

Feast Day of Saint Faustina 5th October 2011

Fr Paul and I have just returned from Poland after attending part of the Second World Apostolic Congress on divine Mercy. It was held at the Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Lagiewniki, Krakov. There had been around 4,000 people present – Cardinals, Bishops, clergy, religious – but most importantly laity from over 80 countries, including China, Kazakhstan, Argentina, Samoa - to name just a few. It was a very humbling, moving and exciting visit. We had, of course, combined our visit with a very special mission to collect a First Class Relic of St Faustina – a piece of her bone – which we, here at St John's, had been granted by granted by the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy due to the development of our own Shrine to the Divine Mercy in recent years.

Tonight then, we are receiving our relic of St Faustina into church for the first time – appropriately enough on her feast day too. And we are indeed reminding ourselves that St Faustina received from Our Lord a message of mercy that she was told to spread throughout the world. She was asked to become the apostle and secretary of God's mercy – a model of how to be merciful to others, and an instrument for re-emphasising God's plan of mercy for the world. Her entire life – in imitation of Christ's was to be a sacrifice – a life lived for others. At the Lord's request, she willingly offered her personal sufferings in union with him to atone for the sins of others; and in her daily life, she was to become a doer of mercy, bringing joy and peace to others. And by writing about God's mercy – in her Diary – she was to encourage others to trust in Him and so prepare the world for his coming again.

Initially, St Faustina wrote and suffered in secret – with only her spiritual director aware that anything special was taking place in her life. And it was only after her death from tuberculosis in 1938, that her fellow sisters were amazed to discover what great sufferings and deep mystical experiences had been given to Faustina, who had always appeared so cheerful and humble. Indeed, she had always referred to herself as being just a small flower in God's garden and she would be content with that. And appropriately our relic – if you look closely – is set within what appears to resemble a small flower in the middle of the reliquary container. St Faustina, then, had taken deeply into her heart Our Lord's gospel command “to be merciful as your heavenly father is merciful” – and she would always act in a way that anyone who came into contact with her would go away joyful. And this same message of mercy that St Faustina received is now being spread throughout the world through devotion to the merciful image of Jesus, as specifically revealed to her in her Diary – and before us here this evening.

And yes, of course, you will say to me – that this message is nothing new. And I would agree that it is indeed the same message proclaimed by our Lord in the Gospels, by the early Christian fathers and by the saints throughout the ages. Yet St Faustina was singled out by Our Lord to proclaim the urgency of this message for our time – here and now – and she urges all mankind to turn to the merciful Lord – to trust in him, and to reveal his mercy to others, while there is still time before He comes again.

So tonight in a few moments, we shall be invited to venerate first the merciful image of Jesus and then to venerate the relic of St Faustina, who proclaimed so lovingly and

faithfully the message Our Lord gave her. **In venerating St Faustina in this way, we are reminded that our relic is indeed a visible sign of her presence with us now in the great communion of saints. And as we do this, we can ask for the prayers of St Faustina and the grace of God to live the same kind of faith-filled life that Faustina herself lived.**

Even so, some of us may still feel uncomfortable with the thought of venerating and kissing relics of the saints – so perhaps it may help us to remember that as we visit the graves of our loved ones simply to express our love and respect; so in a similar way, we may view a relic with the same love and respect for what God has done through the life of that Saint in question. So it is surely appropriate that in time we should make space for a permanent place of reservation for this our relic of St Faustina here in St John's

But - moving back to our celebrations this evening: Our service will conclude with the relic of St Faustina being lifted up in Benediction over us – as we invoke the prayers of St Faustina once again, so that we might go out into the communities in which we live to be true proclaimers of Our Lord's love and mercy like her.

So now I shall close with some words which the then Pope – Blessed John Paul II – spoke on the day of Faustina's canonisation in April 2000:

“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!”