

Sr. M. Elżbieta Siepak ISMM

SHE MADE  
*an ordinary life*  
EXTRAORDINARY



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The Road to Unity with God  
and Mission of Saint Faustina

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nadzwyczajnym. Droga do zjednoczenia z Bogiem  
i misja świętej Siostry Faustyny*

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

Many people have asked for a new edition of *She Made an Ordinary Life Extraordinary*, which was first published in 1993 for the beatification of Saint Faustina Kowalska, and we have now issued a second, revised and extended edition of the book.

Over the decades a very large bibliography has grown up presenting her life, spirituality, and mission. However, a certain amount of guidance is required to use these publications and pinpoint the key issues in all this wealth of information. So there is a need for a synopsis showing the life, spiritual legacy, and mission of Saint Faustina on the basis of the source materials. That is the aim of this book. It describes the devotion to the Divine Mercy on the basis of the work of Professor Father Ignacy Różycki, the chief theologian for the Beatification Process, whose scholarly commentary on the texts of Sister Faustina was recognised by the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of the Saints as a highly com-

mendable achievement. One of the theological censors (reviewers) wrote, "This is a genuine study of the writings . . . thanks to both the amount and quality of the work put into it and the depth of the analysis," (Declaration II). That is why Father Różycki's work is the foundation for the spreading and practice of the devotion to the Divine Mercy in the forms bequeathed by Sister Faustina. Although some of the materials for the Beatification Process have been published in a book entitled *Nabożeństwo do Miłosierdzia Bożego*, it would be too scholarly for many readers, which means that the devotion is being propagated and practised in a variety of ways.

This book's second edition gives a fuller picture of Saint Faustina's road to unity with God, her school of spirituality based entirely on learning about and contemplating the mystery of Divine mercy, and her novel approach to Christian mercy, a new presentation of the beauty and abundance of human acts of mercy accomplished out of love of God.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

We hope this presentation of Saint Faustina's model of holiness and mission will serve as a practical guide for all who wish to follow her example on the road to Christian perfection and in their own way join in her mission to spread worldwide the message of God's merciful love for Man, by giving witness with their own lives, words, deeds, and prayers.

*Sister M. Elżbieta Siepak ISMM*

Łagiewniki, Kraków, 15<sup>th</sup> February 2019

## **A LIFE LIKE OTHERS**

Although St. Faustina is one of the greatest mystics and one of the best-known saints; although her life and mission have had an effect on the history of the whole of the Church and the world, and today she is held in great respect worldwide, she led a very ordinary life. Her life was like that of the other members of her family, later she was a home help living in the house of her employer, and finally she was one of the community of sisters living in a convent. She did not go to college or university, she never studied theology nor spoke any foreign languages, she never held any important offices; she led a life hidden in God and did the simplest chores. Externally there was nothing special about her, except for her fidelity to her Congregation's rule and the generous love of her neighbour.<sup>1</sup>

She was born on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1905, in the village of Głogowiec in Central Poland, as the third of ten children in the family of Stanisław

1 M. Elżbieta Siepak ISMM, *Dar Boga dla naszych czasów. Życie i misja św. Siostry Faustyny*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Misericordia, 2007; Ewa K. Czaczkowska, *Siostra Faustyna. Biografia Świętej*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2012.

Kowalski and his wife Marianna Kowalska. Two days later she was baptised Helena in the parish church at Świnice Warckie. The family's income came from their small farm and the father's work as a carpenter. The children were brought up in the spirit of the Christian faith and moral principles, and from their earliest days were accustomed to work and obedience. As was customary, little Helena made her First Holy Communion after her eighth birthday. She attended school, which had been opened in Świnice Warckie in 1917, for just under three years. Then she went into service with some well-to-do families in the town of Aleksandrów, and later in the city of Łódź, earning her living and helping her parents.

She had already heard a voice calling her to the service of God when she was just six, but she never met anyone who "could explain these things" to her (7).<sup>2</sup> Three times in her adolescence she asked for permission to enter

2 The figures given for quotations refer to the marginal numeration in Sister Faustina's Diary. Its first edition was published in 1981.

a convent, but although her parents were very pious, they objected strongly to this. She was obedient to them, and tried to suppress this calling from God, but the image of the suffering Jesus and His words of resentment spoken to her at a dance in Łódź were such a strong experience that she decided to follow the voice of her vocation at any cost. She went to Warsaw to look for a convent which would accept her, but she was turned down wherever she went. Finally she came to the convent of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy and was accepted, but as she had no dowry she had to spend another year in service in a small place called Ostrówek in the rural district of Kłembów to save for a modest dowry. On 1<sup>st</sup> August 1925 she entered the convent on ul. Żytnia in Warsaw. Its community was involved with the education of women and girls in need of deep moral renewal and ran homes of mercy for them. Helenka Kowalska spent the first months of her religious life in Warsaw; subsequently she completed the novitiate in Kraków, where on taking the veil she received the name Sister Maria Faustina (*siostra*

*Maria Faustyna*). After two years at Kraków she made her first vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, which she was to renew every year for five years until, on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1933 in the presence of Bishop Stanisław Rospond, she made her perpetual vows.

