

History and Explanation of The Image of Divine Mercy ~ A Basic Instruction ~

By Joan Maroney and Fr. Seraphim Michalenko, MIC

The History of the Image

The image of Jesus here depicted was painted in the year 1934 by Eugene Kazimirowski in Vilnius (at the time a city in Poland, but presently in Lithuania) as St. Faustina Kowalska was describing to him how Jesus looked in a vision she received in 1931. The image was venerated publicly for the first time from April 26-28, 1935 during the closing celebration of the 1900th Jubilee of Redemption at the Shrine of Our Lady of Mercy, a chapel in that city called "The Dawn Gate."



Vilnius Image of The Divine Mercy
Original painting by
Eugene Kazimirowski, 1934

In 1937 the Image was hung near the main altar in St. Michael's Church in Vilnius of which Sister Faustina's confessor (the now "Blessed" Michael Sopoćko) was the rector, and where it remained until 1948, when the church was converted into a museum of architecture by the Communist government. The image was then taken to the Holy Spirit Church on Dominican Street not far from the Cathedral, but then removed and placed in the village church of Nowa Ruda (now in Belarus), where it remained for 40 years. For a while it was hidden in an attic to prevent it from being destroyed by the government.

In 1982 the image was again brought to the Holy Spirit Church in Vilnius where in 1986, on account of damage sustained from handling along the years, the painting was retouched by a local artist. In the process, the original appearance of the Lord's face was changed. Then in 1987 the Image was again enshrined in one of the side altars, but access to it was limited.

In 1982 the image was again brought to the Holy Spirit Church in Vilnius where in 1986, on account of damage sustained from handling along the years, the painting was retouched by a local artist. In the process, the original appearance of the Lord's face was changed. Then in 1987 the Image was again enshrined in one of the side altars, but access to it was limited.

Finally, under the guidance of the Archbishop of Vilnius, Cardinal J. Backis, in May of 2003 the image underwent professional restoration and conservation. Meanwhile, the little Church of the Holy Trinity, a very short walking distance from Holy Spirit Church, which the government gave back to the Archdiocese, but in a severely damaged state, was restored with the aid of substantial funds from Members of the Association of Marian Helpers in the U.S.A. It was re-dedicated on the Feast of Mercy 2004, and the restored Divine Mercy Image was enshrined there in September of 2005.

Divine Mercy for Young Hearts

Although different versions of this Image have been painted, the “Vilnius” Image was the only one painted under her personal direction to the artist. Sadly complaining, “Lord, who will paint You as beautiful as You are?” (*Diary* §313), the Sister had the artist change Jesus’ face at least 10 times. Finally, Our Lord told her that it was good enough, and should be left in the final state it was in. In the mid 1990's it was accidentally discovered in the U.S.A. that this final attempt at rendering Our Lord’s Face in The Divine Mercy Image matches the face of the “man” on the Holy Shroud of Turin with mysterious accuracy.

Jesus told St. Faustina: **Not in the beauty of the color, nor of the brush** [that is, the artist’s painting ability] **lies the greatness of this image, but in My grace** (D. §313). So, no matter which version of the Image one prefers, we can be assured that, when prayed over and blessed, it becomes an instrument of God’s grace to be revered [that is, regarded with deep respect, love, and awe, as something sacred] with trust in His goodness to keep His promises made about it. There are many reports of significant graces associated with the veneration of images of Jesus – The Divine Mercy. Nonetheless, as recounted by her spiritual director, Blessed Michael Sopocko, St. Faustina was very strongly demanding about certain details of the Image. By examining these details we can begin to understand better what this Image of Jesus means, and why we can count on His keeping the promises He made about venerating it [that is, showing deep religious respect to it].

The Vilnius Image of The Divine Mercy

Image Detail	What it Represents	What it Means
Dark background of the image	The world is in darkness without Jesus	Without Jesus we live in darkness. We get confused. We don’t know which way to go or what to do so we make mistakes, we hurt ourselves and others.
Illumination of Image comes from Jesus	Jesus is the Light in the Darkness, showing us the way to be and act.	By following the ways of Jesus and the teachings of the Church we minimize our mistakes and hurt ourselves and others less. We learn how to live and how to have peace in all things.
Wounds seen in the Lord’s hands, feet and side	This image is an image of the Risen Christ. The wounds prove that He is the same Jesus who died on the cross yet came back to life.	Even though Jesus suffered and died a violent death, He rose from the dead and lives eternally. We too will have life after death if we believe in Jesus.
Right hand raised to the height of the shoulder in the act of blessing	Jesus is bestowing His blessings upon us.	Jesus is always present and always desires to bless us with the grace we need in our struggles to be holy and in our efforts to follow Him.

Divine Mercy for Young Hearts

Image Detail	What it Represents	What it Means
Left hand drawing aside his robe near his heart, showing the opening to it.	Jesus is opening His Heart to us. He is showing us how much he loves us.	Jesus opens His Heart to fill us with His love. Likewise, He wants us to open our hearts and to be as loving and merciful as He is.
Red and pale rays	The blood and water that poured forth from Jesus when He was pierced with a lance at the crucifixion (<i>John 19:34</i>).	The blood had separated into a light and dark liquid, indicating the heart had stopped pumping and that Jesus truly did die. Even so, He resurrected, and He is alive to us today, touching us especially through the sacraments of the Church.
The pale or "white" ray	The serum or "water" that poured forth from Christ's side indicating the cleansing we receive through the power of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.	The water of Baptism is the first way the Lord cleanses our souls. But, since we are only baptized once, we have the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation to cleanse our souls, to heal us of our hurts and to give us the power, or grace, not to sin as often as we wish.
The red ray	The blood that poured from the side of Christ indicating the life-carrying power of the Most Holy Eucharist.	As blood is needed to keep a body alive and healthy, so too the Holy Eucharist keeps souls alive and healthy.
White robe	The robe of the priesthood. Jesus is a priest; the great High Priest.	A priest is someone who makes offerings to God. As a priest, Jesus offers His own life as the perfect sacrifice. We must follow His example in offering our own lives to God.
Eyes looking downward	Jesus told St. Faustina, "My gaze from this image is such as the gaze from the cross" (<i>Diary, 326</i>).	While He was suffering and dying, Jesus was thinking about and looking upon us. He continues to look upon us with the same love and mercy he proved to have for us while hanging on the cross.
Left foot stepping forward	The Lord is not waiting for us to come to Him. It is he who makes the first move, coming to us with his peace as in the Upper Room.	Jesus comes to us with his message of mercy to prepare us for his return-to remind us that we will be judged on how we treated him in one another.
Signature: Jesus I Trust in You	A reminder of the need to trust in God's mercy and the one who obtained mercy for us. "The graces of My mercy are drawn by mean of one vessel only, and that is - trust. The more a soul trusts the more it will receive" (<i>Diary, 1578</i>).	We need to be convinced about how very much Jesus loves us. To sign something means to attest or confirm that something is true. This "signature" means that we do believe that God, above all, is merciful and ever keeps his promises made to us. To trust, then, means to have the courage to accept his acceptance of us.