

the CATHOLIC NAVIGATOR

Aboard St. Peter's Barque with the Catechism Charting Our Course

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Chasing Holiness

Today, Pope Francis canonizes two of our most influential popes: Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II. John XXIII is known for convening the Second Vatican Council. He is said to have announced, "I want to throw open the windows of the Church..." (After this part there is disagreement on what was said). No evidence of this is found. He is known for having had the common touch. Very busy being the bishop of Rome, he was passionate about the poor and weak, exhibiting these concerns in frequent visits to hospitals, prisons, and orphanages. The Vatican Council he called was meant to finish the first Council, convened 100 years earlier but unfinished due to the outbreak of war. Because of the significance of this event, his feast day is

October 11th, the opening of Vatican II, rather than the day he died, as commonly marks a saint's feast day.

On the other hand, Pope John Paul II seemed very much to be the bishop of the world. Traveling more than any other pope, he was learned, an educator, and wrote volumes! When still a bishop (in 1965), he examined Sr. Maria Faustina's life and determined that the formal process of canonization should be begun. This process did begin and Pope John Paul II was in St. Peter's chair 35 years later to canonize St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, the Divine Mercy saint, in 2000! It is fitting that the Church takes Divine Mercy Sunday, the day that John Paul II did much to promote, to canonize him.

This is a vast and diverse family. It says a lot about a church when two of its own, recognized for such different emphases and seemingly opposing views, are both seen to be living in God's direct presence.

Tender Mercies

Divine Mercy Sunday is a day that has been dedicated to celebrating Jesus' endless mercy. The Divine Mercy image shows Jesus Christ with one arm extended in blessing and the other arm bent, touching his heart. Rays of light (red and white) extend outward from his heart, representing blood and water. This image is a reminder that Jesus' mercy is unending, and we are called to share this mercy. For most of us, our only experience with God's vast mercy is in the experience of the merciful heart of another.

This image of God's infinite mercy was given to a young Polish woman who was born in 1905 and lived only 33 short years: Helenka (Helena) Kowalska. She became a nun at 20 and was soon receiving messages and visions from Jesus and his mother, Mary. Jesus charged her with getting this image of God's mercy drawn and told her "Proclaim that mercy is the greatest attribute of God." (*Diary*, #301)* God's mission for her was to make all aware of his mercy. She tirelessly pushed (through what some now believe to have been tuberculosis) to get this image officially recognized, as well as the Divine Mercy prayers given to her by God. The first Mass celebrated with this image present was in 1935, just three years before Sr. Maria Faustina ("the fortunate one") died.

She made many aware of the special graces that come to those who go to confession, receive communion, and throw themselves into the unending reserve of God's mercy. In the short decade of her active ministry, St. Faustina not only completed her mission from God, but left behind a diary and a legacy that made an old message of mercy new and fresh.

*Diary of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul © 1987 Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M. Used with Permission



SAINTS PRESERVE US!

Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) was another woman who lived just 33 years. She spent her time trying to do God's will. She is the saint, mystic, and a Doctor of the Church whose feast day is celebrated this Tuesday, the 29th. Beginning in childhood (she is said to be the 25th child of a wool dyer in Siena, Italy!), she began seeing angels and hearing voices. She became a Dominican *tertiary* at 16. ['Tertiary' means third. She was in the 'third order' of the Dominicans, or those who took the habit and made vows, but who did not live in community]. She practiced a type of 'hermit-lifestyle' in a back room of her father's house.

In 1366, Catherine is said to have been 'espoused,' or engaged, to Jesus. Here the soul feels the almost constant presence of God. This time marked the beginning of her public activity. She gained a certain fame doing works of mercy (especially during the plague), healing the sick, solving disputes, and advising high level officials. Her writings are considered amongst the greatest in the Church.

She is believed to be largely responsible for getting the Pope to return to Rome from Avignon during a time when power plays were abundant both outside and inside the Church. It is said that she reminded Pope Gregory XI of a vow he had made to return to Rome, a vow he had told no one about! He saw this as a sign and made plans to return, thus ending 74 years of papal reign in Avignon, France. When Gregory died, Rome elected Urban VI, but the bishops in Avignon thought that they should still be the center of the Church and elected their own pope. This 'Great Schism' ('divide') greatly troubled Catherine, and she worked tirelessly to unite all. Sadly, she would die long before this schism would end.

