

**Question:** Does God extend the graces of the Divine Mercy Feast Day to both Catholics and Orthodox Christians on the first Sunday after their respective, but separate dates of Easter?

**Answer:** While the Church has made no official pronouncement in this regard, it is evident from the ecclesiastically approved writings of St. Faustina that the short answer appears to be a resounding “yes.”

The theological foundation for this affirmation is grounded in the following words of Jesus to St. Faustina Kowalska in 1934, “Ask of my faithful servant [a priest] that, on this day, he tell *the whole world* of My great mercy; that *whoever* approaches the Fountain of Life *on this day* will be granted complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to My mercy” (Diary, 300); “No soul will be justified until it turns with confidence to My mercy and this is why *the first Sunday after Easter* is to be the Feast of Mercy. *On that day*, priests are to tell *everyone* about My great and unfathomable mercy” (Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul: Maria Faustina Kowalska 570); “I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter *for all souls*, and especially for poor sinners. *On that day* the very depths of My tender Mercy are open. I pour out *a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fountain of My mercy...* *On that day* all the divine floodgates through which grace flow are opened. *Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet.* My mercy is so great that no mind, be it of man or of angel, will be able to fathom it throughout all eternity. Everything that exists has come forth from the very depths of My most tender Mercy. Every soul in its relation to Me will contemplate My love and mercy throughout eternity. Mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of My Mercy” (Diary 699); “The flames of mercy are burning Me – clamoring to be spent; I want to keep pouring them out upon souls...” (Diary, 177).

It is noteworthy that Jesus does not say that this great Feast Day of Divine Mercy is to be celebrated on the first Sunday after the Catholic Easter or after the Orthodox Easter, but more generously “after Easter,” that “everyone” and “whoever” on that day approaches him with works of mercy (Diary, 742)<sup>1</sup> in Confession and Communion (Diary, 699; 1109)<sup>2</sup> and venerates

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<sup>1</sup> Jesus had St. Faustina prepare for the Divine Mercy Feast Day by performing a work of mercy in reciting a Divine Mercy Chaplet Novena. She writes, “The Lord told me to say this chaplet for nine days before the Feast of Mercy. It is to begin on Good Friday. By this novena, I will grant every possible grace to souls” (Diary, 796). This Novena constitutes a ‘work of mercy.’ Indeed, Jesus tells St. Faustina, who was confined to her convent, “*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 this means a soul glorifies and pays reverence to My mercy. Yes, the first Sunday after Easter is the Feast of Mercy, but there must also be acts of mercy, and I demand the worship of My mercy through the solemn celebration of the Feast and through the veneration of the image which is painted. 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 faith is of no avail without works*” (Diary, 742).

<sup>2</sup> “I want to grant a complete pardon to the souls that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion on the Feast of My Mercy” (Diary 1109).

the Divine mercy image (Diary 742; cf. also 47; 49; 88; 341; 570) will obtain a total remission of all sin and punishment, and that on that day no soul should fear to draw near to him.

It is fortuitous that the Gospel reading of the first Sunday after Easter connects both the Catholic liturgy (“Divine Mercy Sunday”) and Orthodox liturgy (“Thomas Sunday”) – both Churches read the Gospel of John 20:19-31, which depicts Jesus on the evening of Easter as he appeared to his disciples in the upper room, breathed upon them and said unto them, “Receive ye the Holy Spirit.” As if by divine providence the two post-Easter observances of both Catholics and Orthodox coincide with the same Gospel reading. It is reasonable to conclude that this common liturgical observance of both east and west bears witness to the common outpouring of the Holy Spirit (and to the plenary indulgence attached thereto) that occurs on the day of this Gospel reading – the first Sunday after their respective but different dates of Easter. Jesus made it clear to St. Faustina in the preceding passages that the Divine Mercy Sunday indulgences are a part of the experience of the universal church. Indeed during the Orthodox Rite great emphasis is placed on the “Prayer of the Publican” that is recited many times during their services: “O God, be merciful to me a sinner,” and the acclamation recited many times over, “Lord, have mercy,” both of which emphasize “trust” in the love and kindness of God that is expressed through his “divine mercy.”

**Question:** Does God grant this plenary indulgence of the Feast Day of Divine Mercy to the Orthodox Church which does not celebrate it as a universal Feast Day like the Catholic Church?

**Answer:** Let us recall that Jesus assures St. Faustina that he is already outpouring this plenary indulgence of the Feast Day of Divine Mercy upon souls as early as 1934 (Diary, 300), 1935 (Diary, 570) and 1936 (Diary, 699), without it being officially sanctioned by the Orthodox Church and long before the Catholic Church sanctioned and elevated it to the status of a Universal Feast Day (April 30, 2000). This means that before the Church approved this devotion, Jesus, in his great mercy, was already granting the graces of a plenary indulgence to those individuals who on the first Sunday after Easter 1) approached him with works of mercy (Diary, 742) in 2) Confession and 3) Communion (Diary, 699) and 4) venerated the Divine mercy image (Diary 742). On November 5, 1934, Jesus reveals to St. Faustina, *“And who knows anything about this feast? No one! Even those who should be proclaiming My mercy and teaching people about it often do not know about it themselves. That is why I want the image to be solemnly blessed on the first Sunday after Easter, and I want it to be venerated publicly so that every soul may know about it”* (Diary, 341).

