

8th Sunday after Pentecost - Latin

4 August 2019

- Back in the corner standing sentinel above the confessional is the statue of St. John Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests. He stands there because of his renown as a confessor – often spending 16 hours/day in the confessional of his parish in Ars, France.
- What’s interesting about St. John Vianney is that he was a man who struggled mightily to become a priest. Neither academically gifted nor talented in any noticeable way, John only got ordained because his bishop recognized his docility and love for God.
- Because it was feared that John simply didn’t have the capacity to handle a normal parish, he was sent to the meanest and most decrepit parish in his diocese.
- When he arrived in Ars in 1818, he found his parishioners ignorant and indifferent to their Catholic religion, often spending their Sundays either working in the fields or drinking and dancing in the taverns.
- Yet by the time he died in 1859, St. John Vianney had transformed his parish into a spiritual oasis, attracting tens of thousands of pilgrims each year, who came to avail themselves of his saintly pastoral care.
- In all ways St. John Vianney was truly the most remarkable of parish priests, and his incorrupt body testifies not only to his purity of life, but also to his extreme holiness. Today, August 4th, is his feast day in the reformed calendar.
- So what was St. John’s secret to holiness? In addition to a life of deep prayer, St. John was wise in understanding what is most important in life.
- Our Gospel today reminds us that we shouldn’t be outdone by those who are wise in worldly ways, but rather live as God’s children with integrity of heart.
- The wise of this world are quick to place their hopes in worldly things, accumulating and amassing those things they believe will make them happy.
- Yet as Christians we know not to place our hopes and trust in the vanities of this world. We know to guard ourselves against the dangers of greed and materialism.
- Our Lord is very clear in the Gospels that we are to guard our hearts from all greed and not put too much stock in our material possessions. What is important is not that we are materially rich, but that we are rich in what matters to God.
- And what matters to God, my friends, is virtue – is holiness. God doesn’t care how big our houses are, what type of cars we drive, or how much money is in our bank accounts. None of these things will matter when we stand before Him on judgment day.
- What will matter is how holy we’ve become during our time on earth. What will matter is how we’ve tried to grow in virtue throughout our lives. What will matter is how we used our material possessions to help others in need.
- What will matter, my brothers and sisters, is the gratitude we’ve shown God for all our many blessings. What will matter is how well we’ve loved both God and neighbor.
- So it’s a good practice to regularly ask ourselves how much of this world’s goods we really need. While it’s not a sin to be rich or to own many things, we must be aware that having and pursuing wealth poses some significant spiritual dangers.
- You see, when we are blessed with an abundance of material goods, we can come to rely too much upon them and the comforts they provide, thus becoming less willing and able to endure suffering and hardship – while at the same time becoming more self-consumed.
- If we seek our happiness and joy in the things of this world, we will necessarily become greedy and materialistic, consuming whatever catches our eye with the hope of being sated.

- Yet the things of this world will never make us happy or give us true joy. To the contrary, focusing on the things of this world will only leave us feeling empty. That's the great sadness of the sin of greed.
- Greed can never be sated; it can never be quenched. Left unchecked, greed simply grows stronger within us, consuming our souls as we seek to consume the vanities of this world.
- Worldly goods promise something they can never deliver, and worse yet, becoming attached to them makes us less capable of being attached to the One Thing that will give us real, lasting joy and peace: God Himself.
- St. John Vianney understood all of this so very clearly. His was a life of fasting and penance, often eating nothing more than a raw potato in a day in order to keep up his strength.
- If you visit St. John's rectory in Ars today you will see that the only things of value he owned were the things he used for Mass: his vestments and his chalice and paten. He loved poverty, for he knew that poverty provided a freedom to be attached solely to God.
- Refusing to be allured by the things of this world, and through much fasting and penance, St. John was able to "put to death the parts of him that [were] earthly." And so must we.
- But even more so, St. John Vianney followed the advice of St. Paul today to live according to the Spirit rather than the flesh. He understood that God created us to be His children, and so he spent his earthly life trying to get to Heaven – and to take others with him.
- So it is that we must be constantly prepared to meet our Maker! So it is that we must learn to cling to our Lord in this life, preferring Him and His most holy and adorable will over anything this world has to offer.
- We must be willing to turn away not only from earthly goods, but also from all sin and impurity. And again, St. John Vianney provides a wonderful example.
- As I mentioned earlier, St. John Vianney's body is incorrupt, even though he's been dead for 160 years! This is because St. John, like a handful of other saints whose bodies are incorrupt, maintained his chastity and practiced virtue throughout the course of his life.
- And there is great joy and freedom in remaining pure and practicing virtue: a freedom and joy that cannot be matched by whatever fleeting pleasures sin or earthly things may provide.
- Indeed, if we place our hopes and trust in the things of this world, we will end up a fool who has nothing to show for himself on judgment day.
- My brothers and sisters, we live in a society that extols wealth and materialism with little or no thought to the dangers they pose to man. While it is a blessing to have an abundance of this world's goods, it can also be a curse if we seek our happiness in those goods.
- We also live in a world drowning in sexual excess. Yet what are the fruits of the great sexual revolution of the past 50 years? Broken homes, broken marriages, and broken hearts; as well as a willing embrace of abortion and of sins that contravene both the moral and natural law.
- Thus, like the saints we must seek to be detached from all worldly things and pleasures, turning our minds to what is above, shunning all sin and vice, and remembering that we have died and that our lives are hidden with Christ in God.
- By practicing the virtues of charity and generosity, through fasting and penance and prayer, may we become attached only to the things of Heaven.
- And like St. John Vianney, may we learn truly to love our Lord above all things and to seek His glory rather than our own.