



Nurturing Urban Souls: Unveiling the Transformative Power of Divine Mercy Devotion through James W. Fowler's Lens

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Abstract: Urban life is characterized by various difficulties, especially in terms of the economy, poverty levels and high population density. This reality causes many individuals to feel burdened by the existing challenges, and it even has a big impact on the individual's spirituality. This research focuses on the influence of the practice of Divine Mercy Devotion on the spiritual growth of people in urban parish environments, from the perspective of James W. Fowler. The research method uses a quantitative approach by utilizing a Google Form questionnaire to collect data from respondents who are involved in the Divine Mercy devotion. The research results show that the higher the level of involvement in devotional practices, the stronger the individual's spiritual growth in the context of the parish community. The results of the research become the basis for new theology to increase people's awareness of God's mercy and grace in everyday life. Awareness of Divine mercy inspires dedication to always rely on God in life. In the context of spiritual growth, this devotion also creates a closer relationship with God and others. Practical devotion to Divine Mercy makes a significant contribution to the spiritual growth of the people, strengthening relationships with fellow believers and the surrounding environment. Effectively, each person is able to integrate Christian values, social service, personal growth, and concern for the environment, creating a strong and loving community and helping individuals achieve spiritual growth, establishing full confidence in God in the midst of increasingly complex urban activities.

INTRODUCTION

Parishioners in urban environments are always faced with various kinds of social problems that disrupt the harmony of life. The life situation of people who are busy with various work activities, poverty, overcrowding have an impact on weak spiritual growth (Tenau, 2016). Another difficulty faced by urban communities is adapting to rapid progress, to get something you have to spend a lot of money. There are many worldly offers that are attractive and instantaneous to make them feel comfortable with themselves without having to rely completely on spiritual things. Apart from that, many people feel tired from work so they do not have the opportunity to be actively involved in spiritual activities. However, despite this, there are still groups of Catholics who are active and enthusiastic in spiritual activities (Stella Yessy Exlentya, 2017). The author's critical reflection question is whether the spiritual

activities that have been carried out in urban parish environments help the spiritual growth of the people? It is very helpful, but not all people are active and creative in implementing spiritual practices in their lives. The lives of people in urban areas are influenced by the world's offers which make them less aware of God's mercy in their daily lives (Cornelius Iman Sukmana and Karinna, 2017). The appreciation of faith is still weak and spiritual activities often just become an ordinary routine. Many people tend to rely on themselves, despair and lose hope when facing life's problems. A comfortable life with technological advances often creates problems both in society and in the family. The appreciation of Christian values is decreasing, especially in the context of family life and the community environment (Ngabalin, 2017).

One effective solution to realize and discover the meaning of God's love of life is the devotion to Divine Mercy. The Divine Mercy Devotion is one of the Christian practices that has a significant impact in strengthening sustainable spiritual growth in urban environments (Dan et al, 2014). The Divine Mercy Devotion is a forum or means for people to realize their Christian calling which emphasizes God who is all-loving and most merciful. The Devotion of Mercy can provide inspiration and guidance in facing the challenges of modern cities. This devotion encourages Catholics to better understand and feel God's love and mercy in everyday life (Arifin, 2017). God's love and mercy originate from the One who created, gave life to and saved all humans. Humans exist, live and are saved solely by God. Man's unwillingness to renew himself and rejection of God's love will lead him to eternal destruction. Therefore, the devotion to Divine Mercy makes humans aware of God's mercy and tries to renew themselves through repentance.

Through this devotion, Christians can become vessels of mercy and allow God's mercy to continue to flow in others. Willing to help anyone who is in trouble and be a brother to others. Everyone in fact without exception is called to embrace the call to mercy. Through the Devotion of Mercy, people believe in Christ's abundant grace and manifest mercy towards others and act as channels of God's mercy. Like a mother's womb, God always wants to embrace a human child, giving him a sense of security and peace, giving him food and drink, warmth, protection and life (Meki Begint, 2018).

The manifestation of compassion that is lived by devotees through concrete deeds and actions has a positive impact on the development of faith and compassionate service to others. Basically, all Christians are called to bear witness to Christ and can truly become true evangelists (Cf. EN 21). The results of previous studies found that the devotion to Divine Mercy had a significant influence on spiritual growth to respond to God's mercy and unite with Him as a charismatic family (Suwito, 2021). Based on the results of this research study, it is intended to answer the following questions: first, how does the devotion to divine mercy influence the lives of people in urban parish environments? Second, why does the devotion to Divine Mercy increase spiritual growth increase the spiritual growth of urban parishioners? Third, does the devotion to Divine Mercy make people aware of spiritual life in living Christian values?

