

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Easter

On October 5, 1938, a young nun named Sr. Maria Faustina Kowalska died in at a convent in Krakow, Poland. She was the third of ten children, who came from a very poor family that had struggled hard on their little farm during the terrible years of World War I. As a result, she only had three years of a very simple education. After initial attempts to join the religious life, she was eventually accepted by the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, at the age of 20. At the convent, she was relegated to rather menial tasks, usually in the kitchen or the vegetable garden, or as a greeter at the front door.

But in February 1931, after being in the convent for less than five years, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself appeared to Sr. Faustina with rays of light radiating from His heart. He said to her, “Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature, ‘Jesus, I trust in You’. The Lord then went on to say, “I desire that this image be venerated first in your chapel, and throughout the world. “The two rays denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water, which makes souls righteous [baptism]. The red ray stands for the Blood, which is the life of souls [the Eucharist]. These two rays issued forth from the very depths of My tender mercy when My agonized heart was opened by a lance on the Cross.” This image is known as the Divine Mercy image, a copy of which can be seen in front of the altar here.

Canonized a saint in 2000, Faustina recorded in a diary the content of the many appearances of Jesus to her and the conversations they had. In § 1184 of her diary entitled, *Divine Mercy in my Soul*, she writes the following: “In the evening, I saw the Lord Jesus upon the cross. From His hands, feet, and side the Most Sacred Blood was flowing. After some time, Jesus said to me, “All this is for the salvation of souls... And when it seems to you that your suffering exceeds your strength, contemplate My wounds, and you will rise above human scorn and judgment. Meditation on My passion will help you rise above all things.”

The wounds of Jesus. Of course on Good Friday, the day Jesus died on the cross, we meditated on His great suffering for us – in particular the wounds from the nails that pierced His hands and feet. These were signs of His passion and death. But, if they were indeed signs of His passion and death, then why do they still appear on His body after His resurrection? We just heard in the Gospel today, which took place on the very evening of Easter Sunday: “On the evening of that first day of the week...Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side...Now Thomas...was not with them when Jesus came. So...he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” In other words, even though Jesus defeated sin and death, He did not shun or hide the very wounds that killed Him. Why? Because it was those very wounds that saved us and healed us! And these scars are the proof – the proof that Jesus really died because He really loved us, and that He is really risen from the dead!

When we think about it, though, we all have scars. Some are physical – like this one I have on my head from when I fell down the steps at my grandmother’s house as a kid, not once, but twice! It’s more fun to tell that story now than back then! Other scars are hidden – emotional wounds from the past – the marks from the people and situations that have hurt us.

The thing about scars is that they’re conversation starters – there’s a story behind each and every scar. In the case of Jesus, it was His passion, death, and resurrection to save us from our sins. But our scars too have stories to tell too. But, that story can tell one of two tales. It can speak of the bitterness of what someone did wrong to us, and the resulting anger and unforgiveness that we still hold on to. Or, it can be the story of a journey of letting go of that hurtful past, letting Jesus heal the wounds those scars represent.

You see, when we let Jesus into our wounds, or when we unite our suffering to His suffering, we can absolutely find the very hope and strength He possessed in the midst of His very own Passion. When we let our wounds be united to His wounds, we can find true peace in healing. It’s for this very reason that Jesus Himself declared to the disciples in our Gospel today when He appeared to them that Easter evening: “Peace be with you.”

A song I like very much is by the contemporary Christian artist, Johnny Diaz. Appropriately enough, the song is called *Scars*, the refrain of which goes: “So praise God we don't have to hide scars. They just strengthen our wounds, and they soften our hearts. They remind us of where we have been, but not who we are. So praise God, praise God we don't have to hide scars.”

My brothers and sisters, we don't have to hide our scars. We certainly shouldn't hide them from God, because it's His hope and strength that we truly need to bear the wounds behind them. But, we also don't have to hide them from one another. Actually, in this way, scars actually give us a personal story to tell of how Jesus' Resurrection means something to me personally – not just for someday in the future when I die, but even for today in the here and now! For, as Jesus shows us, when we lead with our weakness, which shows that great power of God working in and through us, great things can happen. Just look at His wounds from Good Friday to know the rest of the story. “Contemplate My wounds, and you will rise above all things.” God bless you.