Faustina
MESSANGER OF DIVINE MERCY
STUDY GUIDE

Saint Luke
PRODUCTIONS
WWW.DivineMercyDrama.com
NOTE

Before the performance, emphasis should be placed on preparing the students with a basic understanding of the story of the apparitions of Jesus to Saint Faustina. This is important so that they do not waste time wondering what is going on in the story during the production, since it is the story of a mystical encounter.

We strongly recommend visiting the website www.thedivinemercy.org to become better acquainted with Divine Mercy. This is the website of the Marians of the Immaculate Conception, the religious order which promotes devotion to Divine Mercy and operates the National Shrine of Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, MA

For now, here are a few quick links:

- The basic story of Divine Mercy and request Jesus made to Sr. Faustina – the Image:
  http://thedivinemercy.org/message/devotions/image.php

- What is the basic message of Jesus to Saint Faustina and the faithful? Learn the simple ABCs of the message here:
  http://thedivinemercy.org/message/

- The Chaplet of Divine Mercy
After the performance, focus should be on the effect of God’s Mercy personally in the students’ lives. Therefore, the main emphasis should be on the stories of the Modern Woman and the Dying Man. The students will be asked to reflect on their own experience of despair, sin, isolation, mercy and love. Since young people generally feel that their sins separate them from God, they should be encouraged to hope in God’s forgiveness.

It is very important to understand and relay to students the true value of live, religious drama in our modern world today, to build and strengthen a relationship with Christ and the Saints. It allows the beauty of the Gospel and the saints to be seen and felt. Bringing sanctity to the performing arts in our current culture through this moving production has the real potential to strengthen and convert the people around us.

Live drama allows audiences to understand that sanctity and holiness are possible for everyone. Being in the presence of a real person portraying Christ or a saint awakens in the audience the fundamental truth that the saints were real and human like themselves. Beyond that, there is the potential for the audience to experience those powerful moments where the truth is revealed; a moment that inspires that individual to say, perhaps only deep inside, “I want to do that too!” This powerful moment can be a call to conversion, prayer, and action and God alone can know how Grace will work.
# Table of Contents

- Contact Information (5)
- About the Performance (6)
- About the Actress & Understanding the Value of Live Drama (7)
- Who is St. Faustina? (8)
- What was Happening in 20th Century Poland? (10)
- Pre-Viewing Discussion Questions for Faustina (11)
- Curious Tidbits of Information (13)
- Questions after Attending the Drama (14)
- Action Items (19)
- About Saint Luke Productions (20)
HAVE ANY FEEDBACK OR THOUGHTS FOR US? CONTACT US!
Mr. Defilippis, the Founder and President of Saint Luke Productions, especially enjoys bringing shows to young people, and welcomes your questions and comments. Please write to us and let him know what you thought of the show.

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And of course, we’re also on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter - Become a Fan Today!

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www.DivineMercyDrama.com
We would love to hear from you!
This riveting multimedia production of *Faustina* is a modern message of mercy centered around the spirit and life of Polish nun Maria Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938), whose personal encounters with Jesus have inspired a world-wide devotion and zeal to Christ’s Divine Mercy. A parallel modern story within the drama offers audiences a compelling personal connection to the current moral issues of our times.

The play incorporates state-of-the-art technology, bringing St. Faustina to life with enhanced lighting, video imagery, and a grippingly beautiful musical score. It will seem as if you are watching a movie and a live play – at the same time.

**NOTE**

There is no graphic material presented in this production, but thematic elements and images of the devil are presented.
MARIA VARGO

Maria Vargo, a native of St. Louis, Missouri, is a Hollywood-based actress now starring in the lead role of Saint Luke Productions’ latest touring live drama, *FAUSTINA: MESSENGER OF DIVINE MERCY*.

Vargo brings a wealth of experience in theater and film to the role of FAUSTINA. Her résumé includes numerous roles in film, television, and theater, in addition to work as an artistic director and producer for a faith-based theater in Los Angeles.