Before going any further, the author first briefly outlines the meaning and brief history of the Divine Mercy Devotion. Divine Mercy is a devotion that focuses on the prayer of God's mercy which was poured out in the event of Jesus' cross. This devotion began as a personal devotion to Santa Faustina in her monastery. She was a Polish nun of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy 1905–1938. Through Santa Faustina's diary, this devotion spread widely and became part of the prayer life of many Catholics (Bernadus Boli Ujan, 2016). In this diary, Faustina recorded her prayers which describe her deep relationship with Jesus. The messages of mercy that Jesus conveyed to him became an inspiration for humanity throughout the world. Jesus sent Faustina to spread His love and mercy, not punishment for suffering humanity, but healing and merciful embrace. Faustina emphasized that compassion must be translated into daily actions, words and prayers. In one of the revelations, Faustina was reminded of the importance of the prayer of mercy at three o'clock in the afternoon for the benefit of the world and the salvation of suffering souls (Ujan, 2016). Asking for Divine Mercy for the whole world to always rely on Jesus in life, as stated in Divine Mercy with the words "Jesus You Are My Reliance". The essence of the Divine Mercy devotion is to rely on God and be merciful.

According to Faustina, the three main characteristics of God that Jesus revealed to her were holiness, justice, and especially love and mercy. In his view, love and mercy are the highest attributes of God that unite creation with the Creator. God's mercy is clearly reflected in Jesus and his work of saving humans. The devotion to Divine Mercy became widely known thanks to the support of Pope John Paul II, who highlighted it in the document "Dives in Misericordia" (1980). Pope John Paul II on April 30, 2000 designated the Sunday after Easter Sunday as Divine Mercy Sunday. This devotion opens the door to understanding the mystery of the Trinity, showing God as Most Loving and Most Merciful, while also facing the reality of sin that destroys humans. Pope Francis then raised the mystery of Divine Mercy through the Bull *Misericordiae Vultus* in 2015, establishing the Year of Mercy and emphasizing the primacy of compassion as a way of Christian life. This devotion teaches people to be merciful like God, rely on Him, and spread His love through main prayers such as the hour of mercy, koronka, and novena. The Divine Mercy devotion strengthens human awareness of the great love and mercy of God that flows from the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. His prayers acknowledge the blood and water that emanate from the Heart of Jesus as a source of infinite mercy (Benny Suwito, 2008).

The devotion to Divine Mercy makes humans aware of the great love of Allah, the Most Merciful. The love and mercy of the Triune God are revealed to the world and humans through the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. From the merciful Heart of Jesus flows divine mercy. The heart of Jesus, which was wounded by human sins and from which blood and water came out, became a source of love and mercy for humans and the world. Jesus himself taught St. Faustina said the following short prayer: "O Blood and Water that have gushed from the Heart of Jesus as a source of mercy for us, I trust in you. This prayer should always be prayed by St. Faustina and those who pray for the corona. St. Faustina believed that God's merciful love was so vast and

abundant that even the human mind found it difficult to understand the divine mystery (Stefan Leks, 2009).

The Divine Mercy Devotion introduced by Sister Faustina is a devotion devoted to honoring and asking for God's Mercy. The specialty of this devotion is that it directs devotees to become proclaimers of God's mercy. This can be found in every element of the Divine Mercy devotion. In a vision received by Sister Faustina, Jesus said: "My daughter, I ask that people respect My Mercy. I also ask you to perform acts of mercy that arise from love for Me. You must practice compassion whenever and wherever I give you three ways to practice compassion towards others, namely by deeds, words and prayers (Jones & Heley, 2016).

In the context of urban parishes, the Divine Mercy devotion becomes a means of assisting parishioners through spiritual growth. This devotion allows people to deepen their faith, reflect and know (Hia, 2022). By living and appreciating the devotion to Divine Mercy, believers increasingly grow in the spirituality of Mercy and are able to integrate it into everyday life. The Divine Mercy Devotion provides an effective offer to strengthen human personal relationships with God and each other. In facing big problems in urban environments, Catholics can learn from Jesus to accept and forgive each other (Adoon, 2021). The Divine Mercy Devotion is a form of prayer that is based on recognizing God's infinite mercy and compassion and promotes spiritual growth. In an effort to emphasize spiritual growth through devotion to divine mercy, the author adopts James W. Fowler's perspective theory regarding spiritual growth.

