



**THE SHRINE OF DIVINE MERCY:  
HOME OF SAINT FAUSTINA,  
SAINT JOHN PAUL II,  
BLESSED MICHAEL SOPOCKO  
AND SAINT MAXIMILIAN MARIA KOLBE RELICS**

This sacred shrine is not only a testament to the enduring message of God's infinite mercy, but also a place that houses the precious relics of four beloved Saints—Saint Faustina Kowalska, Saint John Paul II, Blessed Michael Sopocko, and Saint Maximilian Maria Kolbe.

At the heart of this holy shrine, a relic of Saint Faustina Kowalska finds a home. Saint Faustina, the “Apostle of Divine Mercy,” was a humble Polish nun who received divine revelations from Jesus Himself, leading to the propagation of the message of God's boundless mercy. Her relics, venerated by countless believers, serve as a connection to her life and her unwavering dedication to the Divine Mercy devotion. It is a reminder of her profound spiritual journey, and her intercession continues to inspire and uplift those who come seeking comfort and spiritual renewal.

In addition to Saint Faustina, the shrine houses a relic of Saint John Paul II, one of the most beloved and influential pontiffs in recent history. His remarkable papacy was marked by a deep devotion to Divine Mercy and his pivotal role in the canonization of Saint Faustina. The relic of Saint John Paul II serves as a tangible link to his extraordinary life, his tireless work for the Church, and his passionate promotion of the message of Divine Mercy to the world.

Blessed Michael Sopocko, the spiritual director of Saint Faustina and instrumental in the spread of the Divine Mercy devotion, is another revered figure whose relic finds a place of honor in the shrine. His tireless efforts to ensure the authenticity of the Divine Mercy message and his guidance to Saint Faustina make his presence within the shrine particularly meaningful. His relic offers a connection to his profound contribution to the Divine Mercy devotion.

Saint Maximilian Maria Kolbe, the renowned martyr and apostle of the Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, is also remembered within the shrine. His unwavering commitment to charity, self-sacrifice, and his heroic act of choosing to die in place of a fellow prisoner in Auschwitz has made him a symbol of courage and faith. His relic within the shrine inspires all who visit to embrace the ideals of love, sacrifice, and devotion to Mary.

The presence of these relics within the Shrine of Divine Mercy enhances its spiritual significance, creating a space where believers can not only learn about the lives and teachings of these saints, but also experience their intercession and closeness. It serves as a place of pilgrimage for those seeking solace, healing, and spiritual enlightenment.

Pilgrims may come to venerate these relics, finding inspiration and a deeper connection to the Divine Mercy message. The Shrine of Divine Mercy, as the home of these relics, stands as a beacon of hope, a place of prayer, and a sanctuary of spiritual growth. It encapsulates the profound message of God's mercy, brought to life through the lives and intercessions of Saint Faustina Kowalska, Saint John Paul II, Blessed Michael Sopoćko, and Saint Maximilian Maria Kolbe, offering comfort, guidance, and renewal to all who visit.

In this sacred space, the faithful can reflect on the lives of these extraordinary saints, deepen their understanding of the Divine Mercy message, and experience the profound love and forgiveness that God offers to all who seek it with open hearts. It is a place where the mercy of God is not only spoken of but tangibly felt, and where the presence of these relics serves as a reminder of the boundless love and compassion of our Creator.



### **SAINT MARIA FAUSTINA (HELENA KOWALSKA)**

“And you, Faustina, a gift of God to our time, a gift from the land of Poland to the whole Church, obtain for us an awareness of the depth of divine mercy; help us to have a living experience of it and to bear witness to it among our brothers and sisters. May your message of light and hope spread throughout the world, spurring sinners to conversion, calming rivalries and hatred and opening individuals and nations to the practice of brotherhood. Today, fixing our gaze with you on the face of the risen Christ, let us make our own your prayer of trusting abandonment and say with firm hope: Christ Jesus, I trust in you! Jezu, ufam Tobie!” (Saint John Paul II, Homily, April 30, 2000)

Saint Faustina is “a gift from God for our times”, who reminded the biblical truth about merciful love of God for every human being and calls to proclaim it to the world through the testimony of life,

deed, word and prayer.

