

## DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

On this weekend when we honour the image of Divine Mercy, the Gospel presents us with the character of Saint Thomas, sometimes dubbed *doubting* Thomas. But I wonder whether he was doubting. Why? Let's not forget the words of Saint John Henry Newman who once said: "Then thousand difficulties don't make one doubt!" That is, any struggle to grasp a given reality doesn't necessarily result in a doubt. Doubting is dangerous, after all? With the current plethora of AI one cannot help but struggle, be incredulous, one cannot but have difficulties putting all the pieces of the puzzle together, especially when the biased media is providing the pieces! At least, St Thomas had the audacity to speak his mind concerning his difficulties, to put the matter on the table, as one might say. How many political leaders fail in that regard out of fear of public retribution, how many civic leaders lack objectivity and transparency? Let's be honest, most of us, either err in our quest of believing by falling on one of two sides: being too credulous (believing too readily) or being incredulous (wanting in belief).

One person who remained somewhat incredulous regarding a renowned mystic was Fr Michael Sopocko who in 1948, penned these words, as Confessor and Spiritual Director of St Faustina: "I met Sister Faustina in the summer of 1933, when she was in the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy where I was the regular confessor. I became interested in her because of her unusually delicate conscience and close union with God: most of the time there was nothing to absolve her from and she never committed a mortal sin. At the very beginning she told me that she had known me for a long time because of visions. She also told me that I was to be her spiritual director, who was to fulfil some of God's plans relayed by her. I ignored what she told me (incredulous or what!) and put her to a test which, with the Superior's permission, made Sister Faustina look for another confessor. After some time she came back to me and said that she would endure everything but she would not leave me again. For fear that Sister Faustina was having delusions, hallucinations and fantasies, I asked the Mother Superior, to provide me with some information about her. When the results proved most favourable, I still deferred for some time. For I could not quite believe it all; I prayed and pondered over it. Not revealing what and who it was about, I also asked a few knowledgeable priests what should be done. The matter at hand was the Lord's alleged demand for an image to be painted and for instituting a feast of Divine Mercy after Easter. Finally, I became curious what the image would be like rather than believe that Sister Faustina's visions were true, and I decided to have the picture painted. When the work was completed in June or July, 1934, Sister Faustina complained that the image was not as beautiful as her vision yet the Lord put her at ease saying: "I am offering people a vessel for graces... that vessel is this image with the signature: 'Jesus, I trust in You'". At that time Sister Faustina could not explain what the rays in the picture denoted. After a few days she said that the Lord Jesus had told her: "The two rays in the image denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water which makes souls righteous and the red ray stands for the Blood which is the life of souls. They gush forth from My Heart, which was opened on the Cross. These rays shield souls from the wrath of the Heavenly Father. Blessed is the one who will dwell in their shelter, for the just hand of God shall not lay hold of him... I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish. I also promise victory over its enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death. I Myself will defend it as My own glory... I desire that the first Sunday after Easter be the Feast of Divine Mercy."

What should be thought about Sister Faustina and her revelations? As regards her natural disposition, she was a completely stable person without a hint of psychoneurosis or hysteria. Naturalness and simplicity characterized her relationship with the sisters in the Congregation and others. She was not an emotional type nor prone to mood swings. Nor did she draw attention to herself at all but, on the contrary, she tried not to stand out and she told only her confessor and superiors about her spiritual experiences. She did not suffer from psychological depression and nor did not become upset when she failed some task, but endured it calmly, as God's will. As regards her intellectual capabilities, she was wise and able to form a sound opinion of things although she was not well educated at all: she could hardly read and write. As far as her morals go, she was utterly sincere and would never exaggerate or tell lies. She always told the truth even when it cost her much. For example, in 1934 during the summer I was away for a few weeks and Sister Faustina did not tell the other confessors about her spiritual experiences. On my return she told me that she had burnt the diary (that I had commanded her to write) – she claimed that an angel had come and ordered her to throw it in the stove saying: 'You are writing nonsense and because of you, you and others, can get into serious trouble. What do you have to show for the mercy? Why do you waste your time writing about some hallucinations? Burn all of that and you will be calmer and happier!' There was nobody around that Sister Faustina could consult and when the vision appeared again she complied. Afterwards knowing that she had done the wrong thing, she told me everything and began again to write her diary. In mid-September 1938, I visited Sister Faustina in the infectious diseases hospital where she was already prepared to die. She insisted that my main task was to make sure that the Feast of Divine Mercy was instituted on the first Sunday after Easter. On the 26th of September she told me that she would die in 10 days time and she did, passing away on October 5th. I could not come to the funeral because I was so busy. Though I do recall just before her death, I saw Sister Faustina in a state of ecstasy. It was on September 2nd, when I visited her in the hospital. After leaving her, I suddenly returned to give her some extra prayers, and when I opened the door found her engulfed in contemplation. Though she was sitting, she seemed to be almost levitating over the bed. Her eyes were fixed on an invisible object, and her pupils slightly dilated, for some time she did not take any notice of me, and I did not want to disturb her and was intending to leave, but soon she came round, noticed me and apologised for not hearing me knock or enter. I gave her the prayers and said good-bye again, she smiled and said: "See you in heaven!" How true that was. For Fr Michael died in 1975 and was proclaimed a blessed, in heaven, by Pope Benedict XVI in 2008. If we like them "trust in Jesus" in spite of all our difficulties we too will see each other in Heaven!