

**Second Sunday of Easter –
Sunday of Divine Mercy
& 2nd Week of Easter
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Sunday, April 16

DIVINE MERCY FROM THE HEART OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED

From Pope John Paul's homily on the Second Sunday of Easter 2000

"Give thanks to the Lord for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever." So the Church sings on the Octave of Easter, as if receiving from Christ's lips these words of the Psalm; from the lips of the risen Christ, who bears the great message of divine mercy and entrusts its ministry to the Apostles in the Upper Room: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Before speaking these words, Jesus shows his hands and his side. He points, that is, to the wounds of the Passion, especially the wound in his heart, the source from which flows the great wave of mercy poured out on humanity. From that heart Sr Faustina Kowalska, the blessed whom from now on we will call a saint, will see two rays of light shining from that heart and illuminating the world: "*The two rays*", Jesus himself explained to her one day, "*represent blood and water.*" *Blood and water!* We immediately think of the testimony given by the Evangelist John, who, when a soldier on Calvary pierced Christ's side with his spear, sees blood and water flowing from it. Moreover, if the blood recalls the sacrifice of the Cross and the gift of the Eucharist, the water, in Johannine symbolism, represents not only Baptism but also the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Divine Mercy reaches human beings through the heart of Christ crucified: "*My daughter, say that I am love and mercy personified*", Jesus will ask Sr Faustina. Christ pours out this mercy on humanity through the sending of the Spirit who, in the Trinity, is the Person-Love. And is not mercy love's "second name," understood in its deepest and most tender aspect, in its ability to take upon itself the burden of any need and, especially, in its immense capacity for forgiveness? Today my joy is truly great in presenting the life and witness of *Sr Faustina Kowalska* to the whole Church as a gift of God for our time. By divine Providence, the life of this humble daughter of Poland was completely linked with the history of the 20th century, the century we have just left behind. In fact, it was between the First and Second World Wars that Christ entrusted his message of mercy to her. Those who remember, who were witnesses and participants in the events of those years and the horrible sufferings they caused for millions of people, know well how necessary was the message of mercy.

Jesus told Sr Faustina: "*Humanity will not find peace until it turns trustfully to divine mercy.*" Through the work of the Polish religious, this message has become linked for ever to the 20th century, the last of the second millennium and the bridge to the third. It is not a new message but can be considered a gift of special enlightenment that helps us to relive the Gospel of Easter more intensely, to offer it as a ray of light to the men and women of our time.

However, as the Apostles once did, today too humanity must welcome into the upper room of history the risen Christ, who shows the wounds of his Crucifixion and repeats: *Peace be with you!* Humanity must let itself be touched and pervaded by the Spirit given to it by the risen Christ. It is the Spirit who heals the wounds of the heart, pulls down the barriers that separate us from God and divide us from one another, and at the same time, restores the joy of the Father's love and of fraternal unity.

It is important then that we accept the whole message that comes to us from the word of God on this Second Sunday of Easter, which from now on throughout the Church will be called "*Divine Mercy Sunday.*"

Monday, April 17

THE RESURRECTION IS A TRINITARIAN EVENT

From the writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar

The resurrection is a trinitarian event. With his death on the cross the Son of God fulfilled his mandate to return to the Father with his human spirit, the Holy Spirit of his mission. As a human being he himself cannot rise from the dead; it is the the Father who, as “the God of the living,” raises the Son from the dead so that he, as newly united with the Father, might send the Spirit of God into the church.

