

# MICHAEL

FOR THE TRIUMPH OF THE IMMACULATE

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## Divine Mercy over the World

**“Have mercy on us and on the whole world!”**

Jesus said to St. Faustina: “Let no sinner be afraid to approach Me.” In Faustina’s “Diary,” Jesus invites each one of us to yield to His infinite mercy, to trust in His compassion and forgiveness. Great graces are promised to those who proclaim His great mercy.

“I shall protect them Myself at the hour of death, as My own glory. And even if the sins of the soul are as dark as night, when the sinner turns to My mercy, he renders Me the greatest praise, and becomes the glory of My Passion. When a soul praises My goodness, Satan trembles before it and flees to the very bottom of hell” (Diary, 378).

Christ is always knocking at the door of our hearts to remind us that if we have recourse to His Divine Mercy, He will free our souls from evil, restore our ability to love and purify our intentions. Sin is our greatest tragedy since it leads us into the horrible reality of death and eternal condemnation. Trusting in Jesus, praying to Him, relying on Him – this is our one avenue of salvation. Jesus assures us that His wounded heart will not abandon us in the hour of death. It is never too late to renounce evil and start walking in the path of salvation. Having chosen Faustina, a simple, uneducated nun, who trusted Him boundlessly, Christ assigned her the critically important task of proclaiming His Merciful Love to the world: “Today – Jesus told her – I am sending you with My mercy to the people of the whole world. It is not my desire to punish hurting mankind, but to heal it, press it to My merciful Heart (Diary, 1588). You are the secretary of My mercy. I have chosen you for that office in this and the next life (Diary, 1605) (...) to make known to souls the great mercy that I have in store for them, and to exhort them to trust in the bottomless depth of My mercy” (Diary, 1567).



“I promise that the soul that venerates this image will not perish. I also promise victory over its enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death. I Myself will defend it as My own glory.”

### The Hour of Mercy

Jesus asked Saint Faustina to celebrate the Hour of great Mercy, which is the hour when Our Lord died on the cross. He promised that from this prayer of the chaplet of Divine Mercy, said during this hour, tremendous graces would be given to all. This can be applied to other people as well, especially for the dying and the suffering souls in purgatory.

**At three o’clock, implore My mercy, especially for sinners; and, if only for a brief moment, immerse yourself in My Passion, particularly in My abandonment at the moment of agony. This is the hour of great mercy... In this hour I will refuse nothing to the soul that makes a request of Me in virtue of My Passion. (Diary, 1320).**

**As often as you hear the clock strike the third hour, immerse yourself completely in My mercy, adoring and glorifying it. Invoke it’s omnipotence for the whole world, and particularly for poor sinners, for at that moment mercy was opened wide for every soul. In this hour you can obtain everything for yourself and for others for the asking; it was the hour of grace for the whole world – mercy triumphed over justice.**

**Try your best to make the Stations of the Cross in this hour, provided that your duties permit it; and if you are not able to make the Stations of the Cross, then at least step into the chapel for a moment and adore, in the Most Blessed Sacrament, My Heart which is full of mercy. Should you be unable to step into the chapel, immerse yourself in prayer there where you happen to be, if only for a very brief instant. (Diary, 1572)**

(For more on Divine Mercy see page 2)

## Lightning, death, judgement and conversion

Here are some excerpts of an interview given by Dr. Gloria Polo at the National University of Colombia in Bogota. Her testimony is truly inspiring and helps us to appreciate our Faith in a profound way.



Dr. Gloria Polo

Brothers and sisters! It’s beautiful for me to be with you sharing this precious gift my Lord gave me more than ten years ago. I was attending graduate school, along with my nephew, who was also a dentist. My husband was with us that day. It was raining very hard, and my nephew and I were sharing a small umbrella. My husband was wearing his raincoat and he approached the outside wall of the General Library. Meanwhile, my nephew and I approached the trees without noticing, while skipping puddles. As we were about to skip to avoid a huge puddle, we were struck by lightning.

We were charred. My nephew died there. He was a young man who, despite his young age, had given himself over to the Lord and was very devout to the Infant Jesus. He always carried the Infant Jesus’ image inside a quartz crystal next to his chest. According to the coroner, lightning entered him through the image, ran through his heart, burned him on the

### The testimony of Gloria Polo

inside and exited through his foot. But on the outside, he was not charred nor burnt.

In my case, instead, lightning came in (this way) and burned my body in a horrifying way, on the inside and outside. This body you see here, this reconstructed body, is through the mercy of our Lord. Lightning charred me, left me without breasts, practically made my whole flesh and ribs vanish. My stomach, my legs; lightning went out my right foot. My liver was charred, my kidneys were burned, just like my lungs.

The most beautiful part is that, while my flesh was charred, at that instant I found myself inside a beautiful white tunnel full of joy and peace, a happiness for which there are no human words that can describe the grandeur of the moment. The climax of the moment was immense. I was happy and joyful; nothing weighed me down inside that tunnel. I felt the source of all that love, all that peace.

As I was going up, I realized I had died. At that instant I thought about my kids and I said “Oh, my God, my kids! What will they say? This very busy mom never had time for them!” That’s when I saw my life truthfully and I became sad.

Then, I started descending slowly to find my body, where I found myself lifeless. My body was on a gurney at the medical center on campus. I saw how the doctors gave me electric shocks to pull me out of cardiac arrest. We lay there for two-and-a-half hours.

My flesh hurt, it was burned. It hurt a lot. Smoke and vapor came out of it. And the most horrible pain was that of my vanity. I was a woman of the world, an executive woman; an intellectual, a student, enslaved by my body, beauty, and fashion.

From there, we were transported to a hospital, where they quickly moved me to the operating room and began scraping all my burned tissue.

All of a sudden, I went through a moment of horror. I had been a “dieting Catholic” all my life. My relationship with the Lord was down to Sunday Eucharist, no longer than 25 minutes, wherever the priest’s homily was shortest, because I couldn’t stand anything longer. That was my relationship with the Lord. All the trends of the world tossed me like a windsock. In fact, when I was already in graduate school, I once heard a priest say that hell didn’t ex-

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# "Return to the Fount of My Mercy"

## St. Faustina Kowalska, first saint of the third millennium



St. Faustina Kowalska, the convent in Lagiewniki, the house in which St. Faustina was born

The third of ten children, Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska was born into a pious peasant family in 1905, in Glogowiec, Poland. She was christened Helena. At the age of seven years, she first heard an interior call to the religious life. Thirteen years later she was to knock on many a convent door, before finally, on August 1, 1925, gaining admittance to the Convent of the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Warsaw, where she took the name Sister Maria Faustina. After a five-year-long novitiate in Cracow, she made her perpetual vows of chastity, poverty and unselfish love. Being a natural, cheerful person, Sister Faustina served as cook, gardener and doorkeeper at convents in Cracow, Pock and Vilnius. It was during these years that Jesus commissioned her to write her Diary. This extraordinary record reveals the depth and richness of her mystical life and union with God. She enjoyed great graces and a host of spiritual gifts: contemplative prayer, revelations, visions, prophecy, mystical espousals, invisible stigmata, the ability to read human souls, and a profound knowledge of the mystery of God's mercy.

During her lifetime, Faustina was virtually unknown, even to many sisters of her congregation. Only a few of her superiors and her confessor and spiritual director, were ever aware of her visions and revelations. She died of tuberculosis, mystically united with Christ, at the age of 33, on October 5, 1938, having been a religious for 13 years.

Faustina's mission to spread the message of Divine Mercy began on February 22, 1931. Having appeared to her in a vision, Christ commissioned her to paint an image of Him with red and pale rays radiating from His heart. The image was to bear the subscription: Jesus, I trust in You!

