



## **THE IMAGE OF DIVINE MERCY IN DIVINE MERCY SHRINE OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES**

The image of Merciful Jesus is one of the well-known images of the crucified and risen Christ in the history of the Church and in the contemporary world. It is a special painting not only because it is the most popular, but above all because its co-author is the Lord Jesus Himself, who appeared to Sister Faustina in this form in the cell of the Płock convent of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy on February 22, 1931, and ordered his image to be painted according to this vision.

Saint Faustina noted in her Diary: **"In the evening, when I was in my cell, I saw the Lord Jesus clothed in a white garment. One hand [was] raised in the gesture of blessing, the other was touching the garment at the breast. From beneath the garment, slightly drawn aside at the breast, there were emanating two large rays, one red, the other pale. In silence I kept my gaze fixed on the Lord; my soul was struck with awe, but also with great joy. After a while, Jesus said to me, Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: Jesus, I trust in You. I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and [then] throughout the world.** (Diary 47)

The image was therefore created by the will of Jesus himself. It is a sign and at the same time a visual synthesis of the entire message of God's mercy, which he conveyed through St. Faustina, because on the one hand it reminds us of the mystery of God's merciful love for man revealed in the pages of the Holy Scriptures, calls for the formation of a Christian attitude of trust in Him and mercy towards our neighbors, and also serves the role of a vessel for drawing graces, which was promised by Jesus with many promises. With trusting prayer before this image, combined with works of mercy towards one's neighbors, Jesus linked the general promise of all graces and temporal benefits (if they are in accordance with God's will), as well as specific promises: the grace of salvation, great progress on the path of Christian perfection and the grace of a happy death.

The first Image of Divine Mercy was painted in the studio of the Vilnius artist Eugeniusz Kazimirowski under the supervision of Sister Faustina in 1934. Since then, many different versions of the image of the Merciful Christ have been painted according to the vision of Sister Faustina, which can be found in churches and chapels all over the world.

A special place in this iconography and cult of the Divine Mercy Image is also occupied by another famous painting located in the chapel of the Convent of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy in Krakow-Łagiewniki, which was painted by Adolf Hyla.

It was there that the words of Jesus were fulfilled: **" I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and [then] throughout the world."** (Diary 47), although this Image was neither the first image painted under the supervision of Sister Faustina, nor the first image in the chapel of her Congregation. The image of Christ enjoys extraordinary veneration among the faithful and its copies and reproductions can be found everywhere, on all continents of the world.

An exact copy of this Miraculous Image of Merciful Jesus from Krakow-Łagiewniki found its place in the Archdiocesan Shrine of Divine Mercy in the Church of Christ the King in Hollywood.

This image of Divine Mercy was enthroned in a chapel within the Church of Christ the King on September 14, 2003. Since its installation, the image has attracted parishioners and members of the wider community who not only come to seek divine assistance but who also are reminded that they themselves are called to be instruments of mercy to others.

The veneration of this specific sacred image is one of the elements of the authentic forms of devotion to Our Lord, the Divine Mercy Incarnate, revealed to Saint Faustina Kowalska on February 22, 1931.

In 2003, three years after the canonization of Sister Faustina, the Image of Divine Mercy came from Poland to the local church of Christ the King thanks to Father Gorge J. Bobowski, who ordered it from the well-known polish painter, a graphic artist, and sculptor, Dimitr Grozdew, who also painted the images of Saint Faustina, Blessed Michael Sopoćko and paints other religious images. His Divine Mercy Paintings had traveled as far as the Philippines and Brazil.

Fr. George took this painting from Poland to Rome, and from there again through Poland to Los Angeles. The Image was blessed in Rome by Holy Father John Paul II. The Saint Pope, himself a great devotee to Merciful Jesus, upon the request of Father Zenon Jarzabek and Father George J. Bobowski, blessed and signed the Image on April 30, 2003, during a papal audience in the Vatican.

This Image at the Church of Christ the King, one of the contemporary copies of the countenance known through Saint Faustina's revelations, deserves special attention. Looking carefully at this Image, you will see Saint John Paul II's initial. Today, the Image of Merciful Jesus is the only one Icon in the United States signed by Saint John Paul II. This makes this Icon a relic.