Without the resurrection the whole trinitarian salvific plan would be incomprehensible, and the work begun in the life of Jesus would remain meaningless. For the world, and also for the Old Testament, this life was one singular provocation, since Jesus raised himself above the authority of the Law as its goal and meaning. Israel must permit itself to be stretched beyond itself – in a blind faith of Abraham – in order to come to its fulfillment. That it does not want to do this becomes clear at the beginning of Jesus’ preaching; he knew what his provocative mission would inevitably bring to him, but went “with his face firmly set” toward his death. The disciples followed full of amazed fear. And this fearful trembling remains in their bones even at the resurrection. They do not have the slightest preunderstanding for what a resurrection – not “on the last day” but in the midst of their own time – could be. That Jesus himself in his suffering has “finished his business” with the world, and also with the future of the world which for him is the Last Day, while the disciples still abide in time, took quite some time to dawn on them. And still more difficult will it be to understand that the whole life of the church was from then on supposed to be stamped by the two-in-one event of cross and Easter. To understand this, even more to live it, the disciples had to become partakers of the Spirit of Christ, which is at the same time the Spirit of the all-planning and all-accomplishing Father.

But to receive the spirit of Christ and of the Father means at the same time to accept the essential gift of God: the body and blood of the Son which the Father extends to the world through this efficacious power of the Spirit. Receiving the Spirit and Eucharist are two sides of the same thing. In John 6, where Jesus emphasizes with the deepest urgency the inexorableness of the eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood, he adds, “It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail.” After the Spirit accompanies the incarnation of the Son and in him has as it were an experience of the world, it remains forever inseparable from flesh and blood.

Therefore the church assembled at Easter will encounter a Spirit-filled but bodily Christ – he breathes his Spirit into them, but also wants to be touched so that it will not be thought that he is “a spirit.” And after the ascension the church will await both the promised Holy Spirit and the Lord who will come again, whose arrival they anticipate, as instructed, in the celebration of the breaking of the bread. The witness that the disciples receive and must hand on is, according to John, only complete “when water (baptism) and blood (Eucharist), and Spirit” are together. Encounter with the Lord at Easter must culminate into receiving the Spirit so that the Lord may be known and so that he can send the one who does the knowing and empowers possession of the Spirit to nothing other than the proclaiming and witnessing that God the Father has given us his Son, the Son who died and rose for us.

But the church is now the church founded on the cross: the gathering together of the faithful around those endowed with office, with Mary in their midst. To her, as the core of the church, the Son without doubt, appeared first, as St Ignatius states in his *Spiritual Exercises*. She is the one who, sought out by the Spirit before all others, received the body of the Word. Gathered close around her, the church prays that what primordially happened to Mary may now also happen to it. And Mary herself prays anew for this event; she prays now as church, as the centerpoint of the community of saints, that the incarnation completed in cross and resurrection may be communicated to the whole community.

Tuesday, April 18

AN EASTER HOMILY

From the writings of St. John Chrysostom

How shall I recount for you these hidden realities or proclaim what surpasses every word and concept? How shall I lay open before you the mystery of the Lord's resurrection, the saving sign of his cross and of his three days' death? For each and every event that happened to our Savior is an outward sign of the mystery of our redemption.

Just as Christ was born from his mother's inviolate virginal womb, so too he rose again from the closed tomb. As he, the only-begotten Son of God, was made the firstborn of his mother, so, by his resurrection, he became the firstborn from the dead. His birth did not break the seal of his mother's virginal integrity; nor did his rising from the dead break the seals on the sepulcher. As so, just as I cannot fully express his birth in words, neither can I wholly encompass his going forth from the tomb.

Come, see the place where he lay. Come, see the place where the outward signs of your own resurrection are portrayed, where death lies entombed. Come, see the place where the unsown seed of mortality has brought forth a rich harvest of immortality.

Go and tell my brethren to go into Galilee, and there they will see me. Tell my disciples the mysteries which you yourselves have beheld. Thus did our Lord speak to the women. And still today, to those who believe, he is present, although unseen, in the baptismal font. As friends and brethren he embraces the newly baptized; with rejoicing and gladness he fills their hearts and souls. The Lord himself washes away their stains with streams of grace and anoints those who have been reborn with the precious ointment of the Spirit. The Lord becomes not only the one who feeds them, but also their very food; to his own servants he offers the daily largess of spiritual bread. To all the faithful he says, "Take and eat the bread from heaven; receive from my side the spring of water, ever flowing and never dried up. Let those who are hungry have their fill; let those who are thirsty drink the wine that brings true fulfillment and salvation."

