



## THE FACE IN THE MIRROR, THAT IS THE IMAGE OF DIVINE MERCY

### **Mirror**

A daily look in the mirror mercilessly reveals the secret of my earthly life, limited by time, marked by transience. I have touched death several times, therefore, with special awareness and spiritual sensitivity, I rejoice in the grace of existence, and even more in the mystery of God's merciful providence. Thanks be to God; my life is wonderful. This is evidenced by all the favors ..., events ..., meetings ..., experiences ..., written on the "stone tablet" of my heart. At the same time, my life is fragile, which is what my body reminds me of. Do I lose my life while living, or is there more and more of it in me?

The laws of human nature, contrary to the achievements of modern medicine, I cannot change or cheat. So, am I born and live only to die? I ask myself, paraphrasing the words of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) - Who am I, being a human being? Is it just a "soul trapped in the body", "social and rational animal", "soulful body" or "incarnate spirit", "thinking reed", "devilish, purgatory or divine being", "lonely island thirsty for love" or anyone else, determined by the views of some philosophers and thinkers?

Saint John Paul II in his first encyclical "Redemptor Hominis", placing man at the center of his reflections, turns my gaze to Jesus Christ: "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. (.....) The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly-and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being-he must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter into himself with all his own self, he must "appropriate" and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deep wonder at himself. How precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he "gained so great a Redeemer", and if God "gave his only Son "in order that man "should not perish but have eternal life". (John Paul II, Redemptor hominis 10)

The fullness of humanity and the fullness of God's love revealed in the life and mission of Jesus of Nazareth explains to me the mystery of my existence, my priestly vocation, the meaning of life, work, suffering and death. Looking in the mirror, I see, in the spirit of faith, in the face of my imperfect humanity, the image of the Perfect Man and True God, Jesus Christ, my Savior, the likeness of whom I was called to life, from nothingness to eternity, from sin to holiness, from slavery to the freedom of the child of God.

It is difficult to live without looking in the mirror, it is even harder to live without looking at the image of God's Mercy, therefore I often look at this special icon that has accompanied me since childhood, "peregrinating" at all stages of my life so far, at the same time inviting me to pray with childlike trust. In my family home for many years at 3 p.m., with my parents and siblings, I prayed the Divine Mercy Chaplet. Today alone, or with my companion, in the "hour of mercy", we ask "have mercy for us and for the whole world", looking at the "icon of the Merciful Savior", hung in every room of the house, also in the room where I am writing these words.

### **Jesu's Face – through the theology of Image**

The Image depicts the figure of the risen, glorious and transfigured Christ, going out to meet man. At the same time, the symbolism of the painting refers to four biblical scenes. The first of them is the scene of Jesus' death on the cross, symbolized by pierced feet and hands and a wounded heart hidden behind a robe, from which blood and water flowed, marked by two spreading rays of pale and red color. The "rays of mercy" (cf. Diary 441), which embrace the whole world, symbolize the sacrament of Baptism, which begins the supernatural life of God's grace in human nature, and the sacrament of the Eucharist, which makes present the union of man with God, announcing the definitive fullness of life in God. Jesus' slightly lowered eyes, looking down from above, resemble his gaze from the cross (cf. Jn 19:18, 26-27, 34).

The second scene is the revelation of the Risen Christ to the Apostles in the Upper Room, symbolically marked by a delicately outlined door (cf. Jn 20:19). The third scene, depicted by the outstretched hand in blessing, refers to the ascension of Christ, who, leaving the earth, blessed the Apostles who were looking at him (see Lk 24:50-51). The fourth and final scene shows Christ as the Eternal and High Priest, in a white priestly robe, blessing and pointing to his Divine Heart, which, pierced on the cross, became the source of all the graces constantly bestowed in the Church by virtue of the one and most perfect Sacrifice of the New Covenant (cf. Heb 9:11-28).

The image is also distinguished by the inscription "Jesus, I trust in You", which is usually placed in its lower part, under the feet of Christ and together with His figure forms an inseparable whole. An image without an inscription would not faithfully correspond to Sister Faustina's testimony or to one of the most important conditions of the devotion of the Divine Mercy, which is the virtue of trust, which unites in itself the three theological virtues directed to the mystery of God's merciful love revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Faith in the existence of God, who is the fullness of mercy, the hope of receiving God's grace and the grateful love for God are united in an act of childlike and at the same time mature, i.e., persevering and certain, trust, which Christ asks of people in a special way. The testimonies of the Gospel convince us of this (cf. Mt 9:2, 22; 15,28; Mk 5:34, 36; 10,52; Luke 8:50; 18:42) and the words from St. Faustina's Diary: **"The graces of My mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is – trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive. Souls that trust boundlessly are a great comfort to Me, because I pour all the treasures of My graces into them. I rejoice that they ask for much, because it is My desire to give much, very much. On the other hand, I am sad when souls ask for little, when they narrow their hearts"** (Diary 1578).

The inscription "Jesus, I trust in you" placed on the image at the express request of Christ (cf. Diary 47:327) invites us to place total and exclusive trust in God, and not in man, in ourselves or in any other human being. However, it is not only the inscription mentioned above, but also the right hand of Christ, raised in blessing, that awakens in the human heart an act of trust.

