

Retracing the footsteps of Saint Mary Faustina Kowalska

2013-03-21

As many as two million tourists come to Krakow every year to visit the place where St Sister Faustina Kowalska of the Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy lived and died.

Nowadays, people in almost every country in the world know the Divine Mercy image based on her vision of Jesus with the distinctive rays coming forth from His chest – one white and the other one red – and the message „Jesus, I trust in You”. The Divine Mercy Sunday, celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter, was added to the liturgical calendar of the whole Church. The chaplet of Divine Mercy was dictated to St Sister Faustina by Jesus himself and even Christians in Africa say this prayer. The popularity of the Hour of Mercy – a prayer at the hour that Jesus died on the cross (3 p.m.) – is increasing. The apostolic movement of the Divine Mercy began to develop thanks to Faustina's belief in the Divine Mercy and nowadays unites millions of followers in the world.

The Holy Father John Paul II referred to St Sister Faustina and the belief she proclaimed as "a gift from God for our times". This gift was consecrated in the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy in Krakow – which became the centre of devotion to the Divine Mercy, even though it is not the only place truly devoted to the person of St Sister Faustina. Although she rarely left the convent in Łagiewniki, in her notes, Faustina mentions several other places marked by her divine presence which we would like to present in this catalogue.

St Sister Mary Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938)

– biographic note

Helena Kowalska (monastic name: Faustina) was born on 25 August 1905 in Głogowiec, Świnice Wareckie Parish, next to Łęczyca (Włocławek diocese). She was the third of ten children of Marianna and Stanisław Kowalski. After three years of study in school, a sixteen-year-old Faustina started to work as a maid for wealthy families in Aleksandrów Łódzki, Łódź and Ostrówek in Klembów County. When she was twenty years old, she entered the convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy where she remained for thirteen years. She spent the time in several convents (the longest in Krakow, Płock and Vilnius) where she worked in the kitchen and garden or as a convent doorwoman. In her ordinary and simple life she managed to unite with God in a unique harmony. As modest as she was, she had many doubts and difficulties in understanding and fulfilling the tasks given by Jesus but she received help from father Michał Sopoćko in Vilnius and father Józef Andrzej S.J. in Krakow. They told her to keep a "Diary" where she would describe her encounters with Jesus. She wrote down His every wish to remind the world of the biblical truth that the merciful God loves us all and to introduce new forms of devotion to the Divine Mercy.

These new forms included the widespread veneration for the image of Christ with the message: "Jesus, I trust in You", the celebration of the Divine Mercy Sunday on the first Sunday after Easter, prayers called the chaplet of Divine Mercy and the Hour of Mercy which corresponds to the hour at which Jesus died on the cross (3 p.m.), as well as proclaiming the devotion to the Divine Mercy. The mission of St Sister Faustina is continued not only by her convent but also by



the apostolic movement of the Divine Mercy based in Krakow-Łagiewniki.

The convent in Krakow-Łagiewniki was where Faustina spent her two-year nun training, as well as the last years of her life and where she put on a habit and received her monastic name: Maria Faustina. This is where she vowed purity, poverty and obedience and where she experienced many extraordinary mystical events. Łagiewniki is where she wrote most of her "Diary" which has been translated into many languages and never lost its popularity.

This is where she died on 5 October 1938 and where her remains were laid to rest at the convent garden cemetery. Her remains were moved to the chapel in 1966 and placed at the altar under the Divine Mercy image in 1993. She was beatified (18 April 1993) and canonized (30 April 2000) by John Paul II who believed that the life of Sister Faustina was an example of Christian saintliness. Moreover, John Paul II charged the whole Church and world with proclaiming the merciful love of God for us.

"The only desire of this saint woman was to put the Divine Mercy in the centre of Christian life and faith. Thanks to the strength given by her spiritual life, she was able to show – in the times experienced by the cruelty of official ideologies – the new idea of Christian message" – concluded Pope Benedict XVI the life and mission of Saint Faustina on the anniversary of his pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of the Divine Mercy in Łagiewniki.

Places related to St Sister Faustina

Although each period in time and every place in the whole world can be treated as His "temple", there are times and places which are chosen by God so that people could experience His presence and grace. Directed by the sense of faith, people arrive there because they feel certain that they are really going to stand face-to-face with God. I was directed by the same spirit of faith to come to Łagiewniki in order to consecrate this new church. I am certain that this is the special place chosen by God to give grace and to show mercy.

John Paul II, Łagiewniki, 17 August 2002

The Sanctuary of the Divine Mercy in Łagiewniki

It is good to begin retracing the footsteps of St Sister Faustina in Krakow from the convent of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Łagiewniki where she lived for five years and where her remains are buried. Today, the Sanctuary along with the new sacred temples is a religious centre which develops dynamically and attracts millions of pilgrims from all over the world. John Paul II visited the Sanctuary twice – in 1997 and in 2002, whereas Benedict XVI in 2006. The Sanctuary in Krakow-Łagiewniki is visited by pilgrims from numerous countries.



Convent compound

The convent compound was created at the end of the 19th century, funded by a great financier and philanthropist, Aleksander Lubomirski and designed by architect Karol Zaremba. The chapel and convent buildings were consecrated by Cardinal Albin Dunajewski (1891). The place was inhabited by the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy and their alumnae – girls and women who were seeking moral revival. The sisters' work with these people was based on the respect for human dignity, fostering Christian values and preparing for professional work and self-dependant life in society. "The mercy house" (as the Congregation referred to the apostolic facilities) included embroidery, weaving and bookbinding workshops, a washhouse, a garden and an agricultural farm with a windmill. During the First World War a part of the property was used by the military as a hospital where soldiers of different nationalities suffering with contagious diseases were nursed back to health. Given the character of the congregation, the access to the convent was denied to any external visitors until the Second World War.

In the period of German occupation, the sisters helped displaced persons, gave secret tuition, did charity campaigns and prepared meals for the poor. In 1962 the communist authorities took the educational facility and most of the property away from the congregation. A few years later, in 1969, the sisters established "Źródło" ["The Source"] – an open care centre for teenagers who were not socially adjusted. It operated until 1991. In 1989, the state authorities returned the girls' facility to the congregation. Today, it is called the Youth Educational Centre and named after St Sister Faustina. It operates as a closed facility for girls who are not socially adjusted. The sisters run a boarding school, a junior-high school, a three-year high-school of economy and administration and a two-year basic vocational school of gastronomy and hairdressing.

The convent houses a novitiate where sisters prepare for two years to live and serve in the congregation. This is where the "Faustinum" Association of Apostles of Divine Mercy is located. It puts emphasis on spiritual and apostolic formation, organizes days of recollection, retreats, symposia and International Congress of Apostles of Divine Mercy. The association also publishes a quarterly "Oędzie Miłosierdzia" ["The Message of Mercy"]. The congregation has its own publishing house ("Misericordia") which publishes and distributes books, pictures, DVDs, CDs and other materials related to the life and mission of St Sister Faustina.

Chapel with the benevolent image of the Divine Mercy and the tomb of St Sister Faustina

St Joseph's chapel links both wings of the convent. In the main altar there is a sculpture of Our Lady of Mercy who is the patron saint of the congregation. On the left there are figures of St Stanislaw Kostka (patron saint of novices) and St Mary Magdalene on the right (patron saint of penitent women). In the left altar of the presbytery there is the benevolent image of the Divine Mercy which replaced the Sacred Heart image; in the left altar – St Joseph with Baby Jesus (painted by Franciszek Krudowski). One of the lateral walls holds a recess where an image of St Sister Faustina is displayed (painted by Helena Tchorzewska). In 1943, father Józef Andrasz S.J, confessor of Sister Faustina initiated celebrations of the Divine Mercy – which were attended by

lots of inhabitants of Krakow and neighbouring areas.

