

Bishop Hicks' Column

April 2024

FAITH-INSPIRED MOVIES



CONTEMPORARY MOVIES are challenging to watch and often dubious to recommend. It seems so many contain agenda-laden themes, disturbing violence, immorality, and obscene language. I keep hoping to uncover that diamond in the rough that is worth watching—either in the theater or streaming live in the comfort of my home.

When I worked as the vicar general in the Archdiocese of Chicago, I had a colleague who would thoughtfully alert me to the latest Catholic, faith-inspired movie. In 2019, he recommended *Love and Mercy: Faustina*. A few days later, I invited a group of seminarians and priests to join me at a movie theater in downtown Chicago to enjoy this movie together. We were all inspired by the life of Sister Maria Faustina, an uneducated nun in Poland who allowed God to do extraordinary things through her.

Here's what was so inspiring: Helena Kowalska entered the convent in 1925 and took the name of Sister Maria Faustina. She toiled at menial tasks to fill her day in the kitchen or garden but was not always treated kindly by others. Yet throughout her humble existence and faithfulness, she experienced mystical encounters with Jesus that clearly revealed God's forgiveness, mercy, and boundless love for humanity. These experiences prompted her to pen her now-famous diary, *Divine Mercy In My Soul*.

She also was gifted with a beautiful vision of Jesus, that most of us now recognize as the Divine Mercy image (*above*). It touchingly portrays Jesus with His right hand raised in a gesture of blessing. His left hand is touching His chest, emanating rays of red and white light. These rays symbolize the blood and water that flowed from Jesus' side, which signify the graces of mercy and forgiveness. Of course, the rays also represent the sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism. The bottom of the image is inscribed with the spiritual words of surrender: *Jesus, I Trust in You*.

Saint John Paul II canonized Sister Faustina in 2000—the first saint of the new millennium. He affectionately named her “the great apostle of Divine Mercy in our time.”

Every year on the second Sunday of Easter we, as the Catholic Church, celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday. It is a good reminder to focus our attention on God's sacrificial love. On this particular Sunday, we especially pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet, a powerful prayer invoking God's mercy. Most of us would agree our world, our society, and our very souls are in such need of God's grace these days.

On Divine Mercy Sunday, we pray to turn away from division, hate, and vindictiveness, so we can refocus our gaze and actions on God's mercy, forgiveness, and love.

I love the collect prayed at the beginning of Mass on Divine Mercy Sunday, which boldly proclaims:

God of everlasting mercy, who in the very recurrence of the paschal feast, kindle the faith of the people you have made your own, increase, we pray, the grace you have bestowed, that all may grasp and rightly understand in what font they have been washed, by whose Spirit they have been reborn, by whose blood they have been redeemed. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. Amen.

Recently, my “movie whisperer” colleague from the Archdiocese of Chicago emailed and encouraged me to see the movie, *Cabrini*. He informed me that it is about an Italian immigrant, Francesca Cabrini, who fights the odds to help the poor and orphans, and ultimately becomes the first American saint. I immediately told him, “Based on your recommendation, I am determined to see it soon!”

When you see a good, faith-based movie which you enthusiastically give two thumbs up, I encourage you to recommend it to your family and friends. Your endorsement may be a simple way for you to evangelize and help spread the good news of our faith.

Saints Frances Xavier Cabrini and Maria Faustina Kowalska, pray for us, and may the Divine Mercy of God bless you today and always.

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