James W. Fowler, born on October 12, 1940 in Reidsville, North Carolina, is a figure who combines psychology and theology to detail the development of human faith. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees in theology at Duke University, then pursued doctoral studies at Harvard University in educational psychology. His most famous work is the book "Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning." Fowler, a leader in the fields of psychology and theology, received awards from various institutions and was a professor at Emory University. He died on October 16, 2015 in Atlanta, Georgia, but his legacy lives on through his contributions to understanding human spiritual development (Usmany, 2018).

Fowler's Theory of Faith Development identifies three stages: belief, development, and theory. Trust is seen as an individual's attempt to create meaning in life, with three main aspects: relationships with other people, interpretation paradigms, and views on life values. The developmental stage includes the process of change and maturity in beliefs through life experiences. Meanwhile, the theoretical stage involves knowledge and hypotheses that are applied practically to understand the journey of individual faith development (Sitorus, 2023). Fowler classifies the stages of faith development, starting from the intuitive-projective stage to the peak where the individual reaches spiritual maturity. While not all individuals reach this stage, Fowler illustrates it with figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther, King, Jr. This theory can be applied outside of a religious context, helping individuals find the meaning of life in various situations (Johan Hasan, 2018). Known as "Stages of Faith," this theory details

an individual's journey in understanding and experiencing the spiritual dimension throughout their life (Boiliu, 2021). While it is useful to understand faith development, it is important to remember that each individual is unique, and developmental experiences may vary.

The Divine Mercy Devotion in relation to James W. Fowler's perspective on spiritual growth are two complementary concepts, providing a deeper understanding of individual spiritual development. The Divine Mercy devotion, commonly found in the Catholic tradition, emphasizes the importance of love, care, and forgiveness in spiritual growth. Living Christian values practices such as social service, prayer, meditation, and caring for others. The Divine Mercy Devotion provides opportunities for individuals to get closer to God, strengthen their beliefs, and integrate religious values in daily life. James W. Fowler's view of faith development, as outlined in Faith Development Theory, provides a deep framework for understanding how individuals experience spiritual growth throughout their lives. Fowler identifies stages of faith development, ranging from obedience to inclusiveness. The Divine Mercy Devotion can be interpreted as a container or means to reach higher stages in this development, such as the stage of commitment and universality (Adon & Firmanto, 2022)

Fowler's thinking about "faith" or faith as a commitment to transcendent values can be applied in the context of the Divine Mercy devotion. This devotion guides Catholics to absorb, understand, and practice Divine grace and mercy in everyday life (Johan Hasan, 2018). In the context of an urban parish environment, the concept of trust highlights the importance of viewing relationships with God and others based on love, mercy and forgiveness (Usmany, 2018). Fowler also emphasized that spiritual growth is a process of change and maturity through stages. The Divine Mercy devotion is a spiritual activity that involves a deep understanding of God's grace and mercy, which develops over time through life experience. The concept of faith growth theory emphasizes the importance of applying theoretical knowledge about faith growth in the social life of society (Yahya, 2001).

By understanding the stages of faith development, leaders of parish priests as shepherds of people in urban parishes can design spiritual formation programs that are appropriate to the level of development of their people's faith, strengthen the devotion to Divine Mercy, and integrate an understanding of God's grace in the daily lives of Catholics.

1. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted using a quantitative approach to provide an objective picture of the lives of Catholics in the urban parishes that are the focus of the study. The research subjects were Catholics living in the Malang City area. In collecting data, researchers used survey techniques via Google Form which contained 15 Likert scale statements which were distributed to Divine Mercy Devotion participants in the environment. The Likert scale statements are the following reasons:

1. The devotion to Divine Mercy increases my spiritual growth in the seriousness of my prayer life and enthusiasm for serving others sincerely
2. The Divine Mercy Devotion has a positive influence on the understanding and appreciation of God's faith and Mercy in everyday life

