



walking with purpose

Preparation for Sunday of Divine Mercy

DEFINING MOMENTS

INTRODUCTION

“Let no one doubt concerning the goodness of God; even if a person’s sins were as dark as night, God’s mercy is stronger than our misery. One thing alone is necessary: that the sinner set ajar the door of his heart, be it ever so little, to let in a ray of God’s merciful grace, and then God will do the rest.”¹ -Saint Faustina

This week, we prepare to celebrate the Sunday of Divine Mercy. Perhaps now more than ever, we need the reminder that God’s “mercy endures forever” (Psalm 118:1). This feast day is a celebration of the superabundance of grace that Christ offers us—an ocean of divine mercy that is greater than any sin.

When Saint John Paul II canonized St. Faustina Kowalska in 2000, he proclaimed the Second Sunday of Easter to be Divine Mercy Sunday, from that point forward. During St. Faustina’s lifetime, she spent time with Jesus, gaining insight into the depths of His merciful love for mankind. Her diary spoke of Jesus’ desire to be a refuge and shelter for our souls. Her words were a balm to people who had become afraid of God and overwhelmed by their own sins and failures.

Interestingly, St. Faustina could be very hard on herself. If you read her diary, you’ll discover a woman who had early struggles to see herself through the eyes of God. Time and time again, Jesus patiently taught her that His love and mercy were limitless. This was the message she carried to the world.

¹ Sister M. Faustina Kowalska, *Divine Mercy in My Soul, Diary*, (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 1987), Entry 1507, page 539.

As we focus on mercy this week, I'll highlight a quote from St. Faustina's diary each day. Of course, the focus of this feast day is not the words of St. Faustina; it's the mercy of God. But we are often helped when a fellow pilgrim, who has struggled in the same ways that we do, points to freedom. Her words describe a personal encounter with the mercy of God. May we be inspired by the example of St. Faustina and encounter that same mercy, direct from His heart to ours. May our Bible study this week help us to live by grace, not perfection.

Things to Remember:

Each one of us comes to this material from our own unique vantage point. You are welcome as you are. No previous experience is necessary. Some of you will find that the questions in this study cause you to think about concepts that are new to you. Others might find much is a review. God meets each one of us where we are, and He is always faithful, taking us to a deeper, better place spiritually, regardless of where we begin.

Bible Sourcing: There are many translations of the Bible; the Holy Spirit will speak to you in whichever translation you choose. The recommended Bible translations for Walking with Purpose are: The *New American Bible* (NAB), which is the translation used in the United States for the readings at Mass; *The Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition* (RSV); *The Jerusalem Bible* (TJB) and *The English Standard Version* (ESV).

Catechism of the Catholic Church: Some short clips are referenced throughout the lesson to complement the Scripture study. Referenced in each lesson as CCC# and noted at the end of each corresponding lesson. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a catechism promulgated for the Catholic Church by Pope John Paul II in 1992. It sums up, in book form, the beliefs of the Catholic faithful.

Answer Key: The answer key is located at the end of this lesson. You will benefit so much more from the Bible study if you work through the questions on your own, searching your heart, as this is your very personal journey of faith. The answer key is meant to enhance and provide personal guidance through Biblical context and author's insight where needed.

Day One

THE FIRST READING

Read Acts 2:42-47

“Great love can change small things into great ones, and it is only love which lends value to our actions.”² -Saint Faustina

Note: Acts 2:42-47 describes the mercy of the early Church in action. In many ways, this passage sounds more like the domestic church than a public Mass. “The term ‘domestic church’ refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates all the way back to the first century AD... Our Early Church Fathers understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.”³

Acts 2:42-7 charts a vision for what our homes can look like in the midst of our unusual circumstances. Never before in our lifetime has the need to be the domestic church been so apparent. I know many of us are feeling stressed, scared, inconvenienced and troubled. These are the times we most need a vision to propel us forward and keep us focused on what matters most. So let’s dive into this passage, catch the vision and apply the actions of the early Christians to the opportunities within our homes right now.

1. A. To which four things did the early Christians devote themselves?
See Acts 2:42.

B. How can you do the same thing in your home?

² Sister M. Faustina Kowalska, *Divine Mercy in My Soul, Diary*, (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 1987), Entry 303, page 140.

³ “What is a Domestic Church?”, catholiccincinnati.org, <http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/ministries-offices/family-life/family/parenting/what-is-a-domestic-church/>, accessed April 6, 2020.

Devote yourself to good teaching:

Devote yourself to communal life:

Note: If you are living alone, remember that communal life is all about relationship. It's lovely when it is in person, but relationships can be built over the phone, via letters, and through aids like Zoom and Google Hangouts. The "how" isn't the point. The important thing is to proactively reach out during this time, ask open-ended questions, and go deeper with someone you care about. You might want to ask, "What is bringing you joy right now?" or "What would help you rest despite what you are facing?" or "How can I be a good support to you in this season?"

Devote yourself to the breaking of the bread:

Note: I want you to come up with your own ideas, but just to share one of my own, I've decided there is no better time than now to break out the cloth napkins and pretty china. As we've gathered around our table, the beauty ministers to us and reminds us to pause and enjoy.

Devote yourself to prayer:

2. What came over everyone as wonders and signs were done through the apostles? See Acts 2:43.

The word translated “awe” is the same word found in Mark 4:41 to describe how the disciples felt when Jesus calmed the wind and sea. We may be in the middle of the storm, but make no mistake, Jesus is still Lord of the elements. He is in the boat with us, and this storm will calm. Our posture towards Him can still be one of awe, even as the boat is rocked by the waves. What helps us to do this is to look back and remember all the times He has come through for us in the past. COVID-19 will NOT be the exception to the rule.

3. Can you draw any parallels between Acts 2:44 and your current circumstances?

4. A. What incredible behavior was seen among the early Christians in Acts 2:45?

- B. In his article, *Rich Christians in an Age of Coronavirus*, Matthew Soerens shares ways in which we can apply this kind of selfless living in our own communities:

Compared to the average Christian around the world, almost all American believers are relatively privileged in terms of income, access to adequate nutrition, shelter, education and healthcare. This global pandemic presents an important opportunity for those of us who have “been entrusted with much,” (Luke 12:48) to be good, open-handed stewards of those resources. That starts by respecting governmental instructions to stay at home and practice “social distancing.” We do so not out of fear for ourselves but out of love for our more vulnerable neighbors...While we keep our distance,

we can still look for ways to convey concern and affection: phone calls, dropping off groceries or other gifts or old-fashioned letters to those struggling in isolation.⁴

In what way can you be an open-handed steward of what God has entrusted to you?

5. A. Describe the atmosphere among the early Christians as they broke bread together in their homes. See Acts 2:46-47.

The word *exultation* translated means wild joy. The word *sincerity* translated means simplicity, without rocks, uncomplicated. They ate their meals together with wild joy and simplicity of heart.

This is what we want, right? But all our family togetherness may be making all the rocks between us a little more apparent than usual. Do not let this discourage you. *God is in this*. He is in the rough and rocky places; He is using the togetherness to refine you.

How? As we saw earlier, the home is fertile ground for sanctification. That's a fancy word for becoming more like Jesus. One of the primary ways God helps us become more like His Son is by allowing the rub of close relationships to smooth down our rough edges.

- B. Are your current circumstances revealing to you places in your heart that are rocky? Can you invite God into this rough terrain, asking Him to smooth things out within you?

⁴ Matthew Soerens, Rich Christians in an Age of Coronavirus, relevantmagazine.com, https://relevantmagazine.com/current/rich-christians-in-an-age-of-coronavirus/?utm_source=Relevant_Main&utm_campaign=4ae1d350ba-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_02_26_05_03_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_7fb1b39e4e-4ae1d350ba-266845805&mc_cid=4ae1d350ba&mc_eid=916fc2550b, accessed April 6, 2020.

C. In Luke 3:5, St. John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would set out to do exactly what we have been talking about. Record that prophecy here, and claim it as a promise over your life:

6. What was the result of the Lord's smoothing work in the lives of His people in both Acts 2:47 and Luke 3:5-6?

Quiet your heart and enjoy His presence. . . let Him smooth the rocky places in your heart.

“Every home can transform itself in a little church. Not only in the sense that in them must reign the typical Christian love made of altruism and of reciprocal care, but still more in the sense that the whole of family life, based on faith, is called to revolve around the singular lordship of Jesus Christ.”⁵ -Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

The only way that we are going to have homes of mercy—domestic churches that cause others to want to share our faith—is if our hearts revolve around the singular lordship of Jesus Christ.

There's no shortcut. There's no other way. It starts with each one of us, individually, inviting the Lord Jesus to sit on the throne of our hearts and call the shots. It continues with our interpreting every single thing that happens in our day as something the Lord has allowed in order to smooth out rough edges and make us more holy.

We often think of mercy as something we should extend to all the people “out there” who are less fortunate than we are. And most certainly, we should do this. But often the hardest place to extend mercy is within our own homes. Yet isn't this the place where we most desire to be our best, most Christlike selves? Extend mercy, even to the undeserving within the walls of

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, February 7, 2007.

your home.

Perhaps the place you need to extend mercy is to yourself. Maybe you are beating yourself up right now—reciting a litany in your head of all your faults and failures. The faults and failures may be real, my friend, but be assured, they do not define you and they are not the end of the story. All the mess can be redeemed if you just bring it to Jesus.

He is our only hope. He is the only hope for our hearts. He is the only hope for our families. He is the only hope for our country. He is the only hope for our world.

But here's the good news—"They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on eagles' wings; They will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

Day Two

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

"The past does not belong to me; the future is not mine; with all my soul I try to make use of the present moment."⁶ -St. Faustina

Read Psalm 118:1-4, 8, 13-15, 22-24

Note: Psalm 118 is the great Easter hymn for the Church. The great Alleluia, which we speak before the Easter Vigil, is taken from a verse in this Psalm. We read this Psalm on Easter Sunday, and then again on the Second Sunday of Easter. Psalm 118 is frequently quoted in the New Testament and offers a prophetic view of Jesus.