O Christ our God, you alone are the good Lord and lover of all; to you, with the Father of all purity and life-giving Spirit, belong the power and the glory, now and always and for endless ages. Amen.

Wednesday, April 19

THE RISEN CHRIST

From *Journey Toward Easter* by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger

Jesus is not one who has 'returned' from the dead, like for example the young man of Naim and Lazarus, called back again to an earthly life, when then had to end in a final death. The Resurrection of Jesus is not, for example, an overcoming of clinical death, which we know about today, which must however at a certain moment end in a clinical death without return. That matters do not stand like this is not only shown by the Evangelists, but also by the same Credo of Paul's in so far as it describes the successive appearances of the risen Jesus with the Greek word *óphthe*, customarily translated as 'he appeared'; perhaps we should say more correctly: 'made himself seen.' This formula would make clear that what is treated of here is something different: that Jesus, after the Resurrection, belongs to a sphere of reality which is normally withdrawn from our senses. Only so can it be explained that Jesus was not recognized, as all the Evangelists agree in telling us. He no longer belongs to the world perceptible to the senses, but to the world of God. He can therefore be seen only by one to whom he grants it. And involved also in such a way of seeing are likewise the heart, the spirit, the whole inward person. Even in everyday life, seeing is not that simple process we generally take it to be. Two people looking at the same world at the same time rarely see the same things. Moreover seeing is always from within. According to circumstances, one person can perceive the *beauty* of things or only their *usefulness*; one can read in another's countenance preoccupation, love, hidden suffering, dissimulation, or notice nothing. All of this appears manifest to the sense also but comes however to be perceived only by a process of the mind and senses together, which is all the more demanding, the more profoundly the sensible manifestation of a thing arises from the depths of reality. Something analogous is true of the risen Lord: he manifested himself to the *senses*, and yet can stimulate only those senses that see better than through the senses.

Resurrection and appearance are two distinct facts. The Resurrection does not come to an end with the appearances. The appearances are not the Resurrection, only its reflection. Before all this it is an *event* for Jesus *himself*, occurring between him and the Father in virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit; then the event happening to Jesus becomes *accessible* to other *people* because it is he who makes it accessible.

And with this we are back again at the question of the tomb, for which the answer is now found. The tomb is not the central point of the message of the Resurrection; it is instead the Lord in his new life. But the tomb is nevertheless not to be taken away from the message. If the burial comes to be mentioned only in terse fashion, it is very clearly to be understood that this was not the final state of Jesus' earthly life. According to the Jewish interpretation, corruption began after the third day; the word of Scripture is fulfilled in Jesus because he rises on the third day, before corruption begins. The death of Jesus reached as far as the tomb but not as far as decomposition. He is the death of death, death hidden in the word of God and therefore related to life: which takes death's power away when, by the destruction of the body, human beings are destroyed by it in the earth.

Anyone professing resurrection of the body is not affirming an absurd miracle but affirming the power of God, who *respects* his creation, without being tied to the law of its death. Indubitably death is the typical form of things in the world as it actually exists. The Resurrection of Jesus says that this victory is in effect possible, that death does not belong principally and irrevocably to the structure of the creature, to matter. Certainly it also says that to overcome the confines of death is not possible, definitely, by sophisticated clinical methods, through technology. This comes about through the creative power of the word and of love.

Thursday, April 20

AN EASTER HOMILY

From the writings of Hesychius of Jerusalem

The festival we celebrate today, is one of victory – the victory of the son of God, king of the whole universe. On this day the devil is defeated by the crucified one; our race is filled with joy by the risen one. In honor of my resurrection in Christ this day cries out: *Lift up your gates, you princes; be lifted up, you everlasting doors, that the king of glory may come in.* On this day I saw the king of heaven, robed in light, ascend above the lightning and the rays of the sun, above the sun and the sources of water, above the dwelling place of the angelic powers and the city of eternal life.”

