

Vatican Redefines Divine Mercy Sunday

The USCCB's (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) Office of Divine Worship has just published the final changes to the Third Edition of the Roman Missal which includes the liturgical title name change for Divine Mercy Sunday. The title change, which followed the reception of the final text from the Holy See, will now read as follows: "Second Sunday of Easter (or Sunday of Divine Mercy)".

At first glance, many will not notice much change, but the rearrangement of the words is very significant. The Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments were receiving many petitions for a clarification of the original Latin text in the Apostolic Decree establishing the Second Sunday of Easter as the Sunday of Divine Mercy. Many mistakenly thought that there were 2 different types of celebrations for the same Sunday.

The Congregation for Divine Worship had originally translated the Latin text to read "Second Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday". This was not correct, leading many priests to fail to correctly celebrate the feast and to make known the special plenary indulgence that is part of the preparation for the proper celebration as laid out in the instructions for the duties of priests.

In fact, it was the original intention of the Holy See just to add to the previous title, which was the "Second Sunday of Easter", the words "or of Divine Mercy", meaning that the Sunday after Easter was indeed a special Sunday where we can all receive Divine Mercy in great abundance.

The Holy See must have retained the words "the Second Sunday of Easter" in the title for us to remember where the Sunday of Divine Mercy was placed. They never meant for the clergy to consider that there were 2 different feasts to be celebrated. Those in the know understood this well, but there were many that did not comprehend and the word (or) that was in the middle of the title was very perplexing to them and left many of them scratching their heads.

Adding to this confusion, were the very many misled Divine Mercy devotees that were telling priests what they erroneously thought they must do to correctly celebrate the Feast of Mercy that Jesus requested in the diary of St. Faustina. Our Lord never asked for afternoon devotions that are very common today, but instead wanted us to focus on reaching out to what He called "fainting souls" and to bring them to the Feast of His Mercy to heal and strengthen them.

None of the Apostolic Decrees establishing the Sunday of Divine Mercy or the subsequent Plenary Indulgence for Divine Mercy Sunday had any mention of the prophetic revelations that were given to the Church through St. Faustina. The Church recognized the hand of God in the revelations and acted on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to establish a feast on the Sunday after Easter, but only after she had first observed that the readings for that day were already perfect.

To understand the whole concept of a great feast celebrated on the Sunday after Easter, it is necessary to understand the meaning of octaves. In the Old Testament, there were many feasts that lasted for 8 days, including the Feast of Tabernacles specially noted in St. John's Gospel (Jn 7:37-38). The last day was always considered the greatest day, or as a sort of grand finale. The Church had formerly observed many octaves (8 day celebrations) in her earlier days for major feast, but had lost the emphasis of octaves over the years. The Church now observes only 2 octaves, Christmas and Easter, but certainly the greater of these two feasts is Easter.

We have 3 great Doctors of the Church that taught that the last day of an octave celebration, was not only as great as the first day, but actually offered something even greater. Just think of modern day festivals or carnivals that offer the grand prize on the last day. The opening day is always great, but the final day always offers something special. For the Easter feast, the grand opening is absolutely the very best, but it doesn't end there. The 8th day, the Octave of Easter offers the very best grand prize of all, a straight ticket to Heaven for those who partake in it.

We all have to get back into the “swing of things” and start celebrating Easter like it should be celebrated for a full 8 days. Easter doesn't climax until the following Sunday evening. Today, there is a great need for celebrating for a full 8 days, as we should be doing, and there exist a great opportunity for us to invite the Easter-only Catholics into full participation in the faith. The offer of a plenary indulgence gives us the perfect tool to get these souls to come home.

We are supposed to be celebrating all week long, inviting others to join in the celebration. By adding the Sunday of Divine Mercy to the calendar, we now have the fulfillment of a grand octave celebration, for the greatest and the most important feast of all, the feast of Easter.

This is not a new concept; the Church has always taught this. If you look at the readings for every day of the week between Easter and the Octave of Easter, you will see that the Gloria is recited, just like on Sundays. The Church considers every one of those 8 days, the greatest type of feast, a solemnity. So it is like celebrating a whole week of Sundays all together!

So why shouldn't we be celebrating for the entire 8 days with great enthusiasm, especially when that final day, the grand finale, offers to penitents the complete forgiveness of all sins and punishment? Many have wrongly commented that the celebration of Mercy Sunday was taking away from Easter, but the opposite is true: if you don't celebrate the Octave of Easter, you are definitely missing out on the greatest Easter gift that the Lord wants to pour out on us.

Pope John Paul had indicated that he had fulfilled the will of Christ by instituting the Feast of Divine Mercy, but he never pushed for it as some might believe. He prayed and waited for the Holy Spirit to act, but never acted without His guidance. He established the Sunday of Divine Mercy because the Church was in great need of a feast that would create a renewed awakening, a renewed understanding and an appreciation of the great Octave of Easter and its great gifts.

Anyone remarking that the Holy Father was in error by establishing this feast on the very day that Jesus requested, is in very serious error themselves. By God's providence, he died on the vigil of Divine Mercy Sunday. By God's providence, he will be beatified on the feast. This is most definitely a sign from God that indeed, Pope John Paul II had fulfilled the will of Christ.

We have to wake up and smell the coffee. The Lord has given us this great feast of mercy to give us everything that we need to restore the Church. Just consider what would happen if all of the Easter-only Catholics would come back to the practice of their faith? We would not see any church closings. Then consider going out and inviting all of the fallen-away Catholics to come back to the practice of their faith and telling them about the special Plenary Indulgence.

Pastors are not supposed to be “aquarium watchers” but “fishers of men”. They are called to go out and evangelize and to preach the Good News to all, including non-believers as is stated in Canon Law 771.2. What better Good News could there be then a straight ticket to Heaven?

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