



SILENT HOMILIES

So That No Soul Could Say

*Faustina, and the page
she was ordered to keep*





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LITTLE TREASURES

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Before You Begin

Most of us first meet Faustina's vision of hell as a poster. Flames. A list of seven sufferings read too quickly. A talk that uses her name to frighten people, and then wonders why those same people do not come back for Divine Mercy Sunday.

The Diary is larger than that. The page about hell sits inside a book whose main subject is God's mercy in Jesus Christ.

Helena Kowalska, later Sister Maria Faustina of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, wrote the vision in what we now call entry 741 of the second notebook. She wrote it in Kraków in late October 1936, during an eight-day retreat. She had already left Vilnius. She arrived in Kraków in May of that year, and she stayed there until her death.

In the entry she says an angel led her. She names seven sufferings that all the damned share, and then other sufferings that differ from soul to soul. She says she would have died at the sight if God's power had not held her up. She says she is writing at God's command, so that no soul may find an excuse by saying there is no hell, or that nobody has ever been there, or that no one can say what it is like.

This little book is not a tour of hell. It walks through details that popular talks often skip. The first suffering she names is the loss of God, not fire. She says she cannot speak about it then, but has received a command to leave it in writing. She calls what she wrote a pale shadow of what she saw. She notices that most of the souls she saw had not believed hell existed. When she comes back to herself, she prays even more for the conversion of sinners.

The Church did not learn about hell from Faustina. Christ had already taught about judgment and eternal life. Faustina's vision is a private revelation. It can help us take the Gospel seriously, but it does not add a new article of faith. That is how this page should be read.

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Chapter 1

A page inside a book of mercy

The Diary of Saint Faustina is not a book about hell. It is a book about God's mercy, written by a young Polish sister whose ordinary work was cooking, gardening and answering the door.

Entry 741 is one page inside that larger book. If we take it out and treat it as her whole message, then we have only read one part of what she wrote.

She writes about the image of Divine Mercy, the Chaplet, the three o'clock hour, Confession, Holy Communion and trust in Jesus. The vision of hell sits among those pages. It does not cancel them. It helps us see why mercy is urgent.

Our choices matter. That is why God still calls us to repent while we are alive.

A Small Reflection

Faustina's vision of hell must be read inside her larger message of Divine Mercy.

If we use her only to frighten people, we have not understood her. If we never mention judgment at all, we have not understood her either.

The Diary holds both, because the Gospel holds both.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, I trust in You. Do not let us use Saint Faustina's name only to frighten people. Do not let us pretend that sin does not matter. Amen.

Chapter 2

Who was Faustina?

Helena Kowalska was born in 1905 in Głogowiec, in Poland. She entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy and took the name Maria Faustina. Most of her work was ordinary. She cooked. She worked in the garden. She looked after the gate. She was often ill. She died of tuberculosis in Kraków on 5 October 1938, at the age of thirty-three.

From 1933 until March 1936 she lived in Vilnius. There she met Father Michał Sopoćko, who became her confessor and spiritual director. He told her to write down what she saw and heard. He also helped with the first painting of the Divine Mercy image.

On 21 March 1936 she left Vilnius. After short stays at Walendów and Derdy, she arrived in Kraków on 11 May 1936. She remained there until her death. In Kraków her confessor was Father Józef Andrzej, a Jesuit.

The vision in entry 741 belongs to that last part of her life. It did not happen on a stage. It happened to a sister who still had ordinary convent work to do.

A Small Reflection

God worked through a woman whose daily life looked ordinary.

Faustina was not famous when she wrote entry 741. She was a sister with kitchen and garden duties, poor health, and a notebook she kept because she had been told to write.

If we only meet her as a name on a poster, we have not yet met the woman.

A short prayer

*Saint Faustina, who wrote in obedience and worked in hidden places,
pray for us. Amen.*

Chapter 3

She was commanded to write

Faustina did not ask for this vision. In Diary 741 she says she was led by an angel to the chasms of hell.

She also says why she is writing. She is writing at God's command, so that no soul may find an excuse by saying there is no hell, or that nobody has ever been there, and so no one can say what it is like.

She adds something else that is easy to miss. "I cannot speak about it now," she writes, "but I have received a command from God to leave it in writing." Those two sentences should be kept together. She does not say that she was forbidden to speak about it for the rest of her life. She says she cannot speak about it then, and that she has been told to write it down.

She also writes that the demons were full of hatred for her, but they had to obey at God's command.

The title of this book comes from that order to write. She kept the page so that a certain excuse would be harder to use. That is not the same as being told to frighten people. It is a witness she did not choose.

A Small Reflection

Faustina says she wrote because she had been commanded to write.

She did not go looking for this experience. She wrote about it because she believed God had told her to do so. She did not make hell the subject of the rest of the Diary.

If we treat entry 741 as something to display, we have missed her reason for writing it.

A short prayer

Lord, help us to receive what we did not ask for, and keep us from turning it into a show. Amen.

Chapter 4

The first suffering she names

Many people remember the fire. Faustina herself begins somewhere else.

