

Saint Faustina Kowalska: Union of Mercy and Trust

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgments.....	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I: HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS	6
Part 1: Introducing St. Faustina Kowalska and Her Mission.....	6
A. Early Age.....	6
B. Religious Life and Mission.....	10
Part 2: John Paul II: the Mercy Pope.....	18
CHAPTER II: THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS	20
Part 1: Liturgical Tradition and the Spiritual Culture of Faustina’s World: Devotion to the Love of Christ and His Pierced Side...	20
A. Symbols in Christian Liturgy.....	20
1. Devotion to Sacred Heart.....	21
2. The Image as Symbolic Representation.....	23
B. Encountering Christ in Sacraments.....	27
C. Eucharistic Banquet – <i>koinonia</i>	28
D. Christ the Victim and Faustina’s Participation.....	29
Part 2: Mercy in Catholic Teaching and Contemporary Theology.....	32
A. Father Sopocko - Contemporary Teaching on Trust.....	34
B. Development of the Attitude of Trust.....	36
1. The Supernatural Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope, Love.....	37
2. Moral Virtues.....	43
C. Distrust and Impediments.....	48
CONCLUSION	51
BIBLIOGRAPHY	53

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INTRODUCTION

The Divine Mercy devotion was introduced to me 14 years ago, and it was the main reason why I later decided to study theology at St. Mark's. Now, in the last semester of my graduate program, I have chosen this same devotion as the topic of my research paper. My hope is to present from a theological perspective the devotion to Divine Mercy as it comes to us through a private revelation given to Saint Faustina.

It is a fact of Church life that private revelations and mystical experiences have often been the source of new practices of piety or devotion, and that such can become dominant in the faith-experience of laity and members of the clergy. Recognizing this fact requires the student of theology, like myself, to ask the question, "what theological value and influence do these phenomena have for the Church?" The comparatively recent experiences of Faustina Kowalska¹ had a very deep effect on the person and thought of Pope John Paul II, and because of his influence, the whole Church has had to consider this "new" spiritual figure – at least inasmuch as the commemoration of Divine Mercy has entered into the Liturgical celebration of Easter and its Octave.²

Indeed, the 2003 Roman Missal now definitively refers to the Second Sunday of Easter as "Divine Mercy Sunday" and also includes a Votive Mass with this same designation. Therefore the experience of Saint Faustina is a very appropriate and necessary subject for academic and theological consideration.

¹ In this paper, Saint Faustina Kowalska is also addressed as Sister Faustina or simply Faustina in order to make her person more approachable.

² Cardinal Jorge A. Median Estevez, Prefect, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Decree Establishing the Sunday after Easter 'Divine Mercy Sunday'*, 5 May 2000, <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=2822&CFID=129375629&CFTOKEN=45383407>, Accessed on April 1, 2012.

Although private revelations cannot correct or add anything essentially new to Public Revelation already revealed in Scripture and Tradition, the Church can progress in deepening the understanding of the original deposit of faith by embracing private revelations as a special grace for the good of men.³ The revelations given to Faustina Kowalska were recognized by John Paul II as a special call to our time, and he strongly encouraged the whole universal Church to pay heed to them.⁴ He found Sister Faustina's revelations so profoundly important he claimed they had, in a sense, formed the image of his Pontificate. He contributed to the promotion of this devotion in several authoritative ways: beatifying and canonizing Faustina; instituting the liturgical feast of Divine Mercy; and consecrating the whole world to Divine Mercy at the dedication of the new Shrine of Divine Mercy in Lągowo, Poland, in 2002.

One of the great English - speaking authorities on the devotion, the Canadian theologian Robert Stackpole, writes: "what makes Saint Faustina's revelations striking is the way that they so powerfully express the central truths that lie at the heart of the Gospel."⁵ They are also "perfectly in accord" with the "directive of the Vatican II Constitution on Sacred Liturgy."⁶

Faustina Kowalska belongs today to the group of the most popular and well-known Saints of the Church. Through her the Lord Jesus communicates to the world the great message of God's mercy, and reveals the pattern of Christian

³ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that private revelations do not belong to the deposit of faith. "It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history." *Catechism of Catholic Church, CCC 67.*

⁴ In his homily on Mercy Sunday, 2001, the Holy Father spoke these words: "Indeed the message she brought is an appropriate and an incisive answer that God wanted to offer to the questions and expectations of human beings in our time, marked by terrible tragedies." Robert Stackpole, *Understanding Divine Mercy Sunday*, John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy, Congregation of Marians of the Immaculate Conception, 2003, p 1.

⁵ Stackpole, p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

perfection based on trust in God and on the attitude of mercy toward one's neighbors.⁷

Christian Spirituality:

Christian spirituality can be expressed as a participation in the mystery of Christ through the interior life of grace, a radical openness to the transcendent God, who is Trinity. Wainwright, professor of Christian Theology, refers to spirituality as the “combination of praying and living,”⁸ therefore a love relationship lived and explored within the depth of the human heart. The Catholic Church officially teaches that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity.⁹

Although Faustina has not left us a systematically expounded doctrine of the interior life in her writings, like St. Teresa of Avila, she nevertheless emerges as someone who brings a new school of spirituality into the life of the Church, based on the profound experience of the mystery of Divine Mercy, from which springs the attitude of entrustment to God and of mercy towards neighbor. In the unfolding of Faustina's interior life, the voice of Jesus demanded precisely these two attitudes from her.¹⁰

For Faustina Kowalska living trust in mercy was the path to unity with God, and effected a gradual transformation of her life in ever greater charity towards God

⁷ Vatican Website, *Mary Faustina Kowalska*, http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20000430_faustina_en.html, Accessed on January 27, 2012.

⁸ Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, *The Study of Spirituality*, Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 9. NT writers describe this living as ‘living sacrifice’, ‘spiritual worship’ (*Rom. 12.1*).

⁹ CCC 2013. “In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that . . . doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus, the holiness of the People of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church through the lives of so many saints.” *LG*, 40 § 2.

¹⁰ Sister M. Elzbieta Siepak, *The Spirituality of Saint Faustina, The Road to Union with God*, Edittion II, The Shrine of the Divine Mercy, Cracow 2002, p. 39.

and neighbour. She understood, even from the early years of her life, that to be perfect is to be merciful and kind towards others, as her Father in heaven is merciful. Living trust, which she translated into “trustful loving,” has become the key in her interior life, and her fundamental attitude while striving for true and authentic union with God.

Through the teachings of her spiritual director, Father Michael Sopocho, a theologian of some weight, Faustina understood that the mercy of God consists not only in bearing man away from the misery of sin, but also in allowing man to participate in the Divine nature by grace.¹¹ Thus, we can look at mercy from two different standpoints: what we experience and practice towards one another; and who God is in Himself. Faustina’s experience embraces both.

The paper is divided into two parts: 1) Historical considerations – a short biography of Faustina Kowalska, her mission, and contribution to the contemporary spirituality of the Church; 2) Theological considerations – components of the devotion, their theological presentation to the faithful, and the development of an attitude of trust. In this research paper, special focus is given to the importance and significance of trust in the mercy of God as revealed in the life and writings of Saint Faustina, as well as in the contemporary theology of her time. Questions to be considered in my investigation are: 1) How do Faustina’s life and writings contribute to a deeper understanding of the Christian faith? 2) Does her spirituality provide new lines of theological investigation? 3) How does Faustina’s message recall mankind to the living of the Gospel more faithfully?

¹¹ The Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, *In Theology*, http://www.faustyna.pl/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=353&Itemid=60 , Accessed on March 20, 2012.

and 4) What are the hindrances to ‘trust’ in relation to common human experiences, and how do the revelations of Saint Faustina relate to these? Church Doctrine on the mercy of God will also be addressed in order to demonstrate the unity between Sister Faustina’s revelations and the deposit of faith.

Trust:

From a human perspective, trust means believing in another person, counting on another person in time of need, being convinced of another’s goodness, loyalty, greatness of soul, and generous love. Only in the context of such love, are people able to entrust their affairs, and to reveal their most intimate secrets without fear to another person. In human understanding, to “live trust” is for one to willingly and voluntarily abandon control over the actions of another towards them, without any knowledge or certainty of what will unfold, but with a firm conviction of the good will of the other. Trust between a child and a parent is a perfect example of human trust, a total dependence on another. Such understanding of human trust is close to the biblical concept of faith, or entrustment to God’s merciful love. A lack of trust precludes people from meaningful communication and building lasting friendships.¹² Unfortunately, people’s trust often fails or a person fails to be trustworthy and this results in disappointments and separations between persons. Therefore, seeking and understanding the way to a lasting trust, one that lays the natural and human groundwork for building personal and communal relationships, and is the fundamental component in the devotion of Divine Mercy, is important to investigate.¹³ Through Sister Faustina, the voice of Jesus invites us to trust in

¹² Siepak, *The Spirituality of St. Faustina*, p. 39-42, The Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, *In Saint Fautina’s School of Trust*, Misericordia Publications, Cracow 2002, p. 9-10.

¹³ The Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, *Trust in the Practice of Life*, Misericordia Publications, Cracow 2007. In practice, trust consists in fulfilling God’s will expressed by

Him anew: “The graces of my mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is – TRUST. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive.” (1578) ¹⁴

CHAPTER I: HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Part 1: Introducing Faustina Kowalska and her Mission

A. Early Age

Helen Kowalska, the third of ten children of Stanislaus and Marianna Kowalski, was born in the small village of Glogowiec, Poland, on August 25th, 1905. Helena was born into a time of turmoil and unrest. Although Poland, as a nation, no longer existed, having been occupied by Austria, Prussia and Russia, hopes for a free Poland still lived in the hearts of the Polish people, and faith was alive as they secretly prayed for a rebirth of their nation.

The life of Helena’s father, a simple carpenter, was marked by much poverty and hard labour as he tried to support his large family. Though the family was poor materially, their faith and daily prayer kept them strong in difficult times. However, from the age of five, Helena’s deep spirituality set her apart, especially after she experienced a dream in which Mary, Mother of God, walked with her hand in hand through a beautiful

the Commandments, obligations of one's state in life, the Beatitudes, the evangelical counsels or discerned inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁴For clarity of purpose, the quotes taken from Saint Faustina’s Diary will be numbered as they are in the Diary and placed at the end of each quotation. I will not use the footnotes for that purpose. Faustina Kowalska, *Diary of St. Faustina, Divine Mercy in my Soul*, Marians of the Immaculate Conception, Stockbridge, MA, 1998. The invitation to trust speaks of the image, which is given to the faithful as the vessel; and also speaks to the heart, seeking a living trust as the means. This invitation reflects two aspects of the Divine Mercy devotion: living faith and secondary means such the image.

garden.¹⁵ Helena's parents could not understand her attraction to deep prayer and found her religious interest strange and different from the other children. Though they favoured Helena, who was very helpful, obedient and pleasant child, they considered it best to discourage that part of her spirituality they did not consider normal. Yet, they could not suppress her attraction to God. One evening, when Helena was seven, during the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, she heard Jesus speak to her soul in a new way. She experienced the definite call of God, "the grace of a vocation to the religious life."⁽⁷⁾¹⁶

Biographers speak of Helena's deep awareness of the greater poverty of others, and the compassion already alive in her heart in the early years of her life. Her sister, Josephine, would relate that at the age of 10, Helena tried to obtain money in the same way that the poor did, by dressing in rags, knocking on doors and begging for alms. She returned quite depressed saying "The poor have a terrible life. How much they have to bear getting food for themselves."¹⁷ Helena's siblings testify later of her extremely kind nature and the many times she was responsible for taking care of them, telling them stories of the Saints, and reading to them from the Bible. Through her siblings we learn of the strict life of discipline that Stanislaus Kowalski imposed on his family, of his severe punishments, of Helena's constant efforts to please her father, and of her efforts to shield her siblings from his wrath. From such reports it seems that from an early age her life of

¹⁵ Catherine M. O'Dell, *Faustina Apostle of Divine Mercy*, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc. Huntington, Indiana, 1998, p. 19.

