



St John Mary Vianney, Priest

Jean-Marie Vianney was born on 8th May 1786 at Dardilly near Lyon into a family of farmers and his childhood was deeply influenced by the fervour and love of his parents. However the context of the French Revolution made a powerful mark on his youth : he made his first confession beneath the great clock in the living room of the house in which he was born, instead of in the village church and he received absolution from an underground priest.

Two years later he made his first communion in a barn, during a clandestine mass celebrated by a non-juror priest, (a priest who refused to make an oath of allegiance to the state). At the age of seventeen he chose to answer the call of God, saying to his mother Marie Béluze : “I would like to win souls for the Good Lord”. Yet his father opposed to this choice for two years for labour was scarce in his father’s house.

At the age of twenty he began to prepare for the priesthood with the Abbé Balley, the parish priest of Ecully. He chose to become a deserter when he was called into the army to go and fight in the war in Spain. However the Abbé Balley was able to help him during these years of trials. He was ordained a priest in 1815 and at first was curate at Ecully.

He was sent to Ars in 1818. There he awakened the faith of his parishioners through his preaching but most of all by his prayer and his way of life. He felt his own weakness in the face of the mission he was to accomplish, but he allowed the mercy of God to seize him. He restored and embellished his church, founded an orphanage, “La Providence” and took care of the poorest of the poor.

Very rapidly his reputation as a confessor drew to him many pilgrims who were seeking through his person the forgiveness of God and peace of heart. Assailed by many a trial and battle, he kept his heart rooted in the love of God and neighbour : his sole concern was the salvation of souls. His catechism lessons and homilies above all proclaimed the goodness and mercy of God.

He knew that he would die one day a “prisoner of the confessional”. He had attempted three times to flee his parish, believing himself unworthy of the mission of parish priest and because he thought that he was more of an obstacle to the goodness of God than an instrument of His Love. The last attempt to escape was less than six years before his death.

His parishioners caught up with him in the middle of the night and brought him back after having rung the alarm. He then came back to his church and began hearing confessions at one o’clock in the morning. The next morning he remarked : “I behaved like a child”. There was a crowd of more than a thousand people at his funeral, including the bishop and priests of the diocese.

He was beatified on 8th January 1905 and in 1929 he was proclaimed “patron saint of the priests of the entire world”.