In her Diary, Faustina writes: **"I saw the Lord Jesus clothed in a white garment. (...) After a while, Jesus said to me; 'Paint an image according to the model you see, with the motto below: Jesus I trust in You. I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and then throughout the world'"** (47).

**"I promise that the soul that venerates this image will not perish. I also promise victory over its enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death. I Myself will defend it as My own glory"** (48).

When Faustina's spiritual director learned of her visions, he had her submit to a psychiatric assessment. Having determined the soundness of her mental faculties, he placed an artist under the saint's direction with a view to producing a true copy of her vision of the Merciful Savior.

Jesus asked Faustina that the first Sunday after Easter be declared Mercy Sunday, the "Feast of Divine Mercy", a day when His graces would flow in an extraordinary way to all those who asked for them. He told Faustina: **"I desire that priests proclaim this great mercy of Mine toward the souls of sinners. Let no sinner be afraid to approach Me"** (50).

Mercy Sunday is now celebrated in thousands of Catholic parishes across the United States. It has already been designated a liturgical Feast Day of the Catholic Church in Poland. St. Faustina's Diary describes the promise Jesus made to those who solemnly participate in the Feast of Divine Mercy: **"Whoever approaches the Fount of Life on this day will be granted complete remission of sins and punishment"** (300).

**"I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and a shelter for all souls, especially poor sinners. On that day, the very depths of My tender mercy will be opened. I will pour out an entire**

**ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the Fount of My Mercy. The soul that goes to Confession and receives Holy Communion will obtain complete forgiveness of sins and a remission of all punishment. (...) Let no soul fear to approach Me, even though its sins be as scarlet. (...) Humanity will not enjoy peace until it turns to the Fount of My Mercy"** (699).

**On being asked by Faustina about the significance of the two rays on the image, Jesus replied: "The two rays denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water which makes souls righteous. The red ray stands for the Blood which is the life of souls. These two rays poured forth from the very depths of My tender mercy when My agonized Heart on the Cross was opened by the lance"** (299).

Faustina's mission consisted in: reminding the world of God's merciful love towards every human being, even the greatest sinner; conveying new forms of devotion to the Divine Mercy; launching a great movement of devotees and apostles of Divine Mercy, who would lead people to a renewal of Christian life in the spirit of this devotion; i.e. in the gospel spirit of childlike confidence in God and love of neighbour.

### Divine Mercy and St. Faustina's Diary

The essence of Christ's message to St. Faustina is that we are living in a time of mercy. The present age, more than any other in history, calls for a great outpouring of the mercy of God. As a result, the revelations to Faustina have become known as "The Message of Divine Mercy" with Jesus receiving the new title, "The Divine Mercy", not unlike His earlier title of "The Sacred Heart". Many times Jesus reveals to Faustina how deep His mercy is.

**"I have opened My Heart as a living fountain of mercy. Let all souls draw life from it. Let them approach this sea of mercy with great trust. Sinners will attain justification, and the just will be strengthened in goodness. Whoever places his trust in My mercy will be filled with My divine peace at the hour of death"** (1520).

**"I am offering people a vessel with which they are to keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy. That vessel is this image bearing the inscription: Jesus, I trust in You"** (327).

**"I am Love and Mercy itself. When a soul approaches Me with trust, I fill it with such an abundance of graces that it cannot contain them within itself, but radiates them to other souls"** (1074).

Faustina's Diary tells us that it is not enough to trust Jesus. We must show mercy to our neighbours in deed, in word, and in prayer (742). Jesus says to Faustina: **"If a soul does not exercise mercy in one way or another, it will not obtain My mercy on the Day of Judgment"** (1317).

**"The Lord said to me, 'It should be of no concern to you how anyone else acts; you are to be My living reflection, through love and mercy.' I answered, 'Lord, but they often take advantage of my goodness.' 'That makes no difference, My daughter. That is no concern of yours. As for you, be always merciful toward other people, and especially toward sinners'"** (1446).

**"Oh, how painful it is to Me that souls so seldom unite themselves to Me in Holy Communion. I wait for souls, and they are indifferent toward Me. I love them tenderly and sincerely, and they distrust Me. I want to lavish My graces on them, and they do not want to accept them. They treat Me as a dead object, whereas My Heart is full of love and mercy. In order that you may know at least some of My pain, imagine the most tender of mothers who has great love for her children,**

**while those children spurn her love. Consider her pain. No one is in a position to console her. This is but a pale image and likeness of My love"** (1447).

Throughout the Diary we encounter magnificent prayers addressing God's mercy, prayers that urge us to venerate God's infinite mercy and compassion toward any soul that seeks to be joined with Him. **"Praise the Lord, my soul, for everything, and glorify His mercy, for His goodness is without end. Everything will pass, but His mercy is without limit or end. And although evil will attain its measure, in mercy there is no measure. Oh my God, even in the punishments You send down upon the earth I see the abyss of Your mercy, for by punishing us here on earth, You free us from eternal punishment. Rejoice, all you creatures, for you are closer to God in His infinite mercy than a babe is to its mother's heart. O God, You are compassion itself for the greatest sinners who sincerely repent. The greater the sinner, the greater his right to God's mercy"** (423).

St. Faustina reminds us of the meaning of the Eucharist and the Holy Trinity. **"Jesus, when (...) in Holy Communion (...) You (...) condescend to dwell in the little heaven of my heart, I try to keep You company throughout the day. I do not leave You alone for a moment, even though I am in the company of other people or those entrusted to my care. My heart is always united to Him. When I sleep, I offer Him every beat of my heart. When I am awake, I immerse myself in Him in silence. On awaking, I make a brief act of adoration to the Holy Trinity and thank God for allowing me to live yet another day, that the mystery of the incarnation of His Son may once more be repeated in me, and once again His sorrowful Passion may unfold before my eyes. I try to make it easier for Jesus to pass through me to other souls. I go everywhere with Jesus. His presence accompanies me everywhere"** (486)

### The Chaplet of Divine Mercy

On September 13, 1935, Sister Faustina had a terrible vision of a destroying Angel ("the agent of divine wrath") about to strike some place on the planet. She began praying, begging him to put off the punishment until the world did penance. At first, her pleas seemed in vain, but presently she saw the Holy Trinity and felt the power of Christ's grace in her soul. Again she began to plead for the world in words that welled up out of the silence of her soul:

**"Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, for our sins and those of the whole world; for the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us"** (475).



The family of St. Faustina Kowalska

Her prayer was answered and the angel was prevented from carrying out the chastisement. The following morning, Sister Faustina heard these interior words: **"Every time you enter the chapel, start reciting the prayer which I taught you yesterday"** (476).

Later, she was instructed in the recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy: **"This prayer will serve to appease My wrath. You will recite it for nine days, on the beads of the Rosary, in the following manner: first of all, you will say one Our Father and Hail Mary and the I Believe in God. Then, on the Our Father beads, you will say the**

following words: 'Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, for our sins and those of the whole world.' On the Hail Mary beads you will say the following words: 'For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.' In conclusion, three times you will recite these words: 'Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world' " (476).

Jesus Himself tells us why it is so important to recite this prayer: "Recite the chaplet unceasingly that I have taught you. Whoever recites it will receive great mercy at the hour of death. Priests will recommend it to sinners as their last hope of salvation. Even in the case of the most hardened sinner, if he were to recite this chaplet only once, he would receive grace from My infinite mercy. I desire that the whole world know My infinite mercy. I desire to grant unimaginable graces to those souls that trust in My mercy" (687).

"Oh, what great graces I will grant to souls that say this chaplet; the very depths of My tender mercy are stirred for the sake of those who say the chaplet" (848). "At the hour of their death, I defend as My own glory every soul that will say this chaplet; or when others say it for a dying person, the indulgence is the same" (811).