Aside from her work on stage and screen, Maria Vargo’s many talents encompass a far-reaching spectrum from singer, songwriter to voice teacher for actors. Her passion for music led to producing a Christian CD entitled *Fire Tries Iron*. She shares her talents with the Catholic community by cantoring at Mass. In her capacity as a public speaker on sexual education and abstinence, she served in 2011 as a missionary to Uganda.

Because of her own deep spiritual conversion several years ago, Maria is grateful for the opportunity to portray the 20th century Polish mystic, St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, whose personal encounters with Jesus have inspired a popular world-wide devotion to Christ’s Divine Mercy. She looks forward to sharing the message of God’s endless mercy with the world, since she has experienced His mercy in her own life.

Vargo is a member of the Screen Actors Guild- American Federation of Television & Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), Actors’ Equity, and the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers.
Saint Faustina was born Helena Kowalska in 1905, the third of ten children in a peasant family in the village of Glogowiec, Poland. From a young age, “Helenka”, as her family called her, earnestly longed for God, but her parents refused to grant her permission to enter a convent. After a vision of Jesus telling her to go to Warsaw to become a nun, at the age of 18, she secretly slipped away and boarded a train to the city. She knocked on many convent doors but all of them turned her away.

Finally, when she was almost twenty, she entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, whose members devote themselves to the care and education of troubled young women. The following year she received her religious habit and was given the name Sister Maria Faustina, to which she added, “of the Most Blessed Sacrament”. As an uneducated nun, she spent the rest of her life doing menial work in the convent as a cook and as a gardener.

In the 1930s, Sister Faustina began to receive visions from Jesus, appearing to her in a white garment with rays of red and white light emanating from his heart. He asked her to paint his image, with the message “Jesus, I Trust in You” across the bottom. This was the beginning of her mission, for Jesus asked Sr. Faustina to become the apostle and secretary of God’s mercy, a model of how to be merciful to others, and an instrument for making known God’s plan of mercy for the world.

This was the start of what has developed into a powerful devotion for the Church – the Divine Mercy. Jesus continued to speak to Sister Faustina, giving her this message of mercy with a particular urgency for our times. He also gave her a special prayer, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, which spread rapidly along with devotion to Divine Mercy and veneration of the image. Sister Faustina kept a diary of her visions which has been published and read by countless people across the world.
Sister Faustina’s entire life, in imitation of Christ’s, was a **sacrifice** - a life lived for others. At the Divine Lord’s request, she willingly offered her personal sufferings in union with Him to atone for the sins of others until she died of tuberculosis in 1938. On April 30, 2000, Sister Faustina was canonized the first saint of the 21st century. On that day, Pope John Paul II fulfilled Jesus’ request by establishing the Sunday after Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday for the whole church, and two years later, he publicly entrusted the entire world to Divine Mercy.

**FAST FACTS ABOUT THE LIFE OF SR. FAUSTINA**
- **Born:** August 25, 1905 in Glogowiec, Poland
- **Hears a voice calling her to religious life:** Age 7
- **Sees her first vision of Christ:** Age 19
- **Receives her habit and name, Maria Faustina of the Blessed Sacrament:** April 30, 1926
- **Takes perpetual vows:** May 1, 1933
- **Becomes ill and starts writing diary:** July 1934, at Age 29
- **Receives the Divine Mercy Chaplet:** Good Friday, 1937
- **Dies:** October 5, 1938 at age 33
- **Divine Mercy message begins to spread worldwide:** 1942
- **The Diary of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska published in English:** 1986

**THE PATH TO SAINTHOOD**
- **Cause for Sainthood Opened:** 1965
- **Beatified:** 1993 in Rome on 2nd Sunday of Easter
- **Canonized:** April 30, 2000 in Rome on Divine Mercy Sunday - and Divine Mercy Sunday is Officially Proclaimed!
- **Feast Day:** October 5

**WORTH NOTING**
- **St. Faustina is known by the following names/titles:** Secretary of Divine Mercy, Apostle of Divine Mercy
- **Name Meaning:** Faustina is derived from the Latin for “favorable” or “auspicious”
At the beginning of the 20th century, Poland, along with the rest of Europe, was teetering on the brink of the First World War. Poland was divided under the rule of three different powers, despite several uprisings to unite the country. During World War I, the Allies agreed to re-constitute Poland as a single nation, and as a result, about 2 million Polish soldiers fought in World War I, and nearly half a million lost their lives.