She lists seven sufferings shared by all the damned. The first, she says, is the loss of God.

That order matters. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that hell exists and that it is eternal. It also teaches that the chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God. God is the One in whom alone we can have the life and happiness we were made for.

The Church does not reduce hell to a feeling inside the mind. She also does not reduce it to fire alone. Faustina's first point agrees with that teaching.

Then she names the other six, as she saw them in the vision: perpetual remorse of conscience; the knowledge that one's condition will never change; a fire that penetrates the soul without destroying it, which she calls a purely spiritual fire; continual darkness and a terrible smell; the constant company of Satan; and despair, hatred of God, curses and blasphemies.

These are her words about what she saw. They are not a new dogma. They are a private description. The first point agrees with what the Church already teaches. The later details belong to her vision and should be reported as such.

A Small Reflection

The deepest punishment of hell is separation from God.

If we think of hell only as fire, we have not yet understood why it is so serious. God is not an extra comfort added to a good life. He is the One we were made to see.

That is also why mercy matters. While we are alive, God continues to call us to repentance and offers us his mercy.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, do not let us lose you. Keep us close while we still have time to turn back. Amen.

Chapter 5

What she said after the seven

After the seven sufferings shared by all, Faustina writes that this is not the end. In her vision there are special sufferings destined for particular souls, related to the way each has sinned. She speaks of caverns and pits where one form of agony differs from another.

Then she says two things that popular talks often skip.

First: she would have died at the sight if God's power had not supported her.

Second: what she has written is only a pale shadow of what she saw.

She is telling the reader not to treat her sentences as a complete map. The Diary is not a guidebook to hell. It is a witness that hell is real, and that she was not able to put the whole of it on the page.

When she speaks of fire, darkness, smell, demons and particular torments, she is describing her vision. The Church teaches the existence and eternity of hell, and she speaks of eternal fire. She does not define every detail Faustina records. Those details should be left as Faustina's account.

A Small Reflection

Do not turn private revelation into curiosity.

Faustina herself calls her account a pale shadow. That should slow us down. If she would not draw a full picture, we should not add extra scenes of our own.

The useful question is not “What else can we imagine?” The useful question is “How am I answering God now?”

A short prayer

Lord, keep us from curiosity that does not lead to conversion. Amen.

Chapter 6

Those who had not believed

Faustina writes that she noticed one thing: most of the souls there were those who had not believed that there is a hell.

That is her statement within a private revelation. It is not Catholic doctrine. It does not mean that anyone who doubts the teaching is already lost. It does not give us a rule for deciding who is damned.

The Church teaches that a person who dies in mortal sin, without repenting and without accepting God's merciful love, remains separated from him. Mortal sin means a seriously wrong act committed knowingly and freely. We cannot see another person's conscience. We do not know how free that person really was. We do not know what happened between that person and God before death.

Saint John Paul II said that, without special revelation from God, we are not given knowledge of which human beings are actually lost. Faustina's line should not be used to fill that gap.

What we can say is simpler. Christ warned about hell. The Church teaches that it is real. Faustina was told to write so that people would not hide behind the claim that nobody knows. The warning is serious. The judgment of particular souls is not ours.

A Small Reflection

Do not use the vision to judge other people.

“Most of the souls she noticed had not believed” is a line that can lead to gossip. It is better to ask whether I treat judgment as a myth when that would be convenient.

We do not know another person’s final state before God. What matters is how we respond to God while we are alive.

A short prayer

Lord, keep us from judging souls we cannot see. Keep us from treating your warnings as a joke. Amen.

Chapter 7

The Church already taught this

The Catholic Church teaches the reality of hell independently of Saint Faustina. The teaching comes from Scripture and from the living faith of the Church. Christ speaks of Gehenna, of unquenchable fire, and of a judgment that is real.

The Catechism says that to die in mortal sin, without repenting and without accepting God's merciful love, means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. That state of being shut out from communion with God is called hell.

Hell is not something God forces on a person. It involves a final rejection of God that remains unrepented at death. God predestines no one to hell. He desires the salvation of all. Grace is offered. Repentance is possible while we live. The Church does not invite us to settle other people's destinies.

Faustina's vision does not create this doctrine. It points back to it.

A Small Reflection

The Church already taught about hell before Faustina.

We do not need her vision in order to believe what Christ taught. We may still be grateful that she was told to write, because many of us have grown shy of the subject.

Saying nothing is not the same as being merciful. Mercy does not hide the truth about sin. It calls us to repentance and offers forgiveness.

A short prayer

Lord, hold us in the faith of the Church. Do not let private pages replace the Gospel. Amen.

Chapter 8

What private revelation is for

Everything necessary for Christian faith has already been given to us in Christ. Private revelations do not add a new Gospel. They do not complete what Christ has already given. They do not correct Scripture or the teaching of the Church.

At their best, they help Christians live the faith more fully. They must lead us back to Christ.

The Church can recognise that a private revelation has helped people. That is what happened with Faustina. John Paul II placed Divine Mercy Sunday in the Church's calendar. He canonised her on 30 April 2000. Canonisation means the Church recognises her holiness and presents her as a saint. It does not mean that every vision or every sentence in the Diary has become an article of faith.

