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The Spiritual Life of Sister Faustina Major Features

1. The Life and Mission of Sister Faustina

Sister Faustina, the apostle of the Divine Mercy, is one of the most popular saints of the Church. It was through her that Jesus passed the message of the Divine Mercy and showed the model of Christian perfection based on trust in God and on mercy towards other people.

Sister Faustina was born on August, 25th 1905 as the third of ten children in the family of Marianna and Stanisław Kowalski, farmers from the Głogowiec village. She was baptised in the parish church in Świnice Warckie, receiving the name Helena. From her childhood, she loved prayers, hard work, obedience, and was very sensitive to poverty. At the age of nine, Sister Faustina received the Holy Communion, which was a great experience for a child so aware of God's presence in her heart. She attended school only for about three years, and left the family home as a teenager in order to become a servant for wealthy families of Aleksandrów, Łódź and Ostrówek, to earn her living and help her parents.

She wanted to become a nun since she was seven, but because her parents did not agree to that, she tried to repress the feeling. Hastened, however, by the vision of the suffering Christ, she left for Warsaw, and there on August, 1st 1925 she joined the Convent of the Sisters of Our Lady the Merciful. She spent thirteen years in the convent as Sister Maria Faustina, performing the functions of a cook, gardener, and gatekeeper for the many houses of the convent; especially in Cracow, Vilnius and Płock.

Outside, nothing demonstrated her rich mystical life. She was eager to perform all the tasks, obeyed the convent rules, was focused, silent, and at the same time natural, and full of friendly and unconditional love. Her life, seemingly regular, monotonous, and ordinary, was permeated with an enormous unity with God.

Her convent life was full of grace: revelations, visions, hidden stigmata, experiencing the Lord's Passion, the gift of bi-location, reading in human souls, prophecies, or the rare gift of the mystical engagement and wedding. The living contact

with God, the Holy Mother, angels, saints, souls from Purgatory – the entire spiritual world was no less real to her than the one perceived by her senses. Nevertheless, she knew that those gifts were not the essence of sanctity. In her *Diary*, she wrote: “Neither the gifts, nor the revelations or the delights, and aptitudes granted to it [the soul] make it perfect, but the internal unity of my soul with God. The gifts are only the decoration of the soul, yet do not testify to its content nor perfection. My sanctity and perfection consist of the close unity of my will with God’s will” (*Diary* 1107).

Sister Faustina was chosen by Jesus as a secretary and apostle of His Mercy, in order to pass the great message to the world. In *the Old Testament*, He said, “I sent prophets with thunder to my people. Today I’m sending you to all the humanity with My Mercy. I do not wish to punish the suffering humanity, but I wish to heal, embracing it close to my merciful heart” (D. 1588).

Sister Faustina’s mission consisted of three tasks:

- Announcement of the truth revealed in the Holy Bible about God’s merciful love of every man.

- Begging for God’s mercy for the entire world, especially for the sinners, through practising the new forms of worship of the Divine Mercy – as demonstrated by Jesus - including the image of the Merciful Jesus with the inscription: “Jesus, I trust in You”, the Divine Mercy Sunday celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter, the chaplet to the Divine Mercy and the prayer at the Hour of Mercy (3 PM). These forms of worship, and the spreading the cult of Mercy, were linked to the great promises of Christ on the condition of trust in God and being merciful to other people.

- Inspiration of the apostolic movement of the Divine Mercy, which proclaims and begs for God’s mercy for the world and strives for perfection using the methods pointed out by Sister Faustina. It is a way which consists in adopting a child’s trust in God, by implementing His will, and by showing mercy to others. Nowadays, this new movement in the Church has embraced by millions of people in the world: religious orders, secular institutions, priests, associations, various communities of the apostles of the Divine Mercy, and individual people undertaking the tasks passed by Lord Jesus through Sister Faustina.

The message of Sister Faustina was written in her *Diary*, which was kept on the request of Jesus and her confessors. She noted there all the words spoken to her by Jesus, and described the meetings of her soul with Him. “Secretary of my deepest mystery, said Lord to her, your task is to write down all I let you know about My mercy for the souls which, by reading these writings, shall be comforted and become more courageous to come closer to Me” (D. 1693). The *Diary* explains the mystery of the Divine Mercy in an unusual way. It amazes not only simple people, but also scientists, who discover there another source for their theological analyses. The *Diary* has been translated into many languages, including

English, German, Italian, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Russian, Hungarian, Czech and Slovak.

Sister Faustina, devastated by disease and suffering endured as a voluntary sacrifice for sinners, spiritually mature and mystically united with God, died in Cracow on October, 5th 1938, at the age of 33. The fame of her sanctity grew with the spread of the cult of the Divine Mercy, and with the examples of grace favoured on her behalf. In the years 1965-67, in Cracow, the information procedure was conducted concerning her life and virtues, while in 1968 a beatification process began in Rome, which ended in December 1992. Therefore, on April, 18th 1993, at the St. Peter's Square in Rome, Pope John Paul II beatified Sister Faustina; her canonisation took place on April, 30th 2000. Her relics lie in the Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Cracow (Łagiewniki district).

2. Major Features of Sister Faustina's Spirituality

In the rich panorama of spirituality in the modern Church, the spirituality of Sister Faustina plays an important role. Historians describing the spirituality of the 20th or the 21st century will have to consider the modest Polish nun, apostle of the Divine Mercy, as even nowadays one can see her impact on the religious life of our era, not only in Poland, but in the entire world. Speaking about the spirituality of Sister Faustina, we must draw attention to its major features, including: discovering the mystery of the Divine Mercy and its contemplation in everyday life, perfecting the trusting attitude to the Lord, and practising mercy towards others, love of the Church, and the desire to save lost souls, profound sacramental life and prayers to the Holy Mother of God.

2.1. Discovering the Mystery of the Divine Mercy and its Contemplation in Everyday Life

Who is God? This question was also asked by Sister Faustina. In her *Diary* she wrote: *"I was wondering about the Holy Trinity, about God. I eagerly tried to learn who God is. At one moment my spirit was as if kidnapped into the other world, I saw the inaccessible brightness, and within it as if three sources of light, which I could not understand. And from this Brightness came words as thunder circulating heaven and earth. Unable to understand, I became very sad. Suddenly, from the Brightness came out our beloved Saviour, beautiful beyond comprehension, with His shining wounds. And from the Brightness I could hear the voice saying: What is God cannot be understood, neither by an angel's mind, nor by the human mind. Jesus told me: Know God through consideration of His virtues"* (D. 30).

Jesus said to Sister Faustina: *"Know God through consideration of His virtues"* (D. 30). Following this advice, she thought about the Lord's holiness, which

makes “all Powers tremble. Pure spirits cover their faces and delight in continuous adoration (...). God’s holiness, she wrote, spreads onto the Divine Church and on every soul living in it, however, not to an equal extent” (D. 180). Then she wrote that the Lord let her learn about His justice, which is “so great and overwhelming that it reaches the heart of the matter” (D. 180). Finally she described another Godly virtue, which involves love and mercy. She wrote: “I understood that the greatest virtue is love and mercy. It links the creature with the Creator. The greatest love and the magnitude of mercy I perceive in the incarnation of the Word, in His salvation, and here I have learnt that this virtue is the greatest in God” (D. 180).