She is an Apostle of Divine Mercy, Prophet of Our Times, Great Mystic, Mistress of Spiritual Life – these are the epithets usually appended to the name of Sister Faustina Kowalska of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. She is one of the Church's most popular and widely known saints and the greatest mystics in the history of the Church.

Sister Faustina was born on August 25, 1905, in Głogowiec, Poland to Marianna and Stanisław Kowalski as the third of ten children. Two days later she was baptized with the name Helena in the parish church of Świnice Warckie. At the age of nine, she made her first Holy Communion. She attended elementary school for merely three years and then she went to work as a housekeeper in various well-to-do families in Aleksandrów and Łódź. From the age of seven, she had felt the calling for religious vocation, but her parents would not give her permission to enter the convent.

Impelled by the vision of the Suffering Christ, in July 1924 she left for Warsaw to find a Congregation. For another year she worked as a housekeeper to save some money for a modest monastic dowry. On August 01, 1925, she entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Warsaw.

She lived in the Congregation for thirteen years, staying in many houses, the longest time she spent in Kraków, Płock and Vilnius; working as a cook, shop assistant in the bakery shop, gardener, and portress. She suffered from tuberculosis of the lungs and alimentary system and that is why for over 8 months she stayed at the hospital in Kraków – Prądnik. Her sufferings caused by tuberculosis, she offered as a voluntary sacrifice for sinners and as an Apostle of Divine Mercy. She also experienced many extraordinary graces such as: apparitions, ecstasies, the gift of bilocation, hidden stigmata, reading into human souls, the mystical betrothal and nuptials.

Sister Faustina's principal task was to pass on to the Church and the world the Message of Mercy, a recapitulation of the Biblical truth of God's Merciful Love for every human being, and to call each one of us to entrust our lives to Him and to actively love our neighbor.

Jesus not only revealed the depth of His Mercy to St. Faustina, but also gave her new forms of devotions: the image inscribed with "Jesus, I trust in You", the Feast of Divine Mercy, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, and the Prayer in the Hour of His Death on the Cross, the Hour of Mercy. To each of these forms of devotions, as well as to the propagation of the message of Mercy, Jesus attached great promises, on condition that we show an attitude of trust in God, that is to fulfill His will and show mercy to our neighbors.

Sister Faustina died in Krakow on October 5, 1938, at the age of thirty-three. Out of her charism and mystical experience grew the Apostolic Movement of the Divine Mercy which continues her mission, proclaiming the message of Mercy to the world through the testimony of life, deed, words and prayer. On April 18, 1993, Saint John Paul II raised her to the glory of the altars and on April 30, 2000, numbered her among the saints of the Church. Her relics are in the Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Łagiewniki, Kraków.

Saint John Paul II wrote that in the age of totalitarianisms Sister Faustina became the ambassador of the message that the only power strong enough to counteract their evil is the truth of God's Mercy. He called her Diary "a Gospel of Mercy written from a 20th-century perspective", which has helped people to survive the extremely painful experiences of these times. Pope Benedict XVI has said, "the message of Mercy as the Divine Power, as God putting a check on all the world's evil, is indeed the chief message of our times".

### **Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul**

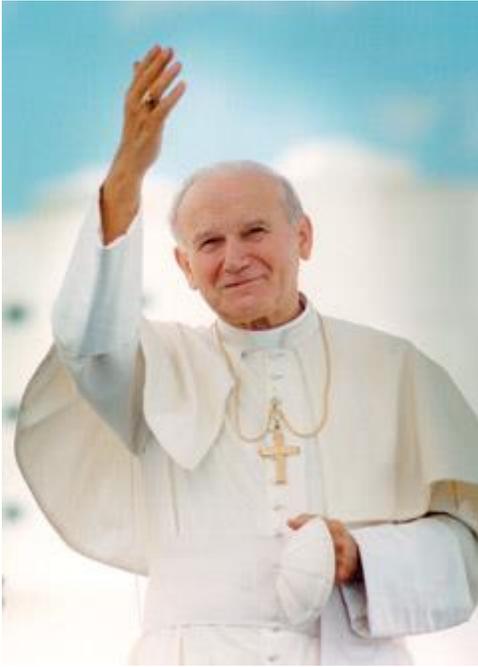
The Diary is one of the gems of mystical literature. Saint Faustina Kowalska wrote it in Vilnius and Cracow in 1934-1938 as Jesus had commanded her to do so directly. Her confessors, Father Michael Sopoćko and Father Joseph Andrasz S.J. had also ordered her to write it and the superiors of the Congregation had given her their consent. The earliest notes that have remained were written in July 1934. It is known that Sister

