

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Saint Faustina was born with the name Helena Kowalska on August 25, 1905 in Poland, the third of ten children. Her father was a carpenter and they were poor, but very devout Catholics. Helena felt the call to the religious life at the age of seven. When she was nineteen, she and her sister went to a dance. While she was at the dance, she had a vision of a suffering Jesus. She then went to the cathedral, where she says that she was told by Jesus to leave for Warsaw immediately and join a convent. She packed a small bag that night and the next morning took a train for Warsaw (85 miles away), without the permission of her parents and without knowing anyone in Warsaw.

After she arrived in Warsaw, she entered the first church she saw and attended Mass. The priest there recommended staying with a local woman until she found a convent. Faustina approached several convents in Warsaw, but was turned down time after time. Eventually the mother superior at the convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy gave her a chance. She worked for a year to save money to buy her religious habit, and then on April 30, 1926, aged 20, she received her habit and took the name in religion of Sister Maria Faustina of the Blessed Sacrament. She was a nun for just over a decade, dying at the age of 33 on October 5, 1938.

Sister Faustina worked as a cook and maid in the convent. Throughout her life, she reported having visions and conversations with Jesus. On the night of Sunday, February 22, 1931, while she was in her cell, Jesus appeared to her as the "King of Divine Mercy" wearing a white garment with red and pale blue rays emanating from his heart. She wrote that Jesus told her: "Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: 'Jesus, I trust in You'. I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and then throughout the world. I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish."

Not knowing how to paint, Faustina approached some other nuns for help, but received no assistance. Three years later, after her assignment to another convent in Vilnius, the first artistic rendering of the image was performed under her direction. Faustina also wrote that Jesus told her that he wanted the Divine Mercy image to be "solemnly blessed on the first Sunday after Easter; that Sunday is to be the Feast of Mercy. When she moved to Vilnius the priest who was the confessor at the convent listened as she told him of her visions. He sent her for a mental examination and when the doctor said she was in sound mind the priest began to support her ideas for devotion to the Divine Mercy. By 1935 the first Mass of the Divine Mercy was held. In 1936 the first brochure with the Divine Mercy image and devotion was printed. By 1938 Sister Faustina had died of tuberculosis, but the devotion spread over the next decades. In 1959, because of faulty translations, the theologians came to a negative conclusion about her writings. The devotion was suppressed for twenty years.

Then in 1978 a Polish cardinal was elected. Pope John Paul II had Faustina's writings examined again and this time the misunderstandings were cleared up. All negative decisions were lifted and the devotion surged in popularity worldwide. So did devotion to Sister Faustina. Pope John Paul II declared her a saint in April of the Jubilee year 2000 saying, "The message she brought is the appropriate and incisive answer that God wanted to offer to the questions and expectations of human beings in our time, marked by terrible tragedies." Jesus said to Sr. Faustina one day: 'Humanity will never find peace until it turns with trust to the Divine Mercy.'

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker