

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MESSAGE OF DIVINE MERCY FOR OUR TIMES

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Foundress

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In the Magnificat, the Blessed Virgin told us, "His mercy will reach from age to age" (Luke 1:50). Each era, each generation ought to respond to God and His saving actions by accepting salvation, battling the evils of its times, and responding to the needs of the historic moment. The men of each generation are responsible for reading the signs of their times, for discovering the voice of God, and for responding with obedience to what He reveals, in order to bring His mercy to that generation. All saving actions of God will manifest themselves in each generation and in each moment of history until that definite moment of the Second Coming of Christ who will come to judge the living and the dead, the men and women of all time; He will judge man and his participation in history.



Since the Resurrection of our Lord, we have been in the time of mercy, and as each day goes by, we come closer and closer to Divine Justice. The Apostle Paul tells us in his first letter to the Thessalonians, "Concerning times and seasons, brothers, you have no need for anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night" (5:1-2). Because of the great love God has for us - for He is love (1 Jn 4:8) and rich in mercy (Eph 2:4) and slow to anger (Neh 9:17) - He warns us and gives us time to prepare. He gives us a time of mercy, a time in which God calls us to conversion and in which we must also exercise ourselves in mercy towards others. We see in Sacred Scripture how men in the Last Judgment will be judged by their works of mercy: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me..." (Mt 25:35).

This is the urgency with which the Lord revealed Himself to Saint Maria Faustina, a Polish religious of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy: "My daughter, tell the entire world of my unfathomable mercy (cf. Diary 848)...Before I come as a Just Judge, I will come as a King of Mercy" (Diary, 83).

The devotion to Divine Mercy is a call of God to men so that they may return to Him and trust in Him. This is not a new devotion; it was known from the times of Christ. "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mt 18:38). We see how the blind man trusted that the Lord would be able to heal him and, therefore, called out to Him for mercy. He recognized his own blindness and trusted in Christ as the only one who could heal him. The message of mercy is for all men, and it is also a message for our times. The Holy Father John Paul II stated at St. Faustina's canonization, "It is not a new message but can be considered a gift of special enlightenment that helps us to relive the Gospel of Easter more intensely, to offer it as a ray of light to the men and women of our time" (April 30, 2000, no.2).

### DEFINITION OF THE MERCY OF GOD

The mercy of God can be described as His response as He comes to the aid of His weak children. No creature deserves the mercy of God, but rather it is a free gift and a grace that is given to His children because of the greatness of His love. Sin is the greatest misery of man and of creation. Our misery is sin, and because man is a sinner, he is considered miserable. But there is a very important distinction between misery and the one who is miserable...and that is that God hates the sin but loves the sinner; He loves the man who is weak and miserable. This love with which God loves man is defined as Mercy. Mercy is not compassion or forgiveness in the precise sense of the term; those are rather the effects of mercy. In the Hebrew Language, *mercy* comes from the word *rahamin*, which is defined as "a sentiment that is born of the maternal womb or of the entrails of the Heart of the Father" (Is 49:15). The mercy of God is one of His attributes that exists only for His creatures. That is to say, in order to display mercy, it is necessary that there first be misery. As St. Francis de Sales explains to us, "Even if God had not created man, He would still be perfect charity, but in reality He would not be merciful, for mercy can only be exercised over misery...Our misery is the throne of God's mercy" (*Spiritual Conferences*, conference ii). And the Cure de Ars would say, "The mercy of God is as a roaring torrent that pulls hearts along its way." Thus, even though no one deserves it, it is available to all.

### DIVINE MERCY IN THE SACRED SCRIPTURES

Divine Mercy has been revealed to us from the very beginning - since Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Man turned away from God and His will, and the Lord gave him the opportunity to make up for his fault and to return to Him with all of his heart. We also see, at the same time, how the devil tried to deceive man, bringing forth in him fear of God's chastisement and wrath.