Precisely this God’s virtue – His immense mercy – is at the very heart of Sister Faustina’s spirituality. Understanding God in this mystery and its contemplation in everyday life are the keys to understanding the path of Sister Faustina, the Apostle of the Divine Mercy, to Christian perfection.

2.1.1. Discovering the Mystery of the Divine Mercy

Convent rules recommended that the sisters should often contemplate the following: “what God had done for the salvation of souls upon their Creation, what He did and suffered in Salvation, and what He is preparing for them in eternal Glory.”¹ Sister Faustina, obedient to the rule, contemplated and experienced the mystery of the Divine Mercy, starting from Creation, through Salvation, to predestined eternal glory. In her *Diary* she left original notes on Creation as a result of the Divine mercy. She wrote: “Lord, You, who Yourself are the joy, needing no other joy, no creatures, as You are the love, yet out of Your immense mercy, You bring creatures to life and let them share Your eternal joy, and in Your eternal Divine life, the inner life You live, one God in the Trinity” (D. 1741). Sister Faustina wrote directly that the only motive for bringing creatures into being was the Divine Mercy. God does not need anything to his joy and happiness, yet if He creates something, it is only because of being the Mercy who wishes to share the gift of existence, allowing thinking creatures to participate in His life.

Sister Faustina was even more amazed when she contemplated the mystery of the Divine mercy in Redemption. She adored God for the grace of the incarnation of the Son of God, who came down on earth to redeem Adam’s fault and to raise the fallen sinful humanity. In her conversation with Jesus she confessed: “Mercy caused You to come down to us and to raise us from our poverty. God shall come down to earth, Lord above all lords, the Immortal will descend (...). And the incomprehensible miracle of Your mercy comes true, O Lord: the Word becomes Flesh. God has come to live with us, the Word of God – the Incarnated Mercy” (D. 1745). This lowering of God by taking on human nature is an expression of His Mercy, *the excess of love*, which makes Heaven wonder (D. 1745). From that moment God becomes closer to humans, as He shares in all aspects of earthly life in everything but sin.

The mystery of the Divine Mercy is revealed fully in the Mystery of Christ's Passion. Sister Faustina contemplated: "Lord, [You] could have saved thousands of worlds with a single word, one sigh of Jesus could have satisfied Your justice, yet You, O Jesus, Yourself went through the terrible Passion for our sake, only out of love. Your Father's justice would have been appeased by Your single sigh, and all Your suffering is only an act of Your mercy" (D. 1747). Sister Faustina acknowledged that by contemplating the Lord's Passion, she received much light in her soul (D. 267), she knew God better, and especially His merciful love embracing over each human being, especially with a sick soul, as he is in the greatest need.

Contemplating the Divine Mercy in Salvation, Sister Faustina perceived it in the founding of the Church, in the Word of God, in the holy sacraments, especially in the sacrament of reconciliation and the Eucharist. She confessed: "I am always amazed when the Lord enters into such close relations with His creation. I always start this contemplation, but I never finish it, as my spirit becomes completely overwhelmed by Him" (D. 1523). She discovered that all that man has, starting from his existence to the smallest instance of grace, he receives out of Divine Mercy. The greatness of this mercy was revealed to her especially when she contemplated it in relation to sinners. She prayed: "O Jesus, Your goodness is incomprehensible to all minds, and Your mercy is boundless. A lost soul is the one that wishes to be lost, as he who wishes to be saved may avail himself of the ocean of the Lord's mercy" (D. 631).

The acts of Creation and Salvation have their consequences in man's participation in the glory of God. And this is also the grace of His mercy. Sister Faustina wrote: „During meditation, the Lord let me know the joy of heaven and the saints (...). [They] love God as the only subject of their love, yet they love us as well in a caring and friendly way (...). The joy overwhelming everyone comes from the face of God, as we see Him face to face. His Face is so sweet that the soul is delighted even more" (D. 1592).

Discovering the mystery of the Divine Mercy in the act of Creation, Salvation and Glory occurred in Sister Faustina's life with very ordinary means, such as reading the Bible, daily meditation (D. 91, 1705), listening to teaching, contemplation of the rosary mysteries and the stations of the Way of the Cross, retreat (D. 458, 1104), deep experiencing of the holy sacraments, Church feasts in the liturgical year, contemplation and perception of the good brought by God into her life and in the world. "My spirit was overwhelmed with the goodness granted me by God during the entire year, she wrote at the end of 1936. My soul trembled when I realised the immensity of the Lord's grace. My soul burst with grateful hymn to God. For an hour I was adoring and expressing gratitude, considering particular instances of God's grace" (D. 855). It is a very significant element of discovering the mystery of the Divine Mercy: perceiving it in one's own life. Then the mystery of the Divine Mercy is no longer of abstract beauty, remote and unattainable.

ble, but takes a concrete shape in human everyday life. Doing so, Sister Faustina saw that her entire life was full of the Divine Mercy. She wrote: *“My soul immerses itself [in Him], I do not know any moment in my life when I would not experience Your mercy”* (D. 697). It is *“like a golden thread, running through our entire lives, which keeps our entity in touch with God (...). The joy causes my senses to fail, she admitted, when God allows me to know this great virtue of His, this immense mercy of His”* (D. 1466).

Systematic insight into the mystery of the Divine Mercy, however, evoked a feeling of insatiability: *“The more I know You, the less I understand You, but it is because I cannot comprehend You – I rather acknowledge Your magnitude”* (D. 278). Sister Faustina experienced the truth that God is a mystery which cannot be comprehended by the human mind. Yet the cognition granted to man by his reason enlightened with the faith, is enough to agree with Sister Faustina’s words: *“I have known You, O Lord, as a source of mercy which enlivens and nourishes every soul. O, how great is the Lord’s mercy, reaching above all His attributes. Mercy is the greatest attribute of God, and everything around me tells me so”* (D. 611).

2.1.2. Contemplation of the Mystery of the Divine Mercy in Everyday Life

Contemplative life is often associated with seclusion, solitude and prayer. Indeed, these are the conditions which encourage contemplation, yet it does not depend on them. The life of Sister Faustina, despite being spent behind the closed walls of a convent, shows that contemplation is possible everywhere, not only in a chapel, during prayer, but also during work and all the circumstances of everyday life, as its essence is not seclusion, but the conscious being with God.

The *Diary* by Sister Faustina contains many prayers, which evolved into contemplation. *“Jesus, my love, she wrote, let me know today how He loves me, despite the disparity between us: the Creator and the creature; yet there is a certain equality here – love annihilates the disparity. He lowers himself to me and makes me capable of being with Him. I am immersed in Him, having completely lost my selfhood. Yet under His beloved gaze, my soul becomes stronger, becomes aware of loving and being specially loved, it knows that the Mighty protects it”* (D. 815). When she thought of the mystery of the Divine Mercy, and considered the blessings granted to people by God, she could not proceed with contemplation, as her soul was overwhelmed by God (D. 1523). *“I am bewildered when I learn and experience this incomprehensible love of God, with which He loves me. Who is God and who am I? I cannot think any further; only love may understand this meeting and the union of the two spirits: that is God – the Spirit and the soul of the creature. The more I know Him, the more I indulge in Him”* (D. 729).