"Through the chaplet you will obtain everything, if what you ask is compatible with My will" (1731).

After Faustina's death, the message of God's mercy began to spread throughout the world. However, owing to the political situation prevailing in Poland during and after the war, the Church found it difficult to verify the authenticity of Faustina's writings. As a result, the Vatican was forced to impose a temporary ban on the spreading of the revelations. Eventually, however, the writings were subjected to a thorough scrutiny. Since then, scholars and theologians have been staggered by the ability of a simple nun, with barely two winters of formal education, to write so profoundly and so clearly on the mystical life. Her writings were found to be entirely free of theological error. They are now numbered among the masterpieces of mystical literature.

### Lagiewniki – Capital of Divine Mercy

The chief purpose of the Holy Father's pilgrimage to Poland on August 2002 was to visit the Shrine of Divine Mercy in Cracow-Lagiewniki. At the Eucharistic celebration, John Paul II dedicated a new church, solemnly entrusted the world to the Divine Mercy, and declared Lagiewniki to be the capital city of Divine Mercy. After all, had not Jesus promised that "the spark preparing the world for His final coming" (Diary, 1732) would fly forth from here?

Until World War II, the Convent of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Cra-

cow-Lagiewniki remained a private institution, serving the sisters and those entrusted to their care. Today, it houses the sanctuary of the Divine Mercy with its famous, grace-working image of the Merciful Jesus and the relics of Sister Faustina. Thousands of pilgrims regularly converge on this spot from all over the world. Here the message of mercy is proclaimed. Prayers are offered up for God's mercy for the world. Acts of mercy are rendered to those in need. Here also apostles of God's Mercy receive their spiritual formation.

### The Mercy Message

The message of mercy is simply this: that God loves us, all of us, no matter how great our sins. He wants us to turn to Him so that He may bless us. He wants us to recognize His mercy and allow it to flow through us to others. In this way, all will come to share in His joy. To repeat: it's as simple as ABC: Ask for His Mercy. God wants us to approach Him, repent of our sins, and ask for His Mercy. Be Merciful. God wants us to receive His mercy and let it flow through us to others. Completely Trust. God wants us to know that the graces of His mercy are dependent upon our trust.

On the first Sunday after Easter, April 18, 1993, at St. Peter's Square in Rome, Pope John Paul II declared Sister Faustina a member of the community of the blessed. She was canonized in the Jubilee Year 2000 on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 30th. She is, therefore, the first saint of the Third Millennium.

In his canonization-Mass homily, the Holy Father pointed out that by Divine Providence, the life of this humble daughter of Poland was inextricably linked with the history of the recently ended 20th century. "In fact, it was between the First and Second World Wars that Christ entrusted His message of mercy to her. Those who remember, who witnessed or participated in the events of those years and the horrible sufferings they caused for millions of people, know well how necessary was the message of mercy (...). What will the years ahead bring us? What will man's future on earth be like? We are not given to know. However, it is certain that in addition to new progress, there will unfortunately be no lack of painful experiences. But the light of Divine Mercy, which the Lord wished to return to the world through Sister Faustina's charism, will illumine the way for the men and women of the third millennium.

**"Sister Faustina's canonization has a 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 even better the true face of God and the true face of their brethren. (...) Sister Faustina Kowalska wrote in her Diary: 'I feel tremendous pain when I see the sufferings of my neighbors. All my neighbors' sufferings reverberate in my own heart; I carry their anguish in my heart in such a way that it even physically destroys me.**



St. Faustina receives a vision of Jesus

**I would like all their sorrows to fall upon me, in order to relieve my neighbor' (Diary, 365).** This is the degree of compassion to which love leads, when it takes the love of God as its measure! (...) It is this love which must inspire humanity today, if it is to face the crisis of the meaning of life, the challenges of the most diverse needs and, especially, the duty to defend the dignity of every human person. Thus the message of divine mercy is also implicitly a message about the value of every human being. Each person is precious in God's eyes; Christ gave his life for each one; to everyone the Father gives his Spirit and offers intimacy (...)

This consoling message is addressed, above all, to those who, afflicted by a particularly harsh trial or crushed by the weight of the sins they committed, have lost all confidence in life and are tempted to give in to despair. To them the gentle face of Christ is offered; those rays from his heart touch them and shine upon them, warm them, show them the way, and fill them with hope. How many souls have been consoled by the prayer "Jesus, I trust in you", which Providence intimated through Sister Faustina! This simple act of abandonment to Jesus dispels the thickest clouds and lets a ray of light penetrate every life. "Jezu, ufam tobie" (...) And you, Faustina, a gift of God to our time, a gift from the land of Poland to the whole Church, obtain for us an awareness of the depth of Divine Mercy; help us to have a living experience of it and to bear witness to it among our brothers and sisters. May your message of light and hope spread throughout the world, spurring sinners to conversion, calming rivalries and hatred, and opening individuals and nations to the practice of brotherhood. Today, fixing our gaze with you on the face of the risen Christ, let us make our own your prayer of trusting abandonment and say with firm hope: Christ Jesus, I trust in you! Jezu, ufam tobie!" (Homily of the Holy Father, April 30, 2000).

**Robert Kasza**

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# THE CHAPLET OF DIVINE MERCY

Begin with...

**Our Father, Hail Mary, I believe in God**

Say on the five large beads:

**Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.**

On the ten small beads:

**For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.**

Conclude with (3 times):

**Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world.**

**O Blood and Water which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as Font of Mercy for us, I trust in You! (3 times)**

**Jesus, I trust in You (3 times)**

**Mother of Mercy, pray for us.**

**St. Sister Faustina, pray for us.**

### Sign Of The Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven, is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen.

### Our Father

Our Father, who art in Heaven; hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. Amen.

### Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

### Glory Be

Glory be to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

# The sacrament of mercy

**“Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them” (Jn. 20:21-23)**

God's mercy manifests itself in a dramatic way in the sacrament of Reconciliation (also called the Sacrament of Penance or Confession). The example of mercy that it demonstrates tells us that God loves us – all of us – no matter how great our sins. He wants us to recognize that His mercy is greater than our sin, so that we will put our trust in Him. Thus, all will come to share His joy. The graces of His mercy are dependent upon our trust, so that the more we trust in Jesus, the more graces and blessings we will receive. He gave us one example of the depth of His mercy in the parable of the prodigal son.

In this parable, a man with two sons gave to the youngest his inheritance. The young man went out and wasted his fortune on riotous living. Afterwards, there was a famine in the country and he lost all he had.

He found employment with a swine farmer, but such was his fate that even the pigs were given better nourishment than he was. So he said to himself, “How many hired men in my father's house have bread in abundance, while I am perishing here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; take me as one of your hired men.” And he arose and went to his father.

While he was yet a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and ran and fell upon his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his servants, “Fetch quickly the best robe and put it on him, and give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet; and bring out the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; because my son was dead and has come to life again; he was lost, and is found.” And they had a great feast in honor of his return. (Lk 15:11-32)

This is only a pale comparison of what occurs in Heaven when one sinner returns to God after, perhaps, many years of living in sin. “I tell you, there will be more rejoicing in Heaven over one sinner repenting than over ninety-nine upright people who have no need of repentance.” (Lk 15:7)

## The institution of the sacrament

Christ instituted the Sacrament of Penance when he appeared to the Apostles after the Resurrection. He gave them authority to forgive or retain sins when He pronounced these words: “As the Father hath sent me, I also send you. When He had said this, He breathed on them and said: ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained’” (John 20:21-23).