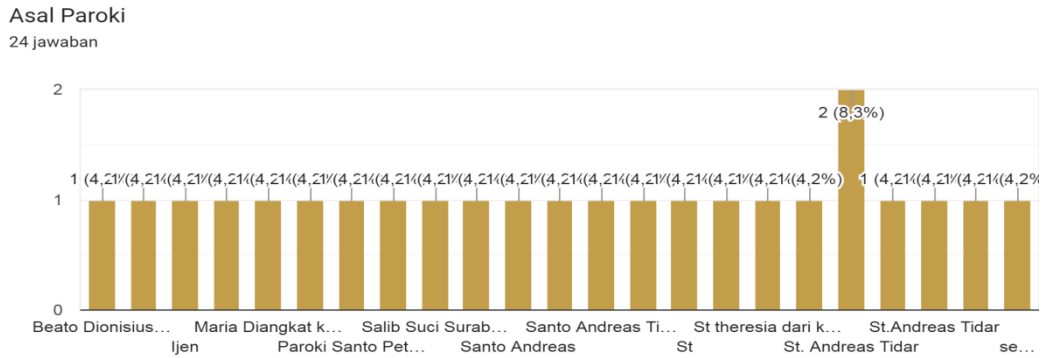
3. The devotion to Divine Mercy reminds me of God's love and Mercy through the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus
4. The devotion to Divine Mercy reminds me of God's love and Mercy through the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus
5. The Devotion of Mercy provides calm and hope in facing difficult urban challenges
6. The Divine Mercy Devotion makes people aware of the Catholic Church as a communion of God's holy people
7. The devotion to Divine Mercy expresses a sense of dependence and trust in God
8. The devotion to Divine Mercy provides spiritual guidance and support in overcoming problems in the urban environment
9. The Divine Mercy Devotion strengthens my relationships with fellow believers and the surrounding environment
10. The Divine Mercy devotion makes a significant contribution to my spiritual growth
11. The Divine Mercy devotion positively influences my understanding of God's love and Mercy in my daily life
12. The Divine Mercy Devotion helps me find solutions or spiritual responses to social problems in urban environments
13. The devotion to Divine Mercy increases my awareness of learning to forgive and respect differences
14. The devotion to Divine Mercy strengthens me in the practice of Christian values
15. The devotion to Divine Mercy makes me closer to God and others regardless of differences

The choice of Google Form as a survey tool was carried out considering efficiency and structure that could facilitate the data analysis process. After data collection is complete, the research results are then analyzed in a structured manner. This analysis aims to produce an in-depth understanding of the influence of the Divine Mercy Devotion on the spiritual growth of Catholics in urban environments.

2. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

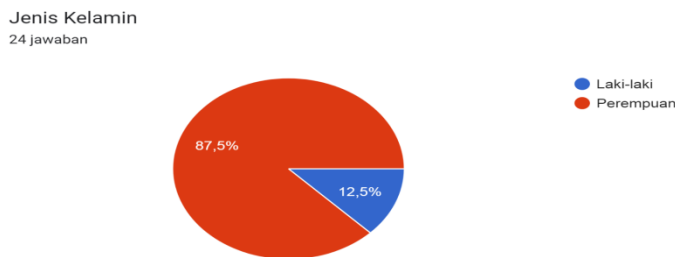
This research discusses several key aspects that are the focus in extracting valid data to obtain data even though the data obtained is limited because it only explores based on respondents' answers. An in-depth understanding of the research results and the demographic context of urban parishioners is revealed through analysis of important aspects, such as the origin of the parish, the age range of respondents, and the results of responses to Likert scale statements. The main aim of this research is to explore the extent to which these variables influence people's perceptions and participation in the Divine Mercy Devotion. Based on the data obtained, the following is a description of the research results.

Parish Origin



The results of the research showed that from 24 respondents there was a high level of participation from the parishioners of Santo Andreas Tidar, showing active involvement in the Divine Mercy Devotion. Apart from that, the research also recorded high activity in other parishes. These findings provide a deep understanding of the level of involvement of Catholics in the practice of the Divine Mercy Devotion, and reflect the spiritual dynamics developing in local and wider Catholic communities.

BASED ON GENDER

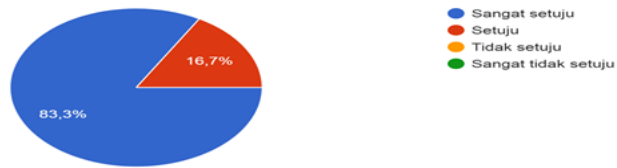


Google Form research results show high participation in the Divine Mercy devotion, especially among women with a percentage of 87.5%. This shows the significant interest and involvement of women in these devotional activities. Meanwhile, men accounted for 12.5%, indicating that this devotion is more commonly followed by women. These differences in proportions can provide insight into the different preferences and interests between the genders regarding this spiritual devotion.