It's Been Said...

...that belief is opposed to reason. Nay-nay! Belief is opposed to unbelief, not reason. Even philosophy, one of the most reasoned of activities points to the "reasonableness" of faith. Thomas Aquinas, in his massive work, the *Summa Theologiae*, offered five arguments that pointed to the existence of God. These are called the *Five Ways*, or *Five Proofs*. In these arguments, Aquinas used the same approaches that scientists use~ observation, measurement, workings of the natural world, logic, and reasoned analysis. Not exactly like sensory knowledge, they still make a good argument!



CATECHETICAL CORNER

Today, the readings deal with belief and doubt. And look at what it is we are called to believe-- none other than one of the core beliefs expressed in both the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds: on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead! This is not an easy thing. Having just gone through the scandal of Christ's Passion and death, the disciples don't know what to believe. (CCC 643) Thomas' reaction reflects our own sensibilities: give me proof! This doubt among the Apostles shows us that the event of the Resurrection was not just something produced by some folks who *wanted* to believe it. (CCC 644) Rather, this event stood against their belief and offered them the same challenge that it offers us.

We are offered a clue as to *how* to believe in Luke's Gospel, "...Why do you seek the living among the dead?" (Lk. 24:5-6) is the question the two men in "dazzling apparel" (v. 4) ask the women who have come to find an empty tomb. An empty tomb does not prove that Jesus rose. But, with the "linen cloths" left behind, it does become a sign that "suggests ...from the empty tomb's condition that the absence of Jesus' body could not have been of human doing and that Jesus had not simply returned to earthly life as had been the case with Lazarus." (CCC 640) What the empty tomb with discarded human clothing did prove was that from now on, people would need different eyes with which to search. Jesus brought with him a kingdom that, although hinted at through our senses, can only be apprehended with the eyes of faith, the eyes of the living.

So, while we struggle with doubt, it is good to remember the prayer of the man in Mark's gospel who had a son given to convulsions and a rabid-like behavior, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mk. 9:23) With this prayer, and a refusal to 'seek the living among the dead,' we will be better equipped to see what the eyes of faith uncover for us.

SCRIPTURAL SECRETS...

Because the nature of God is so different than that of the natural world, our senses can only go so far in proving that God exists. This does not mean that God doesn't exist. It simply means that when we get to the precipice where the limits of our senses, understanding, and proofs reside, we have a choice: do we take that leap that God requires so as to experience a different kind of knowledge, a different kind of reality?

The evidence we've gathered with our senses, reason, and research will form the proper foundation to lead us to the chasm between the material world and the kingdom of God. Here, in this leap of faith, we begin to learn what real knowledge is.

We say each Sunday at Mass, "...and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come..." We Christians believe that we will be resurrected from death to eternal life because Jesus promised this in return for our belief in him-- and he proved the worth of his words by his own resurrection. So what will resurrected bodies look like? Well, I trust it won't be a reanimated 'me' as I went into the grave. But how does one answer this question? Jesus' resurrected body seems the most reliable source of a solution.

Mary of Magdala did not recognize Jesus at the tomb, thinking him a gardener. Only when he spoke did she recognize him and hold on to him (Jn. 20:14-18). Next, inexplicably, Jesus stood in the midst of the disciples who had locked themselves into their gathering place (Jn. 20:19). Lk. 24:13-35 adds that because the disciples thought that he was a ghost, Jesus invited them to touch him, then asked for and ate a piece of baked fish. And, rather astoundingly, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus as he walked and talked with them-- they only recognized him in the breaking of the bread at the inn (Lk. 24:13-35)!

From scriptural evidence the Church developed a doctrine about the risen body of the just that was described by four terms: *impassibility*, *brightness*, *agility*, and *subtily*. *Impassibility* means that the risen body cannot feel pain or endure any unpleasantness. *Brightness* means it will give off a brilliant light just as did Christ's body at the Transfiguration. *Agility* is the ability to move about at total ease and at the speed of will. And *subtily* means that the glorified body is under control of and completely obedient to the soul.

So, if we stay the course and remain true to the Lord, we have an awesome future ahead of us!