¹⁶ Saint Faustina refers to this day in her diary but does not share the exact words heard in her soul. She writes that she was not always obedient to that voice.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

sacrifice on behalf of others had already begun to take shape.¹⁸ These experiences may have deeply influenced Faustina's spiritual life. In her early mystical experiences, she seemed to see Jesus, the Son as "the merciful one" while God the Father retained the authoritarian qualities of her own father. On July 16, 1936 she wrote: "I spent this whole night in prayer. I meditated upon the Lord's Passion, and my soul was crushed by the burden of God's justice. The Hand of the Lord touched me." (661) Perhaps one of the important elements of Faustina's growth as evident in her *Diary* is the healing and correction of this attitude. In another place she writes: "Agony.... Suddenly, God's presence pervades me and I feel as though I am coming under the power of the just God. His justice pervades me to the marrow." (672) Faustina will later come to understand that the mercy of the Son is the same as that of the Father.

Due to the Russian occupation of Poland, Helena did not begin her primary school education until the age of twelve. She completed only three terms, since the older students were required to leave to make room for younger children to start their education. Helena was quickly becoming a woman, and while others her age were interested in their dresses, appearances, and friendships with boys, she was interested in prayer. When she tried to talk to her parents about her spiritual experiences, she was told to stop imagining things; therefore, from early on, with her spirituality misunderstood and receiving no guidance, she kept her interior life hidden as she quietly tried to live a life pleasing to God. The feeling of rejection may have increased her identification with Jesus

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 29. On a particular occasion, having accompanied her sister Josephine to a party, they returned home late in the company of a young man from the party. Accused by their uncle of "witnessed improper behaviour," their enraged father metered out severe punishment without giving the girls a chance to give account. Though innocent, Helena accepted the rebukes and whipping with great grace, determining "for the sadness she caused her father, to make up a hundredfold by bringing honour, not shame."

and increased her sense of needing to forgive others. At 16 years old, Helena began to work for the Goryszewski family, quickly gaining their affection, and that of their young son. However, while at work, a deep spiritual encounter, a profound awareness of interior light shining in her soul, would leave her shaken, and unable to perform her duties. This experience convinced Helena to follow the interior inspiration to come closer to God, and to return home to once again seek her parents' permission to join a convent and devote her life to God. However, her father refused permission and would not discuss the matter.¹⁹

Unable to persuade her father, Helena accepted his decision. Eventually her desire for God began to weaken and she purchased attractive clothes, began to go to dances, and slipped into a more worldly lifestyle. In her *Diary* she writes of an encounter with Jesus that served as a moment of choice for her. While at a dance she saw Jesus at her side, racked with pain, stripped of His clothing and covered with wounds. Jesus said to her: "How long shall I put up with you and how long will you keep putting Me off?"(9) These words almost seem to make Jesus into a suitor seeking an exclusive and undivided love. She immediately went before the Blessed Sacrament in the nearby Cathedral, and in prayer she heard the Lord say: "Go at once to Warsaw; you will enter a convent there." (9) Confiding her experience to her sister, and without saying goodbye to her parents, she boarded a train to Warsaw. Here she was led to a priest in whom she confided, and who arranged a place for her to stay while searching for a convent to enter. The Convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy would be the order which would eventually accept Helena.

¹⁹ Perhaps there were many reasons for Helena's father refusal: misinformed fears formed during the Russian occupation, the seizure of convents and the exile of religious members; their hope and desire that Helena would care for them in their old age; and the shame of their poverty that would make it unable to produce the dowry the convent would require.

The superior, Mother Michael Moraczewska, wisely intuitive, would instruct Helena to go to the Lord of the House and ask whether He would accept her. She went to the chapel and asked Jesus: “Lord of this house, do You accept me?” On relating Jesus’ reply: “I do accept, you are in My Heart.” Mother Michael replied: “If the Lord has accepted, then I also will accept.”(14)²⁰

B. Religious Life and Mission

Helena finally entered the convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy on August 1, 1925. She would be known from then on as Maria Faustina Kowalska. Though Faustina writes that it seemed she had “stepped into the life of Paradise” (17), she soon found that she had little time for prayer due to the many tasks assigned to her, and she began to consider entering another religious community. Again she saw the figure of Jesus, bearing the wounds of His sufferings, Who said to her: “It is you who will cause Me this pain if you leave this convent.”(19) Her thoughts about leaving the convent were quickly overcome. In the future Sister Faustina would be transferred many times from one convent facility to another, and most of her work in the beginning of her religious life would be as a cook in the convent kitchens and bakeries.

A few weeks after entering the religious life, Faustina’s health began to deteriorate.²¹ In addition to her physical sufferings, she began to experience great darkness in her soul, the agony of feeling that she was displeasing to God, and of being

²⁰ Though Helena had finally been accepted to a convent, her inability to afford the Postulant wardrobe would delay her entrance. Mother Moraczewska encouraged her by suggesting that Helena work and bring money to the convent for safe-keeping until there was sufficient to accept her.

²¹ On April 30th Faustina took a religious habit of a novice and during the ceremony, the Lord revealed to her how much she would suffer. She writes of that experience in her *Diary* (22). In short time, Faustina would experience the first signs of a debilitating illness, which in September 1936 was diagnosed as advanced tuberculosis.

rejected by Him. Despair plagued her, “complete abandonment,” which she calls “The Trial of Trials” (98), and a terrible hatred began to break out in her soul, a hatred for all that is holy and divine. (25) Eventually what she felt was almost complete abandonment on the part of others. Her best intentions were often misinterpreted by the sisters, and though Jesus ordered her to tell everything to her Superiors, they did not believe what she was saying, often inflicting humiliations on her with harsh words or judgments, and treating her with pity as one deluded or imagining things. (25, 38) Her *Diary* bears extensive evidence of these struggles. She writes of her dealing with suffering, and it becomes gradually clearer that redemptive suffering for the salvation of souls was a part of her mission.²² Her resolve to suffer for Christ grew stronger, and she began to write of suffering as a great grace, describing the suffering soul as one becoming like the Saviour – “in suffering, love becomes crystallized; the greater the suffering, the purer the love.” (57) Throughout this time of acute sufferings, Faustina continued to experience flashes of understanding and revelations about God’s great mercy.

Externally nothing revealed Faustina’s rich mystical interior life, her many mystical graces. She performed her daily tasks and faithfully observed the rule of religious life. Although her life was apparently insignificant, repetitive and dull, she hid within herself an extraordinary union with God, who chose her as the secretary of His mercy and would speak interiorly to her heart and through many visions (1605, 1693, 1784).

On February 22, 1931, Jesus appeared to Faustina as the risen Christ (47) wearing a white garment. One hand was raised in gesture of blessing; the other was touching His

²² George Kosicki, *Now is the Time for Mercy*, Marian Press, Stockbridge, Revised Edition, 2010, p. 79.

garment at the breast. From beneath the garment, two rays of pale and red light were emanating from near His Heart. Faustina writes of how Jesus instructed her:

Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: ‘Jesus I trust in You.’ I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and then throughout the world. I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish. (47) I desire that there be a Feast of Mercy. I want this image, which you will paint with a brush, to be solemnly blessed on the first Sunday after Easter; that Sunday is to be the Feast of Mercy. (49)

Faustina understood that was the appearance in Upper Room. She would indicate later that this was just a moment after Jesus spoke the words: “*Peace be with you*” (John 20-19). The two rays of red and pale light (299), which were directed towards the viewer and not the ground, represent the blood and water that flowed from Christ’s pierced side. The pale indicates the water of Baptism and Penance, and the red indicates the blood of Christ and the Eucharist.²³ The message regarding this image of Mercy, which Sister Faustina refers to as a vessel to which the people are to come to for graces, has been repeated many times in her private revelations. Machniak writes that the “veneration of the image is only the point of departure for the devotion, which contains the attitude of trust, the approach to the sacraments and the deed of mercy.”²⁴

In late May 1933, when Sister Faustina was transferred to Vilnius as the convent gardener, she met Father Michael Sopocho, the newly appointed confessor to the nuns, who became her spiritual director and eventually the first scholar to transmit Faustina’s experience and provide a theological support and analysis for it. Upon learning of

²³ Father Jan Machniak is chair of the Theology of Spirituality at the Papal Theological Academy in Krakow, Poland. Jan Machniak, *The idea of Divine Mercy in the private visions of S. Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938) in the context of the recent theology*, http://www.janmachniak.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=53:the-idea-of-divine-mercy-in-the-private-visions-of-s-faustina-kowalska-1905-1938-in-the-context-of-the-recent-theology&catid=6:publikacje-zagraniczne&Itemid=19, Accessed on March 15, 2012. More on the symbolism of the image of Divine Mercy will be addressed later in the paper.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, paragraph 4.

Faustina's spiritual experiences and her inner conversations with God, Father Sopocho advised Faustina to begin writing a diary and to record the conversations and messages from Jesus including those already experienced.²⁵ In January 1934, Father Sopocho introduced Faustina to the artist Eugene Kazimierowski and by June 1934 he had finished painting an image based on the direction of Sister Faustina and Father Sopocho.

For the rest of her life Faustina's writings are dominated by her increasing experience of the mercy of Christ, and Jesus' teachings and requests made through her and directed to the whole Church. On Good Friday, 1934, Jesus instructed Faustina to write down a novena in preparation for the Feast of Mercy to be celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter, which completes the Easter Octave, (1209) and promised that whoever approaches the Fount of Life – Holy Communion – on that day, in a state of grace, would be granted a complete remission of sins and punishment. Faustina would come to understand that Thomas benefitted from Divine Mercy and therefore the Sunday of his Gospel was appropriate to reveal this mystery.

