

Reflection for Thursday 6th August 2020

On Tuesday of this week we celebrated the feast of St Jean Marie Vianney, the French priest also known as the Cure of Ars, a remote village in France of about 40 houses. He was given charge of the parish of Ars, a place no other priest wanted to go to. It was a place where almost everyone had given up the practice of the faith and where hardly anyone was going to mass, it was a tough assignment. What would he have to do to revive the faith of so many who appeared to have completely lost it. It seemed like an impossible task.

However, the life of the Cure of Ars is a story that really shows that with God all things are possible. God's ways are not our ways and eventually the good priest was loved by all and became a famous confessor not unlike Saint Padre Pio. People would travel for miles and stand in the rain for hours just to hear him speak and preach and go to confession. He had a remarkable insight and supernatural knowledge and would know what sins a person had committed. It is said that he spent 18 hours in the confessional and heard up to 300 confessions a day.

But he was not a good seminarian in the sense that he found the studies difficult, especially Latin. He failed the entrance exam for the seminary and also the final exams because he couldn't write well enough and became confused and tongue-tied in the oral exams. It looked very much like he would not be ordained a priest until the Vicar General asked, 'Is he pious?' Yes, he was undoubtedly pious. 'Ordain him then,' said the VG, 'the grace of God will do the rest.'

He hadn't been in Ars long when he visited all the homes and started helping the villagers with their everyday problems. He would help shopkeepers with their book keeping, found medicinal cures for diseases such as whooping cough and when one of the taverns closed for lack of business, he raised money for the owner to buy a farm, then tore the tavern down.

They saw him carrying out many acts of penance on their behalf preaching by word and example He survived on a very meagre diet of

bread and potatoes and little sleep and would spend most of the night in prayer, in other words he showed that he cared about them in every way but most importantly he cared for their immortal souls.

In a fairly short space of time he transformed Ars from a rough and rowdy place with 4 taverns, many places for dancing and heavy drinking by the local farmers, into a pious and faithful village with a growing mass attendance. By the end of his life St John Vianney was visited by people from all over the world. People said how his preaching ‘stirred their hearts’, although he was uncompromising in proclaiming the teaching of the Church.

But it wasn’t all smooth and easy. Fellow priests envied his success and accused him of ostentatious poverty. Some parishioners who were angered by the reform of the parish, vandalised his home and spread malicious rumours about him. Like St Padre Pio he was tormented by the devil and wrestled with him through the night. But he calmly, patiently and faithfully persisted in the life God had called him to and continued to serve his people. He remains to this day the living image of the priest ‘after the heart of Christ. He was canonised on 31st May 1925.

Let us pray for our priests that they will live up to their vocation and give themselves completely to God and the service of the people.

May the Lord bless them and Our Lady protect them.

Deacon Kevin