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Sanctuary of the Divine Mercy in Cracow

1. History of the Convent

The Convent of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Cracow-Łagiewniki had first come into being as a foundation of count Aleksander Lubomirski. The latter deposited a big sum of money for charity into the hands of Albin Cardinal Dunajewski. Out of this fund a dozen or so hectares of land had been purchased in the village of Łagiewniki near Cracow in the year 1889. Subsequently, a home for women and girls in need of moral revival, as well as a chapel and convent of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy had been built. The entire area was fenced off with a wall and was henceforth referred to as *Józefów*, in praise of St. Joseph whom the sisters regarded as the saint patron of the foundation and their apostolic work.

On 20 August 1891 Albin Cardinal Dunajewski consecrated the chapel dedicated to St. Joseph as well as an extension of the convent which was to house the *Home of Mercy* a place for young women and girls in need of deep moral revival. In it the sisters conducted their educational activity which from the very beginning was based on the principle of respect for the dignity of the human being, the nurturing of Christian values, and above all, on instilling in its inmates the idea of trust in God who is rich in mercy and preparing them to professional career and independent and noble life within the society. An important role in the educational process was played by work which was at the same time a source of sustenance for both the sisters and the young women entrusted to their care. In the Łagiewniki *Home of Mercy* run by the sisters there were workshops of plain and coloured embroidery, weaving as well as a laundry, a book-binding shop, a gardening and an agricultural center.

The educational activity in the form of total care of young women and girls in need of deep moral revival organized in the so called *Home of Mercy* was conducted within the convent from the very beginning of its existence until the year

1962 when the state authorities annexed the convent's reform school as well as a major part of its estate, allowing it to retain only one wing of the building, the chapel, a part of the garden and the cemetery.

A few years later, (in 1969) the sisters organized within the convent a day care center for socially maladjusted youth, known by the name of *Source*. The center operated until the year 1991.

In the year 1989 the state authorities returned the girls' reform school to the congregation. At the present moment, the center is known by the name of Young People's Educational Center. Within it, the sisters run a boarding-school as well as 3 senior schools: a high school, a vocational hair dressing school and a gastronomical school for girls aged 15 – 18 who are in need of assistance and moral renewal.

Almost from the very beginning of its existence for since the year 1893, the convent in Cracow-Łagiewniki has housed a novitiate of the Congregation which except for a short interlude, has remained in operation until the present day. In it in the course of two years of formation, young generations of prospective nuns, prepare themselves to life in a religious order and to conducting apostolic work.

2. The Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy

The history of the congregation dates back to the experience of certain French religious communities founded in the XIX century for the total care of women in need of moral revival. By accepting the constitutions of the order as well as the methods of apostolic work from mother Teresa Rondeau of Laval, on 1 November 1862, mother Teresa Ewa Potocka set up the first *House of Mercy* in Żytunia St. in Warsaw. The above is regarded as the date of foundation of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Poland. Mother Teresa Rondeau holds the title of co-founder of the Congregation, whereas the Sr. Faustina is looked upon as one of its spiritual co-founders.

The *Houses of Mercy* as these centers of apostolic work were referred to – provided care for girls and women who had themselves wished to undergo a deep moral transformation. Family atmosphere, separation from the outer world, a certain anonymity and discretion, prayer and hard work had brought the desired effect. Hundreds of young girls and women were able to start their life anew, with the feeling of personal dignity, respect for themselves and for others, and in the deep conviction about the value and sense of human life and its ultimate goal.

In the inter-war period, there were more and more young girls among the inmates and gradually there arose a need to organize for them a new system of schooling. And so the *Houses of Mercy* which initially were a place of work and prayer, were becoming transformed into closed educational institutions for girls. Their program corresponded to that of primary schools and senior vocational high schools.

The girls were sent there by the school boards, the courts for juvenile delinquents as well as by private people. This form of apostolic work was continued until the year 1962, but the state authorities had begun the process of taking over the educational institutions conducted by the Congregation already earlier. The remaining institutions had been transformed by the Congregation into the agencies of *Caritas*. It was then that the sisters commenced work with the mentally retarded children, children with a lowered psycho-motoric ability, as well as with sick women. The work with the people in need of moral renewal was conducted by them in special homes for single mothers and in open day-care centers.