1. A. In Psalm 118:1-4, who was called on to express praise for the Lord's mercy?

⁶ Sister M. Faustina Kowalska, *Divine Mercy in My Soul, Diary*, (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 1987), Entry 351, page 157.

- B. What do you hear most often, praise for God's mercy, or requests for God to intervene and make our lives better? What do you think might change if we paused from our request of prayers, and replaced our petitions with praise?
2. A. What insight do you gain from Psalm 118:8 in terms of where we should place our trust?
- B. Where, other than God, are you tempted to place all your hope and trust? In scientists? In the economy? In political leaders? In doctors?

We are not wrong to look to these people and things for help, support, and order, but if we place our ultimate hope and trust in anyone or anything other than God, we will ultimately be disappointed.

How do we check where our hope and trust lie? We pay attention to our peace of heart. Peace of heart, regardless of our circumstances, is directly correlated to our trust in God. If we don't trust God's goodness, we'll be tempted to either take matters into our own hands or look for someone capable of keeping us safe.

This is the core of our problem: we doubt that God will take care of us in a way that will truly make us happy. We settle for temporal happiness (which comes and goes) and, as a result, never give God the chance to show us how deeply He can satisfy us, even in the midst of suffering.

Father Jacques Philippe writes of an obstacle to our confidence in God in *Searching for and Maintaining Peace*:

As long as we have not experienced concretely the fidelity of Divine Providence to provide for our essential needs, we have difficulty believing in it and we abandon it. We have hard heads, the words of Jesus do not suffice for us, we want to see at least a little in order to believe! Well, we do not see it operating around us in a clear manner. How, then, are we to experience it?

It is important to know one thing: We cannot experience this support from God unless we leave Him the necessary space in which He can express Himself...As long as a person who must jump with a parachute does not jump out into the void, he cannot feel that the cords of the parachute will support him, because the parachute has not yet had the chance to open. One must first jump and it is only later that one feels carried. And so it is in spiritual life: "God gives in the measure that we expect of Him," says Saint John of the Cross. And Saint Francis de Sales says: "The measure of Divine Providence acting on us is the degree of confidence that we have in it." This is where the problem lies. Many do not believe in Providence because they've never experienced it, but they've never experienced it because they've never jumped into the void and taken the leap of faith. They never give it the possibility to intervene. They calculate everything, anticipate everything, they seek to resolve everything by counting on themselves, instead of counting on God.⁷

C. Do you feel you have jumped into a void, albeit not by choice? Could it be that this is the perfect opportunity for your trust in God's providence to grow?

⁷ Father Jacques Philippe, *Searching for and Maintaining Peace* (New York: The Society of St. Paul, 2002), 28.

3. A. How is the Lord described in Psalm 118:13-15?

B. Can you put these verses of Psalm 118 into your own words by describing a time when you were hard-pressed and falling, but the Lord came to your help and saved you? Be as specific as you can.

4. A. Who is Psalm 118:22 ultimately pointing to? See Acts 4:8-12.

B. In ancient times, no stone of a building was more important than the cornerstone. The integrity and strength of the entire building depended on that stone being perfect. The cornerstone held everything together. What do you learn about Jesus from Colossians 1:17, and in what way does that point to Him as the cornerstone?

5. In what way does the quote from St. Faustina, “The past does not belong to me; the future is not mine; with all my soul I try to make use of the present moment,” correspond to Psalm 118:24?

Quiet your heart and enjoy His presence. . . let your shoulders fall, and sink into the present moment.

Dear Lord,

This is the day that you have made.

You offer it to me and invite me to find joy in it.

You sustain me, giving me life, breath by breath.

You hold the world together; you hold me together.

I have a choice. I can try to carry the world on my shoulders or offload my cares on to you.

You respect my free will. You won't snatch my burdens from me. You'll just wait to see if I lay them down.

Why do I hold on to them? Why do I have more confidence in my own abilities than I do in yours?

Forgive me, Lord, for my pride.

Forgive me for placing more trust in myself and others than I do in you.

Help me to have just a little more courage than fear, to jump into the unknown.

Help me to trust in that period of waiting when I haven't yet felt the cords of the parachute tighten. Amen.

Day Three

THE SECOND READING

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9

“When I see that the burden is beyond my strength, I do not consider or analyze it or probe into it, but I run like a child to the Heart of Jesus and say only one word to Him: ‘You can do all things.’ And then I keep silent, because I know that Jesus Himself will intervene in the matter, and as for me, instead of tormenting myself, I use that time to love Him.”⁸ -Saint Faustina

1. A. In His great mercy, God offers to give something to each one of us.

What is this gift? See 1 Peter 1:3.

B. Through Baptism, we are born into a new life of living hope. The question is, is this your lived experience? And if not, why not? What gets in the way of you experiencing new life and living hope in your heart?

