

Group Leader's Guide

Study and Discussion Questions for the Online Course:

Divine Mercy Essentials

This guide will give the Group Leader or Class Teacher the background information needed to lead in-depth reflections and responses to the Study and Discussion questions offered for each class lecture of the online course, classes 1-28. There are no discussion questions provided for the final two classes, which are not class lectures per se, but conference talks delivered by Fr. Donald Calloway, MIC and Fr. Serpahim Michalenko, MIC. We encourage group leaders to develop their own questions and responses to these final presentations.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class Lecture #1:

Introduction and the ABCs of Mercy: “Ask for God’s Mercy”

1. Jesus said, “I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me: I was in prison and you came to me.... Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:34-40). How does our understanding of the merciful “Heart” of Jesus, as presented in class lecture #1, help us understand this teaching? What kinds of human suffering in the world today would you say are probably most “on the Heart” of Jesus?

This class emphasizes the bond of compassion that ties the loving Heart of Jesus to the needs of the lost and the broken, so that His Heart rejoices when they are relived of physical, social and spiritual misery. Different kinds of suffering that one might say are especially on the Heart of Jesus today might include the sufferings of the unborn children killed in their mother’s womb, the sufferings of the hungry and malnourished, the sufferings of the lonely and neglected elderly, and the spiritual emptiness, confusion and despair of those who have lost their faith, or have never known faith in Christ.

2. We commonly say, “The proof is in the pudding,” meaning “Don’t just tell me, show me!” According to Holy Scripture, in what ways did God clearly show His merciful love to the People of Israel, and then to the whole human race? Personally speaking, is this enough for you to place your trust in God, day by day? When life gets hard, do you insist on continuous proof of God’s merciful love for you? What do you think He wants to say to those of us who continually “put Him to the test”? How would He, from the depths of His merciful love, address us who are struggling to trust in Him?

God has clearly shown His love for Israel and the whole human race at the Exodus from Egypt, when He rescued His People from bondage in Egypt, and in the Cross and Resurrection of His Son, when He rescued the whole world from bondage to sin and death. In the class discussion, emphasize that God does not reject souls who waver in their trust in His mercy, but continually recall for them His saving deeds. Read together Psalm 77: a Psalm that starts with weak trust in God, but moves toward greater confidence in Him by recalling His saving work.

3. If someone told you that God’s “mercy” means no more than God’s act of pardoning and forgiving sinners, how would you explain to them that the full meaning of “Divine Mercy” in the Catholic Tradition means even more than that?

The following excerpts from the lecture may help you answer this question with the group:

What, then, is the meaning of Divine “Mercy”? God’s very nature is love (See Jn 4:8): infinite, eternal, self-giving love among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But “mercy” is the form God’s love takes when it overflows His divine life and pours itself out upon creatures. This “Divine Mercy” is compassionate love—a love that seeks to meet the needs and overcome the miseries of others....

It may sound awkward to you at first to call it "merciful" love. After all, the word "mercy" in modern English tends to have a very restricted meaning. Generally we only use it to describe a plea for pardon, as when a convicted criminal "throws himself on the mercy of the court." However, in the Catholic Tradition the word has always had a much wider meaning. When we sing at Mass "Lord, have mercy ... Christ have mercy," we are asking for more than just pardon for our sins. We are asking for the complete outpouring of His compassionate love upon the world. St. Thomas Aquinas defined "mercy" (Latin: *misericordia*) as "the compassion in our hearts for another person's misery, a compassion that drives us to do what we can to help him" (*Summa Theologiae* II-II.30.1).

Study and Discussion Questions for Class Lecture #2:

The ABCs of Mercy: "Be Merciful to Others"

1. The first four of the classical "corporal works of mercy" relate to the basic necessities of life: universal access to adequate food, clean water, clothing, and shelter. Are there any of these needs that are not currently being met in your local area? The second set of the corporal works of mercy deal with basic social needs of prisoners, the sick, the lonely, and those who are grieving. Again, in your local area, to the best of your knowledge, how well are these needs being addressed? Share some ideas about what more might be done by Catholics to reach out in merciful love to those in physical and social need in your community.

Answers will vary for this one, depending upon local needs.

2. Read again St. Faustina's "Prayer to Be Merciful to Others" found in her Diary, entry 163. She asks for the grace to be practice merciful love in numerous ways. Which of those ways is the most difficult for you personally to practice?—and share with the group why that might be.

Answers will vary.

3. What are the main challenges you face whenever you seek to share the Catholic Faith with friends or family who are skeptical or doubtful? Share with each other, from your own experience, what has worked—and not worked—in your attempts to share your faith with others in the past. Has this class lecture given you any helpful suggestions as to how you might practice the spiritual works of mercy of "Instructing the uninformed" and "Being patient with those in error"?

Here is the text of those two sections of the class to help discuss the last part of the question:

Second: Instruct the Uninformed

This means, first of all, accepting our God-given responsibility to be the primary source of religious education and formation for our children. Some Catholics may be surprised to learn that it is not the local Catholic school or CCD program upon whom this responsibility primarily rests. Rather, it is the parents.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children" (CCC entry 2223), and parents are told that through the grace of matrimony, they "receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children" (entry 2225). This includes, from an early age, reading to our children and grandchildren Bible stories and stories of the lives of the saints, as well as great Christian works such as The Chronicles of Narnia. It means providing them with a steady diet of good Christian CDs and videos and weeding out all the dubious

ones from our collection that can only cause the loss of their innocence and the confusion of their developing moral character.

In other words, "Veggie Tales" are in; Pokemon is out!

It means tight restrictions on the cultural rot flowing into our homes through the TV set ("The Devil's tabernacle," as Mother Angelica once called it) and from the Internet. It means praying together as a family, too — perhaps by offering a family Rosary or Chaplet of The Divine Mercy or by reciting as prayers the lyrics of good Christian hymns at bedtime.

We do not have to turn our homes into monasteries and convents, but we do have to heed the exhortation of St. Paul: "Do not be conformed to this world, be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:2).

Beyond our homes, of course, the need for instruction in the true faith is equally urgent. Often there is no more effective (and no less threatening) way to share the Catholic faith with our non-Catholic friends than to do so in the natural course of friendship itself. For Christmases or birthdays, why not give your friends or family members a favorite Catholic book that clearly explains the faith? Most non-Catholics (and non-practicing Catholics) are so full of misinformation about what the Church actually teaches and about the role of the Church down through history that even if a good book given away does no more than break down a few of the prejudices they may hold about Catholicism, then count it as a work of mercy well done.

Try one of these books as gift ideas (all in print at the moment): *Fundamentals of the Faith*, by Peter Kreeft; *Theology for Beginners*, by F.J. Sheed; *Catholic and Christian*, by Alan Shreck (a book that is especially good to share with Evangelical Protestant friends); *Orthodoxy*, by G.K. Chesterton; or *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis. Indeed, read the books yourself first! As St. Peter taught us (quote), "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet 3:15).

Fifth: Be Patient With Those in Error

This is a tough one. In God's merciful love, we certainly ought to share the Catholic Faith with those who are far from Him because they need His mercy so badly. (Don't we all!) It is an act of merciful love to share the faith with those who need it and to pray for them. On the other hand, we must be patient with God's work in other people's lives. We must never harass, pressure, or manipulate anyone. There is a famous bumper sticker that reads, "Please be patient: God is not finished with me yet!" That sums up pretty well what our attitude should be. Our job is but to sow the seeds of faith in the hearts and minds of those who are in grievous error. But change has to come in God's own time. Even if we never see for ourselves the fruit of our efforts, God will surely do His part to water with the grace of conversion the seeds we have planted, when and if people are ready to receive that gift. Until then, we are just to be patient with those in error, to share the truth with them as best we can

(acknowledging all the while our own limited grasp of God's revealed truth and limited capacity to adequately express that truth to others), and to pray for them, trusting in God's mercy and patience with us all.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class Lecture #3:

The ABCs of Mercy: “Completely Trust in God’s Mercy”

1. What does “trust” in Divine Mercy really mean? In what way does it involve trust to offer up prayers of petition and intercession, or to commit yourself to keeping God’s commandments?

To trust is to “entrust” your whole life to Jesus Christ, letting Him be “Lord” of every aspect of your life. Prayer and intercession involves the trust that He always hears and responds. Keeping His commandments involves trusting that His ways are the best path for us to tread.

2. Review the four ways we can help ourselves grow in trust in God’s mercy, as discussed in this class lecture. Can you think of additional ways not covered in the lecture?

The lecture mentioned (1) asking our Lord continually for more trust, (2) being patient with the pace of Our Lord’s work in your heart, (3) meditating on the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her trustful surrender to the Lord, and (4) with the help of grace, acting as if you had the very trust that you are seeking. Another way not mentioned in the talk would be opening your heart to the grace of trust that Christ wants to give you by more frequent sacramental confession and frequent communion.

3. Share with others in the group stories from your own life, or from the lives of others you know, about how Jesus, the Good Shepherd, keeps seeking out lost souls until he finds them, and brings them back to Him through repentance and faith. Can you think of any biblical examples of this as well?

Biblical examples might include the patriarch Jacob in the Old Testament, who tried to run his own life by his own cleverness until God’s angel finally wrestled him into submission (see Genesis 32), and Jonah, who tried to flee from God until the Lord finally “caught” him in the belly of the whale (Jonah 1 and 2), and St. Peter, who kept stumbling in his following of His Master (sinking in the waves of the sea, rebuked, “get behind me Satan,” for not accepting that the Lord must go to His death, and denying Christ three times on the night of our Lord’s arrest), but whom the Good Shepherd never gave up on—and even appointed him the chief shepherd under the Good Shepherd, after he had repented (see John 21).

Study and Discussion Questions for Class Lecture #4:

Tough Questions about Divine Mercy

1. Some spiritual writers have said that to refuse to forgive yourself for sins you have confessed is actually to usurp God's role as Judge of the world—it is to say: "Even if God forgives me, on the basis of the shed blood of His Son on the Cross, I nullify His sentence and condemn myself anyway." Are there other ways in our lives that we tend to usurp God's role in the universe and try to take it upon ourselves, for example, His role as providential provider for our own needs, and the needs of our loved ones? His role as the only all-seeing Being, the one who knows precisely what each person deserves and needs, and the best answer to every social problem? How do attempts to take over God's role in these areas tend to distort and damage human life and human relationships?

We always need to remember that we cannot do God's job as well as He can: trying to do so leads to human misery on every level. In society, it leads to ill-conceived, merely human attempts to solve family and social problems. It can also lead to festering resentments and acts of vengeance (when we think we truly know what everyone "deserves"), or to a life of worry and anxiety because we do not trust in God to take care of our true and deepest needs, and to work out His providential plan for our lives.

2. Jesus taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Why should we love ourselves, according to the Bible? What is a proper measure of love for oneself as a true disciple of Jesus Christ? What kinds of things should you be sure to do for yourself— to meet your bodily, social, and spiritual needs—as a child of God? How can this proper measure of self-love strengthen and enable us to love others?

We need to lovingly provide ourselves with all that we need to follow the Lord and have the strength to do His will, especially time for prayer and spiritual reading, frequent reception of the sacraments, and even, wherever possible, all that we need to meet our basic human bodily and social needs: proper food, rest, medical care, and cultivation of wholesome friendships. These things in proper measure will "energize" us and better enable us to follow Christ's plan for our lives.

3. What does this class lecture tell us about the meaning of the "anger" and "wrath" of God? What do we do that subjects us to the wrath of God?

Here is the text of part of the class lecture that dealt with this subject:

Now that we know what God's anger is not, let's try to define what it is: God's anger is an expression of His attribute of 'justice,' a justice by which He permits the self-destructive effects of sin and evil to run their course, thereby rendering to the sinner his due. In other words, God's "wrath" means that if we are stubbornly evil and impenitent, He will permit our sins to have their inevitable destructive (and especially self-destructive) effects upon our bodies and souls. This doesn't mean that God doesn't love us: it is precisely because He loves us that He gives us the freedom to choose between good and evil, and fashion our own final destiny.

It's all there in the first chapter of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans. If we insist on going our own way, following the "I did it my way" philosophy (made famous in Frank Sinatra's hit song!), then God's anger means that He will respect the freedom He gave to us, and say to us, in effect: "OK, do it your way, if you insist. I will not compel you to turn away from your sins and be sanctified. But if you do decide to 'do it your way,' you will have to experience the rotten fruits — the self-destructive effects — of the path you have chosen, both in this life and the life to come."

For those cruel and cold-hearted souls who remain stubbornly impenitent, and who resist God's grace to the end of their lives, God's anger takes the form of the "eternal punishment" of sinners, which simply means that He allows them to turn their backs on Him and live forever in their self-chosen exile from the light of His countenance. That is why the Catechism defines "hell" as essentially "a state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed" (Catechism entry 1033). One time, Jesus said to Sister Faustina that when sinful souls "bring all My graces to naught, I begin to be angry with them, leaving them alone and giving them what they want" (Diary Entry 1728).

Study and Discussion Questions for Class Lecture #5:

Tough Questions about Divine Mercy, Continued

1. If someone said to you, "There can't be a God of merciful love; just look at all the innocent suffering in the world," how could you helpfully respond to their doubt and anguish?

If the class struggles with this—very difficult!—question, you might read back to them the following text from the lecture:

So, what is God up to when He permits innocent people to suffer — prolonged, grinding misery — and prayerful appeals to His mercy seem to fall on deaf ears? I honestly don't know.

But I have to set what I do not know against what I DO know. There IS a God of infinite power and wisdom and goodness; I know enough philosophy to be sure that we have very strong rational grounds for believing in the existence of an all-knowing, all-powerful Creator of this universe. And I know that Jesus Christ was and is the true Son of God; I know enough historical evidence about Jesus to be able to say beyond a reasonable doubt that He was not a liar nor a lunatic, but just who He claimed to be. In addition to all that, I have known and experienced Him personally — His merciful and undeserved love for me — in the gospels, in the Blessed Sacrament, in prayer, in times of solitude, in the sun rising in the morning, and the wind rustling the trees, in His whisper in the depths of my heart, calling me to do good and shun evil. So I have met Him: I cannot deny that. No matter how far away He may seem to be at times, I cannot deny that I have known Him when He was near!

I wish I could understand why the infinitely powerful and merciful God did not grant my prayers about my little daughter — an innocent sufferer for sure—until she was 13 years old. I wish I could understand why He does not grant your prayers for medical aid in a way that, to us, seems only merciful and right. But I can't fully understand these things. I just know that He knows so much more than we do — infinitely more — and He sees so much more than we see. Saint Paul wrote: "all things work together unto good to them that love God" (Rom 8:38). Saint Paul did not promise that we would be able to SEE how all things work out for good to those who trust God — only that they will. Only in heaven shall we see all things clearly, and all the reasons why (I Cor 13:12).

That's why the heart of St. Faustina's spirituality is not the Chaplet, or the Image, or the Feast, but the simple signature at the bottom of the Image: "Jesus, I trust in You." It means that we need to trust either that Jesus will grant us what we ask for in faith, or if not that, then He will grant whatever He knows is best for us, which somehow, some way, must be better for us than we could either ask or imagine. It has to be — just because He is.

2. In this class lecture Dr. Stackpole read the text of a letter from a woman named Angela who had discovered for herself the value of the Catholic tradition of “offering up” one’s unavoidable sufferings for the good of others, and for the Church. How does this approach to suffering fit with the teachings of St. Paul? How might it help us grow in faith and love in the midst of life’s heaviest crosses?

Read Colossians 1:24 together. Discuss how this practice of offering up one’s unavoidable sufferings enables us to turn pain and tragedy into a powerful vocation of love and service.

3. Toward the end of this lecture, Dr. Stackpole shared his own personal testimony to the powerful message of divine love and compassion expressed through the crucifix, a central image and symbol in the Catholic tradition. Did this resonate with your own experience of Catholicism? Are there other sacred images in the Catholic tradition that you find even more helpful, comforting, or inspiring in your walk with Christ? If so, why?

It may be helpful to quote for the group the passage from the lecture to which the question refers:

So, in Catholicism I found the bloody crucifixes not to be disturbing but just plain honest, because that's precisely where most of us are, most of the time, in one way or another: we are with Jesus, on the Cross. The fact that the Son of God Himself once cried out on the Cross: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34)—a passage that is one of the greatest comforts of the Catholic Faith to me—means that there is no human misery that our Savior has not taken on His own Heart. It means that by taking flesh and dwelling among us as a real human being, He has shared with us all the joys, pains, and sorrows of the human journey, and He does not ask us to walk through any darkness or pain that He has not walked through Himself. As the prophet Isaiah said, "Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. ... and by His stripes we are healed" (Is 53:4-5). It is precisely because He descended into the very depths of total human affliction for us on the Cross, and rose again, that I can believe He can raise us up from those depths to new life — even everlasting life. Nothing is a greater sign of hope to me than the Cross.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #6:

The Witness of St. Faustina to Divine Mercy

1. This class makes a distinction between strictly private revelations (i.e., those intended primarily for the benefit of the individual who receives them), and revelations given to chosen souls to be communicated to the wider church, sometimes called “prophetic revelations.” What are some of the ways that we know that the revelations given to St. Bernadette of Lourdes, the three children of Fatima, and St. Faustina are authentic prophetic revelations from God?

In each case, there was sufficient evidence of the sanity and virtuous character of the recipients of these revelations, the Catholic orthodoxy of the messages received, and abundant fruit that they bore of conversions to the faith and spiritual renewal. These revelations were also accompanied by confirming miracles, such as the miracles of healing at Lourdes, and the miracle of the sun at Fatima. Each of these revelations also received papal recognition, in so far as the Holy See encouraged the faithful to pay heed to them, popes paid visits to the shrines and tombs of the saints associated with them, and canonized the visionaries.

2. Can you make the case that St. Faustina ought to be named a doctor of the Church one day? Does she meet the criteria of (a) truly outstanding holiness, (b) depth and clarity of doctrinal insight that unfolds for the Church the mysteries of the Faith, (c) an extensive body of writings that contributes to the Sacred Tradition of the Church, and (d) a “doctor” who applies the precise spiritual/intellectual remedy needed by the People of God in a particular era?

Answers here will vary.

3. What are the differences and similarities between the Rosary and the Chaplet? Is there room in the devotional life of the Church for both?

They are similar in that both are vocal prayers said with the help of ordinary rosary beads. The main differences between them include the Chaplet is primarily a prayer of intercession for an outpouring of Divine Mercy on the world, while the Rosary is primarily a prayer of meditation on the Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful, and Glorious Mysteries of the Faith—although the Rosary is especially recommended by our Lady as an intercessory prayer for world peace.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #7:

Tough Questions on the Life and Witness of St. Faustina

1. Read together St. Faustina's Diary, entry 1318, then recall the teaching in this lecture that "Misery is what [St. Faustina] calls the state of her soul, and of any soul, if you exclude God from the picture. In other words, take away God's power and grace, and what are we? Nothing but misery." Discuss those times in your life when you wandered far from God's power and grace, and had first-hand personal experience of your own "misery," of what you are when you are truly far from God.

Answers to this question will vary based on personal experience.

2. Re-read the prayer of thanksgiving by St. Faustina from her Diary, entry 343, quoted in this lecture. How can we possibly, honestly give thanks for all the crosses we suffer in life?—How can it be that they are all a "gift of your eternal Heart," as St. Faustina says? On what grounds can we honestly pray with St. Faustina: "Thank you, oh Jesus, for everything"?

The crosses we suffer in this life call us to let go of our trust in creatures and earthly securities and place our ultimate trust only in Jesus Christ, who alone is completely trustworthy. We can offer up our crosses in reparation for our sins and for an outpouring of grace upon others (see Col 1:24), all in preparation for eternal life. Finally, we can trust that "all things work together for good for them that love God" (Rom 8:28)—even when we cannot yet see how God is "writing straight with crooked lines" in the situation. But our faith in His loving providence and infinite wisdom assures us that it is happening, whether we can see it happening right away or not!

3. Did Jesus call St. Faustina to leave her religious order and found a new one dedicated to praying for Divine Mercy for the world? Did He promise her that she would one day live in that new order herself? Or did St. Faustina misunderstand some aspect of these messages to her? What do you think?

Answers to this question will vary.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #8:

Tough Questions on the Life and Witness of St. Faustina, Continued

1. How can we understand the revelation given by Christ to St. Faustina which she recorded in Diary, entry 964-965, that the “last hope of salvation” for souls is “the Feast of My Mercy”? What are the options here? If the Feast really is the “last plank” of hope for humanity, what does this imply about how we should promote it—and how we should celebrate the Feast?

Either St. Faustina misunderstood this revelation from our Lord (after all, she was not infallible, and elsewhere in the Diary our Lord tells her it is trust in His mercy that is the only hope for humanity), or this revelation is true in the sense that the most trust-filled prayers of the Church are likely to be prompted by the liturgy of the Eucharist on Divine Mercy Sunday, and offered up on that day—and through those prayers God’s will may be to pour out special graces for the salvation of the world.

2. Read again Diary entry 1656 and what St. Faustina says there about surrender to God’s permissive will. Is this hard to do when we simply don’t see why God permits the crosses that He wills to permit in our lives? Share with the group those times in your life when you have had to walk forward in life by sheer faith, without understanding how God’s plan might be working out in the situation at all.

Answers will vary based on personal experience.

3. As Vatican II teaches, all true states and vocations in life can and should be paths to holiness, but how do we know that the state of consecrated virginity can be a special and supreme path to the very heights of holiness, for those who are called to it, and who fully cooperate with divine grace in living it out?

The superiority (in the abstract) of the life of consecrated virginity is taught by our Lord in Matthew 19, by St. Paul in I Corinthians 7, by the Council of Trent in the 16th century, and by Popes Pius XII and Bl. John Paul II in the 20th century—all as quoted in the class lecture. It is evident from its unique advantages: a more precise imitation of the life of our Lord (Himself a celibate), greater freedom for the service of God’s people, more opportunities for solitude and prayer, and the voluntary embrace of the cross in ways additional to the crosses that we are asked to carry from the misfortunes of life, namely, the crosses of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Yet these crosses can be extraordinarily fruitful for the spiritual life.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #9:

1. How is the fact that God became incarnate in the world, first of all as a little child, an expression of His merciful love for us? What does His Holy Childhood express to us that we need to appreciate?

This mystery of the Faith can deepen our trust in God because we are reassured that we have nothing to fear from a God who would “stoop so low as to become a little child for us.... He disarms our fear of His justice with His littleness” (from the class lecture).

2. What is the Way of Spiritual Childhood taught by both St. Faustina and St. Therese of Lisieux? Why can we say it is not a “childish” form of spirituality?

The following quote from the class lecture may help with the second part of the question:

The way of spiritual childhood, however, is not childish. It's not excessively sentimental or naive. Rather it involves total surrender to our Heavenly Father's providential care, total abandonment of our own plans, our own opinions and self-will, and radical trust in God. You know, Saint Faustina knew very well how difficult such child-like trust in God could be, especially in times of trouble and sorrow. She knew that the key was to rely on Jesus rather than herself every step of the way. One time while adoring the Blessed Sacrament, she described a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus in her arms. Mary told her to “accept all that God asked of you like a little child without questioning.” Saint Faustina prayed to the Lord in response, “Do with me as you please. I am ready for everything, but You, Oh Lord, must not abandon me, even for a moment.” That's Diary entry 529.

3. What are some of the things that St. Faustina learned that bring consolation to the Heart of Jesus? Is His longing to be consoled by us an expression of His own emotional fragility and weakness, or an expression of His selfless love for us—or both? Please explain.

St. Faustina learned that we can bring solace and comfort to the Heart of Jesus in a variety of ways: when we offer up our sufferings for the good of souls, when we meditate on His sufferings with compassion, when we perform works of mercy, when we visit Him in the Blessed Sacrament to receive His grace, when we pray for sinners, and when we trust in Him for His mercy and forgiveness.

For the second part of the question, the following text from the class lecture may need to be quoted to the group:

What Saint Faustina's diary shows us is that our Lord's desire for consolation for Himself is actually an expression of His selfless, self-giving love for us. What causes Him sorrow is simply our refusal to receive all the mercy and grace that He longs to shower upon us: our refusal to repent, the blocking up of our hearts through mistrust. What an awesome Savior we have. Not only His teachings and deeds, but even the affections of His heart are manifestations of his pure and boundless love for His heavenly Father, and for each one of us.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #10:

The Image of The Divine Mercy

1. What are some of the basic features of the two great traditions of Sacred Art in the Church: the Byzantine tradition of the holy icons, and the Western tradition of holy pictures and statues?

Be sure to point out that Byzantine holy icons are “windows into heaven,” emphasizing the radiant glory of Christ, the Blessed Virgin, the angels and saints as they are right now in heaven. Western statues and holy images, however, tend to emphasize the lowly humanity of Jesus, Mary, and the saints, especially as they were during their sojourn on earth, and also the tender compassion and affections of our Lord and His Mother, as in images of the sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

2. Share with the group your favorite sacred images of Jesus. What is it that draws you to Christ through these paintings, sculptures, or icons? What is it that most speaks to your mind and heart through the Image of The Divine Mercy?

Answers will vary.

3. Look at the Image of The Divine Mercy and note the elements of an authentic version of the Image listed by Bl. Fr. Michael Sopocko, St. Faustina’s spiritual director:

"The image represents Christ in a walking posture against a dark background in a white garment, girdled by a band or belt or cincture. With the right hand raised to the height of the shoulder, He is blessing, and with the left one, with two fingers, He is opening the garments somewhat in the area of the Heart, which is not visible, from which are coming out rays, (on the viewer's right, a pale or colorless one, and on the left, a red one), in various directions, but principally toward the viewer. Sister Faustina called attention to this, that the right hand not be raised above the shoulder, not to bend forward, and only place the left foot forward to indicate movement, that the garment be long and somewhat fallen into folds at the bottom, that the Lord Jesus' gaze be directed a bit toward the bottom, as it happens when standing one looks at a point on the ground, a few steps away, that the expression on the face of Jesus be gracious and merciful, that the fingers of the right hand be upright, erect, and freely lie close together, and on the left hand, that the thumb and index finger hold open the garment, that the rays not be like ribbons or bands, hanging down toward the ground, but that with intermittent broken strips or streaks, they be directed toward the viewer and slightly toward the sides, coloring to a certain degree the hands and surrounding objects, that these rays be transparent in such a way that through them the band, belt, or cincture and the garment be visible, that saturation of the rays with redness and

whiteness be greatest at the source in the area of the heart, and then slowly diminish and vanish, fade away."

Why can there never be a perfectly painted Image of Jesus, The Divine Mercy?

There can never be a perfect image of our Savior precisely because the risen and glorified Jesus cannot be fully captured by the finite skills of any human artist.

Class #11: Midterm Exam

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #12:

Divine Mercy Sunday

1. Why did Our Lord tell St. Faustina that He wanted the Image of The Divine Mercy to be publicly venerated on the First Sunday After Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)?

Some reasons are given in the following quote from the class lecture:

It should come as no surprise that Jesus wanted this image to be venerated on Divine Mercy Sunday itself. After all, the image of the Divine Mercy sums up the whole devotion to God's mercy in one picture. As we said before in this course, it depicts His merciful love for us both in His Passion, in the blood and water flowing from His breast as it did on Calvary, and in the Resurrection, the whole Pascal mystery. Also in the inscription at the bottom of the image, we find that summary of the basic response that Jesus asks of each one of us to His merciful love, "Jesus, I trust in You." In short, our Lord not only wants His priests to proclaim the message of Divine Mercy in words on that day, He also wants the message to be proclaimed through a sacred image, a visual aid so to speak, because He knows the truth of what we commonly say, a picture really is worth a thousand words.

2. Review the differences between a plenary indulgence and the extraordinary graces promised by Jesus for devout communicants on Divine Mercy Sunday itself. Why do you think that Our Lord offers us these extraordinary graces, and also (through His Church) a plenary indulgence on the same Feast Day?

With regard to the first part of the question, it may be helpful for the group to review the differences precisely as they were laid out in the class lecture, as follows:

Now all of this leads to the obvious question: "What's the difference between the special graces promised by Jesus for devout Communicants on Divine Mercy Sunday and the plenary indulgence for Divine Mercy Sunday devotions, that was instituted in 2002 by Pope John Paul II? Are they the same thing, or are they different? Well, obviously they are not the same thing. The main difference of course is that an indulgence is something offered to the faithful by the Church, as the keeper of the keys of the kingdom with the authority to bind and loose, see Matthew 16, 17-19, for example. The special graces of Divine Mercy Sunday, on the other hand were promised directly by our Lord through a prophetic revelation given to Saint Faustina, see the diary of Sister Faustina, entry 699. The Church has not officially ruled that this particular promise was an

authentic supernatural revelation, and no Catholic is required to believe it as a matter of faith, but the Church has discerned in various ways there's nothing that violates Catholic doctrine in this promise.

Briefly, here are the other main differences between the special graces promised by Jesus for Mercy Sunday, and the plenary indulgence offered by the Church for special devotions to the Divine Mercy on that same day.

Number one, the special graces that our Lord promised for Divine Mercy Sunday come solely through the reception of Holy Communion on that day in a state of grace, with trust in the Divine Mercy. Any plenary indulgence granted by the Church on the other hand, involves the fulfillment of a number of conditions, including prayer for the Pope's intentions, Confession, and Holy Eucharist, and the carrying out of a special indulgence work, in this case, participating in public devotions to the Divine Mercy on Divine Mercy Sunday itself.