On 1 September 1989 the Young People's Educational Center for girls was returned to the Congregation and in this way, the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy was able to take up apostolic work which was more in accord with its charism, in the form of taking total care of people in need of thorough moral transformation.

The mission of the Sr. Faustina brought with it new forms of implementing the charism of the Congregation, that is cooperation with God's mercy in the task of saving lost souls through word – proclaiming of the message of the Divine Mercy, and prayer for mercy for the sinful world. In this way, also those in need of moral revival who live in the world, had been incorporated into the apostolic ministry of the Congregation. Moreover, the Sr. Faustina also involved the priests, the consecrated and laymen in the charismatic activity of the Congregation. The latter are able to implement her mission within the Association of the Apostles of the Divine Mercy *Faustinum*.

3. The Life and Mission of the Sr. Faustina

The world-famous apostle of the Divine Mercy was born on 25 August 1905 in the village of Głogowiec, in the Świnice Warckie parish (about 50 km outside the city of Łódź) as the third of ten children in the family of Marianna and Stanisław Kowalski. She attended school for less than 3 years. Subsequently, she worked as a charwoman in the households of well-to-do families in Aleksandrów Łódzki, Łódź and Ostrówek in the Klembów county near Warsaw. On 1 August 1925, when she was 20 years old, she joined the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. In the course of the 13 years she had spent in the Congregation, she stayed in a number of its houses: in Cracow (the longest), Vilnius, Płock and Warsaw where she worked as a cook, gardener and gatekeeper.

She suffered from tuberculosis of the lungs and of the alimentary canal. She also experienced great spiritual tribulations, as she had offered her life in sacrifice for poor sinners, particularly those who faced the prospect of being deprived of the grace of salvation. Sr. Faustina's life, which at first glance seems so grey and monotonous was filled with an extraordinary depth of mystical life. She was endowed with many extraordinary graces, among others with the gift of contemplation, concealed stigma-

ta, bilocation, the gift of prophecy, of being able to read human souls, and of mystical betrothal and nuptials all of which enabled her to attain the heights of unity with God on earth.

Sr. Faustina died in the convent of the Congregation in Cracow-Łagiewniki on 5 October 1938. During the II World War, the fame of the sanctity of her life grew rapidly, as thanks to her mediation, people were able to obtain numerous graces. The informative process concerning the heroic quality of her life was carried out in Cracow in the years 1965–67. It was at this time that her earthly remains had been transferred from the convent's cemetery to the chapel. In the year 1968 the Beatification Process of Sister Faustina was initiated in Rome. It was completed with the issuing of a Decree of Heroic Virtues of Sr. Faustina as well as a decree about a miracle which had been worked thanks to her mediation. On 18 April 1993 in St. Peter's Square in Rome the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, beatified this Polish nun. The relics of the Sr. Faustina rest upon the altar in the Sanctuary in Cracow-Łagiewniki, right under the miraculous image of Merciful Jesus.

The Lord Jesus chose Sr. Faustina as the Apostle and "Secretary" of His Mercy, so that she could tell the world about this great message: *"In the Old Covenant – He said to her - I sent prophets wielding thunderbolts to My people. Today I am sending you with My mercy to the people of the whole world. I do not want to punish aching mankind, but I desire to heal it, pressing it to My Merciful Heart"* (Diary1588).

The mission of the Sr. Faustina consisted in 3 tasks:

- reminding the world of the truth of our faith revealed in Holy Scripture about the merciful love of God towards every human being.
- entreating God's mercy for the whole world, among others through the practice of new forms of devotion to Divine Mercy, such as the veneration of the image of the Divine Mercy with the inscription: *"Jesus, I Trust in You"*, the feast of the Divine Mercy celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter, chaplet of the Divine Mercy, prayer at the Hour of Mercy (3 p.m.) and spreading the devotion to the Divine Mercy.
- initiating the apostolic movement of the Divine Mercy which undertakes the task of proclaiming and entreating God's mercy for the world and strives for perfection in the spirit of childlike confidence in God, expressed in the fulfillment of His will and the attitude of mercy towards one's neighbor.