I have been pondering those questions because I think they really matter. It’s a constant temptation for me to regard myself as God’s workhorse instead of as His beloved daughter. When this faulty thinking reigns in my head, I forget the part of the Our Father, which asks that things be “on earth as it is in heaven.” Granted, the total fulfillment of our longings will be in eternity, not here. Yet there is new life and hope available to us today, and I don’t want us to miss it. Life is not all about trudging through and just get-

⁸ Sister M. Faustina Kowalska, *Divine Mercy in My Soul, Diary*, (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 1987), Entry 1033, page 392.

ting the job done. I am a new creation, and so are you (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The following are some things that get in the way of living as a new creation:

- Relying on ourselves instead of on God
- Owning all our fear, self-loathing, shame and reproach by not recognizing our true identity as beloved sons and daughters
- Not grieving the death of dreams
- Being afraid to dream again
- Trying to stay in control at all costs (which is the opposite of giving ourselves over to the Lord)
- Allowing ourselves to be defined by our sin instead of confessing it

My friends, these are the things we need to throw off. “Let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:1).

2. Because you are sons and daughters of God, you will receive an inheritance from your Father, the King of Kings. How is your inheritance described in 1 Peter 1:4?

The word translated *imperishable* can also mean *unravaged by any invading army*.⁹ This is a picture of your inheritance being utterly safe and protected. No matter if all spiritual forces of evil take aim. They will not win. They will not steal what God has protected for you in heaven.

There are two things we know about inheritance. One, you wait for it—you don’t ask for it early. Two, you don’t get to decide what you receive. That’s determined by the person doing the giving. What is true with people on earth is also true with God. We don’t get to define what our inheritance is, and we don’t decide when we get it. Our promised, protected inheritance is not health, wealth, and comfort here on earth. Our

⁹ William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 200.

primary inheritance is God Himself, and the uninterrupted enjoyment of Him that we will experience in heaven. “At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face.” (1 Corinthians 13:12)

3. Personalize 1 Peter 1:5 by filling your name in the blank and reading the verse out loud. “I, _____, by the power of God, am safeguarded through faith, to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time.”

The Greek word translated *safeguarded* is a military word, which means that “our life is garrisoned by God and that he stands sentry over us all our days...God is standing within the shadows keeping watch over his own even when they cannot see him. It is not that God saves us from the troubles and the sorrows and the problems of life, but he enables us to conquer them and move on.”¹⁰

4. A. According to 1 Peter 1:6-7, what is one of the reasons that we may have to suffer through various trials?

The truth is, we usually don't know why a particular suffering is being allowed into our lives. But every time, it is an opportunity for our hearts to be refined, for our motives to be purified, for our will to be strengthened, for the depth of our love for the Lord to be seen. In the words of Bible teacher David Guzik, “Our faith isn't tested because God doesn't know how much or what kind of faith we have. It is tested because *we* often are ignorant of how much or what kind of faith we have.”¹¹

¹⁰ Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, 202.

¹¹ David Guzik, *Study Guide for 1 Peter*, blueletterbible.org, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/Study-Guide2017-1Pe/1Pe-1.cfm?a=1152008, accessed April 7, 2020.

B. Gold is purified when it's heated up, all the impurities rise to the surface, and then are skimmed off. When we suffer, our impurities rise to the surface. We realize that there's been some buried junk, and all of a sudden, it's on display for all to see. We can respond in different ways—getting mad, blaming others, numbing out... or we can seek forgiveness and healing in these areas of our hearts. Which impurities have risen to the surface in the midst of your current trials? How are you responding?

C. Re-read the St. Faustina quote at the beginning of this day's study. As you reflect on your trials, can you turn her words into your own prayer? Record it below.

5. 1 Peter 1:8 says, "Although you have not seen him you love him..." What is it you love most about Jesus?

6. According to 1 Peter 1:9, what is the goal of our faith?

Quiet your heart and enjoy His presence. . . come to Him like a child.

“Now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials” (1 Peter 1:6).

Is the burden you bear beyond your strength? Can you follow the advice of St. Faustina to not consider or analyze it or probe into it, but instead to run like a child to the Heart of Jesus?

When we run to Jesus, He always responds by pouring out His mercy. If we bring Him all our impurities that have risen to the surface—our lack of trust in Him, our anxieties, our frustrations with people around us, our reactions that don’t look anything like the fruits of the Spirit—He will shower us with a compassion so powerful that it will cleanse us.

O merciful God, You do not despise us, but lavish Your graces on us continuously. You make us fit to enter Your kingdom, and in Your goodness You grant that human beings may fill the places vacated by the ungrateful angels. O God of great mercy, who turned your sacred gaze away from the rebellious angels and turned it upon contrite man, praise and glory be to Your unfathomable mercy, O God who do not despise the lowly heart.¹² -Saint Faustina

Day Four

THE GOSPEL, PART I

Read John 20:19-23

1. A. John 20:19 describes the setting where the disciples were spending the first Easter. Can you draw any parallel to our current situation with COVID-19?

¹² Sister M. Faustina Kowalska, *Divine Mercy in My Soul, Diary*. (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 1987), Entry 1339, page 482.

