

# *Apostles of Divine Mercy*

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## *Open Letter to Bishops/Priests*

Dear Apostles of our times,

What a wonderful gift and opportunity that we have during the Easter season to share with everyone the good news of salvation. The greatest of these opportunities presents itself on Easter Sunday when the pews are usually overflowing with many people who do not take advantage of God's incredible mercy. We need to rekindle the hearts of these lukewarm Catholics and urge them to become faithful again and to receive pardon for their sins.

There is a way, I believe, that can be used to melt those hardened hearts and to bring them into full communion with the Church. We have an incredible opportunity, each and every year, to win back many souls in countless numbers. Truly Easter is the most fitting time to rejoice in seeing all the lost sheep being brought back into the fold by the miracle of God's mercy. Divine Mercy Sunday offers us a wonderful opportunity to bring this to fruition.

### **Can this feast really work to save souls?**

Many of us have wondered why Jesus requested that His Feast of Mercy be celebrated on the Sunday right after Easter. When you think about it, it really does sound like a brilliant idea. Our parishes are usually so full on Easter, but the following Sunday they are usually back to the sad low attendance numbers. Doesn't it make good sense to have an attractive feast on that next Sunday? Wouldn't it be nice to see everybody come back to mass every week?

How about if everyone was offered something very special? Something so special that no one would be able to refuse. The **Plenary Indulgence for Divine Mercy Sunday** that the Church issued could be just the enticement that these lukewarm souls need. I believe that if we broadcast the good news of this to every Catholic, through every possible means, we could see quite a large number of conversions and people returning to the practice of their faith. The Church must have issued this special plenary indulgence just for this purpose.

The Church brought about what Pope John Paul II called "the fulfillment of the will of Christ". He was speaking about the Feast of Divine Mercy, which has been named Divine Mercy Sunday. Although he instituted this feast, he still felt the urgent need to issue a very special plenary indulgence to exhibit the importance of this Sunday and to give everyone the chance to receive God's grace that the Paschal sacrifice of Christ is making available to all. By God's Providence, the Pope passed on to Heaven on the vigil of Divine Mercy Sunday!

## **The promises of Christ and the plenary indulgence**

It is no surprise that the prophetic revelations that were given to St. Faustina influenced the Church's decision to add the plenary indulgence to Divine Mercy Sunday. Jesus not only requested this Feast of Mercy and designated that particular day, but He also promised to pour out a whole ocean of graces on that day. Jesus promised the total forgiveness of sins and punishment for a soul that would go to Confession and then receive Holy Communion.

The official Vatican explanation of the Feast of Mercy is as follows: *According to Jesus, the Feast of Mercy is to be celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. Jesus is showing to us the close connection between the Easter mystery of man's redemption and this feast. The Feast of Mercy is to be not only a day designated for the worship of God's mercy, but also a day of grace for all people, particularly for sinners. Jesus attached great promises to this feast. One is the promise of complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. In other words, this grace is equal to the one we receive in the sacrament of baptism. It offers a completely new beginning. The image is to be blessed and venerated on Divine Mercy Sunday.*

The Church, most likely, very anxious to tell the faithful about the incredible promises of Jesus, issued the special plenary indulgence that came with very specific duties for priests. Here are the exact words in the last paragraphs of the indulgence directed to parish priests:

### ***Duty of priests: inform parishioners, hear confessions, lead prayers***

Priests who exercise pastoral ministry, especially parish priests, should inform the faithful in the most suitable way of the Church's salutary provision (the special plenary indulgence for Divine Mercy Sunday). They should promptly and generously be willing to hear their confessions. On Divine Mercy Sunday, after celebrating Mass or Vespers, or during devotions in honour of Divine Mercy, with the dignity that is in accord with the rite, they should lead the recitation of the prayers that have been given above. Finally, since "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt 5,7), when they instruct their people, priests should gently encourage the faithful to practice works of charity or mercy as often as they can, following the example of, and in obeying the commandment of Jesus Christ, as is listed for the second general concession of indulgence in the "*Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*".