Sister Faustina's contemplation was not limited to prayer, but extended onto her entire life. Discovering the mystery of the Divine Mercy allowed her to discover God in her soul, therefore she did not look for Him far away, she did not have to approach the tabernacle in order to meet Him, but enjoyed His presence in her heart, wherever she was. She wrote: "*My inner soul is as if a great and wonderful world where God and I live. Apart from God, nobody is let in*" (D. 582, see D. 193, 1385, 1021). Many times the *Diary* proves the presence of God in her soul. "*I feel you live in me together with Your Father and the Holy Spirit, or rather I feel that I live in You, impenetrable Lord (...). My Lord, I have met You in my heart and loved You above all that exists on earth or in heaven*" (D. 478). She compared her soul to the tabernacle, where the Host is kept (D. 1302), and united with the Lord in her heart. "*I do not search for joy outside my heart where God is present. I am joyful inside; here I meet Him, here I come close to Him, here I am safe with Him, here people's eyes do not reach. The Holy Mother encourages me to such being with God*" (D. 454; see also D. 1793).

The contemplation of God in her soul was supported by constant practice of uniting with the Merciful Jesus (D. 743, 790, 861, 905, 1105, 1778 and other). She was resolved to perform a detailed examination of her conscience every day for years. She noticed: "*This exercise gives me strange power; my heart is always united with the One it desires, and the actions [are] governed by mercy coming out of love*" (D. 703). "*With Him, in Him, and through Him I pay my homage to God*" (D. 1177). When she wanted to change the habit, Jesus did not allow her to do so, still demanding a constant union with Him present in her heart (D. 1544). This union with Jesus was not hindered by her duties, as she did not get emotionally involved in the work or other external factors (D. 226, 582). All her free time she spent with the Divine Visitor inside her soul (D. 504), from Him she took the light and the strength to face all the difficulties and obstacles (D. 193), and we know that she faced many hardships.

The awareness of the presence of Jesus in her soul and the practise of deep contemplation made Sister Faustina even more sensitive to the manifestations of His presence and to His requests. She perceived Him everywhere. "*Everything surrounding me, she wrote, is full of God, and especially my soul adorned with grace*" (D. 887). She was able to find God in another human beings, in many circumstances of everyday life, and even "*in the most secret things*" (D. 148); she perceived His goodness everywhere, even in the circumstances which are hard for a human being to comprehend. Union in her heart with the Beloved made her sensitive to every manifestation of His will, even to the slightest spiritual inspiration, which she undertook out of love, although this required significant effort and suffering. This presence of God in her soul, the possibility to unite with Jesus so simply, to live with Him, in Him and for Him every day and in every hour, as well as revelation of his will, she accepted as a gift of His mercy. Many times she wrote about her bewilderment while contemplating the mystery of Christian faith (D. 1523), as: "*everything begins with Your mercy and ends with Your mercy*" (D. 1506).

Having experienced the passive states of her mind and spirit, Sister Faustina also had states of the induced contemplation. God took possession of her soul, and she could approach Him simply and lovingly. She wrote in her *Diary*: “Often, I encounter the Lord in a more profound manner. My senses remain asleep, however, I perceive all things more subtly, more truly and clearly than with my own eyes. The mind learns more in a moment than during long years of thorough contemplation of God, the revealed truth, and my own misery” (D. 882).

Sister Faustina teaches us how to be contemplative in action. She says that one should decide to lead an intensive and thorough inner life, as it is necessary to purge the soul not only of sin, but also of the issues resulting from the senses and the world of the creative intellect, in order to enter the fascinating world of faith. The purer the soul, the more capable of discovering God inside itself, of developing personal bonds, contemplating His Person, regardless of the fact whether it lives in a convent or in the world. Such a soul will be able to agree with the following words of Sister Faustina: “My spirit is with God, my veins are full of God, therefore I do not seek Him outside myself. The Lord penetrates my soul like a sunbeam passing through clear glass. I had not such a bond with my own mother in her womb, that I have now with God. There it was unconscious, and here, it is real and I am aware of that union” (D. 883).

2.2. The Attitude of Trust and Mercy

Although Sister Faustina did not leave a systematically explained doctrine of the her inner life, as the educated St. John of the Cross or St. Teresa of Avila, she seems to have initiated a new school of spirituality based on the profound experience of the mystery of the Divine Mercy, which results in the attitude of trust in God and mercy towards other people. Jesus, directing her inner life, requested exactly those two approaches. He said: “My dear daughter, if through you I request from people homage to My Mercy, you should be the first to trust in My Mercy. I request from you acts of mercy, which are to derive from your love to Me. You must always show my mercy to people everywhere, you may not refrain nor excuse yourself from doing so” (D. 742).

2.2.1. The Attitude of Trust

In the common language the words: *I trust* mean: I believe the other person, I entrust my present and future life to him or her, I know that I can rely on that person, I am certain that he or she will show me unconditional love and help if there is need for such. This common meaning is close to the biblical understanding of faith as confidence, which is man’s answer to the gift of God revealing His merciful love. Such significance of trust can be found in Sister Faustina’s works.

Confidence is not therefore a virtue resulting from hope or identifiable with it, but an approach covering all the dimensions and relations that can be formed between man and God. As Fr. Różycki wrote, such an approach to God “*Jesus called the faith, and expected it from His followers when He said: «If you have faith no bigger even than a mustard-seed, you will say to this mountain, move from here to there!», and it will move; nothing will prove impossible for you»*” (Mt 17, 20). The same approach to life, continues Fr. Różycki, has been called by St. Paul, and the entire Christian theology, “*hope which derives from faith in the boundless love and goodness of God for us. [It] is directly linked with the humility, i.e. the honest and profound conviction that all the good in us, and the good that we do, is the act and gift of God, that we do not have anything that we would not have received from God. This trust, hope, means opening of the soul to accept the grace of God and calling for it.*”²

Trust was not just a virtue in Sister Faustina’s life, but an approach, defining the relation of man to God, which consisted in “*a singular wealth of virtues and Christian moral approaches.*” “*In the life of Sister Faustina, according to Archbishop Stanisław Nowak, trust in God meant not only placing confidence in God. It meant a trust full of childlike intimacy*”³, therefore a complete devotion to love. Thus the approach of trust in the works and life of Sister Faustina embraces such theological and moral virtues which condition the childlike, complete devotion to God: faith, hope, love, humility and contrition.

Trust is not an abstract approach consisting in the intellectual acceptance of revealed truth or in a religious feeling. Trust is a very concrete approach, as it meets the visible test of performing God’s will. If a man really trusts in God, he knows that God tells the truth, that He wishes nothing else but the earthly and eternal well-being of man, that God’s will is a gift of His mercy and therefore he fulfils it regardless of whether it agrees with his feelings and the logic of the human mind, or not. God’s will reveals to the believer, as Sister Faustina often said, as “*the mercy itself. I give attention to one word, she wrote in her Diary, and I am always prepared for it, this one word is everything to me, I live it and die with it, and that is the will of God. I feed on it, all my soul listens to God’s requests, I always fulfil what He requests from me, although often my nature trembles, and I feel that the requests are beyond my capacity. I know well what I am myself, yet I also know what God’s grace is, which gives me support*” (D. 652). Therefore the test of trust is the fulfilment of God’s will. The measure of our trust is our fulfilment of God’s will, contained in the commandments, our duties in life or the revealed inspirations from the Holy Spirit.

