

Feb 4

Saint of the Week: St John Vianney

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Life:

Vianney was born In 1786 near Lyon, France. He was a shepherd in his youth, his parents were pious Christians. He grew up during the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror's anti-clericalism era. The clergy and the faithful could be sent to the guillotine because of their faith. Vianney witnessed the priests risking their lives to hold a mass in secret. It was not until 1802 when the Catholic Church of France was re-established. Later, Vianney left home to pursue the priesthood; he struggled with his studies - especially in Latin - his exam results were not ideal but because of his virtues, he was finally ordained.

In 1818, Vianney was assigned to Ars, a small village, as the parish priest, where there were only 230 lapsed Catholics, Vianney worked from day till night for the conversion of the parish. By his prayers, sacrifices, preaching, and love, he completely transformed the hearts of the faithful in Ars. Believers not only participated in the Sunday mass, but also became dignified and polite. The news of how Vianney inspired sinners to repent spread far and fast. The faithful wanted to listen to his preaching and seek his advice, Ars became a pilgrimage for the faithful from all over the places, and Lyon Railway Company set up a special office for people to book advance tickets. It was said that Vianney spent 16 hours a day to listen to confessions, he could understand people's hearts, and during confessions, he reminded people of the sins they might have forgotten. The saint died in 1859. Pope Pius XI declared him as the patron saint of all priests, especially of parish priests.

Reflection

Saint John Vianney taught his parishioners primarily by the witness of his life. He frequently knelt before the tabernacle in Eucharistic Adoration. On June 16, 2009 Pope Benedict XVI, in the Letter proclaiming a "Year for Priests", pointed out, "This way of educating the faithful to the Eucharistic presence and to communion proved most effective when they saw him celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Those present said that 'it was not possible to find a finer example of worship... He gazed upon the Host with immense love'." Like his parishioners, let's imitate Vianney in his zeal for the Holy Blessed Sacrament.

Prayer

Pope Benedict XVI's letter proclaiming a "Year for Priests" included a number of quotes from St Vianney on how to pray:

"One need not say much to pray well...We know that Jesus is there in the tabernacle: let us open our hearts to him, let us rejoice in his sacred presence. That is the best prayer".

"All good works, taken together, do not equal the sacrifice of the Mass since they are human works, while the Holy Mass is the work of God".

May we learn from St. Vianney's example, focus on the Holy Eucharist as the center of worship, experience the presence of Christ, and through the sacrament of penance, feel God's love.

We also pray for all priests, especially the priests in our parish.

Saint Vianney, please pray for us.