

First Things: Save the Lost

As we observe our world and our concerns, I often wonder what Jesus is thinking.

Our concerns must seem so petty at times. We get caught up in politics, pleasure seeking, and many other distractions that remove our focus from more important matters. What could our Lord Jesus be thinking about what occupies all our time?

We can surely imagine that the salvation of souls is the first thing. The very First Commandment should be our guiding light for all our actions and if this be truly our goal, then we need to place ourselves in Jesus' heart. Only then can we really know how to conduct ourselves in our daily lives and diligently follow God's will.

Jesus is the savior of all mankind. His purpose is to save. If we love Him then we should love our fellow man, and there is no greater love than we can give, than to help humanity to get home to Heaven. Earth is not our home, and we are all here in exile. We need to forget ourselves, roll-up our sleeves and start getting serious about where we are all headed and find ways to help Jesus to save the human race.

The world's populace has generally lost a sense of sin. Most of mankind has lost the fear of the Lord, which scripture tells us, is the beginning of wisdom. Simply put, we are not as wise as we think we are. We all need to wake up and take note.

It doesn't take a genius to sense the sign of the times that Jesus spoke about. There are many other indications that some of us might have not been paying attention to. One of these most important signs was given to us through Pope John Paul II.

Pope John Paul died on a feast that Jesus said would be the last hope of salvation. If that comes as a surprise to you, you haven't been paying close attention. It was the vigil of Divine Mercy Sunday in 2005. It had been just five years since he had established that Feast of Mercy indicating that he had fulfilled the will of Christ.

The mere fact that a pontiff would establish a new feast should be enough for us to take heed and learn everything about it. It is time for us to end the imprudence and the ignorance and get real serious about saving souls from the eternal fires of Hell.

If Jesus said that one day this feast would be the last hope of salvation, then we must first come to recognize that this feast was made for all mankind. It doesn't matter what religion we have practiced in the past, it is time to let the truth be known, Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one gets to the Father's House, but by Him. Hell is real and there is only one way to Heaven and that is through Jesus. Pope John Paul II wholeheartedly believed the words of Jesus. It was surely Jesus that brought him home to Heaven on this feast as a sign for us.

It is irrational to think that the Lord would not use prophets today. If Jesus indeed promised to send the Holy Spirit, then we best unlock our minds and hearts. Jesus Himself, in 1931, chose a humble nun now named Saint Faustina to be a prophet to prepare the world for His Second Coming. Barely educated, yet Jesus called her His secretary and apostle of Divine Mercy. She obediently recorded His words.

The Lord requested that a Feast of Mercy be established in the Church on the first Sunday after Easter. He promised that the souls that would go to Confession and receive Holy Communion, on that feast, would obtain the total forgiveness of sins and punishment. He also promised to pour out a “whole ocean” of graces to those who approach the fount of His mercy, considered as Confession and Communion.

Pope John Paul II recognized God’s will in establishing this feast. He saw that the liturgical readings, for that particular Sunday, that had already been in place for centuries were perfect for the Feast of Mercy. All it took was a title name change. We only have to look at the liturgical readings for that particular Sunday to see God’s guiding hand in this. This Easter Octave was always to be very special.

The Church over the years had lost the importance of octave celebrations, going as far as nicknaming the Octave of Easter “Low Sunday”. We can see why Jesus felt the need to deliver a prophetic message to insure the proper celebration and focus. Saint Faustina, after painting the image of Himself that Jesus had requested of her and being confronted by her superiors, remarked to Jesus, “*They tell me that there is already such a feast and so why should I talk about it?*” He quickly responded:

And who knows anything about this feast? No one! Even those who should be proclaiming My mercy and teaching people about it often do not know about it themselves. That is why I want the image to be solemnly blessed on the First Sunday after Easter, and I want it to be venerated publicly so that every soul may know about it (Diary 341).

We can see by these words of Jesus and by the readings that had already been in place on that Sunday, that there was a definite need to heighten awareness about God’s mercy. The opening prayer for that particular Sunday reads as follows: *God of mercy, you wash away our sins in water, you give us new birth in the Spirit, and redeem us in the Blood of Christ. As we celebrate Christ’s resurrection increase our awareness of the blessings, and renew your gift of life within us.*

What is portrayed in the image of The Divine Mercy that Jesus wants to be blessed and venerated on that Sunday? The two rays of light coming from Jesus’ heart that was pierced on the cross, one red like blood, the other pale like the color of water, signify exactly what is in the opening prayer for this very special octave Sunday. It is no wonder that Jesus requested this image to be venerated on that particular day!

As that opening prayer asserts, we are to also increase our awareness of the gifts of having our sins washed away in water, our redemption in the blood of Christ, and the new birth given to us in the Spirit. The blood and water portrayed in the image also signify the sacraments of Holy Communion (blood) and Confession (water) of which we are to partake to receive the promise of a spiritually renewed birth on this very special day, set aside for us, each year until the Second Coming of Jesus.

Theologians who have thoroughly analyzed the promise of Jesus liken it to a new Baptism. This also goes along with the words in the Opening Prayer: *you give us new birth in the Spirit... and renew your gift of life within us*. In 2002 Pope John Paul II issued a special plenary indulgence for Divine Mercy Sunday and included specific duties of priests to inform parishioners, hear confessions and lead prayers. This was a clear indication of the serious need for our pastors to reach out and to bring home the lost and to sound the trumpets that we have a wonderful new feast.