After the war ended in 1918, Poland began to establish itself as an independent republic, while Warsaw became the capital of the newly united nation. The Soviet Red Army tried to re-take much of Eastern Poland in 1920, but was defeated in the Battle of Warsaw. This halted, for the time, the advance of communism in Eastern Europe.

For a peasant family such as Faustina’s, the unrest caused a great deal of uncertainty about the future. However, life in a small village would have been somewhat isolated, and far more concerned with working hard to meet day-to-day needs than with political conflict. It was during Poland’s struggle to establish its national identity after the war that St. Faustina travelled alone to the emerging capital city of Warsaw to answer God’s call.

This brief and simple overview of political tensions and daily life now sets the stage for Faustina: Messenger of Divine Mercy.
LIVE PRODUCTION

1. Saint Luke Productions has been creating live productions on scripture and the lives of the saints for thirty-five years. What do you think are the differences between live theater and movies? Have you ever seen a live play? How did it affect you personally?

2. This production is a one-person show. What would be the challenges of performing alone onstage? Pay attention to the use of technology during the performance. The entire production, which incorporates complicated lighting, a full musical score, and characters projected on the screen, with sound effects and voices, is run by one person, who will be sitting at a table in the back of the performance space. Think about the many different production elements that had to come together for the production to look smooth, seamless, fast-paced, and interesting. Have you ever been involved in a video or live production? What do you think about the statement, “It takes a lot of preparation to make something appear effortless”?

3. Saint Faustina experienced mystical visions that are hard to portray on stage. How do you think the production will handle the appearances of Jesus?

4. Take a look at the Divine Mercy image (please have image available) and discuss the details that she described: The Rays, the position of the hand, the garment. This image was painted based on her description. When you are watching the production, be aware of the care used to create these supernatural occurrences.
FAUSTINA BIOGRAPHY

1. How do you think the period of the world wars is similar to our current day? Do you think the Catholic Church is respected by our society? Do you think we truly have religious freedom? For example, do you feel free to tell your friends that you are Catholic? Do you feel embarrassed to have your friends see you with ashes on your head on Ash Wednesday, or for them to know that you can’t eat meat on Fridays during Lent? Is this a function of our society’s view on Catholicism?

2. Faustina felt misunderstood during her time at the convent—especially when others didn’t believe Jesus was appearing to her. Describe when you stood up for what you believed in, even if you knew others would disagree.

3. After the Lord appeared to Faustina and told her to enter a convent, she left immediately despite the unknown. Give an example of a time in your life when you find yourself hesitating to do God’s will. Now think of a time when you obeyed him immediately. Is it a good idea to move quickly when you hear God’s call, or slowly discern?

APPRECIATION FOR THE CONSECRATED LIFE

1. How do you think you would know if you had a vocation to the religious life, that is, a calling from God to become a priest or a nun? Would it be a sign from God if you felt attracted to it? Would it be a sign if you felt repelled and frightened by it? Would it be a sign if the thought kept coming into your mind? Do you think everyone should consider the possibility of religious life or the priesthood, or is such a calling very rare in our day and age?

2. Priests and nuns take vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. What do those three words mean to you? Are married people supposed to be chaste (chaste = the virtue that moderates sexual desire)? Do you think it is possible to live without being married and be a healthy individual?
ABOUT THE SET

The production incorporates state-of-the-art technology to project images on a screen. Since the play goes to many different sized performance spaces, the projector that is behind the set has to be placed within two feet of the screen, in order to fit into churches and stages. This would be impossible with a traditional projector since it has to be placed far back to create a large enough image. The projector used in this production is unique – it uses a system of mirrors and keystone correction, so that it can sit just one foot behind the screen.

The set is constructed out of aluminum square tubes, connected with plastic joints, and the panels that cover these structures are attached with Velcro™. The entire set up takes about five hours to accomplish, and take-down requires about one hour.

