

MEMORIAL OF SAINT JOHN MARY VIANNEY
CANON LAW CONFERENCE
SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, LA CROSSE
AUGUST 4, 2010

Ez 3:17-21
Ps 117:1bc, 2
Mt 9:35-10:1

HOMILY

Praised be Jesus Christ, now and for ever. Amen.

We see in the life of the saintly Curé of Ars, whose memory we celebrate today, a striking participation in the pastoral charity of Our Lord for all men, for “all the cities and villages,” which is described so succinctly and poignantly in the Gospel: “When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (*Mt* 9:36). In fact, we must be struck by the love of Our Lord, not only for those whom He encountered directly during His public ministry, but for all men of all times and place. For, at the very moment in which He was moved with compassion for the crowds, Our Lord also instructed the disciples to pray to God the Father, asking Him to call laborers into His harvest, to call co-workers with Our Lord for the shepherding of the flock without boundary and without cease, and, at the same time, Our Lord sent out the Twelve, the ones whom He had chosen as the first to participate in His work of Head and Shepherd of the flock, the first to bring His pastoral charity, the mercy and love of the Father, to all (cf. *Mt* 9:37-38; 10:1).

We, in fact, can see in the first assignment of Saint John Mary Vianney a reflection of the account of today’s Gospel. He was sent to Ars with the notice that he would find very little faith among the people. Indeed, the rebellious pride of the French Revolution had left the people forgetful of and even hostile to God. From a human point of view, Saint John Mary Vianney could have understandably given up his mission before he had even begun. Or he could have simply taken care of those who practiced the faith and abandoned the others to their godless ways. But he understood his mission as a true shepherd of the flock to include necessarily the prophetic word which alerts the flock to the presents dangers imperiling their eternal salvation.

Our Lord gave the following instruction to the Prophet Ezekiel, at the beginning of his mission to a people whom the Lord described as rebellious: “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me” (*Ez* 3:17). Pope Benedict XVI, in his letter to proclaim the year for priests, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the death of the saintly Curé of Ars, reminded us of the great awe and indeed fear which Saint John Mary Vianney had before the priestly ministry, leading him to want to abandon the parochial ministry, in order to undertake a life of prayer and penance.¹

The Holy Father reminds us that it was “[o]nly obedience and a thirst for souls” which gave him the inspiration and courage to remain faithful and generous in carrying out a pastoral ministry which was most challenging and also exceedingly rich in the blessings of grace.² The Holy Father writes:

As he [Saint John Mary Vianney] explained to himself and his flock: “There are no two good ways of serving God. There is only one: serve him as he desires to be served”. He considered this the golden rule for a life of obedience: “Do only what can be offered to the good Lord”.³

Before the tremendous challenges of the priestly ministry of his time, the saintly Curé knew that the way to meet the challenges was not by way of his own strengths or ideas, but through his total engagement in doing what Christ was asking of Him in the Church.

Saint John Vianney is an example and encouragement to us who are dedicated to the study and application of the law in the Church during a time marked by a great rebellion against authority and discipline. In the period after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, great emphasis was placed on the glory of our new life in Christ. I will recall a famous article in a religious journal, which began: “We are a Resurrection people, and Alleluia is our song.” But the way to the glory of the Resurrection is the Passion and the Cross, namely, the way of denying self in order to be for God and our neighbor.

In the euphoria of the post-Conciliar times, with all of its optimism about what we can do in the Church, there developed an hostility toward canonical discipline and even, on the

¹ cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 101 (2009), 575 and 577.

² “[s]olo obbedienza e la passione per le anime.” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 101 (2009), 577.

³ “A se stesso e ai suoi fedeli spiegava: «Non ci sono due maniere buone di servire Dio. Ce n’è una sola: servirlo come lui vuole essere servito». La regola d’oro per una vita obbediente gli sembrava questa: «Fare solo ciò che può essere offerto al buon Dio».” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 101 (2009), 477.

part of some, the expressed judgment that the Church no longer needed canonical norms by which to carry out her high mission. The loss of respect for liturgical law led to abuses which, in turn, led to confusion and error regarding the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. The loss of respect for the canonical norms regarding Catholic education led to a loss of Catholic identity in Catholic schools and universities, which, in turn, has led to a widespread doctrinal and moral illiteracy. We have witnessed, too, the seriously harmful effects of the antinomian attitude upon seminary and religious formation, and upon the discipline of the clerical and consecrated life.

Let us pray through the intercession of Saint John Mary Vianney that we all may follow his counsel by serving Our Lord in the way in which He desires to be served. Let us pray for growth in the virtue of obedience, so that we may always do what Our Lord asks of us through the canonical discipline of His Church. Let us pray, in a special way, for our Bishops and priests, that they may be filled with pastoral charity, giving an example of selfless and generous obedience to God's flock in their priestly care.

Let us now lift upon our hearts to the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus. Let us place our hearts into the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, opened to receive us in His Eucharistic Sacrifice. In the Heart of Jesus, may we be purified of whatever is rebellious in us and may be strengthened to love as He loves, unceasingly and without boundary.

*Heart of Jesus, formed by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, have mercy on us.
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America and Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us.
Saint John Mary Vianney, pray for us.*

The Most Reverend Raymond L. Burke
Archbishop Emeritus of Saint Louis
Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura