**Deacon Steve’s Reflection on the Sunday Readings**

**April 8, 2018 – Second Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)**

**Acts 4: 32-35 Psalm 118: 2-4, 13-15, 22-24**

**1 John 5: 1-6 John 20: 19-31**

Today is the Second Sunday of Easter, the conclusion of the Easter Octave, and – since 2000 – Divine Mercy Sunday. The Sunday after Easter was renamed the Feast of Divine Mercy by Saint Pope John Paul II. The origin of Divine Mercy Sunday can be traced to Sister Faustina Kowalska, who was only 33 years old when she passed away in 1938. Relatively uneducated, and accepted into the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy on the condition that she pay for her own habit, she was at last accepted into the order, where she served as a cook and housekeeper.

Despite her humble upbringing, Faustina had received a number of visions and in 1931, she was visited by Jesus, who offered himself as the King of Mercy. She wrote this entry in her diary: *"In the evening, when I was in my cell, I became aware of the Lord Jesus clothed in a white garment. One hand was raised in blessing, the other was touching the garment at the breast. From the opening of the garment at the breast there came forth two large rays, one red and the other pale. In silence I gazed intently at the Lord; my soul was overwhelmed with fear, but also with great joy. After a while Jesus said to me, 'paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the inscription: Jesus, I trust in You.'"*

She followed Jesus’ command, but lacking artistic skills, she searched for three years until she found an artist willing to paint the image from her description (Our Lady of Good Counsel has this image in the vestibule at the main entrance to the Church). Pope John Paul II was an ardent admirer of Sister Faustina; as Archbishop of Krakow, he commenced the investigation into her life in 1965 and recommended that the beatification process begin. During his papacy, he beatified her in 1993 and canonized her in 2000, dedicating her as the Patron Saint of Mercy.

Today’s reading from the Gospel of Saint John focuses on Jesus’ loving mercy in his appearance to the disciples who were hidden in the upper room. He showed them his wounds and said to them: *“’Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and who sins you retain are retained.’”* Jesus, who came to save all men and women from their sins, instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation so that all who repented of their transgressions throughout the course of their lives would receive the grace of mercy from God. Even Thomas, who was not present at the original appearance after the resurrection, would encounter Our Lord the following week and receive Jesus’ peace and grace as he exclaimed, *“My Lord and my God!”*

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, came to call sinners. The spotless Lamb, he willingly sacrificed himself in expiation for our sins, and offers his love, grace and mercy to all men and women today each time we share in his Precious Body and Blood of the Eucharist. Through our faith and trust in the Lord, may we be open to God’s infinite and divine compassion and mercy. As we heard in today’s Responsorial Psalm: *The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the LORD has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it.”*

Deacon Steven K. Szmutko