The starting point in the development of a trusting attitude is the gift of faith, granting the knowledge of the mystery of the Divine Mercy. Sister Faustina wrote in her *Diary*: “*I often ask Jesus for my mind to be enlightened by faith. I express this to the Lord saying: Jesus, give me reason, great reason in order to know You better, because the better I know You, the more I shall love You*” (D. 1474).

Owing to faith, Sister Faustina came to know God increasingly better, especially His greatest virtue, mercy. Discovering the mystery of the Divine Mercy is the basis for trust, as you cannot trust or become devoted to someone you do not know.

Working on this approach, Sister Faustina also used other methods, such as prayer and the practise of ascetic life, thus removing all that proved an obstacle in the perfect unity with God. She cared for the acquisition of virtues, i.e. positive moral skills, especially those which condition the attitude of trust, that is: faith, hope, love, humility and contrition. A very important means to cultivate this approach was faithful fulfilment of God's will, as it is the expression of trust in God; as well as personal meetings with Jesus in examining her conscience. This trust was tested at the times of suffering and painful spiritual experiences. Then she did not seek comfort with people, but went in front of the tabernacle and said: "[Lord], *although You kill me, I shall trust in You*" (D. 77). In another place she confessed: "*When the soul is in pain, I only think: Jesus is good and full of mercy, and even if the ground falls out from under my feet, I shall not lose my trust in Him*" (D. 1192).

One has to acknowledge that in order to develop the attitude of trust, Sister Faustina used very simple, regular methods, which are accessible to everyone. The point is that she used them consistently, which required strong will, radicalism, uncompromising attitude in fighting against "*corrupt nature*", as she put it. Developing the attitude of trust required constant conversion, going beyond herself, that is going beyond not only her weaknesses, but also her natural skills, such as logical reasoning, as often God made her experience situations in which she had to renounce her reason and the human logic, in order to trust in Him, and consequently to accept and fulfil His will. Jesus highly assessed the attempts of Sister Faustina to develop the attitude of trust, saying: "*You have got great and strange rights to My heart, because you are a daughter full of love*" (D. 718).

2.2.2. The Attitude of Mercy

Discovering and further experiencing the merciful love of God led Sister Faustina not only to the attitude of a childlike trust in Him, but also created the wish to reflect this attribute of God in her own heart and actions. She prayed: "*Each of the saints reflects one virtue in himself, and I wish to reflect Your merciful Heart and glorify it. Let Your Mercy, O Jesus, be stamped in my heart and soul, and this shall be my badge in this and future life*" (D. 1242).

Theological dictionaries and textbooks define separately *love* and the virtue of *mercy* which starting from the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, Catholic theology defines *love* as a virtue aiming at doing good to other people, while *mercy* is a virtue which aiming at eliminating the evil they suffer. According to St. Thomas, "*the word «mercy» means that in our heart we have a merciful love because of other people's misery.*"⁴ Thus love differs from mercy only in the aim: love aims

at doing good, while mercy seems to prevent evil.⁵ In the traditional theology, mercy is thus one of the moral virtues. St. Thomas wrote: “Among all virtues referring to people, mercy is the greatest, as the elimination of the faults in people is in itself higher and better.”⁶

A new light on mercy was brought upon by Pope John Paul II in his Encyclicals: *Dives in misericordia*. According to him, “mercy is not only a virtue, but an approach which implies the existence of an entire set of moral skills, among which the most important is the creative love, which is not to be conquered by evil, but conquers evil with goodness.”⁷

The same approach to mercy is present in Sister Faustina’s spirituality. It means not only one of the virtues, but a life-long approach towards another human being, consisting of various moral skills. Sister Faustina, defining mercy, stated briefly that love is a flower, while the mercy is a fruit (D. 949). For Sister Faustina mercy is an approach involving all relations with other people; it should characterise each contact with another human being, every action, thought and word. Therefore, with the help of grace, she wanted to “become all mercy” (D. 163), and prayed that her eyes, hearing, tongue, hands, legs, and - most of all - her heart, be merciful (D. 163).

Special attention must be given to the close relation between the Divine Mercy and human mercy. For Sister Faustina, the approach of mercy towards other people not only has a source and derives from the mystery of the Divine mercy, but it also is caused by that ,mystery, both in its “model and effect.”⁸

For Sister Faustina, Jesus Himself was a model for practising mercy, as the Mercy Incarnate. “I learn from Jesus how to be good, she wrote in her *Diary*, in order to be called a daughter of the Holy Father” (D. 669). What was an unattainable model for her was the example of Jesus, said to have travelled the earth doing good to everyone, and especially His bending over a man sick in his soul and sinful - until His final sacrifice on the cross. In difficult moments, when she did not know how to act towards others, she asked: what would Jesus do in my place? This modelling her actions on the example of Jesus is reflected in the description of Sister Faustina’s meeting with a secular person who took advantage of her goodness. She wrote in her *Diary*: “When I saw her, my blood froze, and I saw before my eyes all that I had to suffer because of her (...). And a thought crossed my mind to let her know the truth directly and straightforward. But at the very same moment I saw before my eyes the Divine Mercy, and I decided to act as Jesus would have done in my position. I started to talk to her mildly, and when she wished to speak to me alone, I let her know (...) the sad condition of my soul in a delicate manner. I saw she was deeply moved” (D. 1694).

The Divine Mercy is, for Sister Faustina, a fundamental issue in the approach of mercy towards others, not only in the aspect of being a model, but also in the executive aspect. “It is to be - in her opinion - a certain share in the Divine Mercy.”⁹ Sister Faustina was aware that through her good deeds performed out of lo-

ve of Christ, she shared in granting the Divine Mercy to the world, as God uses people to demonstrate His goodness. Thus she wished to become all mercy, to become a living reflection of the Divine Mercy, “*in order to have this greatest attribute of God, His boundless mercy*”, pass through her heart and soul to other people (D. 163). Such interdependence between human and Divine Mercy was described by Jesus Himself. He taught: “*Know, my dear daughter, that My Heart is mercy itself (...). I wish your heart to become the nest of My mercy. I wish mercy to spread to the world through your heart. Whoever approaches you, let him not leave without trust in My Mercy, which I want so much for human souls*” (D. 1777).

In order, however, for mercy towards others to have a share in the Divine Mercy, it must be performed in the Christian spirit, that is why the Lord said to Sister Faustina that her heart should be the nest of His Mercy and that through her heart His Mercy should spread into the world. Thus it means not any natural charity or various sorts of philanthropy, but mercy performed to others out of love for Jesus and in His spirit. This requires perception of the other person in light of faith, as a creature made “*in God’s image and likeness (Gen. 1, 26), redeemed by no perishable stuff, like gold or silver (...). The price was paid in precious blood (...)* – *the blood of Christ*” (1. P 1, 18), as a God’s child, created to inherit all the goods of heaven, and to participate in the life of the Holy Trinity. Such a perception and approach to the other person was practised by Sister Faustina, and the more difficult it was for her to be with a person, the more she tried to perceive Christ in that person, calling her to show mercy.

What has been said here about trust and mercy in Sister Faustina’s spirituality allows for stating that we deal here with the very foundation of Christian life. The approach of a childlike trust in God and mercy towards others, until the sacrifice of her life, Sister Faustina implemented the greatest commandment of the love of God and other people, that is the essence of Christianity.