The special effects used to create the Divine Mercy Image involve the use of many different programs, including Photoshop, After Effects, and Final Cut Pro. The actor was filmed in front of a green screen. In post production, the computer deletes anything of that bright green color and special effects, like clouds and rays, can be added.
IN GENERAL

• Give three adjectives to describe what you thought the performance would be like before you saw it.
• Name something that struck you or surprised you about the performance.

SR. FAUSTINA

1. Give three adjectives that describe Faustina:
   • As a Young Girl?
   • As a Nun?

2. Can you relate to any of the struggles that Faustina went through? Describe a time that you felt “alone and misunderstood” or possibly when you noticed someone who felt this way. What did you do?

3. When Fr. Sopocko sees Faustina for the last time, he mentions that she no longer had need of him and that she was “in complete communion with the heavenly Father.” What does this mean? Why would it be valuable to have a “spiritual director” to help guide you?

4. Faustina sacrificed her life for souls. What exactly did she sacrifice?

5. Did God use Faustina as a tool or instrument? Why? For what purpose?

6. There were other nuns who were very jealous of Sr. Faustina and they challenged her motivations and actions as a nun. Why?

7. Think about the life of a nun. What do you think the challenges and the rewards are for a nun?

8. Think about being a Messenger of Divine Mercy? Can you be one? In what ways have you shown or received mercy?

9. When Faustina first saw the painted Divine Mercy image, she was sad. Why? What did Jesus say to her in return? Why is this so important?
MODERN WOMAN
1. Discuss the thing that you could most relate to in the story about the modern woman.
2. She says: “All I wanted was to be loved.” How can this attitude get you into trouble? Talk about a situation when you have had to stand up to peer pressure.
3. Can you relate at all to the Modern Woman’s Story? How has or can Divine Mercy help you?
4. Do you ever feel pressured by a friend, boyfriend, or girlfriend? What do you do about it?
5. Have you ever had a friend thinking about having an abortion? Did you speak up or remain silent? Did you try to help your friend understand the value of life?
6. Why is it so important to pray? Do you ever feel like it is difficult to pray? Do you pray anyway?

DYING MAN
1. The Old Man moves through several different stages as he faces his impending death. First is denial, then feeling sorry for himself, then recognition of his alienation, and then anger at God. Have you ever been angry with Him? What did you do about it? Did you try to draw closer to Him in the midst of your anger?

NOTE
The character of the Dying Man is based loosely on The Death of Ivan Ilyich by Leo Tolstoy.
THE DEVIL

1. Why do you think the devil attacked Faustina so much?
2. What did he say he hated the most?
3. Which is more useful to him, to have someone sin, or to have them despair about God’s Mercy when they do sin?
4. The Devil says to Saint Faustina, “I hate His Mercy.” Why does the devil hate mercy more than sin?
5. What did the devil not want Sr. Faustina to do? How did she combat the temptations? Were there times he succeeded? Give an example of how you personally trust in the Lord when you are tempted with doubt and frustration?
6. Describe the ways in which Jesus responds differently to Faustina than the devil does.
7. How does the Devil tempt the Modern Woman? She says “All was right with me and God,” even though she wasn’t going to Confession. Can you trust your own feelings when it comes to your relationship with God? How might you be deluding yourself?

What does the Catholic Church teach about the existence of the devil? Find out! Look this up in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
POST PRODUCTION THEMES
Discuss the following quotes from Saint Faustina, and Jesus (speaking to Sr. Faustina):

TRUST
On the bottom of the image, which Christ asked Faustina to have painted, are the words, Jesus, I trust in You. Why do you think, with the many things He told her, he chose those words to place on the image?

MERCY
Diary Quote from Jesus: Tell them that no soul that has called upon My Mercy has been disappointed or brought to shame. My mercy will shield them in that final battle at the hour of death. (1541)

Silently consider your sins and bad habits - the ones no one knows about. Does God know the real you? Does He accept you as you are, with all your failings? How can you experience the peace that comes with feeling His Mercy? (Confession? Support groups? Talking to friends? ) The Modern Woman felt she was unworthy of God’s Love because of her sin. Can prayer help?