The Divine Mercy image (painted by Adolf Hyła), which corresponded with the size and shape of the recess in the side-altar, was consecrated on 16 April 1944 on the first Sunday after Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday) and became benevolent soon afterwards. This marked the time when its copies and reproductions became so popular all over the world. The paintings on the walls of the chapel were designed in 1934 by Zdzisław Gedliczek. They were revitalized between 1981 and 1990 when stained-glass, designed by Wiktor Ostrzołek, was put in the chapel and vestibule windows. The only older stained-glass is the one presenting St Cecilia in the round choir window. The cabinets hanging on the chapel walls present votive offerings – the evidence of blessings which were asked for by the pilgrims. In 1968 the chapel was enlisted as one of the sanctuaries in the Krakow diocese and in 1992 it received an official decree which established the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy there.

In front of the chapel (on the left side of the entrance) there is a bas-relief (designed by Czesław Dźwigaj) presenting the bust of the Holy Father John Paul II, which commemorates his first pilgrimage to the sanctuary in 1997; and on the right a bas-relief of the Pope Benedict XVI (designed by Andrzej Zaradkiewicz) – commemorating his visit in 2006.

The plaque (designed by Czesław Dźwigaj) fixed to the convent wall under the window on the right side of the entrance marks the cell (former infirmary) where St Sister Faustina died.

In front of the convent there is a historical sculpture of St Joseph (from 1900) – whose name used to be used to refer to this property ("Józefówka" ["Joseph's property"]).

In the square there is also a field altar (mid-1980s) where larger outdoor masses used to be held.

The Divine Mercy Basilica

The dynamic development of this sanctuary was marked by the beatification and canonization of St Faustina, as well as the aforementioned papal pilgrimages. John Paul II played an important role in popularizing this place. He spent time there as a worker of the nearby "Solvay" (1941 – 1944). He paid many visits later on when he was a priest and bishop of Krakow. His successor in the archdiocese of Krakow – cardinal Franciszek Macharski – in 1996 established a foundation whose purpose was to build the Basilica of the Divine Mercy and social facilities for pilgrims. On 17 August 2002 John Paul II consecrated the new Basilica and entrusted the world to the Divine Mercy.

The Basilica, built between 1999 and 2002, designed by Witold Cęckiewicz, resembles a ship and gives the impression of a contemporary "Ark of the Covenant" where everyone who trusts in the Divine Mercy can find salvation. Its symbol is the image of the Divine Mercy (copy of the miraculous image painted by Jan Chrzęszcz) fixed over the tabernacle in the shape of Earth encircled by shrubs under sudden gusts of wind.



The image is the central element of the presbytery. On the walls separating the presbytery from the nave there is an image of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn (painted by Jan Chrząszcz) on the left and the text of the Act of Entrustment of the World to the Divine Mercy, delivered in this basilica on 17 August 2002 by John Paul II, on the right. At the entrance (on the left side of the vestibule) there is a cornerstone from Golgotha consecrated by John Paul II and (on the right) a plaque commemorating his second pilgrimage to Łagiewniki and consecration of the Basilica. The plaque commemorating the pilgrimage of Benedict XVI is fixed above.

In the lower part of the church there are five chapels: Communio Sanctorum chapel with a beautiful decorative mosaic designed by the Hungarian artist and Greek-Catholic priest Laszlo Puskás (offering made by the Hungarian Church), St Faustina's chapel decorated with the image of the Apostle of Divine Mercy painted by Jan Chrząszcz (funded by the Italian Church), the chapel of St Andrew the Apostle with an iconostasis of the Ukrainian artist Lubomir Medwid (funded by the Greek-Catholics from Poland and Ukraine); Our Lady of Sorrows chapel (funded by the Slovak Church); and the Holy Cross chapel (funded by the German Church). Next to the Basilica, there is the Chapel of Perpetual Adoration – designed by Witold Cęckiewicz – where the continuous adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place and the flame lit by John Paul II in Vatican in December 2003 burns as the symbol of the Divine Mercy radiating from this place of worship. Behind the Chapel of Perpetual Adoration there is the John Paul II Assembly Hall, whereas in front of the Basilica there is a freestanding observation tower with the monument of the Holy Father John Paul II – the Apostle of the Divine Mercy and the advocate of peace. The tower overlooks the splendid vista of Krakow and the surrounding area.

