

Mary, Our Mother of Divine Mercy

Talk given by Fr. Shroff at the Legion of Mary One-Day Retreat
at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Metcalfe

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I am very happy to be giving this talk to you today on the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday during this one-day Legion of Mary Retreat. It is very important for us to have regular retreats, and to take time during these retreats to return to the essentials of our Faith. There is a profound link between the devotion that we know today as “Divine Mercy” and Our Blessed Mother. I would like to explore part of this relationship with you today, and especially look at the question of how Our Lady fits into the mystery of Christ in His Divine Mercy.

Divine Mercy, of course, is a devotion that has Christ as its primary focus. But like so many other aspects of our Catholic Faith, Jesus often doesn't come alone. Devotion to His Divine Mercy does not exclude Our Lady, any more than devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus would exclude the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We know, through Faith, that Christ and the Blessed Virgin always work hand-in-hand. The mission of Jesus is the mission of the salvation of souls. He came into this world as the beloved Lamb of God who, by suffering His bitter Passion and dying on the Cross, takes away the sins of the human race. But Christ's mission of salvation of souls is surrounded, wrapped in (if we wish to say it that way) the maternal mission of Our Lady's Immaculate Heart. Not only does Mary never will anything that is contrary to her Son, but we must go much further and say that, in fact, she **only** wills what He wills. You all know the Gospel of the wedding at Cana very well (St. John, Ch. 2). There, we hear Our Lady saying these important words to the stewards of the wedding feast: *Do whatever He [that is, Jesus] tells you!* What Mary is saying is: *Do whatever Christ wills. Seek to carry out the Will of Christ in all things.* These few brief

words, this short phrase (Do whatever He tells you) is in fact the full secret to holiness. There is no holiness possible outside of the Will of Christ. And so the first step in acquiring holiness is for us, as St. Paul says, to “put on the mind of Christ.” The Blessed Virgin Mary, like no other creature before her and like none other that will come after, is thoroughly imbued with the mind of Christ. Her will is God’s Will. So closely united are those two wills.

We speak, in Catholic devotion, about the Hearts of Jesus and Mary: the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts, and about their profound union of intention. Mary never wills what is contrary to the will of her Son; but also, we can just as truthfully say that Jesus never wills anything that goes against the will of His Mother.

The Divine Mercy Devotion, as it was spread largely by St. Faustina and the writings of her beautiful Diary, is all about living in the Heart of Jesus. Another way of saying that is: living in the Will of Jesus. Christ’s human will is completely and thoroughly one with the Divine Will of His Divinity and therefore with the Will of His Heavenly Father. So important is this principal of living in the Will of God that some Saints in the Middle Ages even gave a sort of incarnation to this principal through their names. When you read about the lives of monks from the Mediaeval times, you come across such beautiful names as St. *Quodvultdeus* in Latin or St. *Dieuleveut* in French. Both of these names mean the same thing: *That which God wills* or, to put it more succinctly, *The Will of God*. These were their names because this is what they sought out their whole lives: to live in the Divine Will of God, and nothing else.

God’s Will is expressed through His attributes. And of all God’s attributes, the Divine Mercy devotion centres on two of them: (1) God’s justice; and (2) God’s mercy.

Now, often when we think of mercy, we tend to oppose it to justice. We tend to think of justice as the righteous anger of God (God the Angry

Father) and of mercy as the maternal tenderness of God (God the Tender, Loving Mother). Now of course this is a false separation. God is not bipolar; He is not schizophrenic; he does not have multiple personality disorder! In fact, one of the qualities that St. Thomas Aquinas describes as a central attribute of God is what he calls Divine Simplicity: God is complete and totally simple. *Deus omnino simplex*, in the Latin. What St. Thomas means is that there is no complexity or division or composition in God. All of His attributes are essentially His Divine Essence and Nature. What this means, for our subject, is that God's justice and God's mercy are not two separate things. And they are certainly not in opposition with each other. God is not 50% just and 50% merciful. God is 100% just and 100% merciful. His justice is His mercy, because in God all things are one. This is what we mean by Divine Simplicity.