God created all things in a perfect harmony and order that was foreign to any evil. Man was created to love, know, obey and serve God and to enjoy the order He had instilled in all things. Soon, however, because our first parents succumbed to the seduction of the serpent, the relationship of love with God was broken and the order of all creation was lost. And after having sinned and disobeyed the commandment of God, they

experienced fear. "The Lord God then called to the man and asked him, 'Where are you?' He answered, 'I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself'" (Gen 3:9-10). We see from this that when man commits sin, the devil immediately induces terror of God's punishment so that man will be afraid of encountering Him; thus, man does not confess his sins and does not receive in his life the mercy and forgiveness of God that would cleanse him of the wrong committed. "When a soul praises my goodness, satan trembles before it and flees to the very bottom of hell" (Diary, 378).

The devil makes us see God as a just and terrible judge that does not forgive our offenses. In reality, the opposite is true: God is "rich in mercy" towards His creation (Eph 2:4). The Lord even uses what is evil to bring about a greater good. "The true and proper significance of mercy in the world does not consist only in the gazing, even if it is the most penetrating and the most compassionate, that is directed towards moral, physical or material evil; mercy is manifested in its truest aspect when it revalidates, promotes and extracts the good from all forms of evil that exist in the world and in men. Understood in this manner, it constitutes the fundamental Messianic message of Christ and the constitutive force of His mission. This is the way in which His disciples and followers practiced mercy. Mercy never ceased being revealed in their hearts and in their actions as singularly creative proof of that love that does not 'allow itself to be overcome by evil,' but which 'overcomes evil with good'" (John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia* (DM), 64).

God is not vengeful. Sin makes a person miserable, and God uses this opportunity to reveal His infinite love and mercy to man. In other words, because of sin, man is able to know Divine Mercy. God overcomes evil with good. His Holiness John Paul II, in His encyclical *Dives en Misericordia*, tells us, "In the eschatological fulfillment mercy will be revealed as love, while in the temporal phase, in human history, which is at the same time the history of sin and death, love must be revealed above all as mercy and must also be actualized as mercy" (no.85). In Sacred Scripture we can see clearly the manifestation of Divine mercy in the book of Hosea. God says, "How am I going to leave you Ephraim, or to turn you in, Isreal? My heart is overcome within me, and my entrails are shaken. I will not give vent to the force of my anger, I will not destroy Ephraim again, because I am God and not man, I am the Holy One among you and will not come to you with anger" (11:8-9).

We see that even though God has all reason to be angry with man, He does not have the hardness of heart of man who, on the contrary, often seeks to vent his anger on his adversary. We see that He is God, not man, and thus, He will not allow His anger to be greater than His love.

In the book of Jeremiah, the Lord also directed Himself to Israel and told them, "Return, rebel Israel...I will not remain angry with you; for I am merciful...I will not continue my wrath forever. Only know your guilt: how you rebelled against the Lord, your God" (Jer 3:12-13). God tells us that He is kind to His people. He is kind and forgives the sins of His children who have repented of the evil they have done.

The prophet David understood God's merciful love very well; he also knew man and his desire for vengeance. When David committed a fault against God, God was disappointed in him and sent the prophet Gad in order to communicate His anger to David and the punishment that would follow. David was able to choose between three punishments: three years of famine, three months of fleeing before his enemies, or three days of pestilence from the Lord over the earth (1 Chr 21:12). David responded, "I am in dire straits. But I prefer to fall into the hand of the Lord, whose mercy is very great, than into the hands of men" (21:13).

There are constant references in the psalms to the mercy of God; however, the Prophet Jonah summarizes very well what it means, for after having been angered, God forgave the people of Ninieveh because they believed in Him and were converted. Jonah said, "I beseech you, Lord...is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? This is why I fled at first to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, rich in clemency, loathe to punish" (Jonah 4:2).