Jesus implored priests to proclaim His tender mercy and to encourage sinners to approach this "greatest attribute of God" with confidence. (1520, 1521) On Good Friday, April 19, 1935, Jesus requested the Divine Mercy image be publicly honoured. (4141) With Faustina in attendance, on April 26, 1935, Father Sopocho gave the first sermon ever on Divine Mercy, and on Sunday April 28, with the permission of Archbishop Jabrzykowski, the image was placed within the Gate of Dawn Church in Vilnius, during Mass. On September 13, 1935, Faustina recorded the words of a "chaplet of Divine

²⁵ After confessing to Father Sopocho that Jesus had been conversing with her, he had Dr. Helena Maciejewska, a psychiatrist and physician associated with the Convent, perform a complete psychiatric evaluation of Faustina. Passing the required tests and declared sound of mind, Father Sopocho began to have confidence in Faustina, and supported her efforts. Faustina's interior life was hidden from the eyes of her other sisters, and made known only after her death.

Mercy,” a repetitive series of short prayers recited using a traditional rosary. The new element in her devotional practice was to have three purposes: to obtain mercy, to trust in Christ’s mercy, and to show mercy to others.

From late 1936, hospital visits became a routine for Faustina, and her suffering increased as her tuberculosis progressed. By June, 1938, Faustina was too ill to write any longer in her *Diary*. Mother Michael and Father Sopocko continued to visit her occasionally, and in September, weak and unable to eat much, she was taken home from hospital to Cracow. She died peacefully on October 5, 1938.

Saint Faustina’s writings and new apostolic movement:

Father Groszer writes in his preface to the book, *Meet Saint Faustina*, that “anyone familiar with the history of mysticism” finds the “familiar pattern of God’s preferences-He exalts the lowly.”²⁶ Faustina’s education was flawed, her spelling and punctuation were far from good; yet many theologians who closely studied her writings recognized a certain brilliance in her knowledge of mercy. On the instruction of Father Sopocko, Faustina began to write her *Diary* in 1934 and the entire text is contained in six notebooks, with the last entry in June 1938.²⁷ The present English translation is the work of the Marians of the Immaculate Conception, who made every effort to be faithful to the official and original text in Polish. The *Diary* has since been translated into many different languages, is the subject of study guides, and has been referred to as document of Catholic mysticism of exceptional worth for the Universal Church.

²⁶George Kosicki, *Meet St. Faustina: Herald of Divine Mercy*, Charis Servant Publication Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2001.

²⁷In the first inaccurate transcripts after Faustina’s death, entire pages were omitted, whole sentences and a great many of the words were left out or substituted, causing confusion in essential matters of the text.

Machniak recognizes two sources of understanding of the doctrine of mercy in Faustina's life: her inner communications with Merciful Jesus, and the "contemporary theology of Divine Mercy found in the teachings of her spiritual directors and confessors,"²⁸ of which the most influential was Father Michael Sopocko, professor of dogmatic theology.²⁹ The Divine Mercy devotion helped Faustina to live a life in accordance to the Divine Revelation and Catholic Tradition.³⁰

Machniak writes that for Faustina Kowalska, the simplicity of the Divine Mercy devotion was very important in enabling her to transmit the truth of faith to the people.³¹ Five elements may be distinguished in Faustina's spiritual experience and legacy: 1. The image of the Merciful Jesus; 2. The Feast of Divine Mercy; 3. The Chaplet of Divine Mercy; 4. The Hour of Mercy; 5. Propagation of the devotion of mercy.³²

Theologians who have analyzed Sister Faustina's writings see her mission as being divided into three tasks: *First*, proclaiming the truth of the merciful love of God, as revealed in the Sacred Scriptures; *Second*, imploring God's mercy for the entire world, and particularly for sinners, through the practice of the new forms of devotion; *Third*, initiating the apostolic movement of Divine Mercy which will grow out of Faustina's

²⁸Machniak, paragraph 1.

²⁹ Father Sopocko understood the notion of mercy, according to St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas which will be addressed in the second part of this paper.

³⁰ Machniak, paragraph 1. "The Sister Faustina experience of faith, including also the experience of Divine Mercy, was rooted in the teaching of the Church and in the charisma of the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy The devotion to the Divine Mercy helped Faustina to live the mystery of God who revealed His Mercy in the work of salvation of Jesus Christ."

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Maria Elzbieta Siepak, *The New "Congregation" of Sister Faustina*, The Apostolic Movement of the Divine Mercy, *Misericordia* Publication, Cracow 2005, second edition, p. 77.

charism, and will embrace an attitude of childlike trust in God and mercy actively lived toward one's neighbor.³³

After the death of Sister Faustina, her charism inspired a new apostolic movement of Divine Mercy within the contemporary Church. The development of the movement started when the devotion to Divine Mercy, as handed down by Sister Faustina, began to be practiced by the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, after Father Michael Sopocko published images of the Merciful Jesus with the chaplet of Divine Mercy as well as a booklet of prayers.

During World War II, the hope-inspiring message of Divine Mercy spread throughout the world.³⁴ However, it was slowed down by the Holy See's notification of 1959, which placed a ban on propagating the devotion as handed down by Faustina Kowalska, and which was later attributed mainly to discrepancies due to the incorrect translation of various parts of the *Diary*.³⁵ The Polish Church continued to spread the message of mercy without mentioning Sister Faustina Kowalska.

It was John Paul II who made the greatest contribution to make Sister Faustina Kowalska and her message known to the world. As Karol Wojtyla, Archbishop of Cracow, he initiated the Informative Process relating to the life and virtues of Sister

³³ *The Life of St. Faustina Kowalska, Apostle of Divine Mercy*, http://www.piercedhearts.org/theology_heart/life_saints/faustina_kowalska_life_of.htm, Accessed on March 15, 2012.

³⁴ A copy of Fr. Sopocko's memorial on the devotion to Divine Mercy was brought to the USA by Fr Jozef Jarzebowski, a Marian Priest. The popularity of the devotion spread, the Felician Sisters published the novena, litany and chaplet including the image of the Merciful Jesus, and the Apostolate of Divine Mercy was created by the Marians in Stockbridge to undertake the propagation of Sr. Faustina's mission. Faustinum website, <http://www.faustinum.pl/faustinum.php>, Accessed on March 20, 2012.

³⁵ In the first inaccurate transcripts after Sister Faustina's death, entire pages were omitted, whole sentences and a great many of the words were left out or substituted, causing confusion in essential matters of the text.

Faustina in October, 1965, and was instrumental in the submission of the same to Rome in January, 1968. On April 15, 1978, the Holy See, after a careful examination of some original documents that were not available before, overturned their decision and again permitted the practice of the devotion. The Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints announced by decree that the process of Beatification of the Servant of God, Sister Faustina Kowalska was formally inaugurated and few months later, on October 16, 1978, Cardinal Wojtyla was elevated to the Chair of Peter under the name “Pope John Paul II.” Faustina’s *Diary* began to acquire tremendous interest, especially after the publication of John Paul II’s encyclical in 1980, *Dives in Misericordia*, which provided a rich biblical and theological context for the devotion.

After the beatification of Faustina in 1993, the movement of Divine Mercy began to spread throughout the world. On June 7, 1997, Pope John Paul II made a pilgrimage to the tomb of Blessed Faustina in Poland. There, he addressed the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in a very personal way, reflecting on Divine Mercy and giving a personal witness to the influence of then Blessed Faustina and the importance of her message. On April 30, 2000, Pope John Paul II declared at Faustina’s canonization that the Feast of Divine Mercy would be established on the second Sunday of Easter. He said of the Feast: “I give thanks to the Divine Providence that I have been enabled to contribute personally to the fulfillment of Christ’s will, through the institution of the feast of Divine Mercy.”³⁶

³⁶ Robert R. Allard, *Divine Mercy Sunday*, http://www.divinemercysunday.com/feast_of_the_divine_mercy.htm, Accessed on March 15, 2012.

Part 2: John Paul II: the Mercy Pope

In his *Regina Caeli* address Pope Benedict XVI said: “The mystery of God’s merciful love was at the center of the pontificate of my venerated predecessor.”³⁷ It is precisely the mercy of God that is the ‘privileged key’ for interpreting his pontificate.³⁸ John Paul II introduced the core of His papacy by devoting his first Encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, based on biblical texts, entirely to the mystery of God’s merciful love throughout salvation history. He emphasized the need for the Church to bear witness in her mission to God’s mercy in a broken world, saying “mercy is an indispensable dimension of love primarily focused on the most fundamental human value which constitutes the dignity of his humanity.”³⁹ Jesus Christ, “in revealing the love-mercy of God, at the same time demanded from people that they also should be guided in their lives by love and mercy;”⁴⁰ and he urged the faithful to witness to merciful love incarnate in life, not only through works of mercy, but in calling for the mercy of God upon the whole world against evil.⁴¹

He desired the message of the merciful love of God to reach all men and women and he exhorted the faithful to be its witnesses. In difficult moments in the life of the Church he always pointed to the merciful love of God as the source of healing and peace, and especially so while addressing the scandal of sex abuse in the Church. In his address

³⁷Benedict XVI, *Regina Caeli*, April 23, 2006, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/angelus/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_reg_20060423_en.html , Accessed on March 26, 2012.

³⁸ Benedict XVI, Homily at Mass for John Paul II, “*Death Was the Seal of an Existence Totally Given to Christ.*” April 2, 2008. <http://www.zenit.org/article-22178?l=english>, Accessed March 26, 2012.

³⁹ John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 1980, 7. http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0215/_INDEX.HTM, Accessed on March 26, 2012.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 12. “The Church-professing mercy and remaining always faithful to it-has the right and the duty to call upon the mercy of God, imploring it in the face of all the manifestations of physical and moral evil, before all the threats that cloud the whole horizon of the life of humanity today.”

to the Cardinals of the United States, John Paul II assured them of the importance of forgiveness and of confidence in Christ's liberating power.⁴²

On the day of Faustina's canonization, our late Holy Father presented her life and witness to the Gospel as a "gift for our time."⁴³ John Paul II reminded the faithful on different occasions that apart from the mercy of God, there is no other source of hope for mankind.⁴⁴ His understanding of the evils present in the modern world was always tempered by his belief in the mercy of God embracing the lives of everyone, outside the Church as well as within. With this message of hope he led the Church into the third Millennium: "The light of Divine Mercy will illuminate the way for the men and women of the third millennium."⁴⁵ We read in Saint Faustina's *Diary*: "Humanity will not find peace until it turns trustfully to divine mercy." (300)⁴⁶

⁴² John Paul II reminded the Cardinals that: "God alone is the source of holiness, and it is to Him above all that we must turn to for forgiveness, healing and for the grace to meet this challenge with uncompromising courage and harmony of purpose. Like the Good Shepherd,...Pastors must go among their Priests and people as men who inspire deep trust and lead them to restful waters." John Paul II, *Address of his Holiness Pope John II to the Cardinals of United States*, April 23, 2002. http://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_american-cardinals-2002_en.html, Accessed on March 26, 2012.

⁴³ John Paul II, *Mass in St. Peter's Square For the Canonization of Sr. Mary Fautina Kowalska*, Sunday, 30 April 2000, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000430_faustina_en.html, Accessed on March 20, 2012.

⁴⁴ John Paul II, *Dedication of the Shrine of Divine Mercy*, Krakow-Lagiewniki, 17 August 2002, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20020817_shrine-divine-mercy_en.html, Accessed on March 6, 2012.

⁴⁵ Stackpole, *Understanding Divine Mercy Sunday*, p 4.

