

## Afterword

### A Mother's Plea: Journey Into the Light by Fr. S. Seraphim Michalenko, MIC

For over 20 years, I had the privilege of being the vice-postulator for the canonization cause of the first saint of this new millennium, St. Maria Faustina Kowalska. In light of my familiarity with the urgent message of The Divine Mercy that God entrusted to this saint, Father Anthony Buś, the author of *A Mother's Plea*, requested that I serve as a theological advisor in his mission to respond to what he perceives to be Our Lady's call to build the Sanctuary of The Divine Mercy at St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish in Chicago.

In an effort to evaluate the authenticity of this mission, I read *A Mother's Plea* and discovered fascinating parallels between the story that has been unfolding in this inner-city parish and St. Faustina's perseverance in receiving and spreading the message of The Divine Mercy throughout the world. I believe that these parallels or connections are signs of God's providence that can encourage each of us -- even as we experience difficulties -- to see Jesus, The Divine Mercy, and His mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, very much alive in our lives and our world. Readers of these reflections should be prepared for a life-changing encounter with the living God.

#### This is God's Work, Not Ours

After the sacred image of Jesus, The Divine Mercy -- revealed in a vision to St. Maria Faustina Kowalska on February 22, 1931, in the city of Plock, Poland -- was finally painted by June of 1934, it was hidden in the corner of a dim cloister corridor. Yet the Lord repeatedly insisted to Sr. Faustina, the "Secretary of My Divine Mercy," that it be blessed and solemnly exposed for public veneration.

It was nine months before that request was fulfilled on a single occasion at the three-day celebration of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption in 1935. The image of The Divine Mercy was unveiled, blessed, and exposed for public veneration at the celebration of the Mass concluding the Octave of Easter in this Jubilee Year at the famous Shrine of The Mother of Mercy of the Dawn Gate in Vilnius (then in Poland and now the capital of Lithuania). Sadly, however, after the celebration, the sacred image was returned to the cloister corridor -- and hung up, face to the wall!

During one of the sermons preached on that occasion by her spiritual director, Sr. Faustina was greatly overcome by the many sinners who were sincerely repenting, placing their trust in God's mercy, and confessing their sins at the sight of the image. Further, she saw how many demons were fleeing from their hearts and souls.

While St. Faustina was hurrying back to the convent after the celebration, the demons, in the form of evil people, attacked her, threw her into the gutter, and beat her up. They angrily reproached her for ruining, in one night, their labor of many years. On seeing her returning in such a horrible condition, the Sisters at the convent

pleaded for an explanation. Her response was: "The Lord God is being so greatly offended, and people couldn't care less about His mercy, and so deserve punishment. I am greatly suffering on account of this, and I deeply sympathize with those chosen by God who received revelations."

As I immerse myself in these reflections of an inner-city parish priest, of whom our Blessed Mother is demanding a very similar commitment -- and as I follow, and take part in, his efforts to realize her will -- I, too, greatly sympathize with him. The vicissitudes undergone during the unfolding of God's projects are often challenging. Were we to ask Our Lord and Our Lady (as Sr. Faustina did) why one must go through so many obstacles and put up with so many and such great difficulties in the fulfillment of their requests for the good of souls, most likely we would receive the answer they gave her: That it be evident this is God's work, not ours.

### Fidelity to God's Grace

The second parallel between these two stories became obvious to me as I recalled an important lesson St. Faustina learned well and recorded in her spiritual Diary in this illuminating entry from October, 1936:

The Lord said to me today: Go to the Superior and tell her that I want all the Sisters and wards [the women and girls the Sisters ministered to] to say the chaplet, which I have taught you. They are to say it for nine days in the chapel in order to appease My Father and to entreat God's mercy for Poland.

I answered the Lord that I would tell her, but that I must first speak about this with [the] Father [confessor], and I resolved that as soon as the Father comes I will speak to him at once about this matter. When Father arrived, the circumstances were such that they prevented me from seeing him, but I should not have paid any attention to the circumstances and should have gone and settled the matter. I thought to myself, "Well, I'll do it when he comes again."

