



REV. IGNACY ROZYCKI

**ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF THE DEVOTION
TO THE DIVINE MERCY**

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by
Rev. Ignacy Rozycki

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Introduction

The essay published here represents a summary of the most thorough theological analysis ever written on The Divine Mercy message and devotion as revealed to the world through St. Faustina Kowalska.

The author, Fr. Ignacy Rozycki, was a theologian of considerable stature. Born near Cracow in Poland in 1911, he studied at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome where he completed his doctorate in Dogmatic Theology. He subsequently became a leading expert on the theology of St. Thomas, and served as a member of the International Theological Commission for the Holy See.

In 1965 the then Archbishop of Cracow, Karol Wojtyła, asked Fr. Rozycki to prepare a critical analysis of the Diary and letters of Sister Faustina as part of the Informative Process concerning her life and virtues. But Fr. Rozycki initially had no inclination to waste his time examining what rumor told him were merely the hallucinations of an uneducated nun. Just before sending his refusal to the archbishop, however, he decided to glance at a copy of the Diary “just to pass the time.” After reading a few passages, his prejudices against it were immediately shaken. He decided to read the entire text. The result of this second reading was evident in his actions: Fr. Rozycki devoted nearly ten years of his life to the task of making a thorough and systematic study of Sr. Faustina’s writings. The results of his research were written in French: a massive tome of 500 pages which was presented to the Vatican as part of the official investigation into Sr. Faustina’s life by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. This work by Father Rozycki is presently being translated into English by the John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

On February 19-20, 1981, at a symposium in Cracow celebrating the 50th anniversary of the revelations given to Sr. Faustina, Fr. Rozycki delivered a lecture entitled *The Essential Features of the Devotion to The Divine Mercy* — which is here published in English for the first time. It is a compendium of the principal elements of his main work for the Apostolic See on St. Faustina’s writings. As such it is also the best survey available to date of the theology of The Divine Mercy message and devotion.

Robert A. Stackpole
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ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF THE DEVOTION TO THE DIVINE MERCY

Rev. Ignacy Rozycki

The Divine Mercy messages and devotion were recorded at Christ's command and passed on to the world in the *Diary* of Sister Helen Faustina Kowalska, a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, in Poland.

There is not the slightest doubt that Divine Mercy should be the object of our adoration. When we speak of religious worship or adoration, we must always differentiate the fundamental or *proper* object from the object which is material, inessential and *relative*.¹ The principle object of any type of honor, whether religious or secular, can only be a person. The object of religious worship is always the personal God.

The personal God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, is the proper, that is the essential object of the supreme act of religious worship.² God alone is the object. We are permitted to adore only God Himself with acts of religious adoration. However, when our acts of worship are addressed to some created being, this veneration is not supreme worship, but only the result and expression of the supreme act of worship which we desire to direct to God Himself by venerating His created images. If we, for example, surround portraits, photographs, and other likenesses of our dear ones with signs of veneration, these representations are not in themselves the actual object of our veneration, but the persons they represent who are dear to us are the object. It is much the same with the supreme act of worship. Through sanctifying grace, every saint is a supernatural image of God, One-in-the Holy Trinity.³ Since we are honoring God, this honor must also embrace all His images and in them find its expression, its outward manifestation. In this manner, the supreme act of adoration rendered to God, out of psychological necessity, also entails the dependent veneration of God's images. Perceived in such a manner, the acts of religious veneration do not contradict the supreme act of adoration due only to God, but directly contribute to its increase.

The place of devotion to the Divine Mercy within the scope of honor and adoration or religious worship due to God alone is defined by revealed teaching about the nature of God, One-in-the Holy Trinity. For in the light of revealed teaching, God is utterly simple, uncomplicated, absolutely having no parts. In other words, all that is within God, in His substance, is God. Thus, God is not only wise, He is Wisdom; He is not only omnipotent, He is Omnipotence. With regard to the world, He not only manifests His Providence, but He is Providence. Not only does He love us, but He is Love and not only is He merciful, but He is Mercy. Therefore, Wisdom, Providence, Omnipotence, Love and Mercy, which are the same as God, are entitled to religious adoration on our part. For this reason, there are many churches in the Christian world dedicated to St. Sophia (Holy Wisdom). Even in Poland there are churches dedicated to the Divine Providence, and in Cracow itself, there is a little Church of Divine Mercy on Smolensk Street, which in its present form dates from the year 1620. The liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church and of the separated churches honors the great works of supernatural Divine Providence: the Incarnation of the Son of God, His Nativity, His Epiphany to the nations, His Baptism, His sorrowful Passion and Death, His Resurrection, and finally the Sending of the Holy Spirit. For these were divine-human activities; and because they were divine, on our part, the supreme act of adoration is due to them.

Basically, therefore, on the part of Catholic teaching, there can be no obstacle to the worship of Divine Mercy. There remains to be solved only the question whether the form of devotion to the Divine Mercy which we find in the *Diary* of Sister Helen Faustina Kowalska is consonant with the above mentioned principles of Catholic doctrine, as well as with the fundamental centuries-old, tradition-sanctified forms of religious worship practiced by the Catholic Church. Indeed, *lex credendi lex orandi*, the rule of faith is at the same time the rule of piety, of prayer.

