The Message of Divine Mercy

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On The Essence of the Devotion to the Divine Mercy
Part I — Introduction

In the series of articles that appeared up to the present time in the *Bulletin* on the Message of Divine Mercy as given by Our Lord through the Servant of God Sister Mary Faustina Kowalska, I have dealt, I believe, with all the parts that together make up what we are calling *the Devotion to the Divine Mercy*, except the one which, in fact, appears to be the most important of them all. Since that remaining element, of a nature somewhat different from all the others, was only recently identified as needing to stand on its own right by some, who have been studying Sr. Faustina's writings for a long time, and because its special implications for the devotion as such have not yet been investigated thoroughly enough, we must leave dealing with it for a later date.

This entry, and the next few in this series, will be dedicated to an examination of key terms which have to do with the *essence* of the Divine Mercy Devotion, with all, that is, that makes the devotion what it is. I have come to see the need for this as a result of private conversations, exchanges of thought at conferences, and from questions asked after lectures or received in the mail.

In order to practice this devotion as it merits to be, we must understand it correctly. Problems arise from the fact that the meaning of words like "mercy," "trust," and "devotion" has undergone a change — albeit to a lesser or greater degree, but, nevertheless, for the worse.

Revelations, therefore, like those made known through Sr. Faustina, because they are expressed in words whose original meaning does not sufficiently shine through today's use of them, can be seriously misunderstood, and consequently easily liable to being ignored, if not outrightly rejected, by those who are not attentive to, or are not in the habit of checking out, meanings.

In spite of everything, because we are beings uniquely endowed with the abilities of knowing, reasoning, understanding, and communicating by means of speech, words play *a great part* in our lives. The words, however, that we are taking under particular investigation here, are actually *decisive* for our lives in God's sight. It is in view of this conviction that I find myself compelled to take the course, set by the Church at the Second Council of the Vatican, of "going back to the roots", from which the sap of life flows, to reclaim and reinstate the fundamental definitions which concern the very heart of the argument under consideration. I cannot allow myself the luxury of being indifferent about either words or their meaning, or of simply dismissing them as being of no vital consequence, for in the Sacred Scriptures God himself exhorts me: "My son, pay attention to what I say; listen to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body" *(Proverbs 4:20-22).*

There are strict connections existing between divine mercy and confidence, or trust, in God, and between that trust and the fact of being "devoted" to God. Even though these connections are not necessarily that clearly expressed in so many words in the statements which Our Lord is understood to have made to Sr. Faustina, and which she faithfully recorded in her Diary, they are certainly indirectly, though no less forcefully, pointed to in them, as the following quotations show:

> ***Let souls that aspire to perfection adore My mercy more than others, for the abundance of graces which I bestow upon them flows from My mercy. I desire that they distinguish themselves by a limitless trust in My mercy*** (V, 148).

> ***My daughter, if through you I am demanding that people venerate My mercy, then you should be the first to distinguish yourself by this trust in My mercy*** (II, 162).

Though these statements alone would be reason enough to spur us on to a thorough investigation of the significance of those implied connections on account of the bearing they have on our relationship with our heavenly Father, there is one particularly simple yet very direct declaration of Jesus quoted by Sr. Faustina that most strikingly indicates with what utter seriousness we must regard this "devotion" to Him — the Divine Mercy Incarnate. It reads:

> ***No soul will find justification until it turns with confidence*** [trust] ***to My mercy*** (II, 40).

Did it ever occur to us to stop and consider this truth regarding our salvation which holds such an important place in the teaching of the Apostle Paul, and which, under a certain aspect, because of mutually misunderstood expressions, was a major "bone of contention" between the Roman Catholic Church and Martin Luther?

To be *justified* means no less than to be (as one famous preacher puts it:) "just-as-if-I'd never sinned"; it is to be, in other words, declared free from penalty of sin on the ground of grace poured into us to take sin's place; that is, on the ground of the very Life that is Christ's (the Holy Spirit) taking over our inmost spirit, reclaiming us from the domination of our enemy, Satan (to whom we had handed ourselves over by the rebellion against God which we call sin), and making us by that fact children of God just as Jesus — the only Sinless One — is the Son of God. It means being made in actual fact "blood brothers" in Christ, and so, members of God's Family, heirs of His Kingdom. It means that we, created beings, are given to share (to possess jointly) with the Most Holy Trinity God's own nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4)!

To get a breathtaking view of what "justification" implies we owe it to ourselves to read, with the intent of completely absorbing all the conclusions that flow from them, the first two chapters of St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. It is from the second chapter of the same that Pope John Paul II took the title and theme for his great Encyclical on Divine Mercy.

The following quotation, taken from that Encyclical, allows us to get an insight into the process that leads us to the enjoyment of "justification," that is, to see at work the "mechanism" which starts off all that "justification" signifies: "Conversion to God always consists in discovering his mercy, that is, in discovering that love which is patient and kind (cf. 1 Cor. 13:4) as only the Creator and Father can be; the love to which the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:3) is faithful to the uttermost consequences in the history of his covenant with man: even to the Cross and to the death and Resurrection of the Son. Conversion to God is always the fruit of the "rediscovery" of this Father, who is rich in mercy" (n. 13).

Why linger on the mechanism that sets in motion the process of our "salvation?" *Because the ingredients thereof help us to realize the true place for devotion to the Divine Mercy which is no less than at the very heart of christian existence.* For, thanks to Christ Jesus, mercy aims at operating in us three invisible and unspeakable wonders: faith, hope and charity, in comparison to which all other miracles are hardly shadows. These are "qualities" that divinize created spirits and matter; "virtues" or "strengths" that permit humans to perform divine actions; "realities" that bring creatures to intimate communion with the Godhead. What we call the "*theo*logical virtues," because they establish creatures in a unifying relationship with the uncreated divinity (—*theos* is the Greek work for God), are all, therefore, the *gift* of Divine Mercy to us for which eternal recognition and devotion are surely due.

Now if such is the nature of the offspring, what must that of their Begetter be? — And to what should our nobility acquired by means of that offspring, consequently oblige us? The understanding of what, or rather, who — Mercy is, is bound to make a difference in our relationship to God. We shall examine Sr. Faustina's definition of them: "God is Love and Mercy" (I, 124) in the next issue.

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THE NOVENA TO THE DIVINE MERCY

Jesus requested that Sister Faustina prepare herself for the Feast of Mercy by making a novena which was to begin on Good Friday, saying:

> **I desire that during these nine days you bring souls to the fount of My mercy, that they may draw therefrom strength and refreshment and whatever grace they need in the hardships of life, and especially at the hour of death. On each day you will bring to My heart a different group of souls and you will immerse them in the ocean of My mercy, and I will bring all these souls into the house of My Father. You will do this in this life and in the next. I will deny nothing to any soul whom you will bring to the fount of My mercy. On each day you will beg My Father on the strength of my bitter passion for graces for these souls** (III,57).