It is quite evident that the Vatican is leaving little doubt of the seriousness of the matter. Christ has given us this feast as a last hope of salvation. We have a very serious epidemic with only about 25% of Catholics attending Sunday mass. This leaves about 75% in very grave sin. About 50% of these poor souls will show up on Easter Sunday. Can we afford to let this large group leave our church without any catechetical instruction to save their souls?

Do we not have the responsibility, given to us, to guide these souls away from the eternal fires of Hell and into the arms of our Savior? Canon 767.1, 769, 773, 776, 777.1, 777.5, and 779 clearly indicate the role of priests in catechizing, including during the homilies. I know of no better time than on Easter Sunday. Will we not be held accountable when we stand before the Lord at our judgment for each and every soul that has been entrusted to us?

## **Confessions, Confessions and more Confessions**

Pope John Paul recognized the need to constantly remind priests to encourage the faithful to frequent the Sacrament of Confession. Today we see so many receiving Communion in the state of mortal sin, especially after being absent from regular Sunday Mass attendance for decades. These poor souls are bringing condemnation upon themselves every time they go to receive Communion and this is happening right under our noses and with our knowledge.

From a survey done in 1997, we can surmise that about less than 10% of Catholics actually confess their sins on a yearly basis, to fulfill one of the basic precepts of the Church. When one considers the amount of Easter-only Catholics that are in attendance on Easter, we can see an immense opportunity, in an act of great mercy, to catechize these souls about going to Confession before receiving Holy Communion, and to tell these poor souls about the graces that are available for them through the participation in that very special plenary indulgence.

### **How could we preach about this on Easter?**

Perhaps a charitable way to tell everyone about the plenary indulgence and gently remind them of the precept of yearly confessing their sins is to say something like the following:

*“If you haven’t had a chance to make your yearly confession, don’t miss out on this great opportunity 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 simple terms, is that, if we go to Confession and receive Holy Communion, we can obtain the total forgiveness of all sins and punishment”. That means we would go straight to Heaven!*

To ease people’s fears to enter the confessional, we could say these incredible words that Jesus told St. Faustina to remind her that He is in the confessional, just waiting there for us:

*“When you approach the confessional, know this, that I Myself am waiting there for you. I am only hidden by the priest, but I Myself act in your soul. Here the misery of the soul meets the God of mercy. Make your confession before Me. The person of the priest is, for Me, only a screen. Never analyze what sort of a priest it is that I am making use of; open your soul in confession as you would to Me, and I will fill it with My light. Every time you go to confession, immerse yourself entirely in My mercy with great trust, so that I may pour the bounty of My grace upon your soul. Tell souls that from this fount of mercy souls draw graces solely with the vessel of trust. If there trust is great, there is no limit to my generosity. Tell sinners that I am always waiting for them, that I listen intently to the beating of their heart...when will it beat for me”? (from the Diary entry 1602, 1725, 1728)*

Jesus also made a special promise to help priests in their preaching to save sinners, Our Lord said: ***“Tell My priests that hardened sinners will repent on hearing their words when they speak about My unfathomable mercy, about the compassion I have for them in My Heart. To priests who proclaim and extol My mercy, I will give wondrous power; I will anoint their words and touch the hearts of those to whom they will speak.”*** (Diary, 1521)

I know what its like to be on the outside, and looking in. I was away from the Church for twenty-five years. I was shown my sins, came back, but didn't go to Confession for three more years. It was only when I heard about the promise of Jesus did I make my Confession. Many are in the same boat that I was in, living in misery because of sin. Share with them the incredible mercy of God, especially on Easter Sunday when the attendance is at its greatest.

### **What to preach about on Divine Mercy Sunday**

As usual, focus on the readings for that day because they already relate to **the mercy of God**. That is why the official Vatican decree states: *“the prescribed texts assigned for that day... are always to be used.”* The Opening Prayer speaks of the Blood and Water that are both portrayed in the image, and about a “new birth”. The “Blood” ray signifies Communion and the “Water” ray can signify Baptism and Confession. The Gospel has always been about the institution of Confession in the Upper Room and about trusting in Jesus “without seeing” in the narration of Thomas finally seeing Jesus on that very first “Divine Mercy Sunday”.