⁴⁶ On March 12, 2000 John Paul II asked for forgiveness for the sins of the Church committed against humanity. Through that act the late Holy Father reminded the faithful how the Church and its individual members need to turn to the Mercy of God, to receive it, and to ask forgiveness of others. John Paul II, Sacred Heart University website, *Pope John Paul II Asks For Forgiveness*, http://www.sacredheart.edu/pages/12654_pope_john_paul_ii_asks_for_forgiveness_march_12_2000_cfm, Accessed on March 20, 2012.

CHAPTER II: THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Part 1: Liturgical Tradition and the Spiritual Culture of Faustina's World:

Devotion to the Love of Christ and His Pierced Side

Sister Faustina Kowalska's journey of faith, including also the experience of Divine Mercy, was rooted in the teaching of the Church and in the charisma of the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. The spiritual life of the Congregation grew out of Ignatian spirituality with its emphasis on meditation on the person of Jesus, and it was characterized by "ardent zeal" for the salvation of souls entrusted to its apostolic care. The Sisters offered their prayers, mortifications, and works for the intentions of the souls entrusted to their care. The spirituality of the Congregation was permeated by devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and by a spirit of reparation.

A. Symbols in Christian Liturgy

The Divine Mercy devotion, in the forms proposed by Faustina's experiences, presents us with a new image, a new series of symbols, which relate to the experience of the apostles in the Upper Room on Easter Sunday; its octave presents the on-going experience of mercy in the life of the Church and that of individual believers. But is this valid? How must we receive this 'new sign' and image? First, let us consider the words of Cardinal Ratzinger on the importance of symbols in Christian Liturgy:

After the tearing of the Temple curtain and the opening up of the heart of God in the pierced heart of the Crucified, do we still need sacred space, sacred time, mediating symbols? Yes, we do need them, precisely so that, through the 'image', through the sign, we learn to see the openness of heaven. We need them to give us the

capacity to know the mystery of God in the pierced heart of the Crucified.⁴⁷

We must look to the devotion to the Sacred Heart as the context for the theology and as the symbol which the Faustina image appropriates, yet does not reproduce.

1. Devotion to Sacred Heart

In the Heart of Jesus, the center of Christianity is set before us. It expresses everything, all that is genuinely new and revolutionary in the New Covenant. This Heart calls to our heart. It invites us to step forth out of the futile attempt of self-preservation and, by joining in the task of love, by handing ourselves over to him and with him, to discover the fullness of love which alone is eternity and which alone sustains the world.⁴⁸

The beginnings of a devotion toward the love of God as symbolized by the heart of Jesus are found in the Fathers of the Church, e.g., Origin, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Hippolytus, Irenaeus, Justin, Cyprian, who appealed to the passages in the Gospel of John that speak of living water flowing from Christ.⁴⁹ Many of these same Fathers of the Church reflected on the example of St. John who witnessed the piercing of the side on the Cross. *“They will look upon him whom they have pierced”* (John 19:37). This wound from which the blood and water was poured out for all of humanity, became a symbol of the Church’s birth and sacramental life, the water was the symbol of baptism and the blood, of the Eucharist.⁵⁰ Over the centuries the wound in Jesus’ side became identified as the wound of His heart.

⁴⁷ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000, p. 61.

⁴⁸ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Behold The Pierced One*, trans. Graham Harrison, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986, p. 69.

⁴⁹ Brian Dunn, *The Liturgical Theology of the Solemnity of Sacred Heart*, <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=7146>, Accessed on March 3, 2012.

⁵⁰“The Church has always acknowledged that in the body of Jesus ‘we see our God made visible and so are caught up in the love of the God we cannot see’ Jesus knew and loved us each and all during his life, his agony and his Passion, and gave himself up for each one of us He has loved us all with a

It is in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, through the writings of St. Mechtilde and St. Gertrude, that we find the first unmistakable indications of devotion to the Sacred Heart. Their devotion was to rekindle love for Christ in a time when love had grown cold in the human heart. From the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, the devotion was propagated, and practiced in different religious congregations such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, etc., but remained a private, individual devotion. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, we learn from the writings of various Saints, of their special prayers and spiritual exercises towards homage to the heart of Christ, and paving the way to the call for a devotion of expiatory love as given by Jesus to Saint Mary Margaret Alacoque. Jesus appeared to Mary Margaret saying:

Behold the Heart that has so loved men instead of gratitude I receive from the greater part (of mankind) only ingratitude and He asked for a feast of reparation of the Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi.⁵¹

Although, at first, the official Church expressed hesitancy about the devotion due to an emphasis on physiology, Pope Pius VI issued his bull *Auctorem fidei* on August 28, 1794. This bull not only encouraged devotion to the Sacred Heart, but established the devotion as an authentic Catholic practice. Between 1856 and the Second World War there were many developments in this devotion, both on the magisterial, institutional and devotional levels of the Church life. Devotion to the heart of Christ, made visible in the Holy Eucharist, has been embraced by the faithful, and encouraged by the Vicars of the Church. It is not an exaggeration to say that the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as crystalized by the visions of St. Mary Margaret became one of the foremost venerated

human heart. For this reason, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pierced by our sins and for our salvation, is quite rightly considered the chief sign and symbol of that...love with which the divine Redeemer continually loves the eternal Father and all human beings' without exception." CCC 476, 478.

⁵¹ Dunn.

images of Catholic Christians. Statues and paintings of Jesus with a flaming heart on His chest could be found everywhere. Even the heart symbol with its secondary signs, and detached from the body of Jesus, could be found as an emblem in many different usages. Some of these representations were very beautiful, most were sentimental and even bad religious art. In the last 50 years following Vatican II, devotion to the Sacred Heart has greatly decreased and its symbolism has been reduced in many Church's manifestations. It is in this climate of religion symbols being subjected to reevaluation that the rise of the image presented through Saint Faustina becomes more remarkable.

2. The Image as Symbolic Representation

We find a deep symbolism within the icon of Divine Mercy. Jesus, dressed in white, appears as the Risen Christ, passing through the closed doors of the Upper Room. Wounds are still visible on his hands and feet, and His right hand is raised in blessing. His left hand is opening His tunic to reveal the wound in His side, but His wound is not seen in the painting. Instead from the open robe two rays pour forth, rays of light radiating as a divine light from within and illuminating the world. Faustina Kowalska was repeatedly told that these rays of red and pale light (299) represent the blood and water that flowed from Christ's pierced side. Pope John Paul II explains that "the blood recalls the sacrifice of Golgotha and the mystery of the Eucharist; the water, according to the rich symbolism of the Evangelist John, makes us think of Baptism and the Gift of the Holy Spirit (see John 3:5; 4:14)."⁵² Jesus' appearance as being transfixed in radiance, is similar to His appearance on Easter Sunday, when His apostles beheld His glory. "His

⁵² John Paul II, *Homily for Divine Mercy Sunday*, April 22, 2001, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20010422_divina-misericordia_en.html, Accessed on March 3, 2012.

glorious wounds and His heart,” are “an inexhaustible source of light and truth, of love and forgiveness.”⁵³ From His heart an abundance of grace flows upon His Church, as a source of healing, and His mercy transforms and sanctifies His people. To those who are broken by sin, “the gentle face of Christ is offered; those rays from His heart touch them and shine upon them, warm them, show them the way and fill them with hope.”⁵⁴

The image of Divine Mercy conflates the two appearances of the Risen Christ to His apostles -- the first on Easter night and the second, to Thomas, a week later. Thus, the recipients of His mercy are first of all the apostles, representing the Church, and then later, Thomas, representing the lone soul who seeks a particular outpouring of mercy – or at least the understanding that the gift given to all is especially given to him (each of us). Thus, the Mercy Feast is joined to the second Sunday of Easter, the “touching of Thomas,” as it is known to Easter Christians. When the Lord Jesus, on the eighth day entered the Upper Room, he addressed Thomas directly, as if to satisfy his request for being favored: *“Put your finger here and see My hands, and bring your hand and put it into My side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe” (Jn 20:27)*. Faced with such proof, and overwhelmed by Jesus’ generosity towards him, Thomas not only believed but understood the depth and the meaning of the Paschal Mystery. “In the presence of the Risen Christ, the truth both of His humanity and of His divinity became clear to Thomas.”⁵⁵ His doubts vanished and he became assured of the love of his Lord.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Homily given at St. Faustina’s Canonization*, April 30, 2000. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000430_faustina_en.html, Accessed on March 4, 2012.

⁵⁵ John Paul II, *Homily on April 23, 1995*, <http://thedinemercy.org/message/johnpaul/homilies/apr231995.php>, Accessed on March 10, 2012.

As it has been presented to and received by the devout faithful, the image is seen as evidence of the particular mercy sought out by the desperate of today in all their various needs. One of the great authorities on the devotion, Robert Stackpole, writes:

This makes the Mercy image especially suitable for the desperate needs of so many Catholic families in our time, families all too often broken and wounded by evil: apostasy, adultery, divorce and division, contraception, fornication, greed, shallow consumerist materialism, and the killing of the unborn. These assaults of evil, often promoted by modern culture, are simply overwhelming many Catholic families. The rays of the Mercy image show us the healing, sanctifying graces that our Savior is longing to pour into every human heart, if only we will receive them with trust.⁵⁶

In Machniak's understanding, it is the sacramental element which is most important and approachable for ordinary believers. The sacrament of penance and Eucharist take the central place in the message revealed by and through Sister Faustina Kowalska. This message "contains first of all the invitation to open the heart" and to approach these sacraments "in the attitude of trust, the principal condition and instrument to receive mercy from God."⁵⁷ The devotions, which are considered the "secondary acts of cult of God," including the veneration of the image painted according to Faustina's direction, "have sense only with the practice of the sacraments and with the attitude of trust, which express the inner relation of Christian to God."⁵⁸

Contemporary theology, to which Faustina was introduced through her teachers and confessors, especially Father Sopocho, underlined that "Jesus as the Highest Priest in the sacrifice of the cross is giving His life for the salvation of man and bringing near mercy

⁵⁶ Robert A. Stackpole, *Jesus, Mercy Incarnate*, St. Faustina and Devotion to Jesus Christ, Marians of the Immaculate Conception, Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 2000, p. 118.

⁵⁷ Machniak, paragraph 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, paragraph 4.

to the people.”⁵⁹ The source of infinite mercy, which is Christ’s compassion and forgiveness, is our Saviour’s Sacred Heart. Pope John Paul II directs our attention to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as the source of Divine Mercy in these words:

The Heart of Christ! His ‘Sacred Heart’ has given men everything: redemption, salvation, sanctification Through the mystery of this wounded heart, the restorative tide of God's merciful love continues to spread over the men and women of our time. Here alone can those who long for true and lasting happiness find its secret.⁶⁰

Father Sopocko explains that ‘reason’ tells us that God is merciful, however it cannot grasp the full extent of His Mercy. Our knowledge about God’s mercy is derived from Jesus Christ, who is God’s self-revelation to the world.⁶¹ *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 Jn 4:10)* He chose for Himself a human heart. While the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the heart of His passion, is embraced within Church tradition as the center of love for humanity, the Divine Mercy image turns our focus to Jesus in His risen appearance in the Upper Room. According to Robert Stackpole, while the emphasis of the Sacred Heart devotion is on movement from us to Christ, the Divine Mercy is more from Christ to us. “Everything about this image speaks of the risen Christ graciously taking initiative, and seeking us out in the darkness with the rays of His merciful love,” depicted here as rays of light embracing every human. “His hand is raised in a blessing of peace even before we ask for it.”⁶²

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, paragraph 2.