Saint Joseph's Church

The Podgórski Market Square

At the time of St Faustina, St Joseph's Church was the religious centre of the parish, part of which was the village of Łagiewniki. One event recorded in her "Diary" is directly linked to this temple, namely the entry made on 27 December 1937 when she was travelling in a carriage to the hospital in Prądnik. "I had a pleasant journey – she wrote – because I travelled along with a certain person who was taking an infant to be baptized. We gave her a lift to the church in Podgórze. As she was about to get off, she asked me to hold the child. When I took it in my arms, I prayed to God by offering Him the baby, so that one day it would bring Him glory. Deep inside I felt that the Lord looked upon that little soul in a special way" (Diary 849). The previous night, someone had left the child at the convent gate in Łagiewniki. The sisters found it in the morning. As soon as they bathed and fed it, they started looking for a person who would bring it up. One of the neighbours volunteered to accept the child and decided to give it her surname. So they used the carriage to take Faustina to Prądnik. Sister Faustina and the neighbour along with the infant arrived to the parish church in Podgórze where it was baptized and its name was entered in the church register of births.

The Cebulski printing house

22 Szewska Street



The buildings in Szewska Street date back to the 16th and 17th centuries. The historical tenement building at 22 Szewska Street, referred to as "the collegiate", was rebuilt in 1910 from two older tenement houses from 1636. Józef Cebulski in the mid-war period of the 20th century rented part of the dwelling for his company which operated as the Publishing House and Repository of Devotional Books and Articles (pl. Wydawnictwo Ksiąg do Nabożeństwa i Skład Dewocjonaliów). It was where the first images of the Merciful Jesus were printed with the chaplet of the Divine Mercy and small prayer books, entitled "Christ, the King of Mercy", which were prepared on the basis of St Faustina's revelations by her spiritual guide Rev. Michał Sopoćko of Vilnius. St Faustina, along with mother superior Irena Krzyżanowska, visited the publishing house on 27 September 1937. This is how she described this event in her "Diary": "Today mother superior and I went to see a certain man whose company printed and painted little images of the Divine Mercy, as well as the invocations and chaplets which have already been approved. We also saw the larger enhanced image. What made me really happy is that it resembles very much the original" (see: Diary 1299 and 1301). Having visited the Cebulski printing house, St Faustina and mother superior went to St Mary's Basilica.

Church of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven

The Main Market Square

On the Main Market Square, looking from Floriańska Street, there is the Church of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven (St Mary's Basilica), one of the most famous gothic temples in Poland. Built at the beginning of the 13th century, the Church was rebuilt and refurbished on many occasions.

A magnificent monument of medieval woodcarving – St Mary's Altar was carved by Veit Stoss and constitutes the jewel in the crown of this church. It is one of the largest altars of this particular type in Europe (11 x 13 m). It is made of oak and lime wood (sculpted figures). The retable of the altar presents a vivid scene of the Virgin Mary falling asleep surrounded by the Apostles, whereas the apse illustrates the assumption and coronation.

This is how St Faustina described her visit to and her spiritual experiences in the church: "Having finished our business, we paid a visit to St Mary's Church. As we were listening to the holy ceremony, the Lord gave me a sign of how many souls would attain salvation thanks to this work of art. Then, I began an internal dialogue with the Lord by thanking Him for the grace of seeing how the veneration for His fathomless mercy is spreading. I immersed myself in a profound thanksgiving prayer. Oh, how great is the generosity of God. Blessed be the Lord who keeps His promises" (Diary 1300).

The Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

26 Kopernika Street

The church was constructed between 1912 and 1921 according to a design by Franciszek Mączyński. The Church, which has been occupied by Jesuits from the beginning, was



consecrated by bishop Anatol Nowak (29 May 1921) and a few days later (on 3 June), on the liturgical feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Edmund Dalbor led the procession to the Little Market Square where he solemnly dedicated Poland to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The church at Kopernika Street, which has been a minor basilica since 1960, is the central temple of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Poland.

Convents of the Congregation of Lady of Mercy, at the time of St Faustina, were contemplative and active places. Sisters would not leave the walls if it were not for important matters, as for example the processions organized on the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. St Faustina took part in one of these processions on 19 June 1936: "When we went to the Jesuits to walk in the procession of the Sacred Heart of Jesus – she wrote in her "Diary" – as soon as vespers began, I saw rays coming forth from the Sacred Host – the same as those painted in the image. My soul started longing for God" (Diary 657).