Oh, how much that displeased God! In one moment, the presence of God left me, that great presence of God, which is continuously within me in a distinctly felt way. At that moment, however, it completely left me. Darkness dominated my soul to such an extent that I did not know whether I was in the state of grace or not. Therefore, I did not receive Holy Communion for four days, after which I saw [the] Father [confessor] and told him everything. He comforted me, saying, "You have not lost the grace of God, but, all the same, be true to Him."

The moment I left the confessional, God's presence enveloped me as before. I understood that God's grace must be received just as God sends it, in the way He wants, and one must receive it in that form under which God sends it to us.

O my Jesus, I am making at this very moment a firm and eternal resolution, by virtue of Your grace and mercy, of fidelity to the tiniest grace of yours (Diary of St. Faustina, 714-716).

I don't know whether Fr. Anthony is aware of these passages from St. Maria Faustina's Diary, but I know that he is not swerving from fidelity to what he is convinced is A Mother's Plea.

### The Light of Faith

Another palpable connection between these stories was the prophetic tone found in both Sr. Faustina's writings and Fr. Anthony's reflections. Both of these writings advise the reader to be attentive to the signs of the times. In Matthew's gospel, Our Lord complains that "You know how to read the face of the sky, but you cannot read the signs of the times" (Mt 16:3). Prompted by this complaint, Our Lord wept over the Great King's city with this lament:

Jerusalem! Jerusalem! Killer of the prophets! Stoner of those who were sent to you! How often I wanted to gather together your children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings -- and you would not! (Lk 13:34).

The role of prophecy in the Church was clearly explained by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger on the occasion of the presentation to the world of The Third Secret of Fatima:

The Apostle [Paul] says: "Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything, holding fast to what is good" (1 Thess 5: 19-21). In every age the Church has received the charism of prophecy, which must be scrutinized but not scorned. On this point, it should be kept in mind that prophecy in the biblical sense does not mean to predict the future but to explain the will of God for the present, and therefore show the right path to take for the future.

The prophetic word is a warning or a consolation, or both together. In this sense there is a link between the charism of prophecy and the category of "the signs of the times," which Vatican II brought to light anew: "You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; why, then, do you not know how to interpret the present time?" (Lk 12:56). In this saying of Jesus, the "signs of the times" must be understood as Jesus Himself. To interpret the signs of the times in the light of faith means to recognize the presence of Christ in every age. In the private revelations approved by the Church this is the point: they help us to understand the signs of the times and to respond to them rightly in faith (The Message of Fatima, Theological Commentary, Public Revelation and Private Revelations -- Their Theological Status; Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, © 2000, p. 36).

*A Mother's Plea*, as with St. Maria Faustina Kowalska's revelations of The Divine Mercy, must also be understood as "the signs of the times" for this Third Millennium. In his homily on the occasion of St. Faustina's canonization the Holy Father, John Paul II, declared:

Sister Faustina's canonization has a particular eloquence: By this act I intend today to pass this message on to the new millennium. I pass it on to all people, so that they will learn to know ever better the true face of God and the true face of their brethren.

Saint Faustina's private revelations about Jesus, The Divine Mercy, are, therefore, a prophetic message to the Church and the world for our times. The canonization of the bearer of that message is the Church's stamp of approval as to their divinely supernatural origin and authenticity. The Pope's following declaration on that occasion, I believe, is its highest endorsement:

Today my joy is truly great in presenting the life and witness of Sr. Faustina Kowalska to the whole Church as a gift of God for our time. By Divine Providence, the life of this humble daughter of Poland was completely linked with the history of the 20th century, the century we have just left behind. In fact, it was between the First and Second World Wars that Christ entrusted His message of mercy to her. Those who remember, who were witnesses and participants in the events of those years and the horrible sufferings they caused for millions of people, know well how necessary was the message of mercy.