Hidden first in a womb of flesh, he sanctified human birth by his own birth; hidden afterward in the womb of the earth, he gave life to the dead by his resurrection. Suffering, pain and sighs have now fled away. For who has known the mind of God, or who has been his counselor if not the Word made flesh, who was nailed to the cross, who rose from the dead, and who was taken up into heaven?

This day brings a message of joy: it is the day of the Lord’s resurrection when, with himself, he raised up the race of Adam. Born for the sake of human beings, he rose from the dead with them. On this day paradise is opened by the risen one, Adam is restored to life and Eve is consoled. On this day the divine call is heard, the kingdom is prepared, we are saved and Christ is adored. On this day, when he had trampled death under foot, made the tyrant a prisoner, and despoiled the underworld, Christ ascended into heaven as a king in victory, as a ruler in glory, as an invincible charioteer. He said to the Father: Here am I, O God, with the children you have given me and he heard the Father’s reply: *Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.* To him be glory, now and for ever, through endless ages. Amen.

Friday, April 21

ST ANSELM, BENEDICTINE MONK & ARCHBISHOP

From *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*

Anselm was born in Aosta, the son of a spendthrift Lombard nobleman, with whom he quarrelled as a young man, resulting in him moving to Burgundy to live with his mother's family. Attracted by the reputation of Lanfranc, regarded as the foremost teacher of his time, Anselm moved to Normandy. After much hesitation he became a monk in Lanfranc's monastery at Bec around 1060. He studied Augustine for ten years, but wrote nothing which has survived. Quite early he was made prior: to this period of his life belong his prayers, meditations, and *De Grammatico*. In 1077-8 he wrote the *Monologion* and *Proslogian*. The later has been famous for centuries because of its 'ontological' proof of God's existence: it revealed Anselm's originality and prepared the way for his later theological works.

In 1078 Herluin, founder of Bec, died and Anselm was elected abbot in his place. Besides the care of his monks, for which his sensitive, intuitive mind well fitted him, he also became closely associated again with his former master Lanfranc, since 1070 archbishop of Canterbury. This brought him into contact with English ecclesiastical affairs. On Lanfranc's death in 1089 the English clergy wished Anselm to be his successor, but the King of England, William Rufus, kept Canterbury vacant for four years. Only when he seemed mortally ill did he agree to the appointment of Anselm, then in England for the foundation of Chester (dependent on Bec). Anselm, against his better judgment accepted.

From then onwards he was involved in a series of disputes with William and his successor, about papal jurisdiction, investiture, and, ultimately the primacy of the spiritual. Anselm was utterly committed to what he saw as the cause of God and the Church, to which he gave absolute obedience; he was quite out of sympathy with the world of politics and compromise. As abbot of Bec, he had already recognized Urban II as pope; hence, as archbishop of Canterbury, he was quite unable to recognize the anti-pope Wibert, supported by King William Rufus. The ensuing quarrel, fanned by other issues, resulted in Anselm's exile in 1097.

Now he wrote his important treatise on the Incarnation called *Cur Deus Homo?*; he also took a prominent part in the Council of Bari, when, at the pope's request, he successfully defended the doctrine of the Double Procession of the Holy Spirit against the Greeks. At a Council in Rome soon after he whole-heartedly adopted the Gregorian view of the illegality of lay investiture.

With the accession of Henry I he returned to England in 1100, but the intransigence of both king and archbishop concerning investiture resulted in another exile in 1103. But peace was made in 1106-7, when Pope Paschal counselled some modifications of Anselm's earlier positions. The resulting compromise, used a model for settling similar disputes in other countries, gave the Church victory over the investiture of staff and ring, symbols of spiritual jurisdiction, but left the king, in practice, with undiminished control over the selection of bishops.

From then onwards Anselm remained in England, where he held councils which insisted, among other things, on stricter observance of clerical celibacy. He also established the new see of Ely. He also secured a wider recognition of the Canterbury 'primacy' which Wales, Ireland, and Scotland acknowledged.

He died at the age of nearly eighty on April 21. His name appeared in the Roman Martyrology in 1586. In 1720, as the most important Christian writer between Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, he was named a Doctor of the Church.

Saturday, April 22

BLESSED MARIA GABRIELLA SAGHEDDU, OCSO

From the Monastero Trappiste Vitorchiano website

Maria Sagheddu (1914-1939) was born in Dorgali, Sardinia, into a family of shepherds. Witnesses from her childhood and adolescence speak of a character obstinate, critical, protesting, rebellious, but with a strong sense of duty, of loyalty, of obedience: "She obeyed grumblingly, but she was docile. She would say no but she would go at once."

What everyone noticed was the change that came about in her at 18: little by little she became gentle, her outbursts of temper disappeared; she acquired a pensive and austere profile, sweet and reserved; the spirit of prayer and of charity grew in her, a new ecclesial and apostolic sensibility appeared.

There was born in her the depth of listening that hands itself totally over to the will of God. At 21 she chose to consecrate herself to God and, following the guidance of her spiritual father, entered the Trappistine monastery of Grottaferrata, an economically and culturally poor community, governed at that time by Mother Maria Pia Gullini.

Her life appears to have been dominated by a few essential elements:

-the first and most obvious was gratitude for the mercy which God had poured out on her, calling her to belong completely to him; she loved to compare herself to the prodigal son and could say only "thank you" for the monastic vocation, the house, the superiors, the sisters, everything. "How good is the Lord!" was her constant exclamation, and this gratitude pervaded even the last moments of her illness and agony.

-the second element was the desire to respond with all her strength to grace; that in her might be completed what the Lord had begun, that the will of God might be fulfilled in her, because therein lay true peace for her.

In the novitiate she was anxious that she would be sent away, but after profession, this anxiety ended and a tranquil and trusting abandonment took its place, which produced in her a straining towards the complete sacrifice of herself: "Now do what You will", she would simply say.

Her brief life in the cloister (three and a half years) was consumed like the Eucharist, simply in the daily commitment to conversion in order to follow Christ, obedient to the Father unto death.

Gabriella felt herself defined by the mission of self-giving: the total gift of herself to the Lord. The memories of the sisters are simple and significant: her promptness to acknowledge her fault, to ask pardon of others without justifying herself, her simple and sincere humility, her readiness to gladly do any work, even the most tiring, without making a fuss about it. With profession there grew in her the experience of littleness: "My life is of no value...I can offer it in peace."

Her abbess, Mother Maria Pia Gullini, had a great ecumenical awareness and desire. After taking it up in her own life, she had communicated it to the community too. When Mother M.Pia requested prayer and offering for the great cause of Christian Unity, Sr. Maria Gabriella felt immediately involved and compelled to offer her young life. "I feel the Lord is calling me" - she confided to her abbess - "I feel urged, even when I don't want to think about it".

By means of a rapid and straight journey, committed tenaciously to obedience, conscious of her own frailty, fixed in a single desire: "the will of God, his Glory", Gabriella attained that freedom that urged her to be conformed to Jesus. Tuberculosis showed itself in the body of the young sister, who up to now had been extremely healthy, from the very day of her offering, sweeping her along to her death in fifteen months of suffering.

On the evening of 23 April 1939, Gabriella ended her long agony, totally abandoned to the will of God, while the bells were ringing full peal at the end of Vespers of Good Shepherd Sunday. The influx of vocations, who arrived in great numbers during the following years, is the most concrete gift of Sister Gabriella to her community. She was beatified by John Paul II on January 25, 1983, forty-four years after her death.