The entire book of the Prophet Jonah prepares us for the "evangelical revelation of the God of love" (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22), the greatest act of mercy that God has done for mankind: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). The Word became flesh so that we would come to know the love of God: "In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4: 9-10). In order to save us, to free us from the evil one, sin, the world and the flesh, the Father sent His Son, so that through His words, works, passion, death and resurrection, He would redeem us, purchasing us with His blood and bringing us back into the Kingdom of God. "For Christ, while we were still helpless, yet died at the appointed time for the ungodly... God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Rm 5:6,8). This mercy continues to pour forth through the Sacraments and through the Church - especially in Confession and in the Eucharist. He came to nullify evil with good, to transform our sin into grace, and to transform our suffering into a means of sanctification. He went through the world "doing good."

We could enter so deeply into the immense mercy of God and that of which it consists, but I would like to now reflect on how the message of Divine Mercy has been so evident in these times and how important it is to embrace it.

#### **HOW HAS MERCY MANIFESTED ITSELF IN THE MODERN WORLD?**

The message of mercy has a great and special urgency in our times. God wants to speak to our generation, and

He desires that we listen and respond to His word. In this generation - so marked by the culture of death; by the crisis of faith, hope and charity; by world wars, atomic bombs, terrorism, rebellion and autonomy from God; by the desire of men to be like God; by an era of violence and family destruction; by abortion, drugs, poverty, natural disasters, and sexual immorality of all kinds; and by a great crisis in the Church - we can only exclaim, "Have mercy on us, Lord, and on the whole world!"

In one of the darkest periods of the twentieth century (between the First and Second World Wars), the Lord chose St. Maria Faustina, a Polish religious from the Order of Our Lady of Mercy, to be, as He told her, "the secretary of my Mercy; I have chosen you for that office in this and the next life" (Diary, 1605).

In the conditions of today's world, one of the darkest in the world and in the Church, the Lord wants to remind us of His infinite mercy, which is more and more accessible to the extent of our need for it. "Human misery is not an obstacle to my Mercy. My daughter, write that the greater the misery of souls, so much greater will they have right to my mercy; invite all souls to trust in the inconceivable depth of my mercy" (Diary, 1182).

Saint Faustina played an important and integral part in the message of mercy because God wanted to choose her as an instrument. He chose His trumpet to announce His message - not thunder and lightning - but a secretary and Apostle of mercy. The importance of the Divine Mercy message for our modern world was revealed to us clearly by her canonization during the Jubilee year - a Year of Grace and Mercy, a year in which the Merciful Heart of Christ was opened for humanity. She was the first saint of the Third Millennium. The Holy Father wanted to direct the gaze of two centuries - the one drawing to a close and the new one just beginning - to the Mercy of God. "What will the years ahead bring us? What will man's future on earth be like? We are not given to know. However, it is certain that in addition to new progress there will unfortunately be no lack of painful experiences. But the light of divine mercy, which the Lord in a way wished to return to the world through Sr Faustina's charisma, will illumine the way for the men and women of the third millennium...Sr Faustina's canonization has a particular eloquence: by this act I intend today to pass this message on to the new millennium" (John Paul II, Homily of Canonization, April 30, 2000, no.3,5).

In one of the darkest ages of great sin and great rejection of the love and the law of God - and therefore, as a consequence, great selfishness and lack of charity - Jesus revealed the image of Divine Mercy that bore the wounds He revealed to His Apostles in the Cenacle - Apostles who were fearful of persecution and rejection and who were weak in their faith. "If you do not believe my words, at least believe my wounds" (Diary, 379). He revealed Himself with the signs of His passion - an act of the immense mercy of God, but also one that manifests resurrection and triumph over evil. Love is stronger than death; good is stronger than evil. He told them, "Peace be with you" (Jn 20:19). But before pronouncing those words, He showed them His hands and side, as if to point out the wounds of His passion, especially the wound of His Heart - fountain from which the great wave of mercy was poured forth over humanity. "From all my wounds, like from streams, mercy flows for souls, but the wound in My Heart is the fountain of unfathomable Mercy. From this fountain springs all graces for souls. The flames of compassion burn me. I desire greatly to pour them out upon the souls" (Diary, 1190). St. Faustina saw two rays of light flow from His Heart which illuminated the world. These two rays, Jesus explained to her, represented Blood and Water. Blood and Water! This is what St. John the Evangelist described to us; for he saw, when the soldier pierced the side of Christ with a sword, Blood and Water pouring forth (Jn 19:34). Divine Mercy reaches men through the pierced Heart of Christ. Jesus told St. Faustina, "Tell [all people], My daughter, that I am Love and Mercy itself" (Diary 1074). Christ poured out this mercy upon humanity through the sending of the Holy Spirit who, in the Trinity, is Love. For is not mercy a second name for love (DM, 7)? We come to understand this when we come to understand its most profound and tender aspect: its desire to alleviate any need and particularly its immense capacity to forgive. "My Heart rejoices in this title of Mercy" (Diary, 300).