### **Promises Related to the Devotion of the Image**

The image fulfills two special roles in the devotion of the Divine Mercy. The first of them, in accordance with Christ's promise to Sister Faustina, defines the image as a sign of God's extra-sacramental blessing: **"I am offering people a vessel with which they are to keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy. That vessel is this image with the signature: "Jesus, I trust in You (Diary 327) By means of this Image I shall be granting many graces to souls; so, let every soul have access to it. "** (Diary 570).

Linked to this general promise are three specific promises spoken by Christ, which concern eternal salvation, spiritual progress on the path to holiness, and the grace of a good death: **"I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish. I also promise victory over [its] enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death. I Myself will defend it as My own glory "** (Diary 48).

In addition, the image reminds people to practice mercy, in word, prayer and deed: **"I am giving you three ways of exercising mercy toward your neighbor: the first- by deed, the second – by word, the third – by prayer. In these three degrees is contained the fullness of mercy, and it is an unquestionable proof of love for Me. (...) By means of this image I shall grant many graces to souls. It is to be a reminded of the demands of My mercy, because even the strongest (163) faith is of no avail without works."** (Diary 742). From this it follows that the image is an artistic vision, integrally depicting the essence of the cult handed down by St. Faustina, the essence of which lies in the virtue of trust in the Divine Mercy and in the virtue of mercy rendered to one's neighbors, especially the poor and those suffering morally, spiritually, mentally and physically.

The devotion of the image of the Divine Mercy awakens the grace of love for God and for one's neighbor and allows us to experience the mercy of God, who not only compassionates and shows mercy to suffering man, but effectively comes to his aid in all the circumstances and experiences of life: **"Already there are many souls who have been drawn to My love by this image. My mercy acts in souls through this work. "** (Diary 1379).

The command, or even demand, of Christ, referring to the public cult of the image of the Divine Mercy, uttered during Sister Faustina's first mystical vision, was carried out, taking into account the fact that the image is venerated not only in the religious chapels of the Congregation to which St. Faustina belonged, but also in many private homes, chapels and churches located on all continents. in the universal Church and in the Church in USA, as well as in our Church in Los Angeles

As early as during her life, the Lord Jesus gave Sister Faustina an assurance that the image would draw many souls to God and that the Divine Mercy acts in souls through it (cf. Diary 1379). In 1938, in April she wrote in her 'Diary': **"Today, I saw the glory of God which flows from the image. Many souls are receiving graces, although they do not speak of it openly. Even though it has met up with all sorts of vicissitudes, God is receiving glory because of it; and the efforts of Satan and of evil men are shattered and come to naught. In spite of Satan's anger, The Divine Mercy will triumph over the whole world and will be worshipped by all souls."** (Diary 1789).

## Face

A daily look at the image of Divine Mercy envelops my heart with the grace of spiritual consolation. While the mirror shows my humanity in its real form with all its natural limitations, weaknesses and sins, the image portends the shape of my future and perfect life, liberated from all human disabilities.

It allows me to better understand the mystery of my priestly life and invites, and sometimes even forces me to live in the spirit of boundless and childlike trust in the merciful God and to become an instrument of God's Mercy towards my fellowmen whom I meet on the way of my life. I am aware that my life, redeemed with the Blood of the Savior, is the greatest grace of God's Mercy, which I experience constantly and that is why all previous circumstances and life experiences, regardless of my personal feelings, have a salutary meaning and priceless value.

The weakness of my mortal body, thanks to the Eucharistic union with Christ is strengthened and transformed by the holy and immortal life of God who, in his mercy, is faithful to the covenant he made with me in the act of my creation and redemption marked with the sacramental seal of Holy Baptism. That is why I know that by living, I am losing my earthly life every day, but at the same time there is more and more of this life that will manifest itself after death.

From the image, I look at the pages of the Encyclical "Dives in Misericordia" of Saint John Paul II, devoted to the mystery of God's mercy, to understand the essence of Merciful Love even more deeply, to look at the face of Jesus who, by bestowing His grace on me, awaits for my answer in the form of mercy towards others: "Jesus Christ taught that man not only receives and experiences the mercy of God, but that he is also called "to practice mercy" towards others: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (cf. Mt 5:7). The Church sees in these words a call to action, and she tries to practice mercy. All the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount indicate the way of conversion and of reform of life, but the one referring to those who are merciful is particularly eloquent in this regard. Man attains to the merciful love of God, His mercy, to the extent that he himself is interiorly transformed in the spirit of that love towards his neighbor.

This authentically evangelical process is not just a spiritual transformation realized once and for all: it is a whole lifestyle, an essential and continuous characteristic of the Christian vocation. It consists in the constant discovery and persevering practice of love as a unifying and also elevating power despite all difficulties of a psychological or social nature: it is a question, in fact, of a merciful love which, by its essence, is a creative love. In reciprocal relationships between persons merciful love is never a unilateral act or process. Even in the cases in which everything would seem to indicate that only one party is giving and offering, and the other only receiving and taking (for example, in the case of a

physician giving treatment, a teacher teaching, parents supporting and bringing up their children, a benefactor helping the needy), in reality the one who gives is always also a beneficiary. In any case, he too can easily find himself in the position of the one who receives, who obtains a benefit, who experiences merciful love; he too can find himself the object of mercy. (Saint John Paul II, Dives in Misericordia 14)

It is difficult to live without looking in the mirror, it is even harder to live without looking at the image of God's Mercy, therefore I often look at this special "icon of Merciful Jesus" and repeat in the silence of my heart "Jesus, I trust in You".

Fr. George J. Bobowski