Faustina burnt the first ones because when Fr. Michael Sopoćko was not in Vilnius she yielded into the persuasion of an alleged angel who in reality was Satan. Later Fr. Michael Sopoćko ordered her to reconstruct what had been destroyed. Therefore, the chronology in the present Diary is distorted, especially in the first notebook: the author intersperses current events and experiences with the description of those that happened before.

Sister Faustina wrote all the notes in private when she was not carrying out her monastic duties. She also wrote them in the hospital, where she had more time and, at Fr. Michael Sopoćko's request, she underlined all Jesus' words with a pencil. "Although I am feeling weak and my nature is clamoring for rest, she admitted honestly, I feel the inspiration of grace telling me to take hold of myself and write, write for the comfort of souls, whom I love so much and with whom I will share all eternity. And I desire eternal life for them so ardently that that is why I use all my free moments, no matter how short, for writing in the way that Jesus wishes of me" (Diary 1471). The last notes were taken in June 1938, so Sister Faustina ceased writing the Diary three months before her death. She wrote six notebooks altogether, which were published along with a small notebook entitled: "My preparation for Holy Communion".

In the Diary Sister Faustina described her spiritual life, which was especially deep, reaching the summit of union with God in the mystical betrothal. She depicted how deeply she came to know the mystery of the Divine Mercy and how she contemplated it in her daily life.

She also wrote about the struggle against the weaknesses of human nature and difficulties pertaining to the prophetic mission. Above all, the Diary contains the message of God's merciful love for man, which Sister Faustina was to pass on to the Church and the world.



## SAINT JOHN PAUL II

Karol Józef Wojtyła, elected Pope on October 16, 1978, was born in Wadowice, Poland, on May 18, 1920. He was the third of three children born to Karol Wojtyła and Emilia Kaczorowska, who died in 1929. His elder brother Edmund, a physician, died in 1932, and his father, Karol, a non-commissioned officer in the army, died in 1941. He was nine years old when he received his first communion and eighteen when he received the Sacrament of Confirmation. After completing high school in Wadowice, he enrolled in the Jagellonian University of Krakow in 1938.

When the occupying Nazi forces closed the University in 1939, Karol worked (1940-1944) in a quarry and then in the Solvay chemical factory to earn a living and to avoid deportation to Germany.

Feeling called to the priesthood, he began his studies in 1942 in the clandestine Major Seminary of Krakow, directed by Archbishop Adam Stefan Sapieha. During that time, he was one of the organizers of the “Rhapsodic Theatre”, which was also clandestine.

After the war, Karol continued his studies in the major seminary, newly reopened, and in the school of theology at the Jagellonian University, until his priestly ordination in Krakow on November 01, 1946. Father Wojtyła was then sent by Cardinal Sapieha to Rome, where he attained a doctorate in Theology (1948). He wrote his dissertation on faith as understood in the works of Saint John of the Cross.

While a student in Rome, he spent his vacations exercising pastoral ministry among Polish emigrants in France, Belgium and Holland.

In 1948, Father Wojtyła returned to Poland and was appointed a curate in the parish church of Niegowić, near Krakow, and later at Saint Florian in Krakow. He was a university chaplain until 1951, when he again undertook studies in Philosophy and Theology. In 1953, Father Wojtyła presented a dissertation at the Jagellonian University of Krakow on the possibility of grounding Christian Ethics on the Ethical System developed by Max Scheler. Later he became professor of Moral Theology and Ethics in the Major Seminary of Krakow and in the Theology Faculty of Lublin.