Number Two, the special graces promised by our Lord for Divine Mercy Sunday can be received by a soul in a state of grace, but with imperfect love for God, and imperfect contrition for sin, as long as the soul trusts in the mercy of God and clings to Him because of His promised benefits. A plenary indulgence, however, can only be obtained through the performance of an indulgenced work as an expression of pure love of God, that is, with no attachment to sin in one's soul whatsoever. Not attached to sin, the soul is attached to God. If the intentions of one's indulgenced work are not pure, (say the work is done out of fear of Hell, or Purgatory, or loathing for oneself, or, even the desire to impress one's friends and relatives mixed in there, rather than purely out of love of God), then the indulgence obtained will be only partial, not plenary.

Number three, the special graces that our Lord promised for Divine Mercy Sunday can only be received for oneself, through the devout reception of Holy Communion on Divine Mercy Sunday. As stated before, a plenary indulgence, however, can be offered for oneself or for souls suffering in Purgatory.

Number four, the most special grace promised by our Lord for Divine Mercy Sunday is nothing less than the equivalent of a complete renewal of baptismal grace in the soul, complete remission or forgiveness of sins and punishment. Such a measure of grace can only be received otherwise through baptism itself, through making a sacramental confession, or performing an indulgenced work, as an act of perfect contrition of sin out of pure love for God. You can read about this (making a confession, as a way of renewing baptismal grace) in the writings of Saint Catherine of Sienna. As you can see, this is no easy topic, but again, you can find more in depth treatment of the same subject by reading our essay, "Understanding Divine Mercy Sunday," at www.thedivinemercy.org in the JPPI Institute of Divine Mercy Section of that website.

With regard to the second part of the question, clearly, the Lord wanted us to be able to obtain the extraordinary graces for ourselves as communicants, as well as a plenary indulgence for a soul in purgatory on this wonderful day.

3. What does the phrase “complete remission of sins and punishment” mean in our Lord’s promises to St. Faustina regarding the devout reception of Holy Communion on Divine Mercy Sunday? What is meant by remission of “sins,” and what is meant by remission of “punishment”?

Here again, direct reference to the text of the lecture may be helpful to the group:

When we talk about the remission of sins and punishment, we're speaking about two very different aspects of reconciliation with God. Remission of "punishment" obviously refers to the judicial aspect: God pardons us of the debt we owe to His divine justice for our sins. We offended Him, we wronged Him, and He has a right to expect compensation, restitution or reparation of some kind from us. Based on the merits of the life, agony, and passion of His Divine Son, Jesus Christ, when we repent of our sins, He remits what we owe to Him, wipes the slate clean, so to speak. Remission of "sins," on the other hand, refers to the more relational aspect of reconciliation. Sins are remitted when God restores to us His friendship, pouring His Holy Spirit into our hearts, filling our hearts again with sanctifying grace, which includes the virtues of faith, hope, and love. God remits all sins and punishment whenever by the help of His grace we obtain, what the theologians call "perfect contrition," in other words, repentance for sin out of pure love for God, which for most of us, I'm afraid, is exceptionally rare. The trouble is that most of us are contrite for our sins from mixed reasons. Love of God, yes, is probably involved, but also fear of punishment, and disgust at ourselves, maybe even social embarrassment. In this case, in response to such imperfect contrition, God remits the "eternal punishment" for our mortal sins. He will not consign us to Hell, but "temporal punishment" for them remains. In other words, we are still in a state of partial moral debt to Him, because we have not fully repented of those sins.

With the help of His grace, and in union with Christ, the temporal punishment still due for our sins can be remitted in a number of ways: by prayer, penance, good works, and so on, acts that are medicinal to our souls, helping us to obtain a pure love of God and a deeper contrition.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #13:

Divine Mercy Sunday, Continued

1. Why did our Lord ask for us to go to confession in preparation for Holy Communion on the Feast of Divine Mercy Sunday?

The Sacrament of Reconciliation can remove the obstacles to all the graces of merciful love that our Lord wants to pour into our hearts on that day. The class lecture stated:

All of Lent should be a preparation to make a good confession in order to receive Holy Communion with an open and trusting heart on Easter Sunday, and on the second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday. Sin, without repentance, is the only obstacle that prevents Jesus Christ from deeply healing and sanctifying our souls on these great feast days. That's why it's best not to count the days before these feasts and try to abide by some minimum requirement about when to make your confession. Rather, take an inventory of your heart. If there is anything in your heart that is impeding your love for Jesus, and His for You, any grudge still held, any despair or mistrust, any kind word left unsaid, any duty seriously neglected, this is the time for a spring cleaning of the soul. Make a good confession, and then try your best with the help of grace to keep your soul clean, and open, and ready to receive our Savior in Holy Communion on the first and second Sundays of Easter. Even if you have not committed any mortal sins that need confessing, confessing venial sins is also a good practice, because it removes obstacles to all that the Lord wants to do in your heart, so clean them out, too.

2. This class lecture states that the main reason that some Catholics oppose the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday, as well as the public recitation of the Divine Mercy Novena at this time of the liturgical year, is that they believe we should never allow “devotions” or “private revelations” to intrude upon the Celebration of Easter, or obscure the message of the liturgies of Holy Week and Easter. How could you respond to this (all too common) misunderstanding about the Novena and the Feast of The Divine Mercy?

Divine Mercy Sunday is not a new feast day in the Church calendar, but a new, additional title for a “solemnity” (feast of the highest class) in the Church that already proclaimed the message of God’s mercy in the traditional prayers and readings assigned for that day in the Roman Missal. Moreover, use of St. Faustina’s devotion to The Divine Mercy—in particular the Image and the Chaplet—amplify rather than obscure the meaning of the day, much as the Stations of the Cross, while in no way required by the Church to be used on Good Friday, are often used to amplify the meaning of that day in most parishes. Finally, the Holy See itself established Divine Mercy Sunday for the universal Church in its decree of May 5, 2000.

3. Can we be certain that Jesus asked the Church, through St. Faustina, to establish the Feast of The Divine Mercy, and that He promised special graces to those who receive Holy Communion in a state of grace and trust in His mercy on that day? If so, on what basis?

Yes, with “moral certainty,” i.e., as a judgment of prudence that it is true beyond a reasonable doubt that our Lord gave her this revelation. The matter was summarized in the class lecture as follows:

The Church does indeed make a distinction between private revelations and the public revelation of Divine truth revealed to the apostles, as definitively and infallibly proclaimed by the sacred tradition and the Church's Magisterium. Here's what the Catechism has to say about this matter, in entry number 67: "Throughout the ages, there have been so called, private revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ definitive revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. Guided by the Magisterium of the Church, the *sensus fidelium* knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church." Look at that last line again. The *sensus fidelium*, means the capacity of the faithful to hear and discern the voice of Christ calling. I would argue that this is precisely what the faithful have discerned with regard to the private revelations of Saint Faustina in general, and her revelations about Divine Mercy Sunday in particular, or again, perhaps best to call them, prophetic revelations, since they were intended for the whole Church, and not just for herself as a private individual. As a matter of fact, never before, in the history of the Church has there been such a rapid, widespread embrace by the Catholic faithful of any set of private or prophetic revelations given to any saint.

Secondly, the Bishops—especially Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI—have warmly embraced Saint Faustina's writings and her message. Unless the Holy Spirit has abandoned the Church, which of course is impossible, one would have to be blind not to see the hand of the Holy Spirit at work in this discernment process.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #14:

The Chaplet of Divine Mercy

1. Why does the Chaplet of Divine Mercy start out by addressing God as “Eternal Father” rather than simply as “Merciful Father”?

The class lecture puts it this way:

We also call Him "Eternal Father" here. Why don't we start by calling Him “Almighty Father” or “Heavenly Father” or, even better, Merciful Father? Why focus on His Eternity in this context? There's a special reason for the focus on His eternal divine nature, here, I think. As we saw earlier in this course, God's eternity means that every moment of time is always present before Him. He sees with His infinite intellect all the past all the present, and all the future, always before His gaze. What the Father sees from all eternity, therefore, includes the Life, Agony, and Passion of His beloved Son. In other words, the Father has ever before His eyes, so to speak, His Son's perfect offering and perfect sacrifice for sins. He also sees all the Masses all over the world in which the Church pleads, in Christ and with Christ, that all the graces He won for us by His sacrifice may be poured out upon the world.

It is only because God is our eternal Father who has all these things ever before His gaze, that we can confidently state the second line of the chaplet, "I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly Beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ." Notice that what we offer here to the Father is what He sees from all Eternity: the self-offering, the self-sacrifice of His Son. We offer this to Him in the sense that we pray all our chaplets to the Father solely on the basis of what is most precious to Him in the whole universe, namely, the loving obedience unto death of Jesus, His Son. So we offer Christ's sacrifice to the Father, in the sense that all our pleas to the Father for an outpouring of His mercy upon the world, are made solely on the basis of Christ's perfect sacrifice, with all its abundant merits. And we pray that all the graces that Jesus merited for us by His life and death may be poured out upon us.

2. What does the Chaplet mean when it repeats over and over the phrase, “For the sake of his sorrowful passion, have mercy on us, and on the whole world”?

Essentially, it is a prayer that all the graces that our Lord won for us, at so great a cost, might not be wasted. As the class lecture stated:

The next line of the chaplet says, "For the sake of His sorrowful Passion." Repeated over and over, this part of the chaplet is not just a repeat of the first part. We're not praying here that the Son of God's sacrifice may cover our sins, compensating divine justice for them. Rather the original Polish of this line of the chaplet suggests that a new prayer intention is being introduced.

Father Ignacy Rozycki, the theologian who examined the writings of Sister Faustina as part of the Church's official investigation into her life and virtues, explained the meaning of the phrase of the chaplet like this: 'For the sake of His sorrowful Passion' is not an appeal to the satisfaction which Jesus offered for our sins. Fidelity to the spirit and letter of the devotion demands rather an appeal to the love and mercy of the Father and the Son for us, and to that love which is testified by the sufferings of the Son. In other words, we again emphasize the strongest motive upon which the efficacy of the chaplet is based. We briefly call, 'May so much hardship, so much suffering, not be in vain.' We repeat the same idea which Thomas of Celano expressed in the hymn, *Dies Ire*: "exhausted You sought me, crucified You saved me, may Your wounds not be in vain." Out of love for Jesus our Savior, therefore, we pray to the Father that all that Jesus suffered for us might not be wasted, but might bring about our salvation, as the graces He won for us by His agony and Passion pour out upon us from His merciful Heart. The chaplet, therefore, like the Mass, emphasizes the Son of God's sacrifice and reveals the depth of His merciful love for this lost and broken world. If our Savior was willing to go that far, even to the point of accepting a horrible death by public torture on the Cross for us, and experiencing in His Heart, the feeling of total abandonment by His Heavenly Father, then how can we not love Him and Trust Him in return? As Saint Paul wrote, in his epistle to the Romans, "God showed His love for us in this: that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans Chapter 5, verses 6 through 8).

3. What is an act of "reparation"—and what great act of reparation did Jesus make for our sins? Also, what is the distinction in the Catholic tradition between "imperfect" and "perfect" contrition for sin? Attaining only "imperfect contrition" for sin leaves the soul in what situation with regard to its relationship with God? How can prayers and penances, including praying the Chaplet, remove any remaining "punishment due for sin"?

The answer to this question is summarized in the class lecture, as follows:

First of all, what is an act of reparation? As you know already, it's an act of restitution, or a making compensation to someone for wrongs we have done to them, and in some way, repairing any damage that we have done by our wrong doing. Now some people may ask, "Why do we need to make restitution to God for our sins? Didn't Jesus die for us on the Cross to make up for our sins?" Well, yes, of course He did. But in order for us to make His great act of reparation our own, that is, in order for it to cover completely my own sins, I have to fully repent, and have faith in Him. In other words, I have to be fully contrite from my sins and surrender my heart completely to Him. The trouble is, as I've said before, that most of us are lacking to some degree in such repentance and faith. The Catechism says in entry 1431, "Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with our whole heart, and end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life with hope in God's mercy, and trust in the help of His grace."

Again, sadly, most of us are in a state of imperfect repentance and faith, what the Church calls, "Imperfect contrition for sin." We may be sorry for our sins to some extent, but more out of fear of divine punishment, or shame and disgust with ourselves, than out of love for Jesus Christ and out of letting Him down. Imperfect contrition, does not fully access the remission of all punishment due to sin, that Jesus Christ won for us, and leaves us with a degree of remaining moral debt to God. Sincere acts of reparation done by the grace of Christ not only help clear this temporal debt of sin, but also deepen our love for Christ and our contrition for sin. We begin to obtain more perfect contrition for sin. In other words, in repentance out of pure love for Jesus, our Savior, we are sorry for our sins because they have betrayed His great love for us, and wounded His Sacred Heart. We are sorry just because we have let Him down. In fact almost any sincere and authentic act of Catholic piety can be offered to God as an act of penance or reparation that deepens our love for Him, and deepens our contrition for our sin. In some ways, the chaplet can be especially useful as an act of reparation, because it focuses our attention on our Lord's principle act of merciful love for us, His sorrowful Passion. We can even offer prayerful acts of reparation to God for the good of others, to open the flood gates, so to speak, to all the graces of repentance and deeper conversion that our Lord wants to pour out upon them from His merciful Heart.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #15

The Chaplet of Divine Mercy, Continued

1. What is the difference between the way God pours out His grace through the sacraments, such as the Anointing of the Sick, and the way He does through devout prayers, such as reciting the Chaplet?

The main difference is that the sacraments confer grace *ex opere operato*. The class lecture explains this as follows:

Prayer opens our hearts to the grace of God by means of the virtue of trust: trust in the heart of the one praying and the one who's the object of our prayer. The more a soul trusts, the more graces that person can obtain for himself and for others. And the more a soul trusts the more graces a soul can receive from the merciful Jesus by means of the prayers said by others. So, if Jesus recommends certain prayers and makes certain promises of special graces by the devout and sincere use of those prayers, it is understood by the Church that they're efficacy in strengthening divine grace to the soul is not automatic, so to speak, but in most cases directly related to the degree of trust in those praying, and those who are the object of prayer.

The sacraments, however, are different. They transmit God's grace to the soul in the Latin phrase "Ex opere operato," which means literally, "by the working of the work," or by the very fact of the actions being performed with the proper form, matter and intention. The Catechism of the Catholic church explains in entries 1127 and 1128: "The Sacraments are efficacious because in them, Christ is at work. It follows that the Sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God. From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated, in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ in His spirit acts in and through it, "independently of the personal holiness of the minister." That means, independently also of any trust in the hearts of the minister or the recipient. In other words, even if the priest administering the sacrament has lost his trust in God, say, he is a priest in a spiritual crisis, and carying on his ministry for the moment, just to pick up his paychecks. And even if the person receiving the sacrament has no trust in God at all, still, the sacrament confers divine grace on the soul when it's done with the right form and the right intention: not by magic, of course, but simply by the promise of God. The sacraments are God's covenanted means of grace, you might say: outward signs given to us by God as sure and certain means by which we may receive the graces they signify.

