

THE CECILIAN

A NEWSLETTER TO HONOR ST. CECILIA, VIRGIN AND MARTYR
AND A CHRONICLE OF MICHAELA SASSE'S DISCERNMENT AS A CONSECRATED VIRGIN LIVING IN THE WORLD

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"But He, rising early on the first Sabbath, appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went and announced it to those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. And they, upon hearing that he was alive and that he had been seen by her, did not believe it." Mark 16:9-11

It gives me deep satisfaction to know that the first person our Lord appeared to after He had risen was a woman. One of my favorite books is *Saint Mary Magdalene: Prophetess of Eucharistic Love*. In this book, Fr. Sean Davidson intuits that in Luke 7:47, the sinful woman who anointed the feet of Jesus was St. Mary Magdalene. A Pharisee scoffed at the sinful woman touching the feet of Christ. Jesus said in response, "Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give Me water for My feet, but she wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not greet Me with a kiss, but she has not stopped kissing My feet since I arrived. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she has anointed My feet with perfume. Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven, for she has loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Our Lord's appearance to St. Mary Magdalene is Divine Mercy in action! St. Mary Magdalene was not just any woman; she was a woman who perfectly repented and responded completely to an invitation of His Love. She knew great love as she had been forgiven much. Jesus said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to great repentance." Luke 5:32

A few weeks ago, I had coffee with two friends from FHSU, Fr. Adam Urban and Gentry Heimerman. Last year, Fr. Adam was ordained a diocesan priest for the Diocese of Salina. Gentry has served as the Director of Young Adult Ministry in the Diocese of Dodge City for the past ten years, and he has a beautiful marriage with five children. While sitting with these two men who have been so influential in my faith life, I was struck by how unique God's call is for each of us. I will never forget when I experienced the love of our Lord in Eucharistic Adoration for the first time, and it was because Gentry invited me. I was entirely unaware of Eucharistic Adoration before I attended FHSU, and as St. Mary Magdalene illustrates, spending time at the feet of Jesus is transformative. I spoke with Fr. Adam last summer about my desire to enter religious life, and he was the one who suggested I talk to Bishop Vincke about a vocation as a Consecrated Virgin Living in the World, a vocation that I first read about ten years prior. How mysterious are the Lord's designs; how He longs for us to respond to His invitation.

What does it mean to be a consecrated virgin? Simply, to love Christ as His Bride as a sign of the heavenly union and to serve the Church. A consecrated virgin is not a lay vocation; as a consecrated virgin, one is set apart with approval from the Church to live in a state of perpetual virginity and mystical espousal for the Kingdom of God. As a priest remains celibate for his Bride, the Church, a consecrated virgin remains celibate for the Eternal Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. When a man and woman marry, this is reflective of the sacrificial love Christ has for His Church. My heart was so full as I contemplated these different manifestations of Christ's love sitting at one table!

Throughout Lent, I was privileged to walk with fifteen young women at the FHSU Campus Center as they discern how Christ is uniquely calling them to respond to Him. It has been so encouraging to walk with others who want to respond to whatever Christ's invitation may be. May we find lasting joy and healing in sitting at His feet as we journey to Heaven.

PRAYER INTENTIONS

- Vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life
- For all to experience the depths of God's mercy



ST. MARIA FAUSTINA KOWALSKA

Virgin

St. Faustina was chosen by Jesus to be His missionary of the powerful message of Divine Mercy, but her visionary spiritual life was hidden by her humble external appearance. In 1905, she was born as Helena Kowalska to a family of poor peasants in Poland and was the third of ten children. She felt called to a religious vocation from the age of seven, but she was discouraged from pursuing it by her parents as they could not afford the dowry, which was the money and wardrobe required for a woman entering religious life. Instead, she threw herself into worldly fads, going to dances with her sister and using the money she earned from nannying to buy fashionable clothes. She was in fact so stylish, that one previous employer commented that she thought Helena was too expensive to hire. It was evident she had a natural gift for telling stories to the children, who were captivated by her speech. Even later in her religious life, sisters admitted that they loved being in her company and called her their "lawyer" because of the persuasive way she used hand gestures to boost her argument.

Helena's life took a dramatic turn when at nineteen years old, she saw a vision of the scourged, suffering Christ while at a dance in the park with her sister. As she witnessed His body covered in wounds, she was compelled at that moment to enter religious life immediately. She packed her bags that night, and traveled to Warsaw where she was refused by several convents before finally being accepted by the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. She entered the community when she was almost twenty years old, taking the name Sister Maria Faustina. The community was devoted to caring for the spiritual and educational needs of troubled women, which included helping unwed mothers and women trapped in a life of prostitution. Sister Faustina, however, was given the most menial tasks to do because of her lack of schooling. Whether she was cooking, gardening, or answering the door, Sister Faustina was always cheerful, humble, and diligent. Exteriously, her religious life would have seemed quite ordinary. Yet interiorly, the Lord was inviting her more deeply into His plan for the redemption of humanity through an extravagant union with Him.

Sister Faustina began receiving visions of Jesus who asked her to become His apostle and "Secretary of Mercy." She was being recruited to proclaim the truth about God's mercy to the world, and to implore God's mercy for sinners through new forms of devotion. Out of obedience to Christ and her spiritual director, she recorded the revelations and messages received from Our Lord in her diary, *Divine Mercy in My Soul*. In it, she faithfully documented all of Christ's words and her encounters with Him. Jesus said to her, "Secretary of My most profound mystery, know that your task is to write down everything that I make known to you about My mercy, for the benefit of those who by reading these things will be comforted in their souls and will have the courage to approach Me" (Diary 1693).

None of these events were known beyond Sister Faustina's spiritual director and superiors, and after her death even her closest sisters were shocked by the great sufferings and mystical experiences she had. St. Faustina lived a hidden life of sacrifice, constantly uniting her sufferings with Christ's Passion and cooperating with His plan for the salvation of souls. Her life was filled with extraordinary experiences; she was able to perceive the supernatural world with her senses, and she was endowed with gifts such as reading human souls and prophecy. In her humility, she did not see her gifts as her source of sanctification, but rather, doing the will of God. St. Faustina told Jesus, "I want to love you as no human soul has loved you before." She died in Krakow in 1938 at the age of thirty-three from tuberculosis. In 2000, she was canonized by Pope John Paul II, and her message of Divine Mercy has continued to spread throughout the world, leading souls to trust in Jesus and His love for them.

REFLECTION

"If the angels were capable of envy, they would envy us for two things: one is the receiving of Holy Communion, and the other is suffering."

This quote from St. Faustina leads me back to the words of our Lord: "She who has been forgiven much, loves much." I think the same is true of suffering; that the individual who has suffered much is called to love much. The Crucified One now reigns in eternal glory. What merit does our suffering have in store for us? How are we being asked to pick up our crosses, splinters of what the Lord bore, to have a share in His inheritance?

St. Faustina, pray for us.