But because we are human, and because we tend to think in human ways (even when we are reflecting on God), we often impose our human understanding on the mystery of God Himself. And so we divide God's justice from His mercy. Some have even gone so far as to say that the God of the Old Testament is the God of Justice and the God of the New Testament is the God of Mercy. This is completely and totally false. There are not two Gods: the Old Testament God and the New Testament God. God is completely one, and it is the same God who reveals Himself in both Testaments: and He reveals Himself as being completely merciful and completely just at the same time.

Some people tend to divide justice and mercy by apportioning them between Jesus and Mary. These people say that Jesus is concerned primarily with justice, and Mary with mercy. This too is completely false. It leads to the error of thinking that Christ always seeks to condemn us because of our faults and sins, whereas Mary always seeks to make excuses for us and obtain forgiveness from her Son. Christ strikes, and

Mary heals. There is nothing further from the truth. If this were true, then it would mean that Jesus and Mary are actually working against each other: one, trying to find fault in us in order to condemn us by His justice, and the other, trying to excuse us and obtain God's forgiveness and pardon for us, by her mercy. All of these erroneous views that oppose justice and mercy (the justice of the Old Testament vs. the mercy of the New; or the justice of Jesus vs. the mercy of Mary)...all of these views are false because they do what God forbade us to do. In the Gospel, Our Lord says, when speaking about the Sacrament of Marriage: *What God hath joined, man must not divide!* Well, apply this principal to Christ and to the Blessed Virgin. Fewer things were joined more closely together than Jesus and Mary. Their two Hearts are so closely united in intention, in fact, that St. John Eudes did not speak of the **Hearts** of Jesus and Mary (in the plural): instead, he spoke of the **Heart** (in the singular) of Jesus-Mary. What God has joined, man must not separate. We cannot oppose or separate the justice of Christ and the mercy of His Mother. Jesus Christ is infinitely merciful and just: and so is the Blessed Virgin.

First of all, in order to understand this, we need to ask ourselves: *What is mercy?* There are many false conceptions of mercy out there today, so it would be good to begin by looking at *What mercy is **not**.* Mercy is not the suppression of justice. For example, a judge who fails to sentence a murderer to prison under the pretext of mercy (and who chooses, instead, to let him go scot free) is **not** being merciful at all: he is simply failing to be just. Mercy is also **not** the suppression of truth, or leaving people in their sins or even condoning sin in any way. Some members of the clergy (and even the Catholic hierarchy in the Church today) explicitly or implicitly promote intrinsic evils such as divorce and remarriage, or the homosexual lifestyle. They do this in the name of mercy. *Jesus wouldn't judge, we are told; He would be merciful.* But these clerics

don't understand the mercy of Christ at all. In the Gospel, when the woman who was caught in adultery was publicly dragged out of the house and brought into the presence of Jesus, Christ **did**, in fact, forgive her. He did not condemn her. But what did He say to her after giving His forgiveness: *Go, and sin all you want, because God is merciful and He still loves you???* No! He said to her, *Go and **sin no more!*** Offend God no more by your sins. Christ offered her His forgiveness (His absolution, if you will), but He also told her very clearly to turn away from her sinful life.

Mercy is not about saying to the sinner, *It's ok if you keep sinning, because God loves you anyway.* Mercy is about offering the forgiveness of Christ, and then saying to the forgiven sinner, *Go and sin no more.* Jesus even told one sinner who was healed of a physical illness (and physical illnesses are seen in the Bible as an image of sin)...He told the man whom He healed physically: *Do not sin any more, lest something worse than this befall you.* Mercy, then, is **not** the condoning of sin. This was the great error of Martin Luther (well, one of his numerous errors!). Martin Luther, who broke away from the Catholic Church and formed what became known as the Lutheran Church, took a quotation from St. Augustine and put on it a false interpretation or spin. Luther famously said, *Sin boldly, and believe even more boldly.* He was saying that our confidence or trust in God should be greater than our sins — and in this sense, he is right. But it is the first part that he gets wrong. *Sin boldly* is the exact opposite of what Christ taught: *Go and sin no more!* To say to someone, *Sin boldly!*, is a false mercy. God does not want us to sin **at all** — let alone to sin boldly. Yes, if we should be so unfortunate as to fall into sin, He does want us to have great trust and confidence in His power to forgive. We must never allow our sins to lead us into despair. But Christ never says to us, *Go and sin boldly.* Sin is the antithesis (the exact opposite) of holiness: therefore it is the opposite of God. Sin is the true enemy of God. He cannot condone