John Paul II said that her message is not a new Gospel. It helps the Church live the Gospel of Easter more deeply. That is the right measure for entry 741 as well.

A Small Reflection

Private revelation must lead us back to Christ and the Gospel.

A vision can wake us up. It cannot give us a window into another person's soul. The Church asks us to believe the faith. She does not ask us to treat every detail in Faustina's Diary as defined doctrine.

A short prayer

Holy Spirit, keep us faithful to the teaching of the Church and help us speak about these things with charity. Amen.

Chapter 9

Mercy and judgment belong together

God's mercy does not mean that our choices do not matter. His judgment does not mean that he is unwilling to forgive.

God desires our salvation. He calls sinners to repentance. Christ came to save sinners. Grace is offered. If we are conscious of serious sin, we should repent and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Mercy is not permission to continue deliberately in grave sin. It is God still offering forgiveness while we are alive.

When Scripture and saints speak about God's anger, they do not mean that God loses control as we do. The language expresses God's complete opposition to evil.

People sometimes prefer to speak only about mercy or only about judgment. Catholic faith holds both together. Christ warns us because our choices matter. He offers mercy because he wants sinners to return to him.

A Small Reflection

Mercy and judgment belong together.

People sometimes prefer to speak only about one of them. Faustina was not allowed that split. She saw something that frightened her, and she spent her strength asking God to save people from it.

While we are alive, we can still repent, go to Confession and ask God for mercy.

A short prayer

God of mercy and of truth, forgive what we have done. Do not let us use your kindness as an excuse. Amen.

Chapter 10

She came back and prayed

After the vision Faustina does not ask to unsee it. She does not settle into fascination with punishment.

She writes that when she came to, she could hardly recover from the fright. Then she says she prays even more fervently for the conversion of sinners. She incessantly pleads God's mercy upon them. She says she would rather be in agony until the end of the world than offend Jesus by the least sin.

The vision frightened Faustina deeply. But what did she do afterwards? She prayed more for sinners. That may be the most important thing to remember about entry 741.

The Chaplet of Divine Mercy, which she was taught to say, is one ordinary way of doing what she did when she put the pen down. The image, the feast and the three o'clock hour all point the same way: to Jesus Christ. Those devotions matter. They are not the whole of Divine Mercy. Divine Mercy is first the mercy of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

A Small Reflection

Faustina responded by praying harder for sinners.

If entry 741 leaves us interested in demons and uninterested in living people, we have read it badly. She came back to the convent and prayed.

A Catholic who is shaken by the page can do the same thing this week: pray for the dying, pray for those far from God, and go to Confession if conscience has been awakened by serious sin.

A short prayer

Saint Faustina, teach us to pray for sinners as you did, and to trust the mercy you were sent to announce. Amen.

Chapter 11

What to do with this page

Read the whole of entry 741, not only the frightening lines. Read the command to write, the pale shadow, the souls who had not believed, and the prayer that follows. Then read something from the same notebook about trust.

Do not use the page to judge other people. Do not make hell a hobby. If the page awakens your conscience about serious sin, go to Confession. It is the sacrament of Christ's forgiveness.

Pray the Chaplet for sinners and for the dying if that prayer is part of your life. Speak about hell carefully and truthfully if you must speak of it. Then point to Christ, who still offers mercy.

The Church did not need Faustina's vision in order to know that hell is real. The vision reminded her how serious salvation is. After seeing it, she did not become fascinated with punishment. She prayed harder for sinners. That is the right order for us as well.

A Small Reflection

The proper response is repentance, prayer and trust in God's mercy.

Faustina was shown something that frightened her. She wrote what she had been commanded to write. Then she prayed harder for sinners.

That is enough of entry 741 for one sitting. The rest is in the confession we can still make, and in the mercy of the God who desires our salvation.

A short prayer

Lord Jesus, I trust in You. Keep us from excuses. Keep us from a fear that forgets how to pray. Amen.

A last word

Saint Faustina was shown something that frightened her. She wrote what she had been commanded to write. The Church did not need that vision in order to know that hell is real. The vision reminded her how serious salvation is.

After seeing it, she did not become fascinated with punishment. She prayed harder for sinners.

That is where this little book should leave us. Take the warning seriously. Do not judge other souls. Trust God's mercy. Pray for people who are far from him. If conscience is troubled by serious sin, go to Confession.

Christ still warns. Christ still forgives. While we are alive, both of those things remain true.

A prayer

Saint Faustina Kowalska, pray for us. Saint Michael the Archangel, pray for us. Our Lady of Mercy, pray for us. Lord Jesus Christ, I trust in You. Amen.

A word of thanks

These pages are free to read.

If they have helped you, a gift through Silent Homilies is welcome. Please give only if you wish, and only if you can. It is never a charge for a blessing.

Printing this book

This booklet is designed in A5 format.

For best results print double-sided on A5 paper, flipped on the short edge. Recommended paper: 80–100 gsm.

Written to be read in one or two sittings.