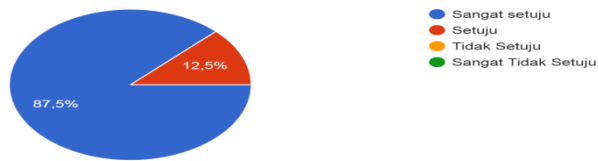
Based on Likert Scale

The author highlights the highest number of respondents' answers. The results of the answers are the basis for the author in explaining the influence of the Divine Mercy devotion in increasing spiritual growth in the urban parish environment.

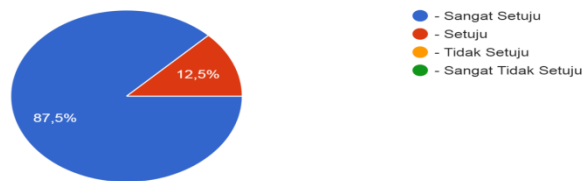
1. Devosi kerahiman Ilahi meningkatkan pertumbuhan rohani saya dalam kesungguhan hidup doa dan semangat dalam melayani sesama dengan tulus
24 jawaban



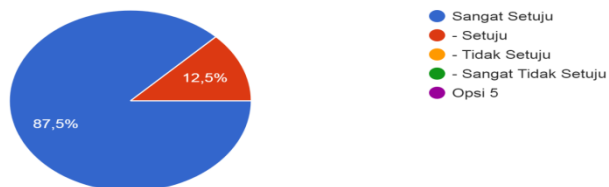
2. Devosi Kerahiman Ilahi memberi pengaruh positif pada pemahaman dan penghayatan iman serta Kerahiman Allah dalam kehidupan sehari-hari
24 jawaban



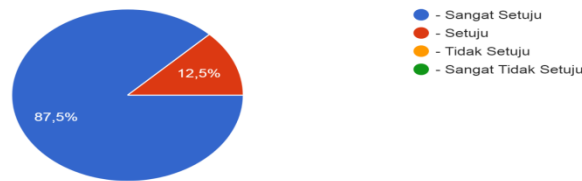
10. Devosi Kerahiman Ilahi memberikan kontribusi yang berarti terhadap pertumbuhan rohani saya
24 jawaban



11. Devosi Kerahiman Ilahi secara positif memengaruhi pemahaman saya akan cinta dan Kerahiman Allah dalam kehidupan sehari-hari
24 jawaban



10. Devosi Kerahiman Ilahi memberikan kontribusi yang berarti terhadap pertumbuhan rohani saya
24 jawaban



There are four statements that have a significant influence on spiritual growth, as reflected by the number of respondents who strongly agree. The Divine Mercy devotion has a significant impact on the respondents' spiritual growth and understanding of the faith. The survey results show that the majority of respondents, approximately 83.3% to 87.5%, strongly agree that this devotion plays an important role in intensifying their spiritual experience.

The importance of prayer and enthusiasm in serving others sincerely becomes apparent with a high percentage, 83.3% strongly agree. This shows that this devotion not only influences spiritual aspects in general, but also encourages active involvement in religious activities and social services so that their faith can be realized in practical life (real action)

Understanding of God's love and Mercy in everyday life also appears to be increasing, with 87.5% strongly agreeing. This confirms that this devotion is not only theoretical, but also has a practical impact in shaping the values and daily behavior of respondents. Overall, the survey results show that the Divine Mercy Devotion has a significant positive impact on respondents' spiritual growth, understanding of the faith, and daily behavior, with the majority expressing a high level of agreement with the proposed statements.

The research results show that the Divine Mercy Devotion has a substantial positive impact on individual spiritual growth. This devotion is very influential in enriching the spiritual dimension and values of people's daily lives. The overall influence includes sincerity of prayer, strengthening relationships with others, and calm in the midst of difficulties (Supriyadi, 2018). In the context of Spiritual Growth in the Urban environment, this devotion becomes a holistic approach that integrates Christian values, social service, personal growth, and concern for the environment as an expression of compassion and mercy. Compassionate people should be ready to help others who are physically and spiritually needy, help others who do not have knowledge or behave outside of healthy morals. However, acts of compassion must have a noble aim, namely bringing others to true goodness (Stefan Leks, 2016). The Divine Mercy Devotion not only creates a strong and loving community, but also assists individuals in achieving spiritual growth. The relationship between the Divine Mercy Devotion and James W. Fowler's view of spiritual development involves the understanding that this devotion can be a means of achieving higher stages of faith development, such as commitment and universality, as identified by Fowler (Adon & Firmanto, 2022).