⁶⁰ John Paul II, *Homily of Divine Mercy*, April 22, 2001.

⁶¹ Michael Sopocko, S.T.D. *The Mercy of God in His Works*, Volume III: The Holy Ghost, The Church, Grace, Virtue, Gifts of the Holy Ghost, Prayer, Confidence, the Sacraments, Marian Apostolate, The Marian fathers, Stockbridge, Mass, U.S.A. 1968, p. 172.

⁶² Stackpole, *Jesus, Mercy Incarnate*, p. 117.

B. Encountering Christ in Sacraments

Father Machniak explains that the sacramental life expressed Faustina's "longing for God and the desire to reach Him."⁶³ The Sacraments, and prayer, helped her to discover God's voice in her soul and to discern His will for her life. It also gave her the possibility to encounter the "God of Mercy" in the mysteries of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. In the sacrament of reconciliation Faustina sought the "shepherd looking for the sheep,"⁶⁴ who gives the grace to hear and recognize His voice, and so to respond to His Mercy. Machniak writes that the "sacrament of penance takes the first place among the sacraments,"⁶⁵ as the source of Divine Mercy experienced in Faustina's life. Faustina writes about great miracles, which take place in the human soul who approaches the sacrament of reconciliation, the "Tribunal of Mercy," with trust. (1448) The second most important sacrament of mercy to which Faustina invites all people is the Eucharist, "the sacrifice of the cross."⁶⁶ Here they can be consoled, strengthened, and find the joy of union with God. Faustina becomes lyrical in her writing about the Eucharist, drawing together the biblical imagery and language of current piety with her own experienced understanding of the blood and water from the pierced side:

Here is the tabernacle of Your mercy, here is the remedy for all our ills. To You, O living spring of mercy, all souls are drawn; some like a deer, thirsting for Your love, others to wash the wound of their sins, and still others, exhausted by life, to draw strength. At the moment of Your death on the Cross, You bestowed upon us eternal life; allowing Your most holy side to be opened, You opened an inexhaustible spring of mercy for us, giving us Your dearest possession, the Blood and Water from Your Heart. (1747)

⁶³ Machniak, paragraph 2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, paragraph 2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, paragraph 3d.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

The Eucharist in a very tangible way is the sacrament of the real presence of the risen Lord among us.

C. Eucharistic Banquet - *koinonia*⁶⁷

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains the mystery of the Eucharist:

The Eucharist is “the source and summit” of the Christian life. “The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.”⁶⁸

In addition to being the “source” of Christian spirituality because it is a “source” of grace, the Eucharist also helps us grow in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. These virtues are essential to the spiritual life because they “dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity” (CCC, no. 1812).⁶⁹

In the Eucharist the Author of sanctity Himself is present.⁷⁰ Faustina was given the grace to know Jesus in the Eucharist as the Author of sanctity, Emmanuel, God who dwells with us, and she points others to Him. She also understood what her role was in *koinonia* celebrated in the Church, and she tried to live this mystery as well as she could in her religious life. Raymond Brown, Biblical scholar, points out that the whole purpose of participation in the Eucharistic banquet, the sacred breaking of the bread is *koinonia*, full participation in the communion.⁷¹ He explains that as the Eucharist is the sign of unity and total oneness in the Body of Christ, so Christians who participate in the

⁶⁷ Christian fellowship.

⁶⁸ CCC 1324.

⁶⁹ Mark Brumley, *The Eucharist: Source and Summit of Christian Spirituality*, http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2005/brumley_eucharist1_aug05.asp, Accessed on January 30, 2012.

⁷⁰ Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, The liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1992, p. 167. The quote refers to the Council of Trent, to a Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist (NR 571/DS 1639-1641).

⁷¹ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, ABRL Doubleday, October 1997, p. 522.

Eucharistic banquet should always aim to follow the path of *koinonia* in its fullest meaning. *Koinonia*, the fellowship with God the Father and fellowship with Christ, must be followed by fellowship with each other. Divine Mercy devotion calls for extending God's mercy to others. From her early years, Helena Kowalska was drawn to true *koinonia*, first through charity towards her parents, siblings, and later her community and the Church. In *koinonia* - Christian fellowship - trust is a basic component of building fellowship with others; lack of trust hinders communication with God and community.

D. Christ the Victim and Faustina's Participation

Faustina Kowalska often refers to herself as another Eucharist, another host placed in the Heart of Jesus offering herself as a sacrificial victim to Christ and with Christ to the Father. In the late 19th and early 20th century, a "victimal" spirituality had developed around the devotion to the Sacred Heart. A common part of such spirituality was the offering of oneself as a living sacrifice, a "hostia" within the wounded heart of Christ, from the preparation and baking of the Eucharistic bread to the breaking of Bread, as one with the body of Christ in the re-presentation of Calvary on the Altar of the Mass.⁷²

The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms that Eucharist, as a memorial of Christ's Passover, is also a sacrifice, a Victim, our Pasch.⁷³ "In the Eucharist the sacrifice

⁷² Arthur Burton Calkins, Pierced Hearts, *The Teaching of Pope John Paul II on the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Theology of Reparation*, http://www.piercedhearts.org/hearts_jesus_mary/heart_jesus/sacred_heart_reparation_jpii_calkins.htm, Also article by Mother Adela, SCTJM, *Suffering: a Mystery of Love and Fecundity in the lives of the Saint*, http://www.piercedhearts.org/mother_adela/suffering_mystery_love_funcundity.htm, Accessed on March 26, 2012.

⁷³ CCC 1367, 1324.

of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body.”⁷⁴ The lives of those who participate in the Eucharistic celebration are united with those of Christ and acquire a new value, and this was especially so in Faustina’s life. It was in the moments of great suffering, that she was particularly aware of Christ closeness in her heart. Her trust was seriously tested, explains Sister Elzbieta, especially in moments of physical suffering and painful spiritual experiences.⁷⁵ A great advance in the theological life took place as the Lord was stripping her soul from all attachments and impurities. Her confidence grew while her darkness thickened, and it was before the tabernacle that Sister Faustina would go to bring her trials and to place her hope and trust.

Theo-Drama

Father Raymont Gawronski writes in his essay, *My name is sacrifice: The mission of Blessed Faustina*,⁷⁶ that Faustina’s sufferings no less than her encounters with Jesus are a part of the mission to which she was called. She came to believe this herself, and accepted it as a necessary dimension of her life and work. It is therefore important to remember her difficult life in order to understand some of the theological implications of her mission. Through her sufferings, Sister Faustina, as well as many other Saints whose lives were marked by much suffering, had entered deeply into the mystery of the Cross, and into the mystery of Trinity, to which Hans Urs von Balthasar, refers to as *Theo-Drama*. Von Balthasar writes that only in the event of the Cross, the Trinity expresses and communicates its full identity. For the Father, as well as for the Son, it is an event of

⁷⁴ CCC 1368.

⁷⁵ Siepak, *The Spirituality of St. Faustina*, p. 46.

⁷⁶ Stackpole, *Divine Mercy, The Heart of the Gospel*, Essays from the first North American Symposium of the John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy, Marians of the Immaculate Conception, Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 1999. Raymond Gawronski, Essay from the first North American Symposium of the John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy, *My Name is sacrifice: the Mission of Blessed Faustina* p. 91.

surrender and God forsakenness.⁷⁷ Machniak writes that Faustina Kowalska, united with Jesus Christ in His sufferings, “entered in very deep relations with the Divine Persons: God the Father and Holy Spirit.”⁷⁸

In *Theo-Drama* the Son freely and obediently welcomes the separation, by accepting and bringing our sins to the cross, thus saving us from deserved separation from God. By the bounds of love, the Holy Spirit unites the Father and Son in the event of the cross, and also espouses to Himself redeemed humanity. In the Holy Spirit all children of God have access to the mystery of Trinitarian love, which Father Kosicki calls: the circle of mercy, the circle of life.⁷⁹ “O Divine Spirit, who pervade my whole being,” writes Faustina, “give me to know Your Divine Threefold Life, initiating me into Your Divine Essence, thus united to You, I will live a life without end.” (1411) Sister Faustina’s personal witness and participation in *Theo-Drama* helps us to better understand our own sufferings, as well as relationship with the Holy Trinity.

⁷⁷ The Son suffers total abandonment and the Father suffers giving away His Son. Jesus’ prayer for deliverance from the darkness experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane, seems unanswered. He cries in His anguish: “*Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will.*” (Mk. 14:36). “From eternity the Father has given Himself away to the Son, he risked His being on the Son, and from eternity the Son has been a ‘yes’ to the father, a surrender of ‘obedience’.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, The Dramatic Personae: Persons in Christ*. Quote taken from Christology Course notes-- St. Mark’s.

⁷⁸ “With many difficulties the mystic from Cracow described with incredible precision her mystical experiences of Divine Mercy in Holy Trinity.” Machniak, paragraph 3b. “Her vision of the Trinity indicates the origin both of her relation to Jesus and to Mercy.” Gawronski, p. 90.

⁷⁹ Pope Paul VI refers to this circle of life: Here there is an incommunicable relationship of love which is identified with His existence as the Son and which is the secret of the life of the Trinity: the Father is seen here as the one, who gives Himself to the Son, without reserve and without ceasing, in a burst of joyful generosity, and the Son is seen as He who gives Himself in the same way to the Father, in a burst of joyful gratitude, in the Holy Spirit. Pope Paul VI, *Gaudete in Domino, on Christian Joy*, May 9, 1975, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19750509_gaudete-in-domino_en.html, Accessed on March 10, 2012.

Part 2: Mercy in Catholic Teaching and Contemporary Theology

In *Summa Theologica* mercy is defined as the virtue that seeks to remove an evil that distresses another. In the section on treatise on the theological virtues St. Thomas Aquinas writes:

Mercy is heartfelt sympathy for another's distress, impelling us to succor him if we can. For mercy takes its name "misericordia" from denoting a man's compassionate heart for another's unhappiness But of all the virtues which relate to our neighbor, mercy is the greatest, even as its act surpasses all others, since it belongs to one who is higher and better to supply the defect of another, in so far as the latter is deficient.⁸⁰

According to Father Sopocko -- whose contribution to the theology of Divine Mercy as passed on by Sister Faustina is unique -- mercy is help given by the Creator to His creation, which rescues man from the misery of sins thus restoring creation after its shortcomings.

