. He wrote:

Upon my request, Mr. Eugene Kazimirowski began the painting of the image on January 2, 1934. Sister

Faustina of blessed memory with the permission of the Superior, Mother Irene, came once or twice a week to the painter's studio (in the company of another sister) and imparted instructions, how this image is to look. For several months the painter was unable to satisfy the author [Faustina], who became sad on that account, and it was at this time that she wrote in her *Diary*: "Once when I was at that painter's, who's painting this image, and saw that it is not as beautiful as Jesus is, I became very sad, but I hid that deep in my heart. When we left the painter, Mother Superior remained in the city to settle various matters, but I returned home by myself, immediately I made my way to the chapel and I had a good cry. I said to the Lord: 'Who will paint You as beautiful as You are?' Of a sudden I heard the words: 'not in the beauty of the color, nor of the brush is the greatness of this image, but in my grace.'" ...

The image represents Christ in a walking posture against a dark background in a white garment, girdled by a band [belt, cincture]. With the right hand, raised to the height of the shoulder, He is blessing, and with the left one (with two fingers) He is opening the garment somewhat in the area of the Heart (not visible), from which are coming out rays (on the viewer's right a pale [colorless] one, and on the left a red one) in various directions, but principally toward the viewer. Sister Faustina called attention to this, that the right hand not be raised above the shoulder, not to bend forward, and only place the left foot forward to indicate movement, that the garment be long and somewhat fallen into folds at the bottom, that the Lord Jesus' gaze be directed a bit toward the bottom, as it happens when, standing, one looks at a point on the ground

a few steps away, that the expression of the face of Jesus be gracious and merciful, that the fingers of the right hand be upright [erect] and freely lie close together, and on the left [hand] — [that] the thumb and index fingers hold open the garment; that the rays not be like ribbons [bands] hanging down toward the ground, but that with intermittent [broken] strips [streaks] they be directed toward the viewer and lightly to the sides, coloring to a certain degree the hands and surrounding objects: that these rays be transparent in such a way that through them the band [belt, cincture] and garment be visible; that the saturation of the rays with redness and whiteness be greatest at the source (in the area of the Heart) and then slowly diminish and vanish [dissolve, fade away].⁹⁷

In the introduction to the *Diary*, Sr. M. Elzbieta Siepak, OLM, explained, “The image not only represents The Divine Mercy, but also serves as a sign that recalls the Christian obligation of trust in God and of active love toward neighbor. By Christ’s will, the image bears a signature comprised of these words: ‘Jesus, I trust in You.’” She also stated, “‘This image,’ Jesus also declared, ‘is to be a reminder of the demands of My mercy, because even the strongest faith is of no avail without works’ (742)” (*Diary*, introduction, xxiii).

The meaning of the two rays

At one point, Sr. Faustina’s confessor asked her to ask Jesus the meaning of the two rays in the image. The saintly sister asked Jesus in prayer. She heard these words:

The two rays denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water which makes souls righteous. The red ray stands for the Blood which is the life of souls ...

These two rays issued forth from the very depths of My tender mercy when My agonized Heart was opened by the lance on the Cross.

These rays shield souls from the wrath of My Father. Happy is the one who will dwell in their shelter, for the just hand of God shall not lay hold of him. I desire that the first Sunday after Easter be the Feast of Mercy (*Diary*, 299).

Jesus continued:

Ask of my faithful servant [Fr. Sopoćko] that, on this day, he tell the whole world of My great mercy; that whoever approaches the Fount of Life on this day will be granted complete remission of sins and punishment.

Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to My mercy.

Oh, how much I am hurt by a soul's distrust! Such a soul professes that I am Holy and Just, but does not believe that I am Mercy and does not trust in My Goodness. Even the devils glorify My Justice but do not believe in My goodness.

My heart rejoices in this title of Mercy (*Diary*, 300).

Proclaim that mercy is the greatest attribute of God. All the works of My hands are crowned with mercy (*Diary*, 301).

Saint John Paul II spoke about the two rays of light flowing from Jesus' Heart and illuminating the world during a homily on Divine Mercy Sunday in 2001. He said:

Today the Lord also shows us His glorious wounds, and His Heart, an inexhaustible source of truth, of

love, and forgiveness. ... Saint Faustina Kowalska saw, coming from this Heart that was overflowing with generous love, two rays of light which illuminated the world. “The two rays,” according to what Jesus Himself told her, “represent the blood and the water” (*Diary*, 299). The blood recalls the sacrifice of Golgotha, and the mystery of the Eucharist; the water, according to the rich symbolism of the Evangelist John, makes us think of Baptism and the Gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 3:5; 4:14). Through the mystery of this wounded Heart, the restorative tide of God’s merciful love continues to spread over the men and women of our time. Here alone can those who long for true and lasting happiness find its secret.⁹⁸

During World War II, tiny replicas of the Divine Mercy Image were made and distributed in Poland to give hope to people in desperate times. Soldiers concealed them under their clothing. The Eugene Kazimirowski painting of 1934-35 is the original Image of the Divine Mercy, and its creation was overseen by St. Faustina and Fr. Sopoćko. Permission was given by the Archbishop of Vilnius in 1937 for the painting to be hung publicly. After being restored to its original colors and contours, it presently hangs in the Cathedral in Vilnius, Lithuania. Since the original was painted, many other artists have painted their own versions of the Divine Mercy image, and some of the images have received ecclesiastical approval for dissemination to the faithful and display in churches. No version is absolutely perfect because no one can capture exactly the Image of Divine Mercy using paint and brush.

Sister M. Elżbieta Siepak, OLM, poignantly explained the beautiful benefits of venerating the Divine Mercy image in the introduction of the *Diary*:

When we venerate this image with personal trust in Jesus and perform works of mercy out of love

for Him and our neighbor, the Lord fulfills His promise by offering us extraordinary graces. These are: eternal salvation, great progress in the way of Christian perfection, the grace of a happy death, and all other possible graces which people will ask Him with trust. [Then she quoted what Jesus said to St. Faustina:] “By means of this Image I shall be granting many graces to souls; so let every soul have access to it” (*Diary*, 570).⁹⁹



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Saint Faustina was given a huge task in transmitting the Divine Mercy message and devotion, a task that included getting the Image painted. Take time this week to meditate upon the Divine Mercy Image. Look at the two rays gushing forth from Jesus’ Heart. Ponder those rays. Pray, “O Blood and Water, which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fount of mercy for us, I trust in You!” God’s mercy is unfathomable. Spending time meditating on it and praying for a deeper understanding will certainly aid you in your comprehension. Ponder the possibility of placing a Divine Mercy Image in your home or workplace. Flip to the end of the appendix to see the Divine Mercy Image. Jesus said those who gaze upon the Image will receive great graces.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Countless souls are confused and misguided, crippled with worry or fears. Ponder how your works of mercy this week could help alleviate someone’s suffering. Could you possibly tell others about the Divine Mercy Message or Image? If desired, take a look at the “How to Use This Book: The Nuts and Bolts” section to refresh your mind on the three degrees of mercy. Pray and carry out your merciful acts.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, You have blessed the
world with Your great merciful Image.
Please help me to teach others about Your mercy.

Mother Mary, keep me close to
Your Immaculate Heart.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.



WEEK 50

Carrying Out Divine Mercy

(The Hour of Great Mercy, Feast, Deeds, and Chaplet)



“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.”