In the convent she performed the duties of cook, shop assistant in the convent's bakery, gardener, and doorkeeper. She stayed at many of the Congregation's houses, but longest at Kraków, Płock, and Wilno (now Vilnius, Lithuania). On the surface there was nothing to betray her exceptionally rich mystical experience. She carried out her duties conscientiously and enthusiastically; she was quiet, meditative and devout, but also natural, straightforward and prudent. She kept the religious rules faithfully, and in her interpersonal relations was known for her affability and extremely subtle form of love.

It was this apparently ordinary, simple religious that Jesus chose as the Apostle and "Secretary" of His mercy. He endowed her with numerous extraordinary graces, such as visions and apparitions, concealed stigmata,

the gift of prophecy, of being able to read human souls, and of the mystical betrothal and nuptials. Above all, however, through the gift of contemplation He allowed her to enter deeply into the mystery of Divine mercy, so that she could tell other people about this religious truth. "The intuition of this simple religious, who could barely recite the catechism, in subtle matters which were so apt and befitting the psychological character of contemporary society cannot be explained in any other way except as a supernatural act of enlightenment. Many a theologian after years of study would not be capable of such apt and simple solutions to these complex matters as Sister Faustina," her spiritual director, Father Michał Sopoćko, would write years later.<sup>3</sup>

A profound life of mysticism went hand in hand with suffering. Sister Faustina suffered from tuberculosis of the lungs and alimentary system. She also went through painful spiritual experiences, the "passive nights."

3 *Wspomnienia o świętej Siostrze Faustynie Kowalskiej ze Zgromadzenia Matki Bożej Miłosierdzia*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Misericordia, 2013, p. 64.

Offering herself up voluntarily for sinners, she accepted numerous forms of suffering, submitting entirely to the will of God, so that in this way she could help souls in danger of forfeiting salvation, and participate more fully in Christ's work of salvation. Her health devastated, but fully mature spiritually and in mystical union with God, she died in odour of sanctity in Kraków on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1938, at the age of barely 33.

Her Superior General, Mother Michaela Moraczewska, wrote in a memorial of Sister Faustina, "What struck me as the most extraordinary thing about her, especially in the terminal months of her illness – and still continues to do so in retrospect – was that she was completely oblivious of herself and instead was devoted to the cause of spreading the devotion to the Divine Mercy. That was the only thing she lived for."<sup>4</sup>

The only people who knew in her lifetime about her close union with God and the mis-

4 *Wspomnienia o świętej Siostrze Faustynie Kowalskiej*, op. cit., p. 84–85.

sion she had received from Him were her confessors and her superiors. The depth of her life of mysticism, the incomprehensible beauty and greatness of the mystery of Divine mercy, and her mission to the contemporary world were revealed in her Diary, a critical edition of which was not published until 1981. This book, which Sister Faustina wrote at the instruction of Jesus “for the benefit of souls” (1693) is regarded as one of the pearls of mystical literature.

The fame of the sanctity of Sister Faustina’s life spread as the devotion to the Divine Mercy disseminated spontaneously. The diocesan Informative Process was conducted in Kraków in 1965–1967. In 1968 the Beatification Process of Sister Faustina was initiated in Rome, and completed in 1992. On 18<sup>th</sup> April 1993, the Feast of Divine Mercy, in St. Peter’s Square in Rome the Holy Father Pope John Paul II beatified this Polish religious, the Apostle of Divine Mercy who was already widely known throughout the world. To a contemporary world lost and dwelling in darkness, Sister Faustina shows the true

path of life, in an attitude of total trust in God and of an active love of one's neighbour. On 30<sup>th</sup> April, the Feast of Divine Mercy, the first Sunday after Easter in the Jubilee Year of 2000, Pope John Paul II canonised Sister Faustina, investing the Church and the world with the message of Mercy recorded in her Diary for the third millennium, to help people acquire a better understanding of "the true face of God and the true face of Man."<sup>5</sup>

Millions of pilgrims from all over the world come to pay their respects at her tomb in the Shrine of Divine Mercy at Łagiewniki, Kraków, which thanks to St. Faustina has become the global capital for the devotion to the Divine Mercy. Many come to Poland only to visit this place where on St. Faustina's death God deposited her entire spiritual legacy. Those who have prayed at her grave-

5 *Dar Boży dla naszych czasów*. Homily delivered by the Holy Father Pope John Paul II during the Canonisation Mass. *L'Osservatore Romano* (Polish edition), no 6/2000, p. 25-26. An abridged English version of the homily is available at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20000430\\_faustina.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000430_faustina.html) (accessed 24 Apr. 2019).



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