

# Holy Rosary offers encounter with God's love on Divine Mercy Sunday

One by one, a steady stream of people approached the confessionals at Holy Rosary in Fells Point on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 8.

Some were in their teens. Others had white hair and used walkers. Many stood in line for an hour or more as four priests granted absolution inside the draped, wooden boxes of mercy.

For some, it was the first time they had received the sacrament in decades. At least one woman left the confessional with tears of joy streaming down her face.

"It's just so amazing and so beautiful seeing so many people taking advantage of the graces of this day," said Elissa Voss, a wedding photographer from Tennessee who heard about the Divine Mercy Mass while shooting a wedding at St. John the Evangelist in Frederick the day before.

Voss rescheduled her flight home so she could attend the Divine Mercy Mass in Baltimore.

"I just love the message of mercy," said Voss, who befriended the people around her as they waited in line for their turn in the confessional. "God wants to give us a reminder that he will do anything to show that his heart is longing for us."

More than 570 people from across the Archdiocese of Baltimore and around the country gathered at Holy Rosary for the special celebration of a feast that has been on the church's liturgical calendar since the Jubilee Year 2000.

Divine Mercy Sunday is connected to Christ's private revelations to St. Faustina Kowalska, a 20th century Polish nun who had visions of Christ.

In her diary, the nun wrote that Christ promised that on the Feast of Divine Mercy "the soul that will go to confession, and receive Holy Communion, shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment."

Celebrated on the second Sunday of Easter, the feast's readings focus on God's mercy. The Holy Rosary celebration included readings and hymns in English and Polish.

### **Power of forgiveness**

In his **homily**, Archbishop Lori emphasized the power of forgiveness. He recalled his friendship with Bishop David Foley, the retired bishop of Birmingham, Ala.

Archbishop Lori first met the future bishop while a seminarian at Mount St. Mary's in Emmitsburg. Then-Monsignor Foley, pastor of a parish not too far from the seminary, was well known as an ever-cheerful person, Archbishop Lori said.

On the day of Bishop Foley's ordination, Archbishop Lori recalled, he revealed the reason he's always so happy: going to confession every two weeks.

"If God loves me so much that he forgives my sins," Bishop Foley said, "what do I have to be sad about?"

Now nearing the end of a battle with cancer, Bishop Foley retains that same cheerfulness. His soul, Archbishop Lori said, is at peace.

"He is as cheerful about dying as he was about living," the archbishop said. "Why? Because he lived his life surrounded by the mercy of God."

Divine Mercy Sunday is a "wonderful opportunity to experience more deeply the peace of Christ and the joy of receiving his mercy anew," Archbishop Lori said.

### **New chapel**

Holy Rosary has a special association with St. Faustina because Father Ronald Pytel, a former pastor, was cured of congestive heart failure when prayers were offered to St. Faustina for her intercession on the priest's behalf. Father Pytel's unexplained

recovery in 1995 became the second miracle needed for St. Faustina's canonization.

The official archdiocesan Shrine of the Divine Mercy is located at Holy Rosary.

During the Divine Mercy Sunday liturgy, which included the sung Chaplet of Divine Mercy and a eucharistic procession, Archbishop Lori blessed a new Divine Mercy chapel which complements the existing shrine in the church.

The new shrine, located in the narthex, features a painting by Polish artist Ewa Mika that depicts Christ as he appeared in a vision to St. Faustina. Christ is dressed in white with his left hand held near his heart, emanating red and white rays symbolizing the blood and water that gushed from the heart of Christ at his crucifixion.

The new shrine also includes paintings of St. Faustina and St. John Paul II.

Relics of St. John Paul II, St. Faustina and Blessed Michael Sopocho (St. Faustina's confessor) are located in the new chapel, where many worshippers solemnly kissed and venerated the sacred objects.

Society of Christ Father Ryszard Czerniak, pastor of Holy Rosary, said the idea for establishing the new Divine Mercy chapel came from his predecessor, Society of Christ Father Andrej Totzke.

Three years ago, Father Totzke discussed the idea for the shrine with a visitor named Victor B. Majka. On the spot, the man offered \$100,000 in memory of his wife, a former parishioner, to help make the new chapel a reality.

"Our people are very happy," Father Czerniak said. "They have been waiting for this shrine, but it was going slowly. Now, it is here just in time for Divine Mercy Sunday."

The pastor noted that marble for the shrine was imported from Vietnam. The total cost for the project was \$142,000, he said.

Daily Masses will be celebrated at the new chapel Monday through Thursday at 6:30 p.m. in English. On Fridays, there will be a 3 p.m. Mass in English and a 7 p.m. Mass

in Polish. Divine Mercy devotion and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament will follow the 3 p.m. Friday Mass until 6:45 p.m. An 8:30 a.m. Mass in Polish will be offered on Saturdays. Confessions are held 30 minutes before every Mass.

Daniel Wacławski, a parishioner of Christ the King in Glen Burnie, called the new worship space “beautiful.”

“We’ve watched it while it was under construction,” said Wacławski, whose fiancée, Krystyna Obrebska, is a music minister at Holy Rosary who sang for the Divine Mercy Mass.

“The paintings are beautiful,” he said, “particularly the vision of Jesus. It’s very expressive, very joyful – and the painting of John Paul II is so life-like. They’re all great pieces.”

Bella Czuhajewski, a parishioner of Our Lady of Peace at Fort Meade, hopes more people will be drawn to Divine Mercy.

“We want to spread that mercy and forgiveness,” she said. “Touching one person, you can change them.”

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