Following Holy Scripture and the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas, Sopocko assumes that in the broad sense God's mercy is also expressed in the creation of the universe and man. The Psalmist places the creative work and the redemptive work side by side. Both are attributed to the mercy of God (Psalm 136). The mercy of God consists not only in bearing man away from the misery of sin, but also in allowing man to participate in the Divine nature by grace. Therefore, the mere act of creating man, and then endowing him with friendship and grace are a manifestation of God's mercy.⁸¹

Machniak notes in his article that Father Sopocko, like St. Thomas Aquinas, extolled the superiority of Divine Mercy over justice:

Whatever God is doing for the creatures, He is doing according to the before determined order, which is justice. Because He accepted this order in a free

⁸⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.30, a.1 and 4, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum285.htm>, Accessed on January 30, 2012.

⁸¹ The Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, *In Theology*, http://www.faustyna.pl/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=353&Itemid=60, Accessed on March 20, 2012.

way, and nobody imposed it on Him, then in the stabilization of this order we have to see the infinite Mercy of God, which every time surpasses justice.⁸²

Machniak then concludes that “Mercy is then the highest perfection of God.”⁸³ It is revealed by the Father in its fullness in the life of His Son, our Lord.

Faustina Kowalska was not the first female mystic to make a significant contribution to the theological understanding of Divine Mercy. St. Catherine of Siena, one of the two first women Doctors of the Church, writes about the mercy of God in her famous book *The Dialogue*. She gives tribute to God’s mercy, which she calls God’s own attribute, wherefore it cannot be destroyed or refused to anyone. In this mercy we were created in the beginning, re-created in Christ’s blood, and this same mercy preserves us. Catherine also writes:

Your mercy is life-giving. It is the light in which both the upright and sinners discover your goodness. Your mercy shines forth in your saints in the heights of heaven. And if I turn to the earth, your mercy is everywhere. Even in the darkness of hell your mercy shines, for you do not punish the damned as much as they deserve.⁸⁴

The mercy of God, reflected in His Creation, must also be actively reflected in His creature. Men and women fulfill their humanity and honor the Creator by practicing mercy towards each other. For Faustina, as for her followers, the traditional works of mercy, both spiritual and corporal, become the effective expression of mercy shown to others. (1155-1158) The Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy illustrate the ways to show charity toward others.

⁸² Machniak, paragraph 2.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, Tan Books and Publishers, Inc. Rockford, Illinois, 1974, section 30.

The Church's love for the poor is a part of her constant tradition. This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor The *works of mercy* are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities.⁸⁵

A. Father Sopocko - Contemporary Teaching on Trust

As I have noted, Father Michael Sopocko is the first theologian to receive and comment on Faustina's experience. As Faustina's spiritual director and confessor, he may have had a very profound influence on the articulation of her mystical intuitions, and certainly he was responsible for their theological transmission to the Church. His research into the writings of St. Thomas and St. Augustine, among others, helped him to confirm the authenticity of Sister Faustina's revelations. He starts his exegesis on mercy and trust with the following sentence: "Nothing gives such glory to Divine omnipotence as the fact that God makes those who trust Him omnipotent also." He goes on to explain that in relation to God, "our trust should be supernatural, complete, pure, strong and enduring," and should spring from grace. Relying on God is not to rely on ourselves, or on our own talents, prudence or strength. Father Sopocko continues that, if we do rely on ourselves, we give up on God's help and end up hurting ourselves in the process. He reminds us of the many 'Sauls' who have fallen into anguish and sin, all due to overconfidence in themselves; and of the many 'Solomons', whose "wise spirits withered away and came to nothing because they trusted, not in God, but in their own powers."⁸⁶

Father Sopocko explains that trust in God is not a call to be passive: "we must, indeed, take any measures that we regard as necessary." However, we cannot rely on our

⁸⁵ CCC 2444, 2447.

⁸⁶ Sopocko, *The Mercy of God in His Works*, p. 173.

own strength, and our whole trust must be placed in God alone. “This trust should be the golden means between what is known as Quietism, and over-activity.”⁸⁷ Trust in God saves us from unrest while we fulfill our duties, and attend to our daily tasks; however, leaving our work to God is laziness, not trust. Father Sopocko explains that trust should go hand in hand with ‘fear of the Lord.’ It is important to remember that in the theology of that time, ‘fear of the Lord’ was considered as a gift of the Holy Spirit and the first step toward divine wisdom. Therefore, Sopocko’s use of the term ‘fear’ must be understood in that context. He lists three stages of fear: 1) Fear that comes from knowing our own misery. We need “the wind of trust” and the “ballast of fear” to sail safely without overturning. “Without this fear trust turns to presumption; just as fear, without trust, turns to pusillanimity;”⁸⁸ 2) Fear of the Lord, whom we do not want to offend. Such fear needs to be desired, for it makes us more vigilant, teaches us prudence, humbles us, and makes us mortified; 3) Filial fear which sees God as the most loving Father who should not be offended. This fear is accompanied by perfect contrition, a gift of the “Holy Spirit, which predisposes us to profound humility in our relations with God.”⁸⁹

Father Sopocko seems to regard, as noted above, human trust from the perspective of a response to grace. He does not emphasise the human foundation as much as the supernatural structure. Perhaps Faustina’s experience of poverty, her hard work before and after entering the religious life, bring a new human element, and contribute to the theological analysis of Sopocko. Faustina’s mystical revelations seemed to be linked

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

profoundly to her human life, and as Father Gawronski writes, she seemed to have “enfleshed realities of a higher order” in her simple heart.⁹⁰

B. Development of the Attitude of Trust

An attitude of trust constitutes the very essence of the devotion to the Divine Mercy, explains Father Ignacy Rozycki, for to worship the mercy of God is equivalent to having trust.⁹¹ In his book *Devotion to the Divine Mercy* Father Rozycki writes that the mercy of God never ceases to assist a man, however, it is trust that opens man’s heart for mercy to take roots in us, so we can receive God’s true peace and become a sign and a blessing of peace to others.⁹² For the followers of Divine Mercy, striving after trust becomes a duty, and a fundamental obligation; it is a vessel by means of which they can draw graces and the shortest way to union with God.

In the theological understanding of leading commentators of Faustina’s spirituality, trust is neither a pious feeling nor an intellectual acceptance of the truths of the faith, but an “attitude towards the Lord God involving the entire person.”⁹³ Sister Elzbieta Siepak, a theologian who is actively involved in the spiritual formation of the Divine Mercy movement, explains that Faustina’s understanding of trust is not “a single virtue that proceeds from hope or is identical to it; rather, is an attitude embracing all the dimensions and relations that might exist between man and God.”⁹⁴ “In Saint Faustina’s life experience, entrusting one-self to God encompasses a great variety of virtues and

⁹⁰ Gawronski, p 89.

⁹¹ Father Ignacy Rozycki, STD, a leading Polish Thomist provided Vatican with “The most in-depth theological analysis ever written on the life and mission of St. Faustina”.

⁹² Ignacy Rozycki, *Devotion to the Divine Mercy, (Nabozenstwo do Milosierdzia Bozego), Misericordia*, Cracow 2010, p. 92.

⁹³ Siepak, In *St. Faustina’s school of trust*, p. 47.

⁹⁴ Siepak, *The Spirituality of Sister Faustina*, p. 41.

Christian moral attitudes.”⁹⁵ In his theological analysis, Rozycki explains that trust is conditioned by a set of virtues, which are faith, hope, humility, and contrition, with faith being the foundation for all. The human response to God’s mercy is our trust. God’s mercy never fails to embrace human existence; however trust opens our hearts to receive the abundance of grace.⁹⁶

Following Rozycki’s understanding, Sister Faustina’s attitude towards the growth of trust can be seen against the framework of the classical Catholic understanding of the theological and moral virtues; this would have been the pattern of her religious life training and spiritual discipline.

1. The Supernatural Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope, Love:

i. Living faith as a source of the attitude of trust.

The Catechism of Catholic Church states:

Faith gives knowledge of supernatural reality, and understanding of the mystery of God. Faith is the virtue by which we entrust ourselves-mind and will-to God, believing what He has revealed because of who He is.⁹⁷

Faustina Kowalska records Jesus saying: “For me to be able to act upon the soul, the soul must have faith.”(1420) In response she often asked the Lord for an intellect enlighten by faith:

Jesus, give me an intellect, a great intellect, for this only, that I may understand You better; because the better I get to know You, the more ardently will I love You. Jesus, I ask You for a powerful intellect, that I may understand divine and lofty matters. Jesus, give me a keen intellect with

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁹⁶ Ignacy Rozycki, *Nabozenstwo Do Milosierdzia Bozego, Studium Teologiczne Dzienniczka Swietej Siostry Faustyny Kowalskiej na Temat Nabozenstwa*, Wydawnictwo Misericordia, Cracow, 2010, p. 92.

⁹⁷ CCC, 143, 1814.

which I will get to know Your Divine Essence and Your indwelling, Triune life. Give my intellect these capacities and aptitudes by means of Your special grace. (1474)

For a believer, particularly a mystic, the spirit of faith values everything on a higher level, gives each event a hidden salvific sense, and makes one appreciate every moment of life as a precious gift. From her *Diary*, we know that Faustina looked at every moment of her life as a moment of a unique grace, and faith allowed her to see life beyond its dullness and monotony. (62)

It is the gift of faith which enables us to come to know the mystery of God's Goodness and His mercy. Without the knowledge of God's goodness, how could Christians place their trust in someone they do not know or love? Sister Elzbieta writes: "no one can put his confidence in somebody or give himself entirely to a person he does not know."⁹⁸ The more Sister Faustina knew God the more she trusted in Him and His perfect will for her life. It is through knowing that God is man's greatest friend, "who is wisdom itself and who loves man with an infinite love"⁹⁹ that a man is able to give himself totally and without reserve to his Creator in total trust. This affects his relationship with his neighbor. Knowledge of God, which comes to us through prayers, allows humans to enter into a relationship with their Creator and God as Karl Rahner writes:

One cannot come to God in prayer without giving him oneself, one's whole existence, in trusting submission and love, and in acceptance of the incomprehensible God who is beyond our understanding not only in His essence but also in His free relationship to us and must be accepted as such.¹⁰⁰

Rozycki explains that the attitude of trust found in the life of Faustina Kowalska is

⁹⁸ Siepak, *The Spirituality of Sister Faustina*, p. 44.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁰ Karl Rahner, *Christians at the Crossroads*, London: Burns & Oats, 1975, p. 57.

what the Lord Jesus calls faith, and that He expects it of His followers: “*If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain: Move from here to there, and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you*” (Mt. 17:2).¹⁰¹ Christian theology calls this attitude of life, hope, which springs from living faith in the infinity of God’s love and goodness towards us.¹⁰² Thus, faith and hope are intertwined. According to Sopocko, trust and faith work miracles, for they have at their disposal the omnipotence of God.¹⁰³

- ii. **Hope** is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁴

Siepak explains that “the deeper a person’s knowledge of God, the stronger his hope and the fuller his trust in God’s mercy.”¹⁰⁵ The virtue of hope comes to our aid when we sink under the heaviness of sin, or when difficulties and suffering crush our lives. In her writings, Faustina has shown us how God sustained her through many trials, giving her sufficient grace to endure, and increasing her desire to make His goodness known to others. On many occasions she heard Jesus’ voice asking for her trust so He could bless her: “Most dear to Me is the soul that strongly believes in My goodness and has complete trust in Me. I heap My confidence upon it.”(453) One of the most appealing aspects of Faustina’s spirituality is a trusting hope. It speaks particularly to those who feel crushed by the experience of suffering. Trust in God, writes Father Sopocko, drives away all sadness and depression, and fills the soul with great joy, even

¹⁰¹ Ignacy Rozycki, *Milosierdzie Boze, Zasadnicze rysy Nabozenstwa do Milosierdzia Bozego*, Cracow Publisher, 1982, p. 16.