— Jesus to St. Faustina (*Diary*, 1320)



We have been journeying with St. Faustina all throughout our reflections and learning about the great mission of Divine Mercy entrusted to her by Jesus. This week’s spiritual exercise delves into the heart of the message of Divine Mercy and all the forms of devotion to mercy that Jesus laid out. Let’s take a closer look.

Saint Faustina was to tell the world about God’s great mercy for each and every soul. Jesus often reminded her to spread the message and devotion of Divine Mercy. He told her about the burning flames of compassion for souls that fill His Heart: “From all My wounds, like from streams, mercy flows for souls, but the wound in My Heart is the fountain of unfathomable mercy. From this fountain spring all graces for souls. The flames of compassion burn Me. I desire greatly to

pour them out upon souls. Speak to the whole world about My mercy” (*Diary*, 1190). Jesus also told her, “In the Old Covenant I sent prophets wielding thunderbolts to My people. Today I am sending you with My mercy to the people of the whole world” (*Diary*, 1588). Such a mammoth task would seem to surpass her capabilities as a simple, basically uneducated nun, confined to the convent, lacking opportunities to propagate the message to the outside world. Like St. Thérèse, who was confined to the cloister and yet had a huge impact on the entire world by God’s amazing grace, so the young mystic Faustina also worked tirelessly through her continual prayers, sacrifices, and obedience to carry out her mission to transmit the great message and devotion of Divine Mercy.

Jesus entrusted the forms of devotion to Divine Mercy to His little instrument, St. Faustina. Those forms of devotion consist of the Image with the signature of “Jesus, I Trust in You”; the Feast of Divine Mercy on the first Sunday after Easter Sunday; the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy; the Novena of Chaplets; and prayer at the 3 o’clock hour of Jesus’ final agony on the Cross, referred to as “The Hour of Great Mercy.” Jesus has attached great promises to each of these forms of devotion, as well as to the spreading of the veneration of mercy. We are also to maintain an attitude of unflinching trust in God while showing mercy to others. We discussed the Image of Divine Mercy in the last chapter; in this chapter, we will go into the other forms of devotion to Divine Mercy just mentioned.

The Hour of Great Mercy

The Hour of Great Mercy is at 3 o’clock in the afternoon. In October 1937, in Krakow, Jesus recommended to St. Faustina that she honor the hour of His death:

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 abandon-

ment at the moment of agony. This is the hour of great mercy for the whole world. I will allow you to enter into My mortal sorrow. In this hour, I will refuse nothing to the soul that makes a request of Me in virtue of My Passion (*Diary*, 1320).

At another time, Jesus reminded His bride of the importance of the 3 o'clock hour and what she should do:

I remind you, My daughter, that as often as you hear the clock strike the third hour, immerse yourself completely in My mercy, adoring and glorifying it; invoke its omnipotence for the whole world, and particularly for poor sinners; for at that moment mercy was opened wide for every soul. In this hour you can obtain everything for yourself and for others for the asking; it was the hour of grace for the whole world — mercy triumphed over justice (*Diary*, 1572).

Jesus requested more:

My daughter, try your best to make the Stations of the Cross in this hour, provided that your duties permit it; and if you are not able to make the Stations of the Cross, then at least step into the chapel for a moment and adore, in the Blessed Sacrament, My Heart, which is full of mercy; and should you be unable to step into the chapel, immerse yourself in prayer there where you happen to be, if only for a very brief instant. I claim veneration for My mercy from every creature, but above all from you, since it is you that I have given the most profound understanding of this mystery (*Diary*, 1572).

We, too, are called to honor this Hour as best we can each day.

The Feast of Divine Mercy

Jesus told St. Faustina several times that He desired a Feast of Divine Mercy to be instituted, and that it should take place on the Sunday following Easter Sunday. Saint John Paul II (whose second encyclical was *Dives in Misericordia* [*Rich in Mercy*] and who entrusted the world to Divine Mercy) granted this Feast to the Universal Church on April 30, 2000, the canonization of St. Faustina.

On May 23, 2000, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments proclaimed, “[T]hroughout the world the Second Sunday of Easter will receive the name Divine Mercy Sunday, a perennial invitation to the Christian world to face, with confidence in divine benevolence, the difficulties and trials that mankind will experience in the years to come.” Jesus stated to St. Faustina, “[W]hoever approaches the Fount of Life on this day will be granted complete forgiveness of sins and punishment” (*Diary*, 300). He also said, “I want the image solemnly blessed on the first Sunday after Easter, and I want it to be venerated publicly so that every soul may know about it” (*Diary*, 341).

Further, Jesus said, “This Feast emerged from the very depths of My mercy, and it is confirmed in the vast depths of My tender mercies” (*Diary*, 420). Jesus went on to say:

My daughter, tell the whole world about My Inconceivable mercy. 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 all the divine floodgates through which graces flow are opened. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or of angel, will be able

to fathom it throughout all eternity. Everything that exists has come forth from the very depths of My most tender mercy. Every soul in its relation to Me will contemplate My love and mercy throughout eternity. The Feast of Mercy emerged from My very depths of tenderness. It is My desire that it be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. Mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of My Mercy (*Diary*, 699).

Another time, Jesus said, “Yes, the first Sunday after Easter is the Feast of Mercy, but there must also be deeds of mercy, which are to arise out of love for Me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to absolve yourself from it” (*Diary*, 742). Elsewhere, He said, “I want to grant complete pardon to the souls that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion on the Feast of My mercy” (*Diary*, 1109).

Jesus’ desire for the Divine Mercy Feast includes the solemn, public veneration of the Image of Divine Mercy by the Church, as well as our personal acts of veneration and mercy. Jesus promised, “The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment” (*Diary*, 699).

Chaplet of Divine Mercy

Jesus taught St. Faustina the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, which is a special and powerful intercessory prayer that offers the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Father in atonement for the sins of the world. The Chaplet may be prayed at any time, but Jesus specifically told St. Faustina to recite it during the nine days before the Feast of Mercy. He then added: “By this Novena [of Chaplets], I will grant every possible grace to souls.” (*Diary*, 796)

The Chaplet is also appropriately prayed during the “Hour of Great Mercy” — 3 o’clock each afternoon (commemorating the time of Christ’s death on the Cross). Our

Lord requested from St. Faustina a special remembrance of His Passion at that hour.

Sister Faustina received a vision in 1935 in which an angel was sent by God to chastise a certain city. Sister Faustina immediately began to pray earnestly for mercy, but was powerless. The Holy Spirit appeared to her and the young nun felt Jesus' grace within her. She began pleading with God for mercy. She then heard these words interiorly:

Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, for our sins and those of the whole world; for the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us (*Diary*, 475).

She prayed the inspired prayer over and over, and the angel became powerless, not able to carry out the punishment that the city deserved. As St. Faustina entered the chapel the following day, she heard an interior voice, explaining how to pray the prayer that our Lord later called "the Chaplet." However, this time, after "have mercy on us" were added the words "and on the whole world" (*Diary*, 476). The Lord's Secretary of Divine Mercy from then on would pray that prayer almost continually, especially for the poor dying souls. Jesus let her know that the Chaplet was for the whole world, not just her, and attached many amazing promises to its recitation.

"[E]ncourage souls to say the chaplet which I have given to you" (*Diary*, 1541). "Whoever will recite it will receive great mercy at the hour of death" (*Diary*, 687). "[W]hen they say this chaplet in the presence of the dying, I will stand between My Father and the dying person, not as the just Judge but as the Merciful Savior" (*Diary*, 1541). "Priests will recommend it to sinners as their last hope of salvation. Even if there were a sinner most hardened, if he were to recite this chaplet only once, he would receive grace from My infinite mercy" (*Diary*, 687). "I desire to grant unimaginable graces to those souls who trust in My mercy" (*Diary*, 687). "Through the chaplet

you will obtain everything, if what you ask for is compatible with My will” (*Diary*, 1731).