Thus, God's mercy not only has a positive impact on the spiritual aspect, but is also integrated in the individual's spiritual development journey in accordance with James W. Fowler's framework (Gaudiawan, 2019). Overall, the research results show that the Divine Mercy

Devotion is not only a religious practice, but also a deep foundation for forming character and spiritual growth in the daily lives of people in urban environments (Sitorus, 2023). The people are getting stronger in living the spirit of mutual forgiveness and forgiveness is a sign of gratitude for the extraordinary grace of God who is full of merciful mercy towards His people. Whoever does not forgive or pardon lacks peace of soul and communion with God. Human life depends on God's mercy and generosity which is evident in all His actions. Forgiveness brings life-giving joy and makes people grow to live in love. Living in love is a manifestation of the grace that flows from God. Allah always flows His merciful nature to all people so that they are safe and closer to Him. The Divine Mercy Devotion provides an effective offer to strengthen human personal relationships with God and others (Alphonsus Tjatur Raharso, Paulinus Yan Olla, 2014). Mercy is the flower of love from God. The Divine Mercy Devotion is a form of prayer and devotion to the most merciful God that is based on the recognition of God's infinite mercy and compassion. God is love and mercy is His action. Like a mother, God is always present and embraces His people, providing a sense of security, warmth and protection. Therefore, humans must continue to live in prayer as an expression of gratitude to Allah (Donobakti, Girsang, & Situmorang, 2016).

Prayer is not just a ritual, but a sincere expression of dependence on the Divine, creating spiritual intimacy that enriches spiritual life, as well as awareness of sin before God. At an advanced stage, this devotion also encourages the practice of Christian life through social service, so that faith is not just confined to prayer but is accompanied by concrete action, because faith without deeds is essentially dead (cf. James 2:26). Thus it is very clear that the fruit of a life of prayer enables a person to open his heart to others and create a space of peace with others.

This practice teaches people to reflect on God's eternal love and how that love can change people's lives. Through deep prayers and meditation, people in urban parish settings can find inner peace and deepen their spiritual relationship with God. God as the source of mercy will radiate goodness to everyone without looking at differences. God's mercy reaches everyone, both believers and those who are far from the faith. Therefore, God's mercy is said to be universal regardless of differences. Allah always conveys His merciful nature. In the light of John 20:19-31, the universality of love is seen in Jesus' attitude of not neglecting anyone. Therefore, the expression of human love for God should be expressed in love for others. Love of God and love of neighbor are not separate. Urban environments are busy with daily activities, the devotion to Divine Mercy offers a sense of peace, warmth in family and community life, and helps individuals find spiritual solutions to social problems. Awareness of Divine mercy inspires dedication to serve others sincerely. By involving themselves in social service activities, such as helping the needy and getting involved in good projects, adherents of this devotion bring Christian values into real action. Thus, the Divine Mercy devotion effectively integrates the Christian values of social service, personal growth, and environmental concern, creating strong and loving communities and helping individuals achieve spiritual growth in a busy urban context.

The essence of the devotion to Divine Mercy for urban life is relying on God and being merciful towards others. Relying on God means being completely confident in His love, because He loves unconditionally, and is always ready to help people who need help. Be merciful following the words of Jesus. Truly I say to you that whatever you did for one of the least of these you did it for Me (cf. Mt 25:40). Compassion towards others is an action that reflects God's real presence, therefore be generous because God is generous.

CONCLUSION

In the hustle and bustle of urban life full of turmoil and busyness, the devotion to Divine Mercy plays an extraordinary role in changing the lifestyle of Catholics. This devotion is not just a routine religious practice, but is a source of calm and hope amidst the commotion and battles of everyday life. The spiritual guidance obtained from Divine Mercy becomes a faithful guide when facing complex urban challenges. This devotion not only invites reflection and deepening of one's personal relationship with God, but also highlights the urgency of strengthening relationships with fellow humans. In this context, the Divine Mercy Devotion teaches the importance of finding spiritual solutions to social problems faced by urban communities. In addition, Christian values are strengthened and implemented in daily actions. In the complex diversity of urban society, devotion to Divine Mercy conveys a powerful message: God's love and mercy are not limited by differences. This devotion is the basis for Catholics to build a strong relationship with God, each other, and to answer spiritual calls in living their daily lives.

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