Christ gave the Apostles the power to forgive sins, but this did not end with their death. It was given to them in view of their capacity as bishops and priests and because of this, as a permanent institution in the Church – just as they had a mission to teach and baptize all nations. Christ foresaw that His people would fall into sin; therefore they would need forgiveness in order to be saved. As long as there are sinners in the Church (until the end of time), there will be a need for the sacrament. From the judicial character of this sacrament, it follows that not every member of the Church is qualified to forgive sins; the administration of penance is reserved to those who are invested with the proper authority.

The sacrament produces certain effects: the power of the keys exercised by a minister (confessor) who must possess the proper qualifications, the effects on the soul of the recipient, i.e. the penitent who with the necessary disposition must perform certain actions and/or satisfaction due to the sin committed.

According to St. Thomas (*Summa Theologiae*



**Jesus, through the sacrament of Reconciliation, draws us from the darkness of sin into the light of grace**

III. 74.2), “The acts of the penitent are the proximate matter of this sacrament.” Regarding the form of the sacrament, both the Council of Florence and the Council of Trent teach that it consists in the words of absolution. “The form of the Sacrament of penance, wherein its force principally consists, is placed in those words of the minister: “I absolve thee, etc.”; to these words indeed, in accordance with the usage of Holy Church, certain prayers are laudably added, but they do not pertain to the essence of the form nor are they necessary for the administration of the sacrament” (Council of Trent, Sess. XIV, c. 3).

The effect of this sacrament is deliverance from sin” (Council of Florence). The same definition in somewhat different terms is given by the Council of Trent (Sess. XIV, c. 3): “So far as pertains to its force and efficacy, the effect (*res et effectus*) of this sacrament is reconciliation with God, upon which there sometimes follows, in pious and devout recipients, peace and calm of conscience with intense consolation of spirit.” This reconciliation implies, first of all, that the guilt of sin is remitted, and consequently also the eternal punishment due to mortal sin. As the Council of Trent declares, penance requires the performance of satisfaction “not indeed for the eternal penalty which is remitted together with the guilt either by the sacrament or by the desire of receiving the sacrament, but for the temporal penalty which, as the Scriptures teach, is not always forgiven entirely as it is in baptism” (Sess. VI, c. 14).

## Why we confess our sins

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that, “All mortal sins of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession, even if they are most secret and have been committed against the last two precepts of the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments); for these sins sometimes wound the soul more grievously and are more dangerous than those which are committed openly.” 1456

A penitent that wilfully conceals a mortal sin, derives no benefit but makes void the sacrament and incurs the guilt of sacrilege. If, however, the sin be

omitted, not through any fault of the penitent, but through forgetfulness, it is forgiven indirectly; but it must be declared at the next confession.

The Catechism continues, “After having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year.” Anyone who has a mortal sin on his soul must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without first having received sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession. Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time. 1457

Without it being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church. Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as He is merciful. 1458

## Return into God's family

After the reception of absolution, there usually remains some temporal debt to be discharged by works of satisfaction. “Venial sins, by which we are not deprived of the grace of God and into which we very frequently fall, are rightly and usefully declared in confession; but mention of them may, without any fault, be omitted and they can be expiated by many other remedies” (Council of Trent, Sess. XIV, c. 3). An act of contrition suffices to obtain forgiveness of venial sin and the same effect is produced by the worthy reception of sacraments other than penance, e.g. by Holy Communion.

Once the sinner is reconciled with God, he experiences the revival of all those merits which he had obtained before committing grievous sin. Good works performed in the state of grace deserve a reward from God, but this is forfeited by mortal sin, so that if the sinner should die unforgiven, all the good that he did in his life will avail him nothing. As long as he remains in the state of serious sin, he cannot merit from any good works. But after his sin is cancelled by penance, he regains the state of grace and also the entire store of merit that he had before.

The only obstacle to obtaining the reward of God's grace is sin, and once this is removed, we are brought back into God's grace. If the merit lost through our sin would not be returned upon our reception of confession, this loss could almost be the equivalent to an eternal punishment, which is not compatible with the forgiveness of the sacrament. A generally accepted opinion is that of Francisco Suarez (*De reviviscentia meritorum*), who stated that the recovery of grace is complete, in other words, the forgiven penitent has regained all of his merit back, as if he had never sinned.

## Unbaptized persons

The Sacrament of Penance was instituted by Christ for the remission of sins committed after baptism. No unbaptized person can be validly absolved, however deep and sincere his sorrow for his sins may be. This does not mean that the sins committed by unbaptized persons are worse than that of anyone else, but that one must first be a member of the Church before he can submit himself and his sins to the judicial process of sacramental Penance.

## Contrition

Without sorrow for sin, there is no forgiveness. Hence the Council of Trent states that (Sess. XIV, c. 4): “Contrition, which holds the first place among the acts of the penitent, is sorrow of heart and detestation for sin committed, with the resolve to sin no

more.” The Council (ibid.) furthermore distinguishes perfect contrition from imperfect contrition, which is called attrition, and which arises from the consideration of the evil of sin or from the fear of hell and punishment.

He who repents of his sin out of love for God must acquiesce to the Divine ordinance regarding penance, i.e., that he would confess if there were a priest available. He is obliged to confess when he has the next opportunity. (This applies to serious sins.) But this does not mean that the penitent has the choice between two methods of receiving forgiveness, because one cannot obtain contrition independently from the sacrament of Confession. So it is clear then, that not even a heartfelt sorrow based on the highest motives can dispense with the power of the sacrament.

“For those who after baptism have fallen into sin, the Sacrament of Penance is as necessary unto salvation as is baptism itself for those who have not yet been regenerated” (Council of Trent, Sess. XIV, c. 2). It is important to understand that the sacrament of Penance is not an institution the use of which is left to the option of each sinner. The penitent must, within the sacrament, secure forgiveness by telling his sins to the priest who will then give absolution. The power given by Christ to the Apostles is twofold; a priest may forgive or retain sins according to the circumstances and dispositions of the penitent. Through the sacrament, God forgives or retains sin, through the intermediary of the priest.

In the history of the Church, the founding fathers knew well that one of the greatest difficulties a penitent has is overcoming shame, but they exhorted and encouraged frequent confession despite this. St. John Chrysostom (d. 347) pleads eloquently with the sinner: “Be not ashamed to approach (the priest) because you have sinned, nay rather, for this very reason approach. No one says: Because I have an ulcer, I will not go near a physician or take medicine; on the contrary, it is just this that makes it needful to call in physicians and apply remedies. We (priests) know well how to pardon, because we ourselves are liable to sin. This is why God did not give us angels to be our doctors, nor send down Gabriel to rule the flock, but from the fold itself He chooses the shepherds, from among the sheep He appoints the leader, in order that he may be inclined to pardon his followers and, keeping in mind his own fault, may not set himself in hardness against the members of the flock.” (Homily “On Frequent Assembly” in P.G., LXIII, 463)

### Absolution and penance

The sacrament has many powerful reminders of how God has shown us how His mercy and forgiveness is without limit, and this has been proven throughout our salvation history. At the end of our confession, the priest traces the sign of the cross in the air and says to the penitent, “I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” This is to remind us that Jesus forgave all of the sinners of the world who participated in His crucifixion, when He said: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Lk: 23:34) A short while later, He forgave the good thief: “Amen, I say to you, this day you shall be with Me in paradise.” (Lk: 23:43) Thus, the symbol of the cross becomes for each Christian the sign of the unwavering forgiveness of God.

As stated previously, the absolution given by the priest to a penitent who confesses his sins with the proper dispositions remits both the guilt and the eternal punishment (of mortal sin). There remains, however, some indebtedness to divine justice which must be cancelled. In order to have it cancelled here, the penitent receives from his confessor what is usually called his “penance,” usually in the form of certain prayers which he is to say, or of certain actions which he is to perform, such as visits to a church, the Stations of the Cross, etc. Giving alms, fasting, and prayer are the chief means of satisfaction, but other penitential works may also be added.