2.3. Love of the Church and the Charisma of the Mystery of the Divine Mercy

“*O how great is my love and adoration for the Church*” (D. 197) – these words of Sister Faustina show her profound understanding of the mystery of the Church, as love results from the feeling of having been endorsed, and the adoration – from the understanding of the immensity of the gift. The Church, born on the cross from the wounded body of Jesus, symbolised by Blood and Water flowing out of the Savior’s heart, was called an act of the Divine Mercy by Sister Faustina (D. 949). It is the Church where the grace of salvation and sanctity was placed, it is the source of Divine life for every Christian.

In the history of the Church, its mystery has been expressed by a number of symbols, such as: herd of sheep, a field, God’s construction, bride, Upper Jeru-

salem, mother (Catechism of the Catholic Church 754-757). This last title seems to be the most accurate to Sister Faustina, who most often used this symbol for the Church. Mother is the one who gives life, who maintains it with love, and cares about its development; hence Sister Faustina wrote: "*O my mother, Divine Church, you are the true Mother who understands her children*" (D. 1469).

Where did Sister Faustina perceive this motherhood of the Church? For her, the Church was the source of grace which raises man to the dignity of God's child, gives him supernatural life and sanctifies him (D. 1474). As the mother, the Church brings up her children, leading them to increasingly closer unity with God (D. 749). The Church hosts the Divine Revelation, through which God allows Himself to be known, demonstrates his intention to love, reveals His will and protects against erring. She wrote in her Diary: "*In order for me not to have doubt, you gave me under the protection of the Church, the true, caring Mother, who on your behalf ensures me about the truth of faith and protects me against erring*" (D. 1488).

In natural relations, a child's love for the mother is expressed through obedience. In Sister Faustina's writings this feature is striking. It was expressed in the complete acceptance of the truths of the faith revealed to the Church. She wrote in her Diary: "*O how sweet it is to have inside my soul what the Church makes us believe*" (D. 1123). "*I have faith, faith and faith again in You, One God in the Holy Trinity, and in all the truth that Your Holy Church makes us believe*" (D. 1558). The voice of the Church was for Sister Faustina even more important than the inner voice of God. She disapproved the credibility of her ecstasies which stood in contrast with the teaching of the Church, and she wanted all her actions to be approved by the Church. She confessed in her Diary: "*Although God Himself reassured me, I always wanted to have the approval of the Church*" (D. 112). She faithfully and accurately fulfilled every order of her confessors and supervisors, although this often required sacrifice and strong will, causing doubts and suffering.

In Sister Faustina's *Diary* there are also definitions of the Church in its essence, referring to the Mystical Corpus Christi. In her words: "*We all are a single organism in Jesus*" (D. 1364), Sister Faustina perceived the mystery of this strange relation and unity of Christ with those who believed Him, and stressed the supernatural connection with Jesus, who – despite having left this world – remains in living relation with the Church and unites everyone.

"*I look at [Christians] as at the living limbs of Christ, who is their Head*" (D. 481), Sister Faustina wrote perceiving that Christ as the Head of the Church is the principle of creation and salvation, as well as the source of its life. The truth about the unity of the Mystical Body results in the fundamental rule of solidarity of its limbs. Pain in one of the limbs causes suffering of the entire organism. Sister Faustina, feeling a limb of the Mystical Corpus, felt the suffering of her brothers and sisters, she regretted the fall of souls, rejoiced with the joyful, and cried with the crying. Her spiritual solidarity with all the members of the Church, is expressed in the following words: "*I desire the salvation of souls (...), I feel all the persecu-*

tion of your believers (...), I despair because of fallen souls" (D. 1366). She was also aware of interdependencies between believers in Christ and their mutual spiritual reactions. She knew that each of her good deeds helped to increase the sanctity of the entire Church, while each sin led to the fall of souls. She wrote: "A minor action of mine, performed in a divine manner, may influence the glory of the Church and the progress of many souls" (D. 508). Recognising the existence of the communicating vessels in the Church, she stated: "The sanctity or the fall of each single soul is reflected in the entire Church" (D. 1475).

Aware of the importance of the moral value of the Church members, she tried to achieve personal sanctity and was convinced that in this way she could become more useful to the Church: "I try to achieve the greatest perfection in order to serve the Church" (D. 1475). Sister Faustina knew that her sanctity was reflected in the entire Church, that each of her good deeds, even unperceived, was very powerful, and proved a good fruit to feed other souls. She wrote in her Diary: "I may be completely useful to the Church by my personal sanctity which will resound in all the Church (...), that is why I keep trying to have the soil of my heart bring forth good fruit, possibly not perceived by the human eye, yet there will be a day to show that this fruit has fed and will feed many souls" (D. 1364).

This outline proves Sister Faustina's connection with the Mystical Corpus Christi as well as expresses of her great responsibility for all Church members. Sister Faustina's confession: "I feel (...) as if I were responsible for all souls" (D. 1505) – is not rhetorical, but it articulates her deeply experienced relation to each member of the Mystical Corpus Christi.

2.3.1. The Charisma of Explaining the Mystery of the Divine Mercy in the Church

Sister Faustina not only loved the Church as her mother and the Mystical Corpus Christi, but also perfectly knew her place in the Church, her task granted to her by Jesus, and her charisma for the benefit of the community of believers.

As a Sister of the Convent of the Sisters of Our Lady the Merciful, she was called to co-operate with Jesus in the task of saving girls and women in need of a profound moral restoration. Wishing to be useful to the Church by fulfilling the charisma of the Convent, she gave all her heart to this task, offering her work, prayers, sacrifice and suffering in this intention. She was aware of the greatness of this task, perceiving a great Divine trust in human beings called to co-operate with God in such an enterprise (D. 245), therefore she awarded each soul under the care of the Convent with special prayer and sacrifice. Some of the girls she met directly when working in the kitchen or in the garden. She had the occasion then to influence the process of transforming of their lives with the example of her own life in union with God, with her deeds and words.

Jesus gradually prepared Sister Faustina to accept the great gift: the Message of the Divine Mercy, which aims at salvation of all sinners, not only girls and women in need of profound moral restoration. Preparing her to her mission, the Lord showed her His desire to save the souls: *"I desire to save souls, He spoke to Sister Faustina, help Me, My daughter, to save souls"* (D. 1032). *"I truly wish to save souls. My dearest secretary, write that I wish to pour My Divine life into human souls and sanctify them, if only they wanted to accept My Grace. The worst sinners would achieve great sanctity if only they trusted My Mercy"* (D. 1784). *"My daughter, give Me souls; know that your task is to conquer souls with prayer and sacrifice, encouragement to trust in My Mercy"* (D. 1690). In many visions of His passion, Jesus showed her the price of salvation of each man and the pain because of the lost souls. *"Souls perish despite My bitter Passion"* (D. 965), He said to her, encouraging her to co-operation in this greatest deed of mercy, which is the salvation of sinners.

He also taught her how to save lost souls. He advised that prayers, fast, sacrifice, work and all suffering should be linked to His life and Passion, as then they would be powerful for in the face of God (D. 531). He wished that she made the mystery of His Mercy available to souls, especially to sinners. *"My heart, He said to her, is full of great mercy for souls, especially for poor sinners. May they understand that I am the best Father for them, that for them My heart bled with Blood and Water, as the spring full of mercy; for them I live in the tabernacle as the King of Mercy"* (D. 367).

