



About St. John Vianney

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St. Jean-Marie Baptiste Vianney

Curé of Ars, born at Dardilly, near Lyons, France, on May 8, 1786; died at Ars, August 4, 1859; son of Matthieu Vianney and Marie Beluze.

In 1806, the curé (curate in English) at Ecully, M. Balley, opened a school for ecclesiastical students, and Jean-Marie was sent to him. He was of average intelligence and his masters never seem to have doubted his vocation. His knowledge was extremely limited, being confined to a little arithmetic, history, and geography, and he found learning, especially the study of Latin, excessively difficult.

In 1812, he was sent to the seminary at Verrieres. He failed to pass the examinations for entrance to the seminary proper, but on re-examination three months later, he succeeded. On 13 August, 1815, he was ordained a priest.

He was sent to Ecully as assistant to M. Balley, who had first recognized and encouraged his vocation, who urged him to persevere when the obstacles in his way seemed insurmountable, who interceded with the examiners when he failed to pass for the higher seminary, and who was his model as well as his preceptor and patron.

In 1818, after the death of M. Balley, M. Vianney was made parish priest of Ars, a village near Lyons. It was in this remote French hamlet that, as the Curé d' Ars, he became known throughout France and the Christian world.

A few years after he went to Ars, he founded a sort of orphanage for destitute girls. It was called "The Providence" and was the model of similar institutions established later

all over France. M. Vianney himself instructed the children of “The Providence” in the catechism, and these catechetical instructions came to be so popular that they were given every day in the church to large crowds.

“The Providence” was the favorite work of the Curé d’ Ars, but although it was successful, it was closed in 1847 because the holy curé thought that he was not justified in maintaining it in the face of the opposition of many good people. Its closing was a very heavy trial to him.

But the chief labor of the Curé d’ Ars was the direction of souls. He had not been long at Ars when people began coming to him from other parishes, then from distant places, then from all parts of France, and finally from other countries. As early as 1835, his bishop forbade him to attend the annual retreats of the diocesan clergy because of “the souls awaiting him yonder.”

During the last ten years of his life, he spent from 16 to 18 hours a day in the confessional. His advice was sought by bishops, priests, religious, young men and women in doubt as to their vocation, sinners, people in all sorts of difficulties and sickness.

In 1855, the number of pilgrims had reached 20,000 a year. His direction was characterized by common sense, remarkable insight, and supernatural knowledge. He would sometimes divine sins withheld in an imperfect confession. His instructions were simple in language, full of imagery drawn from daily life and country scenes, but breathing faith and that love of God which was his life principle and which he infused into his audience as much by his manner and appearance as by his words. At the end of his life, his voice was almost inaudible.

The miracles recorded by his biographers were the obtaining of money for his charities and food for his orphans, supernatural knowledge of the past and future, and healing the sick, especially children.

The greatest miracle of all was his life. He practiced mortification from his early youth. For 40 years, his food and sleep were insufficient, humanly speaking, to sustain life. And yet he labored incessantly, with unflinching humility, gentleness, patience, and cheerfulness, until he was more than 73 years old.

On October 3, 1874, Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney was proclaimed Venerable by Pius IX. On January 8, 1905, he was enrolled among the Blessed. Pope Pius X proposed him as a model to the parochial clergy. In 1925, Pope Pius XI canonized him. His Feast Day is kept on August 4.

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St. Jean-Marie Baptiste is the patron saint of parish priests. He became famous internationally for his priestly and pastoral work in his parish due to the radical, spiritual transformation of the community and its surroundings.

He worked on a farm, as a shepherd, until the age of 18, when he began training for the priesthood. The region of Dardilly was in great religious upheaval during Jean-Marie's youth, and his family had to make a secret of its adherence to Roman Catholicism. He was baptized under the name of Jean-Marie and chose John the Baptist as his confirmational name, and thereafter referred to himself as Jean-Marie-Baptiste.

A period of enforced military service in Napoleon's army, and then a need to hide after he had inadvertently been AWOL, were only two of the impediments to his starting his vocation.

He worked for 41 years in his parish. In that time, he transformed it from a community known for laxity to a fervent Christian community.

Ars became famous for its piety, and in a single year it hosted over 100,000 pilgrims. The very obscure town of Ars, France became so visited that a line of train track was laid from Lyon.

Hagiographers state that St. Jean-Marie Vianney was vigorously tormented by the devil. This was primarily due to his hearing of confessions for hours on end, sometimes up to 16 to 18 hours a day, according to his Catholic biographers. What he believed to be experiences of torment with demons were minor at first, but grew more severe with time. His last days were marked by peace, however, and he died in serenity.

His body is considered incorrupt by the Catholic Church.

He himself was greatly devoted to St. Philomena, to whom he attributed many miraculous occurrences.

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