The three degrees of mercy

Jesus explained how Sr. Faustina was to show mercy, which would prove her love for Him, as well as glorify and pay reverence to Jesus’ mercy. In order to keep all of the essential information about the forms of devotion to Divine Mercy together in this week’s reflection for easy access and meditation, I will repeat an important instruction from Jesus that is quoted in St. Faustina’s *Diary*. He instructed:

I demand from you deeds of mercy, which are to arise out of love for Me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse or absolve yourself from it. I am giving you three ways of exercising mercy toward your neighbor: the first — by deed, the second — by word, the third — by prayer. In these three degrees is contained the fullness of mercy, and it is an unquestionable proof of love for Me. By this means a soul glorifies and pays reverence to My mercy (*Diary*, 742).

Saint Faustina wrote the following beautiful prayer on being merciful:

O Most Holy Trinity! As many times as I breathe, as many times as my heart beats, as many times as my blood pulsates through my body, so many thousand times do I want to glorify Your mercy.

I want to be completely transformed into Your mercy and to be Your living reflection, O Lord. May the greatest of all divine attributes, that of Your unfathomable mercy, pass through my heart and soul to my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, that my eyes may be merciful, so that I may never suspect or judge from appearances, but look for what is beautiful in my neighbors' souls and come to their rescue.

Help me, that my ears may be merciful, so that I may give heed to my neighbors' needs and not be indifferent to their pains and moanings.

Help me, O Lord, that my tongue may be merciful, so that I should never speak negatively of my neighbor, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all.

Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful and filled with good deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbors and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks.

Help me, that my feet may be merciful, so that I may hurry to assist my neighbor, overcoming my own fatigue and weariness. My true rest is in the service of my neighbor.

Help me, O Lord, that my heart may be merciful so that I myself may feel all the sufferings of my neighbor. I will refuse my heart to no one. I will be sincere even with those who, I know, will abuse my kindness. And I will lock myself up in the most merciful Heart of Jesus. I will bear my own suffering in silence. May Your mercy, O Lord, rest upon me.

You Yourself command me to exercise the three degrees of mercy. The first: the act of mercy, of whatever kind. The second: the word of mercy — if I cannot carry out a work of mercy, I will assist by my words. The third: prayer — if I cannot show mercy by deeds or words, I can always do so by prayer. My prayer reaches out even there where I cannot reach out physically.

O my Jesus, transform me into Yourself, for You can do all things (*Diary*, 163).



SOMETHING TO PONDER

We know that God's great mercy is not a new revelation. Yet Jesus painstakingly laid out all of the forms of mercy to His Secretary of Mercy with continual instructions to propagate the message. Take time this week to ponder the forms of mercy that Jesus has given us. Think about how you can become a more merciful person. Are there people in your past that you need to forgive? Are there people who deserve an apology from you? Are you generous with your time, talents, and treasures? God instructs us to be merciful people — always.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Through prayer, ponder ways you can lovingly impart God's great mercy to others this week. Could you teach others about Divine Mercy? Start within your own family and share Divine Mercy. How about at your parish? How about doing your best to carry out one thing from each category — deed, word, and prayer? Ask St. Faustina to guide you!



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, I want to be more merciful.

Please help me.

Mother Mary, guide me, please.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 51

Death, “Our Coronation”



“Death does not frighten me. My soul abounds in great peace ... I kiss your hands, most dear Mother, with most profound reverence, and beg for prayers. The greatest misery and nothingness Sr. Faustina.”¹⁰⁰

— Sr. Faustina’s farewell letter (August 1938)



Death can be sudden, or one could be afforded a long preparation through enduring a terminal illness. Yet no matter when it happens, death can indeed be a scary reality, especially when it’s our own or a loved one’s death. This week’s spiritual exercise explores death, dying, and eternal life, and how this is a fact of life for us all. Death might not be foremost on our minds; however, death is an important and even holy part of our life — no matter how contradictory that might sound. Let’s look at this in the context of St. Faustina’s last days.

Saint Faustina once wrote in her *Diary*, “As long as we live, the love of God grows in us. Until we die, we ought to strive for the love of God” (*Diary*, 1191). This she did each and every day. One day, pondering the great mercy of God, St. Faustina wrote, “The mercy of the Lord is praised by the holy souls in heaven who have themselves experienced that

infinite mercy. What these souls do in heaven, I already will begin to do on earth.” She enumerated a few of these things. “I will praise God for His infinite goodness, and I will strive to bring other souls to know and glorify the inexpressible and incomprehensible mercy of God” (*Diary*, 753). Jesus told her how: “Your life is to be modeled on Mine, from the crib to My death on the Cross. Penetrate My mysteries, and you will know the abyss of My mercy towards creatures and My unfathomable goodness — and this you shall make known to the world” (*Diary*, 438). We too, can take time to ponder this amazing advice — from Jesus Himself!

It’s true that St. Faustina worked hard to never waste a moment in striving to model her life after Jesus, toiling through everyday occurrences and heartfelt prayers to bring the Divine Mercy to the world. Saint Faustina’s heart was filled with mercy. She was a living victim, striving to atone for sinners. She prayed: “Transform me into Yourself, O Jesus, that I may be a living sacrifice and pleasing to You. I desire to atone at each moment for poor sinners” (*Diary*, 908). One time, St. Faustina said to Jesus, “O, God, how I desire that souls come to know You and to see that You have created them because of Your unfathomable love. O my Creator and Lord, I feel that I am going to remove the veil of heaven so that the earth will not doubt Your goodness” (*Diary*, 483).

Towards the end of her life, tuberculosis had ravaged St. Faustina’s body. It affected her respiratory system and also the alimentary canal (the esophagus, stomach, and intestines). As her health deteriorated, her mysticism intensified. In fact, one time, Fr. Sopoćko visited Sr. Faustina when she was very ill, and she was in an ecstasy communing with our Lord. Throughout her illnesses, the young mystic remained courageous, continuing to offer her sufferings to God and wholeheartedly trusting in His great mercy and love. But her charity during her illnesses didn’t stop there. Saint Faustina had a hospital ministry to the dying that unfolded through God’s grace. Even when she was ailing herself, her merciful heart led her to reach out to help others, especially at the most

critical time when prayers are urgently needed: when someone is in their last moments here on earth and soon to be judged. The young mystic was spiritually sensitive to the times that various souls needed prayer, sometimes even being awakened in the night to pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet for them. The Lord had taught her well:

At the hour of their death, I will defend as My own glory every soul that says this chaplet; or when others say it for a dying person, the pardon is the same. When this chaplet is said by the bedside of a dying person, God's anger is placated, unfathomable mercy envelops the soul, and the very depths of My tender mercy are moved for the sake of the sorrowful Passion of My Son (*Diary*, 811).