The task of popularising the Divine Mercy to souls is one of the main methods of co-operation with Jesus in the task of saving souls, therefore Jesus often hurried Sister Faustina to write and tell the world about this greatest attributes of God. The Lord said: *"O if sinners knew My mercy, such a number of them would not be lost. Tell the sinful souls that they should not be afraid to approach Me, tell them about My great mercy"* (D. 1396). *"You see My mercy for sinners (...). Look how little you have written about it (...). Do whatever you can so that sinners know My forgiveness"* (D. 1665). *"Tell sinners that I always await them, and listen to their heartbeat if it beats for Me. Write that I speak to them through their remorse, through their bad luck and suffering, through storm and thunder, I speak to them with the voice of the Church"* (D. 1728). Jesus wanted the message about the Divine Mercy to be preached not only to the girls and women under the care of the Convent, but to all sinners so that they could be saved.

The teaching about the mystery of the Divine Mercy consists not only in proclaiming the good news about Salvation, talking about the forgiveness of God, but also in begging the Divine Mercy for the world, especially for sinners. For that purpose, Jesus passed on the new forms of worship of the Divine Mercy, which were accompanied with great promises provided that we care to have trust in God and mercy for other people. Each form of the worship – the image of Christ with the inscription: *"Jesus, I trust in You"*, the Divine Mercy Sunday, chaplet to the Di-

vine Mercy, the hour of Mercy – intends to lead to the salvation of sinners. The Lord said to Sister Faustina: *“My daughter, I want to teach you how to save souls with sacrifice and prayers. By prayer and suffering you will save more souls than a missionary by pure preaching”* (D. 1767).

Sister Faustina was eager to save souls. She offered her daily work, prayers and suffering in that intention. She desired to save all sinners, as in the mystical way she learnt the joy of the saved, and the misery of the doomed, therefore she claimed that no suffering is too great for the purpose of saving souls. Gradually, a desire grew in her to become the sacrificial Host. On Maundy Thursday, 1934, she renewed her act of voluntary sacrificing her life for sinners, especially for those who had lost faith in the Divine Mercy. By this act, she undertook to accept all the fears and suffering experienced by sinners, and to give them all her comfort resulting from being close to God. Thus, every day, she stood before God united with Jesus, as ultimate sacrifice to save souls from eternal doom.

The search for lost sheep and bringing them back to the Christian fold was the principal aim of Sister Faustina’s apostolic mission. She accomplished it through action, word, and prayer. Aware of her mission, she wrote: *“O my dear God, I am aware of my mission in the Holy Church. My constant effort is to beg for the mercy for the world. I unite with Jesus and become an offering for the world. (...) O God, how I desire that souls may learn that You have created them out of your incomprehensible love; O my Maker and Lord, I feel that I should lift the curtains of Heaven so that the earth should not doubt Your goodness”* (D. 482-483).

2.4. Love of the Eucharist

In the spiritual life of Sister Faustina, the Eucharist had the central position. From her early childhood, the faith in the real presence of Christ in the form of the consecrated Bread filled her heart and mind, consuming her with love and creating the constant desire for God. The profound and all-encompassing insight in the mystery of the living Christ in the Eucharist is expressed by her short and simple statement: *“Jesus concealed in the Eucharist is everything to me”* (D. 1037). Everything means here the only *Confessor*, to whom she could confess all (D. 504); a faithful *Friend*; always present and liberating her from loneliness. *“O how rejoiced is my soul, she wrote, that I have such Friend, who always keeps me company, I do not feel lonely, although I am secluded”* (D. 877). Jesus concealed in the Host was the *Master* to her, who taught her how to live (D. 82), a *Mother*, who one can tell about all the joy and problems.

The establishment of the Eucharist was perceived by Sister Faustina as an expression of the profound Divine Mercy (D. 949). The Second Vatican Council stated that the Eucharist is the testimony of the Sacrifice of the Cross and the commemoration of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus, which was specially experienced by Sister Faustina during each Mass. She learnt this truth not only through

reason, but also in a mystical way, having insight in the mystery of Transubstantiation occurring during the Mass. She described one of her visions: *"I saw Jesus Crucified during the Mass. Jesus was nailed to the cross and in pain. My soul was overwhelmed with Jesus' Passion - my souls and my body, although invisibly but in equally painful manner. O what terrible mystery occurs during the Mass"* (D. 913). Aware of the significance of the mystery of the Greatest Sacrifice, full of faith in the personified Passion and death of Jesus, Sister Faustina pondered upon the Divine love which prepared the source of so much grace for people. She wrote in her Diary: *"A great mystery occurs during the Mass. We should carefully listen and participate in this death of Jesus. One day we shall learn what God does for us in every Mass, and what grace He prepares for us. Only His Divine love could result in such a gift"* (D. 914).

Meditation on the mystery of the sacrifice of Jesus personified in the Eucharist led Sister Faustina to shaping the approach of co-sacrificing oneself with Jesus for the salvation of souls. She identified herself so much with Jesus in the Eucharist that she called herself a *host*, understanding it almost literally as a sacrifice consisting of complete consummation of herself. She wrote: *"My name is host, or sacrifice, but not to be treated as a name, but as the deed, elimination of myself and resemblance of You on the cross, good Jesus and my Lord"* (D. 485). *"Jesus, transform me into another host, she asked in a prayer, I wish to be a living host for You (...). O Jesus, I understand the meaning of the host, I understand the meaning of the sacrifice. I wish to be a living host before Your majesty, a living sacrifice that burns for You every day"* (D. 1826).

The Mass is not only a sacrifice, but also a holy feast during which we accept Jesus Himself. For Sister Faustina, the moment of the Communion was the most celebrated moment in her life (D. 1804). She yearned for each Communion (D. 1804) and thanked for each one, confessing that she feared the day when she would not take it (D. 1826). She adored Jesus who has remained in the Sacrament of the Altar, opening *"His mercy apart"* (D. 1747). She wrote: *"Here is the shrine of Your mercy, a cure for our feebleness; all souls seek You, the living source of mercy, some desiring Your love, some, tired with life, to gain strength"* (D. 1747).

In the Holy Sacrament she perceived the source of power among the hardship and grayness of everyday life, the shield and defense against the bullets of the enemy and efforts of hell, comfort in failures and doubt (D. 356). The love of Jesus of the Eucharist was for her a certainty in all circumstances, in moments of despair, rejection by other people, efforts taken in vain, and failures (D. 356). The tabernacle was the source of strength, courage and light, as well as comfort in difficult moments (D. 1037). The Communion gave her the power to take the burden of everyday sacrifices (D. 1386) and helped to overcome the fear of hardships and suffering (D. 876); for Sister Faustina, it was an encouragement for consistent pursuance of the chosen way, despite the obstacles and misunderstanding, which deprived her of courage and peace of mind (D. 91). Although Sister Faustina strongly

felt her misery, she deeply believed that the Communion had the power to make her saint. (D. 1718) and was a source of the constantly burning and renewing love for other people (D. 1769). The Communion was treated as an introduction to resurrection and eternal life.

