

**Study and Discussion Questions**

**For the Online Course**

***Divine Mercy Essentials***

## Study and Discussion Questions for Class Lecture #1:

### Introduction and the ABC's 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?
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 in 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?
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?

## Study and Discussion Questions for Class Lecture #2:

### The ABC's 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.
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.
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"?

## Study and Discussion Questions for Class Lecture #3:

### The ABC's 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?
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?
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?

## 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?
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?
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?

## 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?
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?
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?

## 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?
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?
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?

## 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, and 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.
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*"?
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?

## 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?
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.
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?

## 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?
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?
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.

## 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?
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 that most speaks to your mind and heart through the Image of The Divine Mercy?
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?

## 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)?
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?
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”?

## 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?
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?
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?

## 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”?
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”?
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”?

## 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?
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?
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?

## 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?
2. Read together the 23<sup>rd</sup> 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?
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?

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

## 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?
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"?
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?

## 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 with the spiritual condition known as “scruples”?
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?
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 helpful to your own walk with Christ?

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

## 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?
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)?
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.

## 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?
2. In the class lecture, a quote from the Ven. Fr. Casimir Wyzinski likens Mary to the Star of Bethlehem. What did he mean by that?
3. The Mother of God often appeared and spoke to St. Faustina right before Holy Communion. What is the spiritual significance of that?

## Study and Discussion Questions for Class #23:

### Mary, Mother of Mercy, Continued

1. How do we know that creatures such as angels actually exist?
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?
3. Why is seeking the heavenly rewards promised by Jesus Christ not necessarily a selfish or self-centred thing to do?

## 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?
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?
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?

## 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?
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?
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?

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

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

## 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?
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?
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?