

THE *Letters*
OF SAINT FAUSTINA

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METROPOLITAN OF CRACOW

We have before us the letters of Saint Faustina. We pick them up and open them, just as we open envelopes; for, although they were not originally addressed to us, they constitute a testimony about Jesus. Let the number of friends who, while standing in the doorway, participate in the encounter between Faustina and her Beloved be as numerous as possible. Just as the *Diary* was written in the most ordinary conditions and situations of religious life in different convents of the Congregation, so do the present letters, through various life situations, clearly reveal the story of Saint Faustina's soul – and the presence of her Beloved. For those of us who have read the *Diary*, the presence of Jesus is very obvious here (the way it must have been to Sr. Faustina's confessors who had no doubt that "it was Jesus"), but in those days, among Sister Faustina's contemporaries, there were many suspicions and doubts...Let us not miss this marvelous opportunity which is given to us, the most ordinary of people in the most ordinary life situations, thanks to these letters: the Lord and the Beloved stands at our door and knocks! Jesus will open His Heart to everyone who believes and trusts in Him. Let us receive this gift, the gift of her letters, from Saint Faustina and let us allow Jesus to draw us onto the paths of the Divine Mercy.

Cracow, 18th January, 2005
+ *Franciszek kard. Macharski*

INTRODUCTION

After Saint Faustina's *Diary*, the present publication is the second document associated with her life and mission which finds its way to the devotees of Divine Mercy and those of her. The volume is a collection of Saint Faustina's correspondence with her spiritual directors, superiors and fellow sisters. It sheds light on the wider climate in which she implemented her mission and the extent to which other persons, in particular Father Micha³ Sopoæko, Saint Faustina's spiritual director, participated in this mission.

1. Authoress of the Letters

Saint Sister Faustina, Helena Kowalska who is nowadays known to the whole world as an Apostle of Divine Mercy, was born on the 25th of August 1905 in the village of Głogowiec, in the Świnice Warckie parish, in the Łódź province. She was the third of ten children born to Marianna and Stanisław Kowalski, a family of poor farmers. The parents had passed on to her a living faith in God present in the world and in fellow human beings. They taught her how to loving God and putting the divine matters in the first place. Helena attended the elementary school for less than three years (1917 – 1920). At the age of 16, she went into service as a domestic help, first in Aleksandrów Łódzki and then in Łódź. She dreamt of a religious life ever since her early childhood.

In July 1924, under the influence of an inner inspiration, Helena Kowalska left for Warsaw in order to realize her religious vocation. For a year, she worked for Aldona Lipszyc in the little town of Ostrówek in the Klembów county near Warsaw, so as to earn some money for her dowry. On the 1st of August 1925, Helena Kowalska entered the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. She completed her period of postulancy in the Warsaw convent at 3/9 Żytnia street. During that time, she interiorly experienced some doubts concerning the character of her vocation. She considered the possibility of leaving the Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy and joining a contemplative order. After a few months spent in the convent in Warsaw, Helena Kowalska departed for Cracow in order to begin her novitiate there; once in Cracow, she undertook an intensive religious formation, whose aim was to become acquainted with the principles of internal life, the charism of the Congregation and the idea of work which was to take up a substantial part of her life in the convent. On the 30th of April 1926, she participated in the ceremony of the taking on the veil, during which she received her religious vestments as well as a new name – sister *Maria Faustina*. During her novitiate, Sister Faustina experienced spiritual darkness which was for her a time of suffering and test expressing itself in the feeling abandoned by God. Having completed her two-year novitiate, on the 30th of April 1928, she made her first profession of temporary vows which she

renewed each year for the successive five years. On the 1st of June 1933, she made her perpetual vows and on the Holy Thursday 1934, she drew up an act in which she offered herself entirely for sinners, especially for those who have lost trust in the Divine Mercy.

