

Venerating the Image of Divine Mercy on the Feast of Mercy

A look at the writings of Pope Benedict XVI

Time has proven the correctness of the prophetic writings that Our Lord asked St. Faustina to record for humanity. The Church has recognized that the readings of Second Sunday of Easter were already perfect for a Feast of Mercy and responded by instituting Divine Mercy Sunday, fulfilling His request. With this in mind, let us look at these requests and promises of the Lord as regards to the Divine Mercy image and compare them to the writings of Pope Benedict XVI.

In his book, “The Spirit of the Liturgy”, the Pope dedicated a complete chapter on the Question of Images. This work that was written at the turn of the millennium, is quite prophetic also. In it he takes us through the history of images from the Old Testament to the New and presents to us the reasons why we must use sacred images in our sacred spaces and also for our liturgies. He said that the purpose of the book was to assist the renewal of understanding the liturgy.

After reading this monumental work, one is left with the impression of what the most perfect image would be to assist us in the celebration of Mass. If you have previously read about the image of Divine Mercy in the diary of St. Faustina, and the requests of Our Lord to have the image venerated, especially on the Feast of Mercy, you will see the prophetic nature of the Pope’s writing because they perfectly apply to this image and to the request of the Lord.

It would take a whole other book just to explain how the Pope’s writings correlate perfectly with the Divine Mercy image. It is evident that the Holy Spirit was at work here, for at the time of the writing, Divine Mercy Sunday as the Feast of Mercy had not yet been established.

Let us take some time to look at the different aspects of the Divine Mercy image and see how it perfectly represents all of the important aspects that the Pope said were essential to sacred art that is ordered to what happens in the liturgy and why Jesus wanted the image to be venerated.

Keep in mind that when the Lord told St. Faustina to paint an image of Him as He had shown her, He was directing her to paint an icon. He had told her to paint an “image” according to the “pattern” that she saw. This is very important because we find many aspects of the image of the Divine Mercy that perfectly correlate to the icon that the Pope methodically assembled in this book on the liturgy. There is no other image that could possibly meet all of his criteria.

Keep in mind also, that the Lord requested that the Feast of Mercy be placed directly on the Sunday after Easter, on the Octave of Easter, on the final day of an eight day celebration of Easter. The image of Divine Mercy is a perfect pictorial of what is read in the liturgy on that Octave of Easter. The Gospel spans the 8 days from the Resurrection until the next Sunday on which St. Thomas finally sees Jesus and exclaims his belief in Him. Jesus responds with the need for us to trust in Him, without seeing, and how blessed are those who do trust in Him.

The first part of the Gospel that is read on that Sunday recalls what happened on the night of the Resurrection when Jesus walks into the Upper Room, shows His Apostles His wounds and bestows on them the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins. This is very important. This

institution of the Sacrament of Confession is the Jesus' first action immediately following His sacrificial offering on the Cross and His Resurrection. Three very important things have just occurred: the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the Blood Sacrifice, and the institution of the sacrament of Confession. All of these are perfectly displayed in the Divine Mercy image.

Jesus is pictured as the Risen Lord, showing us His wounds. He is walking towards us, as He was that evening of the Resurrection as He approached the Apostles in the Upper Room. His right hand is raised in blessing and bestowing on us the Holy Spirit. His left hand is opening His garment at the area of His Heart with 2 rays of light emanating outward, one red as blood, the other, pale as water. These 2 rays of light symbolize the Sacraments that He just initiated.

The red ray symbolizes the life-giving Blood in the Holy Eucharist. The pale ray symbolizes the water washing away our sins in Confession. This image of Christ, The Divine Mercy is the most perfect instrument that we have to make our parishioners understand and absorb what the readings of the day are trying to tell us. The lesson of this Sunday, is not only to learn to trust in Jesus, as St. Thomas did, but also to approach our priests in the Sacrament of Confession.

This is an image of the resurrected Lord walking toward us and pleading with us to trust in Him and not be afraid to confess our sins to a representative of Him, whom He has bestowed the power of the Holy Spirit on to forgive sins. The words "Jesus, I trust in You" have great meaning and are an important tool to get people to understand the Gospel. The result will be a blessing as Jesus promised to St. Thomas to those who would believe without seeing Him.

We ourselves, have to learn and trust that Jesus knew what He was doing when He requested that this image be displayed on His Feast of Mercy. For who better to know what His Church needs? Jesus knew full well that His Church would attach a plenary indulgence to this Sunday. He knew that the Church needed a renewal in the understanding of the Octave of Easter, as the "last and greatest day" of the Easter festival. He offers us the most important and valuable gift: a straight ticket to Heaven for those who confess their sins and receive Him in Communion.

In the Pope's book, he paints a picture of the most perfect image that could assist in the liturgy. That image is one of Jesus as the resurrected Lord; showing us His wounds of the Crucifixion; displaying the sacraments (the Church teaches that the Blood and Water that poured from the side of Christ was indeed the sacraments); displaying a message of hope (the words "Jesus, I trust in You" give us great hope); and an image that would lead us to His Second Coming.

I would highly recommend a reading of the Pope's book after reading the diary of St. Faustina. It will open your eyes to God's Providence. You will see why the Image of The Divine Mercy is the most perfect icon that we could ever have. Jesus did say that we could receive graces from the image itself, and why not? Even the Pope said it himself, that such an image, as the Divine Mercy that portrays the sacraments, would actually contain the sacraments within itself.

The underlying theme of Jesus' request for a Feast of Mercy was to prepare the world for His Second Coming, as He related several times to St. Faustina. In a nutshell, Jesus wants us to properly observe and celebrate the Octave of Easter as the greatest day of the Easter feast and to let the world know that He is pouring out His mercy on that day as a last hope of salvation. This is the season and the Church is in great need of renewal and receiving that Divine Mercy.