Saint Faustina recalled in her *Diary*, "Especially now, while I am in the hospital, I experience an inner communion with the dying who ask me for prayer when their agony begins. God has given me a wondrous contact with the dying!" (*Diary*, 835). Saint Faustina many times felt the needy soul's presence and prayed for them until she felt peace in her soul. One time, she deeply desired that a dying Jewish woman be baptized before death. She begged Jesus, praying before a small Image of the Divine Mercy that was on the cover of a small leaflet she owned. She trusted her Lord wholeheartedly and said, "Jesus, You yourself told me that You would grant many graces through this image. I ask You, then, for the grace of Holy Baptism for this Jewish lady" (*Diary*, 916). God certainly allowed for her Baptism. She died peacefully soon afterwards. Suddenly, St. Faustina was overjoyed to see the woman's soul ascending to Heaven! Saint Faustina was fully confident that the grace was given through the Divine Mercy Image and thanked God. She'd never forget that day and said it was the second great grace she had received for souls before the Image.

Not afraid of death

Saint Faustina was not afraid of death. In her farewell letter, she wrote, “Death does not frighten me. My soul abounds in great peace” The young mystic was certain that she was called to be a saint, just as each and every person is called to holiness. Mother Teresa always said that holiness is but a simple duty for all of us. Saint Faustina recalled in her *Diary*, “I have noticed that, from the very moment I entered the convent, I have been charged with one thing; namely, that I am a saint” (*Diary*, 1571). She further explained that since the word “saint” was used scoffingly by some sister or another, she used to feel hurt. Eventually, she rose above the hurt. One time, Jesus told His bride, “Of course you are a saint. Soon I Myself will make this manifest in you, and they will pronounce that same word, saint, only this time it will be with love” (*Diary*, 1571). Imagine that!

When my sister Barbara was dying of cancer, I requested prayers from those I knew were prayer warriors and quickly booked an immediate flight to Texas. The doctors said she had only a few months left. I had no idea at the time that her remaining days on this planet would actually be much less than that. I called my friends in the Missionaries of Charity and requested a relic of Mother Teresa to bring with me to give to Barbara. The kind nun I spoke with reassured me of the sisters’ prayers for my trip and my sister Barbara, and reminded me of Mother Teresa’s words about death. She wrote them down in the letter she sent to me with the relic, which arrived the day before I hopped on the plane. “Death is nothing except going back to God, where He is and where we belong ... Death is the most decisive moment in human life. It is our Coronation: to die in peace with God.” I took the note with me to Texas. I prayed many Divine Mercy Chaplets by Barbara’s side, as well as the Rosary, while she napped. Time with my sister was extremely short, but I am immensely thankful that I rushed to her side because it turned out that the doctor was wrong — my sister died only five days after I arrived at her bedside.

When Sr. Faustina was getting closer to death, she realized that the new congregation that Jesus had called her to found was not going to come into being during her lifetime. But she had certainly labored hard, tilled the soil, and planted the holy seeds for Fr. Sopoćko, who would carry on with the work. Sister Faustina told Fr. Sopoćko that his main task would be to work hard so that the Feast of Divine Mercy would be instituted on the first Sunday after Easter Sunday. Sister Faustina warned her spiritual father that he would experience many difficulties and even persecutions in spreading the message and devotion of Divine Mercy. She reassured him that the new congregation would come to be, and he would understand the details in time. She added that Fr. Sopoćko “would take vows from six first candidates for the congregation in a little wooden chapel at night.” She informed him that she was finished writing everything she should and that she would soon die. Specifically, she told him on September 26, 1938, that she would die in 10 days.¹⁰¹

After 13 years in the congregation, on October 5, 1938, at the young age of 33, Sr. Faustina departed from her earthly life at 10:45 p.m. in the presence of Sr. Amelia Socha and Sr. Eufemia Traczynska, both of whom, through a miraculous occurrence, arrived at her room only minutes before the saint died. Her funeral was on October 7, 1938, the First Friday of the month and the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. Father Sopoćko was not able to make it to her funeral. Sister Faustina’s family did not attend the funeral because Sr. Faustina did not want her relatives notified, due to the great expense of travel. Sister Faustina’s sister Natalia Grzelek said her sister (Sr. Faustina) visited her at night in her room (presumably before her death). “She was as white as a communion wafer, so thin, with folded hands. And said to me, ‘I have come to say goodbye to you, because I’m leaving. Remain with God. Do not cry, you mustn’t cry!’ She kissed me on the cheek,” Natalia recalled. “I couldn’t say a word. I just pressed my face into the pillow” Natalia and her husband traveled to Glogowiec in the morning. News of her death was spreading now, and there was much weeping.¹⁰²

Up until the time of the funeral, Sr. Faustina's coffin was open. Father Andrasz said, "In the casket, Faustina regained her freshness and loveliness; she was far more beautiful than during her life." Mother Irene Krzyżanowska said, "Sister Faustina's face radiated peace." Her casket was carried by the sisters themselves, and was buried in the convent cemetery in the congregation's garden.¹⁰³

After St. Faustina's death, Fr. Michael Sopoćko disclosed that Sr. Faustina Kowalska was the visionary who had received the message and devotion to Divine Mercy, which had already begun to spread. The Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy also disclosed that, under the exterior appearance of a humble, ordinary nun, all along a great saint had been hidden in their midst. Mother General Michael Moraczewska visited all the congregation's houses and explained the great mission entrusted to His little instrument, Sr. Faustina. Later on, she would testify:

What most struck me about Sr. Faustina and still strikes me today as an extraordinary phenomenon, especially in the last months of her illness, was her absolute self-oblivion for the sake of the dissemination of the worship of Divine Mercy. She never showed the slightest doubts as to the authenticity of her mission nor fear of death; she was absolutely engrossed in the leading light of her entire life — the devotion to Divine Mercy.¹⁰⁴

As Sr. Faustina foretold, Fr. Sopoćko took the private vows of the first six candidates of the new congregation. It was on the night of November 16, 1944, in the wooden chapel of the Carmelite Sisters in Vilnius. Father Sopoćko said he was "amazed by the striking similarity of what I saw and what the late Sister Faustina had told me."¹⁰⁵



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Reflecting on St. Faustina's death, ask yourself: Are you prepared to meet your Maker? For the most part, people don't reflect upon their lives or their imminent death in the course of their day. Yet we really are to ponder our death, and to prepare our hearts and souls for Heaven. Jesus gave very clear instructions when He said, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of the family, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). He also said that we will be judged on how we have served "the least." How are you doing? Are you seeking to alleviate the suffering of "the least"? Are you carrying out works of mercy? Each evening, you can reflect on your day. Take time this week to ponder your life and take the necessary steps to prepare for your death — your "coronation"!



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Pray every chance you have this week for the dying. Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet and the "O Blood and Water" prayer. Make time to visit someone who is sick or dying, or at least call them on the phone. No doubt you will help to lift their spirits. Be instrumental in arranging that a priest come to anoint any Catholic you know who is dying. This week, in addition to giving them your loving example, teach someone about the importance of works of mercy.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus, help me to ready
my soul for eternal life.

Mother Mary, please protect me from all evil.

Saint John Paul II, please pray for me.

Saint Faustina, please pray for me.

Jesus, I trust in You!

Amen.




WEEK 52

“Jesus, I Trust in You”



“The graces of My mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is — trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive.”

— *Diary*, 1578



The message and devotion of Divine Mercy entrusted to Sr. Maria Faustina Kowalska was indeed a fascinating, holy journey. However, it is still very much alive and continues to help save countless souls. In this week’s spiritual exercise, we delve into St. Faustina’s mission after her death and how we can help to spread the Divine Mercy message and devotion.