It is striking, how personal, intimate and profound relation Sister Faustina had with Jesus of the Eucharist. Equally fascinating was her faith and discovery of unlimited potential of supernatural powers in the Eucharist, which can transform a person. *“All that is good in me, she said, was brought about by the Communion, I owe everything to it. I feel that this holy fire has transformed me completely”* (D. 1392). Meditating upon the grace of the Eucharist, Sister Faustina reached its heart. This food is not transformed into the one who eats it. It has the power to transform one into itself, as St. Augustine said: *“I am the food for the adults, therefore grow up, and if you eat Me, you shall not absorb Me in yourself as you do with food, but you shall be transformed into Me.”* Therefore it has the power to make a man divine, and overwhelms him with God. Discovering this truth, Sister Faustina prayed: *“Dearest Jesus (...), transform me into yourself, so that my actions are pleasant to You; let it happen by the power of the Communion which I accept everyday. I desire to be transformed into You, O Lord”* (D. 1289).

The result of accepting the Eucharist in the spiritual life of Sister Faustina was proportional to the efforts and preparations she undertook before each Communion. If the Communion was the most celebrated moment in her life, the efforts to experience it in the best manner were commensurate to this moment. The preparations that we can trace in Sister Faustina's *Diary* reflect her various spiritual condition: from the greatest mystical experiences to the moments of austerity, doubts and difficulties. Yet one motif seems striking: the intensity of love regardless of the mood. Sister Faustina awaited Jesus as her Beloved and Lord greater than heaven. She wrote in her *Diary*: *“Encouraged by His goodness, I place my head on His chest and tell Him about everything. First I tell Him about things I would never tell any creature. And then I speak about the needs of the Church, about the souls of poor sinners, how much they need Your mercy”* (D. 1806). In other instances, Sister Faustina's preparation was short but intense, characterized with deep love. In very short moments her soul became immersed in God, and the meeting with Him became a conversation without words.

2.5. Devotion to the Holy Mother of God

The devotion to the Holy Mother of God is another significant element in the spiritual life of Sister Faustina. She learnt from her early childhood. Already in her childhood she heard her father praising the Virgin Mary with songs about her immaculate conception. It was a tradition in the Kowalski family to sing the *Litany of Loreto* together in May, and to say the *rosary* in October. In their room, next to the crucifix there was a statue of Our Lady, before which they kneeled down to pray every day;

and in front of the house, on the pear-tree there hung a small shrine, before which they gathered in summer. The Virgin Mary was present in Sister Faustina's life from her early childhood, and it was natural to address the Virgin in every need. Therefore when Sister Faustina went to the convent in Warsaw, she sought advice and assistance from Our Lady. Later she described the event in her *Diary*: "*When I got off the train and saw everybody going their way, I felt fear. What should I do? Where to go if I do not know anybody here? And I said to Our Lady: Mary, lead me, guide me. I immediately heard in my soul the words telling me to go outside the town, to a village, promising to find a safe lodging, which I did and found as Our Lady said*" (D. 11). This description proves the simplicity of this nineteen-year-old girl in her contact with Our Lady, and her obedience to Her orders.

At the age of twenty, Helena Kowalska became a member of the Convent of Our Lady the Merciful, where her prayers to Virgin Mary developed. From that time she was a *daughter* of the One who gave all Her life to the act of Salvation performed by her Son. As a good daughter, she learnt from the Mother how to fulfil her calling, how to co-operate with the Merciful Jesus in the act of Salvation of lost souls, how to love God and people.

2.5.1. The Virgin Mary as the Mother

Out of all numerous titles under which Mary is adored in Christian tradition, Sister Faustina used the title closest to the human heart: the Mother, the Mother of God, and her Mother.

The convent which Sister Faustina joined adores the Virgin Mary in a special way, as Our Lady the Merciful, as She was the One, who specially experienced the Divine Mercy, as was saved from the original sin, bestowed with full grace, and awarded the dignity of the Mother of the Holy Son of God. She gave the world the Mercy Incarnate. Mary is also the One who "*in a unique way paid for her participation in the revelation of the Divine Mercy with the sacrifice of her heart*" (DM 9), when she stood on Calvary under the cross of Her Son. Therefore "*She knows fully the entire mystery of the Divine Mercy. She knows how much it cost and how great it is*" (DM 9). Also Mary, "*through her concealed but incomparable share in the messianic mission of her Son was specially called to make this love accessible to people, the love that He (Her Son) came to reveal*" (DM 9). Therefore the sisters of Our Lady the Merciful, who follow their patron in co-operating with the Divine Mercy to save lost souls, adore Mary under this particular title. She is represented as a figure with her arms stretched (ready to offer help to people), from which her cloak spreads as a symbol of the Virgin Mary's care and mercy for people, the image used in iconography from the very beginning.

Sister Faustina always adored Mary as the Mother of the Son of God, the Mercy Incarnate. She never treated Mary as an autonomous person, but always in rela-

tion to Jesus, as His Mother participating in the saving mission of Her Son. In many revelations, the Holy Mother always came to Sister Faustina together with Her Son (D. 608, 846, and other), or as the One who led to Him, focused on His person and participating in His act of salvation.

For Sister Faustina, Mary was not only the Mother of the Holy Son of God, but also her personal spiritual Mother. The Holy Mother reminded Sister Faustina particularly about the truth of the spiritual motherhood of Mary, as held by the Church, perceived as the gift of the Divine Mercy. On the patron's day at the Convent, as Sister Faustina wrote, "*I saw the beautiful Virgin Mary, who approached me coming from the altar to my praying desk, hugged me and said: I am your Mother out of the profound Divine Mercy*" (D. 449, see D. 805). Additionally, to Sister Faustina She said: "*My daughter, on the order of God, I am to be a special Mother to you, but I wish you to be a special daughter to Me*" (D. 1414).

This very personal relationship between Sister Faustina and Our Lady can be seen in various everyday situations described in her *Diary*. She devoted all her joyful moments, such as her vows (D. 260), and moments of suffering in which she did not hesitate to cry. She offered the Virgin all her life: "*My dear Mother and Lady, I give You my soul and my body, my life and death, and whatever comes after that. I entrust all this onto Your hands, my dearest Mother*" (D. 79). She asked Her for grace, and in particular: chastity of *heart, soul and body* (D. 79), defence against the enemies of Salvation (D. 79), grace of faithfulness in her spiritual revelations, and the faithful fulfilment of God's will (D. 170) - all this to become dearer to Jesus and to appropriately present His Mercy to the entire world, through entire eternity (D. 220).

The Holy Mother often let her feel Her motherly love and care (D. 798, 1114). "*At a certain moment, the Holy Mother visited me. She was sad, and looked down to the ground. She let me understand that She was to say something to me, although She indicated that She did not want to speak about it. When I understood this, I asked the Holy Mother to tell me and to look at me. At one moment (...) Mary looked at me with a cheering smile and said «You will suffer from illness and doctors, and you will suffer a lot because of this image, but do not fear». On the next day I was taken ill and suffered a lot, as the Holy Mother said, but my soul is ready for suffering*" (D. 316). The relation between Sister Faustina and the Holy Mother was specially close, based on intimacy between the loving Mother and the adoring daughter.

2.5.2. Mary as the Model and the Mistress of Spiritual Life

Since the beginning of Christianity, Mary has been perceived as a model of Evangelical life based on faith, hope and love; as an image of a perfect unity with Christ in His life and apostolic mission; as an example of obedience and fulfilment of God's will in all acts; example of acceptance of the revelations of the Holy Ghost; as well as model of sensitivity to all the needs of other people. For Sister Faustina, Mary

was mainly the model of complete trust in God, that is fulfilling His will and mercy to other people. She wrote in her *Diary*: “Her heart beat only according to God’s will” (D. 1710, see D. 1437), although She suffered a lot in Her life (D. 915).

