The Marist Way and Divine Mercy as the Forgiveness of Sins.

The Second Sunday of Easter is Divine Mercy Sunday. It is connected with a series of extraordinary visions of the Risen Lord, fourteen to be exact, to a humble Polish nun, Sister Faustina Kowalska, during the 1930s and who died in Krakow in 1938. The message of the Divine Mercy reaffirms that God loves all of us, that His mercy is greater than our sins, so that we will call upon him with trust, receive his mercy, and let it flow through us to others. Thus, all will come to share His joy.

The most famous of the visions that Faustina had of Jesus was the Lord revealing His Sacred Heart, from which came rays of red and white light, the means by which the Lord radiates the Divine Mercy. The pale white light signifies baptism, and the red light signifies the Eucharist, the blood of Christ.

John Paul II recognized the 20th century as perhaps the cruelest century in human history, the one most marked by violence, genocide, and deep hatred. Sadly, it looks as though this century intends to break that record. He understood what these times most needed, which was the Divine Mercy. He saw in the visions of Faustina a sign that God wanted to bestow His mercy on these troubled times.

Pope St. John Paul II had a great devotion to St. Faustina. He felt he was made Pope to institute this Feast of Divine Mercy. He said his happiest day as Pope was when he canonized St. Faustina in 2000. He died on Divine Mercy Sunday, the Second Sunday of Easter, after going to Confession and receiving Holy Communion. For more information about the devotion to the Divine Mercy, check out *From the Rector* in this week's *Weekly Way*.

We ordinarily associate mercy with service, and that is true. However, I thought I would propose another way of understanding what it means to be an instrument of divine mercy that aligns with the Gospel for Divine Mercy Sunday.

Before we get there, we must address what divine mercy means. The English word mercy comes from the Latin word *misericordiae*, which means the suffering of the heart; that is, suffering with a deep, loving identification with people in their misery. The Old Testament authors use the word *hesed*, which translates into God's steadfast love or tender mercy. Please note. God does not have tender mercy. God is tender mercy and compassionate love. Please also note that when there is talk about securing our border, no distinction is made between those who pose a legitimate security threat or are criminals and those who are among the poorest of the poor and come here out of desperation. They are all lumped together. Absent are any words in our civil discourse that would even remotely communicate a suffering of the heart and a deep, loving identification with these immigrants and refugees in their misery. The same can be said of those who speak about terminating a pregnancy. The language used to describe the procedure is cold, sterile, and heartless.

You will note that when the Risen Lord appears to the disciples, he greets them with the word shalom. Shalom refers to a state of wholeness and peace. Even though his disciples had failed and abandoned him in his hour of need, he does not blame them or rebuke them. Instead, he wishes them peace, which is also a gesture of mercy.

With all that as a prelude, let us return to the Gospel and the extraordinary commission he bequeaths to the Church. Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." With those words, the Risen Lord is establishing the Sacrament of Penance.

This sacrament is the privileged vehicle for carrying the Divine Mercy to the world. That is the most extraordinary grace the Church has to offer. It is the grace of forgiveness of our sins. It is the grace of reconciliation and the restoration of our friendship with God that is lost through grave sin.

When asked why he became a Catholic, one of the great Christian apologists of the 20th century, GK Chesterton, replied, “To have my sins forgiven.” Jesus’ commission to forgive sins is a central aspect of Divine Mercy. Now you can understand why the founder of the Society of Mary, Jean-Claude Colin, wanted Marist priests to be instruments of divine mercy, particularly in the confessional.

You may be asking, what about the rest of us who are not priests? What is our role? Remember the Beatitude: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” (Mt. 5:7) That’s where you come in. What does that look like? It looks like the corporal works of mercy: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, visiting those in prison, clothing the naked, providing shelter to the homeless, and burying the dead. It looks like the spiritual works of mercy: instructing the ignorant, counseling the doubtful, admonishing sinners, bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving offenses willingly, comforting the afflicted, and praying for the living and dead.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord promises those who show mercy that mercy will be shown to them. What does that look like? Let me answer that question this way. Blessed is the person who walks in the shoes of others so they can see with their eyes, think with their thoughts, and feel with their feelings. Whomever does that will find others doing the same for them. Then they will know what God in Jesus Christ has done for us.

Marist religious and laity are to return the favor. We are to think, judge, feel, and act like Mary so that we may think, judge, feel, and act like her toward her son and walk in easy friendship with the Lord. That was the Lord’s intention for humanity from the beginning when he would walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening in the Garden of Eden. The offer of Divine Mercy is the Risen Lord’s invitation for us to walk with him again in easy friendship, which begins now and is meant to last forever. For this grace, we pray. Amen.

Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.

Shalom.