Jesus also requested in 1936 that the Divine Mercy Chaplet, even before it was recognized by the Church, be recited by all the nuns in the convent to appease the Father’s wrath (Diary, 714). Indeed the Feast Day of Divine Mercy is intimately linked to the times of mercy in which St. Faustina lived and in which we now live, and that precede the day of God’s justice. Insofar as said ‘times of mercy’ preceded the Church’s approval of the Divine Mercy Feast Day, the outpouring of the graces associated therewith did also. So if, on the one hand, God had

already begun to outpour the graces of the Divine Mercy Feast Day during St. Faustina's lifetime, on the other hand, he also requested a solemn celebration of this Feast Day (Diary, 742) and that the Church recognize this Feast Day (Diary, 570).<sup>3</sup> To St. Faustina Jesus reveals, "*Let all mankind recognize My unfathomable mercy. It is a sign for the end times; after it will come the day of justice*" (Diary, 848); "*The flames of mercy are burning Me – clamoring to be spent; I want to keep pouring them out upon souls...*" (Diary, 177).

**Question:** How is the plenary indulgence that has been granted by the Church since the 11<sup>th</sup> century different from the plenary indulgence of the Divine Mercy Feast Day that has been granted in recent times by Christ and that is now sanctioned by the Church?

**Answer:** First, when the church grants a plenary indulgence she, acting as "the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints" (cf. CCL, 992; CCC, 1471); "the Church... [acting] as the minister of Redemption, dispenses and applies authoritatively the treasury of the expiatory works of Christ and the saints" (Manual on Indulgences, Apostolic Penitentiary, the fourth edition 1999 of *Enchiridion, Indulgentiarum: Normae et Concessionoes*, Norm 1).

Second, the Church permits that a plenary indulgence may be obtained once a day. Third, the plenary indulgence may be applied only to oneself or to a deceased soul in purgatory. Fourth, the Church requires that the following five conditions be met for one to obtain a plenary indulgence (a total remission of all sin and punishment):

- 1) that one have sacramentally confessed their sins within 20 days prior to or on the day of the indulgence
- 2) that one receive the Holy Eucharist on the day of the indulgence
- 3) that one perform a prescribed work (e.g., recitation of the 5-decade rosary in a church or oratory; 30 minutes in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, etc. Cf. "The Handbook on Indulgences, Norms and Grants," 1991).
- 4) that one pray for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff
- 5) that one have the interior disposition of complete detachment from sin, even venial sin

It is noteworthy that for the sake of those legitimately impeded, confessors can commute both the work prescribed and the conditions required (except, obviously, detachment from even venial sin).

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<sup>3</sup> "... *The first Sunday after Easter is to be the Feast of Mercy, and on that day, priests are to tell everyone about My great and unfathomable mercy*" (Diary, 570); "*I desire that the first Sunday after Easter be the Feast of Mercy*" (Diary, 299); "*I want the image to be solemnly blessed on the first Sunday after Easter, and I want it to be venerated publicly so that every soul may know about it*" (Diary, 341). *this is why the first Sunday after Easter is to be the Feast of Mercy. On that day, priests are to tell everyone about My great and unfathomable mercy*" (Diary, 571).

When Jesus instituted the Feast Day of Divine Mercy in recent times, indeed during the lifetime of St. Faustina Kowalska, he asked that five conditions be met in order to obtain the Divine Mercy plenary Indulgence:

- 1) that one have sacramentally confessed their sins with “a contrite heart” (Diary, 1485; 1739; cf. footnotes 4 and 6) within 20 days prior to or on the first Sunday after Easter. While it is spiritually advantageous to sacramentally confess within close proximity of the Divine Mercy Feast Day, on account of the shortage of priests, the Church permits one to confess within 20 days prior to or on the day of the indulgence
- 2) that one perform works of mercy (cf. footnote 1).
- 3) that one venerate the image of the Divine Mercy on the first Sunday after Easter
- 4) that one approach the Feast of Divine Mercy with “trust”<sup>4</sup>
- 5) that one receive the Holy Eucharist on the day of the indulgence

Unlike the church’s plenary indulgence that emerges from the Church that “dispenses and applies authoritatively the treasury of the expiatory works of Christ and the saints,” the Divine Mercy plenary indulgence emerges from “the very depths of” Jesus’ “Mercy”: *“This Feast emerged from the very depths of My Mercy” (Diary 420); “On that day the very depths of My tender Mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the fountain of My Mercy” (Diary 699); “This Feast emerged from the very depths of My Mercy, and it is confirmed in the vast depths of My tender Mercies. Every soul believing and trusting in My Mercy will obtain it” (Diary, 420); “On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open” (Diary, 699).*