On July 4, 1958, Pope Pius XII appointed Father Wojtyła auxiliary bishop of Krakow, with the titular see of Ombi. Archbishop Eugeniusz Baziak ordained him in Wawel Cathedral (Krakow) on September 28, 1958.

On January 13, 1964, Pope Paul VI appointed Bishop Wojtyła as Archbishop of Krakow and subsequently, on June 26, 1967, created him a cardinal. Bishop Wojtyła took part in the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and made a significant contribution to the

drafting of the constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. He also took part in the five assemblies of the Synod of Bishops prior to the start of his Pontificate.

On October 16, 1978, Cardinal Wojtyła was elected Pope and on October 22 he began his ministry as universal Pastor of the church. Saint John Paul II made 146 pastoral visits in Italy and, as the Bishop of Rome, he visited 317 of the current 322 roman parishes. His international apostolic journeys numbered 104 and were expressions of the constant pastoral solicitude of the Successor of Peter for all the churches.

His principal documents include 14 Encyclicals, 15 Apostolic Exhortations, 11 Apostolic constitutions and 45 Apostolic Letters. He also wrote five books: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (October 1994); *Gift and Mystery: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination* (November 1996); *Roman Triptych, meditations in poetry* (March 2003); *Rise, Let Us Be on Our Way* (May 2004) and *Memory and Identity* (February 2005).

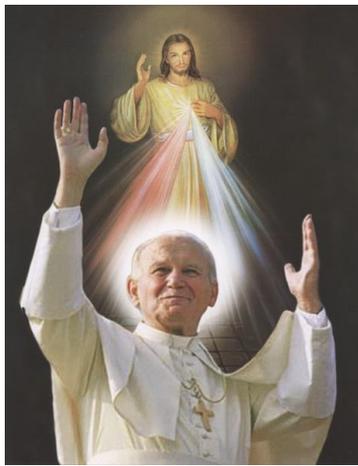
On May 13, 1981, an attempt was made on Saint John Paul II's life in Saint Peter's Square. Saved by the maternal hand of the Mother of God, following a lengthy stay in the hospital, he forgave the attempted assassin and, aware of having received a great gift, intensified his pastoral commitments with heroic generosity.

Saint John Paul II also demonstrated his pastoral concern by erecting numerous dioceses and ecclesiastical circumscriptions, and by promulgating codes of canon Law for the Latin and the Oriental churches, as well as the Catechism of the Catholic Church. He proclaimed the Year of Redemption, the Marian Year and the Year of the Eucharist as well as the Great Jubilee Year of 2000, in order to provide the People of God with particularly intense spiritual experiences. He also attracted young people by beginning the celebration of World Youth Days.

No other Pope met as many people as Pope John Paul II. More than 17.6 million pilgrims attended his Wednesday General Audiences (which numbered over 1,160). This does not include any of the other special audiences and religious ceremonies (more than 8 million pilgrims in the Great Jubilee Year of 2000 alone). He met millions of the faithful in the course of his pastoral visits in Italy and throughout the world.

### **John Paul II – prophet of the Divine Mercy**

On November 30, 1980, on the first Sunday of Advent, in the third year of his pontificate, Saint John Paul II promulgated his second encyclical on God's mercy "*Dives in Misericordia*". On the same day, during the prayer of Angelus the Holy Father presented the main reasons for preparing this document, "I wanted very much to connect the promulgation of the encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, its main aim being to remind people of the Father's love revealed in the entire messianic message of Christ, from his coming to the world till the paschal mystery of his cross and resurrection. The Church and the world need mercy that means love stronger than sin and all evil that man and his earthy living are entangled in."



## DEDICATION OF THE WORLD TO THE DIVINE MERCY

Canonizing Sr. Faustina on April 30, 2000 Saint John Paul II instituted the Feast of the Divine Mercy in the whole Church, asking God through the intercession of the Saint from Krakow: “And you, Faustina, a gift of God to our time, a gift from the land of Poland to the whole Church, obtain for us an awareness of the depth of Divine Mercy; help us to have a living experience of it and to bear witness to it among our brothers and sisters.”