During her formation in the novitiate and then in the course of her religious life in the convent, Sister Faustina performed various duties, working as a cook, gardener, gatekeeper, a help in the bakery and baker's shop: in Warsaw, Płock, Vilnius and Cracow. She performed the simplest of tasks with immense dedication, trying to discover God's love in the simplest of occupations and respond to it with personal involvement. It was in Vilnius that Sister Faustina became gravely ill and was diagnosed with tuberculosis of the lungs; the illness gradually spread to other internal organs, becoming a cause of Saint Faustina's immense sufferings and her ultimate death. During her sickness, on two occasions Sister Faustina underwent hospital treatment in the pulmonary clinic in Prądnik Czerwony in Cracow. She also spent a lot of time in the convent infirmary. When she felt better, she resumed her duties overcoming her sickness and suffering by means of her willpower and great love for Jesus. She died in the Cracovian convent of the Congregation on the 5th of October 1938 and was buried in the convent graveyard. The Holy Father John Paul II declared her the Blessed on the 18th of April 1993 and subsequently canonized her on the 30th of April 2000 in Rome.

Sister Faustina portrayed her interior life in the *Diary* which she wrote at the specific request of Father Michał Sopoćko, her spiritual director in Vilnius. In the above mentioned autobiography, she described her fascinating encounters with God who dwelled in her soul and spoke deep within her heart, leading her to the summits of mystical union and revealing before her the mystery of God's life. By endowing her with His love, Jesus entrusted her with the mission of proclaiming the truth about God's mercy to the world. Saint Faustina was also endowed by God with extraordinary graces which accompanied her union with God through love and the fulfillment of His will. The Lord Jesus spoke to her through various visions, appearing to her as Merciful Jesus, surrounded with the glory of the Risen Christ with two rays – the pale and red one – emerging from His pierced side. Apart from the vision of Jesus, Sister Faustina also had visions of the Mother of God and visions of Saints, as well as souls in purgatory and of Satan; she was also endowed with the gift of spiritual stigmata which consisted in experiencing pain in her hands, legs, side and head, in the absence of any physical wounds.

All of the above graces served Sister Faustina to discover the mystery of Divine Mercy which was revealed in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ; they also showed her in what way in her life she can participate in His salvific mission. With the approval of her spiritual director as well as her superiors in the

Congregation, Sister Faustina accurately transmitted the message of Merciful Christ which reminds one of the truth concerning God's merciful love for each and every individual and summons one to proclaim it through one's deeds, word and prayer. For this purpose, the Lord Jesus passed on through Sister Faustina the new forms of the devotion to the Divine Mercy, namely: the Image of Merciful Jesus, the Feast of Mercy, the Chaplet to Divine Mercy and the Hour of Mercy. He attached to each one of the above new forms of the devotion as well as to the task of proclaiming the mystery of God's mercy, great promises, on condition that one truly practices the devotion in question, which essence is the attitude of trust in the Lord God, that is fulfillment of His will contained in the commandments, the obligations of state or the discerned inspirations of the Holy Spirit, as well as active love of one's neighbor. In spite of the fact that Sister Faustina did nothing spectacular in her lifetime, today she is known the world over as an Apostle of Divine Mercy, reminding us that God is the Father of mercy and that He loves every individual giving each and every one of us a chance to save oneself from becoming entangled in sin.

Apart from the *Diary*, Saint Faustina has also left the letters and cards with best wishes addressed to her spiritual director Father Michał Sopoćko, as well as to Father Józef Andrasz SI, to her mother superiors, fellow sisters of the Congregation and family. The above letters complete the spiritual portrait of the Apostle of the Di-

vine Mercy and point out to her immense involvement in the cause of proclaiming the message of Mercy to the world. They also reveal Sister Faustina as someone who is really and truly concerned about man, his salvation and human needs.

2. Goal of Writing the Letters

Saint Faustina's correspondence comprises letters to Father Michał Sopoćko, her spiritual director, as well as his letters to her. The Apostle of the Divine Mercy wrote her letters in Warsaw and Cracow asking her spiritual director for advice concerning God's will as well as for issues associated with the propagation of the devotion to the Divine Mercy. Among the correspondence, one may also come across letters addressed to Father Józef Andrasz SI, to her superiors and to fellow sisters in the Congregation. A separate batch is made up of cards with best wishes sent on the occasion of anniversaries of professing religious vows, name days and church feasts.

