

In a Nutshell

***"God's practical solution for our world's
problems...including your own."***

I have often been asked to explain the ideas that led us to found the Mission of Divine Mercy. The full story would require a book to recount it----which is what I am in the process of doing! In the meantime, the following explanation is my attempt to briefly present the essentials of our spirit---- in other words, MDM in a nutshell.

In this spirit, we want to serve the Church and our world, and be faithful to the faith that the Lord has given to His Church.

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January, 2017

PART ONE: FAITH, THAT GOD MAY ACT

Our Community has been open, from its beginning, to the different ways in which God speaks to His children. The reason for the existence of this little Community is precisely to be “listeners” of the Lord, in order to be able to fulfill His Will and allow His Mercy to spread through all the world.

God speaks in many different ways because He is a good Father Who looks for any means by which His children will listen to Him.

“Hear, O Israel...”

We, the community members of MDM, believe that God continues to speak to, and act, among His people today in many ways, both ordinary and extraordinary. We know that

so much good can happen when we listen to Him, and learn to work with Him.

HOPE

Many people today are discouraged, even in despair, because of the suffering and darkness of our times¹. But *Faith* gives us a light by which we can better understand the

¹ From an address by then Cardinal Wojtyla (future Pope John Paul II), to the 1976 Eucharistic Congress, in Philadelphia, and quoted recently by the Papal Nuncio: “We are

current state of our world. By the light of Faith, we discover that we are living a Mystery beyond what we can see. It is *the Paschal Mystery of Jesus*.

Paschal comes from the word for *pass over*. Like a passage. The suffering and death of Jesus, which seemed the destruction of His efforts, was actually the great passage to His Resurrection and Triumph.

We are called to follow Him today in that passage of suffering, death and apparent defeat---where the temptation to despair can be extreme--- trusting by faith that this trial is preparing the great victory of God in us.

Viewed through the light of Faith, the sufferings of these times are actually the labor pains of a New Birth²: the Triumph of His Mercy.³ This gives us Hope, the Christian Hope that we need so much today.

REALISM

*"The days are evil."*⁴

now standing in the face of the greatest historical confrontation humanity has ever experienced. ...We are now facing the final confrontation between the Church and the anti-church, between the gospel and the anti-gospel, between Christ and the antichrist. The confrontation lies within the plans of Divine Providence. It is, therefore, in God's Plan, and it must be a trial which the Church must take up, and face courageously...."

² "Truly, truly I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." Revised Standard Version Bible: Second Catholic Edition. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006. Jn 16:20-22

³ Diary of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul. (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2009) 1789.

⁴ RSV Eph 5:15.

Anyone can see that there is terrible evil in our world.

But we need the divine light, given to the prophets, in order to see clearly and realistically, the gravity of this evil and the dangers it poses today. And we need to recognize that mankind, by itself, cannot solve these problems.⁵

A SAVIOR'S MERCY

But there is good news.

*"Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."*⁶

There is a solution to these grave problems. And there is *only one* solution: Jesus Christ, the Mercy of God. He is the only one who can save us. And He *longs* to pour out His Mercy on us today.

GOD ACTS

Jesus' victory in the Paschal Mystery, His Resurrection, is not a gradual triumph of *man's* efforts, but the direct and surprising intervention of *God Himself*.⁷ The history of

⁵ I was struck to realize how much this point, and the other 2 major points of this section relate to the 3 first of the famous Twelve Steps of AA:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

⁶ RSV Rom 5:20

⁷ 667. "The Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through this final Passover, when she will follow her Lord in His death and Resurrection. The kingdom will be fulfilled, then, not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive ascendancy, but only by God's victory over the final unleashing of evil,

our Church and our world is full of examples of God's interventions in critical situations, such as the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Our Lady of Fatima, or the conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus. But we don't have to look only to history, because even in our own time, He is offering many extraordinary graces. Some of these graces are for the whole Church, such as the revelations of Divine Mercy given to St. Faustina in the 1930s but only becoming well known in recent decades. Many others are given for individuals or particular groups. I will speak more about these graces in Part Two of the Nutshell.

But too often, even in the Church, we act as if God simply gave His Church instructions, and then stepped back and left it up to us humans to figure it out from there. However, this is not what we see in the Acts of the Apostles, which is the perennial model of the Church. There we see the Holy Spirit taking a very active role in the lives of the Apostles and in the early Church. Today that same Holy Spirit still acts in our world---much more than we realize. And we are in such great need of His action!

But if God is willing to help, why are things still so bad?

WORKING WITH GOD

Because His action also depends on us. We have our part to play. We are called to be *God's coworkers*.⁸

which will cause His Bride to come down from heaven." Catechism of the Catholic Church (United States Catholic Conference, Inc., Librerio Editrice Vaticana) 1994.

⁸ RSV 2 Cor. 6:1

Notice that St. Paul calls us God's coworkers, not slaves. God respects our freedom and wants our free cooperation. But we have to learn what it means to work with God. To let Him do *His* part, which is by far the biggest part. This means not getting in His way, nor placing obstacles to His work.