Jesus shared with St. Faustina on a number of occasions that lack of trust deeply pains Him. Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos once wrote, “None of the damned was ever lost because his sin was too great, but because his trust was too small!”¹⁰⁶ Why is an act of trust in God so significant in the spiritual life? Jesus told St. Faustina, “The graces of My mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is — trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive” (*Diary*, 1578). One time, when St. Faustina was feeling crushed under trials and sufferings, she made an Act of Trust to Jesus. Earnestly, she prayed, “Do what You will with me, O Jesus; I will adore You

in everything. May Your will be done in me, O my Lord and my God, and I will praise Your infinite mercy.” Saint Faustina wrote, “Through this act of submission, these terrible torments left me. Suddenly I saw Jesus, who said to me, ‘I am always in your heart.’ An inconceivable joy entered my soul, and a great love of God set my heart aflame.” She explained, “I see that God never tries us beyond what we are able to suffer.” She realized, “If God sends such great suffering to a soul. He upholds it with even greater grace, although we are not aware of it.” She wrote, “One act of trust at such moments gives greater glory to God than whole hours passed in prayer filled with consolations. Now I see that if God wants to keep a soul in darkness, no book, no confessor can bring it light” (*Diary*, 78). She knew that God was in control, and that she must trust Him with all of her heart and soul. This she did right from the beginning. Immediately after Jesus appeared to the young Helen at the dance, asking when she would follow Him, she fled to the church and lay prostrate on the floor in prayer. She threw herself into Jesus’ arms and trusted her Lord and Savior all the way to the end.

Her mission after her death

Before departing her earthly exile, the young saint wrote, “Poor earth, I will not forget you. Although I feel that I will be immediately immersed in God as in an ocean of happiness, that will not be an obstacle to my returning to earth to encourage souls and incite them to trust in God’s mercy. Indeed, this immersion in God will give me the possibility of boundless action” (*Diary*, 1582). As she wrote this entry, the enemy who hates Divine Mercy was causing a ruckus. Sister Faustina didn’t care. She continued to write, “As I write this, I hear Satan grinding his teeth. He cannot stand God’s mercy, and keeps banging things in my cell. But I feel so much of God’s power within me that it does not even bother me that the enemy of our salvation gets angry, and I quietly keep on writing” (*Diary*, 1583).

It is believed that Sr. Faustina wrote her final *Diary* entry in mid-June 1938. This young saint in the making had run the race. She had fought the good fight! However, she was not finished. There is more to the story. The humble mystic left an ellipsis after her final entry:

Today, the Majesty of God is surrounding me. There is no way that I can help myself to prepare better. I am thoroughly enwrapped in God. My soul is being inflamed by His love. I only know that I love and am loved. That is enough for me. I am trying my best to be faithful throughout the day to the Holy Spirit and to fulfill His demands. I am trying my best for interior silence in order to be able to hear His voice ... (*Diary*, 1828).

I have no doubt that St. Faustina is working very hard from her place in Heaven. She promised to return to earth “to encourage souls and incite them to trust in God’s mercy” (*Diary*, 1582).

Sister Faustina was beatified on April 18, 1993, by the Holy Father John Paul II in St. Peter’s Square, Rome. On April 30, 2000, the Feast of Divine Mercy, before some 250,000 pilgrims and before the world by means of the television cameras, Sr. Faustina was canonized “the great apostle of Divine Mercy” by Pope John Paul II. The Feast of Divine Mercy was established for the entire Church that day. Passing on the prophetic mission of mercy, Pope John Paul II said, “I pass it on to all people so that they will learn to know ever better the true face of God and the true face of their brethren.”

The pontiff also stated in his homily:

Sr. Faustina Kowalska wrote in her *Diary*: “I feel tremendous pain when I see the sufferings of my neighbours. All my neighbours’ sufferings reverberate in my own heart; I carry their anguish in my heart in such a way that it even physically destroys

me. I would like all their sorrows to fall upon me, in order to relieve my neighbor” (*Diary*, 1039). This is the degree of compassion to which love leads, when it takes the love of God as its measure!

It is this love which must inspire humanity today, if it is to face the crisis of the meaning of life, the challenges of the most diverse needs and, especially, the duty to defend the dignity of every human person. Thus the message of divine mercy is also implicitly *a message about the value of every human being*. Each person is precious in God’s eyes; Christ gave his life for each one; to everyone the Father gives His Spirit and offers intimacy.

This consoling message is addressed above all to those who, afflicted by a particularly harsh trial or crushed by the weight of the sins they committed, have lost all confidence in life and are tempted to give in to despair. To them the gentle face of Christ is offered; those rays from his heart touch them and shine upon them, warm them, show them the way and fill them with hope. How many souls have been consoled by the prayer “Jesus, I trust in you,” which Providence intimated through Sr. Faustina! This simple act of abandonment to Jesus dispels the thickest clouds and lets a ray of light penetrate every life. *Jezu, ufam tobie*.¹⁰⁷

The Divine Mercy movement has made tremendous strides. Today, we see that the Divine Mercy message and devotion has spread throughout all the world. The Divine Mercy Image is displayed in most countries, and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy is prayed in many languages. Countless churches and shrines dedicated to the Divine Mercy, the Merciful Jesus, or St. Faustina have been founded in Poland and around the world. On August 25, 1995, the Congregation of the Sisters of Our

Lady of Mercy fully embraced Sr. Faustina's prophetic mission and formally recognized her as their spiritual Foundress. Still, numerous Catholics are unaware of Divine Mercy, and so they merely fear God. We can pray for them and teach them. We can be inspired by Sr. Faustina's statement, "I feel certain that my mission will not come to an end upon my death, but will begin" (*Diary*, 281). With that in mind, let us call upon the great mystic St. Faustina, asking for her intercession for our world. We can also strive to do as much as we can to promote the Divine Mercy message to the world.

God's mercy for us today

On August 17, 2002, two years after Pope John Paul II canonized St. Faustina, the pontiff made a second pilgrimage to the Lagiewniki Shrine in Poland. He consecrated the basilica church and entrusted the whole world to Divine Mercy. He drew from Jesus' words to His Secretary of Mercy: "I bear a special love for Poland, and if she will be obedient to My will, I will exalt her in might and holiness. From her will come forth the spark that will prepare the world for My final coming" (*Diary*, 1732). Pope John Paul II said he wanted the Divine Mercy message to radiate from Lagiewniki to all of Poland and on to the rest of the world so that Jesus' promise would be fulfilled: The "spark" that would issue from this place would prepare the world for His final coming. He added, "This spark needs to be lighted by the grace of God. This fire needs to be passed on to the world. In the mercy of God, the world will find peace and mankind will find happiness! I entrust this task to you, dear Brothers and Sisters May you be witnesses to mercy!"¹⁰⁸

We know that our ever-changing world is far from God in many respects. The world is in great need of Divine Mercy. Let us heed St. John Paul II's words and allow the grace of God to light a *huge* spark in our hearts. Let us pray for all of the graces we need in order to pass on the fire to enlighten our darkened world to God's unfathomable mercy! Remember, we can call

upon St. Faustina for intercession! She said, “I feel certain that my mission will not come to an end upon my death, but will begin” (*Diary*, 281). With God’s help and St. Faustina’s intercession, may we be tireless witnesses to His mercy!