Fathers Jesuits preached at retreats and were confessors at the convents of the Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy. St Faustina based her spiritual beliefs on the Society of Jesuits and was brought up with their assistance. Her life was significantly influenced by Rev. Edmund Elter, professor of the Gregorian University in Rome, who was the first priest to recognize and confirm the miraculous character of her revelations and by Rev. Józef Andrasz S.J., her confessor and spiritual guide from Krakow.

Jesuits still assist sisters of the Congregation of Our Lady of Mercy in retreats and confessions and provide spiritual guidance. In the convent in Łagiewniki they are responsible for the religious needs of the sisters and pilgrims.

The John Paul II hospital

80 Prądnicka Street

Municipal Hospital in Prądnik Biały was constructed between 1913 and 1917 according to the design by Tomasz Janiszewski (the first director of the facility) and Jan Zawiejski. At the time the hospital was put into use, there were 120 beds for scarlet fever patients and 126 beds for tuberculosis patients. The chapel (in a separate building) was designed in modern style by Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz or Franciszek Mączyński. St Faustina was treated twice at the hospital between 1936 and 1938. She spent over eight months under the supervision of doctor Adam Sielberg and nurses – Sisters of the Sacred Heart. She was kept in isolation in tuberculosis wards no. I and III – close to the said chapel. She filled many pages of her "Diary" and experienced divine grace. She left the hospital on 17 September 1938. As Sielberg was saying goodbye, he asked Faustina for the holy image of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus which she had displayed on her nightstand. When one of the nurses opposed reminding him of the disinfection requirements, the doctor replied: "Saints do not spread diseases". The wards, where St Faustina was admitted, are long gone because they were demolished during the Second World War. All that there is left to this day is the chapel of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.



Since 1990 the hospital has been under the patronage of John Paul II who consecrated the building of the Cardiology Clinic in person on 9 June 1997.

In 2007 the chapel of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was thoroughly refurbished and its pre-war décor was restored. The chapel was consecrated by the archbishop of Krakow, cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz and the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy donated a relic of the Divine Mercy apostle.

A commemorative plaque (designed by Czesław Dźwigaj) marking the time St Faustina spent in the hospital was fixed to the chapel exterior wall and a special inscription inside the chapel marks the place where she prayed.

Practical Information

Convent of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy

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www.faustyna.pl

www.faustinum.pl

www.misericordia.faustina.pl

Rector's office: www.milosierdzie.pl

Information desk

Registration of groups of pilgrims, reservation of lectures on the life and mission of Saint Sister Faustina, bookings of the adoration of the Holy Sacrament at the chapel of Perpetual Adoration
Tel.: +48 12 252 33 33, +48 12 252 33 11

Main celebrations

- The Divine Mercy Sunday celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter (moveable feast)
- Saint Faustina Celebration on 5 October

Mass schedule

- On Sundays and holidays

Monastic chapel: 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 7:00 p.m.

Basilica: 9:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 12:00 p.m., 1:30 p.m., 3:20 p.m., 6:00 p.m.

- On weekdays

Monastic chapel: 6:30 a.m., 5:00 p.m.

Basilica: 9:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 3:20 p.m., 6:00 p.m.

The Hour of Mercy

Everyday at 3 pm – Basilica and the monastic chapel



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House of St Faustina Kowalska

Museum and rooms for pilgrims (52 beds)

3 Siostry Faustyny Street, 30-420 Krakow

Tel.: +48 12 444 68 58; +48 12 266 58 59 ext. 400

e-mail: noclegi@faustyna.pl

Pastoral House

The Pastoral House offers 46 rooms with en suite bathrooms, a restaurant, a cafeteria, a conference room and clinics.

3 Siostry Faustyny Street, 30-420 Krakow

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Access and Parking

Take the southern ring road around Krakow and come off the motorway at the Łagiewniki exit. Cars can park next to the Basilica, whereas coaches – according to the road signs – can park at Matraskiego Street.

Information for disabled visitors

www.krakow.pl/bezbarier