¹⁰² Ignacy Rozycki, *Essential Features of the Devotions to the Divine Mercy*, Stockbridge: Congregation of Marians, 2010, p. 14.

¹⁰³ Sopocko, p. 177. “All the miracles of Moses in Egypt and the desert sprang from trust.”

¹⁰⁴ CCC, no. 1817.

¹⁰⁵ Elzbieta Siepak, *She made ordinary life Extraordinary*, p. 23.

when circumstances are at their worst. Trust can be compared to an anchor, which is lowered down in times of raging storms. The soul, like a ship, sometimes loses all that gave it strength, beauty and value, “the mast of living faith is snapped, the lines of God’s love are broken, the whole cargo-good deeds- is thrown overboard, and final shipwreck seems inevitable.”¹⁰⁶ Trust, by which we can hold on to God’s mercy in moments of difficulties and trials, and so be saved, is our anchor, our hope. *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice. (Phil. 4:4)* St. Paul urged trust, as being the source of joy: *Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:16)* Hope strengthens trust and leads to an attitude of abandonment.

- iii. **Charity**, which is the highest of all virtues, perfects and penetrates the attitude of trust. “Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.”¹⁰⁷

The *Diary* reveals not only Faustina’s understanding of mercy, but also the way in which mercy took shape in her life and ways of practicing active love towards one’s neighbor. The attitude of mercy towards neighbor, along with trust, is the other essential condition for the Divine Mercy devotion. It demands that we shape the evangelical attitude of active love of people in ourselves.¹⁰⁸ This active love practiced by Faustina and also emanated in those who follow in her footsteps, can be described as follows:

¹⁰⁶ Sopocho, p. 176-7.

¹⁰⁷ CCC 1822.

¹⁰⁸ The Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, *Essence*, http://www.faustyna.pl/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=361&Itemid=60, Accessed on March 20, 2012.

✓ Recognizing the dignity of others

Faustina understood that she was to make visible the effect of her love for God through her love and concern for others. Her generosity, so natural and spontaneous in her childhood, became transformed in maturity during her religious life. In her understanding, human mercy is closely related to the mercy of God Himself, which is the source, the model and the motive for Christian deeds of active love towards one's neighbor. Mercy done in this spirit is a participation in the mercy of God Himself, because He, through willing hearts, reveals His kindness and merciful love to people.

A soul's greatness consists: not in deeds but in great love. Love has its worth, and it confers greatness on all our deeds. Although our actions are small and ordinary in themselves, because of love they become great and powerful before God. (889)

The practice of charity and mercy can only be based on the foundation of respect and justice. Faustina's own religious Community has emphasized this in its understanding of the mystic. "In the life and writings of St. Sister Faustina, practicing mercy toward one's neighbors must first and foremost take into account the *dignity* of the person in need, and then man's bodily and spiritual needs."¹⁰⁹ She writes in her *Diary* about the encounter with a beggar who knocked one day at the gate of her convent, and after being treated with love and kindness, he vanished. When she reflected on what had happened, she heard these words in her soul:

My daughter, the blessings of the poor who bless Me as they leave this gate have reached My ears. And your compassion, within the bounds of obedience, has pleased Me, and this is why I came down from My throne--to taste the fruits of your mercy. (1312)

¹⁰⁹ Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, *Mercy in Interpersonal Relationships, In the School of St. Faustina and John Paul II*, http://www.faustyna.pl/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=369&Itemid=60, Accessed on March 20, 2012.

Physical and spiritual suffering not only taught Sister Faustina patience and surrender, but how to offer her pain on behalf of others to God the Father, through uniting it to the merits of Jesus Crucified. In her attempts to “pick up the cross and follow Christ” (Luke 9:23) she encourages others to find the value and merit in suffering united to Jesus.

It is my self-sacrifice which, in my relationship with my neighbor, can give glory to God, but God’s love must flow through this sacrifice, because everything is concentrated in this love and takes its value from it. (1358)

In these words, Sister Faustina brings a special message to those who are sick, a message of hope and patience, and she reminds them that their suffering, if accepted in love, unites them closely to Jesus and His salvific mission.

✓ Her concern for the dying

Faustina understood that part of her mission in life was to intercede for the dying and to encourage them to trust in Divine Mercy in their final moments (1698). Her intercession for the dying often took the form of praying the chaplet which was revealed to her by Jesus. (1565) In addition to praying at the bed side of the person she visited, she also records the mystical experience of being carried in spirit to the bed side of dying people. (1798) Faustina’s confessor, Father Sopocko, who was the first theologian of this new spiritual movement, explains that dying people are often driven to despair in the moment of death and it is trust in mercy that comforts them. Through trust they are reminded of their true home, “where the King of Mercy joyfully awaits all who trust in His Mercy.”¹¹⁰ On one occasion she heard the Lord’s voice:

Pray as much as you can for the dying. By your entreaties, obtain for them trust in My mercy, because they have most need of trust, and have it the least.

¹¹⁰ Sopocko, p. 178.

Be assured that the grace of eternal salvation for certain souls in their final moment depends on your prayer. (1777)

✓ Invoking mercy for sinners and the whole world through prayer and fasting

According to traditional Catholic piety and Sister Faustina's spiritual experiences, we are able to offer the sufferings of Jesus to the Father, and to call down His Mercy upon sinners. The Lamb, who was slain for our redemption, takes the place of the sinner who offends God, and God's anger is appeased. The prayer of the chaplet, which Saint Faustina encouraged others to pray, and which was very important in her prayer life, reflected this theology of intercession.¹¹¹

Through the unique meditation of Jesus Christ, offering Himself on the Cross to His Father for our redemption, the praying person is joined to the mystery of the "universal priesthood of the faithful, is united with Christ, the Mediator between man and God."¹¹² Lord Jesus invites all believers to take part in His salvific work. He instructed Sister Faustina: "You will join prayers, fasts, mortifications, labors and all sufferings to My prayer, fasting, mortification, labors and sufferings and then they will have power before My Father." (531)

2. Moral Virtues

Faustina was trained in an attitude that embraced a life of virtue as the most effective means of receiving the grace of God necessary to faithfully live her vocation as

¹¹¹ Gawronski, p. 97.

¹¹² Machniak, paragraph 4.

a Christian, and as a religious sister. Moral virtues “dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love.”¹¹³

- i. **Humility**- trust in the goodness of God is all the stronger, the humbler it is. The attitude of trust is always strengthened by the virtue of humility.¹¹⁴

Humility has always been seen in Catholic Tradition as antidote to pride. Rozycki explains that God does not bless those who are proud, but His grace is given and received by those who are humble. Consequently, His promise of many graces showered upon the trusting souls, are spoken in humility.¹¹⁵ In the letter to the Philippians, we encounter beautiful insights into the mystery of humility and exaltation. Here Paul speaks through the magnificent hymn that praises Christ Jesus as a humble servant who emptied Himself for our sake.¹¹⁶ Though Christ was in the form of God, for our sake, He became a slave. In His self – emptying *kenosis* and self- offering, Christ was highly exalted by God who gave Him “*the name that is above every name*”.(Phil 2:11) Faustina’s weak health and the many humiliations which marked her life, already present in her childhood due to misunderstandings around her spirituality, kept her aware of human weaknesses, and allowed her in special way to depend on God’s grace.

¹¹³ CCC 1804.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Siepak, *In Saint Faustina’s School of Trust*, p 62-82, *passim*.

¹¹⁵ Rozycki, *Devotion to the Divine Mercy*, p. 93.

¹¹⁶ This hymn is a high point of the Church’s confessional in ‘the Christ’; within the framework of the early Christological development, it offers the first complete view of the Christ. It gives clear witness to the three models of Christ’s existence: 1) his pre-existence; 2) his earthly status; 3) his post-paschal glorification. Taken from the course notes: St. Paul’s epistles, St. Mark’s, Spring 2009.

To trust is not only to entrust oneself to God, it is entrusting oneself to God with childlike intimacy.¹¹⁷ Such childlike intimacy can be called a complete self-surrender in love. In Faustina's life Mary, Mother of God, played a profound role in teachings on humility. Since early childhood, Faustina entrusted herself to Mary's care, and strove to remain united to her through various devotions and prayer. We read in her *Diary*:
"Immaculate Virgin, Pure crystal for my heart, You are my strength, O sturdy anchor!
You are the weak heart's shield and protection."

- ii. **Contrition**- recognition of God's commandments and our need for forgiveness. "Without contrition trust would be arrogance and presumption, not trusting in mercy."¹¹⁸ True contrition leads to change of heart and conversion of one's life.

But there is more to trust than just believing that God is trustworthy. We have to act upon that belief. Trust involves a turning back to God, a real conversion of our whole lives to God, repenting of our sins and forgiving others.¹¹⁹

Faustina had a deep conviction of the ugliness of sin in the human soul and she feared to offend God who is all goodness. *My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.* On one occasion Sister Faustina heard the voice of Jesus:

Every time you go to confession, immerse yourself entirely in My mercy, with great trust, so that I may pour the bounty of My grace upon your soul. 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

¹¹⁷ Siepak, *The Spirituality of St. Faustina*, p. 42. Siepak refers in her book to the words of Archbishop S. Nowak included in Symposium Materials: *The Apostolic Movement of Divine Mercy*, Cracow, 1996, p.117.

¹¹⁸ Rozycki, *Devotion to the Divine Mercy*, p. 23.

¹¹⁹ Marians of Immaculate Conception, *Spirituality of Divine Mercy, Trust*, <http://thedinemercy.org/message/spirituality/trust.php>, Accessed on January 27, 2012.

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. (1602)

- iii. **Obedience to God's will** and the recognition of God's greater plan for human life. Trust expressed through obedience gives space to God, and to His providence, as it did in St Faustina's life.

Jesus, who was fully aware of his eschatological and universal mission, obediently identified himself with God's plan, placing aside His own will and the power to act.¹²⁰ It was through His obedience, that the Father found His life pleasing and it was this obedience that won our souls for God. In His obedience, our rebellious attitudes are healed. We also must reflect the same attitude and have the same mind as was in Jesus (*Ph 2:5*). What does this mean in concrete terms? Sister Elzbieta Siepak writes succinctly but beautifully:

Trust means that we agree to let God be God, instead of trying to be God ourselves. It means that we agree that God can write the script of our lives, instead of insisting on our own script. It means that we agree with the great pledge we make in the Our Father: *Your will [not mine] be done on earth as it is in heaven*. It means that even in our moments of agony we agree with the cry of Jesus in the Garden, *Not my will, but Yours be done* (*Lk. 22:42*).¹²¹

In Faustina's life, trust had taken on a concrete form of entrustment to God's will. She was aware that entrustment and cooperation with God's perfect plan for her life was the way to sanctity and Christian perfection. She modeled her life on Christ, often repeating her prayer: "I have placed my trust in God and fear nothing. I have given myself over to His holy will; let Him do with me as He wishes, and I will still love Him."