It is no wonder why Jesus wanted His Divine Mercy Image painted with all the particulars and then gave the instructions that the image is to be venerated and solemnly blessed on His Feast of Mercy. The image actually helps to bring about the understanding of the readings and themes for that Octave of Easter. Even the words **“Jesus, I trust in You”** helps us to relate to what Jesus said to Thomas ***“Blessed are those who have not seen and believe”***.

St. Augustine, St. Gregory, and St. Thomas Aquinas all taught about the importance of the “octave day of a feast”. The octave (meaning the eighth day) is always considered as the “Grand Finale” of sorts. Even in our world today, the last day of a festival is always when the grand prizes are drawn. Easter is the “Grand Opening” and the Octave of Easter is the “Grand Finale” where we receive “grand graces” of the forgiveness of sin and punishment!

### **Canon 771.2, Evangelizing non-believers**

I refer to this canon because the fallen-away Catholics are, at this point, by not attending any services at all, essentially non-believers. If they believed at all, they would make some kind of attempt to go to mass. These poor souls need to hear the Good News about it too. It is important that we use every means possible to get everyone back to practicing their faith.

Some have forgotten the importance of having a healthy “fear of the Lord”, which is *“the beginning of wisdom”* and as it is written in Proverbs *“The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied.”* People who do not have the fear of the Lord are not content with themselves. All of the Easter-only Catholics are living in misery, and if they perish in the state of mortal sin, without repenting, they will perish for all eternity.

Some are afraid of offending Easter-only Catholics. If they end up in hell, they will most definitely be offended, and for a very very long time! Don't let anyone walk out of church on Easter Sunday without a thorough understanding of the consequences of them dying in the state of mortal sin. Tell them all about the incredible mercy of God that is available to

them in a very special way if they go to Confession and then receive Holy Communion on Divine Mercy Sunday and don't forget to tell them to tell all of their friends and family too.

For those who have difficulty believing that God would only pour down these incredible graces on just one day every year, please look into the Old Testament "Day of Atonement", which was an annual feast where sins were forgiven. For those who haven't confessed and want to receive on Mercy Sunday, you can lead them in a "Perfect Act of Contrition" then urge them to go to Confession as soon as possible, which you might offer on that Sunday.

It is truly a "refuge for sinners". Jesus said ***"I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of My mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment."*** (Diary 699)

Most of the effort for celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday must be directed towards getting all the Fallen-away and Easter-only Catholics back to the practice of their faith. Use media of every type including television, radio, and newspapers. Our Lord Jesus came for sinners. We must focus on saving all the lost and wandering souls on this day. Jesus told Saint Faustina ***"The loss of each soul plunges Me into mortal sadness"***. (1397) Help Him save souls, ***"Oh if sinners knew My mercy, they would not perish in such great numbers. Tell sinful souls not to be afraid to approach Me; speak to them of My great mercy" "I desire that priests proclaim this great mercy of Mine ... The flames of mercy are burning Me, clamoring to be spent; I want to pour them out upon these souls"*** (1396, 50) ***The greatest sinners would achieve great sanctity, if only they would trust in My mercy"*** (1784) ***[Let] the greatest sinners place their trust in My mercy. They have the right before others.*** (1146).

How can we go wrong? Jesus is not only promising to help priests in reaching poor sinners by giving them "wondrous power", but Our Lord is also promising that the worst of sinners will receive the greatest graces necessary for the greatest sanctification and re-birth into life.

I would like to end with a clarification of the allotted time for Confession to obtain the indulgence. The Apostolic Penitentiary at the Vatican has indicated that we have about 3 weeks or 20 days, before or after Divine Mercy Sunday to make the required Confession.

There's nothing that better affirms the dignity of the priesthood than to hear the confessions of people who have not confessed in a long time. This is another gift of the Feast of Mercy.

Please visit our website [www.DivineMercySunday.com](http://www.DivineMercySunday.com) . We have bulletin inserts, images, Easter and Mercy Sunday homilies, instructional DVDs on how and why to celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday, sample newspaper articles to attract Fallen-away Catholics and much more.

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus for all souls,

Robert R. Allard, Director