

From the Deacon's Desk

### **Called to Priesthood:**

I received a phone call from Bishop Cistone last week and his formal letter calling me to priesthood this June. More information will follow but he mentioned that I could share this information with you. Unfortunately, I will most likely be moved to another parish due to the priest shortage, and saying goodbye is always difficult, but the Lord has promised to bless the work we all do with hope and new life.

### **Divine Mercy Sunday:**

On the Second Sunday of Easter, the responsorial psalm and Gospel for Cycles A, B and C center on the theme of mercy. In Psalm 118 we sing three times, "His mercy endures forever." The Gospel, from John 20:19-31, begins with the risen Christ appearing to the apostles on Easter night. Jesus calms his disciples by saying and giving them "Peace." He shows them the scars of his Passion, his wounded hands and side. His glorified body retains the evidence of his saving work through his suffering, death and resurrection.

He fills them with joy and again says to them—and produces in them—"Peace." Then he breathes on them and explains what the divine breathing means with the words, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." He gives the apostles the power of God's mercy for the sinner, the gift of forgiving sins from God's treasury of mercy. The other texts speak of healing and give the assurance there is nothing to fear.

The story of this awareness of Divine Mercy Sunday begins with Saint Faustina Kowalska who received an inspiration behind the popular Divine Mercy devotion. Helena Kowalska was born in Poland on August 25, 1905. She was the third child of a devout Catholic family. As a small child she reported seeing bright lights during her night prayers.

In 1925, she entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, taking the name Faustina. She served as a cook, gardener and doorkeeper in Krakow and several other community convents. The sisters liked her but did not appreciate or understand her deep interior life, which included visions and prophecies.

On February 22, 1931, Sister Faustina experienced a new and life-changing vision of Christ. She saw him wearing a white robe and raising his right hand in blessing with his left hand resting on his heart from which flowed two rays of light. Jesus told her, "Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the prayer, Jesus, I trust in you."

Faustina could not paint, and struggled to convince her incredulous sisters about the truth of her vision. Ultimately she persuaded her spiritual director that the vision was real. He found an artist to create the painting that was named *The Divine Mercy* and shown to the world for the first time on April 28, 1935.

Pope John Paul—now Saint John Paul II—had actively promoted the message of Saint Faustina. In his 1980 encyclical on God's mercy, *Rich in Mercy*, he developed a scriptural and doctrinal basis for our faith in the mercy of God. By linking the revealed truth about God's mercy to one of the most solemn Sundays after

Easter itself, he illumined the fact that the liturgy already proclaimed the divine mercy. The truth has been embedded for two millennia in the worship of the Church.

With a relatively new liturgical celebration like Divine Mercy Sunday, the Church will look among its members for ways to celebrate. When he was archbishop of St. Louis, in 1998, Cardinal Justin Rigali wrote a pastoral letter to his priests in which he urged them to preach on the mystery of the riches of God's mercy on Divine Mercy Sunday:

*I ask that each of our parishes observe the Second Sunday of Easter as a celebration of Divine Mercy. . . I ask that the principal focus of our observance be the Eucharistic Liturgy itself, with special attention given in the homily to preaching on Divine Mercy. The link between Divine Mercy and the Easter celebration, especially on the Second Sunday of Easter, exists on many levels . . . The Scripture readings lend themselves to linking Easter and Divine Mercy since the texts highlight the forgiveness of sins.*

*The disposition of trust in God's mercy is essential for receiving the graces God wants us to have. The time of preparation for the Divine Mercy Sunday is meant to strengthen our people's trust in God's mercy. Artwork or holy cards related to Divine Mercy can play an important role. There is one image of Faustina that speaks to many hearts in a way that is deeper than words. Like a good icon, it confronts the praying and worshiping person with the merciful love of Christ, and its inscription, "Jesus, I trust in you," encourages the believer to respond to this invitation with greater confidence."*

**We have prayer cards available at the doors with the Divine Mercy Chaplet. It is a beautiful way to use the rosary with alternative prayers: "For the sake of his sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us."**

## **Alpha Next Week: Who is the Holy Spirit?**

### **Talk summary:**

- The Holy Spirit is not a kind of twentieth century phenomenon. He has been around literally since the creation of the world.
- For many believers, the Holy Spirit is really rather ignored — there is a big concentration on God the Father and on God the Son, but for many people, the Holy Spirit is an abstract supernatural reality.
- We're going to have a look at the history of the Holy Spirit through the Bible.
- The Holy Spirit does a variety of things including giving new life, a newfound sense of family and unity, and new power to follow Christ. The Holy Spirit not only transforms our character, but gives us the ability to be a blessing to others as well.