The mission of the Sr. Faustina has been recorded in her *Diary* which she had kept at the specific request of the Lord Jesus and her confessors. In it, she recorded faithfully all of the Lord Jesus' wishes and also described the encounters between her soul and God. *"Secretary of My most profound mystery, know that yours is an exclusive intimacy with Me. Your task is to write down everything that I make known to you about My mercy, for the benefit of those who*

by reading these things will be comforted in their souls and will have the courage to approach Me" (Diary 1693). In an extraordinary way, Sr. Faustina's work sheds light on the mystery of the Divine Mercy. It delights not only the simple and uneducated people, but also scholars who look upon it as an additional source of theological research. The *Diary* has been translated into many languages, among others, English, German, Italian, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian, Hungarian, Czech, and Slovak.

4. The Devotion to the Divine Mercy

4.1. The Essence of the Devotion to the Divine Mercy

The mission of the Sr. Faustina gives birth to new forms of devotion to the Divine Mercy. Its foundation is the attitude of trust in God and mercy toward one's neighbors.

Trust in this devotion is understood as inner attitude toward God which is expressed in the fulfillment of His will. Such an attitude is made up of a number of virtues, the most important of which is: faith, hope and love, as well as humility and contrition. Trust grows out of getting to know the secret of God's merciful love for man. It is not an emotional attitude, a feeling or an intellectual act which recognizes God's revelation as the ultimate truth, but it is man's lifetime attitude toward merciful God which is expressed in the fulfillment of His will. The words: "*Jesus, I Trust in You*" – which can be seen underneath the image of the Divine Mercy, are man's most appropriate response to his getting to know the mystery of the Divine mercy and his experiencing of God's mercy in his own life.

Trust constitutes the foundation of the devotion to the Divine Mercy to such an extent that without it, one cannot talk about the cult of the Divine Mercy the way the Lord Jesus wished it. Every form of the devotion described by the Sr. Faustina becomes an authentic act of worship of the Divine Mercy and will bring the desired fruits (among others, the fulfillment of Jesus' promises), if it flows out of the attitude of inner trust in God. Trust is such an essential act of devotion to the Divine Mercy that even without the practice of other forms of the devotion, it assures the attainment of graces contained in the general promises which the Lord Jesus associated with this devotion. "*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*" (Diary 1578).

Mercy towards one's neighbors is the second, besides trust, essential element of this devotion. Through the Sr. Faustina, the Lord Jesus reminds us about the basic Christian duty: "*You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse or absolve yourself from it. I am giving you three ways of exercising mercy toward your neighbor: the first – by deed, the second – by word, the third – by prayer; in these three degrees is contained the fullness of mercy, and it is an unquestionable proof of love for Me. By this means*

a soul glorifies and pays reverence to My mercy" (Diary 742). In the private revelations to the Sr. Faustina the Lord Jesus expressed a desire, that those who worship Him should perform out of love for Him through deed, word or prayer at least one act of mercy toward their neighbors every day. He also explains that mercy for the soul is of greater merit and adds that one does not need material resources to implement it. Mercy may and should be practiced by every human individual. It is a requirement which is set forth in the Holy Gospel before all those who have been baptised. Thanks to this, the worship of the Divine Mercy, does not have a merely devotional character, but is a deeply experienced form of Christian life.

4.2. The Image of the Divine Mercy

The image of the Divine Mercy originates from the private vision that Sr. Faustina had in the cell of the Plock convent on 22 February 1931. *"In the evening when I was in my cell, I saw the Lord Jesus clothed in a white garment. One hand was raised in the gesture of blessing, the other was touching the garment at the breast. From beneath the garment, slightly drawn aside at the breast, there were emanating two large rays, one red, the other pale (...) After a while, Jesus said to me: Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: »Jesus, I trust in You»"* (Diary 47).

The image represents the crucified and risen Christ who brings man peace and salvation through remittance of sins and all the graces and gifts at the price of His passion. What is characteristic of the image are two rays: a red and a pale one. When asked about their meaning Jesus explained: *"The two rays denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water which makes souls righteous. The red ray stands for the Blood which is the life of souls"* (Diary 299). Thus, the two rays denote above all the Holy Sacraments. *"Happy is the one who will dwell in their shelter, for the just hand of God shall not lay hold of him"* – said the Lord Jesus (Diary 299). Man's response to the above gifts of mercy is to be the attitude of trust. Hence in the inscription underneath the image, one is able to read the words: *"Jesus I trust in You"*. The image representing God's mercy toward man is at the same time a sign which is to remind us about the evangelical summons to active love of one's neighbors. Thus, the cult of the image of Merciful Jesus consists in prayer of trust combined with deeds of mercy toward one's neighbors.