Among the letters which have been preserved until today, we find: 19 letters which Saint Faustina Kowalska sent to her spiritual director Father Michał Sopoćko, 7 letters written by Father M. Sopoćko to Sister Faustina, 3 letters written by Sister Faustina to superior general, mother Michaela Moraczewska, 1 letter to the convent superior in Cracow, mother Irena Krzyżanowska, 9 letters to Sister Justyna Gołofit, who Sister Faustina had

looked after in the spiritual sense, acting as a so called “Angel”, 11 letters to Sister Ludwina Gadzina for whom Saint Faustina was also an “Angel”, and 1 letter to Sister Benjamina Zarębska. Among various other notes, one also finds cards with short, rhymed wishes addressed to mother Irena Krzyżanowska and some other sisters. There are also occasional letters to her family: to sister Eugenia, Natalia and Wanda, as well as dedications on holy cards for her parents.

In her letters, Saint Faustina informed her spiritual director, Father Michał Sopoćko about her interior feelings and experiences in which the Lord Jesus had communicated to her the message of Mercy. She raised the issue of her interior inspirations bidding her to leave the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. She also asked Father Sopoćko about the condition of his health and passed on greetings to the priests she knew

Sister Faustina’s letters to the Congregation superiors express her spiritual bond with Mother General and Mother Irena Krzyżanowska who was interested in the spreading of the devotion to the Divine Mercy. While reading these letters, one is struck by Sister Faustina’s great respect for her superiors, the spirit of affection and great love of the Congregation. The letters to Sister Justyna Gołofit and Sister Ludwina Gadzina, for whom Saint Faustina acted as a guardian during the period of the novitiate, have a different character. They exude an air of spiritual closeness and the desire to share the benefits of a vocation. In her letters to the family, Sister

Faustina reveals her love for her closest relations: her parents and brother and sisters for whom she desired the greatest good.

3. Chronology of the Letters

The bulk of Saint Faustina's epistolary legacy is made up of her letters to Father Michał Sopoćko which were written in the years 1936 – 1938 in Warsaw, Walendów and Cracow. The majority of them were sent from Cracow, where the Apostle of the Divine Mercy spent the last years of her life. Father Sopoćko replied to these letters and that is why, in the present collection, his letters have been placed alternately with the letters of Saint Faustina. Thanks to this method, we can recreate the spiritual climate of this exchange of correspondence between Cracow and Vilnius.

Among the remainder of the letters, there is one addressed to Father Józef Andrasz SI which was sent in the year 1933 from Vilnius. Father Józef Andrasz was Sister Faustina's first spiritual director who was helping her in Cracow before she professed her perpetual vows. There are also letters to Superior General Mother Michaela Moraczewska which were written in Vilnius in 1935 as well as in Cracow (1938). Sister Faustina's last letter written in Cracow, in August 1938 should be looked upon as her good-bye note to Mother General; in it, she thanks the Congregation for the good she had experienced and apologizes for her own faults. One of

the letters addressed to Mother Irena Krzyżanowska and written from the hospital in Prądnik Czerwony in Cracow in January 1937, constitutes a testimony of the spiritual bond between Sister Faustina and her superior; the latter one became personally engaged in the work of spreading the message of Mercy. Mother Irena Krzyżanowska did everything that was in her power to publish the images with Merciful Jesus and the Chaplet to the Divine Mercy in Cracow; she also tried to popularize them among both the clergy and the faithful.

A substantial part of Saint Faustina's correspondence is made up of letters addressed to Sister Justyna Gołofit and Sister Ludwina Gadzina. The letters to Sister Justyna Gołofit were written in the years 1929-1938 in Warsaw, Płock, Vilnius and Cracow, whereas the letters to Sister Ludwina Gadzina were written in the years 1932-1938 in Biała, Vilnius and Cracow. Both sets of letters reveal Sister Faustina's faithfulness in friendship as well as her great care for the spiritual well-being of the sisters. We also have at our disposal a single letter addressed to Sister Beniamina Zarębska, containing spiritual advice and Sister Faustina's directions on the way to spiritual progress.

