

My Dear Fellow Priests,

As we prepare to celebrate Our Lord's Resurrection this Easter season, let us keep in mind why we have become other Christ: to save the lost and forgotten.

With this in mind, this year, and every year forthcoming, God willing, we will all try our very best to fulfill our mandate as pastors of souls. We will be using every opportunity to bring the lost sheep back into the fold. I have laid out just what this initiative will entail in the following paragraphs. I am confident that we will continue to see incredible growth in all of our parishes with your effort.

First of all, we must recognize the need to get all Catholics back to the practice of their faith. We have a tremendous opportunity and duty on Easter Sunday to catechize the Easter-only Catholics and invite them back into full participation in the sacramental life of the Church. We cannot let these souls receive Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin, which we know full well is a sacrilege.

Canons 768 and 769 clearly state our responsibilities. It is imperative that we use this opportunity to instruct these souls with a basic catechesis on why they should confess their serious sins before receiving the Eucharist. We will also tell them of the precept of a yearly confession of these sins. We'll do all that is within our power and we will use every available means to achieve our goals.

We should also reach out to those Lapsed Catholics in our areas who no longer attend mass at all. We can do this through every media possible including TV, radio, and newspapers. We also need to reach out and share the good news of the Gospel to those who live within our territory, who are non-believers, as we are called to do in Canon 771.2. The Church has provided everything we need.

We will humbly turn to the Church and follow her direction and we will all be tremendously blessed. Our Lord Jesus reminded us of the need to leave the 99 to get the 1 that was lost, and how much all of Heaven rejoices (Luke 15: 4-7).

The Church has given us a superb opportunity to put these mandates into use. Ever since the Jubilee Year 2000, we have been calling the Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday. Most, if not all, of our parishes have had some type of recognition of this new feastday. With this letter, I want to inform you of the special plenary indulgence and how it fits perfectly into our objectives.

In August of 2002 the Holy See made public a remarkable plenary indulgence for Divine Mercy Sunday that is to remain into perpetuity. The Church, moved by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has mandated special duties for all priests who exercise pastoral ministry. These can be found in the indulgence under the title "Duties of Priests: Inform Parishioners, Hear Confessions, Lead Prayers".

Mindful of the need to catechize the Lapsed Catholics and Non-believers alike, we will use the good news of this special plenary indulgence to attract all souls to partake in this feast. It will matter not if people believe in the authority of the seat of Peter to issue these special opportunities for incredible graces. I want to take this opportunity to recall our promise at our priestly ordination.

There have been some tremendous conversion experiences that have occurred because of this feast. It must be because of these that the Church has mandated that everyone be told about the plenary indulgence. It was Jesus who, through St. Faustina asked the Church to establish this Feast of Mercy on the Sunday after Easter. He promised an outpouring of an ocean of graces to those souls who would go to Confession and then receive Holy Communion on this feast.

The "Duties of Priests" listed in the indulgence decree, indicates 3 main duties: (1) Inform the faithful (of the plenary indulgence) in the most suitable manner; (2) Be prompt and generous in hearing confessions; (3) Lead the prayers for the indulgence after masses (Our Father, Apostles Creed, a prayer for the Pope). There is also a directive to encourage the faithful to practice acts of charity.

These duties will become our lifeline to the souls of poor sinners who are in most need of the Lord's mercy. We must consider the seriousness of the times that we are living. We have only about 25% of Catholics that attend Sunday mass. We have this incredible opportunity and a very serious responsibility to pastor all the souls that live within our territories and we cannot fail at these.

In the following paragraphs (8 simple steps) will be our outline for what we must do to prepare to celebrate Easter as we all should be doing. We must remember that the Easter feast last for eight days, right through to the Octave of Easter, which is Divine Mercy Sunday. How can we expect to celebrate Easter correctly if it doesn't include inviting the faithful to the Octave of Easter with its great gifts?

To see the decrees and for more information go to: www.MercySunday.com .

Outline for the celebration of Easter through the Octave, Divine Mercy Sunday

- (1) Prepare your Easter homily to include words such as these to catechize and invite Easter-only Catholics: *"If you haven't had a chance to make your yearly confession, don't miss out on this great opportunity that is coming up next week, because next Sunday, is our new feast called Divine Mercy Sunday. What our Church is offering next week is called a plenary indulgence and what this means, in very simple terms, is that, if we go to Confession and then receive Holy Communion, we can obtain the complete forgiveness of all sins and all punishment".*
- (2) Use the enclosed two-sided Bulletin Insert in all Easter bulletins. Don't forget to remind everyone before they leave mass that information about the Feast of Divine Mercy can be found in their bulletins. One side of the Bulletin Insert contains information about Divine Mercy Sunday and the other side contains a confession guide.
- (3) Remind those that have already gone to Confession to make room for others who have not gone. Remind them that the Catholic Church allows them about three weeks or 20 days, before or after Divine Mercy Sunday to go to confession.
- (4) Schedule extra time and priests for confessions. Consider doubling your confession time on the Saturday before Divine Mercy Sunday and have all priests available to hear confessions. Be prepared for an onslaught of repentant sinners.
- (5) Place articles in newspapers about your parish celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday and invite all to participate. Include times for confessions for your parish. If there is more than one parish that your area newspapers cover, get together with your neighboring parish to submit the article. Also contact radio and TV stations about it.
- (6) Consider obtaining an image of Divine Mercy to help you with your homily on Divine Mercy Sunday. The image will help people to understand not to fear the Lord, but to trust that He is there to forgive us of our sins and heal us.
- (7) Prepare your homily for Divine Mercy Sunday to focus primarily on the Sacrament of Confession and trust in the Lord that is always in the Gospel for that day. Include the reference to the blood and water, the new birth in the Spirit, and the washing away of sins that are found in the Opening Prayer. Remind everyone of the plenary indulgence available on that day and the need to go to confession.
- (8) On Divine Mercy Sunday, just before the distribution of Communion, lead everyone in the Act of Contrition and remind them of the need to confess their sins as soon as possible, if they have not gone to confession already, to get the forgiveness of sins and punishment that is offered in the plenary indulgence. Keep it simple because many will be in attendance that do not know what an indulgence is.

More information for the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday and pertaining documents can be found at the Vatican website at www.Vatican.va and also at www.DivineMercySunday.com .