In the revelations of Sr. Faustina, the Lord Jesus attached a number of promises to the thus understood veneration of the image of the Divine Mercy. *"The soul that will venerate this image will not perish"* (Diary 48) – said the Lord, in this way promising salvation, as well as progress on the road to Christian perfection – a victory over the enemies of the soul, as well as the grace of a happy death (Diary 48). Yet the Lord Jesus did not limit His generosity to the above-mentioned specific graces, as He also said: *"I am offering people a vessel with which they are to keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy. That vessel is this image with*

the signature: »Jesus, I trust in You» (Diary 327). “By means of this Image I shall be granting many graces to souls” (Diary 570).

The first image of Merciful Jesus had been painted by Eugeniusz Kazimirowski in Vilnius in the year 1934. It was executed under the direct supervision of Sr. Faustina. The image had first been exposed to the faithful for public veneration in the Shrine of Our Lady of Mercy in Ostra Brama on the first Sunday after Easter on 26–28 April 1935. Today this image is being venerated in the church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius. Yet, it was the image of Merciful Jesus painted by Adolf Hyla which the artist presented to the convent chapel in Cracow-Łagiewniki as a votive offering for the miraculous saving of his family from the war, that has become famous throughout the world. In this way, the words spoken by the Lord Jesus to Sr. Faustina during the first vision Sr. Faustina had in Plock, had become reality: “*I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and then throughout the world*” (Diary 47).

4.3. The Feast of the Divine Mercy

“*I desire that the first Sunday after Easter be the Feast of Mercy*” (Diary 299) – the Lord Jesus said to Sr. Faustina. In the following years, Jesus returned to this demand in as many as 14 different apparitions, establishing very clearly the location of this Feast in the Church’s liturgical calendar, and defining the reason and objective of its institution, the manner in which preparations for it and the celebration itself were to be conducted.

Jesus explained why he wanted this Feast instituted: “*Souls perish in spite of My bitter passion ...I am giving them the last hope of salvation that is, the Feast of Mercy. If they will not adore My mercy, they will perish for eternity*” (Diary 965). The Feast is to be a day of special worship of God in the mystery of His mercy which is the source and motive of all His acts toward man, and particularly of the act of redemption. In accordance with God’s will, it is also a day of special grace for all souls, and particularly for sinners who are most in need of God’s mercy. “*The Feast of My Mercy*” – Jesus said – “*has issued forth from My very depths for the consolation of the whole world*” (Diary 1517).

It is with this very day, and more precisely, with the Holy Communion received on this day after making a good confession, that the greatest of the Lord’s promises is connected. We are referring here to the promise of “*complete remission of sins and punishment*” (Diary 300). Yet this grace “*is much more than just a plenary indulgence. A plenary indulgence entails merely the remission of temporal punishment, for sins committed, but it never amounts to the remission of the sins themselves. This grace is basically also greater than the grace of the six Sacraments, other than Baptism, since the remission of sins and punishment is the sacramental grace only of Holy Baptism. Whereas in the above promises, Jesus has attributed the power to remit sins and punishment to the Holy Communion received on the Feast of Mercy (...)* Obviously, the Holy Communion must be received on this

day not only in a state of grace, but all other basic conditions of the devotion to the Divine Mercy must be observed” (Rev. I. Różycki).

The Lord Jesus did not limit His generosity to this single though so exceptional a grace, but promised to pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fount of His mercy, as “*on that day all the divine floodgates through which graces flow are open*” (Diary 699). The greatness of this Feast consists among others in the fact that all people, even those who have only become converted on that day, may partake of all the graces Jesus has prepared for this Feast. The graces and benefits may be received by both the individuals and whole communities, providing they ask for them in a spirit of great trust.