The post-cards containing short, rhymed New Year wishes all date back to the year 1937 and were dedicated to the sisters from the Congregation community in Cracow, where Saint Faustina had stayed. We also have at our disposal a single letter sent to the saint's own sister Eugenia which was written in Cracow on the 12th

of April 1938, and a single letter to the other two of her sisters: Natalia and Wanda of the 10th of June 1938. The dedications on the holy cards sent to her parents from Vilnius, date back to the year 1931 and 1934.

4. Style of the Letters

The letters sent by Sister Faustina to her spiritual director, mother superiors, fellow sisters and family all point out to the fact that Saint Faustina had mastered the principles of letter-writing. Each letter begins with the sign of the cross and an abbreviation “J.M.I.” (Jesus, Mary, Joseph) placed in the left upper corner. In the right upper corner, or else at the bottom of the letter, the authoress usually put the name of the place and the date. In the middle of the page, she wrote the polite appellation to the person to whom she addressed the letter: “Reverend Father”, “Most Reverend Father”, “Dearest Father”, “Most Reverend Dear Father in Jesus Christ”, “Most Reverend, Dear Father!”, “Reverend and Dear Father”, “Dear and Beloved Father in Jesus Christ”, “Dearest, Beloved Mother”, “Dearest Mother”, “Reverend Sister Justyna”, “Dear Sister in Christ!”. In a number of letters, above the polite appellation, she wrote the words “Jesus, I trust in You!” which were to be placed in the image of Merciful Jesus.

At the beginning of her letters, Sister Faustina usually referred to the current situation and problems

CORRESPONDENCE
WITH REVEREND MICHAŁ SOPOĆKO



Reverend Michał Sopoćko

Warsaw, 23rd March 1936

†
J.M.J.

Reverend Father!¹

I would like to share with you my experiences as well as the content of my discussions with Mother General².

In the evening, before leaving Vilnius³, during a benediction service, I communed with God the Father for a brief while. All of a sudden, I felt a strange power and felt like a child in the arms of the Father. It was then that I heard the following words: "Do not fear, My daughter, all your enemies will be shattered at My feet". Having heard these words, my soul had been filled with an extraordinary peace. 1

When I arrived in Warsaw, I heard a voice in my soul which bade me share some of these things with Mother General. I therefore shared with her what I could⁴ without failing to mention the fact that I already intended to leave the Congregation⁵. Mother General told me that at the moment, it was God's will that I should remain in the Congregation and added that everything seemed to strengthen her in the conviction that it was God's work and that Jesus wanted souls to get to know His Merciful Heart. This assures me that maybe God demands this of me, but as regards the new congregation, maybe 2

I should not hurry so much – as Mother General told me⁶.

3 You should not be surprised, Father, that I decided to share some things with Mother General. She can be trusted, as she is a soul that is pervaded with Divine light and she loves God very much; if you happen to meet her, you could freely talk to each other. She herself warned me about some superiors and instructed me how to proceed; and as regards writing to you Father, she gave me permission to seal my letters and receive sealed letters from you, without anyone censoring them⁷; so you can write whatever you like and if there arise propitious conditions with regard to the above-mentioned congregation, you can even inform Mother General about it directly, as hers is a soul that loves God very much and she is not surprised by anything; whereas the fact that things move forward so slowly, is a good thing, for as Mother General told me, if it is a genuinely Divine undertaking, Satan will not sleep, but will also try to make things difficult for me. Mother General was extremely friendly towards me and she acted like a caring mother towards me. I am sorry that I am writing so much about her, but really and truly she is an angel of goodness.

4 And now, I would like to request you to pay greater attention to your health, Father, as you seem to look haggard and gaunt. Please say hello to Father Korcik⁸ from me. I am very happy that you are friendly with him, as I got to know this priest interiorly and I know how

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