



St. Jean Baptiste Marie Vianney *Curé of Ars*

Born: 8 May 1786 (France) | **Died:** 4 August 1859 (Ars, France)
Fest Day: August 4 | **Canonized:** 31 May 1925 by Pope Pius XI

Jean Baptiste Marie Vianney was born to a farming family in Lyons, France, and from an early age he developed a friendship with Jesus. What a surprise, since at the time the French Revolution had brought with it laws against the practice of Christianity. His family traveled long distances to be able to find a Mass to attend in secret. He taught other children about God and how to pray. He himself was a poor student in school. His lack of education made it difficult to pursue priesthood. He finally received holy orders to priesthood in 1815.

After three years as a parochial vicar in Écully, he was assigned to try his hand at being the Curé of the tiny village Ars-sur-Formans. Curé is a French word meaning “one who cares for souls.” He was the pastor. The trouble was that in this tiny parish, very few people paid attention to the Church or even virtue. The people of Ars were notorious for carrying their love of pleasure to the most thoughtless and dangerous excess.

He spent days in prayer with Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament. “Prayer,” he would say, “is the inner bath of love into which the soul plunges itself.” That love is what strengthened him and compelled him to facilitate an extraordinary change in the people of Ars.

Father Vianney began his ministry by meeting people where they were; saying a kind word to even the smallest child he passed on the street. He would visit his parishioners, often in the evenings with families were gathered all together, and he would make simple conversation with them and listen to them. He was known to give special attention to the sick and the poor. People began to convert to faith in God.

He did his utmost to provide an example of Jesus’ love in the way he spoke and acted; even performing acts of penance on behalf of his parishioners. About making decisions, he taught: “We must always choose the most perfect. Two good works present themselves to be done, one in favor of a person we love, the other in favor of a person who has done us some harm. Well, we must give preference to the latter.”

With time, the villagers paid attention to this new priest. They discovered his extraordinary gifts; to listen very well, but even to know things that he had not been told by anyone. He could even prophesy and do the miraculous! His preaching began to draw crowds. And his demeanor and giftedness led people to feel drawn to have Father Vianney hear their confession. He spent hours each day in the parish confessional. By 1855, 20,000 pilgrims were coming to Ars every year.

This was particularly extraordinary because many at this time were still suffering from the effects of a heresy called Jansenism that had spread throughout Europe, focused on the utter sinfulness and depravity of humanity. Jansenism had been formally condemned by the pope even before Jean Vianney’s birth, but one of its long-lasting effects was that extremely few people received Holy Communion on a regular basis.

Jean Vianney’s closeness with Jesus made his opinion of all this very different. He encouraged people to come to Mass frequently AND to experience Jesus’ love by receiving Holy Communion frequently. He said, “Come to Jesus with love and confidence. [...] Can you resist an invitation so full of love and tenderness? Do not say you are not worthy of it; it is true you are not worthy of it, but you have need of it. [...] Do not say that you are sinners; that you are too vile and that therefore you dare not approach the table of the Lord. You might as well say that you are too sick, and that therefore you will not see a physician.” Jean Vianney called the Eucharist Jesus’ beautiful sacrament of love.

He died quietly in the summer of 1859 of natural causes. Today, his incorrupt heart is preserved in a reliquary and is sent throughout the world for veneration by the faithful; a sign of the power of extraordinary love.

St. John Vianney, pray for us; that we would come to know and trust in Jesus’ love as you did here on this earth; believing even in the most difficult of circumstances that his love conquers all.

Source consulted: The Cure D’Ars by Georgina Molyneux