To be sure, the sacraments will do us little good without the beginnings of trust in the soul, and without our willingness to cooperate with the graces we receive. As the Catechism states, "The fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them." That's entry 1128. Nevertheless, God's willingness to give us His sacramental grace is based on His faithfulness to His promises, not on our dispositions. That is why even the soul living in a state of

mortal sin who receives Holy Communion, receives, in the Blessed Sacrament, the gift of the true Body and Blood of Jesus, just as all the other communicants do (although such a person thereby commits a sin of sacrilege, of course, to his own condemnation, see, 1 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 27).

2. Christ made extraordinary promises about the power of the Chaplet as an intercessory prayer (e.g., "Through the Chaplet you will obtain everything, if what you ask for is compatible with My will," Diary, entry 1731). It is evident, however, that many people say the Chaplet with deep trust in Jesus Christ, for good intentions, and they do not always receive what they ask for. How can we understand this?

The answer to this question has to do with the mystery of human free will as it relates to God's providential guidance of our lives, and of the natural order. The class lecture explains this as follows:

God will not compel us to undergo the healing, sanctifying process that alone can cure us. We have to freely choose and consent to it. So you see, much of this world's suffering is not something that God will magically eliminate for us by reciting the chaplet. Everything is under His providence, so the world is not out of control, of course. And He intends to pour out grace upon us to help us.

The chaplet indeed always helps, but it's not a magic cure for sinful disobedience. Through it, we obtain the graces of conversion and sanctification for many people if only they will consent and cooperate with the graces they are offered by God as a result....

Out of malice, ignorance, or pride, stubborn sinners may not be willing to repent and return to the Lord for forgiveness and help. But our chaplets can obtain for them graces that they are not even ready to ask for yet. In the depths of their hearts, Christ will give them special aid, simply because we have asked for it on their behalf, on the basis of His sorrowful Passion. These special graces will not compel them to turn their hearts to the Lord, of course, but certainly will enable them to do so. As Saint Faustina wrote, recorded in diary entry 1507: "Let no one doubt concerning the goodness of God, even if a person sins were as dark as night, God's mercy is stronger than our misery. One thing alone is necessary, that the sinners set ajar the door of His heart, be it ever so little, to let in a ray of God's merciful grace, and then God will do the rest."

The other form of evil the chaplet does not always seem to work to eliminate is physical suffering, that is, suffering that does not arise directly from human sin, but from sickness, disease, and accident, from misfortunes and natural disasters, and even from the inevitable process of growing old. God has not given us a full and complete answer as to why He often permits these physical evils, in so far as they're not a result of sin, to run their course, often, in spite of our prayers and chaplets....

From our limited vantage point, we only see the way we think His plan should work itself out, but He sees all things, from the vantage point of His infinite wisdom and His boundless mercy. And that's why He sometimes has to permit sufferings that seem to us so pointless and unnecessary. And that's why the summary of the Divine Mercy message and devotion is not "Jesus, I fully understand in every situation what You are doing and permitting and why You are doing and permitting it." But rather, "Jesus, I trust in You." The chaplet, recited in trust does not always bring about what we want to happen, but it opens the door, letting Him fully into the situation so that He can bring about or permit what He knows is best for us.

3. Which parts of the Chaplet may be “stumbling blocks” to those of other Christian traditions, especially Protestant Christians, which makes it very difficult for them to join Catholics in reciting this set of prayers?

The part of the Chaplet in which we “offer” to the Father “the Body and the Blood, Soul and Divinity” of Jesus Christ, “in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world” can be very difficult for those who do not share Catholic belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the consecrated host, or in the doctrine of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #16

More on the Chaplet, and Review of Study Questions (from the *Divine Mercy: A Guide*)

1. Saint Catherine of Siena received an explanation from Jesus Christ about the meaning of the symbolism of the blood and water that gushed forth from His pierced Heart after His death. What does this symbolism mean?

St. Catherine asked our Lord why His side was pierced *after* His death, and she received this reply:

“There were plenty of reasons, but I shall tell you one of the chief. My longing for humankind was infinite, but the actual deed of bearing pain and torment was finite and could never show all the love I had. This is why I wanted you to see My inmost heart, so that you would see that I loved you more than finite suffering could show.”

Thus, our Lord tells St. Catherine that His merciful love is so infinitely deep and broad that it could not be adequately expressed even by His (finite) act of dying for us in torment on the Cross—it overflows, so to speak, the boundaries even of that demonstration of His love, for no finite act could ever fully contain or exhaust it. (From *Divine Mercy: A Guide*, p.142.)

2. Read together the 23rd Psalm, “The Lord is my Shepherd”—and after it St. Bonaventure’s meditation on “Jesus, the Solicitous Shepherd” (*Divine Mercy: A Guide*, pp. 152-153). In what ways does this Psalm make you think of Jesus? What does each of the stanzas of the Psalm mean to you, in your own walk with Christ?

Answers will vary.

3. If you were going to make your own personal list of reasons for having confidence in Divine Mercy (somewhat like St. Alphonsus Liguori’s list), what would you include on it?

Answers will vary, but be sure that the group discussion includes the points mentioned in the quote from *Jesus, Mercy Incarnate*, quoted in *Divine Mercy: A Guide*, pp. 26-27:

In fact, God’s love for His creatures always takes the form of merciful love. As we read in the Psalms (25:10) ‘all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth,’ and again (145:9), ‘His tender mercies are over all His works.’

When He created the world 'ex nihilo,' therefore, and holds it in being at every moment, it is an act of merciful love: His merciful love overcoming the potential nothingness, the possible non-existence of all things.

When the divine Son became incarnate and dwelt among us, that was an act of merciful love too: His merciful love in sharing our lot, showing us the way to the Father, and making the perfect offering for our sins.

When He sends His Holy Spirit into our hearts to refresh and sanctify us, that too is His merciful love: His merciful love pouring into our hearts the power to grow in faith, hope, and love, and to serve him with joy. Psalm 136 says it best; while celebrating all the works of the Lord in creation and redemption, the psalm bears the constant refrain: 'for His mercy endures forever.'

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #17:

The Divine Mercy Novena, Hour of Great Mercy, and Personal Prayer

1. How do we know that intercessory prayer offered during the Hour of Great Mercy, on the basis of the sorrowful passion of Jesus, is especially powerful? Is this because there is something “magic” about that hour? How can we understand the intercessory power of the Hour of Great Mercy?

The class lecture addresses this subject as follows:

Saint Faustina's Diary entry 1320, states, that the 3 o'clock hour is best. On the one hand, I suppose, that 3 o'clock hour is not magic. It's not that we will automatically get whatever we want, if we ask God for it at that time of day. On the other hand, our Lord loves to bind Himself to us in love by covenants: big ones, and little ones. True love is always doing that kind of thing. Just look at all the covenant promises of merciful love that He made to His wayward bride, the people of Israel, in the Old Testament. In entry 1320, Jesus promises special graces to those who pray at the 3 o'clock hour in virtue of His Passion, which I take to mean that He has bound Himself in love to do even more for us when we pray at that hour, if we do so with faith in what He has accomplished for us on the Cross. In other words, at that hour we need to have a firm belief that He truly gave His life for each and every one of us, and we need to pray with complete trust in His merciful love in the light of the Cross. It seems to me that this is one version of the prayer of faith, mentioned or alluded to many times in the New Testament, and in response to which Jesus promised such great and extraordinary divine blessings. You may remember that Jesus said the prayer of faith can move mountains. It's the kind of prayer that leaves the door of our hearts wide open so to speak, to let Christ into our lives and do all that He wants to do, to us, and through us, for the spread of His kingdom.

2. Why is the united prayer of many pure and trustful hearts the most powerful form of intercessory prayer of all?

The united prayers of the faithful opens the door wide to all that Christ wants to do for us and for the sanctification of the world. The class lecture put it this way:

St. Theresa once said, "It's not the magnitude of our actions, but the amount of love that we put into them that matters." In that sense, the intercessory prayers of one perfectly pure, innocent, and trusting heart are of more value to God, (that is, He takes them as the most complete invitation and permission to intervene in our lives, and help us), than many thousands of half-hearted supplications from the lukewarm, and the languid. The best thing of all, therefore, would be for many pure and trusting hearts to pray to God for the same good intentions. That would be both quality and quantity, you might say. And that would really open the flood gates to all the

merciful love that our Father wants to pour out upon us. You know, that's the main thing the Divine Mercy intercessory prayer line is striving for. And it's also why the prayers of children and of those who bear chronic illness and suffering, with faith and love, are of such special merit, and why we should always ask the angels and the saints to intercede for our intentions, most especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, who's radiant heart is pure and full of grace above all creatures. To some extent this is all a mystery too deep for us to understand, of course. But the directives from Heaven and scripture and tradition seem clear enough: pray without ceasing, pray with a loving and trustful heart. As many as possible in heaven and earth, pray together for your good intentions in this same spirit, especially at the Holy Eucharist, or in union with the Eucharistic offering, as in the chaplet—and especially in virtue of Christ's passion, and especially at the 3 o'clock hour. And then stand back and watch out: the doors of the world are then wide open to the God of mercy, the Good Shepherd, the King of Kings who right now, even today, "stands at the door and knocks," (Revelations 3:20). He will work in our lives in surprising and even powerful ways if we open the door to Him. Broken families will be reconciled, and broken bodies healed, broken hearts mended and lost faith restored. In fact, whenever we Christians have prayed like that, united with pure hearts and pure intentions, down through history, tremendous things have happened. Just read your history books.

3. Why does Our Lord ask us to express and reveal to Him all of our miseries and sorrows? Doesn't He know all about them already?

Speaking about them to our Lord in spontaneous prayer is a way we acknowledge and admit their burden on us, and at the same time it opens our hearts wider to His merciful love. Again, the class lecture explains this:

Now we may wonder, why does Jesus ask us to reveal all our miseries to Him? Doesn't He know all about them already? After all, He is our heavenly Lord. Doesn't He see everything, and understand the sorrows of my heart, even better than I do myself? And of course that's perfectly true. He does know all about them already, in the same way you may go to the doctor and he may already have seen your x-rays before you come into the door of his office. But he still needs you to show him your injured limb, because unless you permit him to, he cannot begin to apply the remedy that you need. In the same way Jesus, our beloved physician, the physician of our souls, knows very well what we need even before we ask Him. But asking Him, sincerely sharing everything with Him, is our way of showing Him our spiritual wounds, and trusting our spiritual illnesses into His care. When we do that He takes it as our consent, our permission, if you will, to do all that He can to heal and to sanctify us. That's why Jesus said to Saint Faustina, when she dared to begin to trust in His mercy in a time of great discouragement, "You have a special claim on My mercy, let it act in your poor soul. Let the rays of grace enter your soul. They bring with them light and warmth and life." That's entry 1486. By the way this free and spontaneous way of talking to Jesus and to our heavenly Father in the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Truth, (John 16:13), means that we can and must be completely truthful with Him, even opening to Him our

negative feelings: anger, frustration, even confusion and despair sometimes. Jesus, for example, sometimes prayed to His Father with complete candor, and even brutal honesty. "Abba, Father, all things are possible to Thee, remove this cup from Me," and again, "My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?" That's Saint Mark's gospel, chapters 14 and 15. The Psalms, too, are filled with this kind of honesty before God. Psalm 55: "Give ear to my prayer, oh God, and hide not thyself from my supplication. Attend to me and answer me, I am overcome by my trouble. I am distraught by the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked. For they bring trouble upon me, and in anger they cherish enmity against me. My heart is in anguish within me. The terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me and horror overwhelms me." And yet, at the same time, Jesus and the psalmist always lead us through these dark nights of the soul to a new dawn. By sharing honestly their human, spiritual suffering with our heavenly Father, they worked through it, so to speak, and with the help of His grace, came out on the other side, into the light again. So we're invited to talk with Jesus and our heavenly Father in prayer using our own simple and spontaneous words, any time we wish. How can we be afraid to do so, since He has shown Himself to be the one who loves us with infinite and merciful love?

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #18:

Divine Mercy and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

1. According to Scripture and Catholic Tradition, what did Jesus actually accomplish for us by dying for us on the Cross?

The lecture material mentions several places where Scripture and Tradition actually unfold this mystery of our faith to us. Read together:

- **Mark 10:45**
 - **I Corinthians 6:20**
 - **Galatians 3:13 (cf. Dt 21:23)**
 - **Isaiah 53:5**
 - **I John 4:10**
 - **Romans 5:6-8**
 - **Encyclical of Pope John Paul II, Dives in Misericordia, section 7:**

"In the Passion and Death of Christ, in the fact that the Father did not spare His own Son, but for our own sake made Him sin, absolute justice is expressed, for Christ undergoes the Passion and Cross because of the sins of humanity. This constitutes even a superabundance of justice, for the sins of Man are compensated for by the sacrifice of the Man-God. Nevertheless, this justice, which is properly justice to God's measure, springs completely from love, from the love of the Father and the Son, and completely, bears fruit in love."
 - **Catechism, entry 443:**

"By His obedience unto Death, Jesus accomplished the substitution of the suffering servant who makes an offering for sin when 'He bore the sin of many, and who shall make many to be counted righteous, for He shall bear their iniquities'. Jesus atoned for our faults, and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father."
2. How can we understand Our Lord's statement to St. Faustina, recorded in her Diary, entry 1448, that in the Sacrament of Reconciliation "the greatest miracles take place, and are incessantly repeated"?

There are several parts to this answer, all covered in the following excerpt from the class lecture:

in Diary entry 1448, quoted before, Jesus goes so far as to tell Saint Faustina that in this sacrament, "The greatest miracles take place and are incessantly repeated." The greatest miracles of all. Now we're used to speaking of the miracle of the Mass, Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, that's a pretty great miracle. Or how about the miracle of Christ's resurrection from the dead? Or how about the miracles at Lourdes, Fatima and Guadalupe? Or how about the miracle of the creation of the whole universe out of nothing? But our Lord said these are not the greatest miracles. The greatest miracles, He said, take place in the confessional, and are incessantly repeated. How can we possibly understand this? Saint Thomas Aquinas can give us some help here, I think. In his great Summa, Saint Thomas wrote that the miracle of the restoration and salvation of the soul is, in God's eyes, a greater miracle than the creation of the universe itself. For the material universe is something that is brought into being for a time. But then one day will pass away. A soul that is saved, however, is saved for eternal life. In the case of the salvation of the soul, the effects of God's action last forever. In that sense the creation of the universe is a lesser miracle than the rescue of a single human soul. In fact, all the other great miracles that we just mentioned, (the creation of the universe, Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe, the Mass, even Easter itself), are effected solely by God's power and by His will. He commands, and it is done. But it's not so with the rescue and healing of a human soul. God will not overwhelm a soul by His power. He will not force us to repent. Indeed, He cannot compel us to repent if our reconciliation with Him is to be a free response by His human creations. If God overpowered our human freedom with His grace, compelling us to repent and be healed, then He'd be making us into mere puppets on a string, and not into real friends of God who freely return His love. He does not want to turn us into robots as I've said before. He wants His long lost friends freely to return to Him, and to rejoice in Him. So, for God to convert a sinner and bring Him home to heaven is an even greater achievement than any of His other miracles. For it requires all His wisdom, all His loving skill, without using force, to call to strengthen and guide lost sinners home to His heart. The healing and restoration of a human soul, therefore, especially through sacramental confession, is the greatest miracle of His merciful love.