In theological language, this penance is called satisfaction and is defined, in the words of St. Thomas: “The payment of the temporal punishment due on account of the offence committed against God by sin” (*Summa Theologicæ Supplement. 12.3*). It is an act of justice whereby the injury done to the honor of God is required, so far at least as the sinner is able to make reparation; it is also a preventive remedy, meant to hinder the further commission of sin.

### Seal of confession

Regarding the sins revealed to him in sacramental confession, the priest is bound to inviolable secrecy. From this obligation he cannot be excused either to save his own life or good name, to save the life of another, to further the ends of human justice, or to avert any public calamity. No law can compel him to divulge the sins confessed to him, or any oath which he takes – e.g., as a witness in court. He cannot reveal them either directly – i.e., by repeating them in so many words or indirectly – i.e., by any sign or action, or by giving information based on what he knows through confession. The only possible release from the obligation of secrecy is the permission to speak of the sins given freely and formally by the penitent himself. Without such permission, the violation of the seal of confession would not only be a grievous sin, but also a sacrilege.

### Misrepresentations of the sacrament

By way of further explanation, it is needful to correct certain erroneous views regarding this sacrament which not only misrepresent the actual practice of the Church, but also lead to a false interpretation of the theological statements and historical evidence. It should be clear:

- That confession is not a mere human invention devised by the Church to secure power over consciences or to relieve the emotional strain of troubled souls; it is the ordinary means appointed by Christ for the remission of sin. Man indeed is free to obey or disobey, but once he has sinned, he must seek pardon, not on conditions of his own choosing, but on those which God has determined, and these for the Christian are embodied in the Sacrament of Penance.

- No Catholic believes that a priest, simply as an individual man, however pious or learned, has power to forgive sins. This power belongs to God alone; but He can and does exercise it through the ministration of men. Since He has seen fit to exercise it by means of this sacrament, it cannot be said that the Church or the priest interferes between the soul and God; on the contrary, penance is the removal of the one obstacle that keeps the soul away from God.

- It is not true that for the Catholic the mere “telling of one’s sins” suffices to obtain their forgiveness. Without sincere sorrow and purpose of amendment, confession avails nothing, the pronouncement of absolution is of no effect, and the guilt of the sinner is greater than before.

- While this sacrament as a dispensation of Divine Mercy facilitates the pardoning of sin, it by no means renders sin less hateful or its consequences less dreadful to the Christian mind; much less does it imply permission to commit sin in the future.

- Strangely enough, the opposite charge is often heard, viz., that the confession of sin is intolerable and hard and therefore alien to the spirit of Christianity and the loving kindness of its Founder. But this view, in the first place, overlooks the fact that Christ, though merciful, is also just and exacting. Furthermore, however painful or humiliating confession may be, it is but a light penalty for the violation of God’s law.

Both these accusations, of too great leniency and too great severity, proceed as a rule from those who have no experience with the sacrament and only the vaguest ideas of what the Church teaches or of the power to forgive sins which the Church received from Christ. Here is a simple examination of conscience based on the Ten Commandments, given to help those who frequent the sacrament very seldom or for those who are going for the first time.

### Examination of Conscience

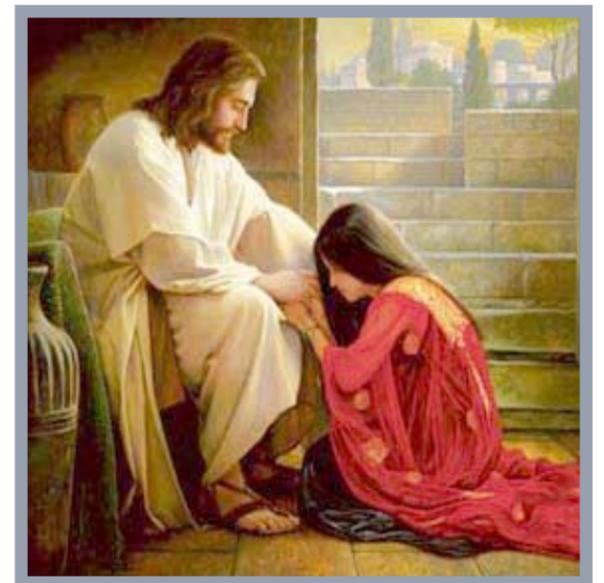
**1. You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.** Do I truly put God first in my life? Are there other elements of my life – money, possessions, habits, relationships, career, hobbies, desires – that are more important to me than my relationship with God? Do I truly put my faith in God – not merely faith that He exists, but faith that He is truly taking care of me? Do I ever doubt God’s existence or His love for others or myself? Do I believe that God speaks, acts, governs and sanctifies through the Church? Do I doubt what God has revealed through the Church? Do I neglect it, or refuse it? Do I give God the proper worship? How is my prayer life? Do I engage in works of charity and justice? How am I living up to my baptismal prom-

ises to reject sin and to refuse to be mastered by the glamour of evil? Am I engaged in any superstitious beliefs which weaken my faith in God?

**2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.** Do I have reverence for God’s name? Do I ever speak His name in anger? If I make an oath by God’s name, am I truly living up to what I swore to do in His name? Since I am a child of God, how am I living up to my name? Am I faithful to all my promises? Am I a person of my word?

**3. Remember the Sabbath day, to make it holy.** Am I faithful to Sunday Mass? Do I participate in the liturgy with my full heart? Am I truly in communion with the Church when I worship? Am I conscious of any ways in which I have broken communion by engaging in serious sin? Have I truly repented of all of my sins before approaching the altar for the Eucharist? Have I availed myself of the sacrament of Reconciliation regularly in conjunction with my reception of the Eucharist? When worshipping, am I judgmental or critical of others in the assembly – the priest, musicians, lectors, other in the pews? Do I regularly take Sabbath-time for prayer, reflection, rest and recreation, or am I constantly pursuing a goal other than that of my salvation and the salvation of others?

**4. Honour your father and mother.** For those with living parents: Do I regularly call or visit my parents? Do I give thanks for the good things they have given and forgive the wrongs they have done? If they are elderly, ill in body, mind or spirit, or suffering from any other circumstance, do I give them aid, comfort and support? When I disagree with them, do I still respect them? Do I seek to settle any disagreements in a civil, just manner?



For those whose parents are deceased: Do I honor the memory of my parents? Do I help that memory to live on, especially to the next generation? Am I living the virtues they have taught me? Have I forgiven wrongs they have done to me? Have I forgiven myself for any conflicts which were left unresolved at the time of their death?

For all: Do I encourage others to honour their parents, especially in times of family conflict? Do I honor the parents of my friends, showing them due respect and honor? Do I contribute to a culture which promotes the family and parental respect?

**5. You shall not kill.** Have I let my anger reach the point of vengeance and hatred where I desire not merely justice, but that harm be done to another person? Have I contributed – by any act of omission or commission, direct or indirect, formal or informal cooperation – to the destruction of innocent human life? Have any of my thoughts, words, deeds, things I have done or things I have failed to do, contributed to a culture of death rather than of life? Have I failed to respond to any need in my community to help promote a culture of life?

**6. You shall not commit adultery.** For married persons: Am I faithful to my spouse, not just in sexual relations, but in everything? Are there other people or activities in my life which take away time and attention due to my spouse? Do I respect my spouse as an equal partner, not an object to an end? Am I attentive and responsive to the needs of my spouse? Do I contribute to an effective communication in my marriage? Do I contribute to a sound prayer life and spiritual foundation in my marriage?

(continued on page 6)

**“The greater the sinner, the greater the right he has to My mercy.” – Our Lord to Saint Faustina**

# Our Lady of America

Every year, hundreds of thousands of youth in America participate in the activities in Washington, DC to protest the culture of death and to promote a culture of Life. The Pro-Life Movement in the United States is by far the largest group of youth in the world striving to live a life of purity that have Our Lady as their model. Many countries throughout the world look to this movement for leadership in protesting the evils of abortion and contraception, thus fulfilling what Our Lady had prophesized through a humble nun in Ohio, Sr. Mary Ephrem Neuzil. On September 25, 1956, She said:

**"I am Our Lady of America. I desire that my children honor me, especially by the purity of their lives." (...)** "Our Lady, moreover, often emphasized her desire that the Shrine in Washington, D.C., be made a place of special pilgrimage. She wishes to be honored there as Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin." (Words of Sr. Neuzil.) Tens of thousands of youth begin their pilgrimage in Washington, DC at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception Basilica, honoring Her as the Patroness of our land.

**On the eve of February 11, 1958:**

**"Our Lady made known to me that she is particularly interested in the youth of our nation. It is they who are to be the leaders of this movement of renewal on the face of the earth. Their ranks will be swelled by the youths of other nations whom Our Lady also calls to help in the accomplishment of this great renewal."**

**"The next day I was interiorly enlightened during Mass. It was made known to me that those, particularly the youth, who are willing wholeheartedly to follow Our Lady in her great battle against evil would bear the special title of 'Torchbearers of the Queen.' This torch, of course, is Divine Love, for it is Love alone that will conquer hate and all that hate brings with it."**

At the 1993 World Youth Day, Venerable Pope John Paul the Great sparked this renewal. Present at this WYD was the 300 lb. statue of Our Lady of America processed by the "Torchbearers of the Queen" Youth Group from Colfax, CA. The Pope told nearly 200,000 young people assembled at Cherry Creek State Park in Denver, CO: "Do not be afraid to go out on the streets and into public places, like



the first Apostles who preached Christ and the Good News of salvation in the squares of cities, towns and villages. This is no time to be ashamed of the Gospel (Rom 1:16). It is the time to preach it from the rooftops (Matt 10:27). Do not be afraid to break out of comfortable and routine modes of living, in order to take up the challenge of making Christ known in the modern 'metropolis'. It is you who must 'go out into the byroads' (Matt 22:9) and invite everyone you meet to the banquet which God has prepared for His people. The Gospel must not be kept hidden because of fear or indifference. It was never meant to be hidden away in private. It has to be put on a stand so that people may see its light and give praise to our heavenly Father."

## **Our Lady's Plan for Peace in America**

### **To obtain peace Our Lady asks:**

- That the youth of America honor Her by the Purity of their lives.
- The Sanctification of families.

- The indwelling of the Holy Trinity in the Christian home.
- The daily recitation of the Rosary.
- Personal, interior conversion.

## **Excerpts of messages taken from the book, "Our Lady of America":**

November 8, 1954: "It is the wish of my Son that fathers and mothers strive to imitate me and my chaste spouse in our holy life at Nazareth. We practiced the simple virtues of family life, Jesus our Son being the center of all our love and activity. The Holy Trinity dwelt with us in a manner far surpassing anything that can ever be imagined. For ours was the earthly paradise where once again God walked among men.

"As in our little home no sin was to be found, so it is the wish of the Heart of my Son and my Immaculate Heart that sin should, as far as possible, be unheard of in the homes of our children. The Divine Trinity will dwell in your midst only if you are faithful in practicing the virtues of our life at Nazareth. Then, you also, my children, you also will become another paradise. God will then walk among you and you will have peace."

September 26, 1956: **"My child, I entrust you with this message that you must make known to my children in America. I wish it to be the country dedicated to my purity. The wonders I will work will be the wonders of the Soul. They must have faith and believe firmly in my love for them. I desire that they be the children of my Pure Heart.** I desire, through my children of America, to further the cause of faith and purity among peoples and nations. Let them come to me with confidence and simplicity, and I, their Mother, will teach them to become pure like to my Heart that their own hearts may be more pleasing to the Heart of my Son."

August 22, 1957: "What am I to do, child of my heart, when my children turn from me? The false peace of this world lures them and in the end will destroy them. They think they have done enough in consecrating themselves to my Immaculate Heart. It is not enough. **That which I ask for and is most important many have not given me. What I ask, have asked, and will continue to ask is reformation of life. There must be sanctification from within. I will work my miracles of grace only in those who ask for them and empty their souls of the love and attachment to sin and all that is displeasing to my Son. Souls who cling to sin cannot have their hands free to receive the treasures of grace that I hold out to them.**"

October 7, 1957: "Making the rosary a family prayer is very pleasing to me. I ask that all families strive to do so. But be careful to say it with great devotion, meditating on each mystery and striving to imitate in your daily lives the virtues depicted therein. Live the mysteries of the rosary as I lived them, and it will become a chain binding you to me forever. They who are found in the circle of my rosary will never be lost. I myself will lead them at death to the throne of my Son, to be eternally united to Him."

## **Canonical Approval**

Archbishop Raymond L. Burke, formerly of the Diocese of St. Louis, MO, now Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura in Rome, revealed the results of his review of the history and canonical status of the message of Our Lady of America in a letter written to the United States Conference of Bishops on May 31, 2007. We quote in part from that letter: "Having reviewed the correspondence between Sister Mary Ephrem and her spiritual director of many years, Monsignor Paul F. Leibold, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, who later became the Bishop of Evansville and, then, Archbishop of Cincinnati, it is clear that the devotion, as proposed by Sister Mary Ephrem, received his approbation... What can be concluded canonically is that the devotion was both approved by Archbishop Leibold and, what is more, was actively promoted by him. In addition, over the years, other Bishops have approved the devotion and have participated in public devotion to the Mother of God, under the title of Our Lady of America."

*We have the complete message of Our Lady of America available (1954-1959) with the imprimatur of Archbishop Paul Francis Leibold in leaflet form. To order these free leaflets to make Our Lady's message of hope known across America please call our toll-free number at 1-888-858-2163 (USA) 1-450-469-2209 (Canada).*

**Marie Anne Jacques**

**Anne Marie Lambert**

# The sacrament of mercy

(continued from page 5)

Do I live my marriage as a sacrament, a sacred covenant whose purpose is to image the covenant between Jesus and the Church and to contribute to the salvation of each spouse?

For unmarried persons: Am I living a chaste life, respecting God's gift of sexuality and its true purpose and place in His creation? Do I engage in any kind of sexual activity which is contrary to God's purpose of sexuality? If I sense a possible call to marriage in the future, am I preparing myself now to be a good spouse, cultivating virtues which will serve well in marriage? Do I contribute to a culture which promotes the proper understanding of marriage?

**7. You shall not steal.** Have I taken anything that does not belong to me, no matter how small? Have I accepted anything under false pretences - through another's mistake or some other circumstance - something to which I am not truly entitled? Do I contribute to the needs of the poor? (Heed the words of St. John Chrysostom: "Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.")

**8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.** Have I told lies in general, or particularly about anyone? Have I participated in gossip?

**9. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.** Am I inordinately attracted to another person's spouse? If so, have I engaged in any speech or behaviour which could lead to an inappropriate end? Have the same circumstances applied to any person who, for various reasons, is an inappropriate sub-

ject for my romantic/sexual interest? Do I entertain fantasies involving inappropriate sexual behaviour? Do I view pornographic materials or other titillating media, distorting my appreciation of the true nature of sexuality?

**10. You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.** Am I inordinately attached to material objects, including money? Am I envious of another's possessions - material or otherwise - instead of being thankful for what God has provided for me?

## **How to make a good Confession**

After examining your conscience and telling God of your sorrow, go into the confessional. Start with the sin(s) that is most difficult to say. (In order to make a good confession, the faithful must confess all mortal sins, according to kind and number.) Listen to the words of the priest. He will assign you some penance. When invited, express some prayer of sorrow or Act of Contrition. Afterwards, listen to the words of absolution, the sacramental forgiveness of the Church through the ordained priest. As you listen to the words of forgiveness, you may make the sign of the cross with the priest. Do your assigned penance and resolve to return to the Sacrament of Reconciliation often.

## **Act of Contrition**

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell. But most of all because I have offended You, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance and to amend my life. Amen.

# The testimony of Gloria Polo

(continued from page 1)

ist and neither did demons. That was the only thing that had kept me in the Church. When I was told the devil didn't exist, I just thought we were all going to heaven regardless of who we were. That distanced me completely from the Lord.

But back to that instant in the operating room, I was really terrified! I saw demons coming for me and I was their pay. At that point through some special insight given to me, I realized I owed each one of them. I realized sin was not for free and that the main infamy and lie of the devil was to state that he didn't exist. I saw how they were coming for me. You can imagine how scared I was. This scientific and intellectual mind was of no avail to me.

I started descending and light became scarce and I started roaming some tunnels in pitch darkness. That darkness has no comparison. The darkest darkness on earth is like noontime sunlight compared to it. That darkness causes pain, horror, and shame. And it smells very bad. I finished descending down those tunnels and landed desperately on a flat spot. I used to claim I had an iron will, that nothing was too much for me. But that was useless now, because I wanted to climb up and I couldn't. At that point I saw a huge mouth opening up on the floor and I felt immense emptiness in my body, a bottomless abyss. The most horrifying thing about that hole was that not even a bit of God's love was felt in it, not a drop of hope.

In the midst of all that pain, I started screaming "Who made this mistake? I'm practically a saint! I've never stolen, I've never killed, I gave food to the poor, I gave free dental treatments to those who couldn't afford them. What am I doing here? As I was shouting, a voice was heard, a sweet voice, a voice that makes my soul shake when I hear it. Everything was inundated with love and peace and all those creatures ran away in horror because they can't stand love or peace. And there was peace for me when that precious voice called out to me, "All right, if you are a Catholic, tell me the commandments of God's law."

How shameful all of this was! They made an analysis of all my life based on the Ten Commandments. They showed me who I had been with my fellowman. They showed me how I would tell God I loved him when I wasn't far from him yet, when I wasn't involved yet in atheism, but with the same tongue with which I blessed the Lord, I would lash out against all of mankind.

They showed me as wife. Who was I? I would complain day in and day out, from the break of day. My husband would say "good morning" and I would respond "what do you mean 'good'? Look, it's raining outside!" I would complain about my children too. They showed me that I never had love or compassion for my fellowmen, for my brothers and sisters out there. And the Lord told me, "You never had any consideration for the sick, never kept them company in their loneliness. Never once compassionate for children without a mother, for all those suffering children." I had a heart of stone.

When they talked to me about the second commandment, I saw full of sadness that, as a little girl, I learned that lies were excellent ways of avoiding my mom's severe punishments. I started walking with the father of lies (Satan) and I became a liar. As my sins grew, my lies also grew. I noticed my mom's respect for the Lord and how His name was holy to her, so I took that as a weapon and I started swearing in vain. I would say, "Mom, I swear to God...", and that's how I would avoid punishments. Imagine my lies, placing the Most Holy Name of the Lord in my rottenness, because at that point I was full of dirt and sin.

On keeping holy the Lord's day, it was horrible, and I felt intense pain; the voice would tell me how I would dedicate four or five hours to my body every day, but not even ten minutes of deep love to my Lord in thanksgiving or a simple prayer.

On the sacraments, I had nothing. I used to say that I would never go to confession with those old men who were far worse than me. I did it because it was very comfortable for me to do so in the midst of my filth. The evil one drove me away from confession and that is how he took away cleanliness and healing from my soul, because every time I sinned,

there was a price to pay: within the white purity of my soul, Satan would place his blemish, a blemish of darkness. Never, with the exception of my first communion, did I make a good confession. From that point on, I received my Lord unworthily.

I never fed my soul, but to make matters worse, I would criticize priests constantly. You should have seen what a hard time I had on that one! Ever since we were little, I remember criticism against priests being present in my family.

On the fourth commandment, honor thy Father and thy Mother, as I already told you, the Lord showed me how ungrateful I was to them. I would curse against and complain about them because they could not give me everything my friends had. I never appreciated anything they did for me, to the point of saying I didn't know my Mom because I thought she was not up to my standards. It was horrible to see the summary of a woman with no God and how that Godless woman can destroy anything coming close to her.



When we came to the fifth commandment, the Lord showed me I was a horrible assassin and that I had committed the worst and most abominable in front of His eyes: an abortion. Money empowered me to pay for several abortions because I claimed women had a right to choose when they wanted to become pregnant or not. I saw in the book of life and it hurt me deeply when I saw a fourteen-year old girl aborting because I had taught her. When one is poisoned, nothing good remains. Everything that comes close to you is also spoiled.

There were these girls, three of them my nieces and the other one, my nephew's girlfriend. Their parents would let them come to my house because I had money and talked to them about fashion, glamour, how to show their bodies, and so on. My sister would send them to me. I corrupted them. I corrupted minors, that was a horrible sin, compounding abortion. I would tell them not to be innocent. "Your mothers talk to you about virginity and chastity because they're outdated. They talk about a 2000 year-old Bible but priests have refused to come to terms with the modern world. Your mothers talk about what the Pope says, but the Pope is outdated."

Abortion is a heavy chain that drags and tramples; it is a hurt that never ends. It's the emptiness of being a murderer. It's the worst thing one can do to a child. I sponsored several abortions. Each time the blood of a baby is spilled, it's like a holocaust to Satan. It is a holocaust which hurts and shakes the Lord. When there is an abortion, that soul screams and moans in pain, even if it has no eyes or flesh. When it is being murdered, that cry is heard and heaven shakes and an equally strong cry is heard in hell, but this time of joy. Immediately after that happens, some seals break loose in hell and larvae come out to continue prowling around humankind,

keeping it enslaved to the flesh and to all those bad things we see and, even worse, that will come.

The price of innocent blood releases one more demon each time. I got washed in that blood and my clean soul became absolutely dark. After those abortions, I had no more sense of sinfulness. For me, everything was okay. It was sad to see how all those debts I owed the devil included as well all those babies I had killed myself because I had a copper-T intrauterine device. I painfully saw how many little babies had been created and those suns had burst, with the cry of that baby being torn away from the hands of his Father, God. No wonder I was always sour and ill-tempered, with a grim face, frustrated with everyone and very depressed. I had become a baby-killing machine!

How could I say I hadn't killed? How about every person I disliked, hated, or simply couldn't put up with? I was being a murderer there too. Because people don't only die from a gunshot. It's enough to hate them, to do bad things to them, to be envious of them. You kill with that.

On the seventh commandment, regarding not stealing, I considered myself very honest. The Lord showed me that while food was being wasted in my house, the rest of the world was going hungry. I had forgotten I had a soul, so I could hardly remember I had talents, that I was the merciful hands of God. Much less that all the good I didn't do hurt the Lord.

Do you want to know what the Lord kept on asking me? About my lack of love and charity. That's when He told me about my spiritual death. I was alive, but dead. If you could have seen what "spiritual death" is. It's like a soul that hates, like a terribly sour and fastidious soul that injures everyone, full of sin. I could see my soul on the outside, smelling well, with good clothes on, but my stench on the inside, living deep in the abyss.