it or tell us that it is ok. The Church too, founded by Christ, has no right to say to her children: *Sin boldly, just have confidence in God's mercy*. To say that would be a false understanding of God's Mercy.

I have spoken thus far about the notion of mercy and justice, and about true vs false mercy. But we haven't yet really gotten to our topic at hand. The title of this talk is *Mary, Our Mother of Divine Mercy*. How is it that we can call Mary the Mother of Mercy? First of all, some people (even some Catholics) object to this expression. *God is the Author of mercy*, they say, *not Mary*. And in a sense they are right. But once again we see a false opposition that they create between Jesus and Mary, between Christ and His Blessed Mother. **Attributing mercy to Our Lady does not, in any way whatsoever, diminish or devalue the fact that all mercy has God as its ultimate source.** In a similar way, we say that loving Mary does not take away any love from Jesus whatsoever; or honouring Mary does not diminish the honour that we owe to Christ Our Saviour Himself. On the other hand, we glorify Jesus even more when we glorify His Mother. And that is why it is good for us to understand how Mary is the Mother of Divine Mercy — because it will help us to better understand the Mercy that flows from the Heart of Jesus Himself.

We call Mary the Mother of Mercy in the Church's great Marian antiphon, the *Salve Regina*. It begins with these words: *Salve Regina, Mater Misericordiae! Hail, O Queen, Mother of Mercy!* One of the greatest commentaries on the *Salve Regina* ever written was written by the Holy Bishop and Founder of the Redemptorist Order, St. Alphonsus Mary de Liguori. If you want to understand why we call Mary *Mother of Mercy*, then read his great commentary on the *Salve Regina*. You will find it in the beautiful work entitled *The Glories of Mary*, which is one of the most popular and most read works on Marian devotion of all time: perhaps second only to St. Louis-Marie de Montfort's *True Devotion to the Blessed*

Virgin. I will give you some highlights from what St. Alphonsus says, but I highly encourage you to read the entire original work yourself: *The Glories of Mary*.

St. Alphonsus Mary begins by saying that because Christ is truly King, His Mother can truly be called Queen. That is why we begin by saying *Salve Regina! Hail, O Queen (or Hail, Holy Queen, as we translate it into English)*. St. Alphonsus goes on to say that Mary is not just any queen though. This is what he says: “For our consolation, we ought to remember that Mary is a most tender and kind Queen, eager to help us in our miseries. So much so that the Church wants us to call her in this prayer a Queen of Mercy. Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy!” He then adds: “If Jesus is the King of the universe, and Mary is its Queen, then, as Queen, she possesses by right the whole Kingdom of her Son.”

Now this is very important, because it shows us that Mary has full possession of Christ’s Kingdom. If His Kingdom is a Kingdom of Mercy and forgiveness from sin, then Mary becomes the Queen of that Kingdom of Mercy. As Queen of Mercy, she is full of compassion towards sinners. She prays for them, intercedes for them, obtains graces of conversion for them. She does not abandon them even when they practice great wickedness. She constantly implores God’s grace for sinners. In a certain sense, we can say that the **First One** ever to have prayed for the Divine Mercy of Jesus to envelope the world and save sinners, was Our Lady. She was the first to pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy: maybe not in the form in which we know it today, but in the sense that she was the very first intercessor for God’s mercy on the world. As Jesus was crucified and cried out from the Cross, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*, Our Blessed Mother made a similar prayer within her maternal and sorrowful heart: *My Son, forgive them for crucifying Thee, for they know not what they do*.