We must inquire, then, as to what constitutes the proper object of the Devotion to the Divine Mercy and what is its relative, material, and secondary object, according to the information conveyed by Sister Helen Faustina Kowalska. For the Divine Mercy, to whom we are to render worship in this

devotion, is infinite and inexhaustible. It is, in fact, in its proper meaning as Divine Mercy, God Himself.

A question of fundamental importance arises: What concretely is denoted by the term “mercy” in those paragraphs of the *Diary* of Sister Helen Faustina that treat of the Devotion? As many as eighty-two revelations speak of the Devotion. Over half of them do not explain precisely what the object signified by this term is. However, almost half do give an explanation. In six cases “mercy” is synonymous with love; in four cases, it means the same as compassion; in four cases it denotes goodness; and finally, in four cases it signifies Jesus Himself. In these revelations mercy simultaneously means love, goodness and compassion. But within the context of the Devotion mercy takes on the Biblical meaning of the word “hesed” from the Old Testament, and of the word “eleos” from the New Testament.

Traditional Catholic moral theology treats of the virtue of mercy as a virtue flowing from love of neighbor. Namely, it is that virtue which inclines us to offer assistance to a person suffering from want or misery. This being so, “mercy” in moral theology has a narrower and secondary meaning and is not love itself but love’s result and extension; it is a *pars potentialis* to the virtue of love. From this we may conclude that the mercy which we wish to honor through this Devotion and which this Devotion demands from us is simply the love of God and the love of neighbor in us.

A second conclusion of great importance flows from the fact that the mercy of which we speak in this Devotion contains a Biblical meaning. In truth, repeatedly and quite clearly, the revelations and Sister Helen Faustina call mercy a Divine attribute. We cannot explain or understand this manner of speaking in the strict philosophical-theological sense, but rather in the Biblical sense of the Old and New Testament. In the philosophical-theological sense, the characteristic or attribute of the Divine nature is that perfection, that quality, which in its essence is found in the nature of God; it is possessed by It. In this sense, all of God’s attributes are God, one and the same. For this reason, all are absolutely equal to each other. Divine Mercy is as infinitely perfect as His

Wisdom or Power, for it is likewise God, and the same God, just as Divine Wisdom and Divine Power are God.

If, on the other hand, mercy is understood in the Biblical sense as functional, then, even though it is called an attribute, it first of all denotes the manifestations and results of the infinite and eternal love of God in world history, and especially in the history of mankind's salvation. In fact, both *hesed* (i.e. mercy in the Old Testament) as well as *eleos* (i.e. mercy in the New Testament) signify active manifestations of God's love toward mankind. In the Old Testament the manifestations found their expression in the calling and directing of the chosen people, and in the New Testament they were found in the sending of the Son of God into the world, and in the entire work of redemption. This Biblically formulated relationship between love and mercy is expressed by Sister Helen Faustina in the words: "Love is the flower, mercy the fruit" (Diary §948), "pure love is my guide in life, but externally its fruit is mercy" (Diary §1363).

So, if we understand mercy functionally in the Biblical sense, then without any fear of error contrary to the faith, it can be said that mercy is the greatest attribute of God. For we recognize the greatest love and abyss of mercy in the Incarnation of the Word, and in His Redemption. The precise and formal sense of the statement: "Mercy is the greatest attribute of God" is that, within this biblical understanding, the results of the activity of merciful love are the greatest in the world and, in this respect, mercy surpasses all other Divine attributes. So, the meaning of this assertion is doctrinally unassailable. Its verbal formulation is probably borrowed from the Latin Vulgate, Ps. 144:9: "Miserationes eius super omnia opera eius," His compassions (in Latin "mercies") are above all his works."

In the revelations granted to Sr. Helen Faustina, this mercy, which is love, goodness and compassion, possesses those qualities which only God can have, for it is incomprehensible, inscrutable, inexpressible, inexhaustible and infinite. In most cases in her writings, when Sr. Helen Faustina speaks of mercy, it is the mercy of Jesus. In four instances it is the mercy of Jesus' heart and in four other instances it is simply Jesus Himself. In only four cases does it appear

On March 6, 1959, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a “Notification” that prohibited the spreading of images and writings that propose the Devotion of The Divine Mercy in the forms expressed by Sr. Faustina Kowalska.

On August 26, 1965, Archbishop Karol Wojtyla of Cracow, Poland, declared: “They are bombarding me with requests to begin the process” [for her beatification]. The Archbishop enlisted the help of his former seminary professor, Ignacy Rozycki, an eminent Thomist (cf. Introduction), who, after almost ten years of meticulous analysis provided the proof of orthodoxy necessary for the Church to lift the ban on St. Faustina’s writings, now hailed as an outstanding work of mystical literature.

On April 30, 2000, Pope John Paul II declared: “It is important then that we accept the whole message that comes to us from the word of God on this Second Sunday of Easter, which from now on throughout the Church will also be called “Divine Mercy Sunday.” He added: “Sr. Faustina’s canonization has particular eloquence: by this act I intend today to pass this message on to the new millennium. I pass it on to all people, so that they will learn to know ever better the true face of God and the true face of their brethren.”

St. Faustina had declared: “There will come a time when this work, which God is demanding so very much, will be as though utterly undone. And then God will act with great power, which will give evidence of its authenticity. I will be a new splendor for the Church, although it has been dormant in it from long ago” (Diary §378).

This book is a concise summary of Rev. Rozycki’s work and is a valuable source for understanding the Divine Mercy Message and Devotion.

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