- B. In the midst of this setting of fear, hiding and confinement, Jesus came and stood in their midst. What were His first words to them? See John 20:19. How did the disciples react to seeing Jesus? See Luke 24:36-37.

Jesus' sudden appearance in a locked room indicates that His resurrected body was superior to a normal one. CCC #645 describes it in this way: "This authentic, real body possesses the new properties of a glorious body: not limited by space and time but able to be present how and when he wills; for Christ's humanity can no longer be confined to earth and belongs henceforth only to the Father's divine realm."

2. According to John 20:20, what did Jesus show the disciples? Was Christ's body a real one or was He a ghost? See Luke 24:28-43.

3. A. What were Jesus' next words to the disciples in John 20:21?

With these words, the eleven disciples were made apostles, a word which means *one who is sent*.

- B. Jesus had been sent by God the Father, and now Jesus was sending out the disciples to carry on His mission. What do you learn about the Apostles' mission from CCC #858?¹³

¹³ CCC #858 refers to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #858 and can be found at the end of this lesson.

C. Church teaching holds that this transfer of mission was meant to be perpetuated. How is this explained in *CCC* #862?¹⁴

4. A. What action did Jesus perform in John 20:22?

In that moment, the apostles “became sacramental signs of Christ. By the power of the same Holy Spirit they entrusted this power to their successors” (*CCC* #1087).¹⁵

B. In what way is this a fulfillment of the promise of Ezekiel 36:26 and 37:5?

5. A. With this gift of the Holy Spirit came greater responsibility. What authority was given to the apostles after receiving the anointing of the Holy Spirit?

¹⁴ *CCC* #862 refers to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #862 and can be found at the end of this lesson.

¹⁵ *CCC* #1087 refers to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1087 and can be found at the end of this lesson.

B. Is it the priest alone who is forgiving sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
See CCC #1441.¹⁶

C. What additional insight do you receive into the priest's role in Reconciliation from the following quote from St. Faustina?

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. Tell souls that from this fount of mercy souls draw graces solely with the vessel of trust. If their trust is great, there is no limit to My generosity. The torrents of grace inundate humble souls. The proud remain always in poverty and misery, because My grace turns away from them to humble souls.¹⁷

Quiet your heart and enjoy His presence. . . meet the God of mercy.

The important thing to remember about the sacrament of Reconciliation is that you will always encounter the mercy of God when you approach Him with authenticity and honesty. This is not a place of judgment or chastisement. It's the place to go to be spiritually fortified and saturated with grace. Theologian Scott Hahn describes it in this way:

¹⁶ CCC #1441 refers to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1441 and can be found at the end of this lesson.

¹⁷ Sister M. Faustina Kowalska, *Divine Mercy in My Soul, Diary*, (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 1987), Entry 1602, page 569.

Through confession, we begin to heal. We begin to get our story straight and stop deceiving ourselves. We come home to resume our place in the family of God. We begin to know peace. None of this comes easily. Confession doesn't make change easy, but it does make it possible. It is not a quick fix, but it is a sure cure. We need to go back to the sacrament, and go again, and keep going back, because life is a marathon, not a forty-yard dash. We'll often want to stop, but like a distance runner, we'll need to press on for our second wind, and third, and fourth. In this case, we can count on the wind coming, because it's the "wind" of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

Many of us wish we could celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation right now, but it isn't possible. Pope Francis spoke to this longing in a recent homily. He said, "Many people today would tell me, 'Father, where can I find a priest, a confessor, because I can't leave the house? And I want to make peace with the Lord, I want Him to embrace me, I want the Father's embrace.'"¹⁹ The pope responded, "Do what the Catechism (of the Catholic Church) says. It is very clear: If you cannot find a priest to confess to, speak directly with God, your father, and tell him the truth. Say, 'Lord, I did this, this, this. Forgive me,' and ask for pardon with all your heart. Make an act of contrition...and promise God, 'I will go to confession afterward, but forgive me now.' And immediately you will return to a state of grace with God."²⁰

Day Five

THE GOSPEL, PART 2

Read John 20:24-31

"Temptations are strong, a whole wave of doubts beats against my soul, and discouragement stands by, ready to act. The Lord, however, strengthens my will, against which all attempts of the enemy are shattered as if against a rock. I see how many actual graces God grants me; these support me ceaselessly. I am very weak, and I attribute everything solely to the grace of God."²¹ -St. Faustina

¹⁸ Scott Hahn, *Lord Have Mercy: The Healing Power of Confession* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2003), 175.

¹⁹ Cindy Wooden, "If you can't go to confession, take your sorrow directly to God, pope says," March 20, 2020, *cru now.com*, <https://cru.com/vatican/2020/03/if-you-cant-go-to-confession-take-your-sorrow-directly-to-god-pope-says/>

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Sister M. Faustina Kowalska, *Divine Mercy in My Soul, Diary*, (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 1987), Entry 1086, page 406.

1. A. Thomas had not been with the disciples when Jesus first appeared to them in John 20:19-23. When he returned and they told him what had happened, what was His response? See John 20:24-25.

