

Divine Mercy: Explained by a 2 ½ Year Old

This Sunday, we celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday. This day was begun by Pope St. John Paul II in the year 2000. For years before that day, and even to today, there has been much written about the source of this image of Jesus with white and red rays coming from him down to the whole world. This image was given to Sr. Faustina of Poland back in the 1930s, along with messages she recorded in her diary, which was later published. For a time, this diary was suppressed, as many did not accept that this word indeed had come to Sister from Jesus. Now, it is a popular devotion for many, and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy (using rosary beads) is said to be a valuable prayer for those near death as well as all believers.

But what is “Divine Mercy”? What does this mean to us today? How is this part of our lives? The best explanation I have heard was from my great-nephew, Ethan, who will be starting second grade this fall. He is the son of our nephew, who was ring bearer at our wedding a hundred years ago (please don’t do the math!).

Like so many other little ones, Ethan at 2 ½ was working on potty training. And his mom used the ever-popular method of giving him M&Ms every time he was able to successfully complete this task.

In the middle of this intensive training, Ethan went to a birthday celebration for one of his buddies. At the end of the party, each guest was

given a “goody bag” of treats to take home. Ethan, like the rest of the party goers, immediately emptied his bag out on the floor to see what was inside. And in the bag was a full-size pack of milk chocolate M&Ms, probably the most he had seen in his entire life.

He picked up the bag and stared at it, and then gave it right away to his mother. When she asked why he was doing this, he replied in his best toddler English “no Ms—no go potty”. He had so connected the candy with the task at hand that he felt unworthy of all these since he had not completed his end of the bargain. “Oh,” his mom replied, holding back her laughter. “It’s ok-these are a gift for you. You don’t have to go potty for them!” Ethan happily took the bag back and ran off to play.

This is the meaning of Divine Mercy. For many years, before as well as after Jesus came to earth and rose from the dead, people believed that they had to DO SOMETHING to earn God’s love. There were rules to be followed, such as rinsing cups or not eating pork, or saying the rosary daily or whatever, and if these rules of the time were not followed satisfactorily, then God would be “angry” and “turn his face” from them. Herds and loved ones would be lost, lives made miserable, and consolation hard to find until proper atonement was achieved. This could be via the sacrifice of a farm animal or the completion of a penance given by a confessor.

While it is true that we have the Ten Commandments and other edicts and

obligations to help us stay close to our Lord, the Lord will never forsake us or abandon us. There is no sin or omission or action too great to cause God to forget about us. We are never beyond redemption, unless we ourselves turn away from it.

Just like the party M&Ms, mercy is a GIFT to us that we don't have to do anything to get. Jesus showers all of us with his mercy and love. We often may not feel worthy, because we haven't done this or that, or we committed this sin or another. And those things can move us further away from God. But God doesn't move—we do. And we can always come back, come closer to Him.