¹²⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, The Dramatic Personae: Persons in Christ*, pp. 154-163.

¹²¹ Siepak, p. 56.

(589) To be obedient Faustina sometimes “had to deny her own reason, suspend the logic of human thinking so as to trust Him, and consequently, to accept and carry out His will.”¹²² In the publication entitled *Trust in The Practice of Life*¹²³ we find practical implications of how to live in a contemporary world in accordance to God’s will in the various calls of life: parenthood, students, workers, etc.

Saint Faustina’s trust does not only “express an attitude flowing from faith and hope; it also implies a special bond of love and of communication of life with Jesus, a participation in His life, passion, death and resurrection, as well as a sharing in His salvific mission through obedience to the will of the Father.”¹²⁴ In Faustina’s life this trust was personally tested in her family life, difficulties in adjusting to religious life, the isolation she felt because of religious experiences and the feeling of inadequacy around fulfilling her mission. If a person truly trusts in God, he or she will accept God’s will as a gift of His mercy, knowing that He desires nothing less than man’s temporal and eternal good.

The proof and evidence of trust, then, is the fulfillment of God’s will. The more we trust in God, the more eagerly we accept His will by living out the commandments, and in the duties of our state of life. “The fulfillment of God’s will is the measure of perfection in the attitude of trust.”¹²⁵ Following the religious formation Faustina records three degrees of obedience to God’s will in her writing in ascending order: 1st is obedience in fulfilling external rules and regulations, and in keeping the commandments of God; 2nd is obedience to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit; 3rd is the total

¹²² Siepak, *Spirituality of St. Faustina*, p. 47.

¹²³ The Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, *Trust in The Practice of Life*.

¹²⁴ Siepak, *The Spirituality of St. Faustina*, p. 42.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

abandonment to the will of God. (444)

C. Distrust and Impediments

Father Joseph Andrasz, one of Faustina's confessors, wrote that the guiding thought of all Faustina's revelations on the mystery of Divine Mercy required the believers response of "fullness of trust in Him."¹²⁶ Yet those who have not experienced being loved or those who live in fear, find it very difficult or even impossible to trust. Fear has the power to paralyze and to keep us in bondage, and to build walls of distrust between people, and between people and God. Fear often comes as a result of human broken love, and broken promises. A distorted picture of love needs healing and compassion.¹²⁷ Eric Ericson, well known psychologist, gives a profound insight into child development and how it affects our future trust. He writes:

If we fail to experience trust and are constantly frustrated because our needs are not met, we may end up with a deep-seated feeling of worthlessness and a mistrust of the world in general.¹²⁸

Distrust can also be a result of past sin and abuse. In this century the Church has experienced a great loss of trust in her clergy as a result of clerical sexual abuse. Here, perhaps, theologians have been given an opportunity for important theological reflection. Andrew Comiskey, a recent convert to Catholicism, is a survivor of sexual abuse. In his book *Strength in Weakness*, he writes how our weakness can become "a threshold for holy power"-- the point at which God can meet us for healing and equip us for service. His own life is an example of how mercy heals and restores. Comiskey reasons:

¹²⁶ As Quoted from Robert A. Stackpole, *Pillars of Fire in my Soul, The Spirituality of St. Faustina*, Marian Press, 2003, p. 30.

¹²⁷ George W. Kosicki, *Antidotes an Stepping Stones*, Spirit Song Ministry, Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 2000, p. 19.

¹²⁸ Eric Erikson, *Developmental stages: Infancy to 18 months*, http://www.support4change.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=47&Itemid=108, Accessed on March 20, 2012.

God is merciful to bear with us when our weaknesses seep out of containment and into sin. Sometimes we are aware of our need to be saved only when we face what is destroying us. Then we have to choose: Jesus or the slow strangulation of sin. Finally we may be ready to give our lives away to the One who can strengthen us with divine love.¹²⁹

God loves and has deep compassion for those who doubt. Jesus understands and accepts human limitations, and offers help by drawing near. The Gospel presented to us on the second Sunday of Easter (*John 20: 19-31*) is full of mercy and Divine goodness towards doubting Thomas. Eight days after the Resurrection Jesus visits his disciples, passing through the closed doors of the Upper Room, He shows them His glorious wounds, and allows Thomas to touch His side. Pope Benedict XVI speaks of this encounter in these words:

Jesus showed the signs of his Passion even to the point of allowing Doubting Thomas to touch him; but how can a disciple possibly doubt? Actually God's indulgence enables us to profit even from Thomas' disbelief, as well as from the believing disciples. Indeed, in touching the Lord's wounds, the hesitant disciple not only heals his own diffidence but also ours.¹³⁰

Gregory the Great had commented on this passage, noting the psychological benefit that Thomas provides to others who believe and yet hesitate:

In a marvellous way God's mercy arranged that the disbelieving disciple, in touching the wounds of his master's body, should heal our wounds of disbelief. The disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the faith of the other disciples.¹³¹

¹²⁹Quote from Andrew Comiskey, *Strength In Weakness*, Inter Varsity Press, 2003, page 56. During many years of ministry, Comiskey and his wife, Annette, have accompanied hundreds of wounded men and women to transformation at the cross of Christ. It is important to note that the 'misery of sin' does not only cover those done by man, but those done to him; most especially those which undoubtedly have an intrinsic and profound effect on his capacity to respond to love—human or divine—and to give it as well. Man needs God's mercy and grace to free him and to save him. God's mercy and truth is critical in the healing and restoration of man's dignity and freedom as a child of God taken away by sin.

¹³⁰ Benedict XVI, *Regina Caeli, Castel Gandolfo Divine Mercy Sunday*, 11 April 2010, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/angelus/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_reg_20100411_en.html#, Accessed on March 5, 2012.

¹³¹ Gregory the Great, Early Church Father and Doctor of the Church, *Doubting Thomas*, The CrossRoads Initiative,

As Thomas touches Christ and comes to believe, his doubts are cast aside and his faith is strengthened. He becomes a receiver of the Merciful Christ's compassionate aid. He becomes a witness to the reality of the resurrection. Thomas's encounter of the Risen Christ is "a proclamation of the Divine Mercy of God who does not reject the thick-headed, the weak, and the doubting." Thomas was given the power to become "strong, loving, and wise."¹³² *Behold, I make all things new. (Rev 12:5)* "Jesus turned Thomas's doubt into an event of Mercy for generations to come."¹³³ Upon touching and seeing, Thomas acclaims: *My Lord, my God*. His disbelief turns into trust. The Feast of Divine Mercy will always be linked to the person of Thomas and his experience of mercy overcoming doubt. The assurance of the personal love of Jesus restores his self-dignity while challenging him to overcome hurt and distrust.

Father Sopocho believed that lack of trust also comes from a false concept of God, and is a result of self-love, which is the cause of "superficial and false judgements and concepts."¹³⁴ "For lack of trust prevents God from lavishing His blessings on us; it is like a dark cloud impeding the action of the sun's rays." Edwards writes that to ask for the grace of intimate love, is risky. "We risk being drawn into boundless love. There is much in us that resists such love."¹³⁵ He explains that if we come to know "our own resistance," the Holy Spirit can help us by freeing us from ourselves, and our limitations. For this, we need to trust in the mercy of God and in His better plan for our lives.

http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_article/152/Doubting_Thomas_St_Gregory_the_Great.html, Accessed on March 3, 2012.

¹³² Marcellino D'Ambrosio, *Doubting Thomas*, http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_article/492/Doubting_Thomas.html, Accessed on March 3, 2012.

¹³³ Keith Fourmier, *Inspire: Doubting Thomas, Divine Mercy and the Wounds that Heals our Disbelief*, <http://www.catholic.org/hf/faith/story.php?id=36119>, Accessed on March 19, 2012.

¹³⁴ Sopocho, p. 172.

¹³⁵ Edwards, p. 178.

The *Diary* of Saint Faustina and her life conveys a message of great empathy towards those who doubt, and she desires to bring others closer to Christ, so they too would encounter His gentle touch. She writes:

I feel certain that my mission will not come to an end upon my death, but will begin. O doubting souls, I will draw aside for you the veils of heaven to convince you of God's goodness, so that you will no longer continue to wound with your distrust the sweetest Heart of Jesus. God is Love and Mercy. (281)

CONCLUSION

Through Saint Faustina Kowalska the Lord Jesus communicates to the world the great message of God's mercy, and reveals the pattern of Christian perfection based on trust in God and on the attitude of mercy toward one's neighbors. Her spiritual experience shows how consistent use of simple measures, such as a sacramental life, prayer, meditation and acquisition of spiritual virtues, leads to achieving the biblical attitude of trust in God that is so essential in the Christian journey to true conversion and transformation in love. John Paul II believed that:

The Church lives an authentic life when she *professes and proclaims mercy* - the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer - and when she brings people close to the sources of the Savior's mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser.¹³⁶

The 20th century has given the Church an added avenue to profess and proclaim mercy through advances in technology and the means of media. However, this same avenue has given individuals a greater and personal awareness of a world strife with global warfare, holocaust, terrorism, disasters, and widespread abuse of the rights and dignity of the human person. This personal awareness often creates an attitude of distrust

¹³⁶ *Dives in Misericordia*, 13.

towards those who govern, various institutions, religious, secular and private organizations and the Catholic Church itself.

The message of Divine Mercy devotion offers the young and old, devout and the struggling, hope in the infinite mercy of God upon a world much in need of both hope and mercy. This new devotion draws from the best of Christian tradition, including the already venerated Sacred Heart devotion, and presents it afresh, renewing and perhaps simplifying its symbolism. Through it, especially the Feast of Divine Mercy, which “has the highest rank among all the forms of the cult of the Divine Mercy and is its culminating expression,” Christ draws the faithful of today, to the mystery of His Resurrection, and its liberating power, so needed in the contemporary world.

The Church makes the Feast of Divine Mercy central to its liturgical year and celebrations by establishing it on the Second Sunday of Easter, the conclusion to the Easter Octave. John Paul II, so influential in the establishment of this Feast, indicates that Divine Mercy is more than private revelation and central to the mystery of our redemption. While some may feel the Divine Mercy Feast is not true to the liturgy, in canonizing Faustina, accepting her revelations, and instituting this Feast liturgically, the Church seeks to restore what is already present in the Gospel of the Upper Room, thereby making the love of the heart of Christ more radiantly visible to all. The widespread and enthusiastic embrace of this devotion by the people is a tangible sign of the universal yet personal need for the reassurance of divine mercy and of a desire to trust -- an attitude and virtue so necessary to combat and heal the wounds of broken trust prevalent in the world today.

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