Does not all humanity and each one of us today need to ask for and receive the forgiveness of God? Yes - and very much so. "Look and see the human race in its present condition" (Diary, 445). But we must do so with the greatest confidence in the fact that the mercy of God is infinite. "I desire that priests proclaim this great mercy of mine towards souls of sinners. Let the sinner not be afraid to approach me. The flames of mercy are burning me - clamouring to be spent; I want to pour them out upon these souls" (Diary, 50). "I desire that that the whole world know my infinite mercy. I desire to grant unimaginable graces to those souls who trust in my Mercy" (Diary 687). "Encourage souls to place great trust in my fathomless mercy. Let the weak, sinful soul have no fear to approach me, for even if it had more sins than are grains of sand in the world, all would be drowned in the immeasurable depths of my mercy" (Diary 1059).

The Holy Father has said many times that peace is in great danger. Peace is an announcement of Divine Mercy. For was it not in between those two World Wars that Jesus came to offer His Mercy? Is not this mercy the only means of obtaining peace - personal, familial, social and world? Jesus told St. Faustina, "Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to my Mercy" (Diary, 300).

#### **FIVE MANNERS TO PROMOTE MERCY: 5 WOUNDS**

The Lord revealed to St. Maria Faustina five ways to fulfill her mission of mercy: the Image of Mercy, the Feast of Mercy, the chaplet and novena of mercy, the hour of mercy and works of mercy towards others.

### The Image of the Merciful Jesus

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, 1931, Saint Faustina received the first revelation of the Mercy of God. She wrote about it in her diary: "When I was in my cell at night, I saw the Lord Jesus dressed in white. One of his hands was lifted as if to give His blessing, and with the other hand, he touched his veil, which was slightly opened at the chest. Two long rays shone: one was red and the other was white. I remained in silence contemplating the Lord. My soul was fearful but also full of immense joy. After a while the Lord told me, "Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: Jesus, I trust in You. I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and [then] throughout the world. I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish. I also promise victory over [its] enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death. I Myself will defend it as My own glory" (Diary, 47-48).

On the order of her confessor, Saint Faustina asked the Lord the meaning of the two rays which appeared to be coming from His Heart in the image. The Lord responded, "The two rays denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water which makes souls righteous. The red ray stands for the Blood which is the life of souls...These two rays issued forth from the very depths of My tender mercy when My agonized Heart was opened by a lance on the Cross. These rays shield souls from the wrath of My Father. Happy is the one who will dwell in their shelter, for the just hand of God shall not lay hold of him (Diary, 299)... I am offering people a vessel with which they are to keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy. That vessel is this image with the signature: 'Jesus, I trust in You'" (Diary, 327).

### The Feast of Divine Mercy

Jesus asked St. Faustina that this feast be celebrated solemnly on the first Sunday after Easter. He told her, "I desire that the Feast of Mercy<sup>139</sup> be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of My tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the Fount of My Mercy. The soul that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day all the divine floodgates through which graces flow are opened" (Diary, 699). On April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2000 during the canonization of St. Faustina, John Paul II officially proclaimed that the second Sunday after Easter would be the Feast of Divine Mercy. He said, "This Second Sunday of Easter...from now on throughout the Church will be called 'Divine Mercy Sunday'" (no.3). Furthermore, he said that Divine Mercy "is a continual invitation to the Christian world to face, with confidence in divine benevolence, the difficulties and trials that await humanity in the coming years" (cf. no.6).

### The Chaplet and Novena

"I give great graces to souls who meditate devoutly on My Passion" (Diary, 737).

On September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1935 St. Faustina had a vision of an angel who was about to carry out the justice of God, and her prayers were not placating this justice. The chaplet was then revealed to her: "Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved son, Our Lord Jesus Christ for our sins and those of the whole world; for the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us" (Diary, 475).

"Oh what great graces I will grant to those souls who say this chaplet; the very depths of My tender mercy are stirred for the sake of those who say the chaplet. Write down these words, My daughter. Speak to the world about my Mercy; let all mankind recognize My unfathomable mercy. It is a sign for the end times; after it will come the day of justice. While there is still time, let them have recourse to the fount of My mercy; let them profit from the Blood and the Water which gushed forth from them" (Diary, 848).

The Novena came about in the following way, as she recorded in her Diary: "The Lord told me to say this chaplet for nine days before the Feast of Mercy. It is to begin on Good Friday. 'By this novena, I will grant every possible grace to souls'" (Diary, 796).

Furthermore, Jesus said to her, "I desire that during these nine days you bring souls to the fountain of My mercy, that they may draw from there strength and refreshment and whatever grace they need in the hardships of life, and especially at the hour of death. On each day you will bring to My Heart a different group of souls, and you will immerse them in this ocean of My mercy, and I will bring all these souls into the house of My Father... On each day you will beg My Father, on the strength of My bitter Passion, for graces for these souls" (Diary, 1209).

St. Faustina answered, "Jesus, I do not know how to make this novena or which souls to bring first into Your Most Compassionate heart." Jesus answered that He would tell her which souls to bring to His Heart each day (ibid).

### The Great Hour of Mercy

On October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1937, Saint Faustina received instructions from the Lord concerning another principal element of the devotion to Divine Mercy: the Hour of Great Mercy. Jesus said to her, "At three o'clock, implore My mercy, especially for sinners; and, if only for a brief moment, immerse yourself in My Passion, particularly in My abandonment at the moment of agony. This is the hour of great mercy for the whole world. I will allow you to enter into My mortal sorrow. In this hour, I will refuse nothing to the soul that makes a request of me in virtue of My Passion" (Diary, 1320).

Jesus desires people, at three in the afternoon, to submerge themselves in His Divine Mercy, as it is the hour in

which mercy triumphed over justice (Diary, 1572). It was the hour of grace for the entire world, the hour in which the Lord gave Himself for our sins and gave us salvation. The Lord wants us to venerate His mercy in that hour and to trust totally in Him, asking Him for all that we need. He told St. Faustina: "The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive. Souls that trust boundlessly are a great comfort to Me, because I pour all the treasures of my graces into them. I rejoice when they ask me for much, because it is my desire to give much, very much. On the other hand, I am sad when souls ask for little, when they have narrow hearts (Diary, 1578).

### **To Give the Mercy we have Received**

"My daughter, look into My Merciful Heart and reflect its Compassion in your own heart and in your deeds, so that you, who proclaim my mercy to the world, may yourself be aflame with it" (Diary, 1688).

During her retreat in October 1936, Jesus gave St. Faustina explicit indications about what true devotion to the Divine Mercy consists of. "My daughter, if I demand through you that people revere My mercy, you should be the first to distinguish yourself by this confidence in My mercy. I demand from your deeds of mercy, which are to arise out of love for Me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse or absolve yourself from it. I am giving you three ways of exercising mercy toward your neighbor: the first – by deed, the second – by word, the third – by prayer. In these three degrees is contained the fullness of mercy, and it is an unquestionable proof of love for Me. By this means a soul glorifies and pays reverence to My mercy (Diary, 742). St. Faustina's heart was so enflamed with love and mercy for souls that on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1936, she wrote, "I shall fight all evil with the weapon of mercy. I am being burned up by the desire to save souls. I traverse the world's length and breadth and venture as far as its ultimate limits and its wildest lands to save souls. I do this through prayer and sacrifice. I want every soul to glorify the mercy of God" (Diary, 745).