SUFFERING
Faustina actually suffered the pains of the crucifixion in her hands, head and side. In her anguish she cries out: “I am sacrifice.” How do you interpret that quote? Does suffering have value? Does your suffering have the potential to actually help people?
GOD’S LOVE FOR EVERY SOUL
Diary Quote from Jesus: Tell sinners that I am always waiting for them, that I listen intently to the beating of their hearts. I am speaking to them through their remorse of conscience, through their failures, and sufferings, through thunderstorms, through the voice of the Church. (1728)

How does Jesus speak to you? Do you believe He really appeared to Saint Faustina? Why or why not?

LOVE
Discuss the following quote from Sr. Faustina:
God has given me to understand that there is but one thing that is of infinite value in His eyes, and that is love of God; love, love and once again, love; and nothing can compare with a single act of pure love of God.

TEMPTATION TO DESPAIR
Diary Quote from Satan: Ask for death for yourself, tomorrow after Holy Communion. God will hear you, for He has heard you so many times before and has given you what you have asked for.

Compare this temptation from Satan to Jesus’ temptation in the desert. Why is it wrong to give in to this temptation? Discuss the temptation to suicide, so prevalent in our world. Discuss the sense of the despair that comes with thinking your sins have cast you out of God’s Love and Mercy.

ISOLATION AND DESPAIR
All three characters, Faustina, the Modern Woman and the Dying Man, express their sense of isolation with the words, “I am so alone.” Talk about what makes us feel alone and isolated. How does sin isolate us? Do our sins and destructive habits and addictions define us? How does one find peace in the midst of our overwhelming weaknesses and failures? How far does God’s Mercy extend?
1. Writing Activities: select one of the pre-viewing or post-viewing discussion questions of your choice, and utilize it as the theme for a writing assignment.

2. As an experiment, write down a prayer intention, and then for one month pray a Rosary, or even one Hail Mary, daily for this intention. Note the results.

3. Stand up for your faith in public, by making the sign of the cross before eating in a restaurant, or saying “God bless you” to a clerk in a store. This takes courage! It will prepare you for greater challenges to your faith.

4. Suggested resources and devotions for learning more about St. Faustina and The Divine Mercy

   1. Resource
      • **Book:** *The Diary of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska*
      • **Website:** www.thedivinemercy.org
      • **Website:** www.marian.org/divinemercy
      • **Book:** *The Death of Ivan Illyich* by Tolstoy (This is an excellent supplemental reading choice to explore man’s mortality and his relationship with God, especially for high school students.)

   2. Information on the devotions related to Divine Mercy can be found at:
      • **The Image**
        http://thedivinemercy.org/message/devotions/image.php
      • **The Chaplet**
      • **The Novena**
      • **The Hour of Mercy**
        http://thedivinemercy.org/message/devotions/hour.php
ABOUT ST. LUKE PRODUCTIONS

Saint Luke Productions produces live theatrical productions, films, television, and radio programs on the life of Christ and the Saints, including the 2004 feature film THÉRÈSE. Saint Luke Productions has proven to be the only company, by the grace of God, which has a consistent and proven track record of bringing a variety of original and quality media productions to our modern culture for nearly four decades.

MISSION
Saint Luke Productions is dedicated to evangelizing and renewing the culture through theater and the media. Their mission is accomplished through live professional dramas and feature films, based on historical, scriptural, and modern-day stories that inspire audiences to a deeper desire for the Truth of Jesus Christ. Saint Luke Productions is committed to the education and encouragement of artists and young people who share their vision through internships, workshops and employment in their office and production company. These opportunities include acting, theatrical lighting and sound, touring, cinematography, film and sound editing, etc. In accord with the teachings of Saint John Paul II and the Second Vatican Council, they believe that a renewal of the culture depends upon a renewal of Catholic family life. Their organization has been established within the context of family, and with the purpose of encouraging a respect for the family, both in their productions and in their work environment.

*This study guide was created by Saint Luke Productions and is intended for the hosts, sponsors, teachers, and students who are preparing to attend or have already attended the live drama of Faustina: Messenger of Divine Mercy.