

SAINT JEAN MARIE VIANNEY [1786-1859]

- A life beneath God's gaze -

Life of the Holy Curé – Main biographies on the Curé of Ars

Life of the Holy Curé

Born on 8 May 1786 in Dardilly, near Leon, in a family of farmers, Jean Marie Vianney's childhood was marked by the dedication and love of his parents. The context of the French Revolution will exercise a strong influence on his formative years: he will make his first confession at the foot of the large clock in the hall of the house where he was born, and not in the village church, and will receive absolution from a clandestine priest.

Two years later, he makes his First Communion in a barn, during a clandestine Mass celebrated by a rebel priest. At 17, he decides to respond to God's call: "*I would like to win souls over to the Good Lord*", he will tell his mother, Marie Béluze. His father, however, opposes this project for two years, as there is a shortage of hands in his father's house.

At 20 he begins to prepare himself for the priesthood with Abbott Balley, Pastor of Écully. The difficulties will make him grow: he passes quickly from discouragement to hope and goes on pilgrimage to Louvesc, to the sepulcher of Saint François Régis. He is forced to desert when called to join the army to go and fight during the war in Spain. Abbot Balley, however, will be there to help him during these years characterized by many trials. Ordained priest in 1815, he begins his service as vicar in Écully.

In 1818, he is sent to Ars. There he reawakens the faith of his parishioners with his homilies, but especially with prayer and with his lifestyle. He feels wanting before the mission at hand, but allows himself to be enveloped by God's mercy. He restores and beautifies the church, founds an orphanage which he calls "Providence" and attends to the needs of the poor.

Very quickly his reputation as a confessor attracts many pilgrims who come to him looking for God's pardon and peace of heart. Assailed by many trials and struggles, he maintains his heart firmly rooted in the love of God and neighbor; his only concern is for the salvation of souls. His catechism lessons and homilies speak above all of the bounty and mercy of God. A priest who consumes himself in love before the Blessed Sacrament, totally donated to God, to his parishioners and to the pilgrims, he dies on 4 August 1859, after having delivered himself to the extreme limits of Love. His poverty was not feigned. He knew that one day he would die as "prisoner of the confessional". On three occasions he attempted to escape from his parish, believing himself unworthy of the mission of Pastor, and seeing himself more a shield to God's goodness than a carrier of his Love. The last attempt was less than six years prior to his death. He was retrieved by his parishioners, who had the bell sounded using a hammer in the middle of the night. He then went back to his church and heard confessions until one in the morning. The next day he would say: "*I behaved like a child*". On the occasion of his funeral, the crowd numbered more than one thousand, including the bishop and all of the priests of the diocese, all come to embrace he who was already their model.

Beatified on 8 January 1905, the same year he was declared "patron of the priests of France". Canonized in 1925 by Pius XI, the same year as Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, he will be proclaimed in 1929 "patron of all the pastors of the universe". Pope John Paul II came to Ars in

1986. Today Ars welcomes 450,000 pilgrims every year and the Sanctuary offers various activities. In 1986, a seminary was opened to form future priests in the school of “M. Vianney”. In fact, where the saints pass, God passes with them!

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