The preparation for this Feast is to be a novena consisting of the recitation of the chaplet to the Divine Mercy for nine days, beginning on Good Friday. Sr. Faustina’s Diary also contains an example of a novena which Jesus dictated for her personal use indicating for whom she should pray. All Christians may likewise make this novena with fervor and piety. Whereas the novena consisting of the chaplet to the Divine Mercy should be looked upon as the most appropriate preparation to the Feast, in accordance with the wish of the Lord Jesus. The Feast as Jesus conceived of it holds forth the promise of “*every possible grace*” (Diary 796).

As regards the manner in which the Feast is to be celebrated, Jesus wished that on that day the image of Mercy be given public veneration. He also wished that the priests should tell souls of the great and unfathomable mercy of God; the faithful should practice acts of mercy toward their neighbors and they should receive with trust the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist.

The Divine Mercy had been worshipped spontaneously on the first Sunday after Easter already during the II World War. Officially, the Feast had first been instituted in the Cracow diocese by Franciszek Cardinal Macharski in his annual “*Pastoral Letter for Lent*” in the year 1985. In the subsequent years, the bishops of other Polish dioceses followed his example. In the year 1995 at the specific request of the Polish Episcopate, the Holy See issued a decree which permitted the celebration of this Feast in all Polish dioceses, provided the liturgical order for this day is preserved.

4.4. The Chaplet to the Divine Mercy

Begin with:

Our Father..., Hail Mary..., I Believe in God...

On the large beads (once):

Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.

On the small beads (10 times):

For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

Conclude with (3 times):

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

On 13 September, 1935 Sr. Faustina had a vision in her cell of an angel coming to punish the world for its sins. When she saw this sign of God's anger, she started to beg the angel to hold off for a while yet, for the world to do penance. However, when she came before the Majesty of Holy Trinity, she did not dare repeat her plea. It was only when she felt the power of Jesus' grace in her soul that she started praying in the words that she heard from within, and saw that the punishment had been removed from the earth. On the next day, when she entered the chapel Jesus again gave her detailed instruction how this prayer was to be said, using the ordinary rosary beads.

With the words of this prayer: *I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity*, we are offering up to God the Father the Person of God the Son in His Divinity and His Humanity. While praying in this way we behave likewise during an act of offering, which is celebrated in the Eucharistic sacrifice. We can participate in the offering of Christ through the common priesthood of the People of God. By reciting the words of *Your dearest Son* – we refer to the love which God the Father has for his Son, and through Him for all the people. In this way, we are resorting to the strongest motive we can for God to hear our prayer.

The words: *for the sake of His sorrowful passion* refer not only to the satisfaction Christ accomplished on the cross, but also they refer to the merciful love revealed the most in the passion of the Son, which God the Father bestows on man. Therefore by reciting the chaplet, we wish that the sorrowful passion of God's Son be not vain, but we want it to bring fruit in our life and in the lives of all people.

In the chaplet we ask for mercy *for us and for the whole world*. The pronoun "us" denotes the person saying the prayer and those for whom he/she wishes to pray. Whereas the words *the whole world* stand for all the people alive on earth and the souls suffering in purgatory.

In a dozen or so revelations the Lord Jesus showed the value and effectiveness of this prayer pointing out to the promises which are connected with it. "*It pleases me to grant souls everything they ask of Me when they say the chaplet*" (Diary 1541), "*if what you ask for is compatible with My will*" (Diary 1731). The will of God is an expression of His merciful love for man, so anything that is not compatible with it is either evil or harmful, and thus cannot be granted by the Heavenly

Father. The specific promises concern the hour of death: the grace of happy and peaceful death. The grace in question will be received not only by those who recite the chaplet themselves, but also by the dying at whose deathbed other people say the chaplet. *“Priests will recommend it to sinners as their last hope of salvation. Even if there were a sinner most hardened, if he were to recite this chaplet only once, he would receive grace from My infinite mercy”* (Diary 687) – said the Lord Jesus. Thus the greatness of this promise rests in the fact that it is to be granted to any sinner who should recite the whole chaplet at least once, but in the spirit of devotion to the Divine Mercy that is in the attitude of trust, humility, and in sincere repentance for his sins. The recitation of the chaplet should not only be an outward act of inner trustfulness, but it should also be persistent. For Jesus promised that we would be able to obtain anything by saying this chaplet, but nowhere – except for the grace of good death – did He say that once was enough.