Now even though we cannot divide justice and mercy, strictly speaking, between Jesus and Mary, St. Thomas Aquinas says something that may be very surprising for you to hear. He says the following: “When the Blessed Virgin conceived the Eternal Word in her womb and gave Him birth, she obtained half the Kingdom of God. She became Queen of Mercy and her Son remained King of Justice.” These words seem to contradict what I was telling you about Justice and Mercy in Jesus and Mary respectively. But we must understand them in the correct light. Saint Thomas is not saying that Jesus is only just and that Mary is only merciful. He is speaking in a mystical language, which does not always have the same precision as when he was speaking theologically, as in the *Summa Theologica*. Mystical theology often uses poet or metaphorical images and expressions. The idea that St. Thomas Aquinas was trying to convey is this: Christ gave to His Mother a very specific mission in regard to His Kingdom. The mission was this: Mary was chosen to be the one through whom the Mercy of Christ would reign in His Kingdom. Mary was given by Christ the specific title: *Queen of Mercy*. She is not just the Mother of Mercy: she is also its Queen! Remember how we cannot separate what God has joined together? Well, in the Blessed Virgin, she is both Mother and Queen. And her maternal role cannot be separated from or opposed to her Queenship. She is Queen of Mercy because she is Mother in the Kingdom of her Son; and She is Mother of Mercy precisely because she is Queen in Christ’s Kingdom.

When we speak of Our Lady as the Mother and Queen of Mercy (or as the Mother and Queen of Divine Mercy — because we are, after all, talking about the Mercy of Christ who is God), we can look at the Blessed Virgin’s relationship to Divine Mercy in a few different ways.

For example, the first thing to note is this: Mary is Mother of Divine Mercy because she was the first and greatest recipient of the Mercy of

God. Every grace, as we know, comes to us from Christ's suffering and Passion on the Cross. But what was the first grace that Our Lord wished to obtain through His Cross? The very first grace that Jesus won on the Cross was not for you or me. It was not for any Angel or celestial power. The very first grace that He won on the Cross was for His greatest creature: the Masterpiece of the world that He created: it was for Our Lady! The first grace that Jesus won through His agony and Passion and suffering on the Cross was that He obtained for Mary, His Blessed Mother, the grace of being conceived without Original Sin. The Immaculate Conception is the first and greatest recipient of Christ's Divine Mercy! Every man and woman born in this world, since the sin of Adam and Eve, contracted Original Sin from the very moment of their being conceived in the maternal womb. The Blessed Virgin Mary — and she alone — was preserved from the stain of Original Sin by a singular, and completely unique, grace that her Son obtained for her from the Cross. You might object, "But Mary was conceived before Christ was even born in this world, and certainly before He died on the Cross!" Yes, she was. But that doesn't matter. Because the Cross, though it took place at one particular moment in time, is not bound by time. The Cross was a historical event, that took place in history, but at the same time it is a reality that transcends all of history and time. And so God, in His infinite Wisdom and Mercy, could apply the merits of Christ's Death on the Cross even to an event or to a person that came before the Crucifixion. God is not bound by time; God is eternal! And this is exactly what God the Son obtained for His Blessed Mother. She was preserved from Original Sin in advance, even before the Cross (the source of all grace) took place. This grace, given to Our Lady in advance of the Cross (historically speaking) is what Catholic theology calls *Prevenient Grace* — from the Latin *praeveniens*: coming before. Mary was redeemed in advance of the Cross, before the event of

the Cross historically took place: but always in view of the Cross, and by the merits of her Son's sacrifice on the Cross. Because God is not bound by time, neither is His Grace. In this way, we see how Our Lady was the absolute first recipient of God's Grace, and therefore of Christ's Divine Mercy. This is why we call the Blessed Virgin *the Mother of Mercy*. She was the Mother in the sense that she was its first receiver or beneficiary. Mary as the Immaculate Conception was the first Masterpiece of Grace in the created world, which showed the power of Divine Grace and Mercy in the life of a mere human being.