Jesus said to her, "My daughter, I desire that your heart be formed after the model of my Merciful Heart. You must be completely imbued with my Mercy" (Diary, 167). A small act of mercy is a perpetual act that endures forever.

### **JESUS I TRUST IN YOU.**

"Trust in Me" – this is the cry of the Lord through the mouth of His servant St. Faustina. If we could summarize the devotion to Divine Mercy in one word, it would be *trust*. For trust is the first response to the awareness of His infinite mercy. "My daughter, write that the greater the misery of a soul, the greater its right to my mercy; [urge] all souls to trust in the unfathomable abyss of my Mercy, because I want to save them all. On the Cross, the fountain of My mercy was opened wide by the lance for all souls – no one have I excluded" (Diary, 1182).

His Holiness John Paul II stated that his special mission from the first day of his pontificate was to proclaim mercy. At the beatification of St. Faustina, he said, "It is truly marvelous the way in which the devotion to the Merciful Jesus has opened a path in our contemporary world and has conquered human hearts! This is without doubt, a sign of our twentieth century. But though divine Mercy has conquered many hearts for good, there still exists in this closing century a profound unrest and fear about the future. Only in Divine Mercy will the world find refuge and the light of hope" (cf. April 18, 1993).

In his visit to the Shrine of Divine Mercy in 1997, the Holy Father said, "The Church re-reads the Message of Mercy in order to bring with greater effectiveness to this generation at the end of the Millennium and to future generations the light of hope. Unceasingly the Church implores from God mercy for everyone. 'At no time and in no historical period...can the Church forget the prayer that is a cry for the mercy of God amid the many forms of evil which weigh upon humanity and threaten it . . . The more the human conscience succumbs to secularization, loses its sense of the very meaning of the word 'mercy', moves away from God and distances itself from the mystery of mercy, the more the Church has the right and the duty to appeal to the God of mercy 'with loud cries'" (DM,15)...I come here to commend the concerns of the Church and of humanity to the merciful Christ. On the threshold of the Third Millennium I come to entrust to him once more my Petrine ministry – 'Jesus, I trust in you!'" (June 7, 1997).

### **DIVINE MERCY AND THE BLESSED VIRGIN**

The gift of divine mercy to our generation is a grace granted to us through the intercession and maternal mediation of the Virgin Mary. Furthermore, Poland was the place chosen to bring forth this light of mercy. "I bear a special love for Poland, and if she will be obedient to My will, I will exalt her in might and holiness. From her will come forth the spark that will prepare the world for My final coming" (Diary, 1732).

Our Holy Father John Paul II, St. Faustina, and St. Maximilian were all Apostles of mercy, formed by the Virgin of Czestochowa in Jasna Gora which means "luminous mountain" or "the light will come."

In Fatima, Our Lady asked us to pray and make sacrifices for sinners; in other words, she asked for acts of great mercy.

At the same time of the revelations to St. Faustina, Sr. Lucia, visionary of Fatima, had a vision of the Trinity. In this vision the words "grace and mercy" were flowing from the wounds of the Son. "I am giving mankind the last hope of salvation; that is, recourse to My mercy" (Diary, 998).

## CONCLUSION

As it always happens in the history of salvation, the last word between God and sinful humanity is not of judgment and punishment, but of love and forgiveness. God does not want to judge and condemn, but to save and liberate humanity from evil. He continues to repeat the words that we read in the Prophet Ezekiel: "Do I indeed derive any pleasure from the death of the wicked?...Do I not rather rejoice when he turns from his evil way that he may live?... Why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies...Return and live!" (Ezekiel 18:23, 31-32).

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