

We're about six weeks into the Great Quarantine, so let's start making some evaluations. Looking back, how well prepared were you for the shutdown? Did you have enough toilet paper, food supplies, etc.? My sister is a bit of a prepper – so she's having a satisfying "I told you so" moment. But I did sort of listen to her warnings. In the weeks before the stay at home order, I had stocked up on a few weeks-worth of food. I did it subtly, a few cans at a time, not wanting to appear to be "one of those people."

But I made one big error. I forgot to get a haircut. Rookie mistake. It's been a couple of months now (confession – my sister gave me a trim on Monday. She's proving pretty useful this month). Most people laugh when I tell them I had long hair back in high school. The mental picture is apparently amusing. But looking in the mirror these days takes me back there. If I ignored the grey hair, dug out a pair of wide-legged blue jeans from the back of my closet, and put some Foreigner or Boston on the stereo, it could be 1978 all over again.

I mention my preparation failure today because this is Divine Mercy Sunday – and an important part of this feast and spiritual devotion is not being caught unprepared. To say that Jesus wants us to know about His mercy sounds comforting, maybe even a little boring. But the message of Divine Mercy is more edgy than that.

The great saint of this feast is St. Faustina. She was a Polish peasant girl who entered a convent after World War I and died in 1938. A short life for a seemingly unremarkable person. But just as with St. Bernadette at Lourdes, and the three children of Fatima, God chooses simple, unnoticed people for His plans.

Over a number of years Jesus appeared to Faustina many times, telling her, this simple nun, to begin a new devotion and feast day in the Catholic Church dedicated to His Mercy. How was she to do that? It seemed impossible. Who would listen to her? But when Jesus wants something done, it happens. I won't go into the details, but there many twists and turns. For a while the Diary of Faustina, wherein she

describes her encounters with Jesus, was even condemned by the Catholic Church (due to a bad translation). But eventually the Archbishop responsible for evaluating Faustina's message was elected Pope, John Paul II (coincidence?). And everything changed. By the end of the 20th century the Divine Mercy feast, chaplet, devotion, had become well known. Faustina was canonized. Predictions she had made came true. When Jesus wants something done, it happens.

And what is this message of Divine Mercy? The scriptures today speak of mercy. And this means taking advantage of Jesus' desire to forgive our sins and reconcile with Him. In our gospel we have Jesus on the night of the first Easter giving the Apostles the power to forgive sins – the origins of the sacrament of reconciliation. This is the ordinary means we have of accessing Jesus' mercy.

But I now want to go back to the beginning of the homily and my point about being prepared for big, sudden crises. The context of Jesus' message to Faustina almost a hundred years ago is one of cosmic

preparation for Jesus' Second Coming. Jesus' basic point was that He is coming soon to bring His justice to the world – which will shock and overthrow it. But first, He will give people one last chance to prepare. Jesus is offering all of us His mercy . . . before He brings His justice.

Listen to a few quotes from St. Faustina's Diary. Jesus tells Faustina, "Write this: before I come as the Just Judge, I am coming first as the King of Mercy (#83)." And, "before I come as a just Judge, I first open wide the door of My mercy. He who refuses to pass through the door of My mercy must pass through the door of justice. #1147)" And, "I use punishment when they themselves force Me to do so; My hand is reluctant to take hold of the sword of justice. Before the Day of Justice I am sending the day of Mercy. (#1588)" Finally, "I have a special love for Poland . . . From her will come forth the spark that will prepare the world for My final coming. (#1732)" This is private revelation. Catholics don't have to believe these words. But the Church has found this message worthy of belief – and built this Feast Day around it.

So, the reason Jesus gave us this devotion and holy day is not to show He's nice (that's what mercy can sometimes summon up in our minds - niceness). Jesus is Love, but "nice" doesn't fit Him very well. He's too much a disturber of our comforts. The message of Divine Mercy is more along the lines of, "Last call before closing time." There is an urgency here. Jesus is saying, "I've offered you all my mercy and not enough of you are taking me up on it. Hurry up before it's too late!"

I wonder: how many of us are worried we haven't made good use of Jesus' mercy? I suspect most of us think we're doing fine with that: we're good. Really? Jesus means: Make use of the sacrament of confession! Remember our Gospel today? Forgiveness of sins by the Apostles and their successors is the first order of business for the resurrected Jesus. Do we make use of it? Remember, you can e-mail Fr. Tyler or me for confession. And do we pray the mercy chaplet every day? Do we remember the three o'clock hour of mercy? (By the way,

stream our Divine Mercy devotion today beginning at 2:00). In other words, are we preparing for the Just Judge?

Next pandemic, first thing I do is get a haircut. I've learned my lesson there. But, really, getting a little shaggy isn't such a big deal. I could forget worse things. But I now don't think the preppers are as crazy as I once did, because Jesus wants us to be spiritual preppers. If we are, the rest of the world will probably think we're crazy or exaggerating the situation. Jesus doesn't.

How well prepared were you for the coronavirus? When did you begin to take it seriously? How well are we prepared for the infinitely greater crisis of our meeting the Just Judge at the end of our life or Jesus' Second Coming? I don't know when that will be. But we should react to the Divine Mercy message as if it's a word out of a distant country that a strange new sickness has been showing up . . . It seems far off, but I hope we now realize that someday, sooner than we think, it's going to make it here, and shake our own lives – and then what?