

*Sisters in the Heart of Christ: St. Margaret Mary and St. Maria
Faustina Kowalska*

by Sister Maria Marguerite

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Dear Friends of the Sacred Heart

“His Heart is All Love and Mercy” ~ Dial of Mercy/Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart

Our Holy Founder, St. Francis de Sales, describes the Pierced Heart of Christ as God’s window on the world where the glance of God and humanity meet. Within this Heart, God’s love is seated upon a royal throne and that throne’s name is mercy. Simply put, mercy, or misericordia, means misery of the heart. Mercy then is love’s deliberative response in the presence of suffering seeking to compassionate and bring love into the painful situation of another. Mercy is forgiveness when forgiveness is undeserved: Father forgive them for they know not what they do. Love and mercy define the paradigm of God’s relationship with humanity and reveal the beating of the Divine Heart – contracting in love and expanding in mercy – one inseparable from the other. Nothing is impossible to love, St. Francis writes to his Visitandine daughters, I ever say that the throne of God’s mercy is our misery, therefore, the greater our misery, the greater should be our confidence . Love incites God to bind Himself to us because of the depths of His boundless kindness and mercy. Therefore, the confidence with which we have in God and in His love for us, express our love for Him and open the floodgates of grace flowing from the Tender Sacred Heart. God invites our participation in loving union so that our hearts can be molded by His. In Salesian terminology, this denotes the love of complacency, which draws God into our hearts, and the love of benevolence which projects our hearts into His and consequently dedicates all our affections and actions to Him. Thus, we as His children and created in His image, have hearts that beat in the rhythm of His – in love and mercy.

This has been God’s message of hope since the beginning of time proclaimed in Sacred Scripture and by every prophet and saint. Yet, God chose to underscore this message by way of two unassuming women religious : St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, the humble Visitandine of Paray-la-Monial with whom Jesus shared the treasury of His Divine Love and appointed Apostle and Eternal Heiress of His Sacred Heart; and St. Maria Faustina Kowalska of the Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy in Poland to whom Jesus revealed the Living Streams of His Divine Mercy naming her its Apostle in this life and the next. For us, they become visible signs of God’s beating Heart – love and mercy – whose lives were consumed by love of God and love for souls.

Despite the time and circumstance which separated St. Margaret Mary and St. Maria Faustina in life, history along with their mission in the Heart of Jesus, forever unite them. A contemporary and correspondent of St. Margaret Mary, Mother Marie-Eleanor d’Apchon de Poncin, Superior of the

French Visitation of Bellcour, kept in close contact with the saint sharing her affection for the Heart of Jesus. In a letter, St. Margaret Mary assured Mother Marie-Eleanor that the Lord desired to make use of her in spreading devotion to His Sacred Heart. Mother Marie-Eleanor was among the French contingent that founded the first Polish Visitation Monastery in Warsaw in 1654. Correspondence with St. Margaret Mary revealed that Mother Marie-Eleanor was instrumental in promoting the Sacred Heart Devotion in Poland. A footnote in *The Letters of St. Margaret Mary*, notes:

After some years she (Mother Marie -Eleanor) returned to her own monastery at Bellcour where she was called upon to fulfill a providential mission as we have just seen. Her connection with Poland continued all her life and the Devotion to the Sacred Heart, of which she sowed the seed, quickly flourished. It is well known what an important role the princes and bishops of Poland played in establishing devotion to the Sacred Heart..."

To what this passage refers is that, at the insistence of Poland's King Augustus III and more than 100 Polish Bishops, the Decree of 1765, instituting a Feast Day for the Sacred Heart along with a proper Office and Mass, was approved by Pope Clement XII and later extended to the universal church by Pope Pius IX in 1856. In addition, Pope Pius XI, on a trip to Poland prior to his papacy, established an Archconfraternity of the Guard of Honor, a pious association founded at the Visitation of Bourg, France in 1863, which remains active to this day in Poland and throughout the world, and whose members offer to the Eternal Father the Blood and Water from the Heart of Christ in reparation for the sins of the world. In his homily while on a papal visit to Poland in June 1997, Ven. John Paul II said that devotion to the Sacred Heart "has profoundly pervaded our Polish piety; it has become part of the life of many of the faithful who feel the need to make reparation to the Heart of Jesus for the sins of humanity. The seeds sown in Poland through the revelations of St. Margaret Mary, and through the work of devotees such as Mother Eleanor-Marie 300 years earlier, found fertile ground particularly in the soul of St. Maria Faustina as she fulfilled her task of proclaiming the greatness of God's mercy in her native Poland on the threshold of World War II and preceding an era of intense suffering and oppression worldwide.