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<sup>4</sup> *“I desire trust from My creatures. Encourage souls to place great trust in My fathomless mercy. Let the weak, sinful souls have no fear to approach Me, for even if it had more sins than there are grains of sand in the world, all would be drowned in the unmeasurable depths of My mercy” (Diary, 1059); “Come, then, with trust to draw graces from this fountain. I never reject a contrite heart. Your misery has disappeared in the depths of My mercy. Do not argue with Me about your wretchedness. You will give me pleasure if you hand over to me all your troubles and griefs. I shall heap upon you the treasures of My grace” (Diary, 1485); “Write, My daughter, that I am mercy itself for the contrite soul. A soul’s greatest wretchedness does not enkindle Me with wrath; but rather, My Heart is moved towards it with great mercy” (Diary, 1739); “How very much I desire the salvation of souls! My dearest secretary, write that I want to pour out My divine life into human souls and sanctify them, if only they were willing to accept My grace. The greatest sinners would achieve great sanctity, if only they would trust in My mercy” (Diary, 1784); St. Faustina relates, “Hail, open Wound of the Most Sacred Heart, From which the rays of mercy issued forth And from which it was given us to draw life With the vessel of trust alone” (1321); “Approach this fountain of Mercy often, to draw with the vessel of trust whatever you need” (Diary, 1487); “Take the vessel of trust and draw from the fountain of life” (Diary, 1488); “Tell souls that from this fount of mercy souls draw graces solely with the vessel of trust. If their trust is great, there is no limit to My generosity. The torrents of grace inundate humble souls. The proud remain always in poverty and misery, because My grace turns away from them to humble souls” (Diary, 1602); “Sooner would heaven and earth turn into nothingness than would My Mercy not embrace a trusting soul” (Diary 1777).*

Unlike the church's plenary indulgence that may be applied either to oneself or to a deceased soul in purgatory, the Divine Mercy plenary indulgence may be applied only to oneself. Unlike the Church's plenary indulgence that may be obtained once a day, the Divine Mercy plenary indulgence may be obtained only one day a year, for only on that day (the first Sunday after Easter) are the floodgates of divine mercy unleashed upon mankind (Diary, 300, 570, 699).

Unlike the Church's plenary indulgence that requires complete detachment from venial sin,<sup>5</sup> the Divine Mercy plenary indulgence requires "contrition" (Diary, 1485; "imperfect contrition" for venial sins, and "perfect contrition" for grave sins).<sup>6</sup> And if the Catholic Church's 2001 Apostolic Penitentiary Decree, "Indulgences attached to devotions in honour of Divine Mercy" stipulates that in order for the faithful to observe Divine Mercy Sunday with "intense" devotion one is to recite a "prayer for the intentions of Supreme Pontiff," observe "prayers and devotions held in honour of Divine Mercy" (e.g., the Novena chaplet), and have "a complete detachment from venial sin, such detachment signifies that there is no sin which the soul is unwilling to renounce. An attachment to sin involves a refusal to amend a situation, and one may confidently know that one has complete detachment when they are resolved to overcome all sin. Should one, after having made said resolve on Divine Mercy Sunday, fall into sin afterward, such falls do not nullify or impede God's divine mercy from flooding the soul and cleaning it of all sin and punishment on Divine Mercy Sunday. Jesus reassured St. Faustina, *"Let no soul fear to draw near to me, even though its sins be as scarlet"* (Diary 699); *"My Mercy is greater than your sins and those of the entire world"* (Diary 1485); *"The greater the sinner, the greater the right he has to My Mercy"* (Diary 723).

Let us thank almighty God for Divine Mercy Sunday that constitutes is a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit reserved for these end times and intended for the salvation of all souls (Diary 1182). To St. Faustina Jesus reveals, *"Write down these words, My daughter. Speak to the world about My mercy; let all mankind recognize My unfathomable mercy. It is a sign for the end times; after it will come the day of justice. While there is still time, let them have recourse to the fount of My mercy; let them profit from the Blood and Water which gushed forth for them"* (Diary 848).

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<sup>5</sup> There is an account of St. Philip Neri, who died in 1595, preaching a jubilee indulgence in a crowded church. A revelation was given to him that only two people in the church actually obtained it. It is said that this was largely on account of most people not being completely detached from sin.

<sup>6</sup> *"The contrition called 'imperfect' (or 'attrition') is also a gift of God, a prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is born of the consideration of sin's ugliness or the fear of eternal damnation and the other penalties threatening the sinner (contrition of fear)... By itself however, imperfect contrition cannot obtain the forgiveness of grave sins, but it disposes one to obtain forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance"* (CCC, op. cit., 1453). *"Among the penitent's acts contrition occupies first place. Contrition is 'sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again'"* (CCC, op. cit., 1451). *"When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called 'perfect' (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible"* (CCC, op. cit., 1452).