You can imagine my deep sorrow when my book closed. I had deep sorrow with God my Father for having behaved like that because, despite all my sins, despite all my filth and all my indifference and all my horrible feelings, the Lord always, up until the last instant, searched for me. He would always send me instruments, people, He would talk to me, He would yell at me, He would take things away from me to seek me. He looked for me up until the very end. God is always "begging" each one of us to convert. (...) I couldn't accuse Him of condemning me! Of course not. Out of my free will, I chose my father, and my father was not God. I chose Satan; he was my father.

With that immense shame and pain, I started to cry: "Jesus Christ, Lord, have compassion on me! Forgive me, Lord, give me a second chance!" And that was the most beautiful moment. I have no words to describe that moment. He came and pulled me out of that pit. When He picked me up, all those creatures threw themselves on the ground. He picked me up and He pulled me onto that flat part and told me with all His love: "You will go back; you will have a second chance (...)", but He told me it wasn't because of my family's prayer. "It's normal for them to pray and cry out for you. It's because of the intercession of all those foreign to your body and blood who have cried, have prayed and have raised their heart with immense love for you."

The Lord told me: "That is love for your fellowman. You will go back, but you won't repeat this 1000 times. You will repeat it 1000 times 1000. And woe to those who don't change their ways despite having heard you, because they will be judged much more severely, just like you will when you come back here again, even their anointed or their priests, or any of them, because the worst deafness is that of a man who refuses to hear."

And this, my brothers and sisters, is not a threat. The Lord doesn't need to threaten us. This is the second chance you have and that, thanks be to God, I lived through what I did. May the Lord bless each one of you abundantly. All glory be to our God! All glory be to our Lord Jesus Christ!

**Dr. Gloria Polo**

(Order the book with the entire testimony of Dr. Gloria Polo, priced at \$5.00 per book that includes S/H. For large quantities, please call for special discount pricing).



# A Statement of Life in a Culture of Death

## “Little Audrey” Marie Santo

Every so often, God sends to the world that special soul that demonstrates more clearly His infinite love and mercy for mankind. Audrey Marie Santo was one of these special little souls.

“Little Audrey” was born in the city of Worcester, Massachusetts on December 19, 1983. On August 9, 1987, when she was only three years old, she fell into the family swimming pool and nearly drowned. She was rushed to a nearby hospital where she was stabilized and then taken to U-Mass Medical Center where she was accidentally overmedicated with 750 mg. of the drug Phenobarbital. The overdose caused her to lapse into a coma-like state called Akinetic Mutism, which meant that she had very limited body movement. Medical professionals told the family that they needed to place her in an institution where she could live out the remaining days of her life. Her mother’s faith-filled response to them was simply: “I shall place her in my arms.” They predicted that “she would not live more than two weeks”. Thus began a labor of love which lasted for twenty years.

Audrey came home from the hospital in November 1987, four months after her accident. Her family immediately set about working around the clock with relatives and medical staff keeping close watch that all of Audrey’s needs were met and that she receive only the very best of care. There was such a tremendous outpouring of love from all those around Little Audrey that it was no wonder that God chose to dispense His special blessings upon her family and anyone else who came in contact with her. What merely began as a labor of love for a helpless little girl had now grown into an apostolate that would spread throughout the whole world.

Miracles began to happen; statues of the Virgin Mary began to weep tears of blood, oil began to exude from statues and holy images and many people were even healed of their illnesses. On five different occasions, while the Holy Mass was being celebrated in Audrey’s home, many people witnessed the Host in the celebrant’s hands beginning to bleed. (An interesting side note is that Audrey received her First Holy Communion from the hands of Most Rev. Bernard Joseph Flanagan, bishop emeritus of the diocese of Worcester, MA (1959-1983). When we recall that Audrey was unable to swallow because of her condition and was being fed via feeding tubes, it is remarkable that on the day of her First Holy Communion and every day after that, she was able to receive Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist without any difficulty. It was also during Bishop Flanagan’s Mass in Audrey’s home that the first Eucharistic Miracle of the bleeding Host took place. Audrey’s family had been given permission to have the Blessed Sacrament in a Tabernacle in her room, thus she was in the continuous presence of Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. But, of all these phenomena, by far the most wonderful of all was that hearts were changed and conversions began taking place. Little Audrey had clearly become one of God’s special instruments and her mission seemed to be two-fold: to bring souls to Jesus and to be a statement of life in a culture of death.

Pope Benedict XVI, in the introduction to his encyclical, *Charity in Truth*, states that: “Charity is love received and given.” It is “grace” (cháris). Its source is the wellspring of the Father’s love for the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Love comes down to us from the Son. It is creative love, through which we have our being; it is redemptive love, through which we are recreated. Love is revealed and made present by Christ (cf. Jn 13:1) and “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5).

As the objects of God’s love, men and women become subjects of charity. They are called to make themselves instruments of grace, so as to pour forth God’s charity and to weave networks of charity. And further on, in chapter one, we read: “Only through an encounter with God are we able to see in the other something more than just another creature [17], to recognize the divine image in the other, thus truly coming to discover him or her and to mature in a love that “becomes concern and care for the other.” [18]

In the life of Little Audrey, we have the perfect

model for this teaching. We see a community coming together, recognizing the “jewel” that they have in this little person, and treating her with the dignity that she deserves as a child of God, thus enabling her to develop to her full potential in the family of God despite all her handicaps. At the same time, we see Little Audrey, in an extraordinary way through a very special grace from God, reciprocating all this love by giving it back to all those around her according to each person’s individual needs. Letters came from all over the world asking Little Audrey for her prayers. These letters were individually read to her by her mother, a family member, or one of her nurses. Audrey would listen attentively to each letter as it was read, and many claim that they were healed either physically or spiritually because of her prayers.



Audrey’s bedroom after her death and her gravesite (right) in Worcester, Massachusetts

According to the world’s standards, Audrey’s life was of very little worth or even of no value at all. She could not work, she could not speak, and she could not even eat without the aid of feeding tubes. She needed constant care and could even be considered a “burden” to her family and to society. But God has made use of “the weak to confound the strong” (Cor.1:28), and “He has exalted the lowly.”(Luke 1: ) Pope Paul VI in his encyclical letter, *Populorum Progressio*, reminds us that: “...in the design of God, every man is called upon to develop and fulfill himself, for every life is a vocation.” Little Audrey’s vocation was truly that of a witness in this life, that we are all precious in God’s eyes, and that every human being

has a particular place and purpose in society. What she was unable to provide physically to society, God made up for in a most extraordinary way, manifesting how great His love is for all of mankind.

Little Audrey died on April 14, 2007. On September 11, 2008, Most Rev. Robert J. McManus, Bishop of the Diocese of Worcester, MA, recognized the Foundation for the Promotion of the cause of the beatification and canonization of Audrey Marie Santo. We can now plead to her to intercede for us in Heaven before the throne of God, that He deliver our beautiful country of America from the “culture of death”, and that all may live their lives with the dignity that they deserve as children of God, having been created in His image and likeness. Little Audrey Santo, pray for us!

**Yves & Annie Jacques**

### Prayer for the Beatification of Audrey

Eternal Father, we thank you for the gift of Audrey Santo and for her extraordinary witness to the world that all life, no matter how small, broken, or wounded, remains precious in Your eyes. Grant that she may be venerated as a saint for the glory of God. Hear the requests of all those who seek her intercession, especially the grace for which we now ask... We ask this through Our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Prayer taken from Little Audrey’s website, [www.littleaudreysanto.org](http://www.littleaudreysanto.org))



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