The death of Jesus was exactly what Thomas had expected to happen. A realist among the disciples, Thomas had seen the risk when they were all preparing to return to Bethany to help Lazarus (John 11:16). After pointing out that people had been trying to kill Jesus there (so why go back?!), Thomas said, “Let us also go to die with him” (John 11:16). He knew what that return would mean.

- B. Although Thomas was pessimistic about Jesus’ chances of surviving a return to Judea, it can’t be doubted that he loved Jesus. In fact, his grief at losing Jesus was so acute that he apparently felt a need to retreat in his sorrow. Herein lay his mistake. What do you think it was?

- C. Many of us make the same mistake that Thomas did— just when we most need people around us to help us in our grief, we isolate. Perhaps we are afraid people will say the wrong thing. We might be listening to the lies, “no one understands” or “I am all alone” or “this is hopeless.” We forget that this is exactly where the enemy wants us. When we are separated from our sisters and brothers in Christ, when we keep every thing bottled up inside, our emotions and thoughts can get very tangled. The alternative? Reach out. Say out loud what you need. Allow your emotions to be seen. This is human. This is humble. This is the road to healing. Do you see this tendency in yourself to withdraw rather than reach out for what you need?

2. A. When Jesus came back (again miraculously appearing in a locked room), did He chastise Thomas for his hesitation to believe? See John 20:26-27.

Struggling to believe is not the same thing as doubt. But the *way* we do this matters. Sometimes we say we struggle with Church teaching, but what we really mean is not just that we don't understand it, but that we also don't care enough to do the work of learning more about it. This is a picture of doubt—knowing fully that with a little digging you could likely learn more, but you just can't be bothered. But there are times when we think we are doubting when we are actually just struggling with our beliefs. So how can we know the difference?

Father Mike Schmitz explains it well:

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls this struggle “involuntary doubt.” It refers to “hesitation in believing, difficulty in overcoming objections with the faith, or also anxiety aroused by its obscurity” (CCC 2088). This is vastly different from “voluntary doubt,” which “disregards or refuses to hold as true what God has revealed and the Church proposes for belief.”

The difference between difficulties and doubts is so profound that Blessed John Henry Newman once stated that “10,000 difficulties do not make one doubt.”²²

He goes on to advise us against becoming content with difficulties—not caring enough to dig deeper, ask the hard questions, and open your mind and heart to what God says.

B. Is there a Scripture passage or Church teaching or that you are having difficulty understanding? List it here. What is an action you could take this week to dig a little deeper in your search for understanding?

²² Father Mike Schmitz, “Struggling to Believe Is Not the Same Thing as Doubting,” UMD Newman, <https://bulldog-catholic.org/in-your-last-column-you-said-you-believe-everything-the-church-teaches-what-if-i-struggle-with-believing-where-does-that-put-me/#> (May 1, 2014).

3. A. What were Thomas' words in response to touching the wounds of Jesus? See John 20:28.
- B. Although we tend to refer to him as "doubting Thomas," he is the one in the upper room who made the most theologically profound statement. In what way do his words reflect the truth of John 1:1 and 14?

"Notice ... *how John frames* his Gospel: beginning with God taking on flesh and ending with 'flesh' being recognized as God."²³

4. Re-read the quote at the start of today's lesson from St. Faustina. When a wave of doubts beat against her soul, what did the Lord do for her? Can you ask Him to do the same for you?

Three of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which were planted in your soul at baptism, are directed toward giving your weak and wounded will a supernatural boost (these are the gifts of fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord). So, if you make a decent effort to do your part, the Holy Spirit will surely give you a fantastic return for your investment.²⁴
-Father John Bartunek LC

5. John 20:30-31 reveals the aim of the Gospel of John. This is why St. John took the time to write all these things down. What was his purpose in writing?

²³ Steven K Ray, *St. John's Gospel* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002), 380.

²⁴ Father John Bartunek, LC, "How Can I Strengthen my Will and Grow in Holiness?", catholicexchange.com, <https://catholicexchange.com/can-strengthen-will-grow-holiness>, accessed April 8, 2020.

Quiet your heart and enjoy His presence. . . seek Jesus and you'll discover an overflow of grace.

Jesus said, "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly," John 10:10. That abundant life is available to those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. It's been said that believing in Jesus is as simple as ABC—accept, believe and commit. We accept that Jesus is who He said He is—the Messiah, the Son of God. We believe that He died on the cross for our sins and through His Resurrection, brings us to new life. We commit to following Him and allowing Him to be in charge of our lives. Accept, believe, commit. It's simple, although it's rarely easy.

Even when we determine to remain faithful to God, waves of doubt can beat against our souls. We often feel alone in our spiritual struggles. But God strengthens our will and pours out grace continuously. This isn't some esoteric spiritual mumbo jumbo. Grace is real—it's a game changer—it enables us to do the impossible. When we whisper, "I can't," God says, "But I can."

In order to tap into His grace, we first need to recognize that His continuous stance toward us is one of mercy. This gives us the confidence to draw near.