Besides the exclamatory prayer: *“Jesus I trust in You”*, the chaplet is the best known and most popular prayer to the Divine Mercy. It is recited in all corners of the world and has been translated even into some African dialects.

4.5. The Hour of Mercy

In October 1937 in Cracow the Lord Jesus said to Sister Faustina: *“At three o’clock, implore My mercy especially for sinners and, if only for a brief moment immerse yourself in My Passion, particularly in My abandonment at the moment of agony. This is the hour of great mercy for the whole world”* (Diary 1320). Such is the history of the origin of this form of worship of the Divine Mercy. A few months later, Jesus repeated His request defining precisely the aim of institution of this form of cult, how to observe the Hour of Mercy, and mentioning what promises are connected with saying the prayer at this hour. He also defined the conditions which had to be met for prayers at this hour to be heard.

The Hour of Mercy is a form of the cult in which we worship the moment of Christ’s agony on the Cross (3 p.m.) when *“grace became available to the whole world and mercy triumphed over justice”* (Diary 1572). What is meant here by the “hour” is not a clock hour or 60 minutes of prayer, but saying a prayer at the moment when *“the clock strikes the third hour”* (Diary 1572), that is at the moment of Christ’s agony on the Mount of Calvary. This form of worship of the cult of the Divine Mercy can be practiced not only on Good Friday, or on every Friday of the month, but everyday. It is a special time in the devotion to the Divine Mercy.

At this hour the Lord Jesus wants us to meditate even though for a brief moment upon His sorrowful passion in which the mystery of His mercy is revealed in the fullest possible way. Getting to know this mystery leads to prayer of praise and thanksgiving, as well as begging for graces for the whole world, and especially for sinners, *“for at that moment mercy was opened wide for every soul”* (Diary 1572).

The Lord Jesus attaches the promise of all possible graces to the prayer at this special hour. *“In this hour, I will refuse nothing to the soul that makes a request of Me in virtue of My Passion”* (Diary 1320). *“In this hour you can obtain everything for yourself and for others for the asking”* (Diary 1572). At the same time, Jesus pointed out that there were three necessary conditions which had to be met for prayer at this hour to be heard: the prayer should be said at three o’clock in the afternoon, it was to be addressed to Jesus, and it was to refer to the values and merits of His Passion. Moreover, it should be added that the object of the prayer has to be in accordance with the will of God, and that the prayer should be trustful, persevering and combined with the practice of active love of one’s neighbor, which is a condition of genuine devotion to the Divine Mercy.

The Lord Jesus also gave Sr. Faustina some detailed advice relating to the ways in which she should pray at the Hour of Mercy: *“Try your best to make the Stations of the Cross in this hour, provided that your duties permit it; and if you are not able to make the Stations of the Cross, then at least step into the chapel for a moment and adore in the Blessed Sacrament, My Heart, which is full of mercy; and should you be unable to step into the chapel, immerse yourself in prayer, if only for a brief instant”* (Diary 1572).

The Hour of Mercy is currently becoming a time of everyday prayer for the apostles of the Divine Mercy the world over. That is why, as if in a continual act of prayer, the faithful all over the world unite with Jesus dying on the Cross – and fulfilling His request – implore for God’s mercy for the world and particularly for sinners.

4.6. The Spreading of the Worship of Mercy

Among the new forms of devotion to the Divine Mercy described by Sr. Faustina, one also finds the spreading of the worship of Mercy, as this form of devotion is also connected with the promises the Lord Jesus addressed to all those who undertake this devotional form.

The Lord Jesus did not precisely define the ways of spreading the worship of Mercy, but He gave us a perfect example of such an apostolate in the life of Sr. Faustina. Thus, the worship of Mercy is primarily to be disseminated through a life in the spirit of total trust in God, that is the fulfillment of His will and mercy towards one’s neighbors. Yet, one must not limit oneself to the above stipulations, as one should also proclaim by word the message of Mercy to the world and arouse trust and confidence in one’s neighbors. On the pages of the *Diary* the Lord Jesus summons us many a time to spread the truth about God’s merciful love for man, so that each and every one of us could take full advantage of the time and the gifts of mercy upon the earth thus attaining salvation. *“Oh, if sinners knew My mercy – the Lord confided in Sr. Faustina – they would not perish in such great numbers. Tell sinful souls not to be afraid to approach Me, speak to them of My great Mercy”* (Diary 1396).