The words of Jesus heard by a modest nun had been heard and repeated in innumerable languages: "Tell the world about my mercy" (Diary 699). Thanks to devotees to God's Mercy, and especially to Father Antonio Cacciapuoti, Father George J. Bobowski and all Christ the King Pastors, up to our current Pastor Fr. Juan J. Ochoa, the echo of these words of Jesus became much louder even in the world's movie capital, Hollywood.

For many years, the devotion to Divine Mercy has encountered serious difficulties in the Church and only the commitment of the contemporary Bishop of Krakow, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła made possible for these obstacles to disappear. No wonder that he was interested in a contemporary mystic, humble, uneducated nun, who has been chosen by Christ as the Apostle of His mercy. Once again, the word of God's Son has been accomplished: "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him." (Mt 11:25-27).

The teachings about God's Mercy are one of the foundations of John Paul II's Petrine Ministry. In his book "Memory and Identity" there is a separate chapter titled "The Mystery of Mercy"; He wrote: "I have chosen here to speak of Sister Faustina and the devotion to merciful Chris which she promoted, because she too belongs to our time [...]Saint Faustina's Diary appears as a particular Gospel of Divine Mercy, written from the 20th Century's perspective. The people of that time understood her

message. They understood it in the light of the dramatic build-up of evil during the Second World War and the cruelty of the totalitarian system. It was as if Christ had wanted to reveal that the limit imposed upon evil, of which man is both perpetrator and victim, is ultimately Divine Mercy.” Thus, in such light we should see the initiative of the devotees of the Divine Mercy, whom - with the Image of Jesus painted for the parish of Christ the King in Los Angeles - first made a trip to the Vatican.

The faithful from the Parish of Christ the King led spiritually by their pastor Father Antonio Cacciapuoti and Father George J. Bobowski prepared themselves for the enthronement of the Image in a separate chapel with prayers and deep reflection during special days of retreat conducted by Bishops from Bialystok — City of Mercy.

First, on September 6 and 7, 2003, they have met Bishop Edward Ozorowski, who delivered the lecture titled “Is There a Need to Talk About God’s Mercy These Days?” Also, he blessed a smaller image of the Merciful Christ, which soon after begun its peregrination through the households of the families of the parish which continues until now. As of today, over one thousand families were blessed to have the Icon in their homes for one week.

The main celebration took place one week later, on September 13 and 14; presided by Archbishop Stanislaw Szymcki from Bialystok, Poland. On the first day’s conference he taught about the “Divine Mercy according to the teachings of John Paul II” and celebrated Holy Mass. The following day, during the solemnly concelebrated Holy Mass, Archbishop Szymcki blessed the Chapel of Divine Mercy in Christ the King Church. This is where the Image of the Merciful Christ found its place. Jesus is really present; miracles had happened and continue to happen touching people’s lives. September 14, 2003, the day the Chapel was blessed coincides with the Solemnity of the Elevation of the Cross. The worshippers of God’s Mercy remember this day as the day when Christ dictated to Saint Faustina the Chaplet to the Divine Mercy.

On April 11, 2010, during the Divine Mercy Sunday, after 7 years, since the Chapel’s initial blessing, the altar in the Chapel of Divine Mercy, commissioned to Mr. Willie Gonzales, has been completed and solemnly blessed by Father Antonio Cacciapuoti, Father Charles Chaffman, Father George J. Bobowski and Father John-Paul Gonzalez with the assistance of Deacon Ricardo Villacorta.

Christ the King Parish has been blessed to have had all the priests who were dedicated to the Devotion to Divine Mercy. In 2019 Father Juan Ochoa became the Administrator of Christ the King Parish, in 2021 he was installed as a Pastor. From the beginning of his ministry, Father Juan embraced the Devotion to Divine Mercy and committed himself to have established the Archdiocesan Shrine of Divine Mercy at Christ the King Church

On October 14, 2023, Archbishop Jose H. Gomez declared the Divine Mercy Shrine of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles at Christ the King Church.

*Lelis Cruzata*