But there is another reason why we call the Virgin Mary the Mother of Divine Mercy. Not just because she was the very first to **receive** the Mercy of God in her soul, but also because Christ gave to His Blessed Mother the power to **spread** that Mercy throughout the whole world. As Mother and Queen of Mercy, Christ gave her the power to dispense His Mercy to whomever she wills. This is why the Saints unanimously say that if the Blessed Virgin prays for a soul, that soul will surely arrive at the port of salvation. Her prayers are efficacious because they are imbued with the Divine Mercy of her Beloved Son. All Mercy has as its Source the Divinity of Christ; all Mercy passes through the Sacred Humanity of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross; and all Mercy is dispensed through the maternal hands of His Blessed Mother. This is why the Catholic Tradition refers to Our Lady as the Mediatrix of all Graces. And although this title has not been infallibly defined by the Church in her extraordinary Magisterium (there has been no formal, solemn, papal pronouncement declaring Our Lady to the Mediatrix of all Graces (at least not yet), nevertheless, belief in her under this title of Mediatrix of all Graces, is certainly firmly anchored in the Sacred Tradition and Apostolic Deposit of Faith. No good Catholic theologian would deny that all graces pass from Christ through Our Lady. She is the channel of all graces. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux uses the image

of a human body. He says that if Christ is the head, and if the body represents the members of Christ (that is, His Church), then how does the head communicate with the body? How do graces flow (that is, how does life pass) from the head into the body? Well, St. Bernard says, through the neck! The neck connects the head with the body, and without the neck, our body would be headless, and our head would be useless because it would not be able to communicate with the rest of us.

And so, St. Bernard says, Mary is like the neck. In the Mystical Body of Christ, Jesus is the Head, we are the members, and Mary is the neck that connects the Head to the members. All graces flow from Christ to us through her!

This is another reason why we call Our Lady the Mother of Divine Mercy or Grace. She distributes the graces, won by her Son's sacrifice on the Cross, to whomever she pleases. If Mary smiles upon us and favours us with her maternal care, then we can be sure that we are on the right path to eternal salvation. And this is why St. Louis-Marie de Montfort famously said the following words in his great little book *The Secret of Mary*. He said: *O faithful soul, if then everything in the spiritual life comes down to this one thing: finding grace from God, then I now tell you a secret of how to do just that. And here is the secret: In order to find and obtain the grace of God, we must first find Mary.*

And there you have it, out of the mouth of one of the greatest Marian Saints ever to have lived: In order to obtain Graces and Mercy from Christ, we must ask for them through His Blessed Mother! Mary is the Dispensatrix of all Graces. To her alone did Christ Our Lord give power to dispense His graces as she willed. And because Mercy is nothing else than obtaining Divine Grace from Our Lord, this is the ultimate reason why we call Mary *Our Mother of Divine Mercy*.

In the Old Testament, in the time of the monarchy, there was a well-established idea that if you wanted to obtain grace and favour from the King, then you had to first of all obtain grace and favour from the Queen-Mother. If the Queen-Mother was on your side, then there would be nothing that her Son, the King, would not grant you. In order to find grace with Him, you had to find grace first with her!

Similarly, in the spiritual life and in regard to our eternal salvation, if we wish to be filled with the Divine Graces and Mercy of God (of Christ Our Lord and King), then we **must** seek these Graces and this Mercy through our Queen-Mother. And that is why, in the Legion of Mary, we consecrate ourselves to Jesus through Mary. In our Act of Consecration, we say very clearly to her: *I am all thine, O Mary, my Queen and my Mother, and all that I have is thine.*

Truly, Mary is the Mother of Divine Mercy! Truly, there is no Mercy or Grace that we cannot obtain from her Son if we ask for it through her. Mary is the Mother of Mercy because she was the first and greatest recipient of the Mercy of God (through her Immaculate Conception), and because it was to her that Our Lord confided the distribution of all His graces and of all His Mercy. And that is why we should pray faithfully every day that beautiful Marian antiphon that reminds us of this truth: the *Salve Regina*. Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy; hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope....