

SAINT JEAN MARIE VIANNEY



If we really understood the Mass, we would die of joy.

## From Fr. Christopher Ankley

Dear Friends,

Thursday August 4<sup>th</sup> is the Feast day of St. John Vianney. He's the only parish priest ever to be canonized a Saint. This gives me something to work for. St. John Vianney lived in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in a small remote French village by the name of Ars. He was ordained a priest at a time when the French Church had been devastated by revolution. Churches had been destroyed and priests and nuns had been martyred. People didn't know their faith and they weren't going to Mass. However, all that changed during the forty four years of Vianney's priesthood. By the time he died thousands were flocking to Ars every day. And Vianney would spend up to 16 hours each day in the confessional drawing people closer and closer to our Lord.

Recently I read a book about St. John Vianney and in that book one passage really stood out to me. This passage was part of a homily in which Vianney has an imaginary conversation with a stranger visiting Ars for the first time. He begins "At the sight of the church's steeple you might ask yourself, what's in there?" And Vianney would answer, "The body of our Lord." And the stranger would ask, "Why is He there?" And Vianney would answer, "Because a priest has passed by and said the Holy Mass." Vianney goes on to say, "And if we really understood the Mass we would die, not of fear, but of love." If we really understood the Mass we would die of love.

In today's Gospel we hear of the miracle of the multiplication of the five loaves and two fish. It's the only miracle that is recorded in all four gospels, and Mark and Matthew even record two instances of this multiplication miracle. It must be important, very important. Jesus, "Took...blessed...broke...and gave." These are the words of the Eucharistic mystery, the

Eucharistic miracle. These same words (took, blessed, broke, and gave) which describe Jesus' actions are also the same words used at the Last Supper and they're the same words used at every Mass where Jesus gives us the totality of His life.

Our first reading from Isaiah tells us, "Thus says the Lord...come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life." Listen to his word, listen to the Word made flesh, receive that flesh and have life. As Vianney said, "If we really understood the Mass we would die, not of fear, but of love." And that understanding begins by listening. I haven't always been the best listener during Mass. Maybe some can identify with this. When I was younger I would sometimes get easily distracted during Mass, maybe staring at the most popular girl in my class, who happened to be sitting in my line of sight across the church, I'd stare and daydream, not paying attention. And I would do this until her 6' 10" dad looked my way. Or even talking, I sometimes talked during Mass. Once in college, when I first started dating this girl, we'd go to Mass together. And during one of those first Masses that we attended together, we just talked and talked oblivious to everything. It must have been really bad because at the sign of peace, the lector came down and told us to be quiet. She told us we were distracting everyone, the priest especially, we weren't that quiet, our whispers were not very good whispers. We were mortified, we never said another word. I'm thankful to that woman who had the courage to challenge us, to challenge us to be silent and to listen. To actively listen, listening for the words of the Eucharistic miracle; took, blessed, broke, and gave.

Peace and all good,

Fr. Christopher J. Ankley