Saint John Paul II completed this act by solemn dedication of the world to the Divine Mercy, made on August 17, 2002. Then he reminded the community of the Church of the universal truth about the Divine Mercy and in the newly consecrated sanctuary in Lagiewniki, which he called the “World Center of the Devotion to Divine Mercy”, he dedicated the fate of the world and every individual to God the Merciful Father who revealed his love in the Son, Jesus Christ, and poured it upon us in the Holy Spirit the Comforter.

Saint John Paul II died in the Apostolic Palace at 9:37 p.m. on Saturday, April 02, 2005, the vigil of Divine Mercy Sunday, which he had instituted. On April 08, his solemn funeral was celebrated in Saint Peter's Basilica. On May 01, 2011 the Remains of Saint John Paul II were moved under the altar of Saint Sebastian, next to the Pieta.

John Paul II was beatified in saint Peter's Square on May 01, 2011, by Pope Benedict XVI, his immediate successor and for many years his valued collaborator as Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. John Paul II was canonized by Pope Francis on April 27, 2014, on Divine Mercy Sunday.

## BLESSED FATHER MICHAEL SOPOĆKO



In June 1933, Fr. Michael Sopoćko met Sister Faustina Kowalska for the first time. It was in Vilnius, where he was the regular confessor of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. “At the very beginning she told me that she knew me because of a vision. She also told me that I was to be her spiritual director, who was to fulfill some of God's plans which were to be conveyed by her” – he recalled years later. Father Sopoćko was Sister Faustina's confessor and spiritual director till March 21, 1936, that is, till she left Vilnius. Later he corresponded with her many times and, in this way, he gave her advice and directions for her spiritual life and the fulfillment of the mission, while he was in Krakow, he visited her in the convent or in the hospital in Prądnik. At his request, Sister Faustina started to write the *Diary*. He was the person who took care of

painting the first image of the Merciful Jesus in Vilnius in 1934 and of the public veneration, which took place during the celebrations of the Jubilee Year of the Redemption on April 26 -28, 1935 in Ostra Brama (the “Dawn Gate”). Before World War II he made efforts to get the Church authorities to institute the Feast of Divine Mercy. He wrote a number of works on the truth of the Divine Mercy. Until the end of his life, he strove for the institution of the feast and approval of the Divine Mercy Devotion.

Father Michael Sopoćko was born in Juszewszczyzna, in Oszmiański district, on November 01, 1888. In 1910 he entered the Seminary in Vilnius.

In 1914 he was ordained and for four years he worked as a curate in Taboryszki. From 1919 to 1924 he was a chaplain in the army in Warsaw and, at the same time, he did specialty studies at the University of Warsaw's Faculty of Theology and at the Institute of Education. In 1924 he was moved to Vilnius, where, until 1932, he served as a chaplain in the army. Since 1928 he worked as an Assistant Professor in Pastoral Theology at the Faculty of Theology of Stefan Batory University. From 1927 to 1932 he served as a spiritual director in the Vilnius Seminary. In 1947 he came to Białystok and from that time till 1962 he gave lectures in the Seminary. It is astonishing how diverse his ministry was: he was a parish priest, a religious education teacher, he organized educational courses, served as a teacher, a lecturer in the University and the Seminary, a spiritual director, a confessor of seminarians, priests, and nuns. He was also a chaplain in the army, an activist who promoted sobriety and a builder of churches.

He died in Białystok on February 15, 1975. In 1987 the diocesan process towards the beatification of Fr. Sopoćko was inaugurated and in 1993 the acts of the case were handed over to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome. In 2004 Saint John Paul II promulgated a decree on the heroic virtues of the Servant of God and then a decree regarding a miracle attributed to his intercession. He was beatified in Białystok on September 28, 2008, and his relics repose in the Divine Mercy church in Białystok, which has been raised to the rank of an archdiocesan sanctuary.