Jesus attaches great importance to the above task, as He addresses special promises to those who perform it. “Souls who spread the honor of My mercy I shield through their entire lives as a tender mother her infant, and at the hour of death I will not be a Judge for them, but the Merciful Savior” (Diary 1075). Jesus addresses a special note of encouragement to priests ensuring them that “hardened sinners will repent on hearing their words when they speak about My unfathomable mercy, about the compassion I have for them in My Heart” (Diary 1521).

In order to acquit oneself well of the above task, one has to primarily get to know the mystery of God’s mercy, meditate upon it after prior analysis of the Holy Scriptures, the encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, Sr. Faustina’s *Diary*, as well as other books which have received the Imprimatur of the Church. Penetrating the mystery of the Divine Mercy in the act of creation, salvation and man’s eternal unity with God, as well as noticing the operation of God’s merciful love in one’s personal life, gives rise to the attitude of trust and mercy, as well as a wish to spread this message to others.

5. The Association of the Apostles of the Divine Mercy “Faustinum”

It was Sr. Faustina’s entire life and mission that inspired the apostolic movement of the Divine Mercy. Its main task is the striving for Christian perfection along the ways she had pointed out to and proclaim the mystery of God’s mercy through life and word, as well as entreating it for the whole world. The movement in question is made up of contemplative orders, active congregations, priests, lay people, by various Christian communities, associations, brotherhoods and individual worshippers of the Divine Mercy – in other words - everyone who in one way or another undertakes the above tasks.

One of such communities is the Association of the Apostles of the Divine Mercy *Faustinum*, which was officially founded and granted the legal status of a church institution by the Archbishop of Cracow, Franciszek Cardinal Macharski on 6 March 1996. Among the members of the Association one finds priests, as well as consecrated and lay people who wish to serve the message of the Divine Mercy under the supervision of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy and the spiritual guidance of the Jesuit fathers.

The aims of the Association include:

- striving for Christian perfection through trust in God and showing mercy towards one’s neighbors,
- getting to know and proclaiming the mystery of God’s mercy,
- entreating God’s mercy for the whole world and especially for sinners, priests and members of religious orders.

The activity of the *Faustinum* Association focuses on the training of the apostles of the Divine Mercy which is based on over 100– year old spiritual and apostolic experience of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, enriched by the mission and mystical experience of the Sr. Faustina. The training process takes up 4 years and is conducted in the form of meetings, religious retreats and various publications. The quarterly *Orędzie Miłosierdzia* (*The Message of Mercy*) is also of use in the educational process.

New candidates are able to join the Association after filling out volunteer declaration forms, in which they pledge to fathom the mystery of the Divine mercy, observe the principle of trust, that is fulfilling God's will contained in the commandments as well as in the obligations of the state, and moreover, reciting the chaplet to the Divine Mercy and performing out of love for Jesus at least one act of mercy towards one's neighbors during the day, through word or prayer.

A new volunteer is linked to the Association in a loose way. He is able to take advantage of its spiritual assets, that is these promises which the Lord Jesus gave to all those who worship and propagate His mercy. However, he cannot hold the Association's membership card nor its badge. He cannot participate more fully in its activities, elect or be elected to its authorities. It is only those who become members that are more involved in the activities of the Association and cooperate with it more closely by participating in the spiritual and apostolic mission of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, that are entitled to the latter rights. Following a course of suitable spiritual formation, the members may also take pledges of total surrender and service to the work of the Divine Mercy for a definite period (a year) or for the entire life.

A member of the *Faustinum* Association is a person who out of a number of ways of striving for Christian perfection, consciously chooses the one which consists in adopting the attitude of trust in God and showing mercy toward one's neighbors (following the example of the Sr. Faustina) and undertakes the apostolic tasks of proclaiming God's mercy with his life and word, as well as entreating it for the whole world. Members of the Association partake of the charism of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, i.e. its spirituality and apostolic mission which consists in cooperation with the Divine Mercy in the task of saving lost souls.