SOMETHING TO PONDER

Take time to reflect on St. Faustina’s life and death. She opened her heart fully to accept her mission and did everything necessary to make sure that the Divine Mercy devotion was spread to you and to me. God is counting on all of us to do our part in showing mercy to others and in teaching the devotion of Divine Mercy to others. When St. Faustina struggled under the weight of her sufferings, she made an Act of Trust in Jesus: “Do what You will with me. O Jesus; I will adore You in everything. May Your will be done in me, O my Lord and my God, and I will praise Your infinite mercy.” When we are challenged and weary, we must also trust our dear Lord, who will grant to us every grace we need. Keep praying! Stay very close to Jesus, His Mother Mary, and the saints! Be as selfless as possible in helping all those God has placed in your lives. Smile at the ones who give you trouble! Keep praying and stay attentive.



A MERCIFUL ACTION

Our world is starving for God’s love and mercy. Be the one who gives it freely to those in need. Ask St. Faustina to guide you and to pray for you. Search your heart and pray to stretch yourself more than you have in the past when carrying out your merciful actions. Ask our dear Lord for His help. Do your very best to teach others about Divine Mercy. You can be an important part of getting Jesus’ Divine Mercy to the world — one person at a time.



A PRAYER OF MERCY FOR THIS WEEK

(To be prayed each day this week.)

Dear Merciful Jesus,
help me to pray with greater fervor.
Light a holy spark in me and help me to spread
Your Divine Mercy message everywhere, never
shirking this duty from embarrassment or laziness.
I want to do my best to carry out this devotion
so that others will be enlightened about
Your Divine Mercy.
Mother Mary, please protect me from all
evil and grant to me the graces that I need.
Saint John Paul II, please pray for me.
Saint Faustina, please pray for me.
Jesus, I trust in You!
Amen.



AFTERWORD

I am eternally grateful for the blessing of writing this book, *52 Weeks with St. Faustina*. Throughout my research and writing, I have continually carried a relic of St. Faustina. I have felt and have benefited from her intercession and guidance. It has been a wonderful journey being steeped in Divine Mercy with St. Faustina by my side.

I am not one that goes looking for signs and wonders. I simply try to accept what comes to me at any given moment. But sometimes, certain things seem to jump out at me — certain “coincidences,” even though I don’t believe in coincidences.

There were many fascinating moments that caused me to stop and smile at God. I’ll just share a couple. I’ll start with something I found very interesting. Towards the end of the writing, I had to note the date of a letter that Mother Teresa wrote to me since I had quoted from it. My heart smiled when I noticed the date on the letter. Mother Teresa, who has written 22 letters to me, wrote that particular letter on October 5, 1988. That was exactly 50 years (to the day) after St. Faustina died. In her letter, Mother Teresa ended with these words: “Keep the joy of loving Jesus ever burning in your heart and share this joy with others by your thoughtful love and humble service.” Mother Teresa often spoke about service to others, and here she was, on the anniversary of St. Faustina’s death (now her feast day), encouraging me to serve others. I didn’t realize when I read the letter in 1988 that it would further impact me 30 years later. This can certainly be considered a coincidence. But it makes me smile and take notice. It causes me to offer thanks to God.

During the writing of my book *Our Lady of Fatima: 100*

Years of Stories, Prayers, and Devotions, I wrote about a few compelling experiences in the afterword. One was about a bizarre injury I suffered in which I fractured and bruised my ribs on the right side. I wrote: “On the eve of the anniversary of Our Lady of Fatima, I fractured my ribs and tore a muscle in a bizarre injury at the Hour of Great Mercy. It was a pain and suffering that I have offered up in the writing of this book. My thoughts went immediately to Jesus’ abiding love, graces, and mercy as blood and water gushed forth from His side. As well, Sister Lucia was blessed with a vision of Jesus Crucified in which drops of Precious Blood from His face and a wound in His side fell into a chalice.”

During the writing of this book, I had a bicycle accident (which occurred right after St. Faustina’s and Mother Teresa’s birthdays: August 25 and August 26, respectively) in which my left knee (which smashed hard on the pavement) and ribs (when the bike I was thrown from swung around and pummeled my right side, knocking the wind out of me) were considerably injured. At the scene of the accident, I could barely breathe and couldn’t get up. I continued to pray to Jesus for His help and mercy. Based on my experience of injuring my ribs in 2017, I immediately knew I’d be in for the long haul, since ribs take a long time to heal (about 3 to 4 months). So there I was again with additional pain and suffering to offer up to our dear Lord in finishing the writing of this book.

I strove to follow Our Lady of Fatima’s requests to offer it to God for the love of Him, the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary. During my convalescence, I often thought of Jesus’ Divine Mercy and how He appeared to St. Faustina showing the Image of Divine Mercy, which showed the beautiful rays of Blood and Water that flowed from His Sacred Heart. I offered thanks to God that once again I could offer a pain to Him and asked that He would unite it to Himself.

Another fact I find interesting is that I just happened to turn my manuscript in on April 30, the anniversary of St. Faustina’s canonization on the Feast of Divine Mercy (in

2000, by St. John Paul II). My tired brain did not realize the significance at the time. It's only now become clear to me as I write this.

I first drafted this afterword on the Feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary (September 12, 2018). But I subsequently had a reason to add to it, as you'll see when you read through.

In the autumn of 2018, I led a pilgrimage to the shrines of France and came home to the U.S. quite exhausted. But, by God's grace, I would take a very unexpected trip soon after. It happened that on the following morning, I sprang up in bed — wide awake at 4 a.m. It was October 5, and I was very cognizant of the fact that it was St. Faustina's feast day! Earlier, I had had no intention of making the trip to the National Shrine of Divine Mercy on that day, knowing full well that I would be thoroughly exhausted from getting in just hours before from a strenuous European trip. However, I felt prodded to get up and go. My husband agreed to take me!

On dear St. Faustina's feast day, a number of beautiful things unfolded. First of all, I was able to participate in Holy Mass, Adoration, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, and Benediction on that special day in such a special place. Then, unexpectedly, Marian Press editor Chris Sparks handed to me one of the first advance reader copies of the book you're reading! What a delightful surprise and blessing — to see the fruits of the blood, sweat, and tears of research, prayer, and labor now printed in book form!

Plus, I was blessed to meet Shrine Rector Fr. Anthony Gramlich, MIC, who gave a very special blessing to me and the book, too. It gets even better! In addition to all of the above, I was told that the *imprimi potest* and the *nihil obstat* came in to Marian Press on that very day: the Feast of St. Faustina, October 5, 2018, which you'll see noted on the copyright page of this book. Coincidences? I think not. Our Lord is amazing and very much within the details of our lives!

Summing up, I'd like to say that writing this book was a profound spiritual pilgrimage for me. Meditating upon the teachings of Jesus and Mary to St. Faustina gave me much

reason to really pause and ponder — to let everything sink into my heart — sometimes amid unexpected, but deeply thankful tears. Writing about the saints and pondering the blessed gift of being part of that great Communion of Saints touched my heart profoundly. Quite often, I have thought of you, my dear reader, and I have prayed for you throughout. I believe that I have come a bit closer to understanding some of the beautiful mysteries of God’s abiding love within His unfathomable mercy. In getting to know the humble St. Faustina more intimately, I have become more deeply inspired to be extra faithful in praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet each day at 3 p.m., and in praying additional Divine Mercy Chaplets at other times. I am inspired to strive to pray more for the sick and dying, and for the Holy Souls in Purgatory. Each night, I find myself praying the beautiful and powerful “O Blood and Water” prayer that Jesus taught His Secretary of Divine Mercy. I pray it for my loved ones and for anyone who needs help.

