



Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY

Unplanned and the Gift of Divine Mercy

Recently I saw the powerful movie *Unplanned*. It tells the true story of Abby Johnson, a Planned Parenthood clinic director and 'employee of the year' who one day was called to the procedure room because she was the only staff member available to assist the doctor with an ultrasound-guided abortion. As she maneuvered the ultrasound probe on the patient's belly, Abby was stunned to see on the monitor the image of a 13-week-old child squirming to escape the doctor's suction tool.

That traumatic experience would change Abby Johnson forever.

Heart wrenching as it is at times to watch, *Unplanned* ultimately lifts us up as a story of healing, a story of profound mercy.

In common usage, we speak of mercy as that form of love which reaches out to a guilty offender, seeking to touch and heal that person's moral failure and pain and to draw them to conversion. In the process, mercy treats them less severely than pure justice might demand.

In *Unplanned*, Abby is shown mercy by Shawn Carney, of the pro-life organization 40 Days for Life, and his wife, Marilisa. We often see the young couple standing outside the fence that surrounds the clinic, praying for those who enter. To her surprise, the couple treats Abby with respect and kindness and they show genuine interest in her life.

Their brief conversations nurture a level of trust. As a result, when she undergoes her sudden conversion, Abby knows exactly where to turn, seeking out Shawn and Marilisa's guidance on what to do next.

Abby's parents also show her mercy. When she informs them of her hiring at the abortion clinic, and later of her promotion to director, they continue to love her with all their hearts. They have the courage to speak the truth to Abby, in a serious and passionate way, about the destructive effects of abortion on women, but always remaining calm and loving toward her.

Mercy is also shown to Abby by her husband, Doug, who married her even though he knew her stand on abortion. Convinced that abortion ends innocent human lives, Doug tries to break through to Abby at various times, but always in love. After she later experiences her graced moment of conversion, Abby breaks down weeping at the realization that she has been complicit in 22,000 abortions, even aborting two of her own children, conceived before she had met Doug. Holding her, he expresses his love for her even more and speaks humbly about God's love and forgiveness.

All these people who reveal mercy to Abby can do so only because they have experienced God's mercy themselves.

Jesus is the primary manifestation of God's **mercy**. Christ has shown us His mercy by freeing us from the prison of our sins by His agonizing suffering and death on the cross, and by His glorious Resurrection. It is timely, then, that each year on the

Sunday after Easter the Church celebrates Divine Mercy.

This feast was designated by Jesus Himself when, in 1931, He appeared to St. Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun, and spoke these words: *"...Tell the whole world about My inconceivable mercy. ... Let no soul fear to draw near to Me. ... It is My desire that the Feast of Mercy be solemnly celebrated on the first Sunday after Easter. Mankind will not have peace until it turns to the Fount of My Mercy."* (Diary, no. 699) *"Paint an image according to the pattern you see with the signature: 'Jesus, I trust in You.'"* (Diary, n. 42)

Jesus taught St. Faustina to pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, a simple prayer recited on the beads of the Rosary. Jesus said: "Encourage souls to say the Chaplet which I have given to you" (Diary, no. 1541). "Whoever will recite it will receive great mercy..." (Diary, no. 687).

To learn more about the Chaplet as well as the story behind this great Feast, Divine Mercy Sunday, visit www.thedivinemercy.org. The April issue of Catholic Life Magazine contains a guide to praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet. They can also usually be found in pamphlet form in most parish churches.

As Abby Johnson received the mercy of God through key people in her life, let us seek the infinite mercy of God through trust, prayer and the Sacraments, and show His mercy to those in our lives.

By Ann Lankford



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