Branches of the Association in the shape of fundamental organizational units, that is Communities of the Apostles of the Divine Mercy, may be called to life by the Executive Board at the level of parishes, with the approval of the diocese bishops and the local parish–priest, provided there are at least 10 full members (not volunteers) of *Faustinum* in a given locality, and among them there is a person who is qualified to conduct the formation (e.g. a priest).

At present, the Association groups volunteers and members from dozens of countries of the world. It is only people who speak Polish, English, German or Czech who may become members of the Association, as the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy conducts its spiritual and apostolic training only in those languages.

6. The Foundation of the Sanctuary of the Divine Mercy

*“Łagiewniki is the capital of the cult of the Divine Mercy
For it was here that there originated the message of the
Divine Mercy, which Christ Himself wished to pass on to
our generation, through the mediation of the Blessed Sister Faustina.”
(John Paul II)*

The place which the Holy Father John Paul II is referring to and which he had visited out of the great need of his heart on 7 June 1997, is the convent of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Cracow-Łagiewniki. Up until the II World War, it was an institution which was closed to the public and which served exclusively the sisters and those entrusted to their care. Today it houses the sanctuary of the Divine Mercy with its famous, grace-working image of Merciful Jesus and the relics of the Sr. Faustina. It is a place which is regularly visited by numerous pilgrims from all over the world. It is a place of proclaiming the message of Mercy, of great prayer for God's mercy for the world as well as acts of mercy towards people in need of moral support. It is also a place where apostles of God's Mercy receive their spiritual formation.

These new tasks have created an urgent need for the construction of a basilica as well as a spacious pastoral care and social center for the pilgrims and apostles of the Divine Mercy (retreat center, pilgrim home, car-parks etc). It was for this very purpose that on 29 June 1996, the Archbishop of Cracow, Franciszek Cardinal Macharski created a *Foundation of the Sanctuary of the Divine Mercy* which since January 1997 has been gathering funds for this aim and supervising all the work connected with the construction. The president of the Foundation Council is bishop Kazimierz Nycz, whereas the president of the Board is Rev. Marian Rapacz.

The design project of the basilica as well as of the remaining buildings was entrusted to Professor Witold Cęckiewicz from the Technical University of Cracow. On 7 June 1997 the model of the newly designed Sanctuary was presented to the Holy Father John Paul II who had approved it with his own signature. The Holy Father also gives his blessing to all those who are in some way involved in this great undertaking conducted by the *Foundation of the Sanctuary of the Divine Mercy*.

The sisters from the Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy, as well as the pilgrims pray daily for all those who in some way support the extension work. Whereas on every third Friday of the month at 5 p.m., a special mass is said on behalf of all the donors.

7. The Holy Father John Paul II visits the Sanctuary

The convent on the Łagiewniki hill in Cracow is well known to the current Pope. During the II World War, he passed it everyday on his way to work in the *Solvay* plant. It is difficult to establish when exactly he was there for the first time. The convent annals record only those events in which he participated, first as a young priest, and then as the chief Shepherd of the Cracow diocese who was interested in the pastoral work of the congregation and the developing cult of the Divine Mercy, in the forms passed on to us by the Sr. Faustina.

On 7 June 1997, the Pope came to this place – as he himself confessed – out of the need of his heart, so as to entrust to the Divine Mercy the plight of the humankind, the Church and his own pontificate, before the grace-working image of the Merciful Jesus and the relics of the Sr. Faustina.

8. “The Message of Mercy”

The magazine has been published at the Sanctuary since 1987. Initially, it appeared twice a year, on special occasions and since 1997 it is published as a coloured quarterly comprising 28 printed pages. *The Message* is devoted exclusively to the topic of God’s mercy and the mission of the Sr. Faustina. It has a formative and informative character. It includes certain permanent series of articles connected with the spiritual formation of the apostles of the Divine Mercy (Biblical series, cycles devoted to Sr. Faustina’s inner life, her mission and spirituality), as well as other articles, interviews, testimonies, documentary materials and news items.

The Message of Mercy is distributed among pilgrims visiting the Sanctuary of the Divine Mercy in Cracow, in exchange for free donations, as well as among subscribers. The editor’s office is located at the Sanctuary.

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