For Sister Faustina, the Holy Mother was not only the unquestioned model of Christian life, which should be reflected in one’s own life, but also a Person actively involved in the shaping of spiritual life - hence she called Her the Mistress (D. 620). Mary taught her mainly to reveal God in her own soul. She said: “My dear daughter, try to be quiet and humble, so that Jesus, who lives in your heart, may rest. Adore Him in your heart, and do not go outside” (D. 785). Sister Faustina obediently fulfilled the advice of the Holy Mother, her encouragement to remain with God in her own soul, to reveal His presence and power there. Therefore she did not seek Him far away, but focused all her life on developing bonds with Him, present in her soul.

Our Lady also encouraged her to obedient fulfilment of God’s will. She said: “My dear daughter, I advise you to obediently fulfil all God’s wishes, as this is dearest to His holy eyes. I desire you to excel in obedience to fulfil God’s will. The will of God should be placed above all sacrifice” (D. 1244). She taught her to accept all God’s will as a small child does, without any questions, otherwise God will not like it (D. 529), as such behaviour shows lack of trust in His wisdom, power and love. She showed Sister Faustina the example of Her own life, explaining what the perfect fulfilment of God’s will was - not only external performance, but also the inner harmony of one’s own will with God’s will (D. 1437).

The cross is always linked to the fulfilment of God’s will. Therefore Our Lady often taught Sister Faustina the art of accepting and experiencing the suffering which does not spare anyone. Mary told her: “You know, my daughter, that although I have been given the dignity of the Mother of God, seven swords of pain crossed My heart” (D. 786). She advised Sister Faustina that she should always, even in happy moments, “look at the cross” (D. 561), at the Passion of Her Son, for in that way she would win (D. 449). Pointing at Her own life, Mary taught Sister Faustina not to shun and avoid the cross, but always to accept it, as it was a part of God’s plan. The cross which is accepted always leads to victory, to purification of the soul, and thus to closer unity with Jesus and to a more complete participation in His mission of Salvation.

As the daughter of the Mother of the Divine Mercy, Sister Faustina was to possess the following virtues: humility, silence, chastity, love of God and people, and mercy (D. 1244). The Holy Mother said also: “My dearest daughter, I desire you to practise three virtues that are dearest to Me, and most pleasant for God: the first is humility, humility, and humility again. The second virtue is chastity, the third virtue is the love of God. As my daughter you must especially shine with these virtues” (D. 1414-15).

Mary, as the Mistress of her spiritual life, gave Sister Faustina the guidelines concerning not only her personal perfection, but also the apostolic mission entrusted to her by Christ. The first apostolic mission of Sister Faustina was to announce to

the world the mystery of the Divine Mercy, which should allow people to prepare for the second coming of Christ. Mary gave Sister Faustina the strength to perform this task, showing the role of this mission: *"I gave the Saviour to the world, and you must tell the world about His great mercy and prepare the world to his second coming (...). Tell these souls about this great mercy when it is time for it; if you keep silent now, on that terrible day you shall be responsible for so great number of souls"* (D. 635). After these serious and responsible words, Our Lady gave her strength saying: *"Do not fear, be faithful to the end, I sympathise with you"* (D. 635).

The second, new apostolic mission of Sister Faustina consisted in asking for the Divine Mercy for the entire world. In this mission, Our Lady supported her as well, pointing at Herself as a model of inner life and constant prayer for others. She said to Sister Faustina: *"Your life should be similar to my life - quiet and concealed, [you shall] constantly unite with God and beg for humanity and prepare the world for the second coming of God"* (D. 625). On another occasion, Our Lady did not any longer ask for prayer, but demanded it: *"My daughter, I demand that you pray, pray, and pray again for the world, and especially for your Homeland"* (D. 325).

Modelling her life on Mary's life, and fulfilling Her orders brought quick results in Sister Faustina's life. She wrote: *"The more I take after the Holy Mother, the more I know God"* (D. 843). Faithful following of Mary sanctified her soul (D. 161) and led to a close co-operation with Jesus. In Sister Faustina's life, her prayers to Our Lady did not take the form of a religious zealotry, they were not her devotion to Mary, but a devotion modelled on Mary's. Sister Faustina not only prayed to Our Lady, celebrated her feasts, but also actively followed Her. She learnt from Her the insight into the mystery of the Divine Mercy and its contemplation in everyday life, trust in God and performing mercy to other people, participation in the life and mission of Jesus in the act of saving lost souls. Sister Faustina was a faithful disciple and a beloved daughter of the Our Lady the Merciful, reflecting Her life in her own living, which was quiet and concealed, but at the same time so fruitful in the act of Salvation.

3. Conclusion

The school of spirituality of Sister Faustina nowadays finds many followers, who learn the mystery of the Divine Mercy, trying to achieve the approach of trust in God and mercy to other people. It is a model of Christian perfection, as if specially provided for our times of moral uncertainty, relativism, liberalism, materialistic approach to man, and trust in man's mind and money. In such times Sister Faustina is a landmark showing that neither money or other temporary values are important, but Salvation, which a man should try to achieve on earth. Salvation cannot be, however, achieved without the help of the Divine Mercy, with whom he should co-operate daily, developing devotion for God and becoming good to other people.

The spiritual life of Sister Faustina is very *healthy*, as on the one hand prevents zealotry, i.e. practising Christianity only through prayer, as it requires the per-

formance of the acts of mercy, and on the other hand it prevents treating the religion as practical charity, as it requires the living contact with God. Sister Faustina teaches us the most difficult art of living in the spirit of childlike trust in God and mercy to other people. This spirituality is based on the discovering and contemplating the mystery of the Divine Mercy in everyday life; strength is given and nourished by the Eucharist, the certainty derives from obedience to the Church, while support comes from Our Lady the Merciful.

Notes:

¹ *Konstytucje Towarzystwa Matki Bożej Miłosierdzia (Constitutions of the Convent of the Sisters of Our Lady the Merciful)*, Płock 1909, p. 6

² Różycki I., ks. *Miłosierdzie Boże. Zasadnicze rysy nabożeństwa do Miłosierdzia Bożego*, Kraków 1982, p. 16.

³ Nowak St., abp, „*Błogosławiona Faustyna jako wzór zawierzenia Bogu i miłosierdzia wobec bliźnich dla apostołów Bożego Miłosierdzia*” in: *Apostolski ruch Bożego Miłosierdzia. Materiały z sympozjum*, Kraków 1996, p. 120

⁴ St. Thomas, *Suma teologiczna w zarysie*, Kraków 1997, vol. II, p. 59

⁵ Kasperkiewicz K., Sł. N. SJ, „*Pojęcie miłosierdzia w encyklice «Dives in misericordia»*” in: *Dives in misericordia. Tekst i komentarz*, Kraków 1981, p. 66

⁶ St. Thomas, *Suma teologiczna*, op. cit., p. 61

⁷ Kasperkiewicz K., Sł. N. SJ, *Pojęcie miłosierdzia*, op. cit., p. 67

⁸ Smoleński St., bp, „*Cnota miłosierdzia chrześcijańskiego w życiu Sługi Bożej s. Faustyny*” in: *Posłannictwo Siostry Faustyny*, Kraków 1991, s. 23

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 24

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