Jesus told Sr. Faustina: "Humanity will not find peace until it turns trustfully to Divine Mercy" (Diary, 300). Through the work of the Polish religious, this message has become linked forever to the 20th century, the last of the second millennium and the bridge to the third. It is not a new message but can be considered a gift of special enlightenment that helps us to relive the Gospel of Easter more intensely, to offer it as a ray of light to the men and women of our time.

What will the years ahead bring us? What will man's future on earth be like? We are not given to know. However, it is certain that in addition to new progress there will unfortunately be no lack of painful experiences. But the light of Divine Mercy, which the Lord in a way wished to return to the world through Sr. Faustina's charism, will illumine the way for the men and women of the third millennium.

### The Spark of The Divine Mercy

Through the life of St. Faustina, the light of Divine Mercy has been slowly spreading throughout the world to give hope to humanity in our time. At the consecration of The Divine Mercy Basilica near the resting place of St. Faustina's mortal remains in Poland, the Holy Father, referring to a statement made by Our Lord as recorded in St. Faustina's Diary, boldly asserted:

Today, therefore, in this Shrine, I wish solemnly to entrust the world to Divine Mercy. I do so with the burning desire that the message of God's merciful love, proclaimed here through Saint Faustina, may be made known to all the peoples of the earth and fill their hearts with hope. May this message radiate from this place to our beloved homeland and throughout the world. May the binding promise of the Lord Jesus be fulfilled: From here there must go forth "the spark which will prepare the world for His final coming" (cf. Diary, 1732).

This spark needs to be lighted by the grace of God. This fire of mercy needs to be passed on to the world. In the mercy of God the world will find peace and mankind will find happiness! I entrust this task to you, dear Brothers and Sisters, to the Church in Kraków and Poland, and to all the votaries of Divine Mercy who will come here

from Poland and from throughout the world. May you be witnesses to mercy! (Homily of Pope John Paul II at the Dedication of The Divine Mercy Shrine in Kraków - Łagiewniki, Poland, August 17, 2002; published in the August 21 issue of L'Osservatore Romano).

"What," the benevolent reader might ask at this point, "has all this to do with these reflections of *A Mother's Plea* and its author?" Let me tell you what happened to St. Faustina before she entered the religious life, when she was only nineteen. As she made her way home from a dance during which Jesus upbraided her for putting Him off, she dropped into the city's cathedral. There, the Lord gave her instructions concerning her calling as the "Secretary" and "Apostle" of His mercy. The cathedral's patronal title is: Of Saint Stanislaus Kostka.

The connection continues in the New World. The first church in the Western Hemisphere where the image of The Divine Mercy was publicly venerated is that of a Polish community in Adams, Massachusetts. Built in 1904, it, too, bears as its patronal title: Of Saint Stanislaus Kostka.

Is it any wonder, then, that "the spark" of The Divine Mercy, of which Our Lord and the Holy Father speak, has now alighted on the first church built in Chicago over a hundred years ago for the benefit of the overwhelming number of Polish immigrants to that city -- a parish that now serves a rather diverse people of distinct ethnicities? Is it any wonder that we discover in *A Mother's Plea* that Our Lady is now requesting of this church's pastor, the author, that a sanctuary or shrine be built there in honor of Her Son -- The Divine Mercy Incarnate?

Further, is it any wonder that this church's heavenly patron is Stanislaus Kostka, whose obedience to his heavenly Mother's instructions to follow the vocation to the consecrated life was all that mattered in spite of his Father's worldly plans for him? Still further, is it any wonder that the same thing happened with St. Faustina as her parents opposed her vocation to the religious life?

For these two saints, God's will was sovereign. Utmost faithfulness to His will and to the inspirations that flowed from it was imperative -- such obedience was absolutely necessary and urgent!

May all who immerse themselves in the timely reflections of *A Mother's Plea* respond aright to "the sign of the times" -- God's call to trust in His mercy while there is yet the time for mercy: JESUS, I TRUST IN YOU! The Sanctuary of The Divine Mercy at St. Stanislaus Kostka Church is to be that urgent sign beckoning Chicagoans and all visitors to that city to find secure refuge under the tender mercy of the Savior of the world and of His Immaculate Mother Mary!

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