



Divine Mercy Sunday Homily

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
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Last year I was privileged to travel with a group of young pilgrims to Poland for World Youth Day which was held in Krakow. The experience was rich in many ways, not least because of the depth of faith which was so evident in the young people from our archdiocese who of course joined quite literally millions of other young people from all around the world who had a deep desire to gather together and celebrate their faith in the Lord and in his Church.

As many of you would understand, and perhaps have experienced yourselves, it is impossible to visit Poland, and especially Krakow, without coming to a deeper appreciation of the way in which the Divine Mercy Devotion, and its foundations in the life and experience of St Faustina, have captured the heart of the nation. In a way that is simply not true in many other parts of the world, Divine Mercy is an integral part of the daily life of Catholics, much as the devotion to the Sacred Heart has been, and continues to be, so formative in the lives of older generations of Catholics here in Australia.

The image of Divine Mercy is of course based on a profound spiritual experience of Saint Faustina. In this image the Lord is represented touching his breast, pointing to his Sacred Heart we might say, from which flow rays of light, white and red, which symbolise the water and blood which flowed from the side of Christ as his body was pierced by the soldier's lance. We are invited by those rays to return to Calvary, where Mary and John stand at the foot of the cross, faithful to Jesus to the end, even in the face of the abandonment of Jesus by all the other disciples. As Saint John's gospel tells us, the Lord's dying words, "It is finished", were immediately followed by Jesus bowing his head as he gave up his spirit. It was then that his side was pierced by the lance.

Saint John's gospel is richly symbolic in the particulars of Jesus' death which the gospel offers to us. Mary and John together at the foot of the cross, given to each other by Jesus as mother and son, represent the Church which is always called to be a community of deep faith and courageous discipleship. We are a community which knows that the water of baptism and the blood of the Eucharist, the sources of the Church's life, come to us through the death of Jesus, whose gift of himself on the cross was foreshadowed on the first Holy Thursday. It was at this Last Supper that Jesus gave his body and blood to his disciples under the appearance of bread and wine and told them to do the same in memory of him: to give their own bodies and blood, their own lives, as a gift for the life of the world. This of course is exactly what Mary and John were doing by remaining at the foot of the cross out of love for the Lord, when everyone else had deserted him.

When Saint Faustina received the precious gift of her encounter with Jesus, the Lord told her that the Image of Divine Mercy should be a reminder of the demands of his mercy, because, he said



“even the strongest faith is of no avail without works”. We are here in the Cathedral this afternoon because in the Lord’s mercy and in his providence we have been given the gift of faith. We certainly have not earned it and we might wonder why we have been given it, when we see so many really good people who do not seem to have been given the same gift. The words of Jesus to Saint Faustina can help us to find an answer. We have been given the gift of faith so that, inspired and strengthened by this faith, we might live our faith in practice by making our lives a gift to others just as Jesus has made his life a gift to us. It may well be the Lord’s plan that it is through us that the gift of faith will be offered to others.

This of course is exactly what Jesus is saying to us in today’s Gospel. Appearing to his disciples after his resurrection, just two days after his side had been pierced by the lance and his dead body had been placed in the tomb, Jesus said to them, *“Peace be with you. As the Father sent me so am I sending you”*. In speaking to them as the founding fathers of his Church Jesus was of course speaking through them to all of us who are members of his Church today. Like the first disciples we too are called and sent to be, in the world of our families, our neighbours, our work colleagues, our friends and our society, the living sign that Jesus still walks among his people, still reaches out with compassion to those in need, still offers the gift of forgiveness to those who hurt us, still binds the wounds of those who are suffering, and still, by our words, yes, and even more by our actions, proclaims the Good News that God exists, that God loves his people, and that God never abandons us, even when we might abandon him.

“Even the strongest faith is of no avail without works”. As we celebrate the Feast of Divine Mercy today, and remember the overwhelming mercy of God which makes us cry out in prayer, *“Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world”*, let us remember that it will also be through us that the Lord wishes to grant this prayer: that as we ask for mercy we also commit ourselves to being apostles of mercy, bearers of mercy and living examples of mercy to others.

Each time we contemplate the image of Divine Mercy we express our trust in the Lord – *Jesus, I trust in you*. May we also remember that at the same time Jesus entrusts himself to us. It is through us that the Lord wishes to live in his Church, to live among his people, to live in the world. Like Mary and John may we be found faithful, ready to stand at the foot of the cross so as to be able to enter into the joy of the resurrection.