The interweaving of our saints occurred, as well, in seemingly insignificant ways. In 1936, St. Maria Faustina chose St. Claude la Colombiere, spiritual director of St. Margaret Mary, as her retreat patron. This small incident, along with, her participation in Sacred Heart devotional practices, the many references in her diary and letters, and the unfolding of her mission, assure us how significant the Heart of Jesus was in her life. St. Claude's Feast Day of February 15, incidentally, was also St. Maria Faustina's "Name Day" and in later years would become the anniversary of death of her own spiritual director, Bl. Michael Sopocko. Ironically, February 15 commemorated the first meeting of St. Claude la Colombiere and St. Margaret Mary when the words, Here he is, the one I am sending you, were whispered in her heart, thus becoming a significant date for all.

The manner in which Our Lord presented Himself to our saints also bears similarity. Both occurred initially within the context of the Blessed Sacrament and both required a Eucharistic act: that is to offer Holy Communion on First Friday as reparation and, through the Chaplet prayer, to offer to the Eternal Father the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus in expiation so as to draw mercy on the world. St. Margaret Mary writes: The Divine Heart is an inexhaustible fountain from which three streams are continually flowing. The first is the stream of mercy which flows down upon sinners and brings the spirit of sorrow and repentance. The second is a stream of charity which brings relief to all those who are suffering under some need, and especially those who are striving for perfection. These will find, through the help of the Holy Angels the means of overcoming themselves. The third is the stream of love for perfect friends whom He wills to unite Himself. To these, He will communicate His knowledge and way of life, in order that they may give themselves up completely to furthering His glory, each in His own way.

Likewise, St. Maria Faustina writes:

Today I saw the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the sky, in the midst of a great brilliance. The rays were issuing from the Wound and spreading out over the entire world.

And the words of Jesus to her:

From all My Wounds, like from streams, mercy flows for souls, but the Wound in My Heart is the fountain of unfathomable mercy. From this fountain springs all graces for souls.

Both saints were passionately in love with God and zealous for the salvation of souls. St. Margaret Mary, known for her many penitential practices, desired to be consumed like a melting candle before her Eucharistic Lord. St. Maria Faustina, similarly, strove to become a sacrificial victim for souls as a living host. Each offered herself willingly, submitting to humiliations, contradictions, and persecutions, in order to save souls and to prosper the work that Our Lord had entrusted in faith and trust. Of them St. Paul's words, the love of Christ impels me, are lived to the full as we witness love inciting mercy. Their love for God through the Pierced Heart of Jesus urged them to willingly take on sufferings in imitation of their Holy Spouse. To both, Jesus imparted this lesson: The bride must resemble the Bridegroom. Their willingness to sacrifice became a cause for their joy because it united them most intimately with its Source-Jesus' Merciful Heart. For these women, reparation was their work of mercy as they placed their confidence in Jesus and offered all their lives and beings for souls -in love, for love and through love. It is not their mystical experiences alone that transformed them into saints, but their depth of love for God and neighbor.

Today, we have scratched only the surface of the lives and spirituality of St. Margaret Mary and St. Maria Faustina. Perhaps, another visit with them will be in order for a future talk. For now, let us close with this prayer of St. Maria Faustina: O Jesus, eternal God thank you for your countless

graces and blessings. Let every beat of my heart be a new hymn of thanksgiving to You, O God. Let every drop of my blood circulate for you, Lord. My soul is one hymn in adoration of your mercy. I love You God, for Yourself alone.

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The Sacred Heart of Jesus is precisely the image of this infinite and merciful love which the heavenly Father has poured out upon the world through His Son, Jesus Christ. – John Paul II God be Praised!