Divine Mercy Sunday is the Sunday in which we honor and glorify the gift of new life that Jesus has obtained for us through the Pascal Mystery. It is to be for us an annual celebration like the Old Testament Feast of Atonement, where on the last day of their greatest annual feast, all sins and punishment were forgiven. God told Moses that this annual celebration was to be for them their Sabbath of Sabbaths. In a way Divine Mercy Sunday is our Sabbath of Sabbaths, our Sunday of Sundays!

Three of the greatest doctors of the Church, St. Gregory of Nazianzen, St. Thomas, and St. Augustine all point to the octave day of a feast as being the greatest day of a festival, without taking anything away from the greatness of the day itself. Even today in the secular world, the last day of a celebration is always the greatest. It is the day when the “grand finale” fireworks go off, and the grand prizes are drawn!

In the same way, we receive the greatest Easter gift on the Octave of Easter. St. John the Evangelist significantly mentions the last day of an annual feast in his gospel (John 7:37-38) *On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me; let him drink who believes in Me. Scripture has it: ‘From within him rivers of living water shall flow’”*. Did Jesus give us these words to point to the ‘ocean of graces’ that He promises to ‘pour’ out on this most important of all octaves, the Octave of Easter, and for the need for us to approach Him with trust on this great Feast of Divine Mercy?

The gospel that has always been read on the Octave of Easter ties in the evening of the Resurrection with the following Sunday (the entire octave period, eight days) (John 20:19-31). The first part of the gospel recalls Jesus appearing in the upper room on the evening of the first day of the week after His Resurrection and pouring out the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and giving them the power to forgive sins (the institution of Confession) and the second part of the gospel recounts what actually happened the very next Sunday, when St. Thomas finally sees Jesus and believes.

Now we can better understand the requests of Jesus to place the words, “Jesus, I trust in You” on the image of Divine Mercy and to solemnly bless and venerate the image in the churches on that day. The gospel lesson is to teach us to “trust in Jesus” without seeing. We are also to trust that it is through the Holy Spirit that sins are forgiven in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The image tells us to “be not afraid”, come to Jesus in the Sacrament of Confession, and to receive Him in the Holy Eucharist and be totally renewed with all sins and all punishment forgiven.

What better way to celebrate the gift of Easter could there be, every year, than to urge everyone to receive a complete spiritual renewal? Isn't that what Easter is all about? We need to get excited about Easter again. We need to get excited about a completely new beginning each year, just like the Israelites did every year on the Day of Atonement. Divine Mercy Sunday is the fulfillment of this day of grace.

It's about time that we listen intently to what the Magisterium is teaching us. It's about time that we take our blinders off. Let's face it, Jesus is coming! The signs are all around us, including the sign of many scoffers (2 Peter 3:3). Pope John Paul II said that he had fulfilled the will of Christ by instituting this Feast of The Divine Mercy. His last written words asked for a greater understanding of Divine Mercy.

We can no longer pretend that everything is fine and dandy. We are closing many of our churches, seemingly without the slightest effort to rejuvenate them, or even going out and trying to bring back the Easter-only or any of the fallen-away and lapsed Catholics. What must our Lord Jesus be thinking now? He has given us this great new feast and we are turning our backs on Him. Let us at least try to help Him. He is telling us where to let down our nets to get an incredible catch of souls. We are acting like the Apostles who had been fishing all night and have given up. Let us start again to be very obedient to the Magisterium and celebrate this feast.

The duties of priests are listed in that special plenary indulgence for Divine Mercy Sunday: Inform Parishioners, Hear Confessions, and Lead the Prayers. Can't we use Easter Sunday as a good opportunity to catechize the Easter-only Catholics that are in a state of mortal sin? Canon Law indicates that it is the pastor's job to catechize when needed, especially during homilies. Can you think of a greater need and opportunity, when you have a church that is full of people that are in a state of mortal sin and are actually going to commit a sacrilege by receiving Holy Communion? They won't be the only ones in Hell if all of us don't speak up.

Only about 10% of Catholics actually confess their serious sins every year. It's one of the precepts of the Catholic Church to confess serious sins annually. We need to encourage every Easter-only, fallen-away, and luke-warm Catholic to go to Reconciliation and also invite them to come back to church on Mercy Sunday so they can experience that outpouring of an ocean of graces and be rejuvenated.

It could very well be their last hope of salvation.

Info: www.DivineMercySunday.com

Written by a Re-born Catholic:

Robert R. Allard, Director
Apostles of Divine Mercy
801 S.E. Forgal Street
Port St. Lucie, Florida 34983
Toll free 1-888-732-0722
Fax. 1-772-343-9475
robertallard@divinemercysunday.com

Biographical data:

57 years old, married, lives in Florida.

Re-vert home to the Catholic Church after a 25 year journey.

Founded the Apostles of Divine Mercy in 1997 to help the Church to understand how to celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday.

Started www.DivineMercySunday.com website in 2002 to provide resources and information about celebrating Divine Mercy Sunday.

Published articles in various Catholic magazines and newspapers.

Appeared on numerous talk shows including EWTN TV.

Goals: To help the Church to save souls.