I hope that you will also draw closer to our Lord, and that you too can put forth greater efforts in lovingly and mercifully serving souls through deeds, words, and prayers of mercy. I am sure that I have not even come close to scratching the surface of the profound truths of Divine Mercy in this book, though I pray it helps your heart and soul. There is so much more to the story — so much more to unpack about the unfathomable gift of Divine Mercy. Please read the *Diary* when you can.

Finally, dear reader, let us pray for one another! We are all on this amazing journey that leads to Eternal Life!

Yours in Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,

Donna-Marie Cooper O’Boyle

October 5, 2018

Feast of Saint Faustina

APPENDIX

Saint Faustina's Simple Act of Trust

“Do what You will with me, O Jesus;
I will adore You in everything. May Your will
be done in me, O my Lord and my God,
and I will praise Your infinite mercy.”

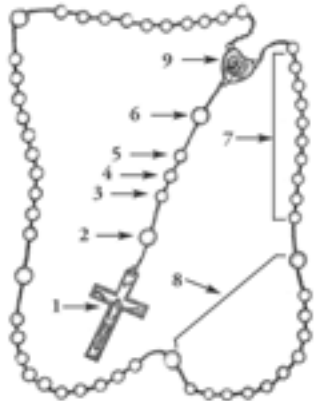
— *Diary*, 78

Divine Mercy Chaplet

The Chaplet of Mercy is recited using ordinary Rosary beads of five decades. At the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, the Chaplet is preceded by two opening prayers from the *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska* and followed by a closing prayer.

How to Pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy

1. Make the Sign of the Cross.
2. Say the optional Opening Prayer.
3. Say the “Our Father.”
4. Say the “Hail Mary.”
5. Say the Apostles’ Creed.
6. Say the “Eternal Father.”
7. Say 10 “For the sake of His sorrowful Passion” on the “Hail Mary” beads.
8. Repeat for four more decades,



saying “Eternal Father” on the “Our Father” bead and then 10 “For the Sake of His sorrowful Passion” on the following “Hail Mary” beads.

9. At the conclusion of the five decades, on the medallion say the “Holy God,” the concluding doxology, three times.
10. Say the optional Closing Prayer.

Prayers of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy

1. The Sign of the Cross: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

2. Opening Prayers (*optional*): You expired, Jesus, but the source of life gushed forth for souls, and the ocean of mercy opened up for the whole world. O Fount of Life, unfathomable Divine Mercy, envelop the whole world and empty Yourself out upon us (*Diary*, 1319).

O Blood and Water, which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fount of mercy for us, I trust in You! (*three times*) (84).

3. The Our Father: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

4. The Hail Mary: Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

5. The Apostles’ Creed: I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from

there he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

6. On the “Our Father” bead before each decade: 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 (476).

7. On the “Hail Mary” beads of each decade: For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

8. Repeat “Eternal Father” and “For the Sake of His sorrowful Passion” (*Numbers 6 & 7*) Prayers for four more decades.

9. After 5 decades, the concluding doxology (*three times*): Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

10. Closing Prayer (*optional*): Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless, and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us, and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments, we might not despair, nor become despondent, but with great confidence, submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy Itself. Amen (950).

The wording of the Apostles’ Creed conforms with the *Roman Missal*.

The Chaplet of Mercy as a Novena

In addition to the Novena to Divine Mercy (see *Diary*, 1209-1229), which our Lord gave to St. Maria Faustina for her own personal use, He revealed to her a powerful prayer that He wanted everyone to say — the Chaplet of Mercy. Saint Faustina prayed the chaplet almost constantly, especially for the dying, and the Lord urged her to encourage others to say it, too, promising extraordinary graces to those who would recite this special prayer.

The chaplet can be said anytime, but the Lord specifically asked that it be recited as a novena, especially on the nine days before the Feast of Mercy. And He promised, “By this Novena (of Chaplets) I will grant every possible grace to souls” (796).

We can pray this Novena of Chaplets for our own personal intentions, or we can offer it together with the Novena to Divine Mercy for the daily intentions dictated by our Lord to St. Faustina.

A Prayer For Divine Mercy

O Greatly Merciful God, Infinite Goodness, today all mankind calls out from the abyss of its misery to Your mercy — to Your compassion, O God; and it is with its mighty voice of misery that it cries out: Gracious God, do not reject the prayer of this earth’s exiles! O Lord, Goodness beyond our understanding, Who are acquainted with our misery through and through and know that by our own power we cannot ascend to You, we implore You, anticipate us with Your grace and keep on increasing Your mercy in us, that we may faithfully do Your holy will all through our life and at death’s hour. Let the omnipotence of Your mercy shield us from the darts of our salvation’s enemies, that we may with confidence, as Your children, await Your final coming — that day known to You alone. And we expect to obtain everything promised us by Jesus in spite of all our wretchedness. For Jesus is our Hope: through His merciful Heart as through an open gate, we pass through to heaven (*Diary*, 1570). Amen.

Saint Faustina’s Praises of Divine Mercy

(*Diary*, 949-950)

Let the doubting soul read these considerations on
Divine Mercy and become trusting.

Divine Mercy, gushing forth from the bosom of the
Father, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, greatest attribute of God, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, incomprehensible mystery, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, fount gushing forth from the mystery of
the Blessed Trinity, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, unfathomed by any intellect, human and
angelic, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, from which wells forth all life and
happiness, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, better than the heavens,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, source of miracles and wonders,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, encompassing the whole universe,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, descending to earth in the Person of the
Incarnate Word, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, which flowed out from the open Wound
of the Heart of Jesus, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, enclosed in the Heart of Jesus for us,
and especially for sinners, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, unfathomed in the institution of the
Sacred Host, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, in the founding of Holy Church,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, in our justification through Jesus Christ,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, accompanying us through our whole life,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, embracing us especially at the hour of
death, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, endowing us with immortal life,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, accompanying us every moment of our
life, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, shielding us from the fire of hell,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, in the conversion of hardened sinners,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, astonishment for Angels,
Incomprehensible to Saints, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, unfathomed in all mysteries of God,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, lifting us out of every misery,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, source of our happiness and joy,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, in calling us forth from nothingness to
existence, I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, embracing all the works of His Hands,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, crown of all of God's handiwork,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, in which we are all immersed,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, sweet relief for anguished hearts,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, only hope of despairing souls,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, repose of hearts, peace amidst fear,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, delight and ecstasy of holy souls,
I trust in You.

Divine Mercy, inspiring hope against hope,
I trust in You.

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence, submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself. Amen (*Diary*, 950).



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About the Author

Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle is a TV host, an international speaker, a pilgrimage and retreat leader, and an award-winning and best-selling author and journalist. She enjoyed a decade-long friendship with St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta and became a lay Missionary of Charity. For many years, her spiritual director was Servant of God John A. Hardon, SJ, who also served as one of Mother Teresa's spiritual directors.

Donna-Marie is the EWTN television host of *Everyday Blessings for Catholic Moms*, *Catholic Mom's Cafe*, and *Feeding Your Family's Soul*. She was invited by the Holy See in 2008 to participate in an international congress for women at the Vatican to mark the 20th anniversary of the apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women)*.

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Perhaps most importantly, Donna-Marie is a Catholic wife, mother, and grandmother.