### **SAINT MAXIMILIAN MARIA KOLBE**



Rajmund Kolbe was born on January 8, 1894 in Zduńska Wola. At the age of 16 he joined the Franciscan Order in Lviv and was given the name Maximilian. He then went to Rome, where he obtained doctorates in philosophy and theology. There, in 1917, he founded the Militia of the Immaculate Association, and a year later he was ordained a priest.

After returning to Poland in 1919, he founded a monastery in Niepokalanów near Warsaw and began publishing the magazine "Knight of the Immaculate". The successes achieved in Poland did not satisfy the friar. Wanting to win the universe for the Immaculate, he went in 1930 on missions to China and then to Japan.

Even some of his brothers thought that the expedition to the Far East was madness, but Father Kolbe created a second Niepokalanów in Nagasaki. He published the Japanese equivalent of the "Knight of the Immaculate" and founded a novitiate and seminary.

#### **Way of the Cross of Fr. Maximilian Kolbe**

In 1936 the monk returned to Poland, where three years later the war found him. He was arrested by the Gestapo and interrogated in Pawiak (Prison in Warsaw). On May 28, 1941, Father Maximilian Kolbe was sent to the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. It was given the number 16670.

Father Kolbe was full of unearthly peace; at night he comforted and lifted the spirits of the fellow prisoners. He wanted to awaken in them the will to live and survive," recalled one of the rescued prisoners. He said to his companions: "Trust in the Immaculate, you young people will live. I won't survive the camp, but you will be saved."

### **He gave his life**

On July 29, 1941, after one of the prisoners escaped, the camp commandant, Lagerführer Karl Fritsch, sentenced ten people to death by starvation. Although Fr. Maximilian Kolbe was not in this group, he voluntarily exchanged and offered his life for Franciszek Gajowniczek, whom he did not know.

When the fierce Lagerführer Karl Fritsch, in reprisal for the escape of a prisoner, select ten prisoners and condemned them to death by starvation and dehydration in the death bunker, "number 16670," Fr. Maximilian M. Kolbe, was not among them. When one of the condemned, Sergeant Francis Gajowniczek, cried out, "My poor wife and my poor children," Fr. Kolbe, driven by the supernatural force of charity and mercy stepped out of the ranks and, before the astonished eyes of the Commandant, presented himself, saying, "I want to die in his place". It was a miracle that Commandant Fritsch did not shoot him dead on the spot. He asked with scorn, "Who are you?" and Fr. Kolbe very calmly and firmly said, "I am a Catholic priest".

This reply is truly his ID card, and you could even say "Catholic priest" was his true first and last name. Saint Maximilian surely could have replied, "I am Maximilian Kolbe," or "I am a Franciscan friar," or even, "I am the leader of a large religious community".

Instead, he responded with the most noble and sacred title, written in the depths of his soul in an indelible sacramental character, the character of Holy Orders: "I am a Catholic priest". You can understand right away that, as soon as St. Maximilian showed his "ID card" as a Catholic priest, offering himself as a sacrificial victim in another's place, immediately Commandant Fritsch accepted the exchange, thinking cynically to himself, "Good! That will be one less priest!"

Father Maximilian also justified his decision: "I am almost fifty years old, I have lived my life, and this one has his life ahead of him. He has a wife and children." To a surprised German who asked why he wanted to die for a stranger, he replied: "I want to give others courage to live." The Franciscan friar died on August 14, 1941, finished off with an injection of phenol, as the last of the prisoners locked in the starvation bunker, in the basement of block 11, the so-called death block.

Franciszek Gajowniczek survived the war. He died in 1995 in Brzeg close to city of Opole region at the age of 94. He was buried in the Franciscan monastery cemetery in Niepokalanów.

Father Maximilian Kolbe was beatified by Pope Paul VI in 1971. Eleven years later, on October 10, 1982, he was canonized by Pope John Paul II. Greeting the German bishops, the Pope said: "May the new saint, Father Maximilian Kolbe, obtain for you, for your people and for your country, God's protection and lasting peace in freedom and justice." At the end he added: 'I ask everyone to pray for the intention of the Polish nation'.