We need to learn to be guided by Him. This is not fantasy. It is not looking at life through rose-colored glasses. It's about our real, messy world.

What could be more important than learning to work with God? And yet *way too few of us have a realistic sense of how to do so*.

I consider our experience at MDM to have been *on the job training* in this area. Over the years we have experienced, time and again, just how much the Lord will guide us, if we are attentive to His will. Yes, we have failed many times, but He is patient and merciful.

FAITH

Our God *wants* to work *with* us. He doesn't want to seem distant and unapproachable. He wants to be very close to His children. For that to happen we need to trust Him; to be people of simple faith.

So frequently in the Gospel we hear the Lord highlight the power of faith, as in, "*Your faith has saved you.*"⁹ Or on the contrary, the Gospel recounts the experience in Nazareth where because of the people's lack of faith, He couldn't work many miracles.¹⁰

⁹ RSV Mt. 15:28; Mk. 5:34; Mk. 9:23

¹⁰ RSV Mt. 13:58

In St. Faustina's diary, "*Divine Mercy in My Soul*," Jesus returns to this message of faith and trust again and again. "*The graces of My mercy are drawn by one vessel only, and that is---trust.*"¹¹ "*Every soul believing and trusting in My mercy will obtain it.*"¹²

But having simple faith means more than just believing *in* God, it means *believing God*. This means trusting Him enough to accept what He reveals and obey what He commands. We have a great example in Abraham, who "believed God,"¹³ and set off from his fatherland. And when we try to understand what it means to have simple faith, we find our greatest example in our Blessed Mother: "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.*"¹⁴

MDM'S CHARISM¹⁵

"*Trust in the Lord, and He will act,*" proclaims Psalm 37. This call to trust in God has been the message that God has instilled in our little Community from its very earliest days.

In St. Faustina's Diary Jesus offers a simple but profound declaration that our Community returns to again and again, seeing in it the ultimate answer to our world's struggle. Jesus said, "*Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to My mercy.*"¹⁶

¹¹ *Divine Mercy In My Soul* 1578

¹² *Divine Mercy In My Soul* 420

¹³ RSV Gn 15:6

¹⁴ RSV Lk 1:38

¹⁵ Charism refers to a special spiritual gift that God gives an individual or group to carry out the mission He is calling them to.

¹⁶ *Divine Mercy in My Soul* 300

In other words, mankind's lack of peace can only be solved by God's Mercy. But to receive His mercy, our trust is needed.

He has led us gradually to the discovery of the charism that He has called us to. This charism is: **Faith, that God may act.** Of course, this charism is for every one of His children.

That is so encouraging. Even though we may be weak, wounded and sinful, by faith we can all help God's saving mercy reach our wounded world.

PART TWO:

"WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING TO THE CHURCHES..."

"Let he who has ears hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches..."¹⁷

THE SPIRIT SPEAKING TODAY

¹⁷ RSV Rev. 2:11

Some of the ways that God intervenes with His mercy are through extraordinary “signs and wonders”¹⁸ such as miracles, healings, exorcisms, apparitions, visions, and prophecies. In our difficult times, we hear many reports of these, including some that are very close to us here at MDM.

These reports call to mind St. Peter’s words on the day of Pentecost:¹⁹

“This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

And in the last days it shall be, God declares,

that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,

and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

and your young men shall see visions,

and your old men shall dream dreams;

yes, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days

I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Is the Lord speaking to us through these same means today?

If so, this raises difficult questions. Most importantly, what should guide us in these matters?

¹⁸ RSV Acts 5:12; Heb 2:4

¹⁹ RSV Acts 2:16-21

Above all, we should be guided by God's will. We should not seek extraordinary manifestations when He chooses in His wisdom not to give them. And we should not reject them when He chooses to give them.

His will is absolutely sovereign and free. He can do whatever He wants, however He wants, whenever and with whomever He wants. He does not have to conform to our criteria.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”²⁰

FAITH AND PRUDENCE

He may surprise us. Throughout the Gospel, the Lord praises the simple faith that is open to His surprises. Once again, Mary is a model of this simple faith that is open to God's surprises. *“And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”²¹* Conversely in Mark's Gospel Jesus rebukes incredulity, even among His chosen apostles who had spent so much time with Him:

“[After His Resurrection] He appeared to the Eleven themselves as they sat at table; and He upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen.”²² God's supernatural manifestations call for a mature, balanced discernment that is guided by humility, faith and prudence.

²⁰ RSV Is 55:8-9

²¹ RSV Lk. 1:45

²²RSV Mk 16:14

The succinct words of St. Paul give wise guidance: *“Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil.”*²³

TWO EXTREMES

Following the guidance of St. Paul, we see that we should avoid two extremes.

