

Is your parish correctly celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday?

We often hear this term “correctly celebrating” among many people who are involved with organizing Divine Mercy Sunday celebrations in their parishes and in their dioceses.

Although it would be difficult to pinpoint exactly what a “correct” celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday would look like, we know that from Vatican documents and from what Jesus Himself asked for, that there are many guidelines to form a very good idea of what it should contain.

First of all, because Pope John Paul II said that he had fulfilled the will of Christ by instituting this Feast of Divine Mercy, we should look at what Christ said about the celebration of this Feast of Mercy. Many might be surprised at what He didn’t ask for on that feast day.

Many parishes have focused on organizing what has been referred to as “parties for devotees”. These types of devotional parties, which usually only devotees attend, have actually been the cause of many priests being turned away from having anything to do with celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday. Devotees usually demand that priests have separate Masses around 3 pm, have adoration, have the recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, or a combination of all of these.

Jesus never asked for any of these for the Feast of Mercy. Jesus gave the instructions for the feast to Saint Faustina and she faithfully recorded them in her diary. Jesus said that “*the Feast of Mercy was a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners*” (Diary 699). Jesus never asked us to recite the Chaplet on the Feast of Mercy. He never asked for separate Masses on the Feast of Mercy. He never asked for adoration at 3 pm on the Feast of Mercy.

So what did Jesus ask us to do? That can be found in diary entry # 206. Jesus said “*On the day of My feast, the Feast of Mercy, you will go through the whole world and bring fainting souls to the spring of My mercy. I shall heal and strengthen them*”. Notice that Jesus was trying to get us to “go” out, not stay “in” and have some type of party for devotees. The focus should always be put on evangelizing poor sinners, not on organizing devotional parties.

Jesus said that the loss of each soul plunges Him into mortal sadness (Diary 1397). If we don’t do our very best to “go” out and evangelize poor sinners, inviting them to the feast, then we are not really helping Jesus with His deepest desire to save these poor sinners. Adoration is good, the Chaplet is good, but on the Feast of Mercy don’t you think that Jesus would rather have us focus on trying to get the worst of sinners to His feast so that He can heal and strengthen them?

How about all of those Easter-only Catholics? Are we making sure that they get invited to come to Mass on the following Sunday? Are we encouraging them to go to Confession, if they haven’t gone already, to prepare for the feast? Are we reaching out to all of the other lukewarm and fallen-away Catholics that haven’t been to Mass in a long time by newspaper ads, radio and TV ads, door to door evangelization, the internet, and any other types of media?

If Jesus said that the Feast of Mercy would one day be the last hope of salvation, don’t you think that we should do the very best to reach out to the whole world before it’s too late? We need to get serious about the salvation of our families, neighbors, friends, and actually all souls, including everyone that lives within our parish or diocesan territorial borders.

OK, secondly, what does the Vatican have to say about a “correct” celebration? This can be found in the decree for the special Plenary Indulgence for Divine Mercy Sunday. The last paragraph is entitled “*Duty of priests: inform parishioners, hear confessions, lead prayers*”. These duties of priests are further clarified in the paragraph, but generally instruct priests to tell souls about the special plenary indulgence, to be generous in hearing confessions, and to lead the recitation of the indulgence prayers after all of the Masses and other liturgies on that day.

If priests follow these simple duties faithfully, they will find that many souls will return to the practice of their faith. Priests will recognize the incredible graces that are available on Divine Mercy Sunday. They will be energized and encouraged in their priesthood from the very good confessions that they are hearing and they will no longer shy away from talking about the feast.

We need to recognize that this Feast of Mercy is God’s great gift to humanity in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus. We need to recognize that this Feast of Mercy is a modern-day Feast of Atonement, just like in the Old Testament. We need to recognize that this Feast of Mercy is an annual preparation for the Judgment, just like the Feast of Atonement was.

The readings for this Octave Sunday of Easter did not change when Divine Mercy Sunday was instituted. They were already perfect for a Feast of Mercy. Providently, the Gospel is always the same for this day, (John 20:19-31) is about the institution of the Sacrament of Confession and about trusting in Jesus. And the Responsorial Psalm is always about the Lord’s mercy.

Jesus surely knew what He was doing when He also requested that the Image of Divine Mercy be solemnly blessed and venerated on that day. The two rays of light, one red, the other, pale like water, represent the Sacraments of Communion and Confession, the two requirements to receive the plenary indulgence. What better way to reinforce the day’s Gospel account of the institution of Confession when Jesus breathes on the Apostles the power to forgive sins?

We can’t forget the words “Jesus, I trust in You” on the image that helps us to remember to trust in Jesus, as recalled in the Gospel incident with St. Thomas finally seeing Jesus. The image is of the Resurrected Christ walking into the Upper Room, showing the Apostles His wounds and bestowing on them the power of the Holy Spirit to forgive sins. The image perfectly portrays every point that we are trying to get our parishioners to understand.

So what would a “correct” celebration look like? Let’s start with a good resolution to do the very best that we can to help Jesus save every soul possible. Let’s do everything within our power to alleviate the pain and sorrow that He experiences when souls are lost. Let’s focus on reaching out to poor sinners, those Easter-only and fallen-away Catholics, the “fainting souls” and invite them to the Feast of Mercy. Let’s use every form of media possible. Let’s go door to door. Let’s tell everyone about the great gift that is available on Divine Mercy Sunday!

Consider using our [Bulletin Insert](#) with the [Confession Guide](#) on the back in all of the Easter Sunday bulletins. Give all of the Priests and Bishops that you know this celebration guide: “[How to Celebrate Mercy Sunday](#)”. Be sure to check out the other resources on our website: www.DivineMercySunday.com including the “[Sample New Stories](#)” and “[Recent Articles](#)”.

But most of all, remember that the Feast of Mercy is a “refuge for sinners” not a “party for devotees”. Focus all of your energy on helping Jesus to save souls. You won’t go wrong.