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and
www.feedingyourfamilyssoul.com
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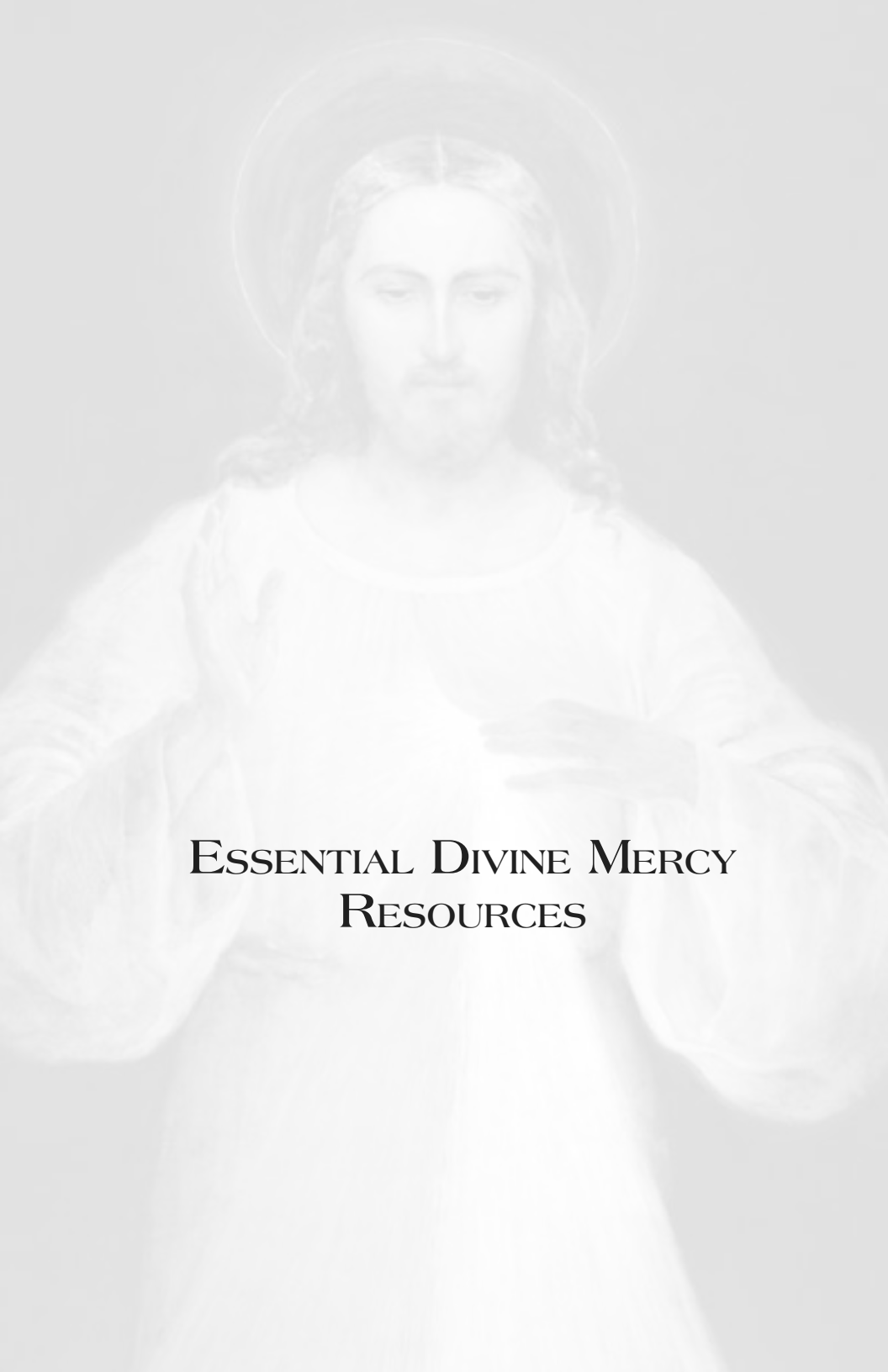
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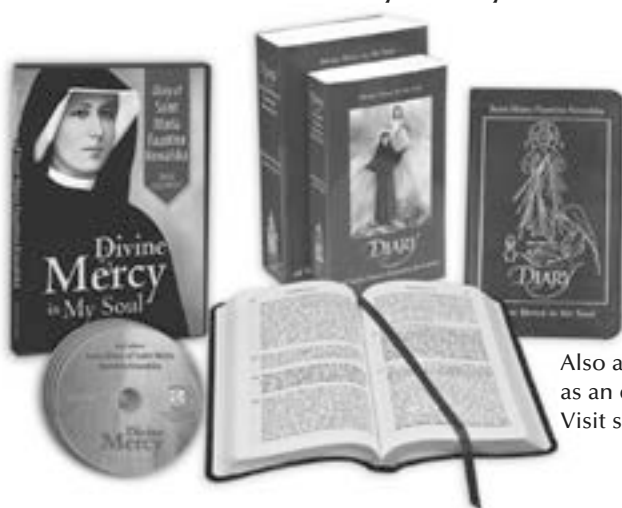
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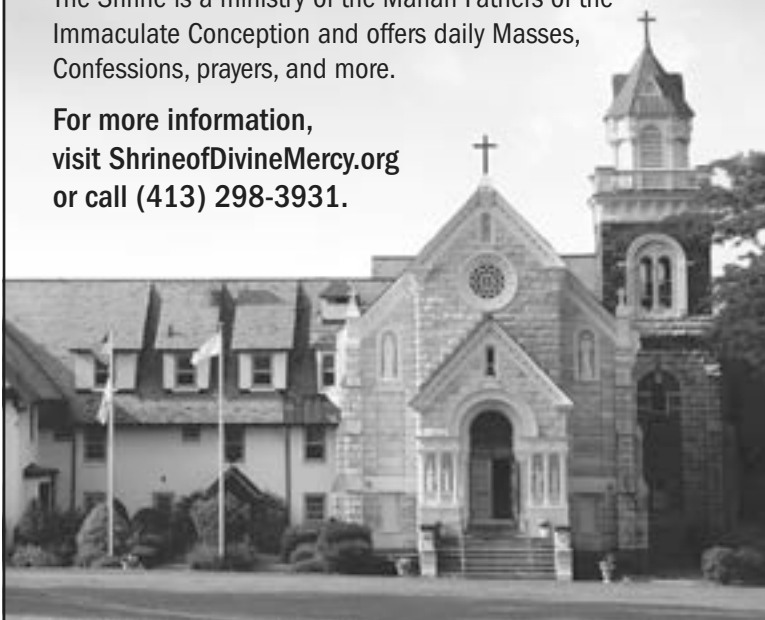
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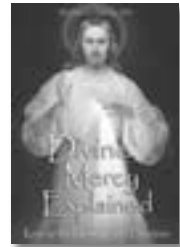
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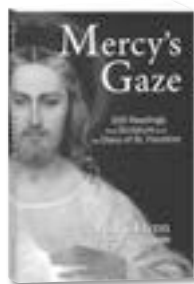
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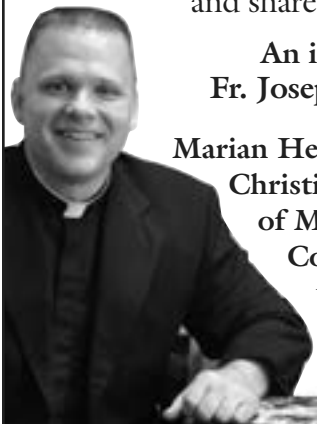
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Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle is a TV host, an international speaker, a pilgrimage and retreat leader, and an award-winning and best-selling author and journalist. Her more than 30 books on faith and family include *Bringing Lent Home with Mother Teresa*; *Feeding Your Family's Soul*; *Dinner Table Spirituality*; and *Catholic Saints Prayer Book*.



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