3. What do we learn from the Gospels, and from St. Faustina's revelations from Christ, about how Our Savior feels when a sinner turns to Him with repentance and faith? What does this tell us about His Heart?

Both the Gospels, and St. Faustina's revelations clearly tell us that our Lord's Heart is filled with joy whenever He is able to find His lost sheep and bring them home. The class lecture put it this way:

As the gospel tells us, whenever the good shepherd finds His lost sheep, He puts them on His shoulders and brings them home rejoicing, Luke chapter 15, verses 5 to 6. Jesus explained this to Saint Faustina, too, as recorded in her diary, (entries 1487, and 1489): "What joy fills my heart when you return to Me. Because you are weak, I take you in My arms and carry you to the home of My Father. In a soul that lives on love alone, I reign as in Heaven. I watch over it day and night.

In it, I find My happiness. My ear is attentive to reach request of its heart. Oh child, especially beloved by Me, apple of My eye, rest a moment near My heart, and taste of the love in which you will delight for all eternity." You know this joy that our Good Shepherd experiences, whenever He recues one of His lost sheep, tells us something very important about His Heart. We commonly say, don't we, that Jesus loves us in spite of our sins. And I think we understand that to mean that He pardons us when we are contrite. He helps us in our struggles, and He puts up with us with great patience. And no doubt all that is true as far as it goes. But the gospels tell us something even more. Our Lord is even more closely bonded to us than that. He actually "likes" us. In other words, He has boundless affection for us. He feels for us when we are suffering and lost, and rejoices for us whenever He is able to relieve or restore us. Notice that the passage from Hebrews that I quoted a moment ago: He sympathizes with us in His human nature. And again, when He finds His lost sheep, Saint Luke's gospel tells us, He puts them on His shoulders and brings them home "rejoicing." In short, Jesus Christ not only loves us with the virtue of charity, He also feels for our plight with tender affection in His human Heart.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #19:

Divine Mercy and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Continued

1. What can we say to encourage and comfort someone who is afflicted by the spiritual condition known as “scruples”?

The class lecture addresses this spiritual affliction as follows:

Well, Vic, you are afflicted by a spiritual condition called “scruples.” In fact, you seem to have gotten yourself into the mental state that unless your confession is perfectly motivated, perfectly prepared, and comprehensive, too, covering all your sins, then maybe you are not forgiven after all, and committing a sin by receiving Holy Communion in such a spiritual state. But confession is not for the perfect, it's for the imperfect; it's medicine for the sin-sick soul. The Church teaches us that even when we make a sacramental confession with imperfect contrition for sin (see, Catechism entry 1453), Our Lord is so generous in mercy that He forgives all our mortal sins, and the eternal punishment due to them, and strengthens us with His sanctifying grace to help us overcome our venial sins. But we must trust Him. At one point in the Diary of Saint Faustina, Jesus complained, "Distrust on the part of souls is tearing at My insides. The distrust of a chosen soul causes Me even greater pain: despite My inexhaustible love for them, they do not trust Me." That's Diary entry number 50. As for leaving out many sins from your confession, not on purpose, as Vic wrote, remember that to do something wrong in the eyes of the Lord, it has to be a conscious and deliberate act of the will. Catechism 1853, for example, says: "The root of sin is in the heart of Man; it is free will." Forgetting something, like some of your past sins in confession, is not a willful act of rebellion against God. It is merely a human weakness, part of our limited human condition. Saint Faustina tells us in her Diary, over and over, that Jesus our Savior is overflowing with compassion for us. He does not hold against us such non deliberate weaknesses, rather He looks on the heart, on our intentions above all, and if we intended to try to confess all the sins troubling our conscience. In other words, if we do not willfully and knowingly cover them up, then all the ones we forgot are forgiven, too.

2. According to the Catholic tradition in general, and Catechism, entry 1864, what is the “unforgiveable sin,” the “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” that Jesus speaks about in Matthew 12:31-32?

This topic is often misunderstood. St. Augustine, and the Catechism, can help us here:

“Saint Augustine by the blasphemy against the Spirit understands the sin of final impenitence, by which an obstinate sinner refuses to be converted, and therefore lives and dies hardened in his

sins." Father Haydock, following Saint Augustine has made a very important point here. Jesus did not say that anyone who commits blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven even if he or she repents of that sin. If a certain kind of sin of blasphemy goes so deep that it's truly unforgivable, there's a good reason for this. But the reason is not because our God of mercy isn't willing to forgive, but because the sinner has rendered himself completely incapable of repentance, hardened beyond recall, if you will. Since God will not compel the person's repentance, there's nothing more He can do for him. He cannot forgive a heart that is stubbornly impenitent to the bitter end. As Jesus said in Revelations 3:20, "I stand at the door and knock." But He will not kick the door down; we have to freely consent to Him and let Him come into our hearts through repentance and faith....

In other words, the blockage is not in God, but in the stubborn impenitence and the hardness of heart of the sinner, right to the end. And this is also the teaching of the Catechism in entry 1864: "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin. For there are no limits to the mercy of God," the Catechism says, "But anyone who deliberately refuses to accept His mercy by repenting rejects the forgiveness of his sins in the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss."

3. Discuss the main similarities between the spirituality of St. Faustina and the spirituality of Bl. Dina Belanger of Quebec (see Divine Mercy: A Guide, pp. 205-206, and 208-212). Do you find any of these points of similarity also helpful to your own walk with Christ?

Answers will vary.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #20:

The Holy Eucharist as a Mystery of Divine Mercy

1. This class lecture states that “when Jesus comes to us in Holy Communion, He never comes alone”—what does this mean? How is this truth manifested in the way Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches have been arranged and decorated over the centuries?

Encourage the group to discuss the sense in which the Eucharist is the gathering together for worship of the whole Body of Christ, in heaven, on earth, and in purgatory. The class lecture explains this as follows:

I want to go back now to that prayer by Saint Faustina recorded in Diary entry number 80 in praise of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. It holds a key to yet another mystery of Divine Mercy in the Mass. She wrote, "Oh King of glory, though You hide Your beauty, yet the eye of my soul rends the veil. I see the angelic choirs giving You honor without cease, and all the heavenly powers praising without cease, and without cease they are saying, 'holy, holy, holy.'" What Saint Faustina saw was all the heavenly powers, all the angelic choirs, all the blessed saints surrounding Jesus in His Eucharistic presence, and praising and glorifying Him forever. In other words, what she saw, was that when Jesus comes to us in the Holy Eucharist, He never comes alone: the whole company of Heaven comes with Him too. After all when He makes Himself miraculously present for us under the outer signs of bread and wine, He does not leave Heaven behind in order to do so. Remember the statement we quoted earlier by Pope Paul VI about the Blessed Sacrament, "It is our very sweet duty to honor and adore the Blessed Host, which our eyes see, the Incarnate Word whom they cannot see, and who, without leaving Heaven is made present before us." So, if Jesus becomes present for us in a special way, in the Eucharistic elements, yet without leaving Heaven, then all those who are with Him in Heaven, must in some way be present with Him also at the Holy Eucharist. I mean of course, the angels who adore Him, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints who glorify Him, all those who have finished the race who have fought the good fight, and who know rest with Him in eternal light, awaiting the glorious resurrection on the last day. Even the English word we use for the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist conveys a hint of this double meaning. We call it the consecrated host, no longer bread and wine, but the Body and Blood of Jesus. Jesus is indeed the host of the Eucharistic banquet, but He comes to us with all the hosts of Heaven at His side. Every Eucharist unites us not only with the King of Heaven, but in the mysterious way with the whole kingdom of Heaven, too. Holy Communion with Jesus brings us into the communion of saints. This is the reason why Catholic churches of the West traditionally had statues of apostles and the saints set in a reredos behind the altar, and why Eastern Orthodox churches traditionally have an icon screen called an iconostasis covered with holy images of the angels and saints between the nave and the altar area of the church. The message these church buildings were trying to convey was not hard to figure out: when you come to Holy Communion,

you are coming to the borderline between Heaven and Earth, and Jesus Christ is there, and His Blessed Mother, too, and all the angels and saints to worship with you and to pray for you.

2. Saint Faustina claimed to enjoy a never-ending sacramental communion with Our Lord: how can this possibly be true? How could we begin to enjoy such an endless communion with Our Lord today?

The key to this mystery is the importance of desire and longing for union with Jesus in the Eucharist. The class lecture explains it this way:

One way a person might remain perpetually united with Jesus in the Eucharist is simply by having in one's heart a pure and overwhelming desire to be continually united with Him there. In fact, Jesus has told a number of His saints that He looks not so much at what we can do for Him in His service, or even what we're capable of doing: what matters to Him most is the purity and intensity of our desire to love Him. If we truly desire to love Him in a way that is physically and practically speaking impossible, still He takes our pure desire to serve Him as the equivalent of the accomplished deed, and rewards us accordingly. For example, I think it was Saint Gertrude the Great who saw in one of her visions that Saint Dominic had attained a very high place in heaven. When she asked our Lord about this, Jesus explained to her that during His lifetime, Saint Dominic carried in his heart such a pure and intense desire for the conversion of the whole world, that Jesus accepted that loving desire from Saint Dominic as if he had actually achieved that (humanly speaking) impossible task, and our Lord exalted him in Heaven accordingly. In a similar way, if there is a soul who ardently longs to be continually united with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, then Jesus takes that pure desire as the equivalent of the accomplished deed, and He pours into that soul all the graces of Holy Communion at every moment. Perhaps that's why Saint Faustina could write in all honesty and sincerity these astonishing words in her Diary, entry 1302:

"Today I have come to understand many of God's mysteries. I have come to know that Holy Communion remains in me until the next Holy Communion. A vivid and clearly felt presence of God continues in my soul. The awareness of this plunges me into deep recollection without the slightest effort on my part. My heart is a living tabernacle in which the living Host is reserved."

Not many of us have obtained that degree of pure and loving desire for the Eucharistic Jesus. Nevertheless, as we grow in our love for Him, we can always commune with Him in another Eucharistic way enjoying all of the graces of Holy Communion even on those days when we're not physically able to receive Him. This is what is called in the Catholic tradition, the practice of making a "spiritual communion."

3. According to St. Faustina and Pope Paul VI, why should we visit Jesus present for us in the tabernacle?

The answer to this question centers on the mystery of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharistic elements, and the great longing and desire He expressed to St. Faustina (and other saints) to be united with His People in this Blessed Sacrament. As the class lecture states:

Wherever the consecrated Host is reserved, in every tabernacle in every Catholic Church throughout the world, He is waiting there for us, and longing for us to come to Him. This, too, is another mystery of Divine Mercy in the Mass. Jesus said to Saint Faustina in Diary entry 1485: "Behold, for you I have established a throne of mercy on earth, the tabernacle. And from this throne I desire to enter into your heart. I'm not surrounded by retinue or guards. You can come to Me at any moment at any time. I want to speak to you, and I desire to grant you grace." To these words of Jesus, I want to add some words of that fantastic statement of faith, penned by Pope Paul VI, just after the second Vatican council, entitled, the Credo of the People of God. Paul VI wrote of the Eucharist in that document: "The unique and indivisible existence of the Lord glorious in Heaven is rendered present by the sacrament in the many places on earth, where the Mass is celebrated. And this existence remains present after the sacrifice of the Mass in the Blessed Sacrament which is, in the tabernacle, the living heart of each of our Churches. And it is our very sweet duty to honor and adore in the Blessed Host, which our eyes see, the Incarnate Word whom they cannot see, and who, without leaving Heaven, is made present before us." So let's put these thoughts by Saint Faustina and Pope Paul VI together. The pope said that it is our very sweet duty to honor and adore Jesus, the Son of God, in His real presence for us in the tabernacle. Saint Faustina said that Jesus is actually longing for us to come to Him there, and that He wants to pour out upon us all the graces of His merciful love, whenever we do come to Him. Pope Paul VI told us that the tabernacle should be seen as quote, "the living heart of each of our Churches." And Saint Faustina called the Blessed Sacrament, "the living host where Jesus gives us His most merciful Heart," and that we should come to Him at any moment at any time because He's not surrounded by a retinue of guards....

Jesus even told Saint Faustina that He longs for souls to visit Him in the Blessed Sacrament. It is a selfless longing, not a selfish longing. What He longs to do is pour the graces of His merciful Heart into the hearts of all those who come to visit Him. He longs to do us good. For example, listen to His words to Saint Faustina, recorded in her Diary entry 367. Jesus said:

"My heart overflows with great mercy for souls, and especially for poor sinners. For them I dwell in the tabernacle as King of Mercy. I desire to bestow My graces upon souls, but they do not want to accept them. You, at least, come to Me as often as possible, and take those graces they do not want to accept. In this way, you will console My heart. Oh, how indifferent are souls to so much goodness, to so many proofs of love. My heart drinks only of the ingratitude and forgetfulness of souls living in the world. They have time for everything, but they have no time to come to Me for graces."

In short, if the merciful Jesus longs for us to visit Him, in the Blessed Sacrament, if He longs to pour the graces of His merciful love into our hearts whenever we do visit Him there, if He says it

even consoles His longing heart, whenever we come to Him for grace, then how can we, who profess to believe in Him, and to love Him-- how can we possibly keep away from Him?

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #21:

The Holy Eucharist as a Mystery of Divine Mercy, Continued

1. What does the Greek word anamnesis (remembrance) mean that Jesus used at the Last Supper? Why is it so significant in helping us to understand the mystery of the Eucharist?

“Anamnesis” means “to make present again”—especially to make a sacred time and event present again. The lecture explained this as follows:

Our English translations of this word are so weak and inaccurate. The Greek word is do this in "anamnesis" of Me, "anamnesis". That word does not mean just to remember with the mind, to recall with our minds a past event. Some English versions of the Bible therefore translate anamnesis as “memorial.” Do this as a memorial of Me. And that perhaps is closer, but it does not help very much, because anamnesis does not mean just to commemorate a fallen comrade in some way. Rather, the word anamnesis means “to make present again, to break down the barriers of time to make a past event or sacred time present again.” The ancient Greek speaking Jews, for example, used to call their Passover celebration in Greek an anamnesis, because they believed that at the Passover meal, they were not just commemorating or symbolizing some important events of the distant past. Rather, in a mysterious way, they were actually participating in those past events. The past was made present to them again in the sacred meal. And so when Jesus says “Do this in anamnesis of Me,” what He must mean is “do this to make Me present to you again, especially the sacred time of My cross and resurrection present for you again.”

