

## River Run

As I prepared to run the inaugural half-marathon in Kansas City for 2018, I reflected on the river of mercy Jesus released for us in Lithuania.

We drove half the night from Latvia to Vilnius, Lithuania's biggest city and source of the Divine Mercy devotion initiated by an uneducated nun in the 1930's. God gave St. Faustina a vision of His mercy for the whole world, a world on the brink of WWII which would prove especially devastating to Lithuania, Poland, Latvia and the surrounding nations that fell under Soviet rule.

From their depths, inspired by this vision of Risen Jesus with a healing flood flowing from His heart, Eastern Europeans Christians were the first to cry out: 'O blood and water which gush forth from the heart of the Savior as a fountain of mercy for us, I trust in You!' (line from Divine Mercy prayer)

And so did Abbey and me as we awoke in Vilnius for the first of three days of equipping the saints there who lead Living Waters group in Lithuania. From my room I could view the Neris River flowing and I prayed that our efforts there would be like a river of mercy for these saints who, having suffered losses I cannot imagine, now entrust themselves wholly to Jesus.



Another marvel—that morning was Divine Mercy Sunday, the day set apart once a year by the Catholic Church to reflect upon and pray for God's mercy to well up and envelope the whole world. One billion Christians cast themselves on God's mercy that day: is it any wonder that the mercy levels rise in the Church like Ezekiel's vision (EZ 47) of the river rising from the temple altar: first

ankle deep, then waist high, then a current so high one must swim in the healing stream that makes everything live (v. 9)?

As we entered our meeting room, I viewed the Cross and the Divine Mercy picture and heard the chorus of worship songs featuring the merciful flood gushing from Christ Crucified and Raised: this is Living Waters! Abbey and I did little but expound upon the basic foundations of our healing groups; we then invited all who thirst in the Spirit of IS 55 to immerse themselves in the flood, to linger there and to receive deep drafts of the Father's love. We invited everyone who knew that their disordered feelings were sourced in love's frustration: bonds blocked by Soviet oppression and addiction and abuse that curdled normal longings for affection. God moved deeply; in His great mercy, He loved each one simply, deeply, specifically.

He kept raining His mercy upon us; the river rose higher that afternoon. As we worshipped and gathered before the Cross, Jesus freed us to name how we reject ourselves for having particular kinds of struggle. Shame is a relentless robber that tempts us to refuse the mercy that could be ours. We name sins and receive forgiveness but then fail to extend that mercy to our clean yet weakened selves. We all went deeper in the truth that God loves us profoundly in our still-being-healed state and wants us to welcome His river where we are most inclined to turn away in shame.

The evening was simpler still. How can we not refuse the temptation to despair when the waters are rising? Heaviness rests naturally upon many post-Soviet citizens but when Jesus soaks us in His Father's love, displacing that spirit of alienation and self-hatred, we cannot help but well up like a fountain of mercy for others! Standing in the river, it was easy to break the power of death and disqualification and to arm ourselves in the weapons of hope: peace, love, joy and the holy purposes our Father entrusts to us as members of His healing army.

Back home, I mused upon that Divine Mercy Sunday in Vilnius and welled up with gratitude for my Lithuanian family, and their legacy of mercy that flows throughout the world. I forgot to fear the rough raced ahead and honestly, ran better than I had in two years. I felt myself to be caught up in the current of something greater than myself, and like Elijah ran furiously til the race's end.