One extreme is to “quench” the action of the Holy Spirit by “despising” His gifts, such as prophecy. We need the Holy Spirit’s help so desperately today. True prudence must be careful not to place obstacles to His action. Too often these charismatic manifestations are met by rejection and incredulity in the Church, rather than a discernment in the spirit of the Gospel.

The other extreme is believing everything without “testing” it, without discernment. This is also a real danger, the danger of chasing after the charismatic and extraordinary, rather than seeking God’s will.

MATURE DISCERNMENT

We must not naively underestimate how difficult this discernment can be. First there is the question: Is the manifestation truly from God? Jesus Himself warns of false prophets.

²³ RSV 1 Th 5:19–22

And if it is from God, there is still another challenging question: How are we to receive it or put it into practice?

But this challenge is not limited to recent messages. Even with many passages in Scripture, and even after two millennia of reflection, this challenge remains. It is not always easy to see what it means or how to apply it.

It may be reassuring to read what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says about the acceptance of charisms: *“Charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them and by all members of the Church as well. They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ, provided they really are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit and are used in full conformity with authentic promptings of this same Spirit, that is, in keeping with charity, the true measure of all charisms.”*²⁴

ROLE OF PASTORS

The pastors of the Church have been entrusted in a particular way with this challenging responsibility of discernment.²⁵ *“Their office [is] not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good,”* so that all the diverse and

²⁴ Catechism 800.

²⁵ See Letter *Juvenescit Ecclesia* to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Regarding the Relationship Between Hierarchical and Charismatic Gifts in the Life and the Mission of the Church (15 May 2016).

complementary charisms work together “*for the common good.*”²⁶ This role, far from being in opposition to charismatic gifts, complements them and is essential if these gifts are to fully serve their purpose for the life of the Church.

We don’t mean to minimize the difficulties and tensions pastors can face concerning this discernment. It is not rare for a pastor to hear: “Father, the Lord told me you should....” Even authentic charisms can be disruptive and confusing without proper guidance. And often pastors have not been given the adequate formation for this discernment. This is an aspect of theology and pastoral practice which needs much more development and study.

“DO NOT DESPISE PROPHECYING”

The beginnings of our Mission of Divine Mercy involved the Lord drawing our attention to the prophetic charism active *today*.

Like so many others, we used to think of prophets as belonging only to the Old Testament. Yet God has shown us that He continues to give prophets to His Church today.²⁷ As St Thomas Aquinas said “*at all times there have not been lacking persons having the spirit of prophecy, not indeed for the declaration of any new doctrine of faith, but for the direction of human acts.*”²⁸

²⁶ Catechism 801.

²⁷ On the important topic of the continuing presence of prophets in the Church, please see the very helpful book, I Am Sending You Prophets (Queenship, 2007) by Fr. Edward O’Connor, CSC.

²⁸ Summa Theologica 174, 6 ad 3

What is the gift of prophecy?

It is not always about the future. In the words of St. Peter: “*men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*”²⁹ The gift of prophecy is to transmit and live the Words that flow from the Heart of the Father who is concerned for His children and seeks any means to help them.³⁰

These graces are often dismissed as “mere private revelation.” But so many of the key actions of the Lord in Scripture involve precisely this type of gift, including the very Incarnation itself when the Angel Gabriel was sent to a young woman of Nazareth. Who could she have turned to for direction among the “experts” of her time who would have believed her? Or, to take another key example, what if St. Joseph, warned in a dream to flee immediately with his family to Egypt, had waited until he could go to Jerusalem and consult with the doctors of the Law?

“*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” From Genesis to the Book of Revelations, Scripture is about God speaking to us, and the good or evil that results depending on whether or not we listen to Him. (For example: in the book of Samuel, recall the Israelites demanding, against the will of God, to have a king; or in Chronicles where the Israelites did not listen to God’s prophets and so brought on the invasion and destruction of their nation.) We need to remember this today. It is not for

²⁹ RSV 2 Pe 1:21

³⁰ “Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you; for I have given them the words which you gave me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.” RSV Jn 17:7-8

us to limit how He can speak to us, or what He can say. Let us receive --- with discernment, yes, but above all with simple faith--- His gifts today, including prophecy.

*“This is My Beloved Son. **Listen** to Him.”*³¹

*“Speak, Lord, for your servant is **listening**.”*³²

EARTHEN VESSELS

*“We have this treasure in earthen vessels.”*³³

In this account, I have attempted to summarize and explain the beliefs that are at the core of the Mission of Divine Mercy. We believe that MDM is a very small and imperfect part of the Lord’s great and merciful designs for our world today. We wish that we were better examples of the treasure of this spirit. But we are earthen vessels with many defects.

So, we trust in His Mercy.

“Let he who has ears hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches...”

“Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything.”

“If anyone hears My Voice, and opens the door, I will enter and eat with him and he with Me.”

Jesus, we trust in You.

Come, Lord Jesus.

³¹ RSV Mk 9:7

³² RSV 1 Sm 3:10

³³ RSV 2 Co 4:7