Saint Paul also records the same word anamnesis that Jesus used in the Last Supper in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 23 -- 25. But then in verse 26, He shows us that He really knows what Jesus meant when Saint Paul added his own commentary to it. Saint Paul writes, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." Here again, the English word “proclaims” is not really an accurate translation of the Greek. We don't have an equivalent word for the Greek word used there in the Scriptures. In English “proclaims” just means to tell something in words, to speak about something. But that's not exactly what the Greek word Saint Paul used meant here. The Greek word meant "to show, to display, to manifest." That's why the old King James version of the Bible translated it as, "To show forth": “For as often as you break this bread and drink this cup, you show forth the Lord's death until He comes.” So Saint Paul is telling us that in this holy anamnesis, this remaking present of Jesus, it is Jesus on the Cross, that sacred and saving event, which is re-made-present for us. If you like to look deeper at the meaning of this word anamnesis, look in R.L. Wilkins's classic book, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*. It's published by Yale University Press, 2003. He argued that the word is more accurately translated as, "to recall by making present." And he quotes Saint John Chrysostom, the early Church father who says, "We do not offer another sacrifice as the priest offered of old, but we also offer the same sacrifice, or rather, we re-present that sacrifice." Wilkins also quotes Saint Augustine who aptly describes the word anamnesis in a sermon on the liturgy, arguing "that it makes present what took place in the past, and in this way it moves us

as if we are actually watching our Lord hanging on the Cross." In other words, anamnesis means that the barriers of time are broken down between our time and the sacred time of Christ's cross and resurrection.

2. How do we know that Jesus was not just speaking metaphorically when He said, "My flesh is real food, and My blood is drink indeed; whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him"(John 6:55-56)?

We know this from the realistic terms that Jesus used to describe His Real Presence in the Eucharist. According to the lecture:

Now, Jesus had clearly shocked His listeners with these words. And the original Greek version of what He said makes it clear why they were so shocked. For when Jesus said in verses 55 and 56, "For My flesh is real food, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in Him," well, the words Jesus used for eating His flesh was actually the Greek word "to chomp" or "to gnaw on a piece of meat." So Jesus could not have been more shockingly physical about this if He had tried. People are invited to eat Him, to chomp on Him so to speak. It really sounds like cannibalism. That is why the Gospel says in verse 60, "Many of His disciples when they heard it said, 'This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?'" Then what did Jesus do? Did He explain to them more clearly that He was just speaking symbolically or metaphorically—in other words, that He was just saying we simply need to metaphorically in a spiritual way feed on Him in our hearts by faith? No, He didn't say that. In verses 62—63, Jesus explains Himself as follows: "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending where He was before? It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." In other words, Jesus says to them: "Do you take offense at my words? I am speaking of My risen and ascended Body and Blood. That is the clue to what all this means. It is something that only the Holy Spirit can help you understand. Your flesh, your human nature, the evidence of your five senses is of no avail here at all to help you understand this mystery. Rather, only the words that I have spoken to you by the life giving Holy Spirit, only My own words will enable you to understand how it is that I am the Bread of Life, and how you can eat and drink My risen and ascended Body and Blood.

Nevertheless, many of His disciples still did not understand or believe what Jesus said according to verse 66, and they drew back and would no longer follow Him. So what did Jesus do? Did He as the Good Shepherd go after His lost sheep and say, "No please, for your own good, come back. I was only speaking metaphorically when I said you are to eat My body and drink my blood. I just meant that as a vivid way of saying that you are to be united to Me by believing in Me." No Jesus, simply does not explain Himself that way. He just turns to the twelve and asks, "Will you, too, also go away?"

3. Share with the group any parts of Vinny Flynn's book *The Seven Secrets of the Eucharist* that you found striking, inspiring, challenging, confusing or helpful in some way. Discuss in particular what Flynn writes about "spiritual communions" as a part of Catholic devotional life.

The lecture summed up Vinny Flynn's reflections on making spiritual communions as follows:

In the second half of the book, Vinny strikes me above all with his extended reflections on making spiritual communions, especially in chapter 7, and by the very careful and theological explanation that he makes of all this on page 85: "Years ago, if I had read this," writes Vinny, "it wouldn't have impressed me much. Like most Catholics I had heard of spiritual communion, but I viewed it as some kind of consolation prize. If for one reason or another you couldn't receive Communion, you could at least unite yourself to Christ through prayer. There was certainly some value to this, but for me, the words, at least, implied that this was not real Communion. As I learned more about the Eucharist and about what real Communion is, I came to understand that spiritual communion is not a substitute for sacramental Communion, but a very real anticipation and extension of its fruits. That's so important. Spiritual Communion prepares us for sacramental Communion by expressing and increasing our spiritual desire for sacramental communion. And spiritual Communion is an extension of its benefits, to those who make spiritual Communions out of sincere faith, hope and love." Once again Vinny Flynn finds so many wonderful quotes from the saints on this mystery, especially on pages 97 -- 98 of his book. See, for example, the bottom of page 97: "There's no better way to grow spiritually," He says, "As Saint Leonard of Port Maurice explains, quote 'if you'd practice the holy exercise of spiritual communion several times each day, within a month you will see your heart completely changed. You will find that every moment can become an occasion for making spiritual communion. Distractions, temptations, anxieties, delays, the beginning or the end of the task, all can become reminders of the need to renew your relationship with God, withdrawing for a moment to meet with Him in the depths of your heart.'" And Vinny writes: "In the times of spiritual dryness, we can follow the prescription of Saint John Vianney, the Cure of Ars, 'A spiritual communion acts on the soul as blowing does on a cinder covered fire which is about to go out. Whenever you feel your love of God growing cold, quickly, make a spiritual communion.'" The wonderful thing of all this is how the Eucharist is an ongoing fulfillment of Christ's Gospel promise to remain with us always, even until the end of time; that's Matthew, chapter 28, verse 20, where the risen Christ says, "Lo, I am with you always, even until the end of time." He remains with us, not only by His Holy Spirit, but also the whole Christ remains with us in His full, glorified humanity, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, in the most Blessed Sacrament.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #22:

Mary, Mother of Mercy

1. How is the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary an expression of God's merciful love?

The class lecture says that the Immaculate Conception "was the great divine act that lay at the foundation of God's whole work of salvation through Jesus Christ":

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary was the great divine act that lay at the foundation of God's whole work of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Father of mercy took the initiative, fashioning Mary's soul from the moment of conception, preserving it from the effects of original sin, making her soul the very masterpiece of His mercy, and it was this unique and extraordinary foundation of grace in Mary's soul that enabled her, years later, to respond to the angel Gabriel's message with total trustful surrender: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to Thy word." By God's prevenient grace, therefore, she was made the masterpiece of the Father's mercy, and in the fullness of time, this special grace within her enabled her to receive our Savior into the world. In short, the whole world's salvation began with a foundational act of unmerited, unprompted, freely given divine mercy.

2. In the class lecture, a quote from the Ven. Fr. Casimir Wyszynski likens Mary to the Star of Bethlehem. What did he mean by that?

The symbol that the Marians use for Mary's ten Gospel virtues is a ten pointed star, with each ray representing one virtue. One of their earliest saintly founders, the Venerable Father Casimir Wyszynski, opened his own meditations on Mary's virtues with these words: "Mary is the noble star rising from the house of Jacob whose rays illuminate the whole world. Let us then watch the rise and movements of this brightest star carefully. Let us follow her. Let us rise up from the sleep of death by sin. If we want to see this morning star rising, we must zealously imitate the ten virtues of the Virgin Mary. For just as a star once led the three wise men to Jesus as He lay in a stable in Bethlehem, so will this morning star shining with the ten rays of these evangelical virtues, lead us to Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly Kingdom."...

The Venerable Casimir Wyszynski, MIC, was surely right: Mary's virtues shine out from the Gospels with matchless radiance, and this is a tremendous work of mercy that she has done for us all, modeling for us the path of virtue that, if we follow it faithfully, will make us true disciples of Jesus Christ.

3. The Mother of God often appeared and spoke to St. Faustina right before Holy Communion. What is the spiritual significance of that?

The class lecture stated that Mary is the one who helps us open the door of our hearts to the coming of her Son, so we can be ever more deeply surrendered to Him:

Whether in times of sorrow or joy, the Blessed Virgin Mary was the one Saint Faustina always could turn to again and again to help her live in close union with Jesus Christ. It's not surprising therefore that the Mother of God often appeared to Saint Faustina, or spoke to her right before Holy Communion, as if Mary's special office was to prepare Saint Faustina for receiving Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. For example, she wrote in Diary entry 840, "I'm spending this time with the Mother of God and preparing myself for the solemn coming of the Lord Jesus. The Mother of God is instructing me in the interior life of the soul with Jesus, especially in Holy Communion." And again, all this is precisely what we should expect. Jesus says to us in the book of Revelation, chapter 3, verse 20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him, and I will sup with him and he with me." So at each Holy Communion, Jesus stands at the door of our hearts and knocks, but He will not force His way in. As He said, He waits for us to open the door and let Him in of our own free will. We may think to ourselves, "Well of course I will let Him in; I will welcome Him and accept Him as my Lord and Savior, every day of my life, and at every Holy Communion." But it's just not as easy as that. The door of our hearts is heavy with pride, the hinges rusted by our doubts, the latches chained by our fears. It's not so easy to swing such a door wide open, even if we wanted to. And that's another reason we have such need of Mary, our Mother of mercy. She's always ready to help us by her prayers, to open the door of our hearts to her Son.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #23:

Mary, Mother of Mercy, Continued

1. How do we know that creatures such as angels actually exist?

We can know from Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and human reason that angels exist:

The Catechism of the Catholic Church assures us that "The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that sacred scripture usually calls angels, is a truth of the faith. The witness of scripture is as clear as the unity of tradition." That's Catechism entry 328. In fact, their existence was solemnly defined as a matter of faith at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 A.D. But Christians never had any doubts on this subject.

The New Testament shows us angels acting as messengers of God's merciful love, for example, when an angel spoke to Joseph in a dream, telling him that his foster Son, conceived in the womb of Mary, would one day, "Save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21), or when the angels promised the shepherds watching their flocks on Christmas night that in Bethlehem just had been born a Savior who was Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11), or when the angel of God comforted Jesus in the midst of His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Saint Luke's Gospel, chapter 22). Jesus Himself taught us that from childhood, each one of us has a Guardian angel. As He said in the Gospels, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones," that is these little children, "For I tell you that their angels always behold the face of My Father who is in Heaven." That's Matthew chapter 18, verse 10.

Even human reason can see that it is fitting for such creatures to be included in God's created order. At the lowest realm of creation there are inanimate objects. And above them living things such as plants and animals. Then higher still, human beings, for we are actually a unity of physical bodies, and immortal rational souls. And it stands to reason that to complete the hierarchy, God would have created what the Catechism calls, "Purely spiritual creatures, having intelligence and will. They are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures as the splendor of their glory bears witness." That's Catechism entry number 330.

2. What indications do we have from Holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition that it is permissible for Christians on earth to ask for the intercessory prayers of the angels and the saints in heaven? What is the "analogy of faith," and how does it help us to discern the truth about this matter?

We can know this from Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and what theologians call "the analogy of faith":

Protestant Christians argue that there's no explicit indication in scripture that we can pray to Mary as Queen or Advocate or Mediatrix, or to any of the angels or saints in Heaven for that matter. In scripture, prayers are always addressed to God alone. The practice of addressing prayers to other heavenly beings, they say, must have been borrowed from pagans of the Roman Empire, who addressed prayers to gods and goddesses of all kinds. But Catholics cannot agree. There are several indications right in the New Testament itself that the saints in Heaven know of our struggles and prayers on earth, and join their powerful intercessory prayers with our own. Hebrews 12:1 says, "Seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [that is by all the heroes and martyrs of the faith, mentioned in chapter 11 of the same book], let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." In other words, the early Christians believed that the martyrs and heroes of faith of the past are a good example for us and that they surround us like a crowd cheering for the runners in an Olympic race. The epistle of Saint James, chapter 5, verse 16, tells us that "the prayer of a good man has powerful effects." And then James gives us an example: the powerful intercessions of the prophet Elijah. This reminds us that the most powerful intercessors of the Church are those most advanced in holiness. In Revelation chapter 5, verse 8, and again in chapter 8, verses 3 -- 4, we are told that in Heaven, the elders and the angels offer up the prayers of the saints on earth as incense before the throne of God. This implies that the angels and the elders, that is, the holy Christian leaders of the past, know of our prayers on earth, and join their prayers with ours now. Put the implications of these scriptural passages together and we can surely say that since the angels and saints can see us, since they care about us, since they can and do pray for us, we can ask them to do so even more, and will be heard. That is as far as the Bible alone can take us, but it surely takes us a long way, and establishes that the invocation of the angels and saints is at least consonant with Holy Scripture.

The first surviving written record of a prayer addressed specifically to Mary, is dated about 250 A.D. and it goes like this, "We fly to your patronage, O holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all dangers, O ever glorious and blessed Virgin. Notice that already, here in the middle of the third century, Mary is referred to as "Mother of God," a title for her that will not be formally decreed by the Church for another two centuries. By the fourth century, the public invocation of the angels and the saints was universally present in the life of the Church both East and West, and there's no evidence at all of any division or dispute about this practice in the early Christian community. Many of the early Fathers were quite adamant about rejecting pagan influences on the life of the Church, so why did none of them claim that this universal custom of invoking the angels and the saints was a pagan corruption of the faith? Evidently, they did not believe it was a pagan practice after all, rather, they saw the prayer-partnership of struggling Christians on earth with the angels and saints in Heaven as a clear expression of the truth that in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, death has no dominion, and that we are one body in Christ in His Spirit, whether we're on earth, in Heaven, or in Purgatory.

Besides, the invocation of Mary, the angels and these saints fits very well with the wider pattern of Christian doctrine. This is what theologians call "the analogy of faith": that all the doctrines that God has revealed fit together. The Bible says that our growth in faith and holiness is aided by

the intercessions of other members of the body of Christ. For example in Ephesians chapter 6, verse 18, First Thessalonians, chapter 3, verses 11 -- 13, and 1 Timothy chapter 2, verses 1 -- 4. And the Bible also says that the Church on earth and in Heaven are closely united. Read Hebrews 12:22 -- 24. We are come to Mount Zion, the book of Hebrew says, including coming to "the spirits of just men made perfect." It's hard to see how asking the angels and saints to pray for us amounts to pagan idolatry, while asking one's family members and friends for their prayers is not. Both acts seem to be based on similar principles of charity and intercession. Idolatry, would occur if someone believed that an angel or saint would give you something that our Lord would not, as if you're praying to an alternate God. But most Catholics believe no such thing. They know that authentic prayers addressed TO the angels and saints are no more than requests made to them to PRAY FOR US to Jesus Christ. The final address of all our prayers, so to speak, is still the same, just as in the Hail Mary we say, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death."

3. Why is seeking the heavenly rewards promised by Jesus Christ not necessarily a selfish or self-centred thing to do?

As the class lecture explained: to seek for heaven is really only to seek for the opportunity to go on loving, and being loved by Jesus forever. That does not make you selfish—just someone who wants to carry on loving! :

First of all, I think, there's nothing wrong with rejoicing in the fact that God has made the world in such a way that ultimately in the long run, justice is done and those who serve Him faithfully will be blessed. The knowledge of this leads us to glorify and praise the Lord for His fairness and His justice. And there's nothing wrong with longing to hear those blessed words from His lips, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," Luke 19:17, and to know that with the help of His grace and forgiveness, we can have His eternal, kind regard. After all, we're commanded to love all the children of God, and you are a child of God, too. So why not seek these good things? How wonderful He is that He's made it possible for us to do eternal good for ourselves at the same time that we're seeking good for others. Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself," not "love your neighbor instead of yourself." You are a self that He loves, and He wants you to love, too. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux taught us in his treatise, entitled, "On Loving God" that the fourth and highest level of love is not refusing to love ourselves altogether, but in fact to love ourselves only for God's sake, because it glorifies God to do good to His children, and each one of us is a child of God.

Most importantly, let's bear in mind what the rewards are that Jesus offers us for our faithful service of His Kingdom. It's not that He offers us "pie in the sky when we die," like the Muslim Jihadists who believe that for slaying the infidel, Allah offers them their own hareem of virgins in Heaven. Eternal rewards like that would be mere bribes to entice us to do good works that we would otherwise have no desire to do. But some rewards are not bribes. C.S. Lewis explained this

in his book, *The Problem of Pain*: "We're afraid that Heaven is a bribe, and that if we make it our goal, we should no longer be disinterested. It is not so. Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. It's safe to tell the pure of heart that they shall see God, for only the pure of heart want to. There are rewards that do not sully motives." Perhaps another way to explain it would be this: sometimes offers of rewards are not bribes, because they are nothing more than the offer of the activity itself in its consummation. For example, the reward offered to the suitor who seeks the prize of his beloved's hand in marriage is really only the opportunity to go on loving her, in an ever deeper and fuller way, his whole life long. In a similar way, the reward Jesus offers to those who serve Him with works of love here on earth, is the opportunity to go on loving Him in an ever deeper and more wonderful way, forever in Heaven. Seeking a reward like that does not make you selfish; it just makes you a true lover.

See if there is really any selfish self-seeking in Saint Alphonsus Ligouri's description of Heaven in his meditation entitled, *Hope*: "On the instant that a soul enters Heaven and sees by the light of glory the infinite beauty of God face to face, she is at once seized and all consumed with love. The happy soul is then as it were lost and immersed in that boundless ocean of the goodness of God. Then it is that she quite forgets herself, and inebriated with divine love thinks only of loving her God, as an intoxicated person no longer thinks of himself, so the soul in bliss can only thinking of loving and affording delight to her beloved Lord. She desires to possess Him entirely, and she does indeed possess Him, for every moment she offers herself to God without reserve, and God receives her in His loving embraces, and so holds her and shall hold her in the same fond embraces throughout eternity."

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #24:

Divine Mercy Manifest in Death, Final Judgment, Hell, and Purgatory

1. Why does God not give us a “second chance” after death to come to repentance and faith—indeed, why does He not give us endless chances to repent and be saved?

God actually gives us thousands of chances to come to repentance and faith in this life—and if he gave us endless chances, and we knew it, we would not need to take any of them too seriously. The class lecture explained it this way:

Well, it's something a lot of people wonder about, and they often ask about it in terms of a possible “second chance” after death. Phrased that way, I think, the question is confusing. It implies that people have only a first chance in this life, and that God would somehow be very strict if He did not give them a second chance after they die. The truth is, however, that in this life, God gives people almost innumerable chances to draw near to Him through repentance and faith. God is present even in the depths of hearts of people who have never heard the Gospel message through no fault of their own, calling them to respond to their conscience and to follow His Way. To the extent that they do respond positively to that call, and the help of His grace, even if they do not know Him by name, they can still be saved. The Catechism tells us in entry number 847, "Those who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience these two may achieve, achieve eternal salvation." If you know the Christian fantasy books by C.S. Lewis, the Chronicles of Narnia, you may recall in the last book of the series, The Last Battle, the story of a Pagan knight, so to speak, named Emeth, and how was finally welcomed into Aslan's heavenly country. It's a beautiful illustration of this doctrine of the Church. In short, everyone has had plenty of opportunities to turn to God in their hearts before they die....

Beyond this, there is really no more that our Lord can do for a soul. The “chances” ultimately have to come to an end, because at some point the soul is either irrevocably hardened to His appeal, or truly open to repentance and faith. Besides, if we all had endless chances, there would be no urgency in responding to any of them. Original sin makes us chronic procrastinators. Jesus talks about such people in the parable, the Rich Fool in Saint Luke's Gospel, chapter 12, beginning at verse 16. Jesus said: “The land of the rich man was very productive, and he began reasoning to himself saying, ‘What shall I do since I have no place to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘This is what I will do. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones. And there I will store all my grain and my goods and I will say to my soul, soul, you have many goods laid out for many years to come, take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said to Him, ‘You fool. This very night your soul is required of you, and now who will own what you have prepared?’”

Thus, the Scriptures and the Catechism clearly imply that this life is the time for decision, and there is no other. The Catechism in entry 1015 says, "Death is the end of man's earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny." So we all have until death to decide for or against Jesus Christ, and many chances to do it in this life.

2. If God is so merciful, why is there a hell? How would you explain this mystery in your own words to someone who was skeptical about the Catholic Faith?

Answers will vary. For a summary, see pgs. 270-272 of *Divine Mercy: A Guide*.

3. If God is so merciful, why is there a purgatory? Again, how would you explain this mystery in your own words to someone who was skeptical about the Catholic Faith?

Answers will vary. For a summary, see pages 272-275 of *Divine Mercy: A Guide*.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #25:

Tough Questions about Salvation...and Creation

1. What did the ancient Fathers of the Church mean by the phrase, "no salvation outside the Church"? What does the Church teach about the prospects for final salvation of those Christians who never become Catholics in this life?

Be sure to discuss the meaning of the concept of "invincible ignorance," as a key to the possibility of salvation for those outside the Catholic Church. The lecture summarizes the answer as follows:

The ancient Fathers of the Church, living as they did in a largely Pagan world, discussed this question in considerable depth. They held to the Orthodox Christian faith, that is, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Thus, the Fathers taught that apart from participating in the life of His Body on earth, the Church, one cannot find salvation (See I Corinthians 12 on the Church as the body of Christ, and being in the Church as being "in Christ"). Their slogan was "No salvation outside the Church." At the same time the Fathers held that to participate at least to some degree to the life of Christ and the Church, it is not absolutely necessary to be a card-carrying member of the Church, so to speak. Rather, the Church of Jesus Christ existed in some sense, they said, from the beginning of the human race. All who follow the truth and commandments of God as far as they are aware of them, are in some sense part of the one true Church....

Blessed Pope Pius IX summed up the matter in an encyclical in 1863: "We all know that those who suffer from invincible ignorance with regard to our holy religion, if they carefully keep the precepts of the natural law, which have been written by God in the hearts of all men, if they are prepared to obey God, and if they lead a virtuous and dutiful life, can by the power of divine light and grace, obtain eternal life, for God who knows completely the minds and souls and thoughts and habits of all men, will not permit, in accordance with His infinite goodness and mercy, anyone who is not guilty of a voluntary fault to suffer eternal punishment." Presumably by "voluntary fault," there, the pope meant a mortal sin for which they do not repent. The Catechism sums it up in entry number 847, "Those who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and move by grace, try in their actions to do His will, as they know it through the dictates of their conscience, these too, may achieve eternal salvation." ...

Those who remain outside of the Catholic Church, due to invincible ignorance about her teachings can still receive divine grace through other Christian communities, and can still be saved through the Catholic inheritance that those other Christian communities possess.

However, Cheryl, it seems to me that you want to go even farther. You want to believe that God's grace is equally available to all Christians. You seem to suggest that it really doesn't matter what

Church you belong to, that all are equal paths to the same Heaven. Someone might say the same thing about other religions, too, if they wanted to press the point: that perhaps they are all equal paths to the same Heaven. After all, if everyone can know at least the pre-incarnate Word in their hearts, and find some salvation in that way, without every knowing about or believing in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then what is the point of Christian evangelism? If everyone can be saved, non-Catholics of every kind, whether they are Christians or not, then what was the point of the last 2,000 years of Catholic missions?

The point is simple and must never be forgotten: those who remain outside the Catholic Church are ordinarily in a state of considerable spiritual danger. To say that those who are in a state of invincible ignorance can possibly find a way to salvation is not to say that they necessarily will, or that the way is easy, rather it is fraught with peril ! For outside the Church they necessarily lack many great gifts and helps from God (such as the fullness of revealed truth and the fullness of the means of grace for their journey) that can only be found within the Catholic Church, the Ark of Salvation founded by Jesus Christ on the rock of Saint Peter in the See of Rome. To be guided on your life journey by the light of the fullness of the truth that God has revealed about Himself through Jesus Christ, and to receive the aid of the fullness of the means of grace for spiritual refreshment and healing, you need to go to the Church that He founded through His Son. In fact, that is what the Greek word, “catholikos” really means; the word means fullness, wholeness, the whole truth and all the means of grace for the whole world. That is why so many of the saints dedicated their lives to spreading the Catholic fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, even at the cost of martyrdom.

2. Can non-Catholics generally receive the extraordinary grace promised by Jesus Christ (complete renewal of baptismal grace, complete remission of sins and punishment) for devout reception of Holy Communion on Divine Mercy Sunday?

The answer is: generally “no”—but please see the explanation from the lecture below:

So, can a non-Catholic receive all the graces promised for divine mercy Sunday? Well, God is sovereign, so He can, if He wishes, pour out His grace into the heart of anyone, in any measure, at any time if He wills to do so. But in general, He has revealed that He wills to pour out the fullness of His grace throughout the world through His Catholic Church, so that we will all be united in one Body, and one flock, as the New Testament says (Jn 10:16). Thus, save for extraordinary cases, usually known only to God, non-Catholics (other than the Eastern Orthodox) cannot receive extraordinary grace of complete renewal of baptismal grace on Divine Mercy Sunday, because that is a sacramental grace; it comes through the reception in a state of grace of Holy Communion in and with His Catholic Church. Of course, non-Catholic Christians can sincerely pray for an outpouring of God's merciful love on Divine Mercy Sunday. They can make a kind of spiritual communion, the benefits of which for a non-Catholic would be known only to God. And they can trust Him for His mercy on that special feast day, and then they'll be open to receive whatever

special graces and guidance our Lord wants to give them. But that is not the same thing as receiving the extraordinary grace of Divine Mercy Sunday Communion. I would guess that in most cases, one of the special graces our Lord would want to give them on that day, if they are open to receive it, is a sincere desire to draw nearer to His Church in its fullness. Divine Mercy generally can be received in its fullness only in the Body of the merciful Christ on earth, which is the Catholic Church. It is in and through His Church that He wants us to unite us all in truth and in love, see Ephesians chapter 4. That is one reason why even though some non-Catholics surely do make it to Heaven, only Catholics can be canonized as saints, and that is why our Lord earnestly desires every one of us to be, saints, of His merciful Heart.

3. According to St. Faustina's canticle of praise to the merciful Creator in her Diary, entry 1750, how is it that all creatures reflect—the flowers, the forest, the seas, the stars, etc.—reflect and glorify the mercy of God?

Be sure to remind the group that Divine Mercy is God reaching out to meet the needs of every creature—and that includes our first and most basic need: the need to exist! The class lecture put it this way:

Now what is the most basic need that any of God's creatures have? Clearly it is to overcome the dread possibility of not existing at all, nothingness, non-existence. In other words, "to be" is the first and most fundamental need that we have. Without that we creatures are literally nothing, and so when God brings the whole world into existence and holds all things in being at every moment, this is an expression of His merciful love: His mercy overcoming the potential nothingness, or possible nonexistence of all things. Did you ever think about this: that and I, and everything around us did not have to be? Every creature exists, not by necessity, but by divine choice. We are all chosen by God to exist, and to take part in His plan. In other words, God literally loves all things into being at every moment, and this is an act of His great mercy, because otherwise things would not be and could not be, not even for a second.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #26:

Divine Mercy, the New Age Movement, and Satan

1. How do the teachings of St. Faustina about God's relationship with creation generally differ from those of the New Age movement?

Saint Faustina's teaching, in accordance with the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Catholic Tradition, holds that God's love for His creation is always a selfless, self-giving love, not a love that springs from some alleged unmet need in God Himself. And this has tremendous ramifications not only for our understanding of God, but for our understanding of human life as well. The class lecture explained:

[The New Age Movement teaches that} the natural world is God's own body. He is the soul of the universe, so to speak, and the world is the body that He fashioned for Himself. All creatures are so close to Him that they are actually part of Him.

At first glance this teaching may sound appealing. It seems to bring God and the natural world closer together, and therefore leads people to support environmentalism, too, since we wouldn't want to pollute and destroy the divine body of God. But a closer look reveals a serious flaw in this viewpoint. For if the whole natural world is really the body that God fashioned for Himself, then He must have created it not out of selfless generosity for creatures, but out of self-interest, because He needed to make a body for Himself, He needed to complete Himself in that way, like a snail that makes a shell for itself. If so, then God does not really love His creatures with merciful, selfless, generous love, rather, He just loves Himself. If He loves us at all, it would be only out of "enlightened self-interest," because in loving us He is thereby loving His own body and fulfilling His own needs.

Saint Faustina's creation spirituality, which actually mirrors the teachings of Saint Thomas Aquinas and the Catechism in this respect, is actually much wiser. It's the perfect antidote to the New Age Movement. She reminds us that God's love is not need love but gift love. It's precisely because God needs nothing at all for Himself, and is infinitely perfect and happy in Himself, that everything He does for creatures can only be a selfless gift of love for them. All that God does for creatures, including bringing them to being in the first place, is an expression of His merciful, generous, compassionate love for them. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains this in depth when it tells us in entry number 293: "God created all things so that they might reflect His glory....Scripture and Tradition never ceases to teach and celebrate this fundamental truth: the world was made for the glory of God. Saint Bonaventure explains that God created all things not to increase His glory but to show it forth and to communicate it, for God has no other reason for

creating than His love and goodness.” The First Vatican Council explained: “This one true God of His own goodness and almighty power, not for increasing His own beatitude or for obtaining His own perfection, but in order to manifest this perfection for the benefits which He bestows on creatures, with absolute freedom of counsel, from the beginning of time, made out of nothing both orders of creatures, the spiritual and the corporeal.” To put it another way, a God who is not other than you, cannot love you with selfless generosity: not if you are part of His very self to begin with!