Accept, believe and commit to these truths:

"The LORD, the LORD, a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity, continuing his love for a thousand generations, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin." (Exodus 34:6-7)

"Those who conceal their sins do not prosper, but those who confess and forsake them obtain mercy." (Proverbs 28:13)

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ (by grace you have been saved), raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:4-6)

"Mercy triumphs over judgment." (James 2:13)

"So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help." (Hebrews 4:16)

CONCLUSION

It is critical that we understand that God's continual stance towards us is one of mercy. That is the core message of the Feast of Divine Mercy. He sees when temptation and doubt slam against our souls. He understands but loves us too much to leave us stuck in those places. He invites us to come to Him, confess our sin, and then rest in the assurance of His forgiveness. Why is it so hard for us to do this?

Could it be that instead of focusing on God's mercy, we are focusing on the things we have left undone, the choices we regret, the weight we want to lose, and our inner voice of self-reproach? Could it be that we are quick to accept, believe and commit to all our garbage, and instead of confessing it and leaving it at the foot of the cross, we keep dragging it around?

We're quick to own the junk. It's time to own truth instead.

St. Faustina challenges us with her words, "The past does not belong to me; the future is not mine; with all my soul I try to make use of the present moment."²⁵ And in this very moment, God is issuing you an invitation.

God is holding out His hand to you, saying, "Come away with me. Come to a quiet place where all that matters is who you are in my eyes. Fix your eyes on ME. Lock eyes with me. Let the rest of the world fade away as you hear me speak over you...

I am looking at you, my precious child, and I am satisfied.

I am looking at you, my precious child, and I say, you are good.

I am looking at you, my precious child, and I am pleased."

Why can He say this, when we know all that is wrong with us? When we know we aren't perfect?

²⁵ Sister M. Faustina Kowalska, *Divine Mercy in My Soul, Diary*, (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 1987), Entry 351, page 157.

The answer is found in Hebrews 4:14-16: “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.”

We have a merciful high priest who was radically stripped naked. Everything was laid bare when He hung on the cross. And as He died, paying the price for our sin, He called out,

IT IS FINISHED.

You don't have to justify yourself anymore.

IT IS FINISHED.

The price for your sin has been paid.

IT IS FINISHED.

Your worth has been determined on the cross.

And what are you worth?

Jesus says, “You are worth my *everything*.”

MY RESOLUTION

“My Resolution” is your opportunity to write down one specific personal application from this lesson. We can take in a lot of information from studying the Bible, but if we don’t translate it into action, we have totally missed the point. In James 1:22, we’re told that we shouldn’t just hear the Word of God; we are to “be doers of the word.” So what qualities should be found in a good resolution? It should be **personal** (use *I, me, my, mine*), it should be **possible** (don’t choose something so far-fetched that you’ll just become discouraged), it should be **measurable** (a specific goal to achieve within a specific time period), and it should be **action oriented** (not just a spiritual thought).

In what specific way will I apply what I learned in this lesson?

Example:

I will tune in to an online Mass this weekend, having done these lessons and prepared my heart to go deeper in intimacy with Christ, the Word of God.

I will make the following Act of Spiritual Communion:

My Jesus,

I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

I love You above all things,

and I desire to receive You into my soul.

Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally,

come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if You were already there

and unite myself wholly to You.

Never permit me to be separated from You.

Amen.

My resolution:

CATECHISM CLIPS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

CCC #858 Jesus is the Father's Emissary. From the beginning of his ministry, he "called to him those whom he desired;...And he appointed twelve, whom also he named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach." From then on, they would also be his "emissaries" (Greek *apostoloi*). In them, Christ continues his own mission: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." The apostles' ministry is the continuation of his mission; Jesus said to the Twelve: "he who receives you receives me."

CCC #862 "Just as the office which the Lord confided to Peter alone, as first of the apostles, destined to be transmitted to his successors, is a permanent one, so also endures the office, which the apostles received, of shepherding the Church, a charge destined to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops." Hence the Church teaches that "the bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church, in such wise that whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and him who sent Christ."

CCC #1087 Thus the risen Christ, by giving the Holy Spirit to the apostles, entrusted to them his power of sanctifying: they became sacramental signs of Christ. By the power of the same Holy Spirit they entrusted this power to their successors. This "apostolic succession" structures the whole liturgical life of the Church and is itself sacramental, handed on by the sacrament of Holy Orders.

CCC #1441 Only God forgives sins. Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" and exercises this divine power: "Your sins are forgiven." Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name.

LIVE WITH LISA BRENNINKMEYER FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

Be sure to join us on Saturday, April 18 at 2 PM ET/ 11 AM PT on Facebook Live and Instagram Stories for teaching and practical application to prepare us for Divine Mercy Sunday!

TO RECEIVE FUTURE *DEFINING MOMENTS* STUDIES:

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Answer Key

Day 1

- “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.” (Acts 2:42)
 - Answers will vary.
- “Awe came upon everyone ...” (Acts 2:43)
- There is a lot of family togetherness in many homes right now. Some might argue that there is too much togetherness and far too much is communal. My five children sharing one bathroom would no doubt cite this as something stretching their patience. Not everyone is experiencing the togetherness of immediate family, but we all are experiencing a global togetherness and solidarity as we face a common enemy in this virus.
- “They would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need.” (Acts 2:45)
 - Answers will vary.
- “They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people.” (Acts 2:46-47)
 - Answers will vary.
 - “Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth.” (Luke 3:5)
- People came to know the Lord in a life-changing way. In Acts 2:47, “the Lord added to their

number those who were being saved,” and in Luke 3:6, “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Day 2

1. A. The Psalmist wasn't content praising God on his own. He invited his whole nation, Israel, to join him, along with the house of Aaron (the priesthood) and all those who fear the LORD.
B. Answers will vary.
2. A. We are to place our trust in the Lord.
B. Answers will vary.
C. Answers will vary.
3. A. The Lord came to my help. The Lord is my strength and might. The Lord has become my savior.
B. Answers will vary.
4. A. Psalm 118:22 is ultimately speaking of Jesus. He was the stone rejected by His people, who then became the cornerstone, the most important part of the Church, the One who holds everything and everyone in place. Peter was later referred to as the cornerstone of the Catholic Church, after Christ Jesus ascended into Heaven, leaving Peter in charge of His church on Earth.
B. “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17), just as a cornerstone is the first stone laid, and the one that holds the whole structure together.
5. This is how we are to live—entirely in the present moment. When we don't dwell on the past or fast forward to the future, we can look at the day the Lord has given us. This helps us to look for the blessing in the moment—to rejoice and be glad. Our ability to practice gratitude is directly correlated to our ability to stay in the present moment.

Day 3

1. A. God offers us the gift of “a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3)
B. Answers will vary.
2. Your inheritance is “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.” It is being “kept in heaven for you.” (1 Peter 1:4)
3. Answers will vary.
4. A. There are times the Lord allows us to suffer “so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for

praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7).

B. Answers will vary.

C. Answers will vary.

5. Answers will vary.
6. The goal of our faith is the salvation of our souls.

Day 4

1. A. The disciples were locked in the house. They weren't going anywhere; they were confined in close quarters. They were also afraid.
B. Jesus' first words to them were, "Peace be with you." The disciples were startled and frightened and thought that they saw a ghost.
2. Jesus showed them His hands and His side. He told the disciples to touch Him and see that His was a truly resurrected body, because a spirit wouldn't have flesh and bones. To further prove that there had been a real resurrection of His physical body, Jesus ate a piece of fish.
3. A. Jesus again said, "Peace be with you," and then said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
B. Jesus sent the Apostles out to preach. They were sent out as Jesus' "emissaries" (Greek *apostoloi*) Jesus continued His mission through them. Their ministry was a continuation of His. Jesus said to them, "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me ..." (Matthew 10:40).
C. CCC #862, "Just as the office which the Lord confided to Peter alone, as first of the apostles, destined to be transmitted to his successors, is a permanent one, so also endures the office, which the apostles received, of shepherding the Church, a charge destined to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops." In no way does this mean that a bishop has carte blanche to teach whatever he likes and say it is the word of God. Bishops have been condemned as heretics, so clearly there are checks and balances in place. This church teaching regarding the authority of the bishops refers to the times when the bishops in an ecumenical council define something, or bishops throughout the world define something to be infallibly held. When an individual bishop is instructing people in his diocese, or when many but not all bishops are gathered together to teach, they are NOT subject to the charism of infallibility in the Church. The Magisterium works diligently inspired by the Holy Spirit, Scripture, Tradition, and our Pope to build trust and respect to Christ and His Church.
4. A. Jesus breathed on them and conferred the Holy Spirit.
B. This impartation of the Holy Spirit was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Ezekiel over the dry bones—that God would breathe new life into them. This was also the fulfillment of Ezekiel 36:26, "I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

5. A. The Council of Trent teaches that in this moment, Jesus conferred on the Apostles the power to forgive sins in His name. This is exercised in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- B. Only God forgives sins. When the priest absolves a person of sin in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, he is doing so because Jesus has given him that authority to exercise in His name.
- C. We confess our sins to God through the priest, who is *in persona Christi*.

Day 5

1. A. Thomas said that unless he saw the mark of the nails in Jesus' hands and put his finger into the nail marks and put his hand into Jesus' side, he would not believe.
- B. Thomas withdrew from the fellowship of the disciples—choosing isolation over community.
- C. Answers will vary.
2. A. Jesus did not chastise Thomas. He invited him to put his finger and hands in His wounds and encouraged him to believe.
- B. Answers will vary.
3. A. "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)
- B. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." When Thomas called Jesus "My Lord and my God!" he was acknowledging Him as Lord, his master and God, his creator. He recognized that somehow, God was able to take on flesh, and God was standing right in front of him.
4. When the waves of doubt beat against St. Faustina's soul, God strengthened her will.
5. John wrote his Gospel so that those who read it would come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief, we might have life in His name.

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