Besides, if you and I are all part of God, included in God's infinite being somehow, then what becomes of the need to repent of our sins, and the need for forgiveness and sanctifying grace? How can a part of God's divine body sin against God anyway? It doesn't make any sense. Do you see how the New Age movement fits so neatly into the morally lax, no regrets, “I'm okay, you're okay” culture in which we live? This is light-years away from the teachings of Jesus Christ and the promises of mercy and grace that He gave to us through Saint Faustina.

2. Why does God warn us, both in Scripture and in Tradition, not to get involved in the occult in any way?

Focus on the warning that occult practices are always “doorways to danger,” even if engaged in for seemingly good intentions:

Engaging in occult practices is always risky business; it's like children playing with matches. Not every single child who plays with matches will come to grief. But it's all too easy to get burned--in this case, supernaturally burned. Séances, Ouija boards, tarot cards, witchcraft, mediumistic activity, channeling (that is, trying to contact spirit guides, or the spirits of departed loved ones), these are all “doorways to danger,” no matter what our intentions may be. We need to remember, and warn our loved ones, too, that the supernatural world is not only populated by holy angels, and the souls of the faithful departed in purgatory or in heaven; it is also populated by fallen angels and demonic forces. These evil beings are quite capable, for example, of mimicking the voices of departed loved ones through a “channeller,” and of imparting secret information, all in order to deceive the living, and lead us into falsehoods about God and morality, and to provide false guidance about our future. It is not true that the occult never works, or is only practiced by fraudulent hucksters. Some do indeed contact supernatural powers, but, I fear, entities that are more evil, more cunning, and more powerful than they could possibly imagine. And that's not just scare-mongering: the fact is that mediumistic activity, Ouija boards, séances, and channeling, have been strongly implicated in many authentic cases of demonic possession and exorcism. If you'd like to read up on all this, please see the classic work on this subject by Monsignor Leon Cristiani, *Evidence of Satan in the Modern World*, as well as the book by the famous Christian Psychotherapist, M. Scott Peck, *The People of the Lie, the Psychology of Evil*. Moreover, it's a sad fact that many of the leaders of what may have been history's most evil regime, the Nazi Third Reich, were steeped in occult practices of all kinds, and this should be

another warning to us, that when those occult doorways to danger are foolishly opened up, it is not spirits obedient to God that are going to step through. Of that we can be absolutely sure.

3. If Satan is out to undermine your Divine Mercy apostolate—or, indeed, any other good work in which you are engaged for the sake of Christ's kingdom—how can you counter-act his efforts? What does St. Faustina's Diary teach us about this?

The class lecture listed the main points of the answer as follows, which you can use to guide the discussion:

Number one: Satan is out to get your apostolate for sure, but look for the enemy first, within your own heart....

Number two: patience is essential to defeating evil and overcoming obstacles....

Thirdly, if you're a divine mercy leader, you will need not only humility, and patience, but a lot of courage, too. So don't expect a quiet life, or a smooth and gently contemplative lifestyle if you're in this kind of mission work. You and your group will suffer major obstacles, setbacks, perhaps even betrayals....

Number four: you may not believe it, but the devil and his allies are actually afraid of you....

Fifthly, take comfort in the fact that Satan is, in some respects, an idiot. He really is foolish in some ways: so much so that evil always, eventually self-destructs....

Number six: all Jesus is asking of you is to do the best you can, and leave all the rest to Him.

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #27:

Divine Mercy and the Devout Life

1. In general, what should true disciples of the merciful Heart of Jesus focus on in their daily Scripture meditations?

They should focus on the affections, sentiments, virtues and intentions of His Heart, especially as manifested in the gospels. The class lecture stated:

Now if there is something distinctive about the way that a true disciple of the merciful Heart of Jesus will be inclined to meditate, it would be this: rather than focusing on our own feelings in our meditations, we should focus on His. In other words, when we read about the words and deeds of Jesus in the Gospels, we are inclined to think to ourselves: what was on His Heart as He was saying this? What were His sentiments and affections and intentions? To whom did His merciful Heart go out in compassion, and why? What brought Him joy? And what brought Him sorrow? Saint Maria Faustina was always meditating on the sentiments of our Lord, especially during the time of His passion. For example, Jesus said to her, "Today brings Me all devout and faithful souls, and immerse them in the ocean of My mercy. These souls brought Me consolation on the way of the cross. They were that drop of consolation in the midst of an ocean of bitterness." That's Diary entry 1214. Here's another example, this time from the writings of Blessed Dina Belanger of Quebec. Meditating in the Gospels for Holy Week, Blessed Dina wrote: "Jesus was anxious for Holy Thursday to come. Yes, He yearned for the Last Supper. He longed to hide Himself under the appearance of a frail piece of bread, and to dwell in human hearts. Ever since, to every soul that He invites to the holy table in every Communion, His Eucharistic Heart repeats with the same effusion of love as to His apostles on that night, quote, 'With desire have I desired to eat this Passion with you.' He always yearns to give Himself."

When we meditate in a similar way, we are not just thinking about Jesus, rather, we are drawing nearer to His merciful Heart, nearer to all the love, compassion, wisdom, tenderness, and mercy that He ever had on His Heart for everyone that He met, and for us. The result of meeting Him in prayer like this in times of meditation is that we will be drawn to be attentive to Him, and nearer to Him in our hearts, every minute of the day.

2. What does St. Faustina teach us about the value of keeping, as much as possible in one's life circumstances, exterior and interior "silence"?

Some quotes on this from St. Faustina's diary were shared in the class lecture:

In fact, Nancy's question actually highlights something that Saint Faustina believed to be very important, and is all too often neglected these days by those who lead busy lives filled with commotion. I'm referring, of course, to the necessity to keep times of external silence in order to foster deeper, inner silence, deeper listening to the call and promptings of God within our own hearts. Ponder for a moment these entries from Saint Faustina's Diary, first, entry 1008: "The Lord gave me to know how displeased He is with a talkative soul. I find no rest in such a soul, the constant din tires me. And in the midst of it, the soul cannot discern my voice, Jesus said." Entry 552: "The Holy Spirit does not speak to a soul that is distracted and garrulous; He speaks by His quiet inspirations to a soul that is recollected, to a soul that knows how to keep silence." Entry 118: "In order to hear the voice of God, one has to have silence in one's soul and to keep silence, not a gloomy silence, but an interior silence, that is to say, to remain recollected in God. Entry 477: "Silence is a sword in the spiritual struggle," Saint Faustina writes:

"A talkative soul will never attain sanctity. That sort of silence will cut off everything that would like to cling to the soul. We are sensitive to words, and quickly want to answer back, without taking any regard as to whether it is God's will that we should speak. A silent soul is strong; no adversities will harm it, if it perseveres in silence. The silent soul is capable of obtaining close unity with God. It lives almost always under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God works in a silent soul, without hindrance."

3. What is the meaning of the virtue of "simplicity" that the Christ Child encouraged St. Faustina to practice?

Simplicity is really to will just one thing in everything that you do: whatever Jesus wills! Here is how the class lecture explained it:

Well, Tom, I suppose, the first clue to what He meant is the fact that He connected simplicity with being childlike. The world of a happy and healthy child is pretty straight-forward: full of trust in God and in his or her parents, and wonder at all the beauty and mysteries of creation. A child like this is rarely torn by competing allegiances or tormented by anxiety and stress. The child's world is simple: obey those whom it is your duty and joy to obey, for you can trust them, and in that context be free to explore this wondrous and magical world we all live in. Grownups tend to be much more complicated people. We have conflicting priorities. We agonize over what to do and we are often anxious about the future. We try to serve God and money at the same time, and put our trust in both, precisely what Jesus told us we couldn't do in Matthew 7:24. We let ourselves be pulled apart in many directions. But Gospel simplicity is the gift of an undivided heart. The Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, used a similar phrase for this. "Purity of heart," he wrote, "is to will one thing," in other words, to will whatever God wills and that's all-- not to try to serve two masters, or three or four. Purity and simplicity of heart is to have just one king on the throne of your heart.

The opposite of singleness of heart is what the Bible calls "idolatry." Have you ever wondered why God put all those warnings in the Bible about worshipping false idols? We tend to think that those passages do not apply to most of us today. After all, who among us is in the modern, scientific western world is really going to bow down and worship a golden calf, as if such religious statues actually had divinities residing in them? The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us however that idolatry is a much more subtle and more widespread problem than that. And I quote: "Idolatry not only refers to false pagan worship, it remains a constant temptation to faith. Idolatry consists in divinizing, in other words, treating as one's highest allegiance and top priority, what is not God. Man commits idolatry whenever he honors and reveres a creature in place of God, whether this be gods or demons (for example, Satanism), or power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, etc. Idolatry rejects the unique lordship of God. It is therefore incompatible with communion with God;" that's Catechism entry 2113.

The result of having an idol at the center to our lives is that such a false God tends to multiply. Since no idol can bring us fulfillment or peace of heart, we tend to run after more and more of them, searching for that peace, and we end up worshipping many gods, with an endless civil war in our hearts between them as to which one gets to reign in our hearts as king as any given time. For example, what will I care about most this year? Money? Pleasure? Power? Drink? Drugs? Work? Play? Sex? Keeping fit? Keeping up the garden or just keeping my nose in everyone else's business? Whatever we care about most from day to day is what we really worship, and as that changes from day to day week to week, month by month, even hour by hour, it tears our lives apart. The Catechism reminds us in entry 2114: "Human life finds its unity in the adoration of the one true God. The commandment to worship the Lord alone integrates man and saves him from an endless disintegration."

Study and Discussion Questions for Class #28:

Divine Mercy and the Devout Life, Continued

1. According to this class lecture, how can we make those “medium-sized” decisions in life that affect our daily life and occupations, decisions such as “Should I take this job or not? Should I move to that new place or not? Should I send my child to this school or that one? Should I start a relationship with this person or not?” In what ways can we exercise the Christian virtue of “prudence” in making these decisions?

The class lecture makes four points in this regard, which can be used to guide the discussion:

First, to choose the path, that furthers our true good, we have to know what our true good really is. The old Baltimore Catechism said it best, I think, when it taught us that our true end is to know, love, and serve God, and to enjoy Him forever. When we have this as our first priority, then everything else begins to fall into place. Our daily decisions become much easier because with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can make those decisions in the light of a true set of priorities....

The second thing to do is to pray for guidance. Prayer clears the head, and opens the heart. Jesus promised, “If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” That's Luke 11:13. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, according to John 16:13, and we need the help of the spirit of truth to guide us in making those choices that lead to our true good.

Third, it can help to ask yourself: what would Jesus or Mary do in my shoes if faced with a decision such as the one I face? These are the two souls most full to overflowing with the Holy Spirit, and they are the Spirit's guidance made visible. Saint Faustina found special help in the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary throughout her life....

Finally, stir all these things around in the prayer-pot, and then add a dose of reason as well. Reason has a bad name in overly pious Catholic circles these days. We tend to think that if you're trying to be reasonable, then you are probably compromising your principles somehow and avoiding the call of heroic faith. But that's simply not true, if reason is being used as what Saint Thomas Aquinas called the handmaid of faith. If we are using reason alone, to work out the best thing to do with the choices we face, then no doubt, we will lead ourselves astray with subtle compromises of all kinds. But if we take our Christian priorities as given, and as immovable, and we pray and bear in mind the example of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints, then it is reason that uses these “givens” of the faith. Reason works out, with the help of the Holy Spirit, how we can apply those prioritized principles, and the examples of Christ and the saints, to our given circumstances. The Holy Spirit is the one who helps us reason clearly. The virtue of

prudence, remember, means knowing how to make reasonable choices in the light of our Christian principles and priorities.

2. What did St. Josemaria Escriva teach about how we can turn our daily work and labors into a way to grow in the love of God and neighbor?

His basic principle was: “Sanctify your work, sanctify yourself in your work, sanctify others through your work.” The class lecture explained it this way:

One of the special things about our relationship with our Lord that makes that relationship unique is that we do not have to completely get away from our work and our labors in order to be with Him and to grow in our love for Him. After all, Jesus promised, “I am with you always, even until the end of time,” Matthew 28:20. By His Spirit, He is with us everywhere, and at all times, and in all places. One of the Catholic spiritual writers who can help us to live out this truth of our faith is the Spaniard, Saint Jose Maria Escriva. For example, Saint Escriva taught that external works should not interrupt our praying, just as the beating of our heart does not break or diminish attention to our activities, whatever they may be. As He taught, our labors, including looking after our own children and earning a living, can be turned into a prayerful offering to God. Many of us give “lip service” to the art of turning our work into prayer, of course, but when we find ourselves caught in situations such as the one Rosalynn faces, sometimes that is almost the only kind of daily prayer we can manage to offer at all.

Saint Jose Maria Escriva's counsel is helpful here. “Sanctify your work,” He taught us, by which He meant doing your work as well as possible with a pure intention, such as providing a good product and service for your community and providing a decent home and good educational opportunities for your kids.

“Sanctify yourself in your work,” Saint Escriva taught, by which he meant doing your work for the glory of God and stealing little prayer times throughout the day to keep your heart open to grace. You may not have time right now for a proper half hour for meditation each day, but you can always grab 30 seconds here, a minute there, ten minutes during a lunch break or even when you are alone behind the wheel of your car. In these little openings during the day, you can offer up the simplest arrow prayers to God: “Merciful Heart of Jesus, into Your Heart, I put my heart. Merciful Heart of Jesus, I put all my trust in You. Merciful Heart of Jesus, make me love you more and more.” Don't you think that our Savior will be delighted by your efforts to steal these minutes in the midst of all your labors to be alone with Him? I can assure you that He will pour His grace into your heart in torrents when you do.

Finally, “sanctify others through your work,” Saint Escriva said. This means setting a good example for others of cheerfulness, helpfulness, honesty, perseverance, and patience. What a tremendous example of Christian virtue you can be for others at your work place, and especially for your own children, as they see you tackle the labors of each day in the spirit of Christ. Of

course I know that some days, many days, it will not be easy. At times of financial stress and strain, we may have to battle constantly against sheer exhaustion, and sometimes suffer discouraging setbacks, but be patient. Let Jesus the Good Shepherd find a way forward for you when sometimes there seems to be no way. If He got His stubborn people of Israel successfully through 40 years in the wilderness before they reached the promised land, He can certainly find a way for you, too. As Saint Frances de Sales put it, "Either He will shield you from suffering, or give you unfailing strength to bear it." And again, He is rather adept at writing straight with crooked lines.

3. Why does Jesus seem to let His best friends get "beaten-up" by interior and exterior trials so often? What insights does this lecture offer to help us understand this? What further insights can you share in this regard?

The class lecture answered this question under the following headings, which may be helpful as a guide to group discussion:

Number one: Jesus permits His best friends to suffer so much because suffering can enable us to grow in self-forgetful love, which is the best preparation for Heaven....

Number two: Jesus sometimes permits His best friends to suffer so that they can offer up their sufferings in union with His own on the Cross, for the out-pouring of His saving grace on the whole world....

Number three: Jesus permits His best friends to suffer so much, because